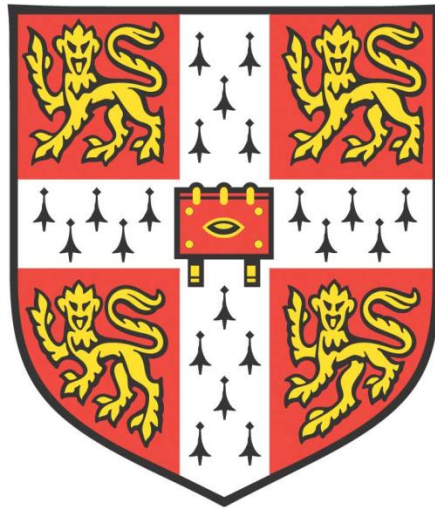


Play in the Roman imagination



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Classics Degree Committee (80,000 words).

Summary/Abstract

This thesis traces a discourse of play in the Roman republic from Plautus' *palliata* comedies via Lucilius' satires to Cicero's philosophical dialogue *De oratore*. Methodologically, it combines philological close reading with historical analysis to interpret the function of appeals to play in the context of the political culture of the Roman republic with its distinctly Roman set of values and beliefs. Due to the more complex semantics of lexemes for play in the Latin language than in English (*ludus* also means e.g., 'school', 'public festival', 'trick'), the study will move beyond the associations that the English concept 'play' suggests. The thesis argues that 'play' is a fundamental notion for Plautus' self-fashioning as a new social type: a writer of comic fiction in Rome's budding literary culture. His exploitation of the multiple meanings of *ludus* influence Lucilius, another innovator in Roman culture as he transfers Plautus' socially inferior modes of play into the milieu of aristocratic leisure. Cicero, finally, draws on both earlier writers and uses 'play' to construct a tradition of Greek philosophy in the Roman past as well as to style himself as the teacher of a renewed upper class in his own imaginary school. Play is a concept that is at odds with the core tenets of the aristocratic value system in Rome and because of its purported marginality has been an underappreciated aspect of important texts across a variety of genres that we possess from the Roman republic.

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Contents

Introduction: play in Rome vs. play in Latin	1
1.1) Plautus and play: a foregone conclusion?	11
1.2) Trick me once, trick me twice: Greek guile and Roman trust	13
1.3) Pretty play: the reinvention of the <i>ludi</i> as an aesthetic sphere	25
1.4) <i>Docti doli</i> : brainpower in Rome?	36
1.5) <i>Ludus</i> squared: power and the play within the play	49
2.1) Comedy on the rise in Rome: Lucilius' satire as intra-elite play	60
2.2) Searching for Lucilius	62
2.3) Lucilius, the bad companion?	70
2.4) Satiric play and the new <i>memoria</i>	84
2.5) Play as capital: fine dining and self-branding	96
3.1) Did Cicero think about play?	110
3.2) Plautine games at the aristocratic villa	114
3.3) Cicero's Lucilius: reinventing the satirist	123
3.4a) Socrates in Rome: philosophy as aristocratic play	132
3.4b) Plato's games and Cicero's training	141
3.5) Getting ready for the fight with Cicero, the <i>ludi magister</i>	144
Conclusion: play in the Roman imagination	154
Bibliography	158

Introduction: play in Rome vs. play in Latin

A host of powerful narratives about the relationship between Roman culture and games have fuelled the popular imagination. Atrocious gladiatorial fights in amphitheatres, nerve-wracking chariot races in the circus, or the collections of ancient toys so intriguingly familiar to a modern observer are all examples of a fascinating culture of play and games, against which modernity has constructed its relationship of similarities and differences with the ancient world.¹ However, fierce competition and violence never seem to be far from Roman modes of play, which clashes starkly with modern conceptions.² Johan Huizinga, the foremost modern theorist of play, has argued in his landmark study *Homo Ludens* that Roman culture (or, as he would have it, civilisation) was inferior to the cultures of ancient Greece and China with regard to the aspect of play: ‘playing did not take on the lively colouring, the teeming imagination it displayed in Greek or Chinese civilization’.³ As to the literature and art of the Roman empire, he asserts: ‘the play-element is very prominent here, but it has no organic connection with the structure of society and is no longer fecund of true culture’.⁴ The Romans were hence never really playful, merely putting it on for show, and when they managed to exhibit genuine signs of play, they were surpassed by other cultures.

Huizinga’s influential musings fail to convince, and meta-reflections such as Sutton-Smith’s show that today’s ever more elaborate theories of play have begun to revolve around themselves, lacking historical orientation.⁵ Yet, although efforts to rehabilitate Roman play culture and to liberate its study from the prejudice of irrelevance have been afoot for some time, play and Roman identity are two categories that are not straightforwardly reconciled with one another.⁶ It is true, the various media in which the Romans asserted and reinforced their fundamental norms and values point to a cultural premium placed on moral and military

¹ A concise overview of Roman games culture can be found in Purcell 2013 and Fagan 2017. See also Purcell 1995 for an intricate study of the game *alea* and its relationship with broader social phenomena.

² Play theory has become its own sub-genre within a larger field of play studies. The amount of literature is vast and constantly growing. For a meta-study of all the ‘rhetorics’ that have accrued around the phenomenon of play in modernity, see Sutton-Smith 1997.

³ Huizinga 1949: 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 176.

⁵ Despite its many problems and untenable claims, Huizinga’s study has become a classic of modern play theory. Broadly speaking, he echoes Roman historians’ decadence model of historical evolution and transfers it to his story of an intact play spirit in the archaic age, which eventually gives way to imperial decay. A strong sense of cultural decline reflects the despondency of his own war-stricken age.

⁶ See Dasen/Vespa 2021 and the abundance of research sprung from the large-scale project *Locus Ludi: The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity*. While not neglecting texts altogether, their focus lies on archeology and iconography. The most recent monograph to originate from this project (Pace 2023) surveys the ludic culture of Pompeii.

excellence, respect for family and tradition, discipline, and honour. Forms of play, it seems, can within a Roman ideological framework only ever be imagined as frivolous leisure activities at variance with legitimate forms of public conduct and self-expression. This fixation on *honor*, *virtus*, *fides*, and *pietas* has often inspired an essentialising caricature of the Romans as stern moralists (certainly an image some Romans were themselves keen to foster). Huizinga's cultural essentialism is patent, but the well-known clichés that split the two dominant ancient Mediterranean cultures into militaristic, hard-working, and pragmatist Romans on the one hand, and playful, symposiastic, and philosophising Greeks on the other hand, continue to hold powerful sway over the imagination inside and outside academia.

However misleading and over-simplified such a contrast might be, there are some cross-cultural differences that support such a bipolar view.⁷ The exclusion of aesthetic practices in the Roman republic, for instance, stands in marked contradistinction to a diverse culture of games, contests, sporting events, music, poetry, dance, and education, which especially in the Hellenistic period extended into a Mediterranean-wide cultural *koine*.⁸ *Paideia* amounted to a hallmark of Greek identity when literary activity in Rome was merely beginning to establish itself.⁹ The Greek world also produced several distinctive institutional contexts for laughter and play, as well as sophisticated theorisations of play in philosophical discourse.¹⁰ It is not surprising, then, to find Greek vase depictions of *Paidia*, a female personification of play.¹¹ Considering language, a brief look at the dictionary confirms that Greek and Latin also deviate from one another in terms of the main lexemes (verbs and nouns) for play:

⁷ A subtle overview of Roman (literary) perceptions of the Greeks is Barchiesi 2009.

⁸ Cf. Flaig 1999b: 84-5 and 99-100 for Roman markers of social status and the ritualised forms of communication between upper and lower classes, which differed radically from the Greek nobility. Instead of an exclusive display of leisure, Roman aristocrats legitimised their rule through gestures of proximity to the masses. For larger institutional and religious differences, see also Martin 1997. The specifically Roman association between refined culture (including literature) and Greekness is emphasised by Dench 2005: 325.

⁹ Feeney 2016 has powerfully unsettled the standard narrative that literary production in Latin was a self-evident process, with the Romans eventually recognising that their culture needed to keep up with the sophistication of Greek culture by starting to write poetry and drama in the middle of the 3rd cent. BCE.

¹⁰ Halliwell 1991: 290 lists the symposium, komos, civic festivals, and poetic contests as sites for conviviality and festivity. The intersection between the dance of the old comic chorus and ritualistic play is discussed in Bierl 2009. Cozzoli 2011 sheds light on Callimachus' 'poetics of childhood' and its link with play. The Greek philosophy of play is treated amongst others by D'Angour 2013 and lately Kidd 2019.

¹¹ Banchich 2017.

<i>ludere</i> ¹²	παίζειν
play	act like a child, play
dance	frolic, dance
spend time idly; waste time (trifles, poetry)	take recreation
engage in sexual play	engage in sexual play
jest, joke	jest, joke; play tricks
tease; trick, deceive; ridicule	play an instrument
play a character on stage	
play games; gamble	

<i>ludus</i>	παιδιά
sport; play	childish play, fun, game
performance, entertainment show	child's play
public games, festival	
foolery	
light-hearted talk, joke, frivolity	
place of instruction/training	

A tabulated juxtaposition of the variety of meanings can certainly not do justice to the intricacy of concrete passages and the deliberate play of authors with the semantic richness of these words. The distinction where one denotation ends and another begins is equally difficult to draw, and the table merely serves to give a general outline of linguistic differences. Yet, what emerges clearly is the wider range of *ludus/ludere* compared to παιδιά/παίζειν. Whereas the Greek terms predominantly betray their derivation from the root παῖς (child), their Latin counterparts branch out into the domains of poetry, theatre, education, and public festivals. Likewise, the moralising denigration of *ludus/ludere* as a trivial activity does not register in the Greek with the same force. Consequently, due to *ludus*' striking polysemy, a much more expansive area will be covered in this thesis than could be captured by modern play theories,

¹² There is partial overlap between the verbs *ludere*, *lascivire*, and *nugari* in Latin. The latter two point to a lack of self-control and nonsensical conduct, and the hint of moral disapproval is strong. *Ludere* has a wider range. On the Greek side, note also the mainly epic ἄθροω with its corresponding noun ἄθρομα (for the latter, see Kidd 2019: 97-121, and Casevitz 2018). Greek lexemes for nonsense are covered in Kidd 2014 (φλυαρία, λῆρος, etc.). The table is based on but adapted from the Oxford Latin Dictionary and the Cambridge Greek Lexicon.

which, in addition, predominantly perceive their data through an English-language lens. Given that *ludus/ludere* comprises within its conceptual remit beside play also festivals, (gladiatorial) training, deceit, or dance, a different approach than the one presupposed by contemporary play theories is called for.

The odd multiplicity of referents for the lexeme *ludus* already puzzled ancient etymologists, and modern commentators have weighed in on speculations about the original meaning of the concept from which all others derive.¹³ This search for an underlying conceptual unity motivates some scholars up to this day. Yon has argued for a relational and negative definition of *ludus*, regarding the concept's core meaning as a copy or imitation of a 'real act'.¹⁴ The same logic guides Wagenvoort's inquiries into Latin poets' labelling of their poetic output as *ludus*. He maintains that the *ludus poeticus* can only be defined against the entity it is contrasted with, usually more weighty and serious types of poetry such as epic or tragedy.¹⁵ From the standpoint of linguistic prototype theory, Nuti has painstakingly illustrated the successive narrowing of the semantic range of *ludus* from Plautus to Sidonius Apollinaris before the lexeme *iocus* encroaches ever more strongly on its remit, eventually supplanting it as Latin evolves into distinct Romance languages.¹⁶ In a chiefly positivistic manner, Väterlein has collated pertinent passages that show ancient politicians and authors discussing play or themselves engaging in playful activities.¹⁷

These philologically oriented studies have their merits but fail to embed the evolution of play as a concept within wider cultural parameters. The first scholar to open philological exegesis of Latin *ludus* towards such a broader cultural analysis was Thomas Habinek. He drew inspiration from the studies above and placed their insights into a complex anthropological framework, initially focusing on the genre of satire. Proceeding from the observation that Roman satirists prefer to describe their writing as *ludere*, he reads satire both as a literary genre and an embodied social practice. While operating with a much more sophisticated model, Habinek still reproduces the same narrative – Roman play as a primary, preparatory substitute for what is considered real and serious. He posits:

'The Roman concept of play [...] encompasses a large and diverse array of activities, including but not limited to gladiatorial combat, dance, non-reproductive sex, children's games, the

¹³ Laes 2021 cites the relevant Latin etymologists. It is also notable that the noun *ludus* has quite a few different senses from its corresponding verb, whereas *παῖδιά* is relatively restricted.

¹⁴ Yon 1940: 393.

¹⁵ Wagenvoort 1956: 39. There are a few more scattered attempts to make sense of Latin authors' branding of their poetic activities as *ludi* or *nugae*, cf. Muth 1972; Buchheit 1976 on Catullus; Gärtner 2007 on the fabulist Phaedrus; Porter 2002 for Horace's *Epistles* 1.

¹⁶ Nuti 1998.

¹⁷ Väterlein 1976.

composition and performance of certain kinds of poetry, and school. Two characteristics construct an activity as play: First, it can be seen as a preparation or substitution for an activity regarded as real, or serious. Gladiatorial combat substitutes and prepares for the contests of honor that characterize the life of the aristocrat. Dance substitutes and prepares for (at least sometimes) military activity. Children's games and school prepare for the real world of adult activity, in its various forms. Non-reproductive sex substitutes and, at least in the case of free citizens, prepares for the serious business of reproducing Roman society. Indeed, the word "play" is frequently placed in expressed or implied contrast with words referring to seriousness or reality or business. At the same time, play is regularly construed by the Romans as constituting an activity of the body that entails submission to externally imposed patterns or standards of action.¹⁸

In his later monograph *The World of Roman Song*, Habinek elaborated this analytic frame to set poetic production labelled *ludus* apart from culturally authoritative speech acts grouped under the marked concept *carmen*.¹⁹ He argues for a fundamental separation in the Roman experience of everyday as opposed to ritualised speech, which is the source of constant negotiations across Rome's cultural history. The power over and mastery of ritualised speech (in the form of songs, prayers, and legal formulae) within and beyond certain ritual contexts empowers social agents to transport their authority into other fields. *Ludus* functions as a preliminary training for the prospective mastery of speech with pragmatic power and historical significance that is *carmen*.

Several points Habinek raises are worth examining further. He is right that *ludere* denotes many activities which are intensely physical (dance, sexual play), that it may refer to specific speech types (jokes, puns), and that it forms the belittled complement to serious, relevant, powerful discourses in Rome (e.g., light poetry vs. epic; serious prayer vs. parody). Habinek's studies have certainly spawned lively debates in Classics about the role of *ludus* as a cultural signifier. There is also considerable value in analysing Roman culture as system of practices. Yet, the biggest drawback of his approach is the ahistorical and essentialising notion of play that underpins his interpretations.²⁰ Readers of his work do not get the sense that Roman culture is in any meaningful way transformed either during the republic or later as the regime of one-man rule stabilises itself during the empire. In the end, ludic writing can only ever serve to bolster the power of the elite encapsulated by *carmen*. This is a much enhanced, yet still largely rigid version of the model 'elite versus the remainder of the population' which he espoused in *The Politics of Latin Literature*.²¹

¹⁸ Habinek 2005b: 177-8.

¹⁹ The following is a certainly reductive précis of an intricate discussion, cf. Habinek 2005a: 110-57.

²⁰ Cf. Feeney/Katz 2006: 242.

²¹ Cf. Habinek 2001.

What Habinek misses, for a start, is that our richest source of play in early Latin literature is Plautus. Nor does he capture the spin that **lud-* lexemes receive in the hands of this earliest Roman writer, to whom we have access through an extant canon of works. An approach that is more alert to historical context is therefore needed to understand the genesis and evolution of a Roman discourse of play. This study seeks to delineate the historical process of how, in what context, and for what purposes producers of Latin literary texts during the republic found it opportune to employ play rhetoric and conceptualise *ludus/ludere* in tendentious ways. I will argue that the unique (re)configuration of these lexemes offers a glimpse into individual author's aesthetic and cultural programme which is deeply intertwined with play in its multiple guises.

I will trace how Plautus (in *Casina*, *Pseudolus*, and *Poenulus*), Lucilius (in his *Satires*), and finally Cicero (in *De oratore*) contribute to a republican discourse of play in both poetry and prose, each making their own distinct interventions. There is a clearly discernible connection between these three authors through linguistic echoes, direct quotations, and cross-referencing of themes, motifs, and their wider cultural projects. These case studies reveal that play rhetoric becomes relevant to all segments of society: Plautus the lower-class non-citizen, Lucilius the knight, and finally Cicero the ex-consul. Their positions within the Roman field of power as well as broader structural changes of Roman society will feed into the literary interpretations to make sense of this rise in society of a discourse that continues to be denigrated as non-Roman and subaltern throughout the republic.²²

The main goal of the thesis is to identify the varying functions the three authors attribute to the rich concept of *ludus* and its cognates within the larger system of knowledge and values of the Roman republic, and to study how they used play to advance their broader cultural projects. This study will thus go beyond literary-philological analysis and static binaries, offering a conceptual and cultural history that relates the evolving discourse of play to the socio-political developments of mid to late republican Rome.²³ The objective is to find a balance

²² For the term 'field of power', see Bourdieu 1996: 215. The usefulness of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory for Roman cultural history has been demonstrated in particular by Hölkeskamp. Taking up Bourdieu's critical idiom, he has read ancestral *imagines*, *pompae* and *laudationes funebres*, and especially triumphs as means to exhibit the accumulated symbolic capital of individual *gentes*, who were vying with each other for the principal position in the highly competitive political culture of the republic. His key writings are collected in Hölkeskamp 2004. For the English version, see Hölkeskamp 2010; on spectacle and Rome's political culture, also succinctly Flower 2004.

²³ An incisive example of studies seeking to uncover the historical and societal conditions that frame the conceptualisations of play and the motivations for social actors to develop and mobilise a discourse of play is Minnema 1998. He shows that the modern fetishisation of the autotelism and disinterestedness of play is but a partial story that needs to be complemented with historical discourse studies; see also Scholtz 2013; and with a stronger focus on play within the current media society, Thimm 2010 and Arlt/Arlt 2020. The massively influential games industry also profits from play theories in multiple ways, cf. Ortoleva 2012.

between macro-sociological insights into the type of playful communication that specific cultural contexts institute and the literary micro-interpretations which shed light on the chosen authors' use of play rhetoric.²⁴

One conspicuous aspect of the semantic range of *ludus* is that it spans a number of institutional contexts which all undergo profound changes in the wake of Rome's cultural Hellenisation from the middle of the 3rd cent. BCE.²⁵ The institutional frames that underwrite the Roman discourse of play are urban festivity (*ludi* as festivals and settings for comedies) in the plays of Plautus, elite commensality (the *convivium* as play) in Lucilian satire, and the escapism of the aristocratic villa in Cicero's *De oratore*. These different institutional dimensions revolve around leisure and its changing significance and are therefore implicated in the large-scale process of Hellenisation that Rome underwent during this period.²⁶ Producers of literature, in particular literature that openly flaunted its playfulness, had a precarious status in Rome insofar as it could not easily be integrated into a societal value system that demanded enduring efforts of the ruling elite to fulfil its duties in the service of the community.²⁷

I contend that a central strategy of Plautus throughout his comic oeuvre is to raise the value of aestheticism and Hellenism, and his creative deployment of **lud-* lexemes is a focal point from which to study his attempt to showcase the effects of language on the imagination of Roman reality. I wish to demonstrate that Plautus' tactic of refashioning Rome's symbolic order is active despite the normative inversion of values found in *palliata* comedies, and that Lucilius and Cicero do equally innovative cultural work precisely by means of the playfulness of the discourse they activate on the surface. A close look at their chosen vocabulary and the trademark use of recurring concepts in their writings will unveil how the rich storehouse of Greek conceptual models preserved in the canon offered Latin language artists the means to

²⁴ The objective is thus twofold, as sketched out by Hinds 2001: 238-9 (with a longer discussion in Hinds 2010). Rather than pitting historicising and aestheticising readings against each other, the task is to elucidate how contextual features feed into aesthetic ones and vice versa.

²⁵ Pertinent studies of these cultural changes are Wallace-Hadrill 1988 and his monograph of 2008. His interventions have put paid to models that presuppose a neat succession of processes of Hellenisation and Romanisation. Rather, both go hand in hand (2008: 10-18). Flaig exposes Hellenism and Hellenisation as ideologically driven 19th-cent. constructs with limited benefits for practical research (1999b: 82-84).

²⁶ Hirsch 2023 interprets Greece as a medium of self-reflection for Rome, and especially its *paideia* as a 'cultural grammar' that provided a tool for the spread of 'soft power'. Padilla-Peralta 2020: 131-77 reads the growth of Rome's culture of festivals in the same light.

²⁷ Flaig 1999b provocatively argues that the Roman elite were never properly Hellenised and Greek culture became a resource exploited in particular by the losers of Rome's increasingly competitive political system. They were consequently seeking new avenues to distinguish themselves (through art, poetry, Greek lifestyle) and turned into drivers of cultural innovation within a socially and culturally differentiating society. For an alternative model, see Scholz 2011, who seeks to attenuate the rather unflattering view of Roman utilitarianism in the takeover of Greek art, culture, and lifestyle by focusing on the willing intellectualisation of the upper class.

construct imaginative worlds and work on their audiences' ideologies and implicit cultural knowledge.

To arrive at a better understanding of just what kind of knowledge regulated Roman society, ancient historians have developed theoretically sophisticated models to explain republican political culture.²⁸ The work of Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp and others has elucidated the unwritten protocols that structured Roman social relations, provided society-wide cohesion, and underpinned the republic's evolving yet remarkably stable value system. I draw on their insights throughout my study to give context to the literary interpretations.

A condensed summary of the main arguments of this study runs as follows: first, Plautus toys with the curious convergence of the institutional frame at which comedies were staged and the designation of comic plotting within the fiction as *ludi*. Through this conceit, subaltern figures gain symbolic control over the actions unfolding on stage and serve as avatars for the real-life playwright who creatively reshapes the function of public games as avenues for the exhibition of his expert verbal and conceptual ingenuity. Viewers are invited to join in on the gamesmanship of the comic protagonists by means of Plautus' salient use of meta-dramatic comments. It is the socially marginalised and disempowered figures, therefore, that most prominently function as conduits of play in discourse and practice on the mid-republican dramatic stage.²⁹

Roughly half a century later, the parameters of the republican discourse of play are strikingly revamped. With Lucilius, it is a Roman *eques* who notoriously styles his strange, genre-defying writing as *ludus ac sermones* (fr. 1055-56). While there are notable parallels and allusions to comedy and the satires of Ennius, Lucilius resists simple categorisation. Against the prevailing tendency to study the extant fragments of his *oeuvre* as largely isolated items that are put to different uses by interpreters, I argue for the possible coherence of Lucilius' project.³⁰ As a member of the upper class, Lucilius had manifest connections to political power, especially Scipio Aemilianus, throughout his lifetime, and ushered in a new phase for literary play in Latin – away from a subaltern cultural practice to the centre of aristocratic life.

Lucilius on the one hand postured as the major critic of the elite's morality, although he was on the other hand deeply implicated in the escapades of the upper echelons and recorded them in his satiric texts for posterity. Play for him functions as a suggestive prism that brings the rifts and power struggles of Roman society to the fore. On the surface, his writing is

²⁸ A brief overview is Rosenstein 2006; see now also Arena/Prag 2022.

²⁹ For the usefulness of postures of inferiority in Roman literature and society, see Matzner/Harrison 2018.

³⁰ See Elliott 2022: 18-22 for pithy remarks on the methodology of studying fragments.

fashioned as roughshod and amateurish, but it self-consciously jumbles what is regarded high and low. The striving for moral rectitude and the memorialisation of *res gestae* is dragged down to petty in-fighting and the failures to uphold Roman moral standards. Likewise in the aesthetic realm, he combines a conversational tone with the most elevated metre to bring about a melange of contradictions. As a wealthy and independent knight, Lucilius could treat literary production as a leisure activity, moving comfortably both within and without elite circles and entertaining his peers with sharp and amusing observations. With its connections to lower-class festivity and un-Roman social practices, *ludus* indicated the right level of self-irony and valuelessness that furnished the framework for a novel genre which draws its power from lampooning discourses and behavioural protocols that are distinctly Roman. Irrespective of actual recitations or performances of satires during banquets, there is sufficient evidence to establish the *convivium* as a key cultural institution that Lucilian satire envisions as a source of anecdotes and a target of critique. The embeddedness within aristocratic leisure makes this type of play an intra-elite affair, with *equites* like Lucilius finding new ways to leave their mark on Roman culture as *literati*, scholars, and authorities of elite *dolce vita*.

The last stage in this history of a republican discourse of play will feature Cicero's *De oratore*, a work better known for its extensive treatise on humour than its explicit concern with play. Yet, Cicero makes use of play for a sweeping recalibration of the foundations of aristocratic sociability in Rome. Being the first specimen of its kind in Latin, *De oratore* is a philosophical dialogue that portrays exemplary aristocratic ancestors with a close connection to Cicero engaging in playful discursive practices such as jokes, irony, and long-winded philosophising. During the public holidays that the *ludi Romani* provide, they gather at a villa to relax, enjoy amusing conversations, and mimic the Greeks familiar to them from philosophical schools and other educational establishments. Deep-rooted conflicts amongst the elite lurk in the background of Cicero's romanticised vision of an ancestral past where disagreements were resolved with civility, the dominance of Roman masters over Greek subordinates was secure, and, in brief, the *res publica* was governed through a universal consensus of Rome's upper class about its core values.

It is easily overlooked how in this historical fiction Cicero underhandedly inserts Greek cultural practices into Roman aristocratic tradition, most strikingly the practice of philosophy which Cicero had been acquainted with on his youthful study trips to Greece. Play offers yet another contrastive foil through which non-Roman ideas and practices can be domesticated in a Roman context. With the ludicrousness and irrelevance of play constantly present as a backdrop, Cicero familiarises his readers gradually with the notion that what may be derided as

useless Greek knowledge is essential for a re-evaluation of the republic's foundational values. *Ludus* features particularly frequently in *De oratore* as a primary space for training and teaching in Cicero's reimagination of the aristocratic villa as a philosophical school in the Greek fashion. As an originally Latin term that opportunely defies the rootedness of Roman educational practices in Greece, *ludus* (in also denoting the gladiatorial school) implies Roman manliness, which Cicero needed to emphasise against potential charges of effete and homoerotic Greek aestheticism. Literary and philosophical education in Greek style is thus fused with the Roman *mos maiorum* while the superiority of the Roman tradition can be asserted throughout.

1.1) Plautus and play: a foregone conclusion?

‘Die römischen “Spiele” waren kein Spiel.’
(‘There is nothing ludic about the Roman *ludi*.’)³¹

Calling Plautus’ comedies playful is hardly going to raise eyebrows. To give a few examples, Allison Sharrock’s monograph *Reading Roman Comedy: Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence* bears the quality of playfulness prominently in the subtitle; Gianna Petrone has dedicated a full chapter to *ludus*, even considering the concept the essence of Plautine comedy.³² It does not seem to warrant further thought that the Roman games (*ludi*) at which Plautus’ comedies were performed were cultural sites for fun and play. All the more startling, then, is the pithy line by Egon Flaig quoted above. He has analysed the communicative dynamics between different strata of society that congealed in the theatre and interacted with the stage personnel, stressing how drama could be politicised by both actors and spectators. According to his view, the *ludi* functioned as channels for the populace to voice their sentiments about the simultaneously present members of the ruling class rather than as spaces for communal merry-making.³³

A curious polarity emerges: while historians like Flaig deny the playfulness of the *ludi* outright, philologists are not slow to declare play to be the quintessence of Plautus’ brand of *palliata* comedies. What is needed, arguably, is a greater conceptual clarity, a better sense of the socio-cultural environment of the earliest extant types of Roman drama, of the institutional constraints and opportunities offered by Roman stage shows to theatre professionals, and the shared ideological background of audiences in Rome against which Plautus produced his comic writings.³⁴ Taking these contextual dimensions into account, one can begin to capture the embeddedness of a distinctly Plautine conception of play. As a cultural institution, the *ludi* formed a part of Rome’s religious and political sphere, two inextricably linked domains firmly in the grip of the aristocracy.³⁵ As a discourse in Latin born out of the appropriation of Greek

³¹ Flaig 2004: 232.

³² Sharrock 2009; Petrone 1983: 153-209.

³³ It is worth stressing that his analysis is based on late republican evidence and concerns the politicised interpretation of re-performances of earlier drama.

³⁴ A historicising approach is of course not new: some prominent Anglophone examples of historically and politically sensitive monographs are Konstan 1986 (exploring ideological tensions negotiated in comedy), Gruen 1990 and 1992 (on the Hellenisation in the middle and late Republic), McCarthy 2000 (on social hierarchies and comedy’s ideological implications), Leigh 2004a (on various social and political issues reflected in contemporary comedy), and most recently Richlin 2017 (Plautine comedy as the expression of slave experiences). Yet, none of these readings takes Rome’s distinct political culture sufficiently into account.

³⁵ For accounts of the originally cultic nature of the *ludi* and their gradual expansion and politicisation, see e.g., Graf 2007; Dunsch 2013; Jeppesen 2020.

texts, Plautine comedies are artistic expressions of the mind of a subaltern non-Roman, for whom *ludus* appears to have been a key concept for his aesthetic and cultural self-positioning.³⁶

Plautus marginalises the ritual and religious facets of the *ludi* and refashions them in an aesthetic key in the wake of the Roman ‘literary project’, i.e., the addition to the games of avowedly Hellenising plays in a new, literary Latin. The playfulness so often associated with the *ludi* is to a large extent a product of Plautus’ comic discourse, brimming as it is with a rich variety of **lud-* vocabulary. I argue that by means of the creative use of concepts and the foregrounding of language’s role in constructing reality, Plautus effects a re-imagining of the *ludi* as spaces in which subaltern comic entertainers call the shots, sidelining the Roman officials tasked to organise these events and to perform religious rites. The games Plautine characters play move the focus towards a newly constituted sphere of the aesthetic, in which a comic artist like Plautus could display excellence.

Ludus thus becomes one of the master terms of the aesthetic programme of Rome’s earliest literary comedian, comprising play with words, metaphors, the display of wit, and the planning, revising, and executing of plots. Both with regard to the stage fiction and the relationship with the audience, Plautus elaborates a notion of play that he gradually integrates into Rome’s cultural norms while still retaining its non-Roman tinge: it is othered in terms of social status (being a mainstay of enslaved and not fully mature characters) and culture (Hellenic rather than Roman), entering Rome from the outside and thus remaining foreign to its cultural-ideological matrix. Outsiders like comic dramatists symbolically import play as a morally dubious category that is approximated to lying, pretence, and deception – activities with a pejorative connotation that are a far cry from the prevailingly positive valuation of the concept of play in modern western culture.

The *ludi* were then ludic after all, but a discourse of play was crafted by creative writers in the first place – writers like the comedian Plautus who exploited his linguistic expertise to symbolically reconfigure the Roman games in agreement with his aesthetic agenda.³⁷ Three of Plautus’ comedies will serve as case studies to trace Plautus’ strategic mobilisation of play

³⁶ For Plautus’ creative rewriting and enrichment of Menander, see in general Fraenkel 1922 (with the revised Italian edition from 1960 containing important *addenda*); an in-depth comparative analysis of the only pieces of text for which such a comparison is possible – Plautus’ *Bacchides* and his Menandrian source *Dis Exapaton* – is provided by Christenson 2020: 13-19; connections of this Menandrian excerpt with other Plautine plays are drawn by Damen 1992.

³⁷ The playful elements of pre-literary stage traditions such as the mime or Atellan farce will of course not be denied. Plautus’ idiosyncratic mix of Greek, Italic, and Roman, however, stands apart precisely because of the linguistic creativity on display and Plautus’ exploitation of Latin as a means to influence his audience’s *conception* of play. For an *in nuce* overview of differing evaluations of the relationship between the *palliata* and earlier drama, see Petrides 2013.

rhetoric: *Casina*, *Poenulus*, and *Pseudolus*. The motive behind the choice of these comedies is primarily a quantifying one. All these works contain a notable abundance of **lud*-lexemes so that their specific conceptualisations of play can be studied in detail. While occasional references to other Plautine plays will complement the close analysis of the triad above, this selection will allow to draw hermeneutic inferences from these comedies to Plautus' entire *oeuvre* as it has survived. To avoid repetitions, I am opting for a thematically organised presentation of the argument rather than a play-by-play analysis. It will emerge that Plautus has created an innovative and experimental language of play in Latin which has decisively shaped modern interpretations of the *palliata* and the Roman games.

1.2) Trick me once, trick me twice: Greek guile and Roman trust

It has become commonplace to describe Plautus' comic universe as *Plautinopolis*, a fantasy world which is poised between the two geographical and ideological poles of Greece and Rome whilst following a generic logic of its own.³⁸ It is certainly accurate that Plautus deliberately merges Greek and Roman elements into a heady mix that uses cultural divergences for comic effect. Yet, within the burgeoning generic branches of Rome's early drama, the *palliata* occupied the place of the most unabashedly Greek one. With the *fabula Atellana* looking back to Italic forms of farcical drama, the *praetexta* being moored in Rome's history of *res gestae*, and the *togata* complementing the *palliata* as a Romanocentric version of popular comedy, the latter accentuates its Greekness rather than latently presupposing it.³⁹ In the gradually more diverse entertainment shows of the *ludi*, the *palliata* was hence the genre in which non-normative Roman behaviour was given centre stage under the veneer of Greek alterity. Plautus not only advertises that his comedies are translations of Greek models, and that they unfold in a setting seemingly belonging to the Hellenised world, but the characters also have Greek names, occasionally resort to the Greek language, and even engage in Greco-Latin wordplay.⁴⁰

I suggest it is expedient to make sense of Plautine *palliata*'s Greekness as a caricature, a self-conscious exaggeration of features associated with the culture of the Hellenised world for

³⁸ The term was coined by Gratwick 1982a: 112-3.

³⁹ Manuwald 2011: 143-200 gives an overview of the evidence; see further Flower 1995 on the *fabula praetexta* and the political importance of these 'history plays'; Clark 2007: 110-116 reveals a connection between Naevius' *praetexta Clastidium* and Marcellus' dedication of a temple to *victoria*. On Ennius' *Ambracia* and the triumph of Fulvius Nobilior, see Gildenhard 2003: 95-7. Pacuvius seems to have written a *praetexta* about L. Aemilius Paullus' victory at Pydna, cf. Muth 1972: 74.

⁴⁰ For Plautus' propensity for wordplay, see Fontaine 2010; on his language more generally, Barrios-Lech 2020.

audiences in Rome.⁴¹ Dupont has proposed to interpret the *palliata*'s Greekness as an 'alterité incluse', a Greek other that was variously defined against Romanness but incorporated into constructions of Roman identity. Ethnically, socially, and culturally diverse audiences would gather to watch a comic spectacle that exploited its spectators' knowledge and stereotypes about Greece from a Roman perspective – with distortion and overstatement as potent tools to prompt laughter. Hence, the prominence of notions of play need to be explained within the larger process of Rome's acculturation of Greek thought. Plautus humorously (over-)stresses the ineptness of his Hellenising characters who flout the most basic principles of Roman society: masters ask slaves for help in solving their problems, slaves pose as intellectual giants, young men want to marry disreputable women out of love, and characters resort to hoodwinking rather than morally acceptable means of achieving their goals. Their continuous deployment of play vocabulary to describe their stratagems and language games therefore marks them as hyper-Greek figures who perform Greekness as a risible caricature for Roman delectation.

Among the list of programmatic words in Plautus, Alison Sharrock singles out **lud-*lexemes for their special importance, adding that this lexical choice is particularly evocative as the comedies were staged during the *ludi*.⁴² However, she does not precisely work out what meaning(s) of the highly polysemous noun *ludus* Plautus is particularly fond of, nor what the relationship between the *ludi* festivals and Plautus' special configuration of his *ludi* might be. After all, why should these festivals have anything to do with games of deception when they were religious occasions in honour of a god at which Rome's special connection with the divine sphere was celebrated? Yet, a quick perusal of the attested cases of **lud-*lexemes in Plautus reveals that '*ludus* as trickery' is the most popular sense by far.⁴³ There is an astonishing lexical variety of play vocabulary in his *oeuvre*, given the early stages of the evolution of a literary form of Latin. Beside the phrases *aliquem ludos facere* and *alicui ludum dare*, the lexemes *ludibrium*, *ludibundus*, *ludificari*, *ludificator*, *ludificabilis*, *luditare*, *lusor*, *adludiare*, *deludere*, *deludificare*, *eludificari*, and *obludiare* can be found in Plautus for the first time.⁴⁴ The prevailing semantic core of this panoply of words is play as a form of fooling or hoodwinking

⁴¹ Hirsch 2023 borrows the concept of hyper-hellenisation from Moore 1998. He explains the *palliata*'s overemphasised Greekness as a safeguard to be able to launch satirical attacks on Roman culture, broadly speaking. Dupont 2002 and 2005 are indispensable for Hellenism in Plautus. The compound verbs *pergraecari* and *congraecare* in Plautus play with the pejorative connotations of the Greeks' alleged low morals and luxuriousness (for *pergraecari*, cf. *Bacch.* 812; *Most.* 20; 63; 959; *Truc.* 79, and *congraecare*, *Bacch.* 742).

⁴² Sharrock 2009: 10.

⁴³ The Plautus text follows Lindsay 1904-5. Translations are generally taken from the Loeb editions and adapted as well as problematised when necessary.

⁴⁴ De Vaan 2008: 350-1. *Alludere*, *eludere*, and *illudere* occur for the first time in Terence. On Plautus' inventive coinage of new words, see Adams 2003: 460. Terence's language already reflects a reduction of lexical experimentalism and greater regularisation, cf. Clackson/Horrocks 2007: 176-7.

someone, a harmless kind of intrigue plotted for the joy of it. It involves pretension and the playing of roles, and for this reason becomes a powerful metaphor in Plautus for Latin comic drama as a whole.

Although earlier and contemporary evidence of the semantic field of play among fragmentary Latin authors is predictably sketchy, some general observations are possible. The dominant sense of *ludere* is ‘to play around, sport, dance, frolic’, and the plural noun *ludi* is used only in the generic meaning ‘games’, e.g. Liv. Andr. *Aeg.* 2: *lascivum [...] Nerei simum pecus ludens ad cantum* (‘the frisky snub-nosed herd of Nereus (i.e. dolphins) [...] sporting to our songs’), Naev. *Tarent.* 2: *quasi in choro ludens* (‘as though she were playing [...] in a ring’⁴⁵), Enn. *Alex.* 2: *ab ludis [...] expectantes nuntium* (‘awaiting a message from the games’).⁴⁶ The frequency with which a ritualistic context is invoked in these passages is striking: unspecified *ludi*, the festival of the *Compitales*, the dancing *in choro* and *in circulis*, and even the tricolon *edi bibi lusi* hint at a particular, socially sanctioned setting for merrymaking, fun, and pleasurable indulgence.

Compared to these uses, the Plautine evidence is more variegated and self-consciously aesthetic. Plautus removes the play lexemes from their ritual and religious mooring and shapes them into symbols of his literary programme. Although the Greek verb παίζω in general covers a similar range of denotations as the Latin *ludere*, the sense of trickery only comes to the fore with the development of New Comedy while being remarkably absent from the earlier Aristophanic type of the genre.⁴⁷ It is conceivable that Plautus and other *palliata* writers promoted the meaning ‘deceive, trick, play games with’ under the influence of the Greek models that he was adapting for the Roman stage. Still, the quality of deceptiveness takes on a different meaning when seen in the light of Rome’s takeover of Greek culture because the construction of play as deceit is itself predicated on a cultural comparison between Greece and

⁴⁵ Ribbeck 1898: 22 follows Buecheler in omitting the ablative *pila*. This might be a case of a round dance rather than a ball game.

⁴⁶ The remaining passages are: Liv. Andr. unassigned comic frg. 1: *affatim edi bibi lusi*; Naev. *Tunic.* 1: *Compitalibus [...] Lares ludentis*; unassigned comic frg. 5: *libera lingua loquemur ludis Liberalibus*, Lyc. 17: *namque ludere ut laetantis inter sese vidimus*; Pac. *Arm. Iud.* 1: *seque ad ludos iam inde abhinc exerceant*; Acc. *Bacch.* 10: *laetum in Parnaso inter pinos tripudiantem in circulis/ludere [...] atque taedis fulgere*. The assignment of fragments follows the editions of Ribbeck. See further Cat. frg. 83: *in pompa uectitatum iri ludis*. Cf. Padilla-Peralta 2020: 158-65 for the ritual aspects of the Naevius passage; Flower 2017: 26-7 elucidates the connection between *lares* and festivity.

⁴⁷ For παίζειν in the sense of ‘teasing, joking’, see *Dis Ex.* 60: παίζεις; *Pk.* 388: πρὸς τίν’ οἶεσθ’, εἰπέ μοι, παίζειν; and 394: ἔπαιζον. The passage in *Sam.* 478-9: τὸ παιδίον σὸν ἐστίν. οἶδ’, ἀκήκοα τοῦ συνειδότος τὰ κρυπτά, Παρμένοντος. μηκέτι πρὸς ἐμὲ παῖζ’ involves a pun on the common root of παιδίον and παίζειν. In Aristophanes, it is only ever the chorus that uses play vocabulary, e.g., *Ran.* 319, 376, 388, 392, 407, 415, 442-4, 452 and 523. Similarly, in *Thesm.* the overwhelming majority of play lexemes denotes a form of ritualistic frolic and jolliness (cf. 795, 947, 984 and 1227). Bierl 2009: 73 calls the chorus in Old Comedy a cultural institutionalisation of child’s play.

Rome. From a Roman perspective, this results in the attribution of trickery to the Greeks (or other non-Romans) while Romanness comes to stand for trust and commitment to social obligations.⁴⁸

I claim that Plautus pursues a qualitatively different strategy with regard to his conception of *ludus* to what we can glean from coeval Latin authors even if the fragmentary state of their remaining textual evidence is a cause for methodological caution. The *Casina* will provide the first test case for this thesis. Right at the outset of the play, the prologue offers the first rich insights into the playwright's inventive deployment of *ludus* and its cognates:⁴⁹

*elicite ex animo curam atque alienum aes <foras>,
ne quis formidet flagitatorem suum:
ludi sunt, ludus datus est argentariis;
tranquillum est, Alcedonia sunt circum forum:
ratione utuntur, ludis poscunt neminem,
secundum ludos reddunt autem nemini.*

(*Cas.* 23-28)

Throw worries about your debts out of your mind,
let no one be afraid of his creditor.
The games are on, and we have played a game with the bankers.
It's calm, it's the Halcyon days throughout the forum.
They're being reasonable: during the games they don't demand anything
from anyone but after the games they don't return anything to anyone.

Before the comic action can set off properly, the prologue speaker induces the audience into the world of the comic fiction.⁵⁰ It is emphasised strongly that the games (*ludi*) elicit a special ambience and that the spectators may shed their concerns for a few hours of amusement.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Martin 1997: 6-13 highlights cultural differences between Greece and Rome, tracing Greek 'individualism' from conceptions of the gods via the vying of heroes for personalised glory in the early epics to natural and political philosophy. The lack of institutions that constituted community in the Greek world contrasts sharply with socio-cultural conditions in Rome, where *fides* was the cornerstone of social cohesion.

⁴⁹ The relationship between the prologue and the play proper is a thorny question: the passage 5-20 has been separated by scholars from the remainder of the prologue on the grounds that it is a later addition, in which the producers felt the need to justify the restaging of an old play unknown to a younger generation of spectators (cf. 13-5). It is sensible to assume that 5-20 (or even 5-22) constitute a later interpolation. An exclusion of these lines, however, has no bearing on my analysis of Plautus' use of play terminology in the prologue since the interpreted passage above can be regarded as a Plautine creation. Furthermore, the imaginative use of **lud-* lexemes is a distinctive feature of Plautus' style throughout the play and thus in keeping with the technique in the prologue.

⁵⁰ For Plautus' prologues and their relationship with the remainder of the plays, see Wessels 2011; Hollmann 2016. Sharrock 2009: 7 reads the prologues as liminal moments, at which the audience receives particular attention and the play world is framed. One of the functions of the prologues is to provide an entry into this secondary world by establishing a communicative relationship with the viewers and displaying the explicitly comic mode of their interaction.

⁵¹ The *ludi* also marked the time at which legal proceedings were halted. On the rich cross-pollination between legal norms in Rome and comic discourse, see Ziogas/Bexley 2022: 8-16.

Plautus' rhetorical move calls to mind an oft-quoted passage in Johan Huizinga's *Homo ludens*.

He writes:

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the playground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.⁵²

Huizinga is invested in blurring the boundaries between ritual and play, an argumentative manoeuvre that lends play a religious aura (cf. 'consecrated spot'). There is a tangible sense of frustration and despair with the ideological conflicts of the interwar period in Europe, which provide the context for Huizinga's theories: rather than, e.g., maintaining the fundamental difference between a religiously sanctioned space and a sphere demarcated for children's play, Huizinga elevates play – a concept far removed from the harms of ideology and political power – into a metaphysical category that structures essentially all human behaviour across cultures (spanning sport, the law, religion, etc.). For Plautus, the *ludi* equally become such a 'playground' where different groups in Roman society play games with one another (25: *ludus datus est argentariis*). Yet, there is a palpably competitive edge ('who tricks and outwits whom?') to this Plautine conception of play, which undercuts modern projections of innocuousness and serenity onto the concept.⁵³

But what type of institution were the *ludi* in the first place? It is a testimony to the abiding influence of Erich Segal's *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* that the *ludi* are habitually connected with an atmosphere of licence, liberty, excess, and frenzy. Segal alleged that the holidays at which these games were organised and the comedies staged at these occasions were representative of the same cultural pattern: a liberation from the exigencies of everyday life, conveniently brought about by the cathartic laughter of comedy.⁵⁴ Horace's sketch of Latin literary history in *Epist.* 2.1 served Segal as an ancient backup for his thesis, but he thereby entirely ignored Horace's own position in Rome's literary culture in the late 1st cent. BCE and the writer's poetic strategy.⁵⁵ The Saturnalian paradigm envisages the *ludi* as suffused

⁵² Huizinga 1949: 13.

⁵³ Cf. Scholtz 2013 (esp. 250), who analyses the impressive expansion of a discourse of play across western society, in particular since the 20th cent.

⁵⁴ Segal 1987: 9. The book was first published in 1968.

⁵⁵ *Epist.* 2.1.145-48 contains the buzzwords *licentia*, *libertas* and *ludere*, describing the Italic tradition of Fescennine verses, which Segal links to the spirit of Roman comedy. See Matzner 2018 for a more recent reading that is alert to Horace's 'maturation plot', which enables him to trace both Greek and Roman literary evolution from childlike playfulness to refined classicism.

with jollity, and it is precisely the festival of the Saturnalia with its association of a temporary inversion of social roles that offers a suitable shorthand for this conceptual model.

This is surprising insofar as no dramatic performances (*ludi scaenici*) were staged during this winter-festival.⁵⁶ Moreover, comedies were far from the only entertainment that the organisers lined up for their Roman and probably ‘international’ audiences.⁵⁷ The *ludi Romani*, for instance, featured horse and chariot races (*ludi circenses*) in the Circus Maximus, as well as the staging of tragedies and comedies. Having initially dominated, the *ludi circenses* were complemented by the *ludi scaenici* (themselves a later addition to the games) in 214 BCE, when four days were reserved for both races and stage shows.⁵⁸ Further, before dramatic performances could even become a part of the games, the *ludi* were at their core religious festivals that included processions, sacrifices, as well as musical and dance performances.⁵⁹

The influence of the Saturnalia on views of Roman comedy are, however, abiding. Recently, Michael Fontaine has even proposed to divide Plautine scholarship roughly into a ‘Saturnalian’ and a ‘Hellenistic’ paradigm. While the Saturnalian model stresses Plautus’ rootedness in the farcical Italic stage tradition, the Hellenistic model focuses on the unbroken continuity between Greek theatre, Hellenistic scholarship, and Plautus’ *palliata*.⁶⁰ The corollary of this fundamental binary is an emphasis on temporary freedom from prevalent Roman norms and a carnivalesque festivity on the one hand, and the poet’s learnedness as well as dense literary allusivity on the other. Fontaine’s schema ultimately rests on a decontextualised understanding of mid-republican literary production. The sophisticated language games Fontaine has highlighted in Plautus’ texts are too hastily linked with Hellenistic poet-philologists and pitted against the Italo-centric ‘Saturnalian’ model.⁶¹ This dichotomy risks perpetuating the old chestnut of Greek refinement versus Roman/Italic rusticity.⁶² Accordingly, Fontaine argues against dramatic shows targeting the masses, and instead construes Plautus’

⁵⁶ Rüpke 2012: 29. Much ink has been spilled on the purportedly Saturnalian spirit of the games and the subversive character of Plautine comedy. More recent studies of ritual have instead emphasised the complexity of civic festivals such as the Saturnalia. Even if the ancient sources regularly narrow down the ‘meaning’ of such occasions to a single aspect, e.g., the temporary inversion of the social order, these events fulfil a plethora of functions (socio-political, performative, didactic...), cf. Versnel 2013.

⁵⁷ Rüpke 2012: 19 and Feeney 2016: 103 emphasise the strategic modelling of the Roman games after the renowned Greek festivals and the likely attraction of visitors from middle Italy. Now also Padilla-Peralta 2020.

⁵⁸ Bernstein 1998: 245.

⁵⁹ Beard, North and Price 1998: 137-144; Rüpke 2006: 225.

⁶⁰ Fontaine 2013: 529-30. A similar dichotomy (Greek vs. Italic) underlies the overview of 20th-cent. Plautus scholarship offered by Petrides 2013.

⁶¹ One could say that Fontaine attempts to counter the tendencies of the German tradition of analytic criticism of comedy, which sought to identify Italic influences on Plautus’ comedies, see e.g. Lefèvre 2004.

⁶² Rawson 1989: 431-444 shows that Roman towns in Italy were often more Hellenised and more open to Greek literature and drama than Rome.

audience as small-scale and ‘aristocratic, knowledgeable, philhellenic’.⁶³ The inference from the undeniable linguistic artistry of Plautine drama to an exclusively elite audience is unconvincing, and the implicit suggestion that a Plautus play can only be enjoyed if one grasps the most subtle of puns hints at what Pierre Bourdieu has criticised as the ‘scholastic view’.⁶⁴

Historical scholarship has lately come to understand the role of these festivals within the broader dynamics of the Roman rise to hegemony in the ancient Mediterranean much better. The gradual increase of the number of occasions for *ludi* and their growth in duration are now seen against the backdrop of Italic rivalry and the deliberate Roman attempt to outdo the heavily Greek-influenced south of the Italian peninsula with its rich theatrical culture. At the same time, it is difficult to see how their proven proliferation and growth could not become entangled with political power in Rome. For aediles climbing the ladder of offices, the sponsorship of stage events formed a politicised arena, in which they competed for recognisability and promotion. It seems likely that the potential for the exploitation of stage entertainment was realised early on and henceforth also drew the nobility to the shows.⁶⁵

In a bid to supplant the soft power of the Greek cultural *koine*, the Romans sought to establish themselves as rightful inheritors of Greek (in particular Athenian) cultural sophistication by systematically taking over and integrating literary genres of the Greek world into the design of the various *ludi*.⁶⁶ This rendered these festivals a rich motley of religious, political, and literary components, which are inextricably intertwined. Hence, the political dimension of the games played itself out both in the foreign and the domestic sphere: Rome’s relation with its neighbours in the wider Mediterranean and the *cursus honorum* at home were arenas for power struggles that shaped the festival context. A logic of competition underlay the commissioning and production of dramatic scripts, which were put on stage as ‘culture for ostentation’.⁶⁷

⁶³ Fontaine 2014: 420. For the more extensive argument, see Fontaine 2010: 149-200, esp. 185, where he reasons: ‘Plautus’ audience was very small. And if it was small, it was exclusive; if it was exclusive, it was predominantly elite.’ None of these logical steps strikes me as a necessary inference from the preceding premise. Richlin 2017 argues for the opposite extreme. For her, Plautine drama was ‘slave theatre’, produced and watched by the increasing number of enslaved and disenfranchised people in Rome.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu 1996: 305 (and 393 n. 33). By this, he means a *déformation professionnelle*, which he alternatively labels ‘philologism’, a scholarly attitude which regards ancient texts as deprived of any other function but to provide a code that is to be deciphered by the expert.

⁶⁵ For the issue of socially stratified seating, see Goldberg 1998: 14-5 and Manuwald 2011: 104-8. The more the *ludi* gained in significance, the more the aristocracy felt it necessary to structure the audience space so it mirrored Rome’s social stratification (Flaig 2004: 235-6). *Contra* Gruen 1992: 188-93, who denies that the organisation of *ludi* helped in the promotion of a political career.

⁶⁶ Cf. Bernstein 1998: 249-50. Feeney 2016: 119-20 emphasises that it was not contemporary, but texts canonised by Hellenistic scholars that the Romans showed keen interest in (epic, classical tragedy, New Comedy).

⁶⁷ Rüpke 2006: 228. Goldberg 2005: 73 alleges that aediles who purchased plays showed little interest in what form of entertainment the audiences would get as long as the acting troupes managed to gather a large crowd.

Based on the evidence, it seems that the organising aediles were in contact with impresarios, who bought plays from authors and therefore had the opportunity to promote young talents and shape the entertainment programme. This system of mutual dependencies in the theatre world was situated on a lower level of social prestige than in (classical) Athens, where actors enjoyed citizen status and the major festival occasions took place in permanent stone theatres.⁶⁸ Thanks to didascalical notices, there is at least safe documentation of the context at which Plautus' *Pseudolus* was staged for the first time.⁶⁹ The performance of the play is reported to have taken place at the festivities of the *ludi Megalenses* in 191 BCE, most likely in front of the Magna Mater temple on the Palatine where a wooden stage would have been erected for the spectators sitting on the temple steps. Unlike the enormous theatre of Dionysus in Athens, the dimensions of a Roman stage performance were relatively small and the stage construction slipshod. Viewers were sitting either on one level with or in an elevated position to the actors on stage, and the closeness of a rather cramped space permitted much greater intimacy and immediacy of communication than in the tall auditorium of the Athenian theatre. The elaborate nature of addresses to the audience in Plautus, which were most likely more frequent than in his Greek models, can be directly linked to the different stage conditions in Rome that a playwright like Plautus is sure to have made the best use of when contriving comic plots.⁷⁰

To return to the *Casina*, beside the lead-in into the comedy, the prologue reveals crucial points about how Plautus fashions himself vis-à-vis the audience in a playful mode. First, the prologue speaker addresses the audience as a collective with the plural imperative *edicite* (23), making a sweeping command without differentiating between the various social backgrounds of individual viewers. What is foregrounded is a generalised human concern (*curam*), which serves as a safe common denominator uniting the different social strata in the *cavea*. The second bit, on the other hand, appears to be a rather less universal worry: *aes alienum*. A well-off member of the senatorial elite would hardly be as troubled by debt as the common man

⁶⁸ Athenian theatre in particular is viewed by scholars as a prototypical example for the theatre's constitutive role in fashioning a shared civic ethos of the whole *polis* (see Cartledge 1997). In the Hellenistic period, acting troupes travelling the Mediterranean (the so-called *technitai* of Dionysus) do not seem to have shared the same privileges. Plautus' background in the Greek-influenced theatre world has variously been linked to these troupes, cf. Gruen 1990: 127; Le Guen 2013.

⁶⁹ Deufert 2002: 88-96, who surmises that these dates probably go back to Varro's inquiries.

⁷⁰ A mixed audience of approximately 1,500 viewers was probably squeezed into the temple steps which functioned as the *cavea*. For a reasoned guess of these figures and the archaeological background of the temple of the Magna Mater, see Goldberg 1998; now also Goldberg 2018b. The performance conditions and practicalities surrounding theatre productions in Plautus' time are further treated in Manuwald 2011: 55-68, Marshall 2006, Franko 2013, and Wiseman 2016: 50-62. Aristophanes' Old Comedy features audience addresses especially in the *parabaseis* (cf. Muecke 1977).

struggling to make ends meet. Popular disdain for people dealing professionally with money is, however, a recurrent theme across the corpus of Plautine comedies.⁷¹ Whereas *argentarius* (25) can be regarded as the neutral term denoting a financial profession with increasing importance in Plautus' time (conventionally translated as 'banker, moneylender'), *flagitator* (24) carries a strongly negative connotation ('a dunning creditor').⁷² The *argentarii* were in charge of changing money, giving out loans, and keeping records of financial transactions. They were frequently freedmen, who conducted their business among the lower ranks, while some senators and knights involved in monetary business were operating in the upper echelons of Roman society.⁷³ What seems at first glance like an announcement that clearly demarcates the audience members into the rich and the financially precarious thus turns out to be a rhetorical strategy to construct an in-group, which is set against the common enemy of nagging moneylenders.⁷⁴

This construction of an imaginary community of Roman citizens defined against a varying set of enemies as one main function of the *ludi* has been widely analysed in scholarship. It is surmised that Rome's increasing imperial expansion led to the risk of an ever-greater rift between the people and the upper class, which they reacted to by providing more opportunities for contact between the diversifying and growingly unequal community of citizens and non-citizens in Rome.⁷⁵ The *ludi* then served as a community ritual that strengthened the internal cohesion of the Roman population by constructing it as an abstract collective united by common values and demarcating them from imaginary non-Roman qualities.⁷⁶ In the *palliata*, the dividing line between a notional body of Romans directly addressed as in the prologue above and the non-Roman actors on stage was clearly marked.⁷⁷ In this case, the community that the *prologus* conjures up is united in their antagonism against the *argentarii*. Whether aristocrats were present in the audience or not, the prologue aligns people sitting in the *cavea* with a consolidating system of (aristocratic) Roman values, in this case the moral strictures against professionalised financial business.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Gruen 2001: 93 links the playwright's preoccupation with pecuniary matters to broader societal debates about high interest rates and a more general economic transformation in the early 2nd cent. BCE subsequent to the influx of plunder in the aftermath of the Punic Wars.

⁷² OLD s.v. *flagitator*.

⁷³ New Pauly s.v. *argentarii*.

⁷⁴ Richlin 2017: 184; 192-3 with the parallel passage in *Pseud.* 297: *suom repetunt, alienum reddunt nato nemini*.

⁷⁵ It is a commonly held view that the multiplication of occasions for public games compensated for increasing social differentiation and demand for military service while acting, in addition, as a legitimating force for the ruling elite, cf. Gruen 1992: 222; Bernstein 1998: 244; Rüpke 2012: 87.

⁷⁶ Flaig 2004: 233-25.

⁷⁷ For the stigmatisation of actors as *infames* in Rome, see in particular Edwards 1993: 98-136. See also Duncan 2006 (ch. 4) on the link in the Roman imagination between acting and prostitution.

⁷⁸ Similar ire against moneylenders introduces Cato's *De agri cultura*, where the first chapter links *faeneratores* with a lack of honour; See also *Curc.* 377-8, where the banker Lyco reflects on the practices of his profession: *habent hunc morem plerique argentarii/ut alius alium poscant, reddant nemini*. The *argentarii* are presented as

The invocation of key tenets of republican political culture is sustained throughout the prologue. At the end, the *prologus* announces: *tantum est. valete, bene rem gerite [et] vincite/virtute vera [...]* (87-8) ('That's all. Farewell, be successful, and be victorious through true bravery'). The appeal to Roman bravery and military success comes so abruptly that it smacks of disingenuousness. Furthermore, the curt *tantum est* gives the line an air of fulfilled duty, which the speaker seems not to be coy about.⁷⁹ Again, it is conspicuous that the speaker addresses the audience with imperatives in the plural (*gerite, vincite*), not counting himself as a fellow Roman (e.g., with a first-person plural). A similar move can be detected in a line at the beginning of the prologue where Plautus appeals to another cornerstone of Roman society: *fides* (2: *Fidem qui facitis maxumi – et vos Fides*) ('you who hold Good Faith in highest esteem – and vice versa'). In just one line, the speaker establishes a relationship between *fides* and the Roman people while excluding himself from the equation. The *prologus* enjoys playing with the opportunities offered to him by the public stage of the *ludi*: he constructs a crowd of fellow Romans and invokes notions deemed central for Rome's aristocratic value system (disdain at openly executed financial business; *virtus, fides; victoria; res gestae*), but his address suddenly acquires an ironic tone at the end of the prologue. The speaker's position remains that of an outside observer, who construes a notional community united by Roman values while simultaneously poking fun at their pretensions.

A variety of suggestions have been made as regards the identity of the prologue speaker in the *Casina*. Referring to l. 2, Skutsch has even put forward the hypothesis that it may have been the personified deity *fides*.⁸⁰ Williams, by contrast, disapproves of Skutsch's idea without, however, offering any convincing counterargument.⁸¹ Both scholars fail to capture the full semantic range of *fides*. More than narrowly economic or marital, *fides* was such a foundational socio-political value in Rome (it even became deified) that Plautus shows keen interest in it

having one single goal: the relentless accumulation of wealth. He claims that they even get embroiled in fistfights about financial matters (379: *pugnis rem solvant, si quis poscat clarius*).

⁷⁹ MacCary/Willcock 1976: 100 consider the utterance complimentary. Although they refer to an almost identical line in *Cist.* 197-8: *haec sic resta gesta est. bene valet vincite/virtute vera, quod fecistis antihac*, they do not see it as a hackneyed phrase. Leigh 2004a: 38 sees the jarring paradox that a notoriously unreliable prologue speaker suddenly appeals ceremoniously to *vera (!) virtus*, the core of the Roman self-image also adduced in other genres (e.g., Ennius *Scaenica* 254: *sed virum vera virtute vivere animatum addecet*). Richlin 2017: 87-8 reads these utterances as potential street chants directed at legions going to war, which a nationalistic audience might have cheered to.

⁸⁰ Skutsch 1900: 272-3. His argument rests on the premise that *fides* in the sense of trustworthiness undergirds financial transactions (hence the reference to *argentarii* and *aes alienum* above). Williams 1993: 34 acknowledges the centrality of *fides* for the play but restricts the meaning of the term to marital faithfulness. For *fides* in the *Captivi*, see e.g., Franko 1995. For the latest attempt to revive the possibility of *fides* leading the audience into the play, see Connors 2016. Richlin 2017: 188 gives a financial lens to *fides*, noting its relation to credit and debt, and how its lack afflicts the lower classes.

⁸¹ Williams 1993: 34. She holds that the wife Cleostrata is the prologue speaker as she takes over the role of the *servus callidus*, who conventionally has a special rapport with the audience.

across his works.⁸² Like *virtus*, it is a key component of a network of values that emerged as a marker of identity for the Romans to distinguish themselves from foreign peoples – often through the building of temples in honour of such deified concepts in the capital.

While it is the Aetolians in the *Captivi* who have a reputation for perfidy, in the *Casina* Plautus has a dig at Carthaginians, Greeks, and Apulians (75-8: *id ni fit, mecum pignus si quis volt dato/in urnam mulsi, Poenus dum iudex siet/vel Graecus adeo, vel mea caussa Apulus* – ‘If anyone wishes to, let him bet a pitcher of honey-wine against me that this isn’t the case, provided that the referee is a Carthaginian or a Greek, or an Apulian for all I care’). This displacement of deception, untrustworthiness, and trickery to rivalling peoples reinforces an abstract Roman ideal that became normative for the *res publica*. If the *Casina* was staged in proximity to the temple of *fides* on the Capitol, spectators would have had a rich multimedia experience with the dramatic performances at the *ludi* being integrated into the monumental cityscape by being staged right next to where uniquely Roman deities were worshipped.⁸³

At these pivotal places that memorialised outstanding achievements of Rome’s past, Plautus establishes a parodic discourse that quotes, bungles, and mocks authoritative utterances, fully exploiting the opportunities that public speech offered to a subaltern playwright without conventional rights to address the *populus*. Commanding the gathered community to be victorious through the display of true *virtus* (*virtute vera*) lays it on very thick – a phonetically memorable jingle that overaccentuates the importance of trust and truthfulness in Roman culture. As much as Plautus’ *palliata* stages itself as hyper-hellenised, it is equally ‘hyper-Roman’ in perpetually conjuring core ideas of Roman identity, which it then gleefully mocks.⁸⁴

It is against this construction of an imagined (hyper-)Roman community that Plautus now sets his discourse of play. Having dispelled fears of nagging creditors, the prologue-speaker in the *Casina* abruptly posits the wider cultural context for the dramatic performance that is to follow (25: *ludi sunt*). He seeks to transport the audience into the festive mood required for the holidays, immediately showing off his trademark wordplay: *ludi sunt, ludus datus est argentariis*. On the surface, the statement seems patently obvious: during the games there is a special licence to be playful. However, what Plautus effects in this verse is the fusion of the

⁸² Clark 2007: 87 and 105-7 relates *fides* as a divinity to several Plautine comedies, demonstrating its substantial significance for Roman self-definitions. Clark’s study is seminal for the understanding of these values in the form of ‘divine qualities’. Beside *fides*, which received a temple on the Capitol in the vicinity of the temple for Jupiter Optimus Maximus in the 3rd cent. BCE, temples of *salus*, *victoria*, *spes*, *libertas*, *honos*, *virtus*, and *pietas* gradually enriched the religious topography of the city.

⁸³ Cf. Franko 1995: 174; more generally for the various media of memory, see Hölkeskamp 2018.

⁸⁴ Owens 1994 compellingly analyses Plautus’ adroit adaptation of Menander to Roman realities in the *Bacch*. Nicobolus is mocked as he enters into a contract because he sticks too punctiliously to the Roman convention of a *stipulatio* – a detail that did not exist in Greece (394).

institutional framework (the *ludi* as civic festival) with one of the hallmarks of his poetic agenda (*ludus* as playful trickery advancing and complicating the plot). This effect is produced, on a stylistic level, by means of an antanaclasis. Owing to its polysemy, the noun *ludus* is, on the one hand, particularly well-suited for such verbal creativity and, on the other hand, gestures self-reflexively to verbal play as the distinct feature of Plautus' poetic technique.⁸⁵

The second part of l. 25 (*ludus datus est argentariis*) is also not as straightforward as de Melo's translation suggests. First, 'we have played a game with the bankers' turns the passive construction in the Latin into an active one in English, adding an (imaginary) subject. This has the effect of obscuring the problem of agency in the sentence and hints at an ambiguity which Plautus again deliberately toys with. The question is: who is playing games with whom? This uncertainty results, secondly, from the difficulty of pinning down the exact meaning of *alicui ludum dare*, which is a phrase first attested in Plautus. When the protagonist of *Stichus* is given the opportunity to have fun, we read: *ac Stichus ludus datur* (*Stich. Arg. 2,7*). The agent benefitting from enhanced freedom to play is here in the dative (*Stichus*).⁸⁶ A slightly different tinge of *ludus* is found in *Bacch.* 1083: *nimis nolo desidiaei dare ludum* ('I don't want to indulge his idleness too much'). These examples suggest that it may equally be the *argentarii* in the dative who are being given the licence to play, even if that results in the exactly opposite meaning of what de Melo offers (i.e., 'the moneylenders get some playtime').⁸⁷ It seems more to the point to presume that this statement ties in with the prologue-speaker's strategy to generate complicity on the part of the audience by evoking an image of deceitful and cunning moneylenders who take advantage of the games to retain as much money for themselves as possible.

Another aspect about l. 25 is worth noting. The anaphoric repetition (*ludus, ludi*) and the asyndeton give the line a sense of rush, thus intentionally forestalling many questions that could be asked (Who has given the *argentarii* special playtime? Why them? What is the relation to the public games?). The message the spectators receive is, however, unequivocal: the *ludi*, primarily religious and political institutions, are reconfigured as spaces of playful trickery in Plautus' comic drama. It is evident that different rules are meant to apply during this time

⁸⁵ More wordplay with the lexeme occurs in *Bacch.*: *Lydus*, the name of the *paedagogus* (ultimately going back to Menander) has been read as a pun on *ludus* ('school'), cf. Fontaine 2010: 34. It is clear-cut that such a pun was Plautus' deliberate design, as he changed the names of other characters in the play for comic effect (cf. Bettini 2012: 58 – the generic name *Syros* was altered to *Chrysalus*) and exhibits further verbal play in l. 129: *Non omnis aetas, Lyde, ludo convenit*.

⁸⁶ See Cic. *Cael.* 28 for an abstract entity in the dative: *datur [...] huic aliqui ludus aetati* (scil. *adulescentiae*).

⁸⁷ MacCary/Willcock betray uncertainty about the passage as well. They propose a *double entendre*: 'the bankers are given a rest' and 'the bankers are given the slip' (1976: 101). Neither translation, however, captures that the *argentarii* might actually be the wily beneficiaries of the break from daily routine that the *ludi* provide.

compared to everyday life. During the *ludi*, even the incessant demand for cash by the *argentarii* comes to a standstill: *ludis poscunt neminem/secundum ludos reddunt autem nemini* (27-8). The parallel sentence structure and the double polyptoton (*ludis, ludos; neminem, nemini*) combined with the antithesis *poscunt-reddunt* neatly mark the boundary between the rules of the play world Plautus has set up and ordinary life. The nagging ends, but so does repayment. With a hint of down-to-earth cynicism, Plautus foils audience expectations, instigating them to distrust the actors' utterances and his whole fictional universe, in which deception is one of the master tropes.⁸⁸ In this passage, his technique of toying with the ambiguity of lexemes produces a tantalising uncertainty about who the mischief-maker is and who is being tricked – an uncertainty that recurs repeatedly in his comedies.

1.3) Pretty play: the reinvention of the *ludi* as an aesthetic sphere

The merging of the label for the performance context of the *ludi* and Plautus' poetics of trickery is not the only tactic the author uses to re-imagine aspects of Roman culture. He also aestheticises *ludus* in a bid to foreground the lexeme's 'non-teleological' semantic content.⁸⁹ Plautus envisions his *ludi* as activities with an intrinsic value, pranks that are played for the sake of it as much as for the concrete outcome they may produce (e.g., cheating an opponent out of money). It has been noted, in fact, that it is a Plautine idiosyncrasy to have his intrigues fail in order to accumulate and compound them.⁹⁰ As a consequence, the games Plautus' characters play with each other gain a self-contained quality and even a receive a critical idiom to evaluate their aesthetic features.

Brian Krostenko has argued that adjectives denoting elegance, refinement, and charm (*lepidus, festivus, elegans, facetus, bellus, venustus*) undergo a semantic narrowing in the course of the history of the Roman republic, which coincides with trends in aristocratic circles toward

⁸⁸ Cf. Feeney 2010: 296 on the homology of financial and theatrical belief (that the Romans signalled with the term *fides*).

⁸⁹ McCarthy 2000: 8 holds that cogitations about the aesthetic quality of cultural products in the medium of language are a binding element for Rome's early textual artists in the late 3rd and early 2nd cent. BCE.

⁹⁰ Stürner 2020 avows that the tricks of the clever slaves or their stand-ins are generally random and cumulative rather than goal-driven. The moments in *Pseud.* at which the protagonist shifts to 'improvisation' are collected in Christenson 2020a: 194. Pseudolus is undoubtedly a vital figure in driving the plot forward, but he is also often forced to revise his original plan due to unforeseen developments. His frankness with the audience about moments of doubt and good luck is remarkable (cf. 667-693; 905-12; 1017-37). In the *Poen.*, e.g., Hanno eventually finds his kidnapped daughters and Agorastocles is allowed to marry his love-interest Adelphasium. The core of the comedy, however, revolves around different matters.

elitist exclusionism and the social performance of a Greek-inspired aestheticism.⁹¹ He postulates that a cultural change is observable in both social practices (luxurious *convivia*, art collection, staging of games, poetry recitals, display of witty banter) and the realm of discourse. These approbative lexemes are wrested from the lower-class context in which they are used in Plautine comedy and become socially elevated in Ciceronian rhetoric and Catullan lyric poetry. Hellenism, however, continued to be associated with aestheticism and individualism displayed in exclusive, elite contexts – two cultural categories that were in contradistinction to the fixation on militarism and the community-orientation that underlay the ideological fabric of Rome’s aristocracy.

While not querying the broad outlines of Krostenko’s study, I contend that Plautus was already highly invested in aestheticisation and provides the template that later writers like Cicero and Catullus picked up for their projects.⁹² Krostenko is right, for instance, that in Plautus’ usage, the adjective *lepidus* can denote a wide range of referents: lavish entertainment, physical attractiveness, as well as exquisite, often erotically charged dress and ornaments.⁹³ However, his analysis obscures the continuity of the lexeme’s meaning. Overall, the adverb is frequent in Plautine comedy.⁹⁴ In the *Casina*, Pardalisca, Cleostrata’s maid, gives an insight into the main function she fulfils within the comedy: plotting against the sex-hungry men of the play (especially Cleostrata’s husband Lysidamus⁹⁵) alongside the *matrona* Cleostrata and her friend Myrrhina.

*Ludo ego hunc facete;
nam quae facta dixi omnia huic falsa dixi:
era atque haec dolum ex proxumo hunc protulerunt,
ego hunc missa sum ludere.*

(Cas. 685-8)

⁹¹ Krostenko 2001: 24-33.

⁹² The increasing appreciation of cultural pursuits (art, textual production, dining, etc.) among a changing nobility into the empire is treated from a historical perspective by Stein-Hölkeskamp 2019.

⁹³ Krostenko 2001: 65.

⁹⁴ *Cas.* 476: *lepide apros capiam*; 480: *lepide repperi*; 491: *lepide volo*; 726: *lepide excuratus [in]cessisti*; 747: *lepide nitide volo*; 771: *nimum lepide dissimulant*; 773: *nimis lepide [...] dant operam*; 935: *satin lepide adita est vobis manus*. For the combination of *lepide* and *ludere* cf. *Pers.* 635: *lepide lusit* (scil. *lenonem*); *Bacch.* 642: *erum [...] ut ego lusi lepide, ut ludificatust*.

⁹⁵ I will follow the convention of many commentators and attribute the name Lysidamus to the *senex* figure in the play. It must be borne in mind, however, that he is never explicitly identified as such in the play but is only addressed generically as *senex*. The namelessness of one of the central characters has been variously explained; for an overview of earlier such readings, see McCarthy 2000: 86, n. 16; also Chiarini 1978: 119. The designation ‘Lysidamus’ is only derived from one manuscript, albeit the oldest one, cf. O’Bryhim 1989: 91-2 and Questa 2001: 33. What the apparent insignificance of the name arguably brings to the fore is the stereotypicality of Lysidamus’ character and the constant awareness of this on the part of the other protagonists who address him only as *senex*. For the characters’ knowledge of being well-known stock figures cf. *Cas.* 684-5: *neque est nec fuit me senex quisquam amator adaeque miser*; 863: *optunso oro nunc pervelim progredi/senem, quo senex nequior nullus vivit*.

I'm fooling him wittily:
what I told him has happened was a lie from the first to last.
My mistress and this woman from next door have hatched this trick,
and I've been sent to fool him.

The act of fooling somebody (685: *ludo*) is modified by an adverb that highlights the aesthetic dimension (*facete*) in a sentence certainly spoken as an aside to the audience (after all, the fun would be quickly thwarted if Lysidamus overheard her profession of telling nothing but lies to him). In the entire scene, Pardalisca has been playing games with Lysidamus (621-714), and successfully managed to persuade him that Casina, the object of his desire, is raging inside the house with a sword in her hand.⁹⁶ The reference to the women's *dolus* (687) and Pardalisca's mendacity (686: *omnia [...] falsa dixi*) are closely bound up with the purpose she proclaims to serve: *hunc missa sum ludere* (688). As a vehicle of play and foolery, the maid acts as Cleostrata's helper-in-chief and proves to be a match for the comic *matrona* by professing how fully in control she is over devising ruses and executing them in a pleasing and entertaining fashion.⁹⁷

Further instances of play lexemes in the *Casina* bolster the impression that they appear in contexts marked by an intensified awareness of the characters for the role they play on stage. Just moments before Pardalisca's announcement of her successful trickery, the *matrona* Cleostrata rejoices in her own scheme after an exchange between her and her neighbour Alcesimus: *Iam hic est lepide ludificatus. Miseri ut festinant senes* (558: 'Now I've made fun of him in a lovely way. How the old wretches are running around!'). The neighbour had conspired with Lysidamus and agreed to provide his house for the latter as a love nest. Having caught wind of the plans right at the outset, Cleostrata designs her own plot to thwart Alcesimus' strategy. He is perplexed that Cleostrata suddenly denies she needs Myrrhina's – another maid's – help, which means his house cannot be vacated for Lysidamus' plotted sexual attack on Casina. When he has grudgingly left the stage, Cleostrata congratulates herself on the persuasive performance that her neighbour was not able to see through. What is more, she openly delineates the next steps of her stratagem:

*nunc ego illum nihili, decrepitum meum virum veniat velim,
ut eum ludificem vicissim, postquam hunc delusi alterum.
Nam ego aliquid contrahere cupio litigi inter eos duos
sed eccum incedit. At quom aspicias tristem, frugi censeas.*

(Cas. 559-62)

⁹⁶ For a moment, the *pater familias* seems to smell a rat and uncover Pardalisca's show: *ludibrio pessuma adhuc quae me habuisti* (645).

⁹⁷ Questa allocates the role of "regista-capocomico" to her (2003: 60).

I wish that useless, decrepit husband of mine would turn up now,
 so that I could make fun of him in turn, after I've had my fun with this other
 one:
 I'm keen to create some argument between the two.
 But look, here he comes. When you see him look so solemn, though, you'd
 think that he's a decent human being.

More than simply a soliloquy, Cleostrata's words can be described as a stylised form of self-reflection witnessed by the viewers in the *cavea*. Cleostrata is thus the first of the *dramatis personae* to render *ludus/ludere* a plot device. Just as Alcesimus has been duped (558: *est...ludificatus*; 560: *hunc delusi alterum*), Lysidamus is to be the victim of Cleostrata's tricks (560: *eum ludificem*). It has been noted that Cleostrata appropriates the language commonly used by the *servus callidus* in this scene.⁹⁸ Yet, several characters in Plautine comedy can take over the function (or parts thereof) of the clever slave, which entails a refined self-awareness of their status as stock figures and a deeper insight into the workings of the comic plot.⁹⁹

The shrewd wife adopts the role of a comic playwright, who invents pranks that are, above all, aimed at audience entertainment. Cleostrata specifies no motives for her plots beyond the enjoyment of outwitting the men. As another character tasked with the function of enhancing the playfulness of the comedy, she lays an emphasis on the aesthetic, not the practical or moral qualities of her scheme when she lauds her performance as *lepide* (558). For Cleostrata, the comic trick becomes an object of aesthetic evaluation, and parallel passages in Plautus attest to the fact that he delighted in having his protagonists betray an appreciation of the performativity of their actions. Hence, Plautus lays the foundation for the late-republican social performances that Krostenko describes by modelling his comic agents as strikingly self-conscious of their status as players on stage and creators of plots, who serve as fictional replicas of the activities of a comic playwright.

Jeremy Bateson has theorised the intimate connection between play and meta-communication. According to him, humans and animals at play are balancing a delicate tightrope as the boundaries of what is play and what is not are constantly porous. Within

⁹⁸ It should be mentioned that the noun phrase *servus callidus* never appears in the extant plays, cf. Richlin 2020: 354; cf. Fraenkel 1922: 231-50 on the augmented slave role as a Plautine innovation; for the role of slaves in the heritage of Greek comedy, see Akrigg/Tordoff 2013. McCarthy 2000: 26 and more extensively Stewart 2008 are insightful on the distinction good vs. bad slave in Roman comedy. The afterlife of the clever slave in theatre is treated by Schironi 2014.

⁹⁹ Crucially, however, figures endowed with meta-communicative capacities are seldom the ones prompting the most laughter – at least in moments in which they self-reflexively comment on the comic world. When the play world is exposed for what it is, spectators may be induced to activate their cognitive powers and chuckle appreciatively, but the slapstick and silliness arguably will get the bigger laughs (cf. Warning 1976: 331-2).

seconds, what used to be childlike rough-and-tumble play can turn into a serious wrestle. Hence, participants in playful practices (involving both verbal and physical interaction) must be able to recognise the metacommunicative signal ‘this is play’ although this message remains unspoken most of the time. He maintains that the message ‘this is play’ creates a paradoxical frame of action, in which the ‘players’ agree on the following rule: “these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote” (italics in original).¹⁰⁰ Play therefore resides at a secondary level of communication since it is not a particular activity *per se* but the metacommunicative frame which distinguishes playful from serious behaviour.

Cleostrata operates here at just such a secondary level, contemplating both the plot at hand and comic conventions more broadly. It is no mere coincidence that she casts Lysidamus and Alcesimus precisely in the lines discussed above as two stereotypical comic *senes* (558) and points to Lysidamus’ being *frugi* (562) – the attribute most commonly required of a comic slave.¹⁰¹ In her ludic vision, the *pater familias* is transformed into a serviceable slave character, who will be subjected to the women’s machinations for the remainder of the play. The way Cleostrata exacts vengeance in the comic cosmos is through crafty but ultimately harmless pranks that set the debilitated men against each other for the enjoyment of the audience (cf. 561: *aliquid litigi*).

In *Pseudolus*, too, the protagonist’s plan to dress up the slave Simia as Harpax and dupe the pimp Ballio is framed as the action of a comic playwright using props: *etiam opust chlamyde et machaera et petaso* (735: ‘I also need a cloak, a sword, and a hat’).¹⁰² What is more, his wager with Simo to finally obtain the money and buy Phoenicium from Ballio is explicitly called ‘staging of *ludi*’ (546: *indice ludos nunciam, quando lubet*; 552: *lubidost ludos tuos spectare*).¹⁰³ Although *Pseudolus* is the main representative of witty interactions (also couched in **lud-* terms) throughout the play, he is at times rivalled by other characters. The young man Calidorus’ companion Charinus presents himself up to the task, which is swiftly recognised by *Pseudolus*: *eugepae! lepide, Charine, meo me ludo lamberas* (743: ‘Well done! Charinus, you wittily beat me at my own game’). Hence, it is not just the fabrication of complex tricks (which

¹⁰⁰ Bateson 1972: 180.

¹⁰¹ More on this prized slave quality in Gildenhard/Viglietti 2020.

¹⁰² The Greek nature of these accoutrements is not at all reflected in the translation but would have been obvious to any Roman audience.

¹⁰³ The passages will be treated in more detail in ch. 1.5 below.

often founder) but also discursive practices such as banter and joking, which Plautus labels as *ludere/ludus*.¹⁰⁴

What Pseudolus gives credit to is the preceding verbal jousting between him and Charinus, in which both characters abundantly display their ability for verbal play in both Greek and Latin, e.g., the *tri*-polyptoton in l. 704-5 (*quaero quoi ter trina triplicia, tribu' modis tria gaudia/artibus tribu' tris demeritas dem laetitias, de tribus*); the deliberate misunderstanding of *utrumque* as a proper name in l. 710 (Ps. *immo utrumque*/Ch. *Utrumque, salve*); the punning on the name Charinus and the Greek noun χάρις in 712 and 736; and the interplay between the figurative and the literal meaning of the lexemes *sapere* (737), *acetum* (739) together with the ensuing metaphorisation of the concrete *pantopolium* ('store') in 742. The ample use of Greek vocabulary (beside 743: *eugepae* also 702, 712) colours this interaction as a demonstration of Greek and Latin linguistic mastery. Furthermore, the preponderance of Greek in this exchange marks such overly stylised rhetorical pyrotechnics as non-Roman verbal behaviour.

In a parallel passage in *Poenulus*, the slave Milphio and the *adulescens* Agorastocles indulge in showy teasing, verbal tug-of-war, and witty games. When the two ne'er-do-wells furtively observe the two girls Adelphasium and Anterastilis, Milphio self-consciously quips about the humour displayed by Agorastocles, which the slave speedily claims for himself: *enim vero, ere, meo me lacessis ludo et delicias facis* (296: 'Really, master, you're provoking me at my own game and making fun of me'). The possessive pronoun *meo* indicates that the *servus callidus* considers himself the rightful exponent of this type of speech, here being challenged by a fellow wit (*lacessis; delicias facis*). De Melo's translation 'making fun of me' for *delicias facere* fittingly encapsulates the proximity of the phrase in Plautus' imagination with the nearly synonymous expression *ludos facere*. This underscores how Plautus likens *ludus* to the noun *deliciae*, aestheticising the concept and furnishing it with connotations of daintiness and cultural refinement. Plautus seems to have incorporated folk practices such as the *flagitatio*, *occentatio*, and *quiritatio* – ritualised forms of exchanged insults similar to a rap battle – into his Hellenising comedies.¹⁰⁵ Playing games with someone (*ludos facere*) now becomes a typically

¹⁰⁴ The heuristic distinctions made by Gotter 2010: 174 into a level of discourse, discursive practices, and social practices will ground my hermeneutic operations. He conceives of oral statements or literary products as acts of speaking and writing, a set of culturally situated practices. Opting for a genre, choosing a unique style, representing a specific content – all these are social actions located within a system of values and an habitualised understanding of the world. This terminology will enable a sharper delineation of what *ludus/ludere* stands for in the analysed texts – a particular kind of play in its complex varieties and overlapping forms in discourse (deceptive, sexual, theatrical, etc.); a 'playful' use of speech (discourse as a practice, even if represented in the medium of literature that has come down to us, e.g., jesting, irony); actual play of an individual or a group outside of discourse (play as a social practice).

¹⁰⁵ See Richlin 2017: 151-184 for further differentiations.

Plautine version of these verbal duels and another pointer that Plautus wants his creativity with the resources of the Latin lexicon to be perceived as a sign of distinction for the playwright devising such verbal skirmishes.¹⁰⁶

To enhance the effect on the audience of this demonstration of witty wordplay, Plautus introduces doubles of the fiction-creating characters.¹⁰⁷ Even before Simia's name in *Pseudolus* is disclosed (744), he emerges as another trickster: he has brains (e.g., 725: *callidum, doctum*), wears typical Greek garb (735: *chlamyde et machaera et petaso*), and his name ('monkey') has overtones of imitation, deception, and the distortion of reality.¹⁰⁸ Play with words and their polysemy is his forte, e.g., 737-8: Ps. *iste servos ex Carysto qui hic adest ecquid sapit?*/Ch. *hircum ab alis* (Ps. 'But does that slave from Carystus who is here have any sense?'/Ch. 'Scents? There's a goat in his armpits'). While Pseudolus intends to learn about Simia's mental faculties (the figurative meaning of *sapere*), Charinus goes straight for the joke by understanding the metaphor literally ('smack'). It is such verbal gymnastics that Pseudolus labels *meus ludus* (743). The possessive pronoun points to the figure's self-awareness that this is a calculated technique and a specialty of his communicative behaviour. The appreciative adverb *lepide* reveals that Pseudolus judges such flippant language tricks for their style as if from a literary critic's meta-position.

This technique is fundamental to the play and can be traced to a much earlier passage. Right at the start of the drama, Calidorus applies the same lexeme to describe his slave's discursive practice: *ludis iam ludo tuo?* (24: 'Are you cracking your usual jokes now?'). Up to this point, Pseudolus seemed like a perfect specimen of the 'good companion' Ennius later memorialised in his *Annales*.¹⁰⁹ The socially inferior interlocutor is mindful of his station (2: *ere*), eminently polite and formal (7-8: *necessitas/me subigit ut te rogitem* – 'necessity forces me to ask you'), reminds his master of previous good judgement and advice (16-7: *tu me antidhac/supremum habuisti comitem consiliis tuis* – 'Previously you had me as chief associate in your counsels'), and vouches for future aid (19: *iuvabo aut re<d> aut opera aut consilio*

¹⁰⁶ Varro quotes an excerpt from the *Cornicula*, a lost play probably by Plautus, in which a soldier surrounded by other characters figures as the circus at which the others can stage their games: *quid cessamus ludos facere? circus noster ecce adest* (quoted in Richlin 2017: 174). Plautus evidently found this interface between institutional space (*circus; ludi*) and a requisite discursive practice (*ludos facere*) particularly evocative.

¹⁰⁷ An investigation of the motif of doubling is Maurice 2003, who has a particular focus on friendship. Panayotakis 2020 illuminates the potential of doubling for Plautus' plays of mistaken identity.

¹⁰⁸ Connors 2004 has memorably called the cultural work done by monkeys in the Greek tradition and early Roman comedies 'monkey business'. Simia's wit is conspicuously overemphasised, cf. 725: *doctum, callidum*; 737: *sapit*; 739: *aceti* [...] *acidissumi*; 746: *argutust*; 748: *scitust*). For Simia's *malitia*, see 725, 729, 909a, 937, 1017-22.

¹⁰⁹ A more detailed discussion of this famous passage will follow in ch. 1.4.

bono – ‘I’ll support you with money or help or good advice’).¹¹⁰ In 22-3, the imagined social harmony receives a first crack. Pseudolus looks at the tablets that are the source of Calidorus’ despondency and quips: *ut opinor, quaerunt litterae hae sibi liberos:/alia aliam scandit* (20-1: ‘I think these letters are trying to have babies; they’re climbing all over each other’). Calidorus reacts with the question whether this is one of his usual jokes. It seems as if only as soon as *ludus* is mentioned, the comedy proper can begin. So far, the conversation had been respectful, well-mannered, distanced – now, the style of communication begins to shift.

Intriguingly, Calidorus does not immediately pick up on Pseudolus’ jest but feels the need to ensure that he comprehends the slave’s intention. This is the instant in the play when the comic spirit gains sway. This juncture serves, above all, as a signal to the spectators that ‘this is play’.¹¹¹ Calidorus’ question *ludis iam ludo tuo* dramatizes a moment of uncertainty for the sake of the audience, in which he briefly steps out of the conversational flow and ponders – resulting in a reflection on Pseudolus’ communicative behaviour. Crucially, nothing is funny about this line, but the clearly marked *figura etymologica* of *ludere-ludus* serves Plautus to distinguish the serious, literal interactive style of the beginning of the comedy with the metaphorical play of 21-3. After this inaugurating moment, the gathered populace will have been inducted into the play world and sensitised to the polyvalence of linguistic signs and the verbal manipulation Plautus can subject them to. A secondary level of communication has been instituted, in which the semantics of words can be probed and tweaked – and the communicative medium itself become an object of creative remoulding.

At this meta-level of communication, the conventional meaning of the *ludi* (public games) and of further contextual terms is henceforth reinterpreted as a comic plot element. In the *Poenulus*, right before Milphio and Agorastocles come to see Adelphasium and Anterastilis for the first time, the slave introduces them as ‘a lovely sight’ (209: *lepidum spectaculum*) and whets Agorastocles’ appetite to watch the soon-to-be prostitutes like ‘a gorgeous show’ (206: *videre ludos iucundissimos*). The slave thus emphasises the aesthetic side of the *ludi* that Plautus’ discourse adds to the Roman games and other forms of public shows (cf. the modifying adjectives *lepidum* and *iucundissimos*).¹¹² The two women are equally embroiled in the language of aestheticism. Anterastilis acknowledges Adelphasium’s wit with a tricolon of

¹¹⁰ Cf. Enn. Ann. fr. 270: *Consilium partit* (emended by Skutsch from the preserved *comiter impertit*) and fr. 272: *Consilio indu foro lato sanctoque senatu*.

¹¹¹ Cf. Slater 1985: 119.

¹¹² The ordinary term for the festivals that featured stage productions in the Greek world was *ἀγών*, but Kidd 2019: 79 n. 13 provides copious examples for the Greek *παιδιά* in relation to ‘festivals’, in comedy e.g., Men. *Sam.* 41–2: *τῆς δ’ ἐορτῆς παιδιὰν πολλὴν ἐχούσης*, or *Epitr.* 478 (*συνέπαιζον* here refers to the participation in the Tauropolia festival).

conventional *servus callidus* attributes: *tam callida et docta sis et faceta* (234: ‘even though you’re so clever and smart and witty’); and their entire conversation revolves lengthily around the gendered question of the self-conscious exhibition of outward appearance and style (cf. esp. the comparison between females and salty fish in 240-6). The metapoetic component of the women’s interaction is somewhat downplayed in scholarly debates.¹¹³ *Sal, lepor, insulsus, salsus*, and *invenustus* all refer in their metaphorical sense to style, elegance, and verbal ingenuity (240: *salsa*; 241: *sine omni lepore et sine suavitate*; 244: *salsa sunt*; 246-7: *insulsa admodum atque invenustae/sine munditia et sumptu*). What is more, the verb *ornare* (which ambiguously denotes clothing and theatre costumes) is particularly frequent in the women’s exchange, showing how the spheres of theatre and (feminine) clothing style merge in the play.¹¹⁴

To be sure, not every use of *ludere/ludus* in Plautus is limited to the denotation ‘to play (verbal) tricks’. There is, for instance, a number of occurrences where *ludere* means ‘dance’ – a cultural practice with pejorative connotations in Rome.¹¹⁵ Moreover, an influential republican tradition has hypothesised about an etymological link between the noun *ludio* (a comic performer/dancer), the Roman games (*ludi*), and the ethnic group of the Lydians (*Lydii*).¹¹⁶ In a bid to marginalise the Greek origins of Rome’s cultural traditions and sever them from charges of decadence and moral corruption, Livy and Valerius Maximus participate in the propagation of an aetiological foundation myth (probably going back to Varro) of the Roman games arising out of the ritual dance from Asia Minor, which gradually came to be Romanised.¹¹⁷ Yet, a passage from *Pseudolus* shows that while an actual dance accompanying the music on stage will undoubtedly have enhanced the dramatic effect of the performance, the language of the

¹¹³ Maurach 1975: 185-8 is more concerned with metrical questions; Fraenkel 1922: 39 notes the double sense of *insulsus*; Moodie 115 remarks on Milphio’s reference to Anterastilis as a cook in *Poen.* 248-9 but does not develop the thought towards metapoetics.

¹¹⁴ Johnston 1980: 150-53: reads the two prostitute apprentices within the discourse of sumptuary legislation, more precisely the repeal of the Oppian Law in 195 BCE. Gruen 1990: 143-6 remarks that pampered women and jokes about them are a frequent trope in Plautus. Fantham 2011: 191 notes that the females are constructed as witty professionals so the male characters can showcase their rhetoric a bit more. On Hanno’s foreign and feminised attire, cf. *Poen.* 975-6, 1298, 1303; Dutsch 2008: 156-60 calls attention to the interplay between masculine and feminine modes of speech.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Cas.* 980: *Bacchae nullae ludunt*; *Aul.* 626: *continuo meum cor coepit artem facere ludicram*. Moore 2022 sheds light on possible dance scenes in Plautus. Another rarer facet of the verb *ludere* concerns the aspect of inefficiency and wastefulness (in Roman comedy collocated with *opera*), e.g., *Pseud.* 369: *operam ludimus*; see further: *Capt.* 344: *operam luseris*; *Cas.* 424: *operam luserim*; *Rud.* 429: *operam ludo* and 899: *operam ludos facit et retia*; *Ter. Phor.* 330: *opera luditur*.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Livy 7.2.1-3 and Val. Max. 2.4.4. Brown 2013 on the problems related to these stories about the origins of dramatic *ludi* in Rome. There are two attestations for the noun *ludio/ludius* in Plautus: *Aul.* 401-2: *tu istum gallum, si sapis, glabriorem reddes mihi quam uolsus ludiust*; *Curc.* 150: *fite caussa mea ludii barbari*.

¹¹⁷ Analysis and further literature in Deufert 2002: 129-30; Rüpke 2012: 19; Vespa 2021.

play adds an aestheticising dimension, by which the main character appraises the merits of his performance.

At the end of the play, Pseudolus evokes a wine-infused, symposiastic atmosphere to convey to the spectators the celebrations inside the house after the triumph over Ballio.¹¹⁸

*ita victa excurato, ita magnis munditiis divis dignis,
itaque in loco festivo sumus festive accepti.
quid opust me multas agere ambages? Hoc est homini
quam ob rem vitam amet,
hic omnes voluptates, in hoc omnes venustates
sunt: deis proximum esse arbitror.
[...]
hoc ego modo atque erus minor hunc diem sumpsimus prothyme,
postquam opus meum ut volui omne perpetravi hostibus fugatis.
illos accubantis, potantis, amantis
cum scortis reliqui et meum scortum ibidem
cordi atque animo suo opsequentis. Sed post
quam exsurrexi, orant me ut saltem.
ad hunc me modum intuli illis sati' facete
nimis ex disciplina, quippe ego qui
probe Ionica perdidici. Sed palliolatim amictus
Sic haec incessi ludibundus.
plaudunt, 'parum' clamitant mi uti revortar.
occepi denuo, hoc modo: nolui:
idem amicae dabam me meae,
ut me amaret: ubi circumvortor, cado:
id fuit naenia ludo.*

(Pseud. 1253-78a)

With such choice food, in such great elegance worthy of the gods, and in such a delightful place were we received delightfully. What need is there for me to beat around the bush? This is the reason why a man loves his life, here there are all joys, in this there are all charms; I consider it to be closest to the gods. [...] That's how I and my young master spent this day merrily after I completed my entire work the way I liked, having put my enemies to flight. I left them reclining, drinking, and making love together with their prostitutes, and I left my prostitute in the same place, all enjoying themselves and having a good time. But after I got up, they asked me to dance. I struck a pose for them like this, in good form and very much in the correct style, since I learned the Ionian dance well. But dressed in a mantle I merrily strutted these steps like this. They clapped and shouted "encore" at me so that I'd return. I began again, in this way, yet I didn't want to. I was showing off to my girlfriend so that she'd love me; when I was doing a pirouette, I fell: that was the unhappy end of my performance.

¹¹⁸ Similar scenes containing comically botched dinner parties are *Per.* 753-858 and *Stich.* 683-775. In the former play, the slave boy Paegnium is interestingly ordered to let the games begin at the inception of the banquet: *age, puere, [...] committe hos ludos* (771-771a).

The atmosphere is shot through with terms for delicacy (1253: *munditiis*; 1254: *festivo* [...] *festive*), eroticism (1257: *omnes voluptates* [...], *omnes venustates*), and playfulness (1275a: *ludibundus*, 1278a: *ludo*). As in the sexualised Greek symposium, participants in the revelry include the slave, his master, and several prostitutes (1268: *ego* [...] *atque erus minor*; 1272: *cum scortis*). Suitably, Plautus gives his portrayal of a symposium the requisite Greek overlay by means of lexical choices, cf. 1268: *prothyme*; 1275: *Ionica*, *palliolatim*; 1279: *pallium*, 1280a: *cantharus*. There is, hence, Greek-style dining equipment, appropriate accoutrements, and the salacious type of dance that Roman moralists connected to Greek ways. Much has been made of this passage in scholarly interpretations: Sharrock, for instance, elevates Pseudolus' rambling speech to a programme of Plautine comedy *tout court*, identifying Pseudolus as a mirror of the real-world author, who takes Greek comedies, plays with them, and messes them up (hence the reference to the verb *inquinare* in l. 1279).¹¹⁹ Slater has speculated that Pseudolus may have been Plautus' last play, which he intended to finish off with proper fanfare before his *ludus*' *naenia* (funeral dirge) is sung.¹²⁰

However, Pseudolus figures in this scene both as the messenger relating the events inside the house to the audience and as a comic entertainer, who reperforms his drunken dance for everyone to witness. He is performing physically, but it is his language that gives his rendition an aestheticised spin. By describing his schtick as *ludus* (1278), he emphasises the lexeme's aspects of play and dance, and the novel adjective *ludibundus* (1275a) used to designate Pseudolus' swagger underscores the performativity of his stage behaviour.¹²¹ The repetition of the adjective *festivus*, moreover, hints at an augmented aesthetic appreciation of the scene as it means not just 'festive', but also 'pleasant, pretty, delightful'. The two poles of excessive Greekness are made to clash with extreme Romanness. First, Pseudolus facetiously uses military language to describe his defeat of Ballio (1269-1270: *hostibus fugatis*), then he jarringly marshals concepts deeply rooted in Roman educational culture (1274a: *discipulina*; 1275: *perdiscere*) to stress his exaggerated devotion to the most un-Roman pursuit: Ionian dance (1273: *saltem*; 1275: *Ionica perdidici*).¹²²

By the same token, the final line *id fuit naenia ludo* mixes Hellenised play and dance (*ludus*) with the traditionally Roman funeral song (*naenia*). The point is not that this is yet

¹¹⁹ Sharrock 1996: 172-3.

¹²⁰ Slater 1985: 145-6.

¹²¹ For the lexeme's novelty, cf. *TLL* s.v. *ludibundus*.

¹²² The Ionian dance may have been associated with *cinaedi*, the antithesis of what an elite young Roman should be like (Christenson 2020: 345). For the *pallium* (which gave the *fabula palliata* its name) as a target of Roman scorn, cf. *Curc.* 288-94: *isti Graeci palliati* [...] *tristes atque ebrioli*. Cf. Humm 2021 on the uncritical, mindless rote learning encapsulated by the term *perdiscere* which seems to have been common practice in Roman education.

another instance in the comedy where Greek and Roman elements are muddled to such an extent that the spectators are left uncertain about what is Roman and what is Greek in this typically Plautine fantasy world. Rather, it is striking that the ludic ambience Plautus generates in this scene is simultaneously marked as still highly Greek. Dance, play, symposiastic pleasures, and laughable philosophising (1253: *munditiis divis dignis*; 1258: *deis proximum esse arbitror*) all require the terms for elegance and cultural refinement as framing devices (*festivo*; *munditiis*; *venustates*), to which Plautus also adds **lud-* lexemes (*ludibundus*; *ludo*).¹²³ Because the principles of an aestheticised lifestyle clashed with Rome's entrenched cultural traditions, they retain a Hellenic flavour even in the topsy-turvy-world of comedy. The preponderance of this conceptual complex of Hellenism-cum-aestheticism that Krostenko has cogently outlined do, however, reveal that Plautus had a stake in the process of aestheticisation, as it supplied him with a cultural space in which to claim distinctive skills and expertise. It is not just later republican developments that lead to the integration of this 'language of social performance' into the political arena with Cicero and Catullus. On the contrary, it is a traditionally non-Roman set of concepts which artists like Plautus found useful in their quest to anchor themselves and their emblematic qualities in Roman culture.

1.4) *Docti doli*: brainpower in Rome?

I have already mentioned above that a new strand of Plautus scholarship is keen to recuperate Plautus' background in Hellenistic culture, tracing his emergence from the *technitai* of Dionysus and equating his output with that of contemporaneous poet-philologists working at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria. The label *poeta doctus* has been introduced to the debate to highlight the playwright's extensive knowledge not just of poetic traditions but various other discourses that find expression in his *oeuvre*.¹²⁴ While it is of course an unobjectionable claim that Plautus' comedies are not born out of an intellectual void, the language of erudition and cognitive brilliance is invoked in Plautus so saliently in relation to his *ludi*-producing characters that it does not suffice to state that his comedies are learned because they draw on several non-poetic sources of knowledge.

¹²³ Christenson 2020: 340-1 notes that l. 1258 (*deis proximum esse arbitror*) alludes to Sappho's poem 31, which bathetically drags down the emotionally delicate first-person voice of the Greek poetess into the sexually graphic fantasies (esp. 1259-61) of the inebriated comic slave.

¹²⁴ Papaioannou/Demetriou 2020.

Instead, I submit that the vocabulary of ‘intellectual abilities’ is not only one of Plautus’ artistic idiosyncrasies but serves to distinguish the figures who habitually play the role of a fictional double for the playwright producing comic plots. Although not discussed at all in the edited volume by Papaioannou and Demetrio, this group of concepts is apt to typify both fictional ‘playwrights’ and real-life producers of literature in Rome’s fledgling literary culture, becoming media for authorial self-fashioning in Plautus.¹²⁵ *Poeta doctus* is hence not a mere tag modern scholars impose onto Plautus, but a term that readily encapsulates how Plautus himself sought to construe authorial figures in his comedies. There is a range of trademark adjectives that he uses to characterise his comic tricksters. Beside the pervasive buzzwords that one could roughly group under the rubric ‘deceptiveness’ (to which the **lud-* passages belong), his protagonists continuously draw attention to the cleverness of their tricks (*dolus*, *astutus*, *doctus*, *callidus*, *versutus*), the constructedness of their schemes (by means of the roots **fabr-*, **machin-*), and the immorality (*facinus*, *malitia*) and dishonesty (*mendacium*, *fallacia*) that Plautus routinely links with their actions.¹²⁶ Throughout his comedies, Plautus systematically merges the semantics of ‘intellectual abilities’ with planning and carrying out ruses.¹²⁷ This is Pseudolus advertising for a main actor in his comic stratagem:

*hoc ego oppidum ammoenire ut hodie capiatur volo;
ad eam rem usust homine astuto, docto, cauto, et callido,
qui imperata effecta reddat, non qui vigilans dormiat.*

(*Pseud.* 384-6)

I want to lay siege to this town so that it can be captured today.
For this purpose, I need a smart, clever, cautious, and tricky man,
someone who turns commands into results and not someone who is asleep
while he’s awake.

Casting his stratagem against Ballio in terms of military conquest (*oppidum ammoenire; capiatur*), Pseudolus requires an assistant for the execution of his plan who stands out for his sharp intelligence (*astuto, docto, [...], callido*), and is yet ready to follow the slave-director’s

¹²⁵ The transference of playwright functions onto a diverse set of (socially subordinate) fictional characters has of course long been noted, cf. Muecke 1986: 223; McCarthy 2000: 28; Gowers 1993b: 93-108 on the poetological cook in *Pseudolus* (also Christenson 2020: 267-8); Damon 1997: 37-79 examines Plautine parasites; Corbett 1986: 5-43 sheds light on the role of the *scurra*. The consequences for our understanding of early authorial self-promotion in Plautus have, however, not been drawn.

¹²⁶ Sharrock 2009: 10-11. Intriguingly, ordinary words with a conventionally respectable meaning receive a comic spin (e.g., *consilium*, *turbare*, *architectus*) and are turned into devices of comic intrigues. See Anderson 1996 for the immoral tendencies of Plautine comedy and his dramatisation of what he dubs ‘heroic badness’.

¹²⁷ To pick just a few suggestive occurrences of the idiom of intellectual abilities in the two other plays: *Poen.* 131-2: *quas tu sapienter, docte et cordate et cate/mihi reddist*; 653-4: *mortalis malos!/ut ingrediuntur docte in sycophantiam*; and *Cas.* 488: *Satin docte?* Ol. *astute*; 529: *nisi sim doctus <ac> dicaculus*.

orders (*imperata effecta reddat*). In a quintessentially Roman fashion, Pseudolus demands that his deputy show the willingness to obey the commands of a superior in spite of his independent intellect. The young man Calidorus, in principle Pseudolus' master, clearly consents to his subsidiary role (cf. his preliminary question *ecquid imperas?* (383)), but Calidorus and his friend Charinus later in the play provide Pseudolus with a much more suitable 'lead-actor', the slave Simia.¹²⁸ When Simia makes his first appearance on stage, Pseudolus quickly realises that he is so shrewd as to be in no way inferior to the chief plotter Pseudolus (cf. 927: *dolis atque mendaciis*; 931a: *o hominem lepidum*; 932-3: *te quoque [...] dolis atque mendaciis, qui magister mihi es, antidibo* – 'You too, who are my teacher, I'll surpass with my tricks and lies'; 942: *meditati sunt mihi doli docte* – 'my schemes have been thought over cleverly').¹²⁹

Wit and resourcefulness are therefore made excessively prominent and conspicuously cluster around the type of the *servus callidus*. The character that undoubtedly dominates the speaking parts in *Pseudolus* is the play's eponymous slave hero. His rapport with the audience is particularly close as Plautus has endowed him with seven monologues that he directs straight at the onlookers.¹³⁰ Given his name's deceptive overtones, Pseudolus stays, for the most part, true to his name and rhetorically revels in the language of deception, fiction-making, and trickery.¹³¹ More explicitly, the 'arch-liar' Pseudolus himself assumes the role of a poet in one of his monologues:

*quoi neque parata est gutta certi consili,
neque adeo argenti neque – nunc quid faciam scio.
neque exordiri primum unde occipias habes
neque ad detexundam telam certos terminos.
sed quasi poeta, tabulas quom cepit sibi
quaerit quod nusquam gentiumst, reperit tamen,
facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est,
nunc ego poeta fiam: viginti minas,
quae nunc nusquam sunt gentium, inveniam tamen.*

(*Pseud.* 397-405)

¹²⁸ The desired qualities Pseudolus wants are reiterated in 725: *malum, callidum, doctum, qui quando principium prehenderit, porro sua virtute quid se facere oporteat*, here with a greater degree of individual freedom deriving from his quick grasp of and ability to act in unforeseen circumstances.

¹²⁹ Pseudolus conceives of his own machinations in remarkably similar terms: 527-8: *per sycophantiam atque per doctos dolos tibicinam illam [...] ea circumducam lepide lenonem*.

¹³⁰ Cf. the helpful structure of scenes in Christenson 2020: 31-2. He is sensitive to the musical aspects of Plautine comedy and further differentiates between monologues delivered in spoken iambs, monodies/*cantica* and musically accompanied monologues. The monologues are: 394-414; 562-573a; 574-93; 667-93; 758b -766; 1017-37; See further the pronouncements which clearly break the fourth wall: 388, 687, 720-1, 1246-84.

¹³¹ Sharrock's programmatic vocabulary (2009: 10) looms large in the play, e.g. lies and deceit: *mendacium* (403, 432, 659, 838, 927, 931, 943) *fallacia* (558, 671, 705a, 765, 1055, 1193, 1194, 1195); cleverness: *astutus* (385, 907), *doctus* (385, 485, 527, 678, 725, 729, 765, 907, 941, 1205, 1243); also recurrent are *sycophantia* (485, 527, 572, 672), *sycophanta* (1204), *sycophantiose* (1211).

Not a drop of certain counsel is ready for you, or indeed of money.
 And I don't know what I should do now.
 You have neither a starting point for beginning your web nor fixed limits for finishing it.
 Yet just as a poet, when he takes writing tablets,
 looks for something that doesn't exist anywhere, but finds it nonetheless
 and makes likely what is a lie, I shall now become a poet:
 even though the twenty minas don't exist anywhere. I'll find them nonetheless.

This is Plautus drawing one of his most overt analogies between a new profession in Rome and the capacities of the fictional clever slave. In this moment of hesitation, Pseudolus briefly misses *certum consilium* (397), adopts the role of a *poeta* (401) with the licence to lie (403: *mendacium*) and invent things that are unreal (402: *reperit*; 405: *inveniam*).¹³² Like Ennius in his *Annales*, Plautus favours the Greek self-description *poeta* over the religiously authorised, prophetic *vates* to designate the role of the playwright as a creator of comic plots.¹³³ Much has been written on the comic slave, its functions as an avatar of Plautus, and the Greek tradition behind the amalgamation of lying, poetic craftsmanship, and fictionality.¹³⁴ Although prefigured in Plato, the notion of a poet as a liar and deceiver receives a different spin in Rome where the adherence to social roles and the deep embedding of personal identity into the workings of the community was paramount. Plautus bestows the almost magical quality of making up reality on his *poeta* (cf. 405: *quae nunc nusquam sunt gentium*) – a line which is an almost verbatim quote of 402. This repetition drives home the strangeness and potential danger of such an act. Poets do not have to care what is truth or cultural reality anywhere, they can just construct fictive worlds as they go about their business of writing. Embroiling his opponents in a web of lies or half-truths, the effect on the audience is clear: they suddenly cannot trust words as reliable representations of reality anymore. Instead, they are made to believe what is in fact a lie (403: *facit illud veri simile quod mendacium est*).¹³⁵

In the same way, the *Casina* prologue quips about staging something as outlandish as a slave wedding (68: *serviles nuptiae*; 70: *novom attulerunt, quod fit nusquam gentium*), which

¹³² De Melo's translation of the verbs *reperire* (402) and *invenire* (405) opts for the meaning 'find' in both cases. Both can, however, also designate 'invent', which gives the lines a special twist. These lines then sound a lot less like the theory of fiction some scholars like to see here, but rather like a self-ironic joke precisely about the limits of poetic creativity and fiction-making. Poets can come up with an idea of something that exists nowhere in the world and write it down, but they cannot just make up twenty minas. Hose 1996: 271 treats this passage as part of a broader reflection on the differences between Greek and Roman terminology of fiction.

¹³³ Gildenhard 2003: 102. Ennius shunned further terms with potent cultural meaning in Rome such as *carmen*. Equally, he blended the Roman *Camēnae* with the Greek Muses.

¹³⁴ Hunter 2006: 81-2; Feeney 2010: 287-8; Christenson 2020: 196.

¹³⁵ Pseudolus' famous second monologue (562-73a) is another passage that has often been discussed as an elaboration of a Plautine poetics, cf. Sharrock 1996: 167; Slater 1985: 132; Feeney 2010: 288.

the speaker claims is an actual cultural practice in Greece, Carthage, and even Apulia. He then offers a wager on condition that the referee come from one such place that traditional Romans consider lands of deception (71-8). Hence, this is an instance of the *prologus* ironically teasing the audience by airing wild claims and stretching their credulity. The upshot is that Plautus implicitly instructs the viewers to shun naïve gullibility and become complicit in his games of trickery. Against normative *fides*, Plautus sets a caricatured image of Greek guile that is located outside of the frame of Roman morality and coalesces around the new social type of the poet.

Plautus' fashioning of typical features for the comic poet in Rome again exploits the binary caricatures of hyper-Hellenism and hyper-Romanism. It is instructive that a temple to *mens* was built during the wars with Hannibal in close proximity to the temple of *fides* on the Capitol. Anna Clark discusses *mens* as a Romanised version of *μητις*, the key character trait of Odysseus.¹³⁶ While there is a debate in scholarship about the identity of the republican cult of *mens* and the attested worship of *bona mens* in particular by slaves and freedmen during the imperial period, the addition of the adjective *bona* is indicative of an ambiguity in the meaning of *mens* and *μητις* as both 'good and wise counsel' and cunning, deceptive intelligence. The close relationship between the (formerly) enslaved and *bona mens* may stem from an intended signal of reassurance to former masters that their erstwhile subjects were still of a 'good disposition' towards them after their manumission.¹³⁷ As social agents with an active interest in reshaping Rome's concepts of knowledge, early Latin authors capitalised on their linguistic creativity to effect modifications in this realm. Comedians such as Plautus and Terence and the generic all-rounder Ennius frequently undermine the philosophical associations of *sapientia* ('wisdom') by tracing the noun back to its literal meaning ('taste'), and even stylising it as a symbol of sophisticated judgment ('connoisseurship').¹³⁸

As a valorised asset for Rome's ruling elite, *sapientia* was meant to imply deep insight, good sense, and a moral grounding of one's judgement.¹³⁹ The Greek tradition that was now translated for Roman purposes, on the contrary, shows greater permissivity for the use of

¹³⁶ More on *μητις* in Detienne/Vernant 1978 whose English title translates the concept as 'cunning intelligence'; also Habinek 2022. Dougherty 2015 juxtaposes the mythical heroes Achilles and Odysseus, the former being stubborn and intransigent, the latter intelligent and adaptable.

¹³⁷ Clark 2007: 202-4.

¹³⁸ See Habinek 2006. Plautus was fond of casting his slave characters as Odysseus, cf. *Bacch.* 940: *ego sum Ulixes, quouiis consilio haec gerunt*; *Bacch.* 946: *Miles Menelaust, ego Agamemno, idem Ulixes Lartius*; *Bacch.* 949: *nam illi itidem Ulixem audivi*; *Bacch.* 962: *atque id periculum adsimilo, Ulixem ut praedicant cognitum ab Helena esse proditum Hecubae*; *Men.* 902: *meus Ulixes, suo qui regi tantum conciuuit mali*; *Pseud.* 1063: *Visso quid rerum meus Ulixes egerit*.

¹³⁹ See Hölkeskamp 2010: 113-4, who discusses the *laudatio funebris* of Lucius Caecilius Metellus in 221 BCE, which emphasised *summa sapientia* as one of the qualities of the deceased.

cunning tactics in the pursuit of personal profit. Odysseus is characterised by Athena in the *Iliad* as a master of counsel, stories, and wile.

[...], εἰδότες ἄμφω
 κέρδε', ἐπεὶ σὺ μὲν ἔσσι βροτῶν ὄχ' ἄριστος
 πάντων
 βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ' ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι
 μή τι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν [...].

(Od. 13.296-99)

[...] being both well versed in craft,
 since you are by far the best of all men
 in counsel and in speech, and I among all the gods
 am famed for wisdom and craft [...].

The noun κέρδος that occurs twice in this passage has no equivalent in Latin that would link sharp intellect with individual gain.¹⁴⁰ Instead, to squeeze profit out of hoodwinking an opponent conflicts with Rome's strictly regulated system of 'checks and balances' that joined the masses and the elite by a communally accepted set of rights and obligations. Cato famously exhorts his son to study Greek literature judiciously, warning him of the corruption, cunning, and greed of the Greeks.¹⁴¹ In another well-known fragment from the *Carmen de moribus*, he vilifies the poet's craft as dishonourable.¹⁴² Ennius' broadly contemporary *Annales*, on the other hand, forge the positive counterimage to the disreputable Greekness of poets and give socially inferior men of learning a place by the side of *nobiles* at war:

*Ingenium quoui nulla malum sententia suadet
 Ut faceret facinus levis aut mala: doctus, fidelis,
 Suavis homo, iucundus, suo contentus, beatus,
 Scitus, secunda loquens in tempore, commodus, verbum
 Paucum, multa tenens antiqua, sepulta vetustas
 Quae fecit et mores veteresque novosque tenentem*

¹⁴⁰ Roisman 1990 differentiates *κερδ-lexemes from other words for trickiness, deception, and guile as they also allude to personal profit gained by skill. In Latin, Plautus could only opt for adjectival modifications, e.g., *docti doli* (*Pseud.* 527; 942).

¹⁴¹ A snippet of *Ad Marcum filium* reads: *quod bonum sit illorum litteras inspicere, non perdiscere* [...]. And after warning that Greek doctors have sworn to kill Romans by their medicine, he is outraged that they feign trust (*fides*) by taking a fee for their services: *mercede faciunt ut fides iis sit* (Pliny, *NH* 29.7.14); further Kuznetsov 2011; Sciarrino 2011: 4-5. The growing cultural influence from Greece spawned uncertainties about which aspects of Greek knowledge were adaptable to a Roman framework and which were deemed destabilising, cf. Feeney 2016: 134-5.

¹⁴² Gell. *NA* 11.2.5: *poeticae artis honos non erat. Si quis in ea re studebat aut sese ad convivia adplicabat grassator vocabatur*, comparing poets to the comic type of the parasite. Leigh 2000: 292-3 briefly touches upon the crucial role of Cato in constructing the ideal of Roman sternness and traditionalism. Cato's agenda is also illuminated by Gildenhard 2003: 109. In an attempt to preserve the unity of the elite at a time of rising material wealth and inequality, he shaped the profile of an aristocrat tirelessly on duty for the *res publica*. On Cato's Hellenism, now Bur/Humm 2021.

*Multorum veterum leges divomque hominumque
Prudentem qui dicta loquive tacereve posset.*

(Ann. 8, fr. 278-285)

[...], the type of person whom no opinion, ill-considered or evil,
can persuade to do wrong: learned, trustworthy,
a charming man, pleasant, content with his lot, prosperous,
shrewd at saying the right thing at the right time, helpful, a man of few words
who preserves many ancient matters which have been buried by antiquity,
who understands customs both old and new,
and the laws of many ancient gods and men.
He is cautious and capable of speaking up or keeping silent.¹⁴³

Ennius' ideal subaltern intellectual is meek, knows his station, and harmoniously combines new and old ways. There is nothing in the least unsettling or disruptive about his character, and it is striking that Ennius lays emphasis on an agreeable mix of knowledge (278: *ingenium*; 279: *doctus*; 281: *scitus*) and moral groundedness (278: *nulla malum sententia suadet*; 285: *prudentem*). His communicative behaviour is also characterised by good timing (281: *secunda loquens in tempore*) and an economic use of words (281-2: *verbum paucum*). As much as he is knowledgeable and educated, Ennius stresses, he demonstrates moderation, reason, and respect for the vital importance of the *mores maiorum* in Roman culture. Tellingly, *fidelis* (279) is mentioned directly after *doctus* to offset potential misgivings about the perils of knowledge that deviates from time-honoured Roman customs and to allay anxieties about these figures' aspirations for social advancement.¹⁴⁴

Plautus' *palliata*, by contrast, taps into contemporary uncertainties about how to integrate new social agents into Rome's pecking order by laughably heroising and hyper-Hellenising figures with fiction-making faculties. Characters like the wily slave possess all the qualities that militate against male aristocratic Roman norms: they are exuberant, prattling, excessively erudite, self-indulgent, and playful. Instead of showing moderation, prudence, community-oriented virtues, and *gravitas*, they excel at celebrating, joking, and playing pranks.¹⁴⁵ The use of intellectual abilities for military planning and war tactics was certainly

¹⁴³ The translation is taken from Sciarrino 2011: 95-6. See also her interpretation of the passage in 100-2. The much-discussed passage is also dealt with in Goldberg 1989: 259-60 and later in Goldberg 1995: 121-24; also Gildenhard 2003: 110-11.

¹⁴⁴ Habinek 2001: 124-6 affirms that knowledge and the dispense of advice are inseparable in the Roman mindset. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake made little sense in such a culture; see also Le Doze 2020: 116, who asserts that knowledge possessed no intrinsic *auctoritas* in Rome.

¹⁴⁵ Curculio's famous harangue also targets the Greeks' love of books (*Curc.* 289: *suffarcinati cum libris*) and their chitter-chatter (290: *sermones*; *cum suis sententiis*). Alongside the socially inferior Greeks carrying a *sportula* (289), Curculio insults *drapetae* ('runaway slaves') and the slaves of *scurrae* who play ball in the streets (296: *tum isti qui ludunt datatim serui scurrarum in via*). The social milieu he assaults is here again deeply enmeshed in play activities.

prized in Rome, but it is the *palliata*'s brazen rejection of Roman morality by parading its 'moral badness' that makes it a poignant foil for the authorial self-fashioning expressed in Ennius' 'good companion' passage.¹⁴⁶ Without any illustrious family line to show, social subordinates like Plautus flaunted what made them special in Rome by means of symbolic representation, therefore laying the groundwork for the appreciation of cultural capital, which had so far not been recognised as such in Rome.¹⁴⁷

Paideia was a crucial feature of Greek identity due to its immense value for the radical democracy of the Athenian *polis* and the enduring significance of Athenian culture.¹⁴⁸ In Rome, on the other hand, no institutions existed where learning was explicitly cultivated and where educated individuals like Plautus could find a venue for cultural integration.¹⁴⁹ Plautus does not seem to have been enslaved like some of the early literary producers in Rome (Livius Andronicus, Caecilius Statius, Terence), and we know nothing about relationships with one or more patrons. Presumably, he depended financially on contractors willing to pay for his scripts.¹⁵⁰ It is at any rate not too far-fetched to credit him and other middle Republican writers with precarious living conditions in a foreign environment.¹⁵¹ Although Goldberg rightly cautions against the difficulties facing biographical interpretations, one may at least note a structural affinity between the dependency of *literati* and other non-elite characters that populated the comic cosmos.¹⁵² Likewise, the preponderance of the association poet-slave and the endowment of *servi* and other characters with fiction-making qualities warrants the recognition of a 'biographical-political subtext' in Plautus' comedies.¹⁵³ An intriguing paradox

¹⁴⁶ A Plautine parody of Ennius' lost tragedy *Hecuba* is discovered by Scafoglio 2006. He incisively analyses a passage in the *Bacchides* where the clever slave compares the success of his trick to the myth of the Trojan horse and then produces an analogy between himself and Odysseus, arguing against an interpolation (posited by most commentators).

¹⁴⁷ For a neat schematisation of Bourdieu's different types of capital and cultural capital more specifically, see Bourdieu 1986.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Straume 2020; on the tremendous importance of the classical *polis* for the Greek literary canon, see Netz 2020. Hesk 2000 explores the relationship between civic identity in democratic Athens and modes of deception as a fundamental component of this socio-political setup.

¹⁴⁹ Scholz 2006 elucidates the education of Rome's aristocracy and differences between Greece and Rome more generally.

¹⁵⁰ Horace paints Plautus as a playwright who was keener on pecuniary gain than literary merit, cf. *Epist.* 2.1.175-6: *gestit enim nummum in oculos demittere, post hoc securus cadat an recto stet fabula talo.*

¹⁵¹ The establishment of a *collegium* of writers is often regarded as evidence for the gradual acceptance of them (and other professionals in similar guilds) in Rome. A *collegium scribarum histrionumque* achieved official recognition in 207 BCE, but the details are hard to work out. There is a comprehensive discussion of the array of *collegia* in the republic and beyond in Jory 1970; see also Horsfall 1976, and for a more positive appraisal of early poets' importance and social status, Gruen 1990: 87-90; Manuwald 2011: 95-7 and 30-40 for the scholarly debates. Rüpke 2001: 58-9 detects the first signs of professionalisation in Rome's early literary culture with Plautus' preference to write in only one genre.

¹⁵² Cf. Goldberg 1995: 285.

¹⁵³ The term is lifted from Kailbach-Mehl 2020: 39. See Deufert 2002: 70 on the inspiration that Plautine biographies drew from elements found in the texts of the *palliatae* themselves (work in the mill as punishment, merchant travelling, financial problems). Gruen 1990: 124-157 collates the evidence for Plautus' life from our

constituted the communicative dynamics of early Roman drama. While subaltern producers of dramatic scripts were barred from socio-political forms of power in Rome, they held symbolic power over the medium of language, i.e., had a primary role to play in determining legitimate, correct, and authoritative meanings of words.¹⁵⁴

Alternative attempts have been made to explain Plautus' predilection for the language of erudition and cunning: Matthew Leigh, for example, sees an arresting parallel between images of Hannibal as a canny battle tactician and Plautus' tricksters.¹⁵⁵ The problem with this explication lies in its use of sources. Leigh draws heavily on Livy's depiction of the cunning Hannibal, not accounting for the criticism that Livy himself may have been inspired by the rhetoric of Roman comedy in his portrayal of the Carthaginian general. A comparison with Aristophanes reveals that a discourse of educatedness formed a seminal part of classical Athenian comedy, comprising poets, intellectual antagonists such as the sophists, and audiences alike.¹⁵⁶ It is worth stressing that such a mockery of audiences for their purported cleverness never appears in Plautine comedy despite its regular audience addresses. In Rome's budding phase of literary production, being knowledgeable was the purview of socially subordinate, non-Roman poets like Plautus, who found enslaved characters potent fictional vehicles to give cunning intelligence a place in Roman culture. This is especially palpable in *Pseudolus*, the *servus callidus* who is more than any other in Plautus' output regarded as a mirror of the playwright.¹⁵⁷ And again, with a remarkable frequency the central schemer is likened to figures from the repertoire of the Greek canon: Simo thinks the slave can easily compete with Odysseus in his cunning (1063: *meus Ulixes*; 1244: *superavit dolum Troianum atque Ulixem Pseudolus*), be as rhetorically skilled as Socrates (464-5: *conficiet iam te hic verbis ut tu censeas/non Pseudolum, sed Socratem tecum loqui* – 'Now he'll knock you out with his words so that you'll

main sources Festus and Gellius. The extant texts strongly support the claim found in the biographical tradition that Plautus was in some capacity active in the theatre business (cf. also Goldberg 2005: 63).

¹⁵⁴ Stehle 1984: 244 considers linguistic expertise as a novel source of power in Rome. Though the Greeks were militarily defeated, they could claim cultural superiority; see also Whitmarsh 2010: 743 on the complementary dyad Roman political power vs. Greek civilisation and culture. Barchiesi 2009: 106-7 characterises the relationship Greece-Rome as ambiguous: Negative stereotypes of the contemporary Greek stood side by side with the reverent perception of authorities of Greek culture. Struggles revolved around the question of who should be authorised to regulate the process of acculturation.

¹⁵⁵ Leigh 2004a: 24-56.

¹⁵⁶ Wright 2012: 25-30 zooms in on the lexemes σοφός and δεξιός. A classic example of Aristophanes' mockery of the purportedly sophisticated audience is *Ar. Ran.* 676-7: οὗ σοφίαι μυρίαί κάθηνται.

¹⁵⁷ Christenson 2020: 197 lists several scholars endorsing this view. See further Sharrock 1996. The connection between the real-life author and poet-figures in the play is also broached by Wright 1975, Slater 1985: 143-6, and Hallett 1993. The latter even conjectures that Plautus himself might have played both the title role and the metatheatrical cook (25-6).

think that it's not Pseudolus but Socrates talking to you'), and Calidorus dubs him – fittingly in Greek – his educated ‘ideas man’ (700: εὔρετής *mihist*).¹⁵⁸

A standard critique of Plautine comedy concerns its predictable and formulaic nature. However, Plautus modulates and complicates the conventional dramatic blueprint by endowing alternative characters with the distinguishing features of the clever slave, who then rival or in other ways complement him. In the conventional form of a Plautine *palliata* that the *Pseudolus* represents, clever slaves aid their wastrel masters in scraping up some money to buy out a prostitute. In the *Poenulus*, the Carthaginian Hanno possesses qualities of the trickster while displaying arch-Roman piety.¹⁵⁹ In *Pseudolus*, the eponymous protagonist retains a certain respectability in comparison to Ballio, who has no redeeming qualities and even disrespects the gods: *eos minimi facit* (269). A core value like *pietas* was thus probed critically but ultimately reinforced for a Roman audience. Hanno, equally, shows both insider and outsider attributes (Punic cunning vs. religious devoutness). Plautus thus poses the challenge: When outsiders become part of the Roman imaginary, who can legitimately lay claim to core Roman qualities?

In the *Casina*, the female characters act as agents of trickery under the leadership of the traditionally conservative Roman *matrona*.¹⁶⁰ The unifying traits of these figures is their refined mental capacities, which allow them to feign, deceive, and programmatically shirk the moral templates of Roman culture. Plautus freely toys with the variation of attributes to subaltern figures that equally distinguish Rome's new poet-intellectuals, the transferral of these features to numerous characters, and even – this is the case with Hanno in the *Poenulus* – the problematisation of the slave's morality when compared with a rivalling trickster that also possesses desirable Roman *pietas*. The probably positive portrayal of a Carthaginian in Alexis' Καρχηδόνιος, the Greek comedy Plautus touts as his model for the *Poenulus*, seems to have proved to be less of a problem to Plautus than the opportunity to furnish yet another character with trickster qualities and experiment with the question of how far he could stretch the *servus callidus* prototype. The challenging question he poses to his viewers is whether shrewdness and trickery have to be exclusively Greek qualities and always warrant a negative connotation.

Already the prologue presents Hanno as analogous to the comic trickster: He is shrewd (111: *docte atque astu*), deceitful (112-3: *sed dissimulat sciens/se scire*), and does not only have a way with words but is actually multilingual (112: *omnis linguas scit*).¹⁶¹ Once he makes his

¹⁵⁸ Christenson 2020: 251. The passages also feature prominently in Stehle 1984.

¹⁵⁹ Giusti 2018: 82 collects the relevant passages in which Hanno evinces his deep respect for the gods: 950-1; 953; 988; 1056; 1163-4; 1187-8; 1251-5; 1274. Regarding Hanno's *pietas*, Clark 2007: 89-97 calls to mind that a temple to *pietas* was vowed in 191 BCE, the year of the production of *Pseudolus*. (89)

¹⁶⁰ Rei 1998 studies the intersectional layers of marginalisation of women and the enslaved, mainly in the *Casina*.

¹⁶¹ For Rome's early poets' bi- or multilingualism is, see Elliott 2022: 9-10 with much further literature.

entrance onto the stage, he does not disappoint expectations: *eu hercle, mortalem catum, malum crudumque et callidum et subdolum* (1107-8: ‘Goodness, a tricky mortal, bad and unfeeling and clever and wily!’). This is the clever slave Milphio, ostensibly afraid this trickster might be cleverer than he is himself: *me quoque dolis iam superat architectonem* (1110: ‘Me too, the master builder, he already surpasses with his guiles’). The alliance between Milphio and his young master Agorastocles is gradually threatened by the presence of the newcomer from Carthage, and Milphio realises he is losing control over fun and audience entertainment: *opino hercle hodie, quod ego dixi per iocum, id eventurum esse et severum et serium* (1169-70: ‘I do believe that what I said in jest will happen seriously and earnestly today’). At this point in the play, Hanno orders Milphio to go inside the house and his master commands to obey the Carthaginian (1148-51), after which he is not to reappear on stage.

A new comic duo, Agorastocles and Hanno, replace the old *servus-adulescens* couple, but Hanno is cut from a different cloth. When taken out of context, the ascriptions of trickster features to Hanno seem clear-cut, but it is crucial to note that they are mostly uttered by the embattled *servus* Milphio, e.g., 1032: *te hominem et sycophantam et subdolum [...], migdilix, bisulci lingua* – ‘But you must be a swindler and a trickster, [...] you double-tongued creature, with a forked tongue’); *hic quidem Poenus probust* – 1125: ‘This Carthaginian is a clever trickster’). While it is true that Hanno is able to adapt his language to changing circumstances and customs (cf. 984: *tum ad horum mores linguam vortero*; and 1029: *nunc dehinc latine iam loquar*), and himself brags about his wiliness (1223: *sed ut astu sum adgressus ad eas*), he is depicted as genuinely emotional (1109: *ut adflet*) and morally upright (*servom hercle te esse oportet et nequam et malum, / hominem peregrinum atque advenam qui inrideas* – 1030-1: ‘You must be a bad and useless slave since you mock a stranger and a newcomer at that’).¹⁶² He even insists that his capacity for dissimulation is only activated against enemies and thus has a clear moral foundation: *Mi. potin tu fieri subdulus? / Ha. inimico possum, amicost insipientia* (1089-90: *Mi*: ‘Can you become wily?’ / *Ha*: ‘Toward an enemy I can, toward a friend it’s stupidity’). With Milphio losing out to Hanno, the question becomes acute if the former’s playful amorality is the only possible stance for the *servus callidus* or whether the role can be filled differently by an equally clever yet morally principled character. In depicting Milphio as a clever slave who misinterprets reality because he sees pretence where there is sincere feeling (cf. 1107-9) or plain truth (cf. 1169-71)¹⁶³, Plautus introduces cracks to the *servus*’ frivolous

¹⁶² The metapoetic overtones of this statement are tangible. Hanno casts Milphio here as a ‘bad slave’ – a common hero in Plautus’ comedies.

¹⁶³ The verses of *Poen.* 1169-73 have been deleted by Ussing, followed by de Melo. Lindsay keeps them.

attitude and probes the audience's expectations about Plautus' comic repertoire and their ingrained assumptions of right and wrong.

To recap, Plautus makes ample and creative use of fictional surrogate figures whose character profile reflects back on the author himself. Just as Hanno can switch his language according to a people's *mores* (a loaded term in Rome), so Plautus' proclamations to convert Greek plays into Latin by using the verb *vortere/vertere* carry a hint of questionable morals and raise the spectre of manipulation through language.¹⁶⁴ After all, this verb is a cognate of yet another adjective (*vorsutus/versutus*) Plautus employs to describe the canny production of *ludi*, cf. *Pseud.* 1017: *peiores ego hominem magisque vorsute malum numquam edepol quemquam vidi quam hic est Simia* ('I've never seen a worse man and bad in a more wicked way than this Simia is'); 1243: *nimis illic mortalis doctus, nimis uorsutus, nimis malus* ('He's a very smart, very clever, very wicked fellow'); *Cas.* 488: *age modo, fabricamini, malo hercle vostro tam vorsuti vivitis* ('Just go on, you two, make your plots, you'll pay a high price for being such tricksters').

It appears, then, that Rome's early literary producers, whom Denis Feeney dubs 'translator-poets' were confident enough to exploit the medium of language not merely to provide the service of translation from one culture to another, but to assert that the capacity to shape people's preception of reality through literary representation entailed considerable power.¹⁶⁵ To push this argument further, it is suggestive that Livius Andronicus chose to translate the *Odyssey*, the epic about the Greek paragon of craftiness when creating the first epic in the Latin language. In his translation of the *Odyssey*'s first line, *πολύτροπος* is rendered *vorsutus*, one of the adjectives that Plautus picks up and employs to identify subaltern fiction-makers.¹⁶⁶

Play is therefore deeply enmeshed in Plautus' comic universe with tricks, guile, and manipulation, signalling the deceptive nature of words and linguistic craft more broadly – a new and powerful medium in Roman culture to represent and recast models of reality.¹⁶⁷ The other side of the coin, however, is that subaltern figures indulging in forms of play tend to be portrayed as childlike. While this grants them the licence to display behaviours that are opposed

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Asin.* 11: *Demophilus scripsit, Maccus vortit barbare*, and *Trin.* 19: *Philemo scripsit, Plautus vortit barbare*; McElduff 2013: 81-3 notes that this is a moment where Hanno cooks up a strategy, which renders the suggestion that he can alter his language so that it is infused with Roman *mores* very provocative.

¹⁶⁵ Feeney 2016. Bettini 2012: 33-60 does not work out the ethical subtext of acts of translation in Rome and the power that ensued from claiming competence in the sphere of language.

¹⁶⁶ Hinds 1998: 61-2.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. the preponderance of *verba dare* (literally, to 'give words'), yet another expression for 'fooling/cheating someone' in Plautus, e.g., *Capt.* 787: *hic ille senex doctus, quod verba data sunt*; *Rud.* 325: *data verba ero sunt* [...].

to the tenets of the Roman elite's ideology of manliness, accomplishments, and stern exertion on behalf of the *res publica*, on the other hand, it also extenuates the threat posed by their superior knowledge.¹⁶⁸ To give an example, the title *Poenulus* (which never appears in the play itself) is an orientalising diminutive that belittles Carthaginians. Similar to the cliché of the hedonistic, unserious, and sexually devious Greekling, one Roman strategy to put down their North African foe was to rid them of their *gravitas* and moral maturity.

An interesting case in which foreignising is combined with ludic imagery is Milphio's nonsense translation of Hanno's Punic speech. He translates thus: [...] *mures Africanos praedicat/in pompam ludis dare se velle aedilibus* (1011-12: 'He states that he wants to present African mice for the parade at the games of the aediles'). The image is jocular in its downsizing of magnificent exotic animals such as elephants to little mice to be paraded at the procession preceding the *ludi*.¹⁶⁹ In the same vein, the soldier Antamoenides' abhorrently brutal threat to punish Anterastilis by beating her until she turns black like Egyptians connects the games and foreign exoticism: *ita replebo atritate, atritior multo ut siet/quam Aegyptini, qui cortinam ludis per circum ferunt* (*Poen.* 1290-1: 'I'll fill her with blackness to such an extent that she's much blacker than the Egyptians who carry the cauldron round the circus during the games.').¹⁷⁰ Even in such moments in the text of seemingly little significance, Plautus thus fosters a conceptual link between the *ludi*, foreignness, childishness, and subalternity. What Fitzgerald points out for slaves is no less applicable to children: seen as a lower form of being, they had the licence to indulge in pleasures free from the rigid (self-)control that adult citizens were subjected to.¹⁷¹ The vehicles of play in Plautus' comedy, in any case, function as an infantilised foil to the construct of the elite, serious, adult Roman *nobilis*.

A detail of Agorastocles' Carthaginian backstory is equally apt to evoke notions of foreign deceptiveness, exoticism, and play. Hanno explains that he would be able to identify Agorastocles by a scar inflicted on him in his childhood years by a monkey he was playing with: *signum esse oportet in manu laeva tibi,/ludenti puero quod memordit simia* (1073-4: 'you

¹⁶⁸ Cowan 2015: 31 notes the associations of childishness in ancient thought with transgressiveness and licence that several authors in 'minor' genres drew upon for their literary projects. Richlin 2017: 184-196 connects slaves' lack of trust (*fides*) in Rome with wide-ranging legal, financial, and social ramifications, but does not admit to any leeway their complete dearth of respectable attributes afforded them. Owens 1994 stresses that *fides* subtended Rome's social order as the guarantor of oaths, promises, and contracts, whereas one incurred shame through perjury.

¹⁶⁹ In 211 BCE, Marcus Claudius Marcellus paraded elephants in his triumphal procession in Rome, cf. Beard 2007: 147-50. Here the allusion to a *pompa circensis* before the games seems to be confused with a *pompa triumphalis*.

¹⁷⁰ The name *Aegyptini* could actually designate Ethiopians, cf. Moodie 2015: 194. Moodie avers that we here perhaps find a nod to the *ludi Apollinares*, which were first established in response to prophecies stating the Romans would defeat Carthage if they introduced a festival for Apollo with Greek rites.

¹⁷¹ Fitzgerald 2000: 41-3; also Laes 2011: 116.

should have a mark on your left hand, which a monkey made by biting you when you were playing'). While scars as recognition signs are rare in Roman and Greek New Comedy, other genres feature this motif more prominently.¹⁷² However, not mentioned by commentators is the symbolically powerful and culturally deeply embedded practice of Roman military leaders of exhibiting the scars they have incurred on the battlefield and flaunt them as signs of valour.¹⁷³ Against this backdrop, the image of the little boy being bitten while playing is a petty and laughable miniature version of the potent symbol of a devoted general making a heroic gesture. Given how the Roman elite were expected to fashion themselves and their accomplishments, the child at play and the exotic monkey create a ridiculous caricature when set against the Roman audience's shared cultural knowledge of an aristocratic habitus. Subalterns served Plautus as the perfect characters to enact the inversion of hierarchy in the comic play world, as their oppression and infantilisation in Roman society dovetailed with the conceptual valuelessness of play in the (elite) Roman imagination.¹⁷⁴

1.5) *Ludus* squared: power and the play within the play

In sum, play as deception figures in Plautus in a linguistic and a theatrical sense: as play with words that are used unconventionally or ambiguously, and as play with roles designed to dupe fictional antagonists. Plautus locates play-making in a subaltern social milieu, and elaborates an idiom that allows him to evaluate the aesthetic qualities of his dramatic *ludi*. A related literary technique of his is the depiction of a play within the play, which is, I will argue, a distinct contribution of Plautus to the history of western theatre that qualitatively differs from Greek precedents due to the specific polysemy of the Latin lexeme *ludus*. Whereas there is no dearth of studies on metatheatricality in Plautus, scholarship has usually not ventured beyond formalist discussions of this prominent element of his comedies.¹⁷⁵ Bungard's overview article in

¹⁷² Arnott 2004: 83. Most famously, the *Odyssey*; for more examples, see Moodie 2015: 176. Connors 2004: 194 detects a metapoetic signpost to Plautine poetics, which are marked by play (*ludenti*) and the monkey as a symbol of deceptive imitation.

¹⁷³ Flaig 2004: 123-136. Mc Carthy 2000: 27 n. 45 for more examples from other plays, and Segal 1987: 143-54.

¹⁷⁴ Fitzgerald 2000 reads the slave in Roman comedy mainly as a contradictory figure that features both as the destabilising and simultaneously fascinating 'Other' (2000: 41-2). I suggest that the play frame Plautus has the slave establish acts as an obligatory buffer against strong feelings while keeping the potential real-life consequences of defiant slaves at bay. The actual danger of slave revolts in an economy that was fuelled by the increasing enslavement of foreigners is treated by Parker 1989: 237-8, who lists the four actual slave rebellions in this time. Insurgent slaves were therefore not merely a fictional construct.

¹⁷⁵ Maurice 2004: 273 gives an overview of all Plautine comedies that feature a play within the play. This *topos* in Greek and Roman comedy is discussed by Blänsdorf 1982; a more general account that largely brackets out ancient drama is Fischer/Greiner 2007; Leigh 2000: 303 gives examples of festivals (Eleutheria, Dionysia, etc.) that are

Blackwell's *Companion to Plautus* is emblematic of this approach: employing a universalist frame, he reads Plautus' metatheatrical staples as invitations for the audience to contemplate the 'theatrical nature of life' and the constructedness of their identity.¹⁷⁶ There is no doubt that Plautus relished openly showcasing the artificiality of his comic creations and the histrionics of his characters, and that staging a play within the play forms part of his predilection for complicating the various layers of his comic universe. What most of these accounts miss, however, is a historical contextualisation of this complex meta-communicative strategy of Plautine comedy. The play within the play is chiefly discussed as an aesthetic gambit with roots in the Greek comic tradition that Plautus expanded to set himself off from his Greek predecessors.¹⁷⁷ Although references to props, stage conventions, and the theatre world more broadly are all incorporated into Plautus' comic discourse, his duplicated *ludi* during the *ludi* cannot simply be explained by the evolution of an artistic form and the pressure to outdo a Greek model that faced Latin dramatists.

Examples from the texts will elucidate these questions: in the *Pseudolus*, Callipho periodically emphasises the pleasure he takes in watching the slave hero's tomfoolery: *ted ausculto libens* (523: 'I quite enjoy listening to you'), and *lubidost ludos tuos spectare* (552: 'I'm keen to watch your games'). Just as Pseudolus serves as the stand-in for the extra-fictional playwright, Callipho appears as the fictional double of a real-life audience who enjoy listening to and watching the slave's machinations.¹⁷⁸ Pseudolus is in fact commissioned by his master Simo to stage *ludi* within the fictional universe, i.e., a play within the play. After drawn-out verbal duelling between master and slave (from l. 415), Simo eventually instructs Pseudolus to commence his games: *indice ludos nunciam, quando lubet* (546: 'Let the games begin now as soon as you please'). Since the organisation of the games falls within the ambit of an aedile's authority, the slave is here implicitly co-opting official political power to swindle Ballio out of the possession of Phoenicium.

celebrated within Plautine comedies, creating a simulated microcosm of the theatrical settings. For a thought-provoking critique of the overuse of the concept 'metatheatre' especially in classical scholarship, see Rosenmeyer 2002. But the trend continues, see most recently Mazzara 2022, introducing the term 'meta-genre'.

¹⁷⁶ Bungard 2020: 247. See 238-9 for further literature on this theme. Marshall 2006: 262 adds another twist, regarding the second-order dimension of Plautus' comedies as a reflection of the improvisational nature of the early Roman stage. Gunderson's psychoanalytic reading appears a little too wistful. He perceives a "great wariness on the part of characters: maybe the person opposite me is just play-acting" (2015: 120). On the contrary, the characters are fully aware of their own and others' play-acting, but this rather triggers a contest about who is the master plotter or no-nonsense rebuttals of pomposity (cf. Olympio's reply to Lysidamus' self-comparison to Jupiter at *Cas.* 333: *nugae sunt istae magnae*).

¹⁷⁷ Gutzwiller 2000: 133-4.

¹⁷⁸ Sharrock 1996: 164-5.

Although Pseudolus' games later involve the dressing up and posing of Simia as the soldier's slave, thus acquiring a theatrical quality, his *ludi* are a far more protean affair. He freely switches between roles, impersonating not only the playwright directing Simia as the lead actor, but also a wealth of other, culturally mixed roles: the Roman orator (454: *orationem tibi para*), the Greek βασιλικός (458: *statum [...] quam basilicum*), the oracle of Delphi (480: *quod scibo Delphis tibi responsum dicito*). It is striking that just when Pseudolus obtains the authority to stage his own *ludi* (the play within the play ranges from l. 905-55), his imperious demeanour resembles both a theatre director positioning his actors and the military general arranging his troops (550: *machinas*; 557: *agite amolimini hinc vos intro nunciam*).

Especially Callipho declares his subservience to Pseudolus (559: *fiat, geratur mos tibi*; 561: *quin tibi hanc operam dico*), but Simo is no less willing to cede his power (cf. 546: *quando lubet*). The imagery of the slave's power-grab is highly convoluted: Warfare and magisterial duties are yoked together with theatre, which underlines how the centrepieces of Roman power symbolically have to surrender to Pseudolus/Plautus' métier: *ac meis vicissim date locum fallaciis* (558: 'give me in turn room for my tricks'). Such a role reversal is prefigured in an earlier dialogue between Simo and Pseudolus, in which the master is baffled at the slave's assertiveness: *mihin domino servos tu suscenses?* (472: 'You, a slave, are angry with me, your master?'); *alio tu modo/me verberare atque ego te soleo cogitas* (474-5: 'and you're planning to beat me in another way than the one I usually employ with you.').

The stance adopted by the *prologus* in the *Poenulus*, on the other hand, is more complicated than a simple model of inversion (i.e., powerless actor poses as powerful general and politician) would suggest.¹⁷⁹ He proclaims:

*quodque ad ludorum curatores attinet,
ne palma detur quoiquam artifici iniuria
niue ambitionis caussa extrudantur foras,
quo deteriores anteponantur bonis.
et hoc quoque etiam quod paene oblitus fui:
dum ludi fiunt, in popinam, pedisequi,
inruptionem facite; nunc dum occasio est,
nunc dum scribilitae aestuant, occurrite,
haec imperata quae sunt pro imperio histrico,
bonum hercle factum pro se quisque ut meminerit.* (Poen. 36-45)

And as for the organizers of the games,
let the palm not be given to any artist unfairly
and let them not be thrown out so that others benefit from corruption
and so that the worse can be placed ahead of the good.

¹⁷⁹ Slater 1992: 133 and 139, for instance, speaks of a power reversal between the theatrical and the political sphere.

And this, too, which I almost forgot:
 while the games are taking place, footmen,
 storm the eating house; attack now
 while you have the opportunity,
 now while the cheese tarts are hot!
 It is proper that everyone should remember for himself
 these orders issued by virtue of the actor's authority.

This prologue speaker directly addresses the organisers of the games (36: *ludorum curatores*), but also entangles the entire audience in a web of humorous communication. Scholars are uncertain whether the mentioning of a prize for dramatists (37: *palma*) has a basis in historical reality.¹⁸⁰ In light of the playful pronouncement to start an attack on inns (42: *in popinam [...] inruptionem facite*), and the invention of an absurd-sounding power of actors that mocks *imperium* as a military form of command (44: *imperio histrico*), it seems reasonable to regard l. 37-8 as another joke that toys with the spectators' cultural knowledge. The *prologus* impishly undermines the high moral standards that were a pillar of public speeches delivered to the people in Rome (37: *iniuria*; 38: *ambitionis caussa extrudantur*; 39: *bonis*).¹⁸¹ Just as politicians ought to be elected according to moral uprightness (39: *deteriores; bonis*) and without resorting to illegal means of securing votes (38: *ambitionis caussa*) – which was, of course, an increasing problem of the republican political system – , Plautus imagines a contest between theatre groups that follows the rules of politics.¹⁸² As the term *artifex* (*scaenicus*) is the Latin rendering of the Greek *technitai* of Dionysus, the itinerant acting troupes who travelled the (mostly eastern) Mediterranean to stage their plays, Plautus identifies himself here with these individuals (37: *artifici*).¹⁸³

It is not accurate to see Plautus siding with an upper-class male view to ingratiate himself with those members of the audience.¹⁸⁴ Instead, he breezily shifts between aristocratic values and presumably lowly interests (the world of inns and cheese-tarts), engulfing all of the spectators in communal play. As in the *Casina* prologue above, the explicit signalling that this

¹⁸⁰ Moodie 2015: 97. Christenson 2000: 138-9 is non-committal about purported dramatic contests in Rome. He instead stresses Aristophanes' habit to gripe about bad judges (150). Greece had theatrical competitions, of which sure evidence is lacking in Rome. Manuwald 2011: 95 highlights that the Roman *ludi* were no institutionalised poetic contests (*ἀγῶνες*) as known from the Greek world.

¹⁸¹ Another description of audience members and edicts is found in *Amph.* 64-85. The confounding of electioneering, theatre business, and political and poetic competition features again in the prologue of this play, cf. 70-73: *seu quoiquam artifici (seu per scriptas litteras/seu qui ipse ambisset seu per internuntium)/siue adeo aediles perfidiose quoi duint*; see further Christenson 2000: 152-3.

¹⁸² For *ambitus* and its role in republican politics, see the summary in Mouritsen 2017: 51-3. Germany 2019: 81-2 briefly broaches the similarities between public oratory at a *contio* and theatre without systematically pursuing this intriguing intersection.

¹⁸³ Le Guen 2013: 371.

¹⁸⁴ See Moodie 2015: 95 with further literature, endorsing this position.

is a *ludi* context gives the speaker the licence to invent the most ridiculous scenarios, e.g., an actor stigmatised with *infamia* to assume the speaking position of a military general, who orders his footsoldiers to storm the taverns (*Cas.* 25: *ludi sunt, ludus datus est* [...]; here *Poen.* 41: *dum ludi fiunt*). Regular signs that articulate to the audience that they are dealing with playful communication and ought to show the requisite responsiveness thus pervade Plautus' comedies. This is the explicit pointer 'this is play', which according to Bateson is often left unspoken but is here clearly verbalised. Such utterances testify to the precarious speaking position of a dramatic writer in the middle republic as he sought to ensure that such a daring send-up of roles of power did not get him into trouble.¹⁸⁵ The experimental re-modelling of voices and perspectives a few lines later also includes that of a land surveyor (49: *finitor*), an apparent conversation with an undertaker (63: *pollicitor*), and the construction of the collective audience as *iuratores* (58), who are supposed to judge the *prologus*' plot summary and are thus authorised to become fellow participants in the comic fictionalisation of everyday scenes from Roman life.

Without any alternative venue at which subaltern people could speak in public, Plautus exploited the licence granted by the frame of silly play to overturn Roman power hierarchies within the play space he sets up. The playwright recurrently invites his audiences to join in the temporary suspension of usual behavioural protocols and become fellow players in his game. Another example from *Casina* shows Plautus at work instructing the viewers to adopt the required ludic attitude at which his characters excel within the stage fiction. The spectators are invited to become complicit in the tricksters' ruses and co-author, as it were, the fictional *ludi*. Myrrhina, the third of the triplet of contriving women in the *Casina*, sets act five in motion with another reference to *ludi* within the *ludi*. After Olympio and Lysidamus falsely believed they have reached the goal of possessing Casina even though they were actually fondling Chalinus in drag, the women step outside Alcesimus' house to watch the spectacle.¹⁸⁶ Myrrhina lets the audience know how much they are enjoying the men's cluelessness:

*acceptae bene et commode eximus intus
ludos visere huc in viam nuptialis.
Numquam ecastor ullo die risi adaeque,
neque hoc quod relicuom est plus risuram opinor.* (Cas. 855-58)

After we've been entertained well and pleasurably

¹⁸⁵ As may, according to some accounts, have happened to Naevius who was sent into exile for his slanders, cf. Mattingly 1960; Compton 2006.

¹⁸⁶ See Richlin 2017: 104 for the drag act of the male actor playing a male slave (Chalinus) who dresses up as a woman (Casina). I am inclined to read these lines as jokes whose underlying reality is the pennilessness of actors in Rome mixed with metatheatrical quips. Actors may well have offered sexual services, but the licence of fiction also furnished a channel for arresting frankness, giving actors a paradoxical power (cf. Edwards 1993: 127).

we're going outside here into the street to watch the wedding games.
I've never, on any day, laughed as much,
nor do I think I will laugh more during all the rest of my life.

What Pardalisca has concocted is a full-blown send-up of a Roman marriage ritual which accordingly receives the fitting epithet: *ludos nuptialis*.¹⁸⁷ Programmatic expressions abound in Myrrhina's ensuing observations: *nec fallaciam astutior ullus fecit/poeta atque ut haec est fabre facta ab nobis* (860-1: 'No playwright has ever produced a trick cleverer than this skilful one of ours').¹⁸⁸ Her creation of *ludi* is both directly compared to a poet's activity and singled out for the expert craft with which they were fashioned (*fabre*). Later on, Pardalisca is commanded to continue to exercise her trickster-function on behalf of Cleostrata: **** *(te) nunc praesidem/volo hic, Pardalisca, esse, qui hinc exeat/eum ut ** ludibrio habeas* (867-8: 'Now I want you to be in charge here, Pardalisca, so that you make fun of whoever comes out from here').¹⁸⁹ The women in the *Casina*, as the playwright Plautus by analogy, can briefly leave their real-life marginalisation behind and pose as masters of the production of unconventional but entertaining fictions: the standard rules of the marriage ritual are violated, females hold supreme power, and even sexual identity can be altered (Chalinus becomes 'Casina'). Needless to say, such comic reshuffling remains intricately linked to the temporally constrained religious frame of the *ludi* and to the particular discursive formation of comedy.

Nonetheless, Plautus promotes a new kind of public interaction in Roman culture that originates from the fringes of society, is shrouded in the language of denigrated play, and for this reason provided a second-order space of communication that could be monopolised by clever slaves and similarly disenfranchised social agents. In the *Casina*, the ancilla Pardalisca has a soliloquy (759-79) which is deliberately marked off from the rest of the play as an interlude that does nothing to advance the plot.¹⁹⁰ Aestheticising vocabulary again looms large in such parts of the comedy.¹⁹¹ In this instance, Pardalisca informs the spectators of the activities inside Lysidamus' house. The maid makes the following remarks before explaining what is going on inside:

¹⁸⁷ On the mock-marriage and its implications, see Christenson 2019: 67-71.

¹⁸⁸ McCarthy 2000: 111 speaks of the 'vocabulary of metatheatrical control (*ludi, fallacia, astutior, poeta, fabre*)' that flags up the women's hold over the plot.

¹⁸⁹ The order of the lines is uncertain here, cf. Questa's text (2001: 84).

¹⁹⁰ Slater 1985: 86 is right that Pardalisca poses in the above scene as a second audience on stage wondering at and relating the events inside the house (linguistically marked by *hic intus*). At the same time, this adoption of audience status binds her more closely to the spectators, who experience her as a communicative mediator between two spheres.

¹⁹¹ Note also the repetition of *lepide* (771, 773) to describe the performative skills of the women inside the house.

*nec pol ego Nemeae credo neque ego Olympiae
neque usquam ludos tam festivos fieri
quam hic intus fiunt ludi ludificabiles
seni nostro et Olympioni vilico.*

(Cas. 759-62)

I don't believe that at Nemea or Olympia or anywhere else
such jolly games take place as the game-making taking place inside here
at the expense of our old master and our overseer Olympio.

Given the *palliata*'s hyper-Hellenised characters, Pardalisca's choice of Nemea and Olympia as reference points for large-scale festivals is easily explained as a reference to the landmarks of Greek festival culture.¹⁹² Yet the consideration that this comedy was performed in Rome adds an interesting geopolitical dimension. As the Romans sought to establish their games as the new cultural magnet in the Mediterranean world, the playwrights must have realised they had a role to play in this endeavour. The competitive edge of these lines becomes transparent in the climax *nec [...] Nemeae credo neque [...] Olympiae/neque usquam* (759-60) as well as the modification of the *ludi* by the hapax *ludificabiles* (761), which is almost certainly a Plautine invention and is hardly captured by de Melo's translation 'game-making'.¹⁹³

Emilia Barbiero points out that *ludi ludificabiles* may well be a direct translation of Diphilus, Plautus' source text. Taking on board a suggestion by Michael Fontaine, she wonders whether ἁγῶνες in the sense of *ludi* and πανηγυρικός in the sense of both 'festive' (*festivos*) and 'false, flattering' (*ludificabiles*) would not make a nice pun in Greek as well.¹⁹⁴ This idea ignores the dynamic of augmentation in Plautus' word choice which points to his distinct contribution to the festival world in the ancient Mediterranean, and fails to recognise the special aesthetic brilliance Plautus ascribes to his games (cf. 760: *festivos*). On top of that, his games are brimming with playful tricks (761: *ludificabiles*) – a unique adjective Plautus invented specifically to capture the originality of his trademark technique. Sporting spirit and the promise of civic honour after a victory at Nemea or Olympia give way to Plautine play with roles and words (here amplified by the pun on the target of the trick, Olympio, and the place name Olympia).

Pardalisca is here speaking to the audience on two levels: first, she shares her enjoyment about the successful conning of the male protagonists with the viewers and reminds them

¹⁹² Together with Delphi and the Isthmus of Corinth, Nemea and Olympia provided the settings for the four greatest athletic festivals in the Greek world, cf. MacCary/Willcock 1976: 182.

¹⁹³ TLL s.v. *ludificabilis*.

¹⁹⁴ Barbiero 2020: 62 (n. 32).

confidently how well-wrought the machinations are.¹⁹⁵ Second, she opens a conduit for the audience to consider the play within the play crafted by her and her allies in the context of Greek festival culture. It is at this point that Plautus' own artistic self-fashioning comes to the fore. While other passages have shown that he is well aware of the organising capacities of the aediles, Pardalisca's *ludi* contain a veiled claim to power. By conflating the tricks played in the comedy (*ludi* in discourse) with the institutional context of the games (*ludi*), Plautus intimates that there is little need for magistrates authorising lavish festivals when you have a Plautus to throw a big show. The peculiarity of this strategy in Latin stems from the lexical identity of the festival occasions that framed Plautus' comedies and his intra-fictional *ludi*, which Greek could not imitate. By creating fictional replicas of the playwright as well as *ludi* within the *ludi*, Plautus thus underhandedly arrogates the power to himself to act as the main organiser of Rome's festivals. By analogy, the real-world *ludi* become transformed in the viewers' minds into a stage for play-acting and pretence, which undercuts the principal religious functions of these institutions.

Plautus exploits the heightened awareness among the audience for the manipulable relationship between linguistic representation and reality that he stimulates and intersperses his comedies with remarkably forthright commentary on the role he assigns to himself as Rome's new top comedy producer. In the *Mostellaria*, the clever slave Tranio demonstrates his control over his befuddled master Theopropides, giving advice about the writing of comedies to the latter's question of what he should do after having been duped: *si amicus Diphilo aut Philemoni es/dicito is quo pacto tuo' te servos ludificaverit:/optumas frustrationes dederis in comoediis* (1149-51: 'If you're a friend of Diphilus or Philemon, tell them how your slave made fun of you: you'll give them first-rate stories of imposture in their comedies'). The joke is lost on Theopropides. In fact, none of the interlocutors in the comedy pick up on this utterance, which shows how such lines constitute a direct communication with the Romans sitting in the *cavea*.

It does not matter whether each and every member of the audience knew the Greek comic writers Philemon and Diphilus for the joke to work. Whereas frequent theatregoers might be acquainted with the names which were usually openly revealed in the prologues, others might be totally ignorant. What does matter is that they grasp the gesture: a slave talks as if he were a comic playwright who explains his business to the audience. One might argue that the joke works even better if the spectators do not know the Greek predecessors of Plautus. In this

¹⁹⁵ Moore 1998: 174-5 has noted Pardalisca's rapport with the audience, which orientates audience sympathy towards the female protagonists. Halliwell, too, calls attention to the essential importance of audience complicity for comic success, mostly determined by laughter (2014: 196).

case, they would be confronted with a theatrical in-joke, whose objective it is to demonstrate the expert knowledge of the playwright, who can, in this manner, advertise his unique skill set more effectively. At any rate, such meta-dramatic moments neither further the plot nor are they rooted in the communicative network on stage. More plausibly, this is Plautus ostentatiously vaunting what he does best: making jokes and devising comic plots – keenly aware of his predecessors’ (Diphilus, Philemon) comic styles and insinuating (disingenuously) that the Greek tradition of New Comedy had featured the kind of overly witty poet-slaves Plautus champions all along.¹⁹⁶

Plautus can even be seen at work constructing his own anti-normative catalogue of values. The *Bacchides* contain such an inventory of deified abstractions:

LYD: quid ‘huc’? quis istic habet?
PIS: Amor, Voluptas, Venu’ Venustas, Gaudium,
Iocu’, Ludus, Sermo, Suavisaviatio.

(*Bacch.* 114-6)

What, “here”? Who lives there?
 Love, Pleasure, Charm, Grace, Joy,
 Wit, Playfulness, Chit-chat, Sweetikiss.

In this scene, the *paedagogus* Lydus asks his protégé Pistoclerus where he is headed, to which the latter responds effusively with an unusual list of personified Roman deities. As a young man coming of age, Pistoclerus opposes his tutor’s pedagogical sternness (who wants to save him from *nequitia* (112)) and gives his creative imagination free rein. He comes up with a remarkable enumeration of concepts that stands in sharp contrast to the personified value terms in whose honour individual temples were erected in the middle republic. What initially comes across as the buoyant verbosity of a young man in love, appears against this backdrop as a parody of the pervasive custom of monumentalising fundamental values. Lydus’ foolish question renders the connection of the line to Roman building activities unmistakable and adds to the fun: *an deus est ullus Suavisaviatio?* (120: ‘Since when is there any god called Sweetikiss?’).

Anna Clark’s study of deified values in the Roman republic has the tendency to regard Plautus as a detached artist, who merely contributed to an ongoing public debate on contemporary religion and cult.¹⁹⁷ Yet, I want to go a step further and posit that Plautus is

¹⁹⁶ Gutzwiller 2000 provides a metatheatrical reading of Daos in Menander’s *Aspis* – a much more restrained slave character than any in Plautus. She notes that the difference between Menander and Plautus is that the latter has figures readily step outside of the fictional frame whereas new comic metatheatricality remains far more oblique.

¹⁹⁷ See, e.g., Clark 2007: 99; Gruen 1990: 124-157 tends in the same direction.

confidently reimagining the centre of Rome's value system under the veneer of comic jollity. Similar lists in the Plautine *corpus* attest to his fondness for this stylistic device, and it is notable that none of them omits *ludus* as a core element: *Merc.* 846: *vitam, amicitiam, civitatem, laetitiam, ludum, iocum* ('life, friendship, citizenship, joy, jubilation, jest'); *Capt.* 770: *laudem, lucrum, ludum, iocum, festivitatem, ferias* ('praise, profit, pleasure, laughter, liveliness, and leisure').¹⁹⁸ Whereas *fides*, *honor*, *virtus* and other values are increasingly revered in Roman public life of the 3rd and 2nd cent. BCE, Plautus repeatedly comes back to the idea of furnishing his comedies with an opposing set of anti-values, with play being a prominent one of them. The success of this symbolic form of self-promotion is evidenced by the spurious funerary epigram transmitted by Gellius:

*Postquam est mortem aptus Plautus, Comoedia luget,
scaena est deserta, dein Risus Ludus Iocusque
et Numeri innumeri simul omnes conlacrimarunt.*

(NA 1.24.3)

Since Plautus has met death, Comedy mourns,
Deserted is the stage; then Laughter, Sport and Wit,
And Music's countless numbers all together wept.

Whoever wrote this epitaph, the author appears to have been keen to underscore the typical features of Plautus' style: a variety of metres (*Numeri innumeri*), a concentration on comic theatre (*Comoedia*; *scaena*), and personified principles (*Risus Ludus Iocusque*) that programmatically structure his comic discourse. In *ludus*, Plautus found a key symbol to situate himself as a comic entertainer within Rome's budding festival culture, elaborating his literary principles as an aestheticised version of an existing cultural institution.

While *sermo* and *iocus* are two concepts that also identify the 'good companion' of Ennius' *Annales*, Plautus promotes a self-reflexive aesthetic programme that potentiates play and deception under the guise of (clichéd) cultural differences between Rome and Greece.¹⁹⁹ The *palliata*'s inflated Greekness offered Plautus the means to create a domain of distinction for subordinate artist-intellectuals like him – fictionally represented by social inferiors, who are granted the temporary, symbolic licence to significantly upset Roman norms. The valuelessness of play in Rome's political culture granted a non-citizen without *auctoritas* the paradoxical freedom to tease Roman audiences about their fundamental norms and offered him a sphere in

¹⁹⁸ Willcock 1987: 99 states that *Pseud.* 65 is probably an interpolation as it repeats verbatim *Bacch.* 116 and would fit the preceding line better if the nouns were all plural (64: *nunc nostri amores, mores, consuetudines*). It should also be stressed that lists were a staple of epic style, which Plautus here absorbs into his comic world.

¹⁹⁹ *Ann.* 8, fr. 269-70: *mensam sermonesque [...] partit*, and 273-4: *Quoi res audacter magnas parvasque iocumque/Eloqueretur*. The good friend shares dinner-table conversations and jokes with the military general.

which he could lay out his cultural programme. At the same time, couching acts of intentional and calculated deceit in the language of play made them appear harmless, benign, and childlike. Everyone knew that this was time-bound loosening of norms, whose effects would not be grave and were not designed to last.

Plautus' self-reflexive language games are far removed from the processions, sacrifices, and entertainment shows the *ludi* offered at an ever-grander scale, but they hold lingering sway over modern interpretations of the playfulness of the Roman games.

2.1) Comedy on the rise in Rome: Lucilius' satire as intra-elite play

The previous chapter put forward the thesis that **lud-* concepts were vital for Plautus' self-advertisement as a comic author. He fashioned an image of producers of comedy in Rome as cunning, deceptive tricksters, who excelled at discursive practices that one can broadly label as playful (punning, banter, irony, etc.). Furthermore, he endowed these figures not only with the mental and communicative capacities to put such practices on display but also to propagate them as their exclusive, standout features. The next writer for whom play imagery appears to have been central is the elusive 2nd cent. BCE satirist Lucilius. In fr. 1055, he calls his verses *ludus ac sermones* ('play and chats'), which has often been taken as a programmatic statement that has repercussions for the interpretation of his entire *oeuvre*.²⁰⁰ Whereas Plautus' subaltern agents of play retain a non-Roman colouring in a markedly Greek genre (*palliata* comedy), Roman satire seems to break free from the shackles of Greek legacy, instituting a purportedly purely Roman kind of playful discourse.²⁰¹ Thomas Habinek has been the most active scholar in trying to interpret the intriguing fact that Roman satirists prefer to style their writings as *ludus* rather than *satura*. Reading satire as a form of play, he postulates that the genre is imagined in Rome as experimental and secondary, a preliminary stage for the Roman male to rehearse the assertion of authoritative, elite identity: *ludus* enabling *auctoritas*.²⁰²

While I have no objection to the general insight of this analysis, Habinek's model of a unified elite whose hegemony is universally bolstered by the ideology contained within literary texts is too monolithic and ahistorical. What is needed is an approach that traces the evolution of Rome's discourse of play, as well as a socio-cultural explanation of the emergence of Lucilian satire as an entirely new ludic genre.²⁰³ One might ask: how did Lucilius transform and integrate the paradigms of Roman comedy into his work? What are the cultural implications of framing this new genre as play? In an interview with the *American Journal of Play*, Simon Goldhill has claimed that 'practices of cultural self-definition and assimilation between Greece and Rome can be articulated through contrasting and competing ideas of play'.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ For an in-depth analysis of the fragment, see ch. 2.4.

²⁰¹ For the respective judgements, see Quintilian's famous dictum *satura quidem tota nostra est* (*Inst.* 10.1.93) and Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.66: *Graecis intacti carminis auctor* with important remarks in Goldberg 2018a: 40-4; also *Sat.* 2.1.62: *cum est Lucilius ausus / primus in hunc operis componere carmina morem*.

²⁰² Habinek 2005a and 2005b.

²⁰³ Gowers 1993b: 110-1 recalls the introduction of *per saturam* laws contemporaneous to the evolution of satiric writing in Rome. The term is an insulting name for political bills that concealed unpopular among popular measures ('a messy medley'). The genre thus carries dubiousness and low esteem in its name.

²⁰⁴ Goldhill 2017: 292.

I will show that an approach that is alert to the cultural interactions between Greece and Rome especially in the era of the Scipios in which Lucilius was writing is another aspect Habinek's thesis neglects. My reading will set the 'birth of satire' against the changing relationship between prominent members of the Roman nobility and Greek *paideia*, as well as Lucilius' equestrian career against the political and cultural ascendancy of Scipio the Younger.²⁰⁵ Plautus had created a space for the self-fashioning of authors in Latin, who worked in genres that were difficult to harmonise with the values of Rome's political culture. Lucilius picks up on and reworks this tradition, positioning himself as a writer of humorous poetry without an immediate political function within Rome's aristocratic milieu. He locates the now aesthetically charged category of *ludus* forged by Plautus in an environment of aristocratic *amicitia* where political struggles were increasingly also fought about appropriate self-presentation in the domain of *otium*.

Concomitantly, changes in educational practices of the elite rendered Hellenism a resource that could be marshalled in the strife for supremacy with heightened intensity. With some members of the elite fully trained in Greek language and ideas, a transformed paradigm of the relationship between poetry and power emerged: Lucilius and Scipio as a symmetrical pair of friends, captured in the medium of light poetry with its roots in Roman comedy for which *ludus ac sermones* proved suitable epithets. Roman satire evolves formally as an inconsequential anti-type of genres that gave aristocrats a means to memorialise their *res gestae* (e.g., epic, historiography, *fabula praetexta*). Lucilius' satire plays with such powerful discourses and confidently rejects their tone, aspirations, and cultural function. Instead, he upgrades *ludus* to a place within aristocratic life and maintains the ideological inferiority of the concept in that it designates politically irrelevant poetry which he simultaneously imbues with political efficacy.

The argumentative thread to be pursued in the next chapters can be summarised as follows: first, I will attempt to dig out a more historically accurate Lucilius from two powerful late republican and Augustan filters: Cicero and Horace. Second, I will contrast a reconstruction of Lucilius' relationship to Scipio Aemilianus with Ennius' 'good companion' paradigm of the

²⁰⁵ Goldberg 2005: 150-4 briefly traces the development of Roman satire with a view to alternative genres so far practised in Rome and their expressive opportunities and limitations. For possible precursors of Lucilian satire, see Gruen 1992: 308 (Ennius, Pacuvius and Spurius Mummius apparently wrote *versiculi faceti* in 146 BCE). Gratwick 1982c: 159 compares the scanty fragments of Ennius' *saturae* with Lucilius. Lucilius' fragments certainly feature a farrago of themes ranging from autobiography, love affairs, cultural and moral critique to orthography and personal feuds. Whether he bound all these themes together under the rubric satire is at least doubtful (cf. Martyn 1972). Roman 2014: 36 n. 14 summarises: 'Lucilius himself may not have called his work *satura*. Yet the name in the end may matter less than the specifically Roman concept of informal, sub- or counter-poetic writing variously designated *satura*, *sermo*, *lusus*.'

good client poet to tease out how Ennius' historical epic functions as a powerful foil for Lucilius' playful self-fashioning in the satires. In chapter 2.4, I will lay out how satire functions as a novel medium of memory that parodies the pretensions of epic and aristocratic grandeur, representing also disreputable (e.g., playful) forms of aristocratic life and creating an alternative model of poetry and power – and a different way to understand the relationship between Lucilius and Scipio. Finally, satiric play as a culturally refined (Roman-cum-Hellenised) mode of poking fun at pompous diction and elite peers will be analysed as a resource that finds its origins in the banter and idiom of comedy and makes an impressive career upwards in society to then be utilised in the increasingly competitive sphere of elite *otium*.

2.2) Searching for Lucilius

It is a truism that Classicists consistently face the problem that many ancient authors do not exist independently of the filters that subsequent phases of reception have superimposed on them. Due to the shortness of most of the remains of Lucilius, the challenge posed by reception as a distorting lens is even exacerbated. Yet despite the regrettably fragmentary evidence we possess of Lucilius, there is much recent scholarly activity that (re-)appraises the author's language, literary style, and cultural context.²⁰⁶ One tendency in the existing scholarship, however, is a 'hermeneutic atomisation' that adds to the fragmentation of the text and impedes an understanding of Lucilius' work as a coherent activity.²⁰⁷ The upshot is a confusing array of images of this poet: a fully integrated upper-class male, on the one hand, and a caustic critic of the elite's moral shortcomings on the other; an urban gourmand, and a rural landowner; a citizen and a non-Roman notable from the *municipia*, simultaneously right at the centre of power, yet still an outsider in the budding metropolis of Rome; a writer for an exclusive coterie of upper-class friends, and a moderately educated detractor of eruditeness.²⁰⁸ Each fragment has the potential to inspire a plethora of (contradicting) associations – a tendency which is then

²⁰⁶ See the latest collected volume 'Lucilius and Satire in Second-Century BC Rome' by Breed/Keitel/Wallace (2018). Almost half of the pages in the book are, however, devoted to linguistics.

²⁰⁷ See already the collection of essays 'Der Satiriker Lucilius und seine Zeit' edited by Manuwald (2001). Every single contribution is, of course, valuable, but Lucilius' elusiveness is rather compounded by the presentation of findings into discreet sub-topics that variously find expression in the fragments (epic, philosophy, scholarship, comedy, history, etc.).

²⁰⁸ Cf. Goh 2018: 256 on Lucilius' peculiar position in between the social, political and literary categories so far established in Rome's cultural history. On the diverging audience reconstructions, cf. Puelma Piwonka (I §4) and Breed 2018 (small clique vs. provincial elites).

counteracted by ready-made talk of satire as the hodgepodge, whose essence is the eclectic mixing of references, genres, themes, and tones.²⁰⁹

Lucilius is not only credited as the founder of the new, and supposedly fully Roman, genre of satire, but also as the inaugurator of a new epoch in Latin literary history, the first exponent of personal poetry in Rome, and the first member of the ruling class to take up writing as more than an occasional leisure occupation.²¹⁰ Despite countless efforts to extract a Lucilian voice out of the mostly minute fragments, the most vivid vignettes of the author come down to us via later authors such as Cicero and Horace.²¹¹ Intriguingly, Lucilius' playfulness is one of the salient features that these later writers single out as the trademark of the author's character. Cicero refers to Lucilius 29 times and instead of mentioning the title of his literary output he only refers to him by his name – an indication that Lucilius succeeded in infusing his writings with a strong authorial personality that gave his miscellaneous writings a unifying touch.²¹² So powerful seems the Lucilian *persona* to have been that it even engendered the coinage of the adjectival derivative *Lucilianus*, which is common in the later literary tradition.²¹³ Two literary documents that have been influential in shaping our image of Lucilius stand out in particular and therefore deserve more in-depth treatment: Cicero's *De oratore* and Horace *Sat.* 2.1.

A republican author who casts a powerful spell over Lucilian studies and the author's image as an *exemplum* of play is Cicero. A far cry from the characterisation as prolix and uncouth which we find in Horace (*lutulentus* in *Sat.* 1.4.11 and 1.10.50), Crassus in Cicero's dialogue *De oratore* dubs Lucilius *homo doctus et perurbanus* (*De or.* 2.25; also 1.72), and the way he applies his wit is described as both *lepide* and *elegantissime* (*De or.* 3.171). The first passage, in particular, is replete with all the ideological signposts of stylised leisure pursuits that are symptomatic of Cicero's idealised vision of elite affability in late republican country retreats: Crassus asserts that Laelius and Scipio had to find refuge in the countryside (*rus ex urbe*) to give in to the pleasures of relaxation and play (*ad omnem animi remissionem ludumque descendere*) and momentarily leave the burdens of city life (*De or.* 2.23: *forensibus negotiis atque urbano opere defessi* vs. *vacui cura ac labore*). Relaxation figures here as a primarily

²⁰⁹ Cf. Ferriss-Hill 2022 for an up-to-date overview of the genre and the scholarly discourses it has spawned.

²¹⁰ See the wide-ranging historical account by Gruen 1992; Haß 2007 for Lucilius as the originator of personal poetry in Rome.

²¹¹ In addition, the grammarians Festus and Nonius have been most instrumental in preserving the bits and pieces of Lucilius which they have deemed valuable for their own scholarly projects.

²¹² Cf. Martyn 1972: 165-6.

²¹³ Poccetti 2018: 92 points to the small number of Latin authors to receive such an epithet. Examples include †vallo† *Luciliano* (Cic. *Att.* 16.11.1), *Luciliano caractere* (Varr. *Rust.* 3.2.17), *Luciliana urbanitate* (Porph. *ad Sat.* 1.3.40) and *Lucilianae humilitatis* (Petron. *Sat.* 4). See also *lusit Luciliano stilo* (Auson. *De Hered. praef.*), which connects the notion of an emblematic Lucilian style with playfulness. Svarlien 1994: 257 emphasises that Lucilius has been exploited as a model and foil expressly not of invective, but of wit, humour, and style.

mental state (*animi*), and *ludus* is overtly cast as a base activity unfit for reputable aristocratic life (*descendere*). Lucilius is first missing in Cicero's image only to then make a sudden appearance as the source of the anecdote Cicero wishes to relate.²¹⁴ Interestingly, the friends' time-out from city business in their rural refuge is concurrent with a return to boyhood (*De or.* 2.22):

saepe ex socero meo audivi, cum is diceret socerum suum Laelium semper fere cum Scipione solitum rusticari eosque incredibiliter repuerascere esse solitos [...]. Non audeo dicere de talibus viris, sed tamen ita solet narrare Scaevola conchas eos et umbilicos ad Caietam et ad Laurentum legere consuesse et ad omnem animi remissionem ludumque descendere.

I have often heard from my father-in-law the story of how his own father-in-law, Laelius, would go to the country, usually in the company of Scipio, and how they would, more than you'd ever believe, become boys again [...]. I hardly dare say this about such great men, but still, Scaevola likes to tell how they were in the habit of collecting snails and seashells at Caieta and Lavernium, and of indulging in all kinds of distractions and play.

Cicero throws a dramatic shade over his description of pre-eminent men acting inappropriately. He not only stresses the outrageousness of their behaviour (*incredibiliter; non audeo dicere de talibus viris*) but puts them on stage like two young men from Roman comedy, who are up for all kinds of mischief. The verb *repuerascere* is attested before Cicero only once in Plautus and the writer of Atellan farces Novius.²¹⁵ In *Merc.* 296, it is used by the *senex* Lysimachus to explain to his old neighbour Demipho that he has fallen in love like a young man.²¹⁶ Moreover, Cicero acts scandalised because of the sexual innuendo of the noun *concha*, which again has a Plautine precedent.²¹⁷ *Umbilicus* to describe a pebble in the form of a navel is an equally odd usage and only found in this sense in the above passage.²¹⁸ The *TLL* is wrong to classify

²¹⁴ It is unclear where the anecdotes about Scipio's friends and their boyish rollicking originates, i.e., whether they are later republican fabrications or indeed go back to Lucilius' verses themselves. Wohlleben 1998: 134 holds this view; see also Cichorius 1964: 54 n. 1. Undoubtedly, the tale has spawned elaborations, e.g., by the scholiast Ps.-Acro *ad Hor. Sat.* 2.1.72, where Lucilius is depicted chasing Scipio around the dining couches with a napkin: *Scipio Africanus fertur intra domum tam civilis fuisse et carus Lucilio, ut quodam tempore Laelius circa lectos triclinii fugienti supervenerit, cum eum Lucilius obtorta mappa quasi feriturus sequeretur*. Horace may of course have been influenced by the Ciceronian scenario and transformed the story in his own right.

²¹⁵ *TLL* s.v. *repuerasco*.

²¹⁶ **Lud-* lexemes are a prominent feature of the excerpt, cf. *Merc.* 303: *hodie eire occepi in ludum litterarium*; 307: *ludificas nunc tu me*. Lysimachus' rejuvenation goes so far that he even claims (jokingly) that he returned to primary school to learn the alphabet.

²¹⁷ In *Rud.*, Trachalio's prayer to Venus plays with the double meaning of *concha* as shell and the female genitalia: *Rud.* 704: *te ex concha natam esse autumant, caue tu harum conchas spernas*. See further Jeppesen 2015. The description of Caligula commanding his soldiers to collect seashells (*conchas*) as spoils of war (*Suet. Calig.* 46) has been thought by some scholars to play with the same meaning, cf. Woods 2000 for the various readings of this episode.

²¹⁸ OLD s.v. *umbilicus*. Valerius Maximus' account of this scene is evidently modelled on Cicero. He tells of Scipio and Laelius: *eos [...] conchulas et umbilicos lectitasse* (8.8.1). Aurelius Victor intriguingly transmits the same group of nouns in his description of Caligula at the shore, adding *umbilicos*, which had been missing in *Suet. Calig.* 46: *conchas umbilicosque in ora maris Oceani legi iussit* (*Caes.* 3.11). Considering Cicero's penchant in

Cicero's use of *repuerascere* as straightforwardly positive. It is rather that through the prism of Plautine comedy, Cicero allows himself to enter into playful discourse, leaving it at least ambiguous what Scipio and Laelius were doing: harmlessly collecting shells like the seasoned elder statesmen they want to be seen as, or reverting to schoolboy humour and picking out just those shells that rather look like something else.

Lucilius as a signal of play is deployed when the otherwise scrupulously upheld public image of men like Scipio – an example of a powerful and celebrated *nobilis* if ever there was one – is disclosed as a façade. Clearly, Lucilian play is given a special spin by Cicero to make it accord with his project in *De oratore* of modelling an ideal of elite social interaction that encompasses dainty humour and witty repartee, which he himself was so fond of.²¹⁹ In consequence, Lucilius is described as nimbly adopting the *persona* of Q. Mucius Scaevola Augur, who mocks his opponent T. Albucius' appropriation of Greek culture and takes a dig at his son-in law Crassus (who is also the speaker of this section). Beside the buzzwords of what Krostenko has termed the 'language of social performance' (*elegantissime*, *lepide*), the preponderance of **lud-* terminology stands out: *lepide soceri mei persona lusit is, qui elegantissime id facere potuit, Lucilius [...], in Albucium inludens [...]* (*De or.* 3.171: 'there are some playful and witty lines by Lucilius (who could do such things with particular elegance), put in the mouth of my father-in-law [...], mocking Albucius with this gibe [...]), and *in me quidem lusit ille, ut solet* (*De or.* 3.172 ('But he was just making fun of me, as usual')).

According to Cicero's vision, aristocratic sociability is marked by elegant, good-natured humour of which all participants in a conversation ought to have their fair share. Lucilius is brought to bear as a model of erudition and *urbanitas*, who sharply but benevolently ridicules the follies within a circle of elite peers without ever really threatening their congenial attitude towards one another.²²⁰ As for Plautus, he, too, is reimagined by Cicero as an urbane wit in accordance with Cicero's self-interested portrayal of 'aristocrats at play'. In *Off.* 1.104, Cicero puts Plautus' joking style even into the same box as Socratic irony: *iocandi genus [...] elegans urbanum ingeniosum facetum. Quo genere non modo Plautus noster et Atticorum antiqua comoedia, sed etiam philosophorum Socraticorum libri referti sunt* ('a type of joke: refined,

De or. to illustrate his arguments with children's games, a technique borrowed from Plato, the collection of shells may also evoke the Greek game of *ostrakinda*, which was played with differently coloured *ostraka*, meaning both potsherd and shell. Sprague 1984: 283-4 gives examples of Plato elaborating a philosophical point with reference to *ostrakinda* (e.g., *Resp.* 521c; *Phdr.* 241b).

²¹⁹ Cf. Krostenko 2001: 224, who considers Cicero's lecture on humour as a vindication of his predilection for joking, which in the eyes of his detractors occasionally transgressed the boundaries of good taste.

²²⁰ For the significance of the same social status shared by Lucilius and Crassus, see Goldberg 2005: 172.

polite, clever, witty. With this latter sort not only our own Plautus and the Old Comedy of Athens, but also the books of Socratic philosophy abound’).²²¹

Whereas Cicero puts the notions of humour and wit that are connected to *ludus/ludere* in the limelight, Horace foregrounds the childish connotations of the concepts.²²² In a fictive dialogue between his satiric *persona* and the famous 1st-cent. lawyer C. Trebatius Testa, Horace investigates legal concerns regarding his potentially law-breaking satires. Trebatius warns him of the inherent perils of satiric discourse, as the powers that be might easily be offended by being depicted unfavourably in verse. Here is Horace’s reply:

[...] *quid, cum est Lucilius ausus
primus in hunc operis componere carmina morem,
detrahere et pellem, nitidus qua quisque per ora
cederet, introrsum turpis, num Laelius aut qui
duxit ab oppressa meritum Carthagine nomen
ingenio offensi aut laeso doluere Metello
famosisque Lupo cooperto versibus? atqui
primores populi arripuit populumque tributim,
scilicet uni aequus virtuti atque eius amicis.
quin ubi se a vulgo et scaena in secreta remorant
virtus Scipiadae et mitis sapientia Laeli,
nugari cum illo et discincti ludere donec
decoqueretur holus soliti.*

(Sat. 2.1.62-74)

What! when Lucilius first dared to compose poems after this kind, and to strip off the skin with which each strutted all bedecked before the eyes of men, though foul within, was Laelius offended at his wit, or he who took his well-earned name from conquered Carthage? Or were they hurt because Metellus was smitten, and Lupus buried under a shower of lampooning verses? Yet he laid hold upon the leaders of the people, and upon the people in their tribes, kindly in fact only to Virtue and her friends. Nay, when virtuous Scipio and the wise and gentle Laelius withdrew into privacy from the throng and theatre of life, they would turn to folly, and flinging off restraint would indulge with him in sport while their dish of herbs was on the boil.

The passage is memorable for the sense it gives of the conceptual nexus of friendship, play, and Rome’s *exempla* discourse. Horace defends his satirical jibes by conjuring figures of the past that serve as exemplars of certain character traits and codes of conduct: Lucilius is set up as the first Roman to produce acerbic poetry that exposed the ugly truth behind the glossy facades of public life. Ennius’ ‘good companion’ had been sufficiently honoured to sit at the great man’s table and share in his good counsel (*Ann.* 8, fr. 269-70: *mensam sermonesque suos rerumque*

²²¹ See also Corbeill 2023: 49-50. Coffey 1989: 57-8 maintains that the form of the Socratic dialogue and Plato’s *Symposium* influenced the structure and content of Lucilius’ satires.

²²² The passages will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters on Cicero’s *De oratore*.

suarum/consilium partit [...]); the patron can be sure of his subordinate's discretion (fr. 273-6: *quoi res audacter magnas parvasque iocumque/eloqueretur [...] tutoque locaret [...] gaudia clamque palamque* – 'To him he would speak with confidence of matters great and small, of jests [...], and keep them in safety [...], joys privately and openly'), since his character is placid and sound (fr. 277: *ingenium quoi nulla malum sententia suadet*). Sharing his patron's private hours is depicted as a privilege, and his wise *consilium* seems to rub off on the subaltern voice. Not so Lucilius. His *ingenium* is on the attack (2.1.67: *ingenio offensi*), and he uses his knowledge of the private life of the powerful to skewer them in his verses (2.1.63-4).²²³

As in Cicero's depiction, the passage has dramatic overtones (2.1.71: *ubi se a vulgo et scaena in secreta remorant*), with the dark insinuation that Scipio's and Laelius' public *personae* are nothing but a theatre performance. Horace plays a double game here. On the one hand, he pays these two men homage by emphasising their exemplary characteristics (2.1.71-2: *remorant/virtus Scipiadae et mitis sapientia Laeli*). Their names are periphrastically relegated to the genitive case while the exemplary attributes they embody function in the sentence like living agents performing the action of the verb. It is as if Laelius did not only personify philosophical wisdom and Scipio military valour, but that the prized qualities live and breathe through their incarnations. Hölkeskamp has cogently demonstrated how the Romans routinely concretise abstract values and behavioural norms through historical individuals, who then become their carriers.²²⁴ What Lucilius adds is a force that punctures the public pretensions of illustrious men, entangling them in silliness and play behind the scenes (73: *nugari [...] et discincti ludere*). On the surface, Horace remains respectful, but reading the final line leaves a bitter aftertaste: what if their outward nobility and humbleness is all just for show, and if what looks like Lucilius' trademark satiric aggression is actually just puerile play of three stage actors?²²⁵ Read this way, Horace even intimates that their pretensions to *sapientia* and *virtus* are just a sheen that covers up what is foul within (2.1.65: *introrsum turpis*).

²²³ Cf. Freudenburg 2021 *ad loc.* on the ambiguity between *ingenium* as 'inborn proclivities' and 'poetic talent'.

²²⁴ Hölkeskamp 2004: 182-3 calls such *exempla* 'holzschnittartig idealisierte Kunstfiguren', pointing out that after continuous reiterations in the reception process, the mentioning of a name alone sometimes sufficed to evoke a certain trait, historical deed, or abstract value.

²²⁵ The link between play and childishness reappears in *Epist.* 2.1 where Horace joins the onset of cultural productivity in Greece with peace times, see l. 93: *ut primum positus nugari Graecia bellis/coepit [...]*. He then compares these pursuits to child's play: *sub nutrice puella velut si luderet infans* (99). Later, he ridicules the craze for poetry by all and sundry in Rome: *scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim* (117). Unlike the high standards that Horace abides by in his poetic production, his readers are led to infer, the verses of dilettantes, and by analogy, early Latin authors such as Lucilius are degraded as unprofessional triflings lacking in a sense of decorum and stylistic rigour. For a more wide-ranging discussion of Horace's stance towards the famously 'muddy' Lucilius, see Schlegel 2010.

The point the speaker is making is intimately connected to Horace's agenda in book 1 of the satires, as outlined by DuQuesnay.²²⁶ Horace's *ludus* between Scipio, Laelius, and Lucilius is a fiction that provides the backdrop for his construction of the circle around Maecenas – a group of friends in which the decorum that public life affords is carefully respected and the pursuit of pleasure is demoted to the separate sphere of *otium*. The ensemble of jolly pals Scipio, Laelius, and Lucilius are reduced to the set types well known from the comic stage, with Lucilius taking over the task of play master that Plautus had conferred to witty servants in his comedies. Happily, Horace implies, these times are over and more dignified men now share a table with the *princeps*. Instead of regressing into adolescence, the circle around Maecenas return to the well-mannered intimacy with a distance that had characterised the relationship between the 'good companion' and his patron.

It has further been pointed out that the adjective *discinctus* is used pejoratively to refer to contemptible morals, and that the behind-the-scenes intimacy of these three companions is even erotically charged.²²⁷ Behind the scenes and goaded on by Lucilius, the three pals loosen up. The benefits of play imagery for Horace's anecdote lie in the temporary suspension of social hierarchies which are otherwise carefully respected on the public stage.²²⁸ Once the friends are unencumbered by public scrutiny, Lucilius acts as the subversive counterweight to the carefully crafted image of *virtus* à la Scipio and *sapientia* à la Laelius, prompting these embodiments of core Roman values to indulge in un-Roman play. The convivial setting of this intimate scene is certainly a barometer of morality. Their alleged contentment with a modest diet creates the image of men who cherish the values of old before moral degeneration and corruption have set in in Rome – even in exclusive spaces.²²⁹ The differences in social status between Lucilius and Horace are instructive: Although Scipio, Laelius, and Lucilius may have belonged to the same social stratum (unlike Horace, Virgil, and Maecenas), Horace's own position within his social environment is elevated through the comparison with Scipio's friends. Despite Horace's lower

²²⁶ Cf. DuQuesnay 1984. Having changed sides from the Republicans to Octavian after Philippi, Horace was at pains to portray the circle around Octavian's associate Maecenas as the ideal group of cultured, humane, morally upright Roman citizens now rightfully in close proximity to the centre of power. His choice of Lucilius (instead of Ennius) as the *primus inventor* of satire is rooted in the attempt to present himself as a worthy successor of the poet, who was regarded as the incorporation of republican freedom of speech. Under new political circumstances, Horace adapted the meaning of *libertas* so that Maecenas and his circle could be seen as the new champions thereof (32). See also Ruffell 2003: 37 and 62 for Horace's depoliticisation and privatisation of republican *libertas*.

²²⁷ Cf. Goh 2016: 75. Maecenas provides a perfect test case for the culturally powerful idea that bad morals entail a bad writing style. Sen. *Ep.* 114 is fundamental in this regard. Suetonius (*vita Terenti passim*) reports rumours about the sexual interest Terence aroused in the exact same noblemen who were close to Lucilius, Laelius, and Scipio. On Terence's relationship with aristocratic patrons, see Umbrico 2010.

²²⁸ Gruen 1992: 280.

²²⁹ Eating cabbage (*holus*) was a marker of the simple life of ordinary Romans (Freudenburg 2021 *ad loc.*). Yet again, there are theatrical allusions. On the connection between a lower-class diet and comic drama, see Gowers 1993b: 50-108.

status, Maecenas grants him the freedom to produce satiric *ludi*, albeit with a more restrained, seriocomic tone, which fits the greater respectability Horace seeks to project for Maecenas' circle.²³⁰

What links Cicero's and Horace's scenes of aristocrats at play, then, is the imagined context of exclusive, elite spaces that are recorded and stylised by a narrator who was present behind the scenes (Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.71: *in secreta remorant*) or at least has family connections that guarantee the credibility of the recounted anecdotes (Cic. *De or.* 2.22: *ex socero meo audivi*). Both scenes have a dramatic flavour (the mention of *scaena* (*Sat.* 2.1.71); aristocrats playing the roles of abstract values; the verbal reminiscences of Plautus), with Cicero's picture being more jolly and Horace's more ambiguous. For Horace, removing oneself from the masses (*Sat.* 2.1.71: *a vulgo*) indicates a break from burdensome role-play and an entry into a world where relationships can be symmetrical. Hence, the playfulness established by Lucilian verse among his upper-class friends Scipio and Laelius serves him as a template for an ideal vision of Maecenas' circle where he himself can play the new Lucilius.

Cicero, who probably inspired Horace's depiction, uses drama to contrive a comic sketch of two *senes* rejuvenating and to set up Lucilius as a comic impersonator of Roman *nobiles* – exactly what Cicero then goes on to do throughout his philosophical dialogues. Both renditions underscore the habitual quality of the actions performed (cf. Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.74: *soliti*; Cic. *De or.* 2.22: *solitum, solitos, solet, consuesse*, and *De or.* 3.172: *ut solet*), elevating the Scipio – Laelius – Lucilius triangle into to the storehouse of *exempla* that could be remembered, reactivated, and remoulded. This process consolidated the conception of these agents as key figures with typical traits and trademark behaviours that became deeply rooted in the Roman imagination. I suggest there is a clear line between the configurations of *ludus* found in Plautus, Lucilius, and finally Cicero's first dialogue, in which he tested a new mode of writing. It is manifest that at any stage of reception the conceptual model 'Lucilius the player among elite peers' is altered and refashioned. However, the question is whether one can trace the origin of this idea to Lucilius' fragments themselves. I submit that what Cicero and Horace, to name but two prominent examples, make of this paradigm must have (however nuclear) precedents in the

²³⁰ Though professing to having powerful friends himself, Horace admits that Lucilius was of a higher social status than he himself: *infra Lucili censum ingeniumque* (*Sat.* 2.1.74-5). Still, play activities within Horace's coterie are never enforced by Maecenas and can be rejected, cf. *Sat.* 1.5.48-9: *lusum it Maecenas, dormitum ego Vergiliusque:/namque pila lippis inimicum e ludere crudis*. Horace seems to have had the freedom to reject play while Lucilius persistently had to play his role as a caustic satirist. On Horation *sermo* as a new type of satire, see Gowers 2012: 13 with reference to the Greek tradition of *spoud(ai)ogeloion*. For Horace's complex generic play between constructing a history of satire and simultaneously denying its poetic worth, see Farrell 2003: 395. Horace's switch from *sermo* to *satura* is elucidated in Ferriss-Hill 2022: 31-41.

satires of Lucilius, which caught the imagination of later writers as they built their own intellectual projects on their idiosyncratic readings and of earlier republican authors.²³¹

2.3) Lucilius, the bad companion?

I have already hinted that the image Cicero and Horace construct of Lucilius can profitably be set against the template of Ennius' 'good companion' to arrive at two complementary modes of imagining the relationship between poetry and power in Rome.²³² Moreover, I hold that Lucilius was already developing a new paradigm that later authors then adopted and reformulated. There is, at any rate, sufficient evidence to posit that an unprecedentedly assertive first-person voice spoke through Lucilius' poetry. The name Lucilius occurs in the extant fragments with remarkable frequency. While Lucilius is not the first Latin writer to create a rhetorical representation of himself in his literary works, his strategy of self-fashioning is far more ostentatious than previous techniques. Plautus limits explicit mentions of his authorial self to the prologues of his comedies, and Terence repurposes the prologues to allude to the vagaries of a dramatist's career in Rome.²³³ In the remains of Ennius' multifaceted *oeuvre*, readers get a glimpse of a self-confident poet who is cognisant of the monumentalising capacities of the literary medium.²³⁴

A parallel form of self-memorialisation in a different medium are the inscriptions on tombstones of prominent *nobiles* that focus on the deceased aristocrat's accomplishments in the service of the commonwealth, which are all in keeping with the core ideological ingredients of elite male success in the republic.²³⁵ Lucilius, by contrast, transposes abject modes of self-fashioning found in comedy into his verses to fashion an image of himself as an immature, straight-talking humourist akin to the heroes of Plautus' *palliata*. To begin with, the sheer

²³¹ Commentators of *De or.* place the origin of this anecdote with Lucilius, cf. Leemann/Pinkster/Nelson (= LPN) 1985: 214 *ad loc.*

²³² Hardie 2007 stresses the inspirational quality of the 'good companion' passage for later literary and scholarly imaginations of the relationship between art and power. Breed 2020 contends that Aelius Stilo's reading of Ennius' 'good companion' passage as an autobiographical account of a client-poet's meekness towards his patron is only possible behind the background of 2nd-cent. expectations about poetic self-representation, which Lucilius radically broke with.

²³³ For Terence's prologues, see Gowers 2004.

²³⁴ The phenomenon of Ennius naming himself in his poetry can be observed in *Sat.* 3.6-7: *Enni poeta salve qui mortalibus/versus propinas flammeos medullitus* and in the possibly spurious epigram *aspicite o cives senis Enni imaginis formam./Hic verstrum panxit maxima facta patrum* (*Epigr.* 7-10). Cf. also Haß 2007: 105. On the self-fashioning of early Roman authors more systematically, see Suerbaum 1968.

²³⁵ The aristocratic value system underpinning the epitaphs of the *Scipiones* is discussed in Rosenstein 2006: 365-7. See also Hölkeskamp 2010: ch. 8.

number of self-references in relation to the extant fragments is impressive. Haß calculates that Lucilian self-naming may have appeared ten times more frequently than currently emerges from the remaining fragments, which would amount to roughly 120 times.²³⁶ A few selected fragments shall serve to highlight how the Lucilian construction of an authorial self differs from his precursors.

*iam 'puerei venere' 'e' postremum facito atque 'i',
ut puerei plures fiant. 'i' si facis solum,
'pupilli, pueri, Lucili', hoc unius fiet.*

(fr. 362-4)²³⁷

Now the next point: “purei venere” put at the end (of purei) ‘e’ and ‘i’ that “purei” may express the plural. If you put ‘i’ alone, “pupilli, pueri, Lucili” then you make it express the genitive singular (of pupillus, puer, Lucilius).

*tu Lucilium
credis contenturum, cum me ruperint, summa omnia
fecerim?*

(fr. 728-30)

Do you believe that Lucilius will restrain himself, when they have destroyed me, and I have done all that's possible?

*amicos hodie cum improbo illo audivimus
Lucilio advocasse.*

(fr. 886-7)

We have heard that he has invited some friends including that rascal Lucilius.

While scholarship on Roman satire is often deeply informed by *persona* theory, there are good arguments to resist the drive for a neat distinction between fictional *persona* and real-life writer.²³⁸ For the ancient Greek imagination, Reviel Netz has posited a temporally remarkably stable notion of the author underpinning the Greek canon.²³⁹ He shows that authorial utterances were imagined as voices within a performative and institutional frame in the largely oral, face-to-face cultures of antiquity.²⁴⁰ Fashioning a memorable character and voice enabled writers to

²³⁶ Haß 2007: 106. The fragments containing self-references are 241-2, 362-4, 380, 576-7, 617-8, 728-30, 732-3, 763, 886-7, 1013, 1030 and 1359. Both his *nomen gentile* Lucilius and his *praenomen* Gaius are used in the process of defining himself, cf. Poccetti 2018: 128.

²³⁷ The number of the fragments follows the latest edition of Lucilius by Christes/Garbugino 2015. At times, translations are adaptations from Christes/Garbugino's German renditions.

²³⁸ The theoretical premises are analysed by Edmunds 2001 (ch. 4). For a critique of *persona* theory, see Iddeng 2000.

²³⁹ Netz 2020: 103.

²⁴⁰ Along the same lines, Tilg 2019; also Mayer 2003 for a trenchant critique of anachronistic modern attempts to neatly distinguish real-life writer and fictional narrator-persona. Perspicacious remarks on the need for a functional cultural history of institutions as a necessary complement to literary analysis are made in Rüpke 1998: 210-1.

gain fame by building their brand with a view to contemporary and future readers. In his fragments, Lucilius seems to fully embrace literature's potential to design a Lucilian brand in the third person and gain fame and notoriety.²⁴¹ Fr. 728-30 shows him presumably tied up in tussles with an unnamed collective of enemies who have hit him hard. The rhetorical question suggests a sharp counterattack is to be expected from a character who must have, so we are led to understand, a certain renown for not controlling himself (*contenturum*). Instead of using the unmarked personal pronoun *me*, the speaker is projecting Lucilius as a brand name to drive home his point: someone else might show clemency, but a Lucilius? The exemplarity of Lucilius' voice that would later be appropriated by Cicero and Horace is therefore present in the original Lucilius pieces that survive.

The character Lucilius constructs for himself is imagined in frs. 728-30 and 886-7 as embroiled in direct communication with presumably close acquaintances (*tu...credis; amicos*). Aggression is present on both sides (*Lucilium...contenturum; me ruperint*). This is a group of friends at loggerheads with each other. Self-ironically, the speaker gives himself the label *inprobus* (886), turning his supposed friends' dim view of himself on its head and declaring improbity his unique selling point.²⁴² Like the typically immoral slave figures with authorial competencies in Plautus, Lucilius' voice is distinguished for its 'moral badness' and its opposition to the social norms of decorous conduct and impeccable character.²⁴³ In fr. 362-4, too, an ostensible disquisition on orthography groups the name Lucilius with terms for underage boys (*pupillus, puer*). Juxtaposing three masculine nouns with a genitive in -i, Lucilius complements the inflections of *pupillus* and *puer* with the genitive of his name to make a grammatical point.²⁴⁴ Lucilian play operates pointedly in contradistinction to the world of aristocratic self-fashioning that comes to light in the Scipionic epitaphs among others (targeting *virtus, sapientia, honos*, etc.). Lucilius, by contrast, appears as not fully mature, irresponsible, and morally deficient, his writings as mere trifles with no relevance in Rome's exchange economy into which writers were structurally embedded. Just as Cicero has him spur aristocrats

Johnson 2000: 600-3 similarly speaks out in favour of reconstructing the sociocultural context to understand ancient literary practices.

²⁴¹ In a similar vein, Keane interprets Lucilian invective as a tool for becoming the talk of the town and making both himself and his targets a topic of gossip and conversation (2018: 219). See e.g., fr. 1089: *et sola ex multis nunc nostra poemata ferri*. Horace picks up on the idea in *Sat.* 2.1.46: [...] *insignis tota cantabitur urbe*.

²⁴² Another fragment preserves the same gesture: *omnes formonsi, fortes tibi, ego inprobus: esto* (1030).

²⁴³ The lexeme *inprobus* is frequent in Plautus, e.g., *Cas.* 268 where the stereotypical good slave is juxtaposed with the bad slave: *ut enim frugi seruo detur potius quam seruo improbo*. The comic slave's stock attributes are also invoked in fr. 1348: *inprobus, confidens, nequam, malus <ut> uideatur*. Breed 2020: 256-61 intriguingly tries to interpret Lucilius' self-portray as *improbus* and this disreputable dinner party as the negative foil of Ennius' diffident 'good companion' passage.

²⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Lucilius' name is used to comment on the grammar of the preposition *a/ab* (380), highlighting Lucilius' systematic insertion of his brand name into his satiric potpourri.

like Scipio and Laelius to recede into boyhood (*repuerascere*), Lucilius himself forges an image of the witty subaltern for which Plautus had crafted an (albeit limited) freedom to laugh at Rome. The difference was now of course that Lucilius' equestrian status enabled him to turn comedy's blanket ridicule of Roman society into more personalised barbs.

In another oft-discussed fragment, Lucilius' strong authorial presence and his borrowing of conceptual resources from comedy come to the fore as well. In fr. 617-8, the speaker assuredly pronounces he will never be tempted by the opportunities for lucre that the province Asia provides: *publicanus vero ut Asiae fiam, ut scripturarius/pro Lucilio, id ego nolo et uno hoc non muto omnia* ('But to become a tax-farmer of Asia, a collector of pasture-taxes, instead of Lucilius – that I don't want; in exchange for what I am – for this alone of all things I'm not taking the whole world'). *Publicani* were recruited from the non-senatorial fraction of the *equites* who were precisely the group that could recklessly exploit the outposts of a growing empire, which was certain to provoke tensions with their senatorial peers.²⁴⁵

Editors have been struck by an almost exact replication of the final words in another fragment, which is why it has been deemed to follow straight after the excerpt above (fr. 619-20). Here, the speaker is a remarkably volatile character: *quicum versipellis fio et quicum conmuto omnia* ('with whom I change my skin, with whom I exchange everything'). The salient noun *versipellis* has exclusively Plautine precedents, cf. *Amph.* 123: *vorsipellem se facit*, and *Bacch.* 657-8: *vorsipellem frugi convenit/esse hominem, pectus quoi sapit* ('a man who has cleverness in his heart should be able to change his spots'). Referring to Jupiter in his role as an infamous trickster in the *Amphitruo* and as part of a programmatic speech by the clever slave Chrysalus in the *Bacchides*, both quotes exemplify the debt of Plautine comedy to Lucilius' construction of a satiric persona.²⁴⁶ The store of intellectually dazzling, flexible slaves (*vorsipellem; sapit*) that systematically replace their meek and obedient counterparts in Plautus (the *frugi* slaves) offered a powerful set of motifs that Lucilius appropriated for his own ends.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Davenport 2019: 65. The evidence for Lucilius' landholding (in Campania?) is collected by Gruen 1992: 309. Many critics infer from this that he was sufficiently affluent to need no further income and could therefore devote himself to moralising scolding of the *publicani*. Undoubtedly, Lucilius' vision extends beyond Rome, cf. especially his *iter Siculum* in book 3, whose motives and exact travel route remain contested (cf. Faller 2001). Lucilius is sometimes considered a member of the municipal aristocracy, hailing from the Roman colony of Suessa Aurunca in Campania (cf. Goh 2015, Gruen 1992: 309). Patterson 2006: 189 recalls how huge the landholdings of the elites of non-citizen colonies could be.

²⁴⁶ The programmatics are underscored by Chrysalus' exclamation that he is a masterful creator of *ludi*, cf. *Bacch.* 643: *erum maiorem meum ut ego hodie lusi lepide, ut ludificatust!* Chahoud 2018: 161 discusses the comic foundations of Lucilius' language. Pezzini 2018: 175-82 stresses Lucilius' linguistic debt to Plautus rather than Terence.

²⁴⁷ The desire to read this fragment as a confident declaration of Lucilius' opting for a poetic career instead of moneymaking in the province is great. Haß 2007: 54-7 gives a good overview. The literal change of skin is a vivid image that recurs in Horace's judgement of Lucilius' social function as a moral censor who sees beyond the shiny surface of public figures: *detrahare et pellem* (*Sat.* 2.1.64). Goldberg 2005: 160 notes, beside the comic language

The programmatic play lexemes of Plautus equally reappear in Lucilian satire. Here is the first occurrence of **lud-* lexemes in fr. 107-10:

*verum haec ludus ibi, susque omnia deque fuerunt,
susque et deque fuere, inquam, omnia ludus iocusque:
illud opus durum, ut Setinum accessimus finem,
αἰγίλοι montes, Aetnae omnes, asperi Athones.*

But there all this was play and everything was
free and easy, all this I say was free and easy, play and fun:
but when we reached the boundary of Setia –
that was a hard business – goat-deserted mountains,
all Aetnas and rugged Athones.

At first, it may seem too far-fetched to belabour a metapoetic reading of this fragment. Firstly, *ludus iocusque* is a formulaic phrase found in many other Latin writers²⁴⁸; secondly, the excerpt is conventionally placed in the context of book 3's journey to Sicily expounded in lively colours and in a conversational tone, which has variously been linked to the author's own estates in southern Italy, a kind of travel diary similar to Hellenistic *periplous* writing, or *commentarii* that could serve as notes for a later elaboration into a historiographical or geographical treatise.²⁴⁹ Yet, the literary sophistication of the lines is equally indisputable, cf. the chiasmic repetition of *ludus* and *susque deque*, the epic hyperbole of the massive mountain ranges without geographical veracity (*Aetnae [...] Athones*), and the inclusion of the rare Greek adjective αἰγίλιος, which has been associated with steep cliffs since Homer.²⁵⁰

Scholars have therefore understandably been eager to see a deeper significance in the tags *ludus iocusque* than first meets the eye. Once the term play is employed in classical scholarship, however, it is almost a reflex to start expatiating about an alleged Alexandrian poetics of play.²⁵¹ For instance, Puelma Piwonka relates the good cheer expressed in the excerpt to the

in both fragments, a pun on *Lupus* ('wolf'), the target of Lucilius' satire in book 1, but he does not link it with the *versipellis*-fragment. For the ancient proclivity for puns on names, see Goh 2020: 286-7, touching on the satirist's subversiveness in calling himself *versipellis*.

²⁴⁸ Ter. *Eun.* 299, Liv. 28.42.2; see also Nuti 1998: 57-67 for the interplay between *ludus* and *iocus*.

²⁴⁹ Gowers 2011: 178. Varro also wrote a Menippean satire called *periplous* (Gowers 2011: 195 n. 63); see also Puelma Piwonka 1949: 77.

²⁵⁰ Gowers 2011: 182 on the setting of this scene (Setia) between Rome and Capua. This was not yet Sicily, the supposed end point of the journey from where the Aetna might be directly visible. Mount Athos is in Greece. The plural points to the metaphorical usage of these names here as well. In *Il.* 9.15, it similarly modifies a rock: αἰγίλιος πέτρης. Also in *Il.* 13.63; 16.4. Petersmann 1995: 301 derives the nominative plural *aigilipoi* from the variety of Greek spoken in Southern Italy.

²⁵¹ Puelma Piwonka 1949 has argued most comprehensively for Callimachus and Lucilius as literary soul mates. Chahoud 2018: 140 detects an Alexandrian interest in the constituent parts of words in Lucilius, which is part of his *poeta doctus* ideal. Affiliating Callimachus with a poetics of play is commonplace, cf. Weber 1993: 187-98; Cozzoli 2011, and the critique by Asper 1997: 209-10; 224-34. Locating a bookish sort of playfulness in the

required ambiance found in the choice circles of the Roman upper class – a space of amusing and erudite conversations where playfulness was intimately related to the exhibition and exchange of cultivated, witty banter.²⁵² Puelma Piwonka's reference points are philosophically charged idealisations of symposiastic conversations found in Plato or Xenophon. He assumes that out of a shared spirit of affability and community there arises the production of poetry as penned by Lucilius – learned, elitist, and amusing. It is also true that play vocabulary had since Plautus been tied to poetic creation and the distinctive qualities of Rome's new poet-intellectuals. Yet, just as there was an evident political design behind the erection of the Mouseion of Alexandria by the Ptolemies as a centre of panhellenic knowledge, so the production of learned poetry in mid-2nd-cent. Rome is very imprecisely described as fun and games between cheerful friends of high society.²⁵³ Lucilian satire undoubtedly reflects the world of Roman *amicitia*, but the possession of knowledge and practical abilities derived from intensive training in Greek *paideia* is as much a marker of inclusion into upper-class circles as it excludes the majority of the population who could not display bilingual and bicultural learning with aplomb.

Michael Sommer has compared the Mouseion with its access regulated on the basis of friendship (*philia*) with the monarch to the 'Scipionic circle' that attracted both Greek and Latin intellectuals.²⁵⁴ The theme of friendship in book 3 is salient. Some commentators even go so far as to claim that the entire illustration of a journey in verse was directly addressed to a friend who could not take part in the travel.²⁵⁵ While the rest of the journey is studded with vivid details of a visit to an inn (fr. 130-8) and physical humour (fr. 119; fr. 136), the quoted verses are perceived through the filter of Greek epic and contain learned allusions which one expects Lucilius' readers to have savoured.²⁵⁶ Roman realities are blended with Greek ideas and create a *mélange* where even such seemingly formulaic phrases as *ludus iocusque* acquire figurative meaning. Lucilius describes his tour as *lutosum* (fr. 103), a notion that recurs prominently in Horace's characterisation of Lucilius and becomes an analogy of the satiric predecessor's style when Horace equates Lucilius' 'muddiness' with his intemperate verbosity (*Sat.* 1.4.11: *cum*

scholarly Mouseion-culture of Ptolemaic Egypt and thereby explaining its bookishness is more to the point, see Kerkhecker 1997; Bonanno 2021.

²⁵² Puelma Piwonka 1949: 81. Gärtner 2001: 101 beats the same drum.

²⁵³ For the culture of learning in Alexandria, see Dench 2005: 322; Sommer 2013: 314-5.

²⁵⁴ Writers and thinkers who are attested to have been close to Scipio are Lucilius, Terence, Sempronius Asellio, and Rutilius Rufus on the Latin side, and Polybius and Panaetius on the Greek side. The debunking of the myth of the Scipionic Circle was begun by Strasburger 1966, later followed up by Zetzel 1972; Sommer 2013: 311 criticises that positing an all-out Ciceronian invention goes too far and seeks a middle ground.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Faller 2001: 74 for further literature; Christes/Garbugino 2015: 46-7. The predominance of the second person singular across book three is indicative of an epistolary exchange.

²⁵⁶ See Ávila 2016 for the Odyssean lens of Lucilius' journey to Sicily.

flueret lutulentus; 1.10.50: *dixi fluere hunc lutulentum*).²⁵⁷ This is a sign that Horace, who took up book 3's trip to Sicily as an inspiration for his own *iter Brundisinum* (*Sat.* 1.5), already identified the metapoetic quality in those verses, with *ludus* being one of its cornerstones.²⁵⁸ In this vein, *susque deque* appears in a different light, too.²⁵⁹ Certainly, *opus durum* has poetic overtones as well, which makes the four lines read like an *in nuce* programme of satire: stylised lightness in favour of epic toil, the base play and jokes of the Latin comic tradition versus the epic heights of Homer.²⁶⁰

The passage also invites comparison with Ennius' *Annales* where the 'good companion' expressed his gratitude to partake in his patron's dinner conversations and laidback joking removed from the battlefield: *mensam sermonesque* (fr. 269); *res [...] magnas parvasque iocumque* (fr. 273). The link to Lucilius' much-discussed *ludi ac sermones* (fr. 1055) is striking. It is fruitful to read Lucilian satire as the anti-type to Ennius' historical epic regarding the choice of metre, subject matter, and political subtext.²⁶¹ Lucilius enjoys invoking epic models to deflate them in the next instant. The wavering between high and low (*susque deque*) is then a fitting emblem for his generic experiment.

Undermining the ideal-type image of Roman *nobiles* ceaselessly amassing glory and honour, Lucilius relays the day-to-day, mundane bits and bobs that had hitherto not received a place in Rome's memorial culture.²⁶² Petty personal squabbles, love stories, dining faux pas, travel anecdotes – all these were minutiae unworthy of representation and recording in literature that could also serve a patron's political interest. Lucilius marks a juncture. Despite his borrowings from the conceptual repertory of comedy, his verses pose as amateurish, leisurely entertainment on the surface while being implicated in the self-advancement of members of the aristocracy who stood to gain from nurturing the most cutting-edge and innovative Greco-

²⁵⁷ Gowers 2011: 182-3. For the muddy river as a poetological metaphor in Callimachus, see Asper 1997: 109-34.

²⁵⁸ In *Sat.* 1.27, he seems to wave good-bye to Lucilian *ludus*, seeking out more serious grounds: *sed tamen amoto quaeramus seria ludo*. Cf. Dufallo 2000: 583-5, who only detects an inversion of Verg. *Ecl.* 7.17 in this use of *ludus*.

²⁵⁹ Contrast Gowers' attempt (2011: 182-3) to uncover a practical philosophical quality in *susque deque* ('the ups and downs of life') with Faller, who limits himself to a concrete reading: the up and down movement for him marks the relatively low hills of Aricia (2001: 77).

²⁶⁰ See Peirano 2014: 264 on the widespread metaphor of the *opus* in poetic sphragides; also, of course, Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.63: *in hunc operis componere carmina morem*.

²⁶¹ Cf. the *concilium deorum*/senate parody in book 1 and the settling for the hexameter after experimenting with other meters. Coffey 1989: 40 argues that books 26-30 of the satires were written first, with books 26 and 27 exclusively in septenarii, 28 and 29 in trimeters and senarii. Only book 30 switches entirely from dramatic to the epic metre, which henceforth becomes normative for verse satire. See also Gratwick 1982c: 170-1.

²⁶² Morgan 2020 traces the motif of the divine epic council from Ennius via Lucilius to Virgil's *Aeneid*, identifying a split between the reverent epic and the deflated satiric strand of this tradition.

Roman poets on the market. What looks like the inconsequential poetic dilettantism of a wealthy knight is a cultivated image that neatly chimes with Scipio's self-presentation.²⁶³

The prevailing view about Scipio Aemilianus' relationship with Lucilius is in need of an update.²⁶⁴ From the get-go, Scipio was a polarising figure, openly embracing Hellenism and venturing into uncharted territory culturally and politically. Due to his adoption, he had two ancestral lines to trump in his *res gestae*: one, the victor over Carthage, Scipio Africanus, and two, the conqueror of Macedon, Aemilius Paullus. The dominance of the Cornelii family between 218-108 BCE is impressive. Of 222 consulships, they held a tenth. Scipio Aemilianus' rise to power is already accompanied by breaches to the age requirements of the *cursus honorum* and a strategic use of the *populus* for individual defiance of the senatorial majority.²⁶⁵ Now, Sander Goldberg is right to point out that Lucilius' high social status exonerated him from the exigencies of patronage so he could merely distribute his verses among his *amici* without any need for demonstrations of deference.²⁶⁶ But what does *amici* mean?

Raymond Starr has sketched the broad outlines of literary production and reception before the transfer of libraries from conquered places to Rome. He emphasises the exclusively elite nature of the production, copying, and dissemination of texts among 'widening concentric circles' of *amici*. Authors who were part of the *clientela* of a patron would accompany the great man, read out their texts at gatherings with his *familia*, friends and associates, and thus benefit from the exposure to potentially interested, sufficiently educated and leisured readers/listeners who would have a slave make a copy of the author's text.²⁶⁷ There are enough testimonies which allude to Lucilius' connections with leading men of his age, and a necessary condition for the promulgation and eventual success of his satires was being read by those at the upper level of Rome's social hierarchy (i.e., *nobiles* and *equites*).²⁶⁸ In a society with relatively low literacy rates and a universal disinterest on the part of the highest social strata to give general

²⁶³ Roman 2014: 37 paints the picture of a dandy-like dilettante ostentatiously opposing the subtleties of aristocratic erudition.

²⁶⁴ For a roundup of Scipio's career, see Zahrnt 2000. The classic monograph on Scipio is Astin 1967.

²⁶⁵ Hölkeskamp recounts the antics of Scipio Asiagenus, the younger brother of Scipio the Elder. Asiagenus had a statue built of himself, in which he appeared not in a toga but in Greek-style dress and sandals (2017: 442). Hölkeskamp describes the family as so paramount that the Capitol was becoming an atrium of the Scipios in the 2nd cent. BCE (2017: 444).

²⁶⁶ Goldberg 2005: 170. Breed 2020: 257 points to Horace's verdict that Lucilius converted his books into good friends he shared private secrets with (Sat. 2.1.28-9: *ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim/credebat libris*) so that his whole life lay open to his readers (32-4: *omnis [...] pateat [...] vita*).

²⁶⁷ Starr 1987: *passim*. The first known 'public' library was established by Asinius Pollio only in the 30s BCE (213). In Lucilius' lifetime, Aemilius Paullus imported Perseus' library to Rome after his victory at Pydna in 168 BCE (cf. Plut. *Aem.* 28; Pol. 31.23). It is evident how essential it must have been for writers to be acquainted with a powerful aristocrat to get access to books and be able to cultivate a network of readers. For the situation of writers in Scipio's orbit, see Coffey 1989: 37.

²⁶⁸ Hölkeskamp 2011: 27 lists the key concepts for success as a statesman in Rome's face-to-face society: visibility, publicity, and performativity.

literacy a lasting boost, this meant taking part in the world of shifting alliances and political battles of the ruling elite.²⁶⁹

As fraught with uncertainties as historical reconstructions of an author's biographical details may be, there is a broad consensus among critics that Lucilius belonged to the wealthy class of Roman knights.²⁷⁰ The links between the rise of literary production from the early 2nd cent. BCE onwards and the increasing influence of the *ordo equester* have been cogently laid out by Asper.²⁷¹ The knights can, broadly speaking, be classified as the cultural 'modernisers' in their greater propensity to carve out new spheres in which they could gain distinction.²⁷² One such sphere was Greek *paideia*, which different actors appropriated in unique ways.²⁷³ The hypothesis of the well-off *equites* as the chief drivers of Hellenisation is corroborated by the number of knights among Rome's early textual scholars, e.g., Aelius Stilo or Valerius Cato.²⁷⁴ In dining culture, too, the knights were particularly innovative in their co-option of banquets for the purpose of self-promotion.²⁷⁵

In general, historians are unanimous in outlining the 2nd cent. BCE as a time of rapid social changes that affected domestic and foreign policies, demography, labour, the calendar, distribution of land, voting, coinage, and army recruitment.²⁷⁶ Considering the evolution of the Roman upper class, tensions both between *equites* and *nobiles* and between senatorial and non-

²⁶⁹ See Hedrick 2011: 171 on literacy. For the sociology of Roman book production and dissemination, see White 1993; Johnson 2000. For the culturally specific expectations related to *amicitia*, see Deniaux 2006 and Verboven 2011. The production of literature was thus implicated in the ideological nexus of obligations and gift-giving that pertained to *amicitia*-networks.

²⁷⁰ Nicolet 1996-74: 926-9 is fundamental; Gruen 1992: 274-80 illuminates the imprecisions of surviving biographical dates; Goldberg 2005: 166 emphasises Lucilius' pioneering role as an upper-class individual who took up writing poetry as a professional career, in contrast to occasional poetic dabblers such as Strabo and Lutatius Catulus. That he apparently served in the army under Scipio in Numantia is sometimes elided in scholarly discussions (cf Vell. Pat. 2.9.4: *sub P. Africano Numantino bello eques militaverat*). Gruen 1992: 276 n. 18 calls into question, however, whether *militare* really entailed active fighting – perhaps Lucilius was merely a member of Scipio's entourage.

²⁷¹ Asper 2016; a list of equestrian writers is offered by White 1993: 8-10. Asper's paper builds on Flaig 1999b, who provides a more comprehensive historical reconstruction of a diversifying Roman elite, with the traditional nobility vying with the increasingly powerful knights in differentiating sites of competition. Literature in the 'second-rate' genres (lyric poetry, satire, comedy,...), he argues, would long remain a practice that a *nobilis* may have spent his leisure time with but would strictly avoid to adopt professionally (97-8).

²⁷² Dench 2005: 316-321 illuminates Cato's stance as a successful self-made man, who sought to demote his lack of high birth and his origins from a village outside Rome by promoting his education. His background clearly provided a motivation for the import of Greek ideas. Gotter 2009: 112 diagnoses a paradigm shift in Roman historiography with Cato's decision to sideline individuals that shaped the success of the commonwealth in favour of a collective but anonymous *populus Romanus* in his *Origines*.

²⁷³ Sommer 2013: 312 on *paideia* as new battleground for Rome's fiercely vying nobility.

²⁷⁴ Davenport 2019: 56-7. For Lucilius' own scholarly activities as reflected in his work, see Koster 2001 and Muecke 2005: 43.

²⁷⁵ Schnurbusch 2011: 228.

²⁷⁶ Flower 2010: 64-76, who holds that many of these changes represent 'a striking departure from ancestral tradition' (70). See also Morley 2007: 303; on the structural changes that affected Roman society as a result of its massive expansion, see Alföldy 1975: 37-51.

senatorial knights were rising. Commonly, the fluidity of elite status and the complex alliances and family affiliations in the higher echelons of society tend to be underplayed in favour of a rather rigid conception of ‘the Roman aristocracy’.²⁷⁷ It was only in the 120s BCE that two laws (in 129 and 123) cemented the strict distinction between senatorial and equestrian rank, thus effectively stipulating two separate classes. Since the knights were accorded the prerogative of presiding over the newly established courts for *de repetundis* trials, they had the considerable power to hold their peers to account for the extortion of provinces.²⁷⁸ In this historical moment, Lucilius emerges as a figure right at the intersection between an early phase in Latin literary history in which literary activity is in the hands of foreign intellectuals, who rely on poetry as a precarious means to make a living, and a subsequent period, in which literature becomes an alternative sphere to stand apart in Roman society – particularly by those agents that are barred from or eschew the traditional ‘career path’ of the *cursus honorum*.²⁷⁹

Given the conditions facing literary producers and intellectuals in republican Rome laid out above, affiliating oneself with a nobleman like Scipio was a necessity for outsiders with a low social status such as Polybius or Terence. It is not far-fetched to claim that Scipio built a veritable hub of intellectuals that were active in the production of texts in both Greek and Latin so he could be seen to surpass his fellow aristocrats not just in the traditional arenas of the law courts and the battlefield but also in matters of higher learning.²⁸⁰ Lucilius’ relationship with Scipio Aemilianus, the victor over Carthage, is then a novelty. Reconstructions range from Lucilian satire as consistent Scipionic propaganda to wholesale independence of the satirist from any political allegiances. Available historical contextualisations of Lucilius are still in the shadow of Gruen’s seminal 1992 study ‘Lucilius and the contemporary scene’. The corollary is that Lucilius appears as a historical agent largely freed from social ties and obligations, whose

²⁷⁷ Morley 2007: 305–6 stresses that within upper-class circles there would be a dynamic toing and froing between the coveted heights of senatorial rank and non-senatorial occupations. Mouritsen 2017: 81 emphasises that *equites* were often better off financially than senators, as they were legally allowed to be involved in trade and commerce. As the first census class, they would have been instrumental in controlling access to the highest offices and probably shaped public opinion to a considerable degree.

²⁷⁸ Davenport 2019: 49 for the distinction between *nobiles* and senators; p. 66–9 for the creation in the 120s of the *ordo equester*, which was highly heterogeneous in terms of occupation (comprising military officers, orators, poets, businessmen, tax-collectors, etc.), but marked out by their significant financial resources. What was at stake at the *de repetundis* trials was essentially the distribution of the exploits of empire, for which both senatorial and non-senatorial members of the elite competed (although the former with recourse to middlemen).

²⁷⁹ A standard political career was enshrined in law in 180 BCE through the pivotal *lex Villia annalis*, probably to regulate the growingly fierce struggles for office and the overbearing success of individual clans like the Cornelii. Scipio the Elder was only 25 when he achieved military *imperium* without ever holding office (cf. Flower 2010: 65 and Alföldy 1975: 43).

²⁸⁰ Sommer 2013: 312 asserts pointedly that Scipio established a hub of Greek *paideia* in Rome. Scipio reportedly quoted Homer after the destruction of Carthage and the death of his brother-in-law T. Gracchus, cf. Zahrnt 2000: 164–70.

wealth and independence from the system of patronage allowed him to cast a critical look at the society around him without being much implicated in its workings or problems.²⁸¹

A vocal proponent of the theory of a deep affiliation between Lucilian satire and the causes Scipio supported throughout his career is Wendy Raschke.²⁸² Ultimately, her analyses suffer from a rather narrow and individualising idea of aligning opinions and ideological commitments between Lucilius' and Scipio. The satires are, however, unsatisfactorily explained as Scipionic propaganda even if certain sentiments expressed in the fragments correspond with viewpoints Scipio is reported to have held at certain points during his career. What is more, there is a possibility that the supposed immediacy of satire's attacks and the genre's engagement with contemporaneous political failings is only a result of historical inaccuracies or uncertainties.²⁸³ Both his wealth and status thus give reason to accredit Lucilius with considerable social and artistic freedom.²⁸⁴

There is an interesting gloss of Porphyrio on Horace's satires (2.1.16) which (all too neatly?) seems to divide the tasks of Scipio's 'client poets' between Ennius and Lucilius: *ut Lucilius Scipionis fecit qui vitam illius privatam descripsit, Ennius vero bella*.²⁸⁵ Porphyrio hints that Lucilius might have been, even if not for his entire career, at least for some time the nobleman's ally, whose job it was to portray the great man's private life while Ennius monumentalised his military triumphs. It is imaginable that in a public domain chiefly informed by hearsay, rumours and gossip, Scipio proved himself adept at exploiting all means available to him (now also the written word after Rome's turn to literature) to influence his image among aristocratic colleagues and contenders.²⁸⁶ Fr. 955-6, for example, in which Lucilius makes fun of Scipio's pronunciation of *pertaesum*, is not exactly a vicious snub but could instead have served to present Scipio as a cultured, good-humoured patron, ready to take a joke and even admitting independent voices into his throng of followers: *quo facetior videare et scire plus*

²⁸¹ Cf. Gruen 1992: 283-9.

²⁸² Raschke 1987 and 1990. For Lucilius as a member of Scipio's entourage, also Haß 2007: 140-1 and Schäfer 2001: 179.

²⁸³ Morgan 2002 gives an important corrective by reminding that Lucilius was potentially active as a writer from c. 129 to c. 101 BCE while Scipio died already in 129 BCE. The issue is contentious, and the editors of Christes/Garbugino 2015 even disagree on this question (cf. 373-5).

²⁸⁴ Goldberg's reading of Ennius also attributes more independence to the poet (e.g. 2006). On the whole, the flexibility and mutability of *amicitia*-networks and the creative workers who were entangled within them should caution against a rigid notion of patron-client relationships, cf. already Astin 1967: 80. Ennius' shifting connections with Cato, Fulvius Nobilior, and Scipio the Elder testify to this phenomenon. Poets had something to offer, and became an asset to vie for.

²⁸⁵ The scholiast mixes up Scipio Africanus and his grandson Scipio Aemilianus, cf. Freudenburg 2021: 60.

²⁸⁶ Reay 2005: 336 follows the same tack with Cato, who was the first senator to include his speeches into his published writings. Hurllet 2019: 31 places the existence of a public opinion in Rome (expressed via pamphlets etc.) external to the aristocracy. He cautions, however, that the diffusion of texts was very limited due to illiteracy and a lack of technology.

quam ceteri/pertisum hominem, non pertaesum, dicere humanum genus ('to appear wittier and to know more than the others, humankind is supposed to say *pertisum*, not *pertaesum*'). Lucilius here seems to puncture Scipio's pretensions, using the language of aesthetic refinement Plautus had already employed for his aesthetic programme (*facetus*). Scipio's arrogance and his desire to appear more educated than others are equally on display (*scire plus quam ceteri*). Scipio comes across as affected, excessively invested in setting himself apart by means of pronunciation.²⁸⁷ But Lucilius redresses the balance.

A complicated set of fragments often put forward in discussions about Lucilius' envisioned target audience is fr. 671-674a, which is only recoverable through the lens of Cicero and Pliny the Elder along with philological conjectures. Lucilius is supposed to have explicitly envisaged his ideal readership: *nec doctissimis <nec scribo indoctis nimis> [...]*. Pliny (*nat. praef.* 7) cites this line as a quotation found in Cicero and recognises Lucilius as the *primus inventor* of *stili nasum*, a phrase that has occasioned heated scholarly debate.²⁸⁸ Seen in context, Pliny's intention seems transparent enough: in his prefatory letter to Titus, he seeks to justify the blandness of his scholarly project (*praef.* 13: *sterilis materia*), which he presents as far below the genius of the later emperor who, however, is to be Pliny's most eminent addressee and, according to the conventions of *amicitia*, the most outstanding proof-reader to give him critical feedback (cf. *praef.* 5: *quantus in poetica es! o magna fecunditas animi*; *praef.* 8-9: Titus is to be the *iudex* of his work). Hence, he invokes revered models of the past such as Cicero (a person *extra omnem ingenii aleam positus*), who had already appropriated Lucilian style in his literary dialogues. Cicero and Lucilius serve Pliny's need – as authoritative exemplars from the past that have taken pains to anticipate the criticism of their textual products and vindicate them (cf. *praef.* 12: *quod levioris operae hos tibi dedicavi libellos: nam nec ingenii sunt capaces, quod alioqui in nobis perquam mediocre erat* - 'dedicating to you the present volumes – a work of a lighter nature, as it does not admit of talent, of which in any case I possessed only quite a moderate amount').

The puzzling *stili nasum* can therefore be rendered plainly as 'stylistic criticism', possibly of a derisory nature (*nasus*), of which Lucilius was, according to Pliny, the first exponent in Rome. The Cicero passage alluded to is clearly humorous: He introduces Lucilius as an educated, but above all supremely witty, man (*homo doctus et perurbanus*), for whom the shtick about his desired audience (consisting of neither too learned nor too unlearned readers)

²⁸⁷ Petersmann 1995: 297, 303, and 310 identifies two strands of Scipionic 'language policy' – Latin purism and linguistic innovation according to analogy, such as *pertisum* instead of *pertaesum*.

²⁸⁸ Morgan 1992: 280 lists the innumerable attempts at translating these two words and offers a new emendation.

was a joke, maybe even a running gag (cf. the habituality encoded in the imperfect *dicere solebat*). In fr. 674a, Cicero again depicts Lucilius as a jokester (*facete is quidem*), who was witty (*urbanitas summa*) but not erudite (*doctrina mediocris*): not equipped with the subtleties of Greek philosophy like Cicero himself, but a model of Rome's homegrown fine humour nonetheless, Plautine precedents included. Hence, it is questionable to take the fragments at face value and treat them as poetological announcements of an autonomist poet who rejects intricate specialisation and stylistic fine-tuning in favour of amused and decidedly amateurish dabbling.²⁸⁹ By the same token, Lucilius' declared preference for non-Roman readers from Magna Graecia out of fear of overeducated and finicky critics from the city such as Scipio (674a: *quorum ille iudicium reformidans Tarentinis ait se et Consentinis et Siculis scribere*) is a rather tongue-in-cheek anticipation of the presumably higher learning of Scipio and his coterie in the most Hellenising circles of the capital.²⁹⁰

A similar fragment in which Scipio is explicitly named and figures as a sharp humourist is fr. 1217: *Cornelius Publius noster/Scipiadas dicto tempus quae intorquet in ipsum oti et deliciis, luci effictae atque cinaedo [...], sequimur multi atque frequentes* ('I dictate what Publius Cornelius of the Scipio family even during leisure hurled towards his darling, his shining star and catamite [...], we followed in numbers and crowds'). Here, the speaker (Lucilius?) belongs to the great man's retinue, dictating and thus further circulating the memorable witticisms Scipio had uttered among his inner circle. The detail that Scipio seems to have had his private *cinaedus* jars with Scipio's own verbal assaults at P. Sulpicius Gallus for his effete, overly Hellenised manners.

In one of the remainders we possess of Scipio's speeches, he likens his opponent to a *cinaedus*: *idem fecerit quod cinaedi facere solent* (Gell. NA 6.12.4-5). On the one hand, Scipio himself at times forcefully obviated Hellenistic practices in his public speeches, for instance, in his harangue against the most dismal outgrowths of the new-fangled Hellenic education of young Roman *nobiles*, quoted by Macrobius.²⁹¹ On the other hand, Lucilius promotes the

²⁸⁹ This is the reading endorsed by Roman 2014: 36-8.

²⁹⁰ See also fr. 393-4, where the speaker equates the Latin *iudicium* (such as the judgement of wits like Scipio that he dreads) with the Greek *crisis*. On the legal and political uses of the Greek concept and its success in later European history, see Koselleck/Richter 2006. Gruen 1992: 313 notes that the provincial readership Lucilius was apparently seeking might not even understand Latin. There would be an added irony if Lucilius himself hailed from a province (as is likely), trying to address non-Romans in perfectly sophisticated versified Latin. Poccetti 2018: 101-5 gives an overview of this group of fragments, believing that Lucilius intended to be read by the often multilingual speakers in southern Italy.

²⁹¹ Macr. Sat. 3.14.7: *Docentur praestigias inhonestas, cum cinaedulis et sambuca psalterioque eunt in ludum histrionum, discunt cantare, quae maiores nostri ingenuis probro ducier voluerunt: eunt, inquam, in ludum saltatorium inter cinaedos virgines puerique ingenui!* ('They're taught disreputable tricks, they go to acting school with little pansies toting this and that kind of harp, they learn to sing – things our ancestors wished to be considered

positive flipside of Hellenism that distinguishes his perfectly Greco-Roman benefactor. He casts him as rhetorically so shrewd and fully equipped with the refinements of Greek *paideia* that a relationship with an equestrian poet such as Lucilius was bound to take a rather different course than the simplified ‘resources for propaganda’ model implies.

It is striking that – from Lucilius onwards – Scipio has managed to accrue a tradition that remembers him almost as a proto-satirist in his display of quick wit and rhetorical brilliance.²⁹² Admittedly, the useful list Astin has compiled of Scipio’s sayings must be biased towards quotable and striking *dicta*.²⁹³ It does appear, however, that Lucilius’ chronicling of his noble friend’s utterances stands in a direct line with Cicero’s practice in his philosophical dialogues. It is again in *De or.* (2.272) that Cicero recounts an utterance by Scipio which he discusses as an example of Socratic irony (giving it the technical Latin name *dissimulatio*). It looks as if Lucilius’ satires proved a fitting medium to promulgate an image of Scipio and his *amici* as not only politically hegemonic but also intellectually and culturally far superior to his peers – regardless of whether they were published during Scipio’s lifetime or posthumously. It is then not so much the compatibility in personality and viewpoints that Raschke postulates for Scipio and Lucilius, but a convergence in the promotion of a certain public image that may have strengthened a strategic partnership between the two.

One passage in Lucilius coupled with examples preserved by Cicero shows Scipio as a master of sharp innuendo (what Cicero dubs *arguta* [...] *significatio*): *Scipiadae magno improbus obiciebat Asellus/lustrum illo censore malum infelixque fuisse* (fr. 410-1: ‘impudent Asellus reproached the great son of the Scipio family that his censorship had been bad and unlucky’).²⁹⁴ Conspicuously, Cicero inserted this quote again in his first dialogue *De oratore* to furnish an example for a witty and critical remark that sees an eminent political figure triumph in a battle of wits, in this case against the tribune Tiberius Claudius Asellus. Yet another instance from the same work relates Scipio’s quips about Asellus’ *cognomen*: *proverbia, ut illud Scipionis, cum Asellus omnis se provincias stipendia merentem peragrasse gloriaretur: ‘agas asellum’* (*De or.* 2.258: ‘Proverbial expressions [...], such as the one Scipio used when

disgraceful for freeborn children. They go to dancing school, I say, freeborn maidens and boys, in a crowd of pansies!’).

²⁹² Scipio was apparently famed for his biting wit, cf. Astin 1967: 27-8 and Hölkeskamp 2018: 455

²⁹³ Astin 1967: 248-69.

²⁹⁴ The Cicero excerpt comes from *De or.* 2.268: *Arguta etiam significatio est, cum parva re et saepe verbo res obscura et latens inlustratur.*

Asellus (“Mr. Ass”) was boasting that, during his military service, he had travelled through all the provinces: ‘You’ll have to drive your ass’).²⁹⁵

While this anecdote may arguably have taken its origins in the law courts where Asellus sought to defend himself, the samples of Scipionic *dicta* above blur the line between public, open-air duels of rhetoric and more exclusive spaces only ‘insiders’ could get access to (cf. the fragment set amid Scipio’s entourage).²⁹⁶ It could be said, then, that the public image of Scipio, who might easily have come across as haughty, distant, and exclusivist (in short, too Hellenised for anyone’s good) benefited from a literary genre such as satire that playfully maligned Rome’s elite indiscriminately and made Scipio appear moderate and equipped with humour.²⁹⁷ The charge of bad morals that was swiftly associated with Hellenism could thus be diverted from Scipio and taken up by his protégé, the *inprobus* Lucilius, the first ‘bad companion’, who anchored the inverted value system of comedy into an aristocratic environment.²⁹⁸

2.4) Satiric play and the new *memoria*

Lucilius’ strategic adoption of the image of a boyish, disreputable rogue has repercussions for his refashioning of the Latin discourse of play. In the prologue to the *Origines* transmitted by Cicero, Cato reportedly asserts: *clarorum hominum atque magnorum non minus otii quam negotii rationem exstare oportere* (Cic. *Planc.* 66: ‘great and eminent men should give an account of their hours of leisure as of their hours of business’). It is common to point to Cato’s debt to Xenophon’s *Symposium* and his investment in a typically Roman and self-serving conception of leisure.²⁹⁹ Xenophon opens his *Symposium* thus: Ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ἔργα οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα ἀξιωμακτικὰ εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς (‘To my mind it is worthwhile to relate not only the serious acts of men but also what they do in their lighter moments’).

²⁹⁵ The translation is from May/Wisse 2001. During his tenure as a censor, Scipio deprived Asellus of his equestrian rank by forbidding him to own a public horse; see further Davenport 2019: 55 on the significance of the horse for the knights and their pursuit of wealth.

²⁹⁶ Lucilius’ role as a reporter is thus different from the direct involvement in verbal tug-of-war between Naevius and the aristocratic Metelli. A recent rekindling of the debate with new ideas about Naevius’ alleged imprisonment is Fontaine 2020. He revives the debate with the new argument that the possible reference to the imprisonment of a ‘barbarian poet’ in Plautus (*Mil.* 211-12) is not to Naevius but the Hellenistic poet Sotades.

²⁹⁷ On Scipio’s arrogance, see Astin 1967: 27-8; Hölkeskamp 2018: 455.

²⁹⁸ Interestingly, it is not Scipio but of course his enemy Asellus who is given the negative tag in fr. 410-1: *improbus* [...] *obiciebat Asellus*.

²⁹⁹ Sciarrino 2004: 348.

What Cato does (or, indeed, Cicero, who may be using his own words rather than quoting verbatim) is map the Greek distinction between σπουδή and παιδιά onto the Latin *negotium* vs. *otium*. This shift downplays the aspect of play in the Greek, rendering παιδιά as *otium* – a kind of free time that became normatively overdetermined as time to be spent honourably.³⁰⁰ Cato himself sought to justify his writing of a history in Latin as a product of *otium* that, according to his view, should be regarded as time spent profitably and worthily.³⁰¹ As a consequence, he replaced παιδιά with *otium*, sidelining play and upgrading leisure. In Rome’s political culture, play was a no-go, but leisure used with a view to political purpose ought to be acceptable. What Lucilius offered to Scipio may have been exactly this: an account of the *otium* of aristocratic circles and their increasingly exclusive leisure pursuits exactly at the point where things go wrong and actually descend into dishonourable play. His satires are chock-full with juvenile in-fighting, botched dinner parties and juicy gossip, in short, noblemen behaving like low-life characters from comedy. The resulting image is one of a seemingly reputable ruling class gone bonkers. And while Lucilius revels in the dirt that is also elite Rome, Scipio’s image of the harsh, morally upright *nobilis* of old that he cultivated in his later career can shine all the more brightly.³⁰²

While Xenophon had decided to make the documentation of eminent men’s leisurely pursuits his task, Cato needed a positive rejigging of *otium* to first of all raise the respectability of writing literature in Rome’s *res-gestae*-obsessed society and impart a political purpose to historiography.³⁰³ Lucilius returns to παιδιά, depicting the elite’s leisure activities in all their glaring folly and in their imitation of elitist cultural practices resembling the Hellenistic nobility rather than Roman republicans with a permanent eye for the good of the commonwealth.³⁰⁴ What we learn from Scipio’s upbringing, intellectual formation, and later political career can almost be read as a compensation strategy whereby an early phase of ‘hyper-Hellenism’ is counteracted by a later phase of ‘hyper-Romanism’. Did Scipio and Lucilius deliberately use their image as philhellenes to get the better of their peers, complementing it with an aggressive, masculine, ‘hyper-Roman’ public *persona*?

³⁰⁰ In addition, the formulation *rationem exstare* is not synonymous with ἀξιωματιόνευστα since the former stresses documentation but also businesslike accountancy and – vital in Rome’s political culture – accountability for one’s time spent at leisure. Sciarrino 2004: 348-50 refers to the role Cato imparts on the *pater familias* in *De agri cultura* and his need for producing an account (*rationem inire*) of farming duties.

³⁰¹ Churchill 1995: 95-6.

³⁰² On Scipio’s censorship, Coffey 1989: 50, and more extensively Astin 1967: 115-124.

³⁰³ The first sentence in the prologue of this *Origines* reads *si ques homines sunt quos delectat populi Romani gesta describere*; for discussion of the passage, Sciarrino 2004: 334-40, Biggs 2020: 105-6.

³⁰⁴ Flaig 1999a: 214. The Hellenistic nobility defined itself through an exclusive culture of self-serving practices one engaged in away from the political arena (gymnastics, symposia, class-specific education with poetry, music, and dance).

Cicero records Scipio as an admirer of Xenophon, especially his *Cyropaedia*.³⁰⁵ In addition, the account that Polybius gives of his relationship with young Scipio Aemilianus gives us a striking portrait of a young man from a most glorious family, who stood out for his disconcertingly un-Roman tendencies: he rejected traditional Roman practices of education, did not plead in the law courts, and instead preferred hunting in the grounds of the Macedonian king Perseus after his biological father Aemilius Paullus' victory at Pydna. Polybius dramatises how distressing his reputation as an idle recluse was for the scion of one of the most illustrious and successful *gentes* in Rome: δοκῶ γὰρ εἶναι πᾶσιν ἡσύχιός τις καὶ νωθρός, ὥς ἀκούω, καὶ πολὺ κεχωρισμένος τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς αἰρέσεως καὶ πράξεως, ὅτι κρίσεις οὐχ αἰροῦμαι λέγειν (Polyb. 23.11-12: 'For, as I am told, I am believed by everybody to be a quiet and indolent man, with none of the energetic character of a Roman, because I don't choose to speak in the law courts').³⁰⁶ To make amends for his bad standing among his countrymen, young Scipio eventually aspires to transform himself into a paragon of Roman virtues, albeit by unconventional means:

Πρώτη δὲ τις ἐνέπεσεν ὁρμὴ καὶ ζῆλος τῶν καλῶν τὸ τὴν ἐπὶ σωφροσύνῃ δόξαν ἀναλαβεῖν καὶ παραδραμεῖν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει τοὺς κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν ὑπάρχοντας. ὢν δὲ μέγας οὗτος καὶ δυσέφικτος ὁ στέφανος εὐθήρατος ἦν κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν καιρὸν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον ὁρμὴν τῶν πλείστων. οἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰς ἐρωμένους τῶν νέων, οἱ δ' εἰς ἐταίρας ἐξεκέχυντο, πολλοὶ δ' εἰς ἀκροάματα καὶ πότους καὶ τὴν ἐν τούτοις πολυτέλειαν, ταχέως ἡρπακότες ἐν τῷ Περσικῷ πολέμῳ τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἰς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος εὐχέρειαν [...]. πλὴν ὁ γε Σκιπίων ὁρμήσας ἐπὶ τὴν ἐναντίαν ἀγωγὴν τοῦ βίου καὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ἀντιταξάμενος καὶ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ὁμολογούμενον καὶ σύμφωνον ἑαυτὸν κατασκευάσας κατὰ τὸν βίον ἐν ἴσως πέντε τοῖς πρώτοις ἔτεσι πάνδημον ἐποιήσατο τὴν ἐπ' εὐταξία καὶ σωφροσύνῃ δόξαν.

Polyb. 31.25.2-5; 8

The first direction taken by Scipio's ambition to lead a virtuous life was to attain a reputation for temperance and excel in this respect all the other young men of the same age. This is a high prize indeed and difficult to gain, but it was at this time easy to pursue at Rome owing to the vicious tendencies of most of the youths. For some of them had abandoned themselves to amours with boys and others to the society of courtesans, and many to musical entertainments and banquets, and the extravagance they involve, having in the course of the war with Perseus been speedily infected by Greek laxity in these respects [...]. Scipio, however, setting himself to pursue the opposite course of conduct, combating all his appetites and molding his life to be in every way coherent and uniform, in about the first five years established his universal reputation for strictness and temperance.

³⁰⁵ All the evidence for this is Ciceronian, which warrants caution, cf. Coffey 1989: 58 n. 139. More on this influential pedagogical treatise in Too 1998.

³⁰⁶ The translation is slightly adapted from the Loeb edition by Paton et al. 2012.

Λοιποῦ δ' ὄντος τοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἀνδρείαν <μέρους> καὶ κυριωτάτου σχεδὸν ἐν πάσῃ μὲν πολιτείᾳ μάλιστα δ' ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ, μεγίστην ἔδει καὶ τὴν ἄσκησιν περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ποιήσασθαι. καλὸν μὲν οὖν τι πρὸς ταύτην τὴν ἐπιβολὴν αὐτῷ καὶ διὰ τῆς τύχης ἐγένετο συνέργημα. τῶν γὰρ ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ βασιλικῶν μεγίστην ποιουμένων σπουδὴν περὶ τὰς κυνηγεσίας καὶ Μακεδόνων ἀνεικότων τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους τόπους πρὸς τὴν τῶν θηρίων συναγωγὴν [...]. διὸ καὶ παραγενόμενος εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην καὶ προσλαβὼν τὸν τοῦ Πολυβίου πρὸς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἐνθουσιασμόν, ἐφ' ὅσον οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νέων περὶ τὰς κρίσεις καὶ τοὺς χαιρετισμοὺς ἐσπούδαζον, κατὰ τὴν ἀγορὰν ποιούμενοι τὴν διατριβήν, καὶ διὰ τούτων συνιστάνειν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπειρῶντο τοῖς πολλοῖς, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὁ Σκιπίων ἐν ταῖς κυνηγεσίαις ἀναστρεφόμενος καὶ λαμπρὸν αἰεὶ τι ποιῶν καὶ μνήμης ἄξιον καλλίῳ δόξαν ἐξεφέρετο τῶν ἄλλων.³⁰⁷

Polyb. 31.29.1-4; 8-10

It remained for him to gain a reputation for courage, the most essential virtue in practically all states and especially so in Rome; and for this the training required of him was correspondingly severe. Chance, however, assisted him also in this determination. For the members of the royal house of Macedon had always been devoted to hunting, and the Macedonians had reserved the most suitable areas for breeding game [...]. So that when he arrived in Rome and when he found in Polybius one equally devoted to the chase, all the time that other young men gave up to law affairs and greetings, spending the whole day in the forum and thus trying to court the favor of the populace, Scipio was occupied by the chase, and by his brilliant and memorable exploits, acquired a higher reputation than anyone.

On top of that, there are ample grounds to assume that Scipio Aemilianus remained a misfit in the family line of his adoptive father Scipio (the son of Scipio Africanus the Elder) throughout his life.³⁰⁸ Right at this cultural moment which is marked by a decisive shift in Roman educational practices, a novel, almost unclassifiable genre such as satire emerges as the supposedly first full-scale Roman form of literature. Kick-started by Aemilius Paullus' defeat over Macedon in 168 BCE and the gifting of the vanquished king Perseus' library to his two sons, Hellenism was more than ever a resource that easily became a contested asset in Rome's cut-throat political arena.³⁰⁹ From then on, journeys by Roman magistrates to Athens and the new province of Macedonia became more common, and beside the young Scipios it was

³⁰⁷ The episode is analysed incisively by Scholz 2011: 141-50. Young Scipio imitated his biological father Aemilius Paullus, who also did not take advantage of the opportunity to make a name for himself by speaking at the lawcourts (Plut. *Aem.* 2.4). Hence, he needs Polybius, the paternal advisor, who shares his love for the hunt and intriguingly teaches him Roman ways through Greek means. This leads to myriad updates of Roman customs so that, e.g., hunting can become a source of *virtus*. On the influence of Polybius' Greek perspective on his depiction of his relationship with Scipio and the symbolism of the episode, see Green 1996: 245-53. He notes that the first positive evidence for a Roman aristocrat taking to hunting as a pastime is of Aemilius Paullus.

³⁰⁸ Etcheto 2012: 143-6 sketches a picture of an isolated Aemilianus, particularly in comparison with the line of the Scipiones Nasicae. Tellingly, he states, Polybius marginalises Aemilianus' adoptive father in favour of Aemilius Paullus, who offered a model for an effective fusion of philhellenic inclinations with a stalwart preservation of Roman morality (cf. Plut. *Aem.* 6.8-10).

³⁰⁹ Aemilius Paullus' (failed) strategies of family politics and his Greek campaigns are perceptively analysed by Flaig 2000.

especially the directly related Gracchi brothers, who were educated from their childhood in both Greek and Roman ways.³¹⁰ Quite schematically, two opposing options for self-fashioning arise out of this innovation: Cato's avowed 'hyper-Romanism', and Scipio's flaunted 'hyper-Hellenism'.³¹¹ Whereas the former stealthily imports all things Greek while cultivating an image as an uber-moralist, the latter openly espouses contacts with Greek intellectuals while later styling himself the champion of *virtus* and the harshest of censors.³¹² While the traditional view of a circle of Hellenophile sophisticates around Scipio Aemilianus and the fervent contemporaneous hatred of all things Greek embodied by Cato the Elder have long been corrected and more finely reinterpreted, neither attitude towards Hellenism has been adequately utilised for an interpretation of Lucilius' satiric discourse.

Comparing accounts of Scipio's early years with his later career, one may easily get the impression that his eventual self-branding as the epitome of *virtus* is part of a calculated manoeuvre to overwrite potentially disadvantageous narratives of his un-Roman upbringing by a wholesale image makeover. Polybius was evidently at pains to assure that in his report Scipio did achieve *virtus* – although by excelling at hunting. A strategy of political self-promotion in Scipio's handling of looted art has been recognised to boot.³¹³ After his victory at Numantia, he had a temple of *virtus* built in Rome.³¹⁴ With regard to the potential of literature as a medium of memorialisation, Scipio must have been aware of the approach of his contemporary aristocratic competitor M. Fulvius Nobilior, who found in Ennius a welcome aid in the literary representation of Roman history with a slant towards his patron.³¹⁵ It is conspicuous that the group of individuals with literary leanings who were allegedly present in Scipio's entourage at the Numantine war introduced other significant innovations to the generic traditions in which they were working by adapting Greek heritage to a Roman context: Polybius' novel conception of *pragmatikē historia* that neatly blended (Greek) inquiry of the causes and underlying structures of historical evolution into the (Roman) penchant for practical experience and moral

³¹⁰ Cf. Scholz 2011: 130-3 and Bloomer 2011. Bloomer maintains that the education of sons in a now bicultural and bilingual fashion became a site for competitive display among families (giving the examples of Aemilius Paullus and the Younger Scipio, Cato and his son, and Cornelia and the Gracchi).

³¹¹ Pointedly, Plutarch reports that Cato took the education of his son Licinianus into his own hands and instructed him about the glorious deeds of his Roman forefathers with his *Origines* even though he had a well-trained Greek slave in his household (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.3-5). Cf. Jehne 1999 for an analysis of the episode. The tensions between the obedience expected from a Roman in daily practice and the abstracted rules prevalent in Greek thought is also highlighted by Scholz 2006.

³¹² Two paradigms, Ruebel 1977. For Cato's double-edged stance towards Greece, see Sciarrino 2004, Reay 2005 and Gotter 2009. On Cato's hellenism now Bur/Humm 2021.

³¹³ Kendall 2009: 170-2.

³¹⁴ Astin 1967: 79 and Freudenburg 2021: 74-5 for Scipio's campaign to become a champion of *virtus*. See also his calculated currying of favour with the masses (Astin 1967: 26-34). On Scipio's populism, see also Mouritsen 2017: 153.

³¹⁵ The two outstanding generals' rivalry is alluded to by Astin 1967: 453.

lessons; Sempronius Asellio's translation of Polybian-style historiography into Latin; and Lucilius' mix of Greek iambic-comic verse and Roman moralising censoriousness.³¹⁶

Manifold echoes and allusions to earlier literature are of course detectable in Lucilius' fragments and have variously been studied.³¹⁷ Lucilius is in many ways an anti-type of the subaltern 'client poet' Ennius, who was artistically highly prolific and versatile, moving from patron to patron (Cato, Scipio the Elder, M. Fulvius Nobilior) to secure himself a livelihood in Rome. Lucilius, on the other hand, had also witnessed his 'patron's' exploits on the battlefield first-hand but then opted to create a mixed bag of a genre that playfully subverted the function of aristocratic memory-making.³¹⁸ Both Scipio Aemilianus' and Lucilius' self-fashioning as successful politicians and writers are indicative of a new, more expressly self-confident phase of the relationship between power and poetry in Rome. The signal sent to Scipio's noble peers was that even well-off and high-born knights like Lucilius profited from advertising a partnership with this leading man of Rome. It anyway seemed beyond doubt that the Scipio clan was such an invincible and dominant force in Roman politics that some of its members were toying with a public image that dangerously overstepped the bounds of good-old Roman mores. Lucilius' radical break with tradition in eschewing historical epic or historiography chimes well with Scipionic megalomania.

While there are enough fragments in Lucilius that evoke the writer's awareness of literature's function to create memorable representations of aristocratic *res gestae*, it is highly likely that Lucilius' satires enact Latin literature's first *recusatio*.³¹⁹ Relishing the assertiveness that comes with high status, Lucilius positioned his writings as an experimental alternative to politically instrumental literature in Rome, be it epics that give an authoritative account in verse of Rome's august past and its pre-eminent men, or works of history that effect the same in prose.³²⁰ Consequently, the harsh, moralising tone that pervades the satires is the direct 'hyper-Roman' complement to its Greek underbelly, a messy blend of Greek aestheticism, philosophy,

³¹⁶ Coffey 1989: 47 dates the inception of Lucilius' literary activity to after his return from the Numantine campaign. Christes/Garbugino 2015: 10 leave the knotty question open. Walter 2011: 32 on the new phase ushered in for Roman historiography – a partial break from the annalistic principle while others continued in this vein (Piso Frugi, Hemina). For 'pragmatic history', see Thornton 2012. Freudenburg 2018 on Roman satire's relation with the office of the censor.

³¹⁷ Cf. the collected papers in Manuwald 2001; For Lucilius' relationship with Archilochus, see Mankin 1987; Mundt 2018 (ch. 3.1) offers a summary discussion.

³¹⁸ According to Gratwick 1982b: 149-52, Asellio penned a history of the events at Numantia in prose, a task Lucilius apparently declined by writing playful verse instead.

³¹⁹ Raschke 1987: 309-10; Gruen 1992: 282; Coffey 1989: 42 is sceptical of assuming a full-blown *recusatio*.

³²⁰ There are hints that Lucilius was keenly alert to the memorialising powers of literary texts, cf. fr. 974: *haec virtutis tuae <c>artis monumenta locantur*; fr. 732-3: *rem populi salute et fictis versibus Lucilius, quibus potest, impertit, totumque hoc studiose et sedulo*, fr. 973: *et virtute tua*; fr. 975-6: *his te versibus interea contentus teneto*. Christes/Garbugino *ad loc.* consider the last fr. as a hint to an alternative kind of *memoria* through personal friendship. They follow the tradition since Marx in regarding Scipio as the addressee of book 30 (2015: 373-8).

and technical sophistication with an aggressively masculine and judgmental voice akin to the Roman censor.³²¹ Taking a cue from Cato's admonition to keep a tally of the events in *otium* and *negotium*, Lucilius returns *otium* to παιδιά, covering the disrespectable and childish side of Roman upper-class leisure which was othered as Hellenic, provoking associations with the types and themes of comedy.

Two of the most-discussed fragments in the Lucilian corpus shall serve to highlight the consequences of this reading of satire as a discourse, whose function is set in opposition to the genres that give authoritative accounts of exceptional *res gestae* and were thus serviceable in political struggles. This is Lucilius apparently explicating to the unknown Albinus what *virtus* is:

*Virtus, Albine, est pretium persolvere verum
 quis in versamur, quis vivimus rebus, potesse;
 virtus est, homini scire id quod quaeque habeat res,
 virtus, scire, homini rectum, utile quid sit, honestum,
 quae bona, quae mala item, quid inutile, turpe, inhonestum,
 virtus quaerendae finem re scire modumque,
 virtus divitiis pretium persolvere posse,
 virtus id dare quod re ipsa debetur honori,
 hostem esse atque inimicum hominum morumque malorum,
 contra defensorem hominum morumque bonorum,
 hos magni facere, his bene velle, his vivere amicum,
 commoda praeterea patriai prima putare,
 deinde parentum, tertia iam postremaque nostra.*

(fr. 1119-31)

Virtus, my dear Albinus, is being able to pay in full a fair price in our business dealings and in the affairs which life brings us; *virtus* is knowing what each affair has within it for a man; *virtus* is knowing what is right and useful and honourable for a man and what things are good and again what are bad, what is shameful, useless, dishonourable; *virtus* is knowing the limit and the end of seeking a thing, *virtus* is being able to pay in full the price from our store; *virtus* is giving that which in all truth is due to honour, being an enemy and no friend of bad men and manners, and on the other hand being a defender of good men and manners; prizing greatly the latter, wishing them well and being a life-long friend to them; and besides all this, thinking our country's interests to be foremost of all, our parents' next, and then thirdly and lastly our own.

Much has been written about the famous 'virtus-fragment', mostly in connection with Lucilius' philosophy, his relation to Scipio's policies around *virtus*, and a specifically Roman practical

³²¹ Compared to Plautus, Lucilius' Greek has been characterised as more technical and learned, extending into diverse spheres (pleasure, sex, luxuries, grammar, rhetoric, philosophy), cf. Baier 2001; Petersmann 1995: 297-302; Coffey 1989: 61; useful is also Mundt 2018 (3.1) for Lucilius' relationship to Greek language, culture, and literature.

ethics.³²² *Virtus* is indeed one of the prime qualities claimed by the Scipionic clan and is widely attested on the family's epitaphs.³²³ Yet what Lucilius relays here bears little resemblance to the manliness, military bravery, and ethical excellence usually associated with the concept. Instead, economic terminology looms large (1119, 1125: *pretium persolvere*; 1125: *divitiis*; 1126: *debetur*; 1129: *magni facere*). Moreover, the meaning of the protean nouns *res* (1120, 1121, 1124, 1126) and *commoda* (1130) is far from clear here. The translators Christes/Garbugino seem to prefer an 'ethical' reading of the fragment, rendering *quis* [...] *rebus* as 'circumstances', *quaeque* [...] *res* as 'each thing', and *commoda* [...] *patriai* as 'wellbeing of the of the fatherland'.³²⁴ Warmington's translation given above (with slight alterations) fully appreciates the mercantile tone of the Latin, making this fragment sound rather backhanded. The image of this bedrock of the aristocratic value system *par excellence* that the speaker evokes is calculating, transactional, and profit-oriented. Knowing what a thing is worth helps you to get the desired outcome. This fragment, then, reads much more like an unapologetically commercial type of *virtus* that openly embraces economic interests and betrays a tactical shrewdness in forging expedient personal alliances (cf. 1129: *hos magni facere* [...], *his vivere amicum*).³²⁵

If we come back to Horace's image of virtuous Scipio, wise Laelius, and the playfully loose Lucilius, it seems he was a much better reader of his satiric predecessor than often recognised. Just as Lucilius had sketched a vision that cannily manipulates Roman society's logic of *do-ut-des* to come out with the best *amici* for one's own gain, Horace insinuates that the romanticised friendship between statesman, philosopher, and satiric jokester is actually nothing but first-class reputation management – Scipio is *virtus* incarnate, Laelius embodies *sapientia*, and Lucilius develops a paradoxical brand as a hard-hitting moralist (*Sat.* 2.1.70: *virtuti atque eius amicis*) while also occupying the role of the dissolute lover of pleasure and games (2.1.73: *discincti ludere*). Read in this light, Horace slyly launches his own jibe against Lucilius, who looks in the later satirist's conception like a useful crony for Scipio's self-

³²² The secondary literature on the 'virtus fragment' is vast. Mutschler 2000 traditionally maintains that Lucilius endorses aristocratic values, Raschke 1990 focuses on his turn from philosophical to practical rules for life; similarly Roman 2014: 41-2. The philosophical overtones of the fragment continue to be debated, cf. Haß 2007: 79-83; Lévy 2017. A fundamental disagreement is over whether we should read this fragment with a straight face. Gruen 1992: 309-10, e.g., senses irony here. Christes/Garbugino 2015: 432-3 with further literature.

³²³ Cf. Hölkeskamp 2018 *passim*, and especially 455 for Scipio's 'virtus rivalry' with Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus.

³²⁴ Christes/Garbugino 2015: 433. Another disagreement between the two concerns the case of *divitiis* (1125). Is it dative ('to wealth') or ablative ('from wealth')?

³²⁵ Cf. Davenport 2019: 57, who points out that *virtus* was a no less pertinent pillar of the evaluation of equestrian success, also in a military sense.

fashioning as a prototype of *virtus* and like a partisan to his circle of *amici*.³²⁶ Little is then left of true Roman *virtus*. Scipio, Laelius, and Lucilius are reduced to actors who play their part, but even the purportedly freedom-loving satirist Lucilius shrinks down to a pawn of the manoeuvring powers in the highest echelons of Roman society.

The notion of a high society obsessed with its image which Horace deviously critiques but was already fleshed out by Lucilius contains reminiscences of comic drama. A catalogue of definitions of *virtus* that starts off with an economically inflected one is already found in Plaut. *Amph.* 648-53 (*virtus praemium est optimum* [...] – ‘*virtus* is the best reward’).³²⁷ Another moralising fragment preserved by Lactantius is evocative of the scheming and dissimulation of Plautus’ servile characters, which is now extended to the majority of Roman society: *nunc vero a mani ad noctem* [...] *populus patresque/iactare indu foro se omnes*, [...] *verba dare ut caute possint, pugnare dolose,/blanditia certare, ‘bonum’ simulare ‘virum’ se* (fr. 1161-67: ‘But, as it is, from morning till night, the people and the senators, all alike go bustling about in the Forum [...] to swindle with impunity, to fight cunningly, to strive, using soft words as weapons, to act like a ‘fine man’).³²⁸ Beside evident linguistic allusions, Lucilius borrowed from the available set of comic types to portray himself as the *improbis Lucilius* and his social environment in a comic key.³²⁹ Furthermore, Marcus Deufert has perceptively demonstrated how the contemporaries Lucilius and Accius (who seem to be bickering with each other in the satires) were witnessing a great achievement of Plautus philology in the 130s and 120s BCE – the first collected edition of Plautus’ comedies that both poets could consult in the form of a book.³³⁰ It is probable that Lucilius’ early experiments with comic metres (trochaic septenarii and iambic senarii) stem from this novel opportunity which was later superseded by the hexameter as the standard metre for the new genre of satire, emphasising the parody of epic over the genre’s links to comic drama.

³²⁶ Freudenburg 2021 *ad loc.*

³²⁷ For the reference, see Mundt 2018 (ch. 3.1. n. 37). On gift and commerce in early Latin comedy, see Coffey 2017: 61-78. The wide-ranging effects of economic imagery in Pseudolus is enlightened by Feeney 2010.

³²⁸ Christes/Garbugino 2015: 444 note the clear verbal echo of Plaut. *Most.* 534: *a mani ad noctem usque in foro dego diem*.

³²⁹ Coffey 1989: 55 on comic character types as a precedent for satire.

³³⁰ Deufert 2002: 44-7 for verbatim quotes of Plautus in the satires and imitation of comic clausulae, from which he infers that Lucilius must have had recourse to a book edition of the comedian. Breed 2020: 246-50 attempts to read the ‘birth’ of Roman satire in tandem with a burgeoning interest in scholarly activities in Rome (collection, edition, criticism of texts). The neoteric grammarian and poet Valerius Cato, among others, may have been influential in shaping the image of Lucilius as a ‘proto-neoteric’ urban sophisticate. The transmission of Lucilius’ texts stems from the scholarly work undertaken by his friends, who arranged his output after the poet’s death along metrical lines, i.e., into iambo-trochaics, elegiacs, and hexameters. For the preference of Lucilius over Ennius in republican scholarship, see Rawson 1985: 270, and more recently Zetzel 2018: 60-1. Ferri 2013 offers a succinct rundown of Plautus’ reception in antiquity.

It is no wonder, then, that another hotly debated fragment from the thematically multifarious book 30 plays with comic allusions:

*cuius vultu ac facie ludo ac sermonibus nostris
virginis hoc pretium atque hunc reddebamus honorem.*

(fr. 1055-56)

To this young girl's pretty face and looks this was the
price, this the honour we offered – through our play, our
chats.

In a passage that is often given programmatic weight in scholarly discussions, Lucilius names his poetry both 'play' and 'chats'. The problem perennially haunting any critical evaluation of the fragmentary remains of Lucilius is the impossibility of pinning down who exactly is speaking these lines: is it the poet himself or a fictional character appearing in the satires? Keeping this caveat in mind, it is at least a hermeneutic commonplace to read this passage as having some poetological import, which would give *ludus* a central place in Lucilius' conception of his own literary work. Cynthia Damon has recently shed light on Lucilius' pervasive strategy of assigning labels and prices to things and thereby puncturing Rome's system of values.³³¹ The commercial tone of the *virtus*-fragment, at any rate, reverberates in this excerpt: the speaker claims a profit obtained through his verse which already occurred in fr. 1119-31: *pretium* and *honor* (cf. 1119, 1125: *pretium persolvere*; 1126: *quod re ipsa debetur honori*).

The speaker asserts that through his writings price/value (*pretium*) and honour (*honor*) used to be conferred – if one takes the imperfect *reddebamus* to indicate habituality.³³² Grammatically, while the forms *vultu ac facie* seem odd at first sight, a passage in Gellius confirms that they can actually function as the dative objects of the verb *reddere*.³³³ While critics rapidly zero in on the supposedly programmatic meaning of *ludo ac sermonibus*, they forget that Nonius had picked out the Lucilian fragment because he found the usage of *honor* and *pretium* as two synonyms for *praemium* perplexing.³³⁴ *Praemium* would be the usual lexeme when speaking about a prize that bestows honour and distinction on the recipient. One could say *praemium* belongs semantically to the ideological sphere in Rome ('a prize of honour, reward'), whereas *pretium* is squarely economic ('the price of an object').³³⁵ This mixing of the

³³¹ Damon 2018. Cf. also fr. 1155-6, which likewise probes the worth of *virtus*: *aurum atque ambitio specimen virtutis utrique est:/tantum habeas, tantum ipse sies tantique habearis*.

³³² Martyn 1972: 163 takes it as a conative imperfect and translates: 'I tried to give her...'.

³³³ Gell. 9.14.20-5 gives other Lucilius passages as references. Martyn 1972: 163 takes *vultu ac facie* as ablatives of reason ('because of this girl's pretty face and looks').

³³⁴ Non. 320.25 and 366.1.

³³⁵ Menge 1988: 87.

ideological and the economic sphere replicates the problem found in fr. 1119-31, where translators struggle with the vagueness of the phrase *pretium persolvere*, reading it as either ‘pay a fair price’ or as ‘attribute a value to’.

In the political field, fierce battles were raging about the acquisition of *honor/honores*, and Lucilius jarringly confounds concepts of high public repute with the realm of personal female beauty (*vultus ac facies*) and the leisure sphere (*ludus ac sermones*).³³⁶ It is conspicuous, moreover, that the excerpt has merely two lines of verse and yet features three nominal doubles, which are, if not synonymous, very close in meaning. This, at least, seems to be suggested by the triple hendiadys.³³⁷ Are readers meant to ask themselves how overlapping *vultus* and *facies*, *ludus* and *sermones*, *pretium* and *honor* really are? Lucilius is palpably concerned here with the question about the worth of a new kind of poetry that is styled as the chatty, amateurish, undeveloped counterpart of Rome’s authoritative discourses which could, in fact, be converted into political capital. The pieces analysed above reflect an obsession with an inquiry into the value of things – a suitable move for an experiment in a humorously ineffectual substitute for politically relevant verse and prose, whose status in the generic hierarchy was uncertain. According to the logic of Rome’s economy of services, a gossipy version of a narrative account of the exploits of Rome’s great men was not straightforwardly classifiable. It was not obvious, at least, what instrumental value a record of the quotidian affairs of the ruling elite could have in the eyes of this segment of society. This excerpt thus undermines the usual expectations of what kind of honour literary representation can bestow in Rome. What becomes part of Roman memory is now the beauty of a girl ably versified by Lucilius – a use of his poetic talents for traditionally base matters.

The era of Lucilius marks a decisive differentiation in Rome’s literary culture. As a canon of, for instance, Plautus’ comedies enabled an intensified scholarly activity about early Roman texts and authors, Lucilius uses such literary models to craft a unique new source of *memoria* that rejects tales from the battleground and creeps into the realm of elite leisure. Habinek was right to ask the question why satirists refer to their own writings so often as *ludus*. He did not, however, take the continually negative connotations of this concept and its subaltern tinge seriously enough. *Ludus* traditionally stood for a discursive practice that was not meant to be appropriate for elite agents, originating from the lowly fictional characters and real-life actors of comedy. It may have been enjoyable and fun, but it conflicted with the core

³³⁶ For the double of meaning of abstract ‘honour’ and esteemed ‘positions’ in the *cursus honorum*, see pointedly Hölkeskamp 2010: 123.

³³⁷ Marx 1905: 332 has already spotted this stylistic device without asking further interpretative questions.

principles of the aristocratic value system. The equivocation Lucilius expresses about the worth of his poetry highlights the perceived inconsequentiality of a new genre called ‘play and chats’ that exploded the conventional workings of Rome’s exchange economy between patron and protégé. When an equestrian like Lucilius does not strictly speaking depend on a benefactor anymore, then the relationship between a Lucilius and a Scipio allowed an entirely new conception of the *beneficia* that were being traded. Play in Rome is, to say the least, a category of dubious value that seemingly offers nothing that would serve a patron’s ends. But if Lucilius was invested in portraying his *amicitia* with Scipio precisely as a genuine friendship, it would propel the position of a ludic poet upwards in society and suggest a patron who stood so far above usual procedures and constraints that any cultural innovation like the invention of a new genre was but a function of his indubitable supremacy. At the same time, it gave Lucilius the opportunity to exploit the lower-class connotations of comic paradigms and types for a now much more direct critique of Rome’s ruling class and the sordid underbelly of their day-to-day dealings.³³⁸

Aristocratic *otium* now figured as a world of excess, folly, and pleasure, and Plautus’ idiom of play provided a fitting semantic frame for this new literary project. Questions about the scope of the presumably generic labels *ludus* and *sermo* have of course been put forward: are they meant to characterise Lucilius’ literary output *tout court* (‘satire as playful chats’³³⁹), or are they limited to the immediate context of a conversation with Lucilius’ female lover Hymnis?³⁴⁰ To be sure, Hymnis is a standard name of the prostitute in comedy and the title of a play by the comic playwrights Menander and Caecilius.³⁴¹ Her name appears again in the fragments, especially in frs. 830-51, which are manifestly comic in language, social types, and the focus on imagery from the commercial sphere.³⁴² It is further customary to read *ludus* and *sermo* in tandem with fr. 1109 (featuring the term *schedium* – ‘ramshackle poetry’) and paint a picture of Lucilius’

³³⁸ The interest in economic matters is also a feature of imperial satire, cf. Nauta 2002: 17. His introduction (1-36) is instructive on the logic of exchange between poets and patrons in Rome.

³³⁹ Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.48 questions comedy’s claim to even the status of poetry (*sermo merus*), while in *Epist.* 2.1, 250-1 he calls his own work *sermones* [...] *repentis per humum*. Further fragments in which Lucilius seems to equate his poetry with *sermones* are 1017 and 1018: [...] *sermonibus differs*. Keane 2018 treats Lucilius’ *sermo* and his meta-comments on this type of speech.

³⁴⁰ Haß 2001: 112; Puelma Piwonka 1949: 273-4 senses a complaint of Lucilius’ lover, as she prefers material gifts to poetry. Cichorius 1964: 167-71 has a whole chapter on Hymnis. Christes/Garbugino 2015: 407 are musing that this might be a proclamation against marriage of a content bachelor. Koster 2001: 123 n. 10 follows the same line and reads *ludus* as erotic play between the two lovers. On the other hand, commentators have been keen to declare that the lines contain a full-blown poetological programme that is frequently assimilated to a putative ‘Alexandrian poetics of play’, cf. Puelma Piwonka 1949: 81-3 and 320-21; Mariotti 1960: 17; Nuti 1998: 103-4; Haß 2007: 374. Martyn 1972: 157 warns of poetological overinterpretations.

³⁴¹ Coffey 1989: 56 conjectures that the scene is taken from comedy, an auction of a slave girl by a pimp.

³⁴² Damon 1997: 263. The fragments patently evoke a comic scene featuring a *senex*, *meretrix*, *adulescens*, and *servus callidus*; further Christes/Garbugino 2015 *ad loc.*

poetry as slipshod, conversational, light-hearted amateur products perfectly apt for the spare time entertainment of upper class *otium*.³⁴³ Being himself privy to upper-class leisure pursuits, Lucilius is able to forfeit the transactional dynamics of aedilician commissions for comic poetry that marked the entertainment programme at the *ludi*. Instead, the poet could now style himself as a humorous observer of activities among a peer group which he observed first-hand and was a direct participant in. *Ludi* and *sermones* are now discursive modes that are a hallmark of the new poetic genre of satire as well as a new type of elite communication that is honed by Greek *paideia*.

2.5) Play as capital: fine dining and self-branding

It has long been noted that ancient authors rank comedy alongside other genres (satire, epigram, iambic) as lowly in both poetic and social terms, but that these genres also metapoetically broadcast an awareness of their own second-rate status. Plautus' comedies are replete with lower-class agents such as the cook, who function as avatars for the comic author.³⁴⁴ In addition, Latin culinary language as a whole has a socio-cultural dimension in its symbolising of refined taste and intellectual sophistication.³⁴⁵ The subaltern types of comedy that were variously characterised by this idiom of cultural refinement are integrated in Lucilian satire into a panorama of dining culture among the Roman upper class. It transpires in many fragments that Lucilius was no stranger to fancy dinner parties and fine dining.³⁴⁶ Frs. 992-1006, for instance, are classified by Christes/Garbugino as a mocking exhibit of a ridiculously bungled *convivium*, in which one character leaves the banquet entirely boozed up and the speaker of the excerpt utters the following words: *serus cum eo medio a ludo bene potus recessit* (1005: 'when at a

³⁴³ Emblematic of this approach is Scholz 2000: 222. Haß 2007: 181-2 also discusses the terms *poemata* and *poesis* found in the fragments. A very useful overview of terms with poetological connotations in Lucilius is Martyn 1972. He concludes that satire as a generic term had no programmatic force for Lucilius, either because he decidedly avoided the term to distinguish himself from Ennius or because *satura* was not available as a marker of genre. Arguably, no one could say during Lucilius' *floruit* what satire was and what it was doing (cf. Morgan 2002).

³⁴⁴ See especially Gowers 1993b for a study of the metaphoric enmeshing of literary production and food.

³⁴⁵ One of the numerous examples of this phenomenon in Plautus will suffice here. In *Mil. Glor.* 187-218, Periplectomenus censures trickery as an evil, feminine vice that requires ingredients like the spices in a garden (194: *domi habet hortum et condimenta ad omnis mores malificos*). Later, the cooking imagery is transferred to the clever slave Palaestrio, who is deliberately portrayed as 'cooking up' a new plot (208: *quicquid est, incoctum non expromet, bene coctum dabit*). See Laelius' mocking eulogy of sorrell in ch. 2.5 and the Lucilian framing of his jokes at a high-class banquet with *bene cocto et condito, sermone bono* (fr. 1147-8). The metapoetic dimension of these expressions is evident. Christes/Garbugino 2015 *ad loc.* read the passage literally.

³⁴⁶ Goh 2018: 275 on the many paradoxes surrounding Lucilius: he seems to have been well-versed in both country life and urban eating culture. The evidence Goh 2018 (*passim*) has assembled attests to a sophistication in dining matters and the centrality of the *convivium* for satiric discourse. Gruen 1992: 303-4 collects pertinent fragments.

late hour he withdrew pretty drunk from the midst of the fun'). The reconstruction is fraught with problems, but it is uncontroversial that the speaker paints the picture of leisurely atmosphere which involved drinking to excess (*bene potus*) and play (*ludus*).

Possibly, the speaker identifies a banquet with play wholesale and is not simply referring to more specific play activities during dinner.³⁴⁷ In that case, this is the first incident in extant Latin literature that performs the explicit equation between a *convivium* and *ludus*. Through the prism of (comic) literary imagination, one of the central institutions of the Roman aristocracy, could become Hellenised, and therefore caricatured.³⁴⁸ In the process of the acculturation of Greece, it became possible to reimagine the Roman banquet as a play space by conceiving of the Greek *symposion* as a site of excess, revelry, and exclusively upper-class frivolity.³⁴⁹ The *convivium* as a venue for aesthetic practices (drinking, playing, dancing, poetry,...) through which the elite marked out its difference from commoners is both vividly represented and lampooned. Florence Dupont's astute suggestion that Rome invented itself as it began to intensively import the foreign medium of literature from the Hellenised Mediterranean is a reminder that Lucilius is operating here with an imaginary Greece which he inherited from Plautus and now moored in elite *otium*.³⁵⁰

Dirk Schnurbusch emphasises that the *convivium* was a space for intra-elite communication that accommodated a host of social relationships, both asymmetrical and symmetrical. There was a finely calibrated etiquette around inviting and being invited, and far from being an apolitical leisure-time institution, the *convivium* was an opportunity for self-promotion and the fostering of networks, which created a type of 'public sphere' that was subject to mutual control among the aristocracy.³⁵¹ It may well be that Lucilius took part in many such events during his life, yet when it comes to literary representation, he will equally have drawn on the wealth of 'sympotic literature' originating in the Greek world that helped him to dramatise the events at a banquet and charge them with added meaning in a way that

³⁴⁷ Marx proffers parallel passages to suggest that he was looking for such *ludos in convivio* (1905: 341). Here, however, Lucilius uses the singular *ludo*, which makes it more likely that this encompasses the entire context.

³⁴⁸ The overtones of elite banquets are tangible, cf. fr. 994, which speaks of small cushions (*culcitulae*) and blankets (*centonibus*). This detail does not fit the shabby inn, in which some critics want to locate the dinner. Haß 2007: 162-4, e.g., follows Krenkel's reconstruction, which diverges from Christes/Garbugino, and reads the drunken party as a memorable anecdote from the sordid camps in the Numantine war; also Puelma Piwonka 1949: 156.

³⁴⁹ After standing in the shadows of its Greek cousin, the *symposion*, the Roman *convivium* has for a long time been neglected by scholars. See, however, the individual monographs that have now been dedicated to the topic: Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005 offers a historical discourse analysis of the institution; Schnurbusch 2011 is a more sociologically informed historical study (cf. esp. ch. 7 on the *convivium*'s functions and his detailed critique of Stein-Hölkeskamp's shortcomings in 44-9); Dunbabin 2003 investigates iconographic remains of the banquet.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Dupont 2002 and 2005. In the later publication, she reads the banquet as an instance of this *alterité incluse*, a Romanised version of Greekness.

³⁵¹ Schnurbusch 2011: 221-45.

suited his satirical project.³⁵² Literary discourse creates a representation of events at a banquet, charging them with added meaning. The questions I want to pose will thus not be concerned with the *convivium* as an actual performance context of Lucilius' verse. Instead, it is notable that Lucilius incessantly invokes the image of the banquet as a cultural institution and the knowledge of practices, pressures, and opportunities associated with it. Whereas the Romans insisted on the permanent visibility of social hierarchies during a *convivium*, its Greek counterpart has been read as a communal exercise in self-control on the basis of the wine-fuelled licentiousness and the boisterous games that marked out the *symposion*.³⁵³

Classicists have had lively debates about a purported pre-literary Roman song culture that flourished principally at elite banquets.³⁵⁴ Whether these were ever actual Roman practice or rather opportune projections modelled after the *skolia* sang at archaic Greek *symposia*, the banquet proved to be a powerful symbol of Greco-Roman cultural differences that authors found good to think with.³⁵⁵ Lucilius' picture of a banquet turned into play shows him as a sharp manipulator of the Latin comic language which propels the lower-class agents and producers of *ludi* socially upwards into upper-class spaces. Harnessing a Greek conceptual background for his project of casting a sharp and critical look at elite leisure, Lucilius configures *otium* as *παίδιά* and a *convivium* as symposiastic play, which notionally explodes the preservation of social hierarchies in spaces of *otium*. Since *ludus* conveys the idea of symmetrical social relations with all players submitting to the shared rules of the game, the always stratified Roman *convivium* suddenly came across as remarkably devoid of power differentials. The subversive force of this identification stems from the elite's propensity to instrumentalise banquets for political ends, when in fact, so Lucilius bathetically intimates, they are transgressive fooleries among a cabal of friends. His undermining of the ideal-type *convivium* corresponds to his choice of a position in society both at the margins and right at the centre of power.

³⁵² Mundt 2018 (chapter 4.2) calls to mind that from the beginning sympotic poetry was also metapoetic in that it thematised the venue of its performances and its own performativity. Roman authors took over this legacy and added further layers of meaning. There is always a danger of mixing up a recoverable historical reality with an ideal type, which authors may even have an interest in promoting (see the introduction to Stein-Hölkeskamp 2005).

³⁵³ Osborne 2014; Murray 2009 is a synoptic treatment of the archaic *symposion*; Barchiesi 2007 and Davis 2007 explore Horace's inclination for sympotic themes and the self-reflexive nature of Latin poetry that appropriates this quintessentially Greek cultural paradigm, which from the outset was a multimedia phenomenon. The iconography on drinking vessels and the poetry performed (or just imaginatively situated) at the *symposia* attest to the constant meta-dimension participants were presented with – while they took part in *symposia*, they also received visual and linguistic stimuli about *symposia* as an abstract notion. This makes it all the more important to distinguish carefully between different historical stages and generic conventions shaping modern views of this institution.

³⁵⁴ Regardless of Cic. *Tusc.* 4.2 being the sole evidence for the alleged *carmina convivalia*, the secondary literature on this topic is vast. Sciarrino 2011: 21-8 is a helpful summary of the state of affairs.

³⁵⁵ On the *skolia*, see Goldberg 2006: 434-5.

While poetic activities were an integral part of ‘the Greek symposion’, especially its archaic type, poets, dancers, and the manifold kinds of entertainers in Rome were bereft of social prestige, mere assets to the feasts of the ruling class. Lucilius’ role as a poet amounts to a self-marginalisation in the political field, which stands in inverse relation to the confident assumption of authoritative judgement and critique within his satires. The notorious *libertas* that is so often coupled with his name in later receptions is arguably tied to the crafting of a ‘sympotic voice’ born out of Rome’s comic imaginary, which – by dint of its Greek cultural background – is endowed with the special licence of an (imagined) social context where equals interact, joke, and play at a par.³⁵⁶ Since for Lucilius the need to make up for the lack of social standing was suspended, he could invert the widely held connotation of play with non-Roman subalternity by puncturing the underlying value system and serving up the gross details of festive excesses. This simultaneous participation in and critique of elite lifestyle is a fitting cultural sphere to occupy for an affluent knight who was the first to use a ‘low’ type of literature to mould a notoriously opinionated public voice from within and yet outside elite social circles.

A polemic by Scipio Aemilianus recorded in Gellius illustrates that the *convivium* was a particularly attractive institutional framework through which one could launch an attack that was predicated on cultural stereotypes. This is Scipio launching a harangue against the sartorial and cosmetic habits of a certain P. Sulpicius Gallus, introduced by Gellius as *homo delicatus* (NA 6.12.4-5):

Nam qui cotidie unguentatus adversum speculum ornetur [...], qui in conviviis adolescentulus cum amatore cum chirodyta tunica interior accubuerit, qui non modo vinosus, sed virosus quoque sit, eumne quisquam dubitet, quin idem fecerit, quod cinaedi facere solent?

For one who daily perfumes himself and dresses before a mirror [...], who at banquets, though a young man, has reclined in a long-sleeved tunic on the inner side of the couch with a lover, who is fond not only of wine but of men – does anyone doubt that he does what catamites commonly do?

Scipio appears in this passage as a satirist *avant la lettre*, hurling abuse against dangerous conduct that stood in contradistinction to normative Romanness. The stylisation of Scipio’s speech (cf. the list of relative clauses; the pun on *vinosus/virosus*) shows him fully in control over the fineries of rhetorical knowledge. Against the backdrop of an imaginary banquet, Scipio

³⁵⁶ Even if Rüpke’s reconstructions (2000) of the social space of Ennius’ epic poetry at elite banquets are disregarded, Ennius’ thoroughly Greek-influenced *Hedyphagetica* (based on the 4th-cent. mock-didactic epic of Archestratus of Gela, cf. Goh 2018: 269) reveals an interest in the high-end culture of commensality. After Lucilius, Varro’s *satura Menippea* has been shown to be deeply invested in using the etymology of the lexeme *convivium* for the dissemination of an idealised, normative notion of the banquet between Roman competition and Greek obstreperousness (cf. Krostenko 2013: 113).

paints his adversary as a sexual deviant, an uncontrolled drunk, and an androgynous philhellene who disrespects Rome's cultural practices and its established social order. As a result, Scipio appears as a staunch upholder of Roman mores, resolutely revoking his early reputation as an intemperate Helleniser.

The same rhetorical move is performed by Lucilius across his satires. Take the contrasting of down-to-earth Romanness with fancy Greekness in frs. 181-88, which is again related by Gellius:

*Quo me habeam pacto, tam etsi non quaeris, docebo,
quando in eo numero mansi, quo in maxima non est
pars hominum...
ut per<i>sse velis, quem visere nolueris, cum
debueris. Hoc 'nolueris' et 'debueris' te
sit minus delectat, quod ἄτεχον et Eissocratium hoc
ληρώδες simul totum ac συμμειρακιῶδες,
non operam perdo, sit tu hic...*

Although you do not ask after me, still I will let
you know how I find myself, since I have managed to
stay among the number in which the greater part of
mankind is not found . . .
that you wish that man to have passed away whom you would not
come and see when you should have. If this 'would' and
'should' is not to your liking because, you say, it
is all without art, and Isocratican, and all rubbish and
also childish –
I won't waste my time, if that's the kind you are.

The situation is evidently an address to a friend who did not visit the satiric speaker during a period of illness.³⁵⁷ Deep awareness of the technical details of Greek *paideia* are coupled with a (hyper-)Roman attitude that turns the friend's criticism on its head and in turn ridicules him as childish in his pursuit of affected dandyism. Like Scipio in the abovementioned extract, Lucilius is in full command of Greek and Latin rhetoric and completely up to date with the latest educational trends that have come to Rome via Greek intellectuals and teachers.³⁵⁸ As expected, the language of aesthetic polish known from Plautus is employed by Gellius in framing the quote: *quod ad se aegrotum non viseret, haec ibidem addit festiviter* ('he did not come to see him in sickness, then and there he went on to say most cheerfully'). Gellius quickly

³⁵⁷ Coffey 1989: 45: calls this a parody of the epistolary style. Also Gärtner 2001: 90 for satire's place within *amicitia*-networks.

³⁵⁸ Gruen 1992 discerns no anti-Greek sentiment in Lucilius' writings and hints at a probably intimate knowledge of Greek philosophy as well as personal affiliations with renowned Greek intellectuals (307). Cf. also Lévy 2017; Poccetti 2018: 119-23; Persyn 2020.

homes in on the stylistics of Lucilius' *bon mot*. He condemns *homoiooteleuta* as *insubida et inertia et puerilia* ('stupid, idle and childish'), thus translating the critique Lucilius' friend had proffered with the aid of Greek terms and ideas (ἄτεχνος, *Eissocratius*, ληρῶδες, συμμειρακιώδες). Roughly 250 years later, Gellius had no problem formulating categories of style in Latin whereas the Lucilius passage plays with the ethnic othering of rhetorical education as Greek operative during the republic. The speaker's addressee can only use Greek phrases to express his disapproval of the grating sound effect in the conjoined verbs *nolueris* [...] *debueris*.

Melanie Möller has examined the pervasive *topos* in Greek and Roman thought of the convergence between a speaker's style and his character.³⁵⁹ By consequence, ethical and aesthetic considerations were routinely commingled in antiquity.³⁶⁰ A childlike style betokens an incompletely developed morality as well as a lack of decorum, judgement, and self-control.³⁶¹ As the friend casts the satiric I as an immature child, prone to unskilful speech, Lucilius flips the negative connotations of the child at play around, brandishing it as an aesthetic role while standing firmly on Roman moral grounds. Stylistic refinement thus continues to be tainted as a Greek import, which actors such as Lucilius and Scipio confidently wield without losing touch with Roman realities – and most importantly – its superior value system. Lucilius paints a caricature of a friend who fails ridiculously to exert moderation and control in the use of the new knowledge coming from the Greek world. As a reaction to the speaker's charge that he did not visit him, the Hellenophile friend completely disregards the point of the message, instead criticising its poor stylistics. Lucilius taps into the stereotype of the impractical dandy – fashionable and chic, but sorely lacking in the commonsensical human decency expected from upright friends. This is where Grecomania gets you, the satiric speaker seems to say, only producing stylish young men who are totally unmindful of the obligations that binds society together.

Another aspect is noteworthy: by incorporating this exchange between friends into his satires, Lucilius records it for posterity and simultaneously provides a critical commentary of the conversation. Similarly, fr. 86-92 exemplifies once more that one of the useful functions Lucilius' texts fulfilled for later writers was the depiction of exchanges and quarrels between members of the ruling elite in the conventional arenas in which such interactions unfolded. Book 2, which contains this fragment, is set in the law courts – the setting of Scaevola's trial

³⁵⁹ See Möller 2000, and the more comprehensive monograph 2004. In 2000: 98, she mentions the particularly vivid example of Cicero's portrayal of Q. Aelius Tubero: *ut vita, sic oratione durus, incultus, horridus*.

³⁶⁰ Chahoud 2004: 22 notes both meanings of (συμ)μειρακιώδες: childish, and foppish/affected.

³⁶¹ Cowan 2015: 28-31 emphasises that a self-fashioning as a 'child author' entailed connotations of transgressiveness in style, form and subject matter of one's literary products; see also Morgan 2003 on Ovid's poetics of childhood.

de repetundis, which Cicero will later include into *De oratore*.³⁶² Fr. 86-92 revolves around T. Albucius' overblown affectations of Greekness, which is why Scaevola – on a visit to Athens during his praetorship – says he addressed Albucius in Greek while strolling in public with his entire throng of lictors and followers:

*Graecum te, Albuci, quam Romanum atque Sabinum,
municipem Ponti, Tritani, centurionum,
praeclarorum hominum ac primorum signiferumque,
maluisti dici. Graece ergo praetor Athenis,
id quod maluisti te, cum ad me accedis, saluto:
'χαῖρε' inquam 'Tite.' Lictores, turma omnis chorusque:
'χαῖρε, Tite.' Hinc hostis mi Albucius, hinc inimicus!*"

You have preferred to be called a Greek, Albucius, rather than a Roman and a Sabine, a fellow-townsmen of Pontius and Tritanus, of centurions, of famous and foremost men, of standard-bearers.
Therefore I as praetor greet you at Athens in Greek, when you approach me, just as you preferred.
'Chaere', say I, 'Titus'. 'Chaere, Titus', say my lictors and my troupe in chorus. That's why Albucius is my enemy, my personal opponent.

Bishop has remarked that the aspect of Albucius' conduct that gives Scaevola a cause for his taunt is his improper use of Greek knowledge. Knowing Greek is not the issue, but preferring it over Latin when talking to Roman superiors is anathema.³⁶³ Akin to the reporting of some of Scipio's witty *dicta*, Lucilius here records a funny line by Scaevola, sexual wordplay included.³⁶⁴ Lucilius' satire hence functions as an offshoot of a discourse that Roman aristocrats were already displaying at banquets, in the senate or in the law courts. It is intra-elite squabbles that Lucilius versifies, making them henceforth available as ready *exempla* of playful speech that he catalogues and himself partakes in. Again, Hellenism is adroitly accommodated but also subordinated to the required respect for Roman conventions and constellations of power. No wonder, then, that Scaevola is recalled stressing that after he says 'χαῖρε, Tite', his whole entourage follow in lockstep, adding comic repetition to the line. While Albucius stoops to the conquered Greeks by exaggeratedly going native, Scaevola displays superiority over his Greek subjects by bringing the official insignia of his political power: *lictors*, *turma*, and *chorus*. His Roman followers are reduced to submissive claqueurs, who copy what the big man intones. At

³⁶² The whole scene ranges from frs. 76-93.

³⁶³ Bishop 2019: 17 n. 60.

³⁶⁴ O'Sullivan 2012 has uncovered a pun on the vocative of Titus and the Greek noun τιτίς, a term that could designate the female genitals.

the same time, he trumps Albucius with a subtle Greco-Latin pun that also demonstrates his mastery of the aesthetic domain which was coded as Greek.

Some commentators wish to see a (self-ironic) identification as a *semigraecus* on the part of Lucilius, which would liken him to earlier literary practitioners in Rome such as Livius Andronicus or Ennius.³⁶⁵ As with his comic models, Lucilius certainly plays with the pejorative connotations of the insignificant type of discourse that he seeks to institute as well as the characters that act as representatives of this mode of speech. This enables him to keep the negative valuations of the comic in Rome intact ('Greek, socially inferior, immature') while broadcasting the moral righteousness of his verse. The result is that the foppish Greek-lover becomes the butt of the joke, with the satiric speaker coming out of the verbal duel as the winner – perfectly commanding Greek technical vocabulary, and still finding a healthy distance to the foreign culture's superficial charms. Lucilius' satires thus provide a depository for the *lepide dicta* rather than the *res gestae* of noblemen, and the satirist himself functions as one of this discursive practice's main proponent.

After Aemilius Paullus' victory at Pydna, journeys to Athens and the new province of Macedonia became more common, especially by Roman magistrates. Scipio Aemilianus himself visited the city in 139 BCE.³⁶⁶ It was therefore not only a mere pastime to deal seriously with Greek culture but became an expedient means to dominate and control imperial subjects abroad as well as aristocratic rivals at home. The language of *ludus* to which Plautus had given an aesthetic twist in his quest to forge a programme for comic writing in Rome now arrived among the powers that be in their incessant games of one-upmanship. The stylistic embellishment of public speech could continue to be conceived of as non-Roman, childish play (συμμεπρακιώδης), but it undoubtedly gained a function in the many venues both in leisure and politics where *nobiles* had to prove their mettle.

The final example of play terminology in the satires underscores their roots in comic scripts and again highlights the evolution that takes place from Plautus to Lucilius:

*Coelius, conlusor Galloni, scurra, trigonum
cum ludet, solus ***
ludet et eludet*

(fr. 1226-8)

Coelius the buffoon, player with Gallonius, when he
plays at three-corner ball, will [...] play alone and outplay

³⁶⁵ Cf. Chahoud 2004: 4; Alekou 2021: 54. However, fr. 376-9, in which the adjective occurs, is also frequently related to Accius, see Christes/Garbugino 2015: 134-5.

³⁶⁶ Scholz 2011: 137-8.

The attribution of the following fragments to a single book remains contentious. Christes/Garbugino leave the fragment unassigned whereas Warmington groups it under book 5, placing it alongside the context in later authors in which the name Gallonius is mentioned: Cic. *Fin.* 2.23-5 and Hor. *Sat.* 2.2.46-7. The scenario underlying the passage is also familiar by now. The frame is a dinner party, at which elite banter was on full display. In fr. 1223-4, the auctioneer (*praeco*) Q. Granius, who reappears in Lucilius, has supposedly organised a *convivium*. In fr. 1225, the designated urban praetor C. Caecilius Metellus Caprarius is lampooned for lack of urban sophistication (...*Cecilius pretor ne rusticus fiat*). The joke plays both with the implications of pronunciations that were shunned in the stylish capital (cf. the spelling *Cecilius* and *pretor* with e instead of ae) and Metellus' nickname Caprarius, which evokes the noun *capra* (she-goat), a symbol of the countryside.³⁶⁷

Similar wordplay, which revolves around a *cognomen*, underwrites the connected excerpts which Warmington places straight next to the above (fr. 1139-48 in Christes/Garbugino). Here, Laelius ironically eulogises sorrel as a falsely spurned delicacy (1141: '*o lapathe, ut iactare, nec es satis cognitus qui sis!*').³⁶⁸ Twice, Cicero, who transmits the Lucilian scene, plays on Laelius' moniker *Sapiens* in Greek (1142-3: *in quo Laelius clamores sophos ille solebat/edere compellans gumias ex ordine nostros; praeclare Laelius et recte σοφός illudque vere*). Translating these Greek epithets as 'wise' hardly captures the sense here.³⁶⁹ This is Laelius the Hellenised wit boasting his satirical weapons (cf. *compellans gumias*; 1144-6: '*O Publi, o gorges, Galloni! es homo miser[...]cenasti in vita numquam bene, cum omnia in ista/consumes squilla atque acupensere cum decimano* - 'O Publius, O glutton Gallonius, you're a poor fellow [...]. You've never been dining well in your life, neither when wasting all you have on that shrimp nor when on a sturgeon, in size a number ten.'). Laelius jeers at the gluttony and culinary extremities of figures such as Gallonius, acting like a satirist who is in no way inferior to Lucilius himself, the reporter of these interactions.³⁷⁰ Laelius (and by extension his witness Lucilius) is here marking off an elite sphere to which not every rival claimant for aristocratic attention will be admitted – especially elite assistants such as the *praeco*.³⁷¹

³⁶⁷ Cf. Adams 2007: 78-88 for the monophthongisation of ai/ae to e as a distinguishing feature between the Latin of the capital and Italic regions.

³⁶⁸ Sorrel was a cheap diet not fitting for urban fine dining – a contrast that explains the exclamation's humour, cf. Goh 2018: 257.

³⁶⁹ But unperturbed Christes/Garbugino 2015 (437: 'jener weise Laelius'; 439: 'und er ist wohl ein Weiser').

³⁷⁰ Freudenburg 2021: 75 calls Laelius an 'inset satirist'.

³⁷¹ Hinard 1976 dubs *praecones* 'members of staff' of official magistrates.

Horace reiterates the gaffe with the sturgeon (*acipenser*), adding the detail that Gallonius was a *praeco*: *haud ita pridem Galloni praeconis erat acipensere mensa/infamis* (Sat. 2.2.47-8).³⁷² Gallonius tries to imitate the trappings of elite commensality, yet what he receives is a moralising harangue by those really adroit at the intricacies of this exclusive culture. Utter lack of taste and tact cannot but provoke the bad press of Lucilian satire. Whereas Cicero is otherwise at pains to romanticise Laelius, the embodiment of the philosophically trained wise man, in this passage he happily vacillates between the convivial connotations of the stem **sap-* and the metaphorical extension into the semantic sphere of ‘refined judgement, taste’.³⁷³ The shrewd self-fashioning by way of Roman naming conventions that leaves both options strategically open for Laelius must again be more than a coincidence. It has been recognised, of course, that the name *Sapiens* originated as much out of political calculation as out of intimate acquaintance with Greek philosophers.³⁷⁴

Coelius receives the appellation *scurra* (1226), which is another social type usually held in low repute by social superiors and those who aspired to distance themselves from contenders for esteem and power in the retinues of powerful *nobiles*.³⁷⁵ Both the *praeco* and the *scurra* are not lower-class characters *per se* and therefore potentially threatening social climbers in a society where the proximity to powerful men was a source of capital and influence, and reaching the coveted positions was competitive business. Yet, the panorama that emerges is one of an even wider cast of competitors that covers beside the *praeco* and the *scurra* also the satiric speaker, who scrambles for the eyes and ears of mighty aristocrats. In this light, both the *praeco* and the *scurra* are versions of dependent agents who rely on their voice and wit for self-promotion on

³⁷² Cf. Ps.-Acro on Hor. Sat. 2., 2.46-7: *quidam fuit praeco, qui habebat apparatus convivium: Quem Lucilius etiam pulsat. Hic [etiam] iam acipenserem suis conviviis (convivis?) exhibebat.*

³⁷³ Cf. Cic. Fin. 2.24: *Nec ille [...] Laelius eo dictus est sapiens, quod non intellexeret quid suavissimum esset – nec enim sequitur, ut, cui cor sapiat, ei non sapiat palatus [...]*. See also Habinek 2006, reading the *convivium* as an important frame of reference for Ennius’ *Annales* and *Saturae*, a space where the poet could showcase his advisory competence and judiciousness.

³⁷⁴ Astin 1967: 81, 307-10; Flower 2010: 71-2. See also Gildenhard 2020: 254-5 with further literature for an intriguing example of an aristocrat (L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi) co-opting his unflattering *cognomen* Frugi for a confident rebranding of a tag with lower-class connotations.

³⁷⁵ Corbett 1986 ch. 2 and 3 is the standard study for the *scurra* and his close cousin, the parasite, in Plautine comedy. The *scurra* was closely associated with the city and abusive humour. He might have been particularly despised by aristocrats or those who have successfully climbed the social ladder because he possessed the necessary intellectual prowess to be a sharp social commentator but was not allowed to indulge in such humour in carefully hedged off elite circles. Cicero holds one of his main character traits to be *dicacitas*, which he guardedly distinguishes from *facetiae*, the type of amiable, well-mannered humour that is harmless because it merely beautifies elite leisure pursuits, whereas *dicacitas* can be hard-hitting and slanderous (Or. 26.90). In *Planc.* 33, on the other hand, Cicero credits the *praeco* Granius with (albeit harsh) *facetiae* against luminaries such as Crassus and Antonius (*Ille L. Crassi, ille M. Antonii voluntatem asperioribus facetiis saepe perstrinxit impune*).

Rome's steep social ladder.³⁷⁶ They are similar to the parasite, another comic character that lends itself to parallelisation with the inferior parts in Rome's highly asymmetrical system of patronage.³⁷⁷ Cicero directly amalgamates types like Granius the *praeco* and Lucilius the satirist, even grouping them with exemplary upper-class men such as Laelius and Crassus for their genuinely Roman brand of humour: *omnis mihi Granios, omnis Lucilios, vere ut dicam, Crassos quoque et Laelios videre videor* (Fam. 9.15.2: 'I imagine I have Granius, Lucilius, and their like – indeed, to say the truth, Crassus and Laelius and their like – all before my eyes').³⁷⁸ Marshalling *exempla* of homegrown wit (Granius, Lucilius, Crassus, Laelius), Cicero readily breaks status boundaries and gives Granius and Lucilius a place among the *nobiles*.³⁷⁹

Granius already features in Lucilius' verse as a source of *bon mots* that the speaker wishes to memorialise (fr. 424-5: *conicere in versus dictum praeconis volebam Grani*). Since the other uncontentious reference to Granius in the Lucilian corpus is placed right in front of the play scene mentioned above, a complex set-up arises: Granius' confident pronouncement of his own worth and the dismissal of haughty 'kings' probably falls within the parameters of a banquet organised by him, at which L. Licinius Crassus was present (cf. fr. 1223-4: *Granius autem non contemnere se et odisse reges superbos*).³⁸⁰ Cicero deploys Granius a couple of times during *De oratore*'s disquisition on humour (2.216b-290) as a friend of Crassus, who delivers fitting examples of the different types of humour Cicero seeks to classify.³⁸¹ It is plausible, then, that the source of Granius' wit is Lucilius' verse itself.³⁸² What to do therefore with Coelius and Gallonius at play in the context of a dinner party that may have been hosted by a *praeco*, who had befriended an illustrious aristocrat and fashioned himself as a modest master of ceremonies who loathes excess and arrogance (fr. 1223-4)?

First, it is noteworthy that Gallonius and Coelius are portrayed as fellow players (1226: *conlutor*). It has been surmised that a third player is left unmentioned, and that they are engaging

³⁷⁶ See Oliensis 1998: 164 for the structural affinities between *praeco* and *scurra*. Lowe 2018: 158-62 relates the voice of the satirist to the rhetorical model of the *praeco* (with Horace himself proclaiming to be the son of a *praeco*), which allows for a reflection on poetic advancement within aristocratic circles.

³⁷⁷ The classic study that reads the parasites of comedy as analogues of the problems inherent to Rome's system of patronage is Damon 1997.

³⁷⁸ Cicero praises Papirius Paetus, the addressee of this letter, for his excellent humour, which still retains traces of the old wit whose loss Cicero wistfully decries: *ut nullum veteris leporis vestigium appareat*. On the passage, see also ch. 3.3.

³⁷⁹ See further *Brut.* 46, where Granius competes in sharp banter with another wit: *T. Tincam Placentinum hominem facetissimum cum familiari nostro Q. Granio praecone dicacitate certare*. Breed 2018: 62-3 calls Lucilius' and Granius' humour a 'blue-collar' alternative to Cicero's ideal *urbanitas*.

³⁸⁰ Breed 2018: 63.

³⁸¹ For Granius in *De or.* see 2.244, 2.253, 2.281, and 2.282.

³⁸² Leemann/Pinkster/Rabbie (= LPR) 1989: 321 take this for certain.

in a game of *trigon*.³⁸³ Christes/Garbugino wish to read *eludere* (1228) in a technical sense ('play back, keep the ball rolling'), but there seems to be more to the fragment than simple game instructions.³⁸⁴ The proximity of *scurrae* and *praecones* to the parasites of comedy render all depicted characters borrowings from Rome's comic inventory. In addition, the variety of **lud*-lexemes is charged with programmatic significance which is hardly absent in this passage. It remains elusive how one ought to take the verb *eludere*. Lindsay favours a simple 'finish playing', seeing a tripartite division of the play activity into communal play (*colludere*), single play (*solus ludere*), and the termination of play (*eludere*).³⁸⁵ However, *eludere* in Plautus is universally used with a sense of trickery ('deceive, mock'), which gives the whole scene a less innocent twist.³⁸⁶ Is Coelius really a co-player of Gallonius? Who outsmarts whom (*eludere*) in this uncannily competitive situation where various multiple players seek to get the better over their rivals to secure a place at the dinner table? These questions are not made easier by the fact that Lucilius the satiric speaker features as the chief producer of *ludi* in his verse despite being perpetually rivalled in this activity by his upper-class friends Laelius and Scipio – two capacious sources of acerbic wit akin to the satirist.

Comparable passages in the later satirical tradition reveal an imbrication of fictional representations of play scenes and social anxieties. Horace professes to steer clear of the sportsground where the common folk play *trigon* in a satire openly dedicated to the speaker's satisfaction with the admission to Maecenas' circle: *fugio Campum lusumque trigonem* (*Sat.* 1.6.126).³⁸⁷ Martial broaches the game of *trigon* three times in his epigrams (4.19; 12.82; 14.46), showing that an excessively accommodating conduct at play could give rise to satirical cynicism. At 12.82, the speaker intimates that Menogenes deliberately scores points for the opponent to obtain a dinner invitation in return (3-4: *captabit tepidum dextra laevaue trigonem, inputet acceptas ut tibi saepe pilas*). Though laughably distorted, Petronius' opening scene of Trimalchio features the flamboyant dinner-party host playing ball (*Sat.* 27.1-3: *inter pueros capillatos ludentem pila*). His radical inversion of the rules of *trigon* to demonstrate his autocratic power is

³⁸³ In the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* (5.233.21), in which this fragment survives, Veturius is added as the third one who was counted among the *peritissimi lusores* of this game.

³⁸⁴ Christes/Garbugino 2015: 471.

³⁸⁵ Lindsay 1926: 102.

³⁸⁶ Cf. Plaut. *Amph.* 265: *certum est hominem eludere*; *Curc.* 609: *elusi militem, inquam, in alea*; *Curc.* 630: *parasitus hic te elusit*. The emendation from *solus* to *scius* proposed by Housman 1907: 157-8 makes good sense given that the passage implies skills and competence to worst one's opponents. This sense is backed by Goh 2018: 274 and Lowe 2018: 161 n. 52. The compound *colludere* has a comparably sinister secondary meaning ('collude with somebody').

³⁸⁷ Habinek 2005b: 182-5 considers Horace the satirist as in competition with the *scurra* in many of his *sermones* (e.g., 1.5 and 1.8) because both agents share a social role, namely the (entertaining, witty) judgement of elite behaviour.

a particularly apt testimony to the intricacies of play among unequal partners in a society that strictly policed its pecking order.³⁸⁸ Whether or not Lucilius was the third player in the game of *trigon*, the concern about social status in relation to play practices is palpable in his satiric discourse.³⁸⁹

Play in the Roman imagination easily exposes the fault lines of patronage networks, which were strongly asymmetrical and therefore did not allow activities where social hierarchies, however temporarily, were put on hold. Yet, Lucilius' satires think about play exactly as a category at the interface between poetry and power. Lucilius takes the old models (esp. Ennius' 'good companion') and reimagines a much more active, vocal, and involved role for the poet within the spaces of elite commensality. Suddenly it is them sharing a discursive sphere with the writer of ludic verse. Lucilius depicts them outwitting their aristocratic peers in the law courts, *convivia*, and the forum, seemingly ever-present to record their memorable *dicta*. Lucilius revels in the question of the worth of such verse that openly flouts the established exchange logic of duties and services that structure Roman social relations, not least between patron and poet. What to make of poetry that markets itself as play and chats, a mundane, inconsequential anti-type of commemorating verse and prose without obvious efficacy and function? The give-and-take of benefactor and grateful versifier reaches a new dimension when the stylised communication between patron and poet can be labelled *ludi* – a knowing, ironic, self-aware relationship with their own image, their public performances, and their shared background in Greek *paideia* that Scipio and Laelius must have intentionally cultivated with the help of their entourage. Kirk Freudenburg has shown that the trope of the *recusatio* in Augustan poetry imitates the emperor's pose of renouncing absolute power within the aesthetic domain.³⁹⁰ In the same vein, Lucilius and his elite friends' symbolic and political strategies can be seen to correspond at a much deeper level.

Lucilius was a crucial player in the transfer of play as a traditionally un-Roman discursive practice into elite circles, with certain aristocrats equally benefitting from the diversifying arenas of competitive display. The banter and games of verbal one-upmanship between young men and clever slaves in comedy morph into a signal of intra-elite struggles for distinction. Lucilius moves *ludus* into the centre of his generically experimental *oeuvre*, retaining the concept's connotations

³⁸⁸ Petronius casts Trimalchio as the aged *erastes* (*senem calvum*) playing with his young *eromenoi* (*pueros*). Instead of counting the passes the players make before the ball drops to the ground, Trimalchio's slaves count the fallen ones. Other slaves are employed to pick up the balls so the master never has to bow down. It is telling that even in Trimalchio's topsy-turvy world, the slaves remain relegated to auxiliary tools who are shut out from participating in the game. See also Lucil. fr. 369-72: *pilam lusimus*, which, however, only serves as an example in a disquisition on spelling rules.

³⁸⁹ Goh 2018: 274 offers this as a possibility.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Freudenburg 2014.

of childish alterity, while simultaneously politicising unauthoritative speech and endowing it with critical panache. After Plautus, the subaltern outsider, provided a foundational ‘grammar of playfulness’ in the Latin language, Lucilius re-engages with the ludic idiom as it provides him with both an aesthetic and a social strategy to parody the values of epic (heroism, military valour) and the pomposity of parts of the nobility (in their memorial practices and exclusionism). At the same time, a display of learnedness that could equally figure as a form of *ludus* becomes the province of a circle of aristocrats who stood to gain from the ostentation of their intellectual bravura. While the devaluation of play remained a fundamental principle of Roman culture, later literary practitioners would be inspired by the example set by Lucilius. First and foremost, Cicero’s attempt to establish a tradition of Greek-style philosophical dialogue among otiose aristocrats required Lucilius as a model, which is why he incorporated him so prominently in Roman literature’s first philosophical dialogue *De oratore*.

3.1) Did Cicero think about play?

At first glance, Cicero's *De oratore* appears to be an unlikely candidate for a study of play in republican Rome. Written in 55 BCE, at a time when Cicero was recalibrating his post-exilic role in public life and expressed intense dismay at Rome's political scene in his private correspondence, the prefaces of *De oratore* in particular are interspersed with laments about the grim realities Cicero found the commonwealth of this time to be mired in.³⁹¹ A fleeting survey of the most recent monographs on the text confirms that play is not a notion ready at hand for scholars tackling *De oratore*.³⁹² Whilst the 'excursus on wit' (2.217-90) and the elaborate systematisation of a Latin lexicon of humour have received much attention, *ludus/ludere* is a set of lexemes scarcely commented upon.³⁹³ This surprises given that *De oratore* is the work of Cicero that stands out as the text with the largest number of occurrences of said vocabulary.³⁹⁴

I am going to show in this chapter that Cicero's engagement with *ludus/ludere* in this work and at this point of his career is far from coincidental and manifests Cicero's deepest and most experimental probing into the strategically useful polysemy of Latin play terminology. Even though his uses of *ludus* throughout this long text may appear to be scattered and fragmentary examples of Cicero's linguistic flexibility, the dense web of interconnections between the different senses of the lexeme are too conspicuous and sustained to be coincidental. On the one hand, Cicero continues the strand of conceptions of play inaugurated by Plautus and Lucilius ('play as banter and mockery'). He has his cast of ideal *nobiles* amply display such

³⁹¹ See most poignantly *De or.* 1.2-3 and 3.9-11; on the role of the prefaces in Cicero's *oeuvre*, see Baraz 2012: 150-86; Habinek 1994. The text I will be using is Kumaniecki's Teubneriana. Translations are taken from May/Wisse 2001. For a concise contextualisation of the work, cf. Steel 2005: 38-9. Cicero's recurrent protestations of a shortage of time for devoting himself to his studies in the mid-50s are Ciceronian tropes. Scholarly opinions, however, diverge on whether they should be taken at face value: Gildenhard 2007: 51 sees them as 'apologetic gestures' of an ex-consul hard-pressed to make time for writing literature. Zetzel 2022: 6 n.10 allows for the possibility that Cicero uncomfortably had much more time at his disposal than he wished. At any rate, letters such as *Att.* 4.6 and *Fam.* 5.12 as well as Cicero's own staggering productivity in 55 BCE evidence his intensified desire to use the literary medium for self-presentation and memorialisation; see more extensively Zetzel 2022: 4-8 and Leemann/Pinkster 1981 (= LP): 23-5. A crisp summary of Cicero's tactics is provided by Gildenhard 2013: 238-9; similarly Steel 2005 and Bishop 2019: 6. In the same year, Cicero wrote *In Pisonem*, the letter to Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) and three books of *De temporibus suis*, which were never circulated.

³⁹² An entry for '*ludus*, play, games, etc.' is absent from the indices of both Fantham 2004 and Zetzel 2022. The title of Fantham's index III reflects, so it seems, the thematic preoccupations of much scholarly production on *De or.* to this day ('legal, political, and rhetorical terms').

³⁹³ Pertinent discussions on the *excursus de ridiculis* can be found in Krostenko 2001: 202-32, Fantham 2004: 186-208, Dugan 2005: 75-171, Beard 2014: 99-127, Guérin 2019, and Kish 2021. Calling this passage an *excursus* is unfortunate as the term implies that Cicero's analysis of rhetorically useful humour was a somehow marginal component of the whole work. It is, however, a central facet of Cicero's project and self-fashioning.

³⁹⁴ A similarity search in the Library of Latin Texts for the prompt '*ludo*' in Cicero's *oeuvre* results in 243 hits, of which the majority denote the *ludi* as public games and markers of holidays. Such a search does not identify all **lud*-lexemes, but remains valuable as a rough overview. With 29 occurrences, *De or.* takes the lead by a considerable margin over *Har. resp.* (18), which is mainly concerned with *ludi* as the Megalesian games of 56 BCE that had been desecrated by Clodius.

forms of play in extracts from political and legal speeches and even theoretically capture them as part of the perfect orator's rhetorical toolkit.

On the other hand, he adopts Plautus' framing technique of locating a traditionally un-Roman cultural practice in the time-out of Rome's public life during the games (*ludi*). Instead of slaves outwitting their masters, Cicero imagines exemplary aristocrats at play with one another in a villa outside of Rome. For this purpose, it is also the satirist Lucilius whom Cicero remoulds into a vital literary precursor as he offered both testimonies for past *nobiles'* leisure pursuits and a practical example of an innovative discourse labelled as *ludus ac sermones* (albeit in verse). Cicero picked up on Lucilius' model to fashion an idealised form of civil, cultivated communication that was supposed to act as a bulwark against the corrosive conflicts among the Roman ruling class by channelling their rifts into a shared culture of learning and courteousness.³⁹⁵ While being rife with badinage, this culture of learning-cum-etiquette restored, at least in the world of Cicero's dialogues, the aristocratic consensus on which the wellbeing of the *res publica* depended.

A central ambition of *De oratore* is to lay out the ideological basis in Rome for the right (i.e., Ciceronian) appropriation of Greek *paideia*, which would serve both as a theoretical bedrock for Cicero's imagined return to a functioning community of aristocratic peers and a type of cultural capital the Roman, urban elite ought to use as a marker of social distinction.³⁹⁶ At the heart of *De oratore* stands the diagnosis of a cultural and political crisis, a violent and chaotic period of Roman history, which ushered in decades of civil war and the eventual downfall of the republican system.³⁹⁷ Firstly, Cicero retrojected his vision of Romans doing Greek theory into the exemplary republican past to create a tradition he could write himself into. Secondly, he maligned the contemporary, separated practice of Greek philosophy and rhetorical schooling as otherworldly, impractical, and useless, – akin to a form of play –, but

³⁹⁵ The dialogue's date of 91 BCE is significant as a point of crisis in the republic (the war with Italian allies is looming). Cicero drops hints at these events in the prologues but generally omits concrete politics during the philosophical conversation proper, cf. Wisse 2002a: 379. By the end of the dialogue, it transpires that some of the depicted aristocrats were actually at loggerheads with each other, cf. Zetzel 2022: 60. Cicero was anxious not to broach sensitive political topics of his time by setting the dialogue in the past, cf. *QFr* 3.5.2: *ego autem id ipsum tum eram secutus, ne in nostra tempora incurrens offenderem quempiam*.

³⁹⁶ Mouritsen 2017: 167 stresses that Rome's legal framework was incapable of impeding individual aristocrats from ever more jarringly breaking the rules and that compliance in the political system of the republic was largely predicated on ideological factors.

³⁹⁷ Lintott 2008: 215-52 summarises that the central ambition behind *De or.* was a defence of Cicero's career alongside the reconstruction of a safer and more civilised Rome before the wars against the Italian allies and other Roman citizens. For Flower 2010, the traditional republic of the *nobiles* had vanished by the 80s BCE in the wake of the Social War (81), which makes Cicero's choice of locating his dialogue in the lead-up to this momentous turning point highly significant. She further underlines Cicero's own contribution to the shaky political situation after his handling of the Catilinarian conspiracy (146-7).

simultaneously gave it a foundational yet adapted function in his innovative pedagogical curriculum for young Roman *nobiles*.

En route, *ludus* proved just the right concept to merge the domains of education and play – a conceptual proximity prefigured by the Greek lexical nexus παιδεία- παιδιά which had already occupied Plato, Cicero’s expressed model for his new genre of literary-philosophical dialogues. By connecting the Roman tradition that conceived of play as a subaltern activity with Plato’s serious philosophical reflection on play and its significance in human and cultural development, Cicero could embark on an extensive cultural comparison between Greece and Rome and hammer home the point that the idea of Romans doing (Greek) theory remains a laughable flight of fancy and is easy to learn for naturally more talented Romans. At the same time, he maintained the secondary status of play in Roman thought while upgrading the notion of *ludus* as a significant educational space.

Like Plato, Cicero also frequently illustrates his arguments with examples of ordinary games (ball, dice). While the former is fond of metaphysical reflections that are connected to play imagery, the latter takes pains to activate the meaning of ‘*ludus* as a gladiatorial school’, which was a non-Greek institution and served to distinguish enfeebling Greek forms of education from Roman ways, which ought to have an eye to the display of valour, fighting spirit, and the cultivation of manliness. For the first time in the history of the republican discourse of play, an author therefore comprehensively harnesses the conceptual breadth and variety of *ludus*, promoting the relevance of ‘*ludus* as a training ground’ in Rome’s educational system; a system which he himself seeks to transform so the underlying normative structures of the commonwealth may be revitalised through a blend of Roman practice and tradition with the innovations of Greek theory.

A host of new analyses have recently sought to rehabilitate Cicero as an original thinker who was both aware of the deeply entrenched cultural beliefs, values, and expectations which contemporary Roman readers were holding, and how he could refine, modify, or even radically alter them through his creative use of the Latin language.³⁹⁸ It is this tactic, I argue, which can be seen at play with regard to the distinctly Roman educational institution of the *ludus* as well. When trying to make sense of the puzzling polysemy of *ludus* in Latin, scholars routinely have recourse to ancient Roman scholars’ cogitations and the meticulous collection of meanings in the *TLL*.³⁹⁹ Whereas the severe nature of the Roman school is a *topos* of all modern assessments,

³⁹⁸ E.g. Gotter 1994 and 2010; Cole 2013; most emphatically and wide-rangingly for the speeches Gildenhard 2011; now also for his political philosophy Schofield 2021b.

³⁹⁹ Cf. Väterlein 1976; Laes 2021: 119-23 gives a succinct overview of ancient etymological explanations; Dickey 2020 most recently notes the pervasively negative view of the *ludus* as an institution where respect for children’s

ludus' precise place in Roman society is frequently overlooked. As Cicero's envisaged educational model in *De oratore* demonstrates, powerful aristocratic father figures either sought to have their offspring trained by private (often Greek) teachers at home or took over their sons' education themselves.⁴⁰⁰ What unites conceptions of *ludus* in the Roman elite imagination is their deprecatory bent: of all the types of educational institutions it commonly designates the most basic one, *ludus*-teachers had the lowest social standing of a by and large denigrated profession, and such *ludi* possessed a certain inclusivity in that everyone's children were admitted as long as the parents could rack up the required sum of money.⁴⁰¹ Accordingly, from an elite standpoint one had better no truck at all with such an establishment. It is all the more surprising, then, to see Cicero grapple with the notion '*ludus* as school' in *De oratore* as well as with the question of its appropriate place in Roman thought and society.

The following chapters will start out from interpretations of Cicero's use of the republican poets Plautus and Lucilius and his systematic enmeshing of these models within a discourse of distinctly Roman *exempla*. Then, I will take a closer look at the alterations that Socrates and Plato, Cicero's main Greek precedents of philosophical and conversational play, undergo in his text. Lastly, the characters' and, by implication, Cicero's own self-fashioning as a *ludi magister* will be examined. In his (ironic) conception, the semantics of the term become remoulded so that it incorporates beside 'schoolmaster/gladiator coach' the meaning 'teacher in a philosophical school' – an imaginary space where Cicero can function as the new Roman Isocrates, combining the subtleties of philosophical inquiry with a preparation for pugnacious, toughened-up elite masculinity.⁴⁰²

needs, let alone play, were not on the agenda (up to Quintilian's more child-friendly stance, at least). Both Corbeill 2001: 277 and Habinek 2006 highlight the notions of military training and imitation of battle as the original sense of *ludus*, which subsequently is supposed to have evolved into a more general notion of 'preparation for elite Roman masculinity'.

⁴⁰⁰ Cato the Elder's refusal to let his Greek slave-teacher Chilon teach his son is paradigmatic here (cf. Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.3-5). See further Scholz 2006; Bloomer 2011; Sciarrino 2015.

⁴⁰¹ Horster 2011: 94 and Wisse 2002b: 342-4, who cautions that many reconstructions of the Roman school system suffer from presupposing too a rigid and schematic a trajectory a young man would traverse.

⁴⁰² More wide-ranging studies of Cicero's use of *ludus* lie beyond the scope of this chapter. It appears, however, that the more creative and ameliorative employment of the term I am going to delineate for *De or.* is dropped in his later writings. Instead, Cicero returns to a typically dismissive attitude, e.g., *Or.* 47: *Faciet igitur hic noster—non enim declamatorem aliquem de ludo aut rabulam de foro, sed doctissimum et perfectissimum quaerimus; Rep.* 67,5: *senes autem ad ludum adolescentium descendant*; also *Or.* 144: *dignitatem docere non habet? Certe, si quasi in ludo*. The perversity of Cicero setting up a lowly *ludus* at his Tusculan villa to teach rhetoric to Caesar's cronies Hirtius and Pansa is analysed by Gildenhard 2007: 42-4. In letters contemporaneous with the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero also resorts to gallows humour in the face of the loss of the old republic, and **lud-* lexemes feature prominently, cf. *Fam.* 9.16.9: *superiora illa lusimus*, and 9.18.1: *ut Dionysius tyrannus [...] Corinthi dicitur ludum aperuisse, sic ego [...] amisso regno forensi ludum quasi habere coeperim*.

3.2) Plautine games at the aristocratic villa

De oratore marks a turning point in Cicero's career in that in this text his 'self-transformation as a writer' and the attendant return to intellectual and literary interests of his youth receives its intellectual foundation.⁴⁰³ It is striking how careful Cicero is in his first philosophical dialogue to remind his readers of the setting and atmosphere of his imagined conversation. He evidently does not deem it sufficient to stress just once that the meeting of aristocrats at Crassus' villa takes place during the major public games in Rome. Instead, the lead-in to each of the three books of *De oratore* frames the narrated conversations as holiday events. Comparing these individual instances tells a story of how Cicero does not simply evoke the ambience of holidays, at which the ever-busy Roman statesmen could finally get their well-earned respite from official duties, but also offers insights into how Cicero works against the background of Plautine comedy where the *ludi* had first functioned as apt framing devices for the representation of behaviour that lay well outside the respected norms of public demeanour conventionally expected from the upper class.

After guiding the reader from an address to his brother Quintus over reflections on the political woes of his time to musings on the dearth of outstanding orators in Rome, Cicero segues into the world of the fictionalised dialogue proper.⁴⁰⁴ *De or.* 1.24 sets the scene very matter-of-factly: *dici mihi meminisse ludorum Romanorum diebus L. Crassum quasi colligendi sui causa se in Tusculanum contulisse* ('I remember being told that [...] Lucius Crassus retired during the Roman Games to his villa at Tusculum as if to reinvigorate himself'). Although Cicero has the line of transmission of the philosophical discussion run indirectly from the elite peers assembled in Tusculum via Cotta to himself, he already sends powerful signals to his readers to be alert to the obvious parallels between the larger-than-life host Crassus and himself.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Zetzel 2022: 8; see also Schofield 2021a: 100-1 for the intimate relation between Cicero's waning political influence and his growing adoption of more philosophical, aesthetic, and technical subjects in the works of the 40s BCE. The deliberate reshaping of the Roman historiographical and rhetorical tradition so as to create a space in which Cicero himself could stand out with his much more aesthetically demanding standards is emphasised by Feldherr 2003 and most recently van den Berg 2021.

⁴⁰⁴ There is no doubt that Cicero presents historical fictions in his *philosophica*, cf. e.g., Wisse 2002a: 377; Stull 2011: 255; Gildenhard 2013: 253. The more precise question how Cicero innovatively merges his personal story with his fictional but plausible accounts of the republican past in *De or.* and later dialogues will recur throughout this chapter.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. *De or.* 1.26. Cotta informs Cicero of the *sermo* he had witnessed. Crassus is, like Cicero, a *consularis* and owns a villa in Tusculum, cf. Görler 2004: 179. From the outset, Crassus' utterances are characterised as spoken in a divine spirit (*De or.* 1.26: *divinitus*). Three years later, the same ploy reappears in *Rep.* 1.13: *nec vero nostra quaedam est instituenda nova et a nobis inventa ratio, sed unius aetatis clarissimorum ac sapientissimorum nostrae civitatis virorum disputatio repetenda memoria est, quae mihi tibi quondam adolescentulo est a P. Rutilio Rufo, Smyrnae cum simul essemus compluris dies, exposita [...]*.

Noticeably similar communicative situations are portrayed in Cicero's other dialogues penned in the second half of the 50s (*De re publica* and *De legibus*): a group of congenial aristocrats meeting at a country villa to discuss the state's dire condition with the host having to be gently nudged into philosophising (first Crassus, then Scipio Aemilianus in *De re publica*, and finally Cicero himself in *De legibus*).⁴⁰⁶ In *De legibus*, Cicero writes himself into the fictional dialogue world and takes over Crassus' function in *De oratore*, delighting his friends with a disputation on civil law: *Quin igitur ista ipsa explicas nobis his subsicivis, ut ais, temporibus et conscribis de iure civili subtilius quam ceteri?* (*Leg.* 1.13: 'Why do you not, then, in the present "odds and ends of time," as you call them, expound this very subject to us, and compose a treatise on the civil law, going into it more deeply than your predecessors?').⁴⁰⁷

Dugan sees in *De oratore*'s opening the erection of a self-consciously theatrical frame that enables Cicero to launch a theoretical examination of the dramatic dimensions of Roman oratory.⁴⁰⁸ True as it is, this statement neglects what the *nobiles* are actually setting out to do at this time when public duties are at rest. A little further down, Cicero shocks with a blatant absurdity: of the three most senior statesmen, it is the oldest ex-consul Scaevola (i.e., the man with the greatest *auctoritas*) who eggs on the others to play Socrates – known to all from Plato's *Phaedrus* (*De or.* 1.28: *cur non imitamur, Crasse, Socratem illum qui est in Phaedro Platonis?* – 'Say, Crassus, why don't we follow the example of Socrates as he appears in Plato's *Phaedrus*?').⁴⁰⁹ Inspired by the flora (the plane tree) that surrounds the speakers and their shared knowledge of canonical Greek literature, the aristocrats have a seat, relax, and indulge in their discussion (1.29: *ibi ut ex pristino sermone relaxarentur animi omnium [...] Crassum sermonem quendam de studio dicendi intulisse* – 'Then [...], to relieve the minds of all from the tension of the conversation on the day before, Crassus initiated a discussion about the pursuit of oratory.').⁴¹⁰

It is accepted knowledge that the dialogue's structural design proceeds along the normative template of the formation of Rome's ruling class. Three generations are imagined to be present at Crassus' Tusculan villa: Scaevola is Crassus' father-in-law, Crassus (who was

⁴⁰⁶ In *Rep.*, too, the philosophical conversations Cicero chronicles are depicted as removed from the disquieting world of politics and provide a longed-for palliative, this time unfolding during the *feriae Latinae*: *Rep.* 1.14: *feriis Latinis [...] hoc praesertim motu rei publicae*.

⁴⁰⁷ Quintilian already notes in antiquity how Cicero exploited his imagined interlocutor's high social standing for the expression of his own visions, cf. *Inst.* 10,3,1: *cui sententiae personam L. Crassi in disputationibus quae sunt de Oratore adsignando iudicium suum cum illius auctoritate coniunxit*.

⁴⁰⁸ Dugan 2005: 133.

⁴⁰⁹ On Scaevola's social status and the background of the group of interlocutors, cf. LP 1981: 86-90.

⁴¹⁰ For the significance of Ciceronian scene-setting and the relationship Greece-Rome, see especially Zetzel 2003.

consul in 95 BCE, censor in 92 BCE) and Antonius (consul in 99 BCE, censor in 97 BCE) were in their late 40s and 50s; Catulus, who joins on day two, is likewise of consular rank; and Strabo, Cotta, and Sulpicius are aspiring senators in their 30s.⁴¹¹ Scaevola, Antonius, and Crassus have acted as Cicero's teachers of oratory, law, and Roman politics, which is why they are granted a place in his pantheon of exemplary statesmen.⁴¹² The communicative roles of the participants in the dialogue at Tusculum are hierarchically distributed so that the younger generation is largely restricted to listening while the older generation receives the lion's share of speaking time. Knowledge is thus handed down from generation to generation though the close personal bonds between a highly accomplished and practically experienced statesman and a younger aristocrat who promises excellent success in the future.⁴¹³

In consequence, it falls to the younger generation to keep asking for Greek knowledge against the reservations of their host. Still, even the initial stimulus to adopt Greek modes of speech and thought has to originate with the most senior statesman, who will then depart after day one.⁴¹⁴ Cicero's introduction *in propria persona* (1.1-28) yields to Crassus' first speech (1.29-34), and at the same time the initial lamentations give way to the establishment of the play world as it was conceived in Roman comedy – a sphere in which social norms could be overturned within a frame of comic licence.⁴¹⁵ As in a comic prologue, Cicero states in the preface of book one – a structural feature of all the three books' prologues – his position on the perfect orator in a nutshell before he lets the drama unfold. Readers of the ensuing conversation are left in no doubt about its unusual, even unsettling nature: some of the most powerful Roman statesmen of 91 BCE use their leisure to act as if they were Greek philosophers – social agents who were either active or imagined in Rome as perhaps possessing expertise in a plethora of technical subjects (rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, etc.) but no power to impact Roman politics. Cicero carefully emphasises that his dialogues take place in the sphere of *otium*, that the circle of aristocrats is only playful after a day of gravely talking politics, and that the purpose of such

⁴¹¹ LP 1981: 23-5; May/Wisse 2001: 14-6; Steel 2005: 36.

⁴¹² Cf. e.g. *De or.* 2.1-11; van der Blom 2010: 311-5 illuminates Cicero's adoption of the role as an exemplary teacher to the young nobility.

⁴¹³ Corbeill 2002: 43-6.

⁴¹⁴ Scaevola's function for the dialogue thus lies to a large extent in helping the younger Sulpicius and Cotta to goad Crassus into philosophising, cf. *De or.* 1.105-12 and 1.163-4. While Crassus and Antonius represent the authoritative older generation, it is implied that Scaevola is too old to join in on the more technical conversation of days two and three, cf. LPN 1985: 183 (a move prefigured in Plato's *Phaedrus* with the departure of Cephalus).

⁴¹⁵ There is even thematic imbrication, see e.g., how the characteristics of Cicero's model orator in *De or.* 1.17 chime remarkably well with those Crassus embraces: *lepos quidam facetiaeque et eruditio libero digna [...] subtili venustate atque urbanitate coniuncta*. Görler 2004: 191 struggles to put a label on the complex textual network Cicero has woven. There is, in any case, indubitable allusivity between Crassus the historical *consularis*, Crassus the Ciceronian ideal, Cicero the historical *consularis*, and the fictionalised Ciceronian self. This is complicated further by links between Crassus and Socrates (and hence Cicero and Plato).

ridiculous postures is mere relaxation to gather all available strength for the impending struggles back in the senate house.⁴¹⁶ Commentators betray uncertainty as to the translation of the noun phrase *sermonem quendam*, as the indefinite pronoun *quendam* is either glossed over or felt to be inadequate for the Roman version of a Platonic dialogue.⁴¹⁷

The bewilderment Cicero projected onto his audiences at imagining Roman *nobiles* practising philosophy is further mitigated by recurring reminders early in each new book that the readers find themselves in a congenial atmosphere that is open to forms of play. After another preface in the voice of Cicero addressed to his brother Quintus, it is right at the transition to the goings-on in Crassus' villa of 91 BCE that two newcomers briefly threaten to put the worries of the political realm back onto the table:

Crassus "numquidnam" inquit "novi?" "nihil sane" inquit Catulus "etenim vides esse ludos; sed – vel tu nos ineptos licet" inquit "vel molestos putes – cum [...] heri vesperi venisset Caesar de Tusculano suo, dixit mihi a se Scaevolam hinc euntem esse conventum ex quo mira quaedam se audisse dicebat; te, quem ego totiens omni ratione temptans ad disputandum elicere non potuissem, permulta de eloquentia cum Antonio disseruisse et tamquam in schola prope ad Graecorum consuetudinem disputasse.

(*De or.* 2.13)

Crassus asked. "No new developments, I hope?" "None at all," replied Catulus; "for as you know, the games are on. But – and you will probably think we are being tactless or bothersome –, when Caesar [...] visited me last evening [...], he told me that he had run into Scaevola, who was on his way home from here, and he said that he had heard truly extraordinary things from him. You, whom I could never once entice into a discussion, whatever I tried, had had an extensive exchange of views about eloquence with Antonius, discussing this as though you were lecturing, almost the way the Greeks always do.

Quintus Catulus and Julius Caesar Strabo are excited to join Crassus' get-together on day two of the shenanigans. The sense of amazement Cicero seeks to evoke is palpable. The fact that Crassus descends into Greek-style philosophical debates (*ad Graecorum consuetudinem*) is marvellous and strange enough (*mira quaedam*), that he has routinely refused to do so (*omni ratione...non potuissem*) makes matters even less credible, but that Crassus and Antonius were behaving like teachers in a school (*tamquam in schola*) is the pinnacle of ridiculousness.

⁴¹⁶ On this excerpt and the intricacies of its presentation, see Zetzel 2003: 121-2; Gildenhard 2007: 47-8. Griffin 1994: 695 expatiates on the exceptional rural setting of Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, which proved particularly stimulating models for Cicero's own agenda in the 50s, as well as the alterations Cicero made to his Greek model while transferring Greek practices and ideas to Rome.

⁴¹⁷ May and Wisse's translation completely omits *quendam* ('a discussion'). LP 1981: 101 have the problem of trying to elevate *sermo* into a label for Platonic philosophy in Rome. Rather, it constitutes a flexible concept (prefigured as a self-conscious literary term by Lucilius) which Cicero seeks to render more philosophical and elitist in *De Or.*

Crassus, anxious statesman that he still is, must inquire about political news from Rome, but Strabo and Catulus ensure that the play spirit may continue to hold sway for now (*esse ludos*).

The prologue of book three, finally, transports the reader from the play world back into the harsh realities of a politician's life in Rome, even proleptically announcing Crassus' death: *virtus L. Crassi morte extincta subita est [...] ut enim Romam rediit, extremo ludorum scaenicorum die* (3.1-2: 'the steadfast character of L. Crassus [...] (was) wiped out by a sudden death [...]. On the last day of the dramatic festival, he returned to Rome [...]').⁴¹⁸ Within the preface spoken in Cicero's voice, the repercussions of Crassus' passing for the commonwealth are bemoaned at length before the historical dialogue continues in 3.19. Chapters 3.17-18 provide the transition from Cicero's narration to what he can report via Cotta (3.17: *hoc a se Cotta animadversum esse dicebat*). Compared to the transitional passages in books one and two, the atmosphere of play has vanished, and Crassus' role shifts from jolly host to deeply serious thinker: *omne illud tempus meridianum Crassum in acerrima atque attentissima cogitatione posuisse* (3.17: 'Crassus devoted this entire midday break to intense, concentrated thinking'). This framing differs in important respects from the communicative situation Cicero had depicted before.

While it is a trope throughout the work that Crassus has to be cajoled into theorising in Greek fashion, at this point he is already set up as the archetypal Greek philosopher, so that Strabo's persuasive skills can be a good deal more muted than earlier.⁴¹⁹ A comparison of 2.12-28 and 3.17-18 is instructive: Strabo's extremely respectful and lengthy nudging of Crassus in the second book morphs into a mere sentence in book three (2.17: *quid est, Crasse [...] flagitatum*), and from Strabo's suspicion that he and his brother Catulus may appear *inepti* in wanting to see Crassus practising philosophy, it has now become Crassus himself who evokes his own shamelessness and the duties he owes to the younger men (*an me tam impudentem esse existimatis, ut vobis hoc praesertim munus putem diutius posse debere?* – 3.18: "Do you really suppose," [...] "that I am so shameless that I think I can be in your debt any longer, especially concerning this obligation?"). Whereas the association Crassus-Socrates is alluded to repeatedly, the great effort required by doing philosophy with a serious intent only comes out in book three, most pointedly in the very last sentence: *ab hac contentione disputationis animos nostros curamque laxemus* (3.230: 'rest our minds after the intensity and seriousness of our discussion'). Activities in *otium* such as discussing philosophical topics have finally become

⁴¹⁸ Two more instances of *ludi* in the sense of 'games' will not be discussed here as they represent fairly unmarked uses of these cultural institutions: *De or.* 3.73: *ludorum epulare sacrificium*; 3.127: *illa quinquennali celebritate ludorum*.

⁴¹⁹ For Crassus' evasion tactics, see Hall 1996.

serious business, from which one now needs respite.⁴²⁰ With the *ludi* drawing to a close and the prediction of Crassus' death, Cicero gives all that Crassus is about to say in the final book a more tragic and somber aura – and the increasingly technical subject matter of book three dovetails with Cicero's envisaged effect on the reader.⁴²¹

Crassus' evolution in *De oratore* can be mapped on a scale from the traditional Roman aristocrat ridiculing Greek learning as irrelevant to the *nobilis* who has fully incorporated *paideia* into an elite Roman environment. Crassus, Cicero's main actor in *De oratore*, oscillates conspicuously between being a Roman Socrates and an anti-Socrates.⁴²² Cicero reveals at crucial junctures in his dialogue (through the voice of Crassus) that his own project seeks to rectify a disaster that Socrates had brought about: the rupture of philosophy and oratory (3.56-62).⁴²³ The sorry outcome of this separation is that two types of teachers have developed – those for philosophy and those for oratory, which Cicero deems particularly absurd as Socrates himself had been a brilliant speaker. He possessed *prudencia*, *acumen*, *venustas*, *subtilitas*, *eloquentia*, *varietas*, and *copia* (3.60). The development of Cicero's ideal Roman education, of which Crassus is the embodiment, serves to reverse the split and reunite philosophical wisdom with practical, oratorical experience. In Cicero's view, the sons of Tiberius Gracchus the Elder have gone perilously astray in practising brilliant oratory without ethical grounding: *eius filii deserti et omnibus vel naturae vel doctrinae praesidiis ad dicendum parati [...] ista praeclara gubernatrice, ut ais, civitatum eloquentia rem publicam dissipaverunt* (1.38: 'His sons, on the other hand, were accomplished speakers and equipped for speaking with all the instruments that talent and instruction can offer [...], they shattered the State by what you maintain is a splendid guide of communities, by eloquence').⁴²⁴

Thus, Crassus' evolution corresponds well with the trajectory from philosophy-as-play to philosophy as a powerful intellectual basis of Roman mores, which is the serious message Cicero seeks to drive home at the end of his dialogue. Yet, the Plautine background of verbal games and meta-drama accompanies the new discourse of Greek philosophy in a Roman environment across the text. Not only are the reiterations at salient transitional points in the narrative that the conversation was held during the games strongly reminiscent of Plautus'

⁴²⁰ LPW 1996: 87 confirm that it is only book three that stands out for its serious and idealist tone.

⁴²¹ Cf. Hall 1994. LPN 1985: 183, who diagnose a development from a Platonic mode of philosophy (thesis-antithesis) under the shades of the plane tree in book one to an Aristotelian mode of stand-alone speeches in books two and three delivered while walking and governed by an underlying consensus of all the interlocutors.

⁴²² *De or.* 3.17-18; Cicero's written record of Crassus' swan song (3.2-6) parallels Socrates' last words in Plato's *Phaedo*, cf. Gunderson 2000: 210-14.

⁴²³ Most poignantly put by Cicero as *discidium [...] quasi linguae atque cordis* in 3.61.

⁴²⁴ Zetzel 2022: 159 emphasises the significance of the Gracchi brothers in Cicero's conception as dangerous harbingers of a state ruined by aristocrats with rhetorical training but no moral foundation in the *mos maiorum*.

aesthetic technique, but there is also a knowing second-order-awareness in Cicero's artistic design. Just like Plautus' figures routinely enjoy talking for talking's sake without propelling the plot forward in any meaningful way, Cicero reports the otiose ramblings of his cast of aristocrats at Tusculum while relentlessly taunting Greek loquacity. No doubt, long-windedness in speech and overly abstract conversations are systematically othered as Greek vices, e.g., 1.102: *mihi nunc vos [...] tamquam alicui Graeculo otioso et loquaci et fortasse docto atque erudito quaestiunculam [...] ponitis?* ('Are you treating me like one of those idle and jabbering little Greeks – learned and well-read as they may be – posing me a trivial question?').⁴²⁵

There is, however, a second layer to the constant scoffing of Greeklings in *De oratore*. Later authors testify that Cicero himself was lampooned by his detractors as *Graeculus*.⁴²⁶ Beside the obvious attempt to defuse this criticism, there are instances where he intimates that Plautus-like *ludi* can be relished for their own sake as pure enjoyment. Caesar Strabo, who offers the bizarrely technical treatment on different types of humour in book two, seems to be tasked specifically with self-conscious playfulness.⁴²⁷ After one of Crassus' usual evasions to talk Greek theory, he wittily retorts: *haec ipsa recusatio disputationis disputatio quaedam fuit mihi quidem periucunda* (2.26: 'For this protest against a discussion has, to me at least, itself been a rather pleasant discussion'). The newcomers Strabo and Catulus evidently seek to participate in the conversations because they crave the 'edutainment' that the strange sight of a philosophising and lecturing Crassus provides.⁴²⁸

The debt to Plautus' *ludi* is not just a fanciful analogy. There is clear evidence that dramatic models, and in the years 56 and 55 BCE especially Plautus, were sources that Cicero drew upon across his *oeuvre*. The inspiration of Plautus' *palliata* for his speech *Pro Caelio* of 56 BCE, in a lawsuit which coincided with the *Ludi Megalenses* in April that year, has been compellingly analysed.⁴²⁹ In letters written in the same year as Cicero's first major philosophical dialogue, imagery borrowed from the stage is equally pervasive, and *ludus* is a concept that is intriguingly prominent. 55 BCE was also the year in which Pompey's theatre was inaugurated with a massive spectacle of shows that blended Greco-Roman myth, drama,

⁴²⁵ The entire chapter constitutes a tirade against useless theoretical gobbledygook that the Greeks are so fond of. This culminates in 1.105: *Graeci alicuius cotidianam loquacitatem sine usu neque ex scholis cantilenam*. The other passages mobilising this discourse of Greek garrulousness are 1.214; 2.21; 2.76; 2.160; 2.361; 3.142; 3.185.

⁴²⁶ Dio Cass. 46.18.1 and Plut. *Cic.* 5.2.

⁴²⁷ Zetzel 2022: 84 n. 21 describes the lecture on humour as a parody that is in itself a joke on the dry handbook-tradition of rhetoric which systematises even the most trivial subjects.

⁴²⁸ Griffin 1994: 690 portrays Cicero's educational trip to Greece as both edification and entertainment without using this term.

⁴²⁹ Leigh 2004b adds substantially to earlier interpretations that have seen Cicero rivalling concurrent entertainment at the *ludi* by casting the personnel of his defence in comic roles. He teases out the various Plautine echoes, in particular his discourse of play (323-6).

and political self-promotion.⁴³⁰ Cicero affects elitist disdain of the gaudy extravaganza in a letter to M. Marius (*Fam.* 7.1), detailing the various large-scale *ludi* that entertained the masses but only prompted bitter sarcasm from a man of culture such as himself.

The addressee Marius is praised for his decision to leave Rome for his villa, where he could indulge in more cultivated leisure pursuits. With a pinch of salt, Cicero hints at the idea that he himself will act as a teacher of *humanitas* together with likeminded noble peers to counteract the base pleasures of *hoi polloi* that were now rampant in the city: *te ipsum, qui multos annos nihil aliud commentaris, docebo profecto quid sit humaniter vivere* (*Fam.* 7.1.5: ‘then, no question about it, I shall teach you the art of civilized living, to which you have been giving your undivided attention for years!’).⁴³¹ In the letter to Luceius (another product of 55 BCE), Cicero also invokes drama in his attempt to persuade his addressee to write a more captivating account of his consulship than the dull annalistic history he is wont to produce: *ut a continentibus tuis scriptis, in quibus perpetuam rerum gestarum historiam complecteris, secernas hanc quasi fabulam rerum eventorumque nostrorum* (*Fam.* 5.12.6: ‘that you set my story apart from the main stream of your work, in which you embrace events in their historical sequence – this drama, one may call it, of what I did and experienced’). What is more, Cicero is not only arguing for a narrativisation that follows the template of drama (*quasi fabulam*), but also integrates the humorous tone of comedy into his letters.⁴³²

His fondness for quoting early Roman poets as examples of a specific language use, a historical cultural practice, and to evoke a sense of indispensable Roman learning which he shares with his *amici*, are well known.⁴³³ While Cicero generally seems to have set himself apart from his contemporary intellectual giant Varro in his preference for citations from Terence rather than Plautus, it is significant that in 60 BCE Cicero had been gifted the library of Servius Clodius, a Plautus aficionado, who was a close relative of Cicero’s friend L. Papirius Paetus.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Cf. Erasmo 2020. He contends that Pompey sought to restage his triple triumph of 61 BCE in the newly completed theatre by incorporating a production of Accius’ *Clytemnestra* and the *Trojan Horse* by Livius Andronicus or Naevius, which enabled Pompey to style himself as both Alexander the Great and Agamemnon.

⁴³¹ Rawson 1975: 132 gives context to this letter, stressing Pompey and Caesar’s strengthened dominance after the elections in 55 BCE, which left Cicero distraught about a return to republican order.

⁴³² Wilcox 2017 *passim*. For humour in the letter to Luceius, see Kenty 2022.

⁴³³ Schierl 2015 gives an example of Cicero elevating Pacuvius to the position of a moral authority over and against his Greek models. Kenty 2022: 56 singles out Papirius Paetus, Caelius, and Trebatius Testa as epistolary correspondents, with whom Cicero engages in congenial banter. Fundamental for Cicero’s quotations of early Latin poets is Shackleton Bailey 1983; now more extensively Čulík-Baird 2022; see also Ferri 2013 and Hanses 2020 for Cicero’s reception of Plautus.

⁴³⁴ Čulík-Baird 2022: 155–72. Plautus is, after Ennius, the second-most-quoted poet in Varro’s *LL*. Cicero quotes Plautus only five times, four of which are from Plaut. *Trin*. Terence is quoted forty times. The explicit references of Plautus in *De or.* are found in 2.39 and 3.45. For the library gift, see Čulík-Baird 2022: 155 n. 5. Servius Clodius, who according to Cicero could easily distinguish a genuine from a spurious Plautus verse (*Fam.* 9.16.4), was the son-in-law of Aelius Stilo, a vital figure in the inception of scholarship on early Roman poets in the republic. His

Moreover, the etymological studies of scholars such as Aelius Stilo (both Cicero's and Varro's teacher) and Varro into the relationship between linguistic representation and reality have also spawned reflections on the paradoxical semantics of *ludus*. Aelius Stilo is in fact our first evidence for the etymological explanation of the central ambiguity between 'ludus as play' and 'ludus as school' – a glaring contradiction to Roman ears given the harsh nature of ordinary school instruction. Resorting to an explanation through opposites (*kat'antiphrasin*), Stilo states *ludus* means school exactly because schools are totally devoid of play: *ludus quia sit longissime a lusu*.⁴³⁵

In light of Cicero's sparing but highly purposeful use of Plautus, the quote in *De or.* 2.39 is much more than mere learned ornament to garnish upper-class conversation. Here, Catulus imitates the Plautine slave Stasimus while cutting short Antonius' disquisitions: "*non enim possum quin exclamem*" *ut ait ille in Trinummus* ("You see, I can't help crying out," as that character in the *Trinummus* says). In Plautus' original, this is a highly meta-dramatic scene, with Stasimus casting Lysiteles' statements as pure comedy set to win a theatrical prize: *non enim possum quin exclamem: eugae, eugae, Lysiteles, πάλιν! / facile palmam habes: hic uictust, uicit tua comoedia* (*Trin.* 705-6: 'I really can't help shouting it out: bravo, bravo, Lysiteles, encore! You easily have the palm: this chap is beaten, your comedy beat him').⁴³⁶ The function of these lines is now exactly parallel in *De oratore* even if the circumstances have changed drastically. Catulus comments on his interruption of Antonius by echoing a meta-dramatic quip of the trickster in *Trinummus*. By alluding to this model of playful meta-communication (cf. the *ludi* within the *ludi*, here signalled by the generic tag *tua comoedia*), Cicero creates a space where aristocrats can playfully entertain unconventional ideas and toy with improper modes of self-expression, imitating social agents and communicative behaviour that are far below their station.

Even in Crassus' definitive lecture in the final book, Cicero has his protagonist quote from tragic and comic drama to underscore how a broad knowledge base in Roman verse helps the ideal orator to buttress his arguments with apposite quotes. To conjure up a happy atmosphere, Crassus recommends quotation from comedy: *sed sibi cum tetulit coronam ob*

studies about the authenticity of the plays of Plautus was carried on by his pupil Varro, whose Plautine canon we have inherited.

⁴³⁵ Festus later adopts this idea: *ludum dicimus in quo minime luditur*, cf. Laes 2021: 121. On Varro's self-fashioning as a refined *bellus homo* distinguished by his literary learning and elegant speech, see Krostenko 2013: 136-9. He compares Varro's Menippean satires to the world of Catullus' polymetrics and the Ciceronian villa dialogues, with the difference that for Cicero cultural capital had to serve political practice whereas for Catullus and Varro it seems to have been a self-sufficient ideal. For Varronian scholarship and the Stoic background of his etymological reasoning, see Zetzel 2018: 36.

⁴³⁶ The passage is discussed in Gunderson 2000: 196.

coligandas nuptias/tibi ferebat, cum simulabat se sibi iam facis dare,/tum ad te ludibunda docte et delicate detulit (3.219: ‘But when she brought herself the bridal wreath to tie the knot of marriage, she was bringing it to you; and when she feigned that she was giving herself the bridal torch, she carried it to you in fine and elegant jest.’). The source of this quote is unknown, but the language (*detulit*; *simulabat*; *ludibunda*; *docte*; *delicate*) and the scenario can easily be imagined as Plautine. The polyptoton of forms of *ferre* and the cognate *deferre*, the references to feigning (*simulabat*), play (*ludibunda*), the idiom of intellectual and aesthetic sophistication (*docte*; *delicate*), and the motif of women acting as the tricksters – especially in relation to marriage rites – all echo the comic universe of Plautus (e.g., the botched marriage rite in *Casina*). In sum, Plautus surfaces in key moments in *De oratore*, but a different model proved similarly fruitful for a representation of playful discourse, in particular in the idealised aristocratic environment Cicero was envisioning. Fantham has made the surprising finding that only one example of the jokes in Strabo’s lecture on humour is taken from comedy.⁴³⁷ She surmises that comic wit was regarded as slave terrain – which makes Cicero’s opting for Lucilius as an upper-class archetype of play all the more cogent.

3.3) Cicero’s Lucilius: reinventing the satirist

In Cicero’s *oeuvre*, Lucilius is quoted the most in *De oratore*.⁴³⁸ Analogous to Cicero’s co-option of Plautus, Lucilius serves him as a generic example of playful speech (cf. *ludus ac sermones*) and as a source of banter that is situated within the elite rather than among witty subalterns.⁴³⁹ Corresponding to Cicero’s pedagogical goals, Lucilian satire’s ribald and moralising aspects are, however, overwritten by a discourse of *urbanitas*. A letter to Papirius Paetus illustrates how Cicero liked to commingle different figures from the past that served his purpose, casting them as recognisable types. In *Fam.* 9.15.2, Lucilius is listed alongside the witty *praeco* Granius as an icon of a bygone era of homegrown Roman humour unmatched by the Athenians, an era to which he wanted Crassus and Laelius to belong as well: *itaque te cum video, omnis mihi Granios, omnis Lucilios, vere ut dicam, Crassos quoque et Laelios videre videor. moriar si praeter te quemquam reliquum habeo in quo possim imaginem antiquae et*

⁴³⁷ Fantham 2004: 19.

⁴³⁸ In 1.72; 2.25; 2.253; 3.86; 3.171, cf. Čulík-Baird 2022: 52, and 262-4 for a useful overview of all quotes.

⁴³⁹ Lucilius is as instrumental as other pre-Ciceronian poets for the crafting of a philosophical idiom in Latin. See the example of *Acad.* 2.94, which Cicero also mentions in a letter to Atticus and discusses with Varro. He was looking for a fitting Latin translation of the technical term ἐποχή and made a find in Lucilius, cf. Čulík-Baird 2022: 151-2.

vernaculae festivitatis agnoscere ('So when I see you, I imagine I have Granius, Lucilius, and their like – indeed, to say the truth, Crassus and Laelius and their like – all before my eyes. Confound me if I have anyone left but you in whom I can recognize the image of the good old home-bred humour').⁴⁴⁰ Cicero lauds Paetus for displaying the exact same kind of humour in his letters, a humour that distinguishes Cicero's model ancestors Crassus and Laelius, from whom a direct line leads to the correspondence between the friends Cicero and Paetus.⁴⁴¹

Cicero's substitution of his non-existent upper-class pedigree with a creative but credible reconstruction of republican exemplars is a well-treated topic in scholarship.⁴⁴² In short, he is concerned with the invention of a 'genealogy' of both the content of his theories and their practical instantiation in the republican past. Protagonists like Scaevola and Crassus are designed in such a way as to showcase Cicero's ideal elite character traits, which always align with his own – conservative, erudite, witty. Beside their role as outstanding republican politicians, however, Cicero also marshals his *exempla* as a set of 'cultural' models to emulate and outshine.⁴⁴³ This is manifested in a story about Laelius and Scipio Aemilianus, who are dragged down from their exemplary heights into the devalued world of play, as discussed in chapter 2.2 (*De or.* 2.22: *ad omnem animi remissionem ludumque descendere*). Here, Cicero fashions a lineage in his mould that strikingly matches the agenda of his early philosophical dialogues: Scaevola provides the link between the generation of Scipio and Laelius, who will become the protagonists of *De Legibus*; the narrated events are related in an unbroken line from Scaevola (*solet narrare Scaevola*) through the speaker (his real-life son-in-law) Crassus (*ex socero meo audivi*). The integration of Lucilius into this set of *nobiles* makes sense insofar as they were of the same generation, Lucilius had acquired a reputation for telling impudent jokes

⁴⁴⁰ Cicero's elitist linguistic purism also features in *De or.* 3.44-5, where Laelia, Crassus' mother-in law is hailed as an icon of Latinity: *vox Romani generis urbisque propria [...] hanc sequamur, neque solum rusticam asperitatem, sed etiam peregrinam insolentiam fugere discamus*. Cicero asserts she sounds just as uncorrupted from foreign influences as the early republican poets Plautus and Naevius (*ut Plautum mihi aut Naevium videar audire*). Further Willi 2010 on the ideological underpinnings of Cicero's elitist 'language policy' and Caesar's populist reaction to it in *De Analogia*; also Krostenko 2001: 223-4 on the Asianist-Atticist debate and the accusation that Cicero was too much of a stylist, which militated against ideals of plain, authoritative male speech unadorned by stylistic niceties; Dugan 2005: 161 and Corbeil 2001: 278-80 elucidate the implications of gender ideologies on questions of style.

⁴⁴¹ Analyses of the passage in Chahoud 2010; Wilcox 2017: 233. In *Brut.* 172, Cicero sets Roman humour apart from its Attic and Gallic counterparts.

⁴⁴² On Cicero's construction of his own ancestors as a compensation for his personal lack of a distinguished noble lineage, see Steel 2005: 36; Gildenhard 2013: 258, van der Blom 2010: 151-74. Van der Blom 2010: 294-334 proposes a differentiation of Cicero's role models into historical and personal. Her focus is almost exclusively on political *exempla*.

⁴⁴³ I conceive of this as a broad set of predecessors and their characteristics, against which Cicero could define his own agenda. Plato the great stylist, producer of dialogues, chronicler of Socrates' philosophy, Isocrates the orator-philosopher and teacher, etc. See O'Connor 2015, who comments on Socrates' instruction method of making himself into an object of imitation and emulation, thus combining theory and practice. This provided a powerful touchstone for Cicero.

about the most powerful, and he left texts recording exactly that.⁴⁴⁴ Cicero had no qualms about producing tendentious images of the republican past, and for *De oratore*, this project covered apart from the exploitation of elder statesmen's *auctoritas* also any tales he stumbled upon in his scholarly investigations that portrayed these memorable characters in a playful manner.⁴⁴⁵

On the way, Lucilius was reshaped into an *exemplum*-worthy figure in his own right. The exemplary quality Cicero ascribes to Lucilius already comes to the fore in his first appearance in *De or.* 1.72: *ut solebat Lucilius saepe dicere, homo tibi subiratus, mihi propter eam ipsam causam minus quam volebat familiaris, sed tamen et doctus et perurbanus* ('what Gaius Lucilius often used to say – he had some hard feelings toward you, and for that reason was not as close to me as he wished, but he was still a learned and very cultured man'). This is Crassus addressing his father-in-law Scaevola with a saying of Lucilius, a figure again deeply intertwined with the lives of Cicero's fictionalised ancestors. Cicero hints at their personal entanglement, suggesting that Lucilius sought Crassus' friendship without success as he had incurred Scaevola's ill feeling. As the good son-in-law, Crassus puts the satiric writer in his place (*minus quam volebat familiaris*) but concedes his redeeming features that make him a worthy member of the club (*doctus et perurbanus*).

Then, he fuses Lucilius' purported wisdom with the opinion of his protagonist Crassus (*ut solebat*): *sic sentio neminem esse in oratorum numero habendum, qui non sit omnibus iis artibus, quae sunt libero dignae, perpolitus* (*De or.* 1.73: 'He said that no one should be ranked an orator who is not thoroughly accomplished in all arts that befit a gentleman'). The translators fail to connect the phrases *ut solebat C. Lucilius saepe dicere* with *sic sentio* ('like Lucilius' opinion, so is mine'), which introduces Crassus' words as a saying Lucilius might already have uttered. Through this addition, Cicero slyly links a written statement that perfectly fits his own agenda with a memorable expression supposedly going back to Lucilius, an intellectual of a more pristine period of Roman history. He thus insinuates that Lucilius used to make the same statements as Cicero himself would eventually articulate in writing.

Cicero's construction of a tradition and Lucilius' transformation *en route* are palpable. Since Lucilius' notoriety as an acerbic critic of upper-class foibles could make him a discomforting presence in Cicero's courteous villa milieu, he is reinvented as an evocative exemplar of urbane refinement that is in this case even endowed with a notably serious, Ciceronian message. When he makes his first appearance in *De oratore*, Lucilius is

⁴⁴⁴ See also the enumeration of jokes grounded in lexical ambiguity, one of them uttered by Lucilius about Scipio Africanus (*De or.* 2.253: *ut illud Africani, quod est apud Lucilium*).

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. the assessment of Lucilius' importance for Cicero as a historical source and a storehouse for representations of the aristocracy at play in Čulík-Baird 2022: 202-10.

instantaneously roped in for a viewpoint that flawlessly chimes with Crassus' maximalist educational principles: The *orator perfectus* needs training in all the arts, but only those which are deemed appropriate for a man of high standing. As Lucilius becomes moulded according to Cicero's *paideia*-ideal as *doctus et perurbanus*, the tradition of aristocratic play can originate from a potential misfit in elite peer groups who is then fittingly furnished with all the required qualities to participate in their exemplary communication.

More excerpts corroborate the finding that Cicero's insertion of play into the world of his constructed aristocratic ancestors through the figure of Lucilius is carefully planned and strategic. Tellingly, the characterisation of Lucilius in *De or.* 2.25 is almost an exact copy of the one above, which increases the tags' memorability through repetition: *ut C. Lucilius homo doctus et perurbanus dicere solebat*. Once more, Lucilius receives the ideally learned aristocrat's epithets. Noteworthy is again the recurrence of the verb *solere*, which gives the quotes a habitual tinge. Cicero's rewriting of Lucilius knowingly inaugurates a new tradition which renders Lucilius an aristocratic wit. In Cicero's overcompensating fabrication, all the unwieldy aspects of Lucilius had to be trimmed so he could become an *exemplum* like Crassus, Scaevola, Laelius, and others. Churning out memorable, witty aphorisms that match Ciceronian teaching all too well is then what Lucilius was typically imagined to be good at.

Seen in this light, the quip of Lucilius that he wanted his ideal readership to be neither too learned nor too uncultivated (*De or.* 2.25: *neque se ab indoctissimis neque a doctissimis legi velle*) because they would either not understand him at all or be too knowledgeable and threaten to criticise him contains a punchline that accords with Cicero's vision of ironic humour. It permits just the right mix between mild subversion and compliance with elite decorum. In the end, Crassus asserts: *malo enim non intellegi orationem meam quam reprehendi* (*De or.* 2.25: 'For I'd rather be misunderstood than criticized'). Crassus here deconstructs the pose Cicero seeks to cultivate among the nobility as a sham. The joke plays with the idea that the text's envisaged all-round Roman *doctrina* is primarily a puffed-up posture designed to avert the critique of those who know better. To counteract this blow, Cicero couples the jest with an implicit praise of his listeners who are being cast as the intelligentsia whose deep understanding of upper-class courtesies allows them a shared moment of cutting self-irony.

Another three-line-citation from Lucilius' satires in book three is replete with play terminology: *in quo lepide soceri mei persona lusit is, qui elegantissime id facere potuit, Lucilius* (3.171: 'here are some playful and witty lines by Lucilius (who could do such things with particular elegance), put in the mouth of my father-in-law'). This is Crassus as he recounts his father-in-law Scaevola making fun of Albucius (probably at a court trial): *in Albucium*

inludens (3.171). But he does not spare his son-in-law Crassus either: *in me quidem lusit ille, ut solet* (3.172: ‘But he was just making fun of me, as usual’). The complex layering of statements underscores why Cicero regarded Lucilius as such an appealing paradigm for his project in *De oratore*. The mentioning of *soceri mei persona* reveals Lucilius’ talent at *ethopoiia*, which Cicero could draw upon for the portrayal of the circle around Crassus. Furthermore, the emphasis on Lucilius’ stylistic accomplishments (*lepide; elegantissime*) mirrors Cicero’s cultural ideals, echoing Plautus’ register of aesthetic evaluation. The verb *lusit* appears here as the social practice of mocking someone’s rhetorical style, accompanied by the display of superior verbal and intellectual skills (cf. the hexameter lines taken from Lucilius which derides Albucius’ oratory: *quam lepide lexis compostae* [...]; *ne rhetoricoterus to seis*). Impersonated by Lucilius, Scaevola is hence presented as an emblem of the effective use of wit to poke fun at relatives and aristocratic rivals alike. Yet again, the phrase *ut solet* marks this as a trademark feature, in this instance so ambiguous that it could refer to both Lucilius and Scaevola who almost merge into one person. Cicero has therefore constructed a line of transmission from Lucilius, the originator of a kind of character imitation with a playful intent (*soceri mei persona lusit*) which then comes to be adopted by the oldest aristocrat Scaevola, who had opened the Tusculan play talk on day one.

After anchoring verbal play in the republican past, Cicero transposes it into the realm of aristocratic *otium*, where the intensifying and destructive political strife of his era may be temporarily suspended, and elite men are freed from some of the strictures of official *gravitas*. Hence, the work Cicero does to Rome’s discourse of play does not only register on the lexical surface by way of his exploitation of the whole semantic range of *ludus/ludere*, but is also appropriated as a set of practices which the fictional interlocutors display and, on a third level, which Cicero demands from his ideal readers.⁴⁴⁶ Reading *De Oratore* also constitutes a habitus training in the performance of *urbanitas*.⁴⁴⁷ Following the theoretical precepts that his aristocrats lay out in the dialogue, the ideal Roman teacher is a model to imitate, so that the lack of closure at the end of day three (the discussion is merely interrupted by dusk) entices the readers to carry on conversing in this vein in their own lives.⁴⁴⁸ The textual and the extra-textual

⁴⁴⁶ On Cicero’s intended readership, see especially Murphy 1998. He is clear about Cicero picking his readers for their high social standing (505), and his tailoring a piece of writing like a persuasive speech to his audiences (501). Hall 1994: 212-3 remarks that most readers would have had no personal contact with the orators of 91 BCE that Cicero models to his liking; see also Wisse 2002a: 377 on the relative transparency of Cicero’s historical fictions to contemporary readers. Baraz 2012: 186 shows how Cicero’s prologues construct a model reader. Bishop 2019: 304-8 elucidates his general success with his readership at canonising himself after the giants of classical Attic prose.

⁴⁴⁷ Rühl 2018: 262-70 investigates Cicero’s urbane speech as a marker of in- and out-group in his letters.

⁴⁴⁸ On the lack of closure, see Müller 2012: 48.

world are thus intricately intertwined, with the latter becoming a site for the continuation of Cicero's distinct style of conversation.⁴⁴⁹

Scholars have been quick to reify a so-called *sermo urbanus* that late republican *nobiles* would engage in during their prized time off duty.⁴⁵⁰ While they fail to categorise this as a Ciceronian construct, these accounts also fail to gesture to Lucilius' satirical *sermo*, a Roman template for Cicero to build on beyond Plato's dialogues. Right after the scene has been set at the beginning of the dialogue, Crassus makes a start, immediately waxing lyrical about the power of eloquence to function as a civilising force in human cultures (1.30-1). Then, Crassus exhorts his companions to forget about forum, court-benches, rostra, and curia, and instead embark on a gracious, well-informed conversation during their *villeggiatura*: *quid esse potest in otio aut iucundius at magis proprium humanitatis quam sermo facetus ac nulla in re rudis?* (1.32: 'what can be more pleasant or more properly human than to be able to engage in elegant conversation and show oneself a stranger to no subject?'). Cicero's philosophical dialogues can be described as an experiment in the production of a new kind of *sermo* – one with a Greek philosophical overlay that aims to move beyond the constrictions of the poetic *sermo* of Lucilian satire.⁴⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, the verb *ludere* figures frequently as an act of mockery. Known from the battle of wits between comic *servi* and *adulescentes* and Lucilius' commentary on verbal duels between members of the upper class, Cicero's genteel villa discussions do feature derision, but predominantly in the form of remembered instances or in a notably mild manner. Lucilian verbal aggressiveness is transmuted into elegant badinage which never threatens to fracture an underlying aristocratic unanimity about mockery being a normal part of rhetorical competition in the forum, law courts, and senate. In the process, wit, irony, and verbal play come to function as distinctive features of a close-knit, intimately related ruling class (even through family ties) whose profound coherence and harmony is, at least in Cicero's idealised reimagining of aristocratic cohesion, never to be called into question. In fact, the new level of sophistication that Cicero elaborates with regard to wit can be seen as a unifying mechanism that channels the disintegrating dynamics of elite competition into socially cohesive modes. As

⁴⁴⁹ *Fam.* 1.9.23 reveals Cicero's hope that *De Or.* may be of use to the son of his addressee Lentulus Spinther.

⁴⁵⁰ Narducci 1997: 30, e.g., catalogues the characteristics of this type of speech, which he traces back to Plato: surprise, improvisation, lack of systematicity and proportion, digressions. LP 1981: 70 recognise the transformations of this practice in a Roman context, but relate the back-and-forth arguments between Crassus, Antonius, and their friends to Cicero's academic scepticism – a stance that prefers suspension of judgement to the obstinacy to logically deduce the truth and hence suits the status-conscious Roman culture.

⁴⁵¹ Cicero's redefinition of *sermo* is beyond the scope of this study, but may warrant further research, especially as an elaboration of Lucilian satire, which would then be picked up again by Horace.

long as the demarcating lines set by *auctoritas* are respected, jeering and ridicule are tolerable and do not disrupt the concord of Rome's most eminent families.

Following the lines set out by Cicero, competitive play should be a type of intra-elite communication that encompasses power struggles within a frame of conviviality and, vitally, communal moral standards. In the courts, for instance, the playful banter exhibited and practised in leisure time interactions may help to put down one's opponents and impress the judges: *multo maiorem partem sententiarum sale tuo et lepore et politissimis facetiis pellexisti, cum et illud nimium acumen inluderet* [...] (1.243: 'you won by far the greatest part of the jury's votes by seducing them with your charming wit and your refined jokes, for instance when you poked fun at the excessive ingenuity [...]').⁴⁵² This display of Crassus' sharp wit alluded to here occurred during a trial (*causa Curiana*) in which Crassus was facing off against Q. Scaevola Pontifex, another member of the Scaevola family beside the immediately present Q. Mucius Scaevola Augur, Crassus' father-in-law (1.242: *huius optimi viri*) and the mentioned P. Mucius Scaevola, Scaevola Pontifex' father (1.242: *Scaevolae* [...] *libellis*). Banter runs in the family, according to Cicero's vision, and the occasionally acrimonious debates in the law courts are but two leading Roman *nobiles* expertly playing a game which brings them fame in the city but does not result in irreversibly severed ties between illustrious families. When the legal battles have been fought, one can meet again in the villa and enjoy one another's company and intellectual like-mindedness.

The Scaevola and Crassus featuring in Cicero's dialogue are hence also engaged in placid banter, which allows his characters to express criticism of elite peers without tipping over into uncompromising aggression.⁴⁵³ Telling the different family members of the Scaevola and the Crassus line apart is not always easy, and one may assume that Cicero designed his dialogue deliberately in this way to emphasise the point that the transmission of knowledge should ideally be preserved as a tradition within noble families. In 1.240, Antonius adduces more famous legal cases, one involving a tussle between P. Crassus and Ser. Galba, the former being adopted into the Crassus family after being born the son of P. Mucius Scaevola, the legal expert and cousin of the interlocutor of *De oratore* (1.170).⁴⁵⁴ At this point, the family links are even made explicit, and Galba's rhetorical techniques of playfully and richly illustrating his

⁴⁵² The remainder of this chapter is stacked with the buzzwords of Cicero's refined urbanity: *acute, ridicule, facete, summa festivitate et venustate*.

⁴⁵³ P. Mucius Scaevola has registered before in the texts as a legal specialist and lover of games, cf. *De or.* 1.217: *licet ista ratione dicamus pila bene et duodecim scriptis ludere proprium esse iuris civilis, quoniam utrumque eorum P. Mucius optime fecerit*; 1.166: *cum in campum properaret et ridens et stomachans P. Scaevola*. Cicero gladly seems to have made use of such personal information about republican *nobiles* to furnish his troupe of play exemplars.

⁴⁵⁴ LPN 1985: 40 offer a pedigree of the Licinii Crassi.

arguments fit right into the desired outcome Cicero seeks to achieve with his historical *tour de force* of the art of rhetoric (1.240: *Galba autem adludens varie et copiose*).

This is further exemplified by 2.188: *haec sunt illa, quae me ludens Crassus modo flagitabat, cum a me divinitus tractari solere diceret [...]* ('Such are the things Crassus was pressing me for just now, making fun of me and saying that I always handle them with brilliance'). Here, Antonius suggests that the speeches of the previous one and a half books that had largely been guided by Crassus and Antonius contain just the abovementioned type of banter as the two stake out opposing argumentative positions. Crassus supposedly mocked Antonius for not propounding theoretical guidelines on how to handle judges earlier in their conversation. Crassus' mockery (*ludens*) and praise of Antonius (*divinitus tractari*) are, however, side by side, which emphasises that banter within Cicero's ideal aristocratic communication is a mutually enjoyable game that unites more by the communal adherence to the rules than it separates.

What Cicero's model *nobiles* enact in practice later also receives its theoretical treatment in Caesar Strabo's speech on humour. The verb *ludere* designates again the act of ridiculing an opponent in court (2.222):

Sed ut in Scaevola continuit ea Crassus atque in illo altero genere, in quo nulli aculei contumeliarum inerant, causam illam disputationemque lusit, sic in Bruto quem oderat et quem dignum contumelia iudicabat, utroque genere pugnavit.

But while Crassus suppressed these in dealing with Scaevola, and made fun of his opponent's case and argumentation by means of the other kind of humour (which employs no stinging insults), in fighting Brutus he used both kinds; he hated the man, and thought he deserved to be insulted.

After recording some of Crassus' most memorable performances in his official capacity as a senator and prosecutor in court, Cicero metaphorically merges the spheres of court pleading and warfare (*aculei; pugnavit*), highlighting how the act of mockery (*lusit*) can be used as a powerful tool to get the better of one's adversaries. The ideal orator, so he implies, ought to command different types of humour (*utroque genere*) like weapons and employ them competently at the right occasion. Additionally, he should be able to control his impulses and not tear opponents apart indiscriminately: P. Scaevola (the referent of *in illo*) is exposed to a gentler treatment (*nulli aculei contumeliarum inerant*), in parallel with the scene which featured the *causa Curiana* in book one. Strabo's theoretical disquisition merges with earlier practical examples offered by Crassus and Antonius, now explicating how differing levels of aggressiveness in humour can be modulated by the supreme orator depending on context and

opponent. Accordingly, because Brutus was hated by Crassus, he is hit with the full force of Crassus' rhetorical weapons (*sic in Bruto quem oderat [...], utroque genere pugnavit*).

Ludere as a social practice can be understood as a more moderate form of derision, which the ideal orator needs to master alongside more vicious speech types.⁴⁵⁵ Transferred to Cicero's villa-setting, this means that the jovial banter exchanged among aristocratic companions functions as a suitable training ground for humorous communication of all sorts later to be put to the test in the legitimate arenas of forum and senate where upper-class struggles for dominance and prestige played themselves out in earnest. Interestingly, Strabo's classification of jokes is later picked up again in earnest by Crassus: *et extenuatio et huic adiuncta inlusio a praeceptis Caesaris non abhorrens* (3.202: 'There is also disparagement, and akin to this, mockery employed in a way that is consistent with Caesar's precepts'). Listing effective figures of thought the orator can apply in speeches, Cicero registers *inlusio* now as a technical term, defined and illustrated earlier by Caesar Strabo in his lecture on humour. Cicero has created his own tradition, having added humour as an essential component to the orator's toolkit and now quoting himself as the new authority in rhetorical theory.

The outcome of Cicero surpassing Greek theory is consistent with another sphere in which mockery is often represented in the world of *De oratore* – the relationship with the Greeks and their heritage of rhetorical thought. Starting with Antonius' stay in Greece where he interacted with Greek philosophers, the lampooning of rhetorical teaching via common handbooks runs through the entire work. Intriguingly, the otherworldliness of many Greek rhetorical precepts is first ridiculed by a Greek himself, the academic sceptic Charmadas: *ipsa vero praecepta sic includere solebat* (1.87).⁴⁵⁶ Charmadas is modelled after an ideal Ciceronian orator, his academic credentials provide a suitable philosophical background for Cicero, and Antonius' rhetorical elegance can receive a Greek coating.⁴⁵⁷ In Cicero's design, it turns out that Antonius, Crassus, and even Scaevola have their own first-hand experience of partaking in intellectual exchanges with Greek thinkers.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ In Strabo's treatment of humour, losing control over one's humorous performance is also considered beyond the pale and unhelpful for a refined orator, cf. *De or.* 2.238: *adhibenda est primum in iocando moderatio [...] ea facillime luduntur quae neque odio magno nec misericordia maxima digna sunt*; also 2.237: *miseros inludi nolunt*.

⁴⁵⁶ Plato's role is more ambivalent. While clearly a model, his invention of a utopian society in the *Politeia* is declassified as a purely theoretical mindgame with no use in real life (*De or.* 1.224).

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. *De or.* 1.84-5: *multo uberius isdem de rebus loquebatur; homo promptus atque omni abundans doctrina et quadam incredibili varietate rerum atque copia*. As Charmadas possesses all the qualities of the Ciceronian model orator, Antonius hints that Charmadas' praise of his rhetorical abilities was probably an instance of *inlusio*; *in altero autem me inludi [...] arbitrabar* (1.91). In 1.47, Charmadas is said to have read Plato's *Gorgias* together with Antonius. His influence on Antonius is therefore considerable so that he is carefully construed as a great orator himself.

⁴⁵⁸ For Antonius *De or.* 1.80-95; Scaevola 1.75; Crassus 1.45-47. Wisse/May 2001: 17 believe Cicero's portrait of Antonius and Crassus' Athens trips. Zetzel 2022: 117, on the other hand, cautions against taking these educational

Another example of the intricate connections Cicero builds between Greek tradition, Roman past, and his own biography is Crassus' mentioning of the little-known Marcellus in 1.57: *haec ego cum ipsis philosophis tum Athenis disserebam. cogebat enim me M. Marcellus hic noster, qui nunc aedilis curulis est et profecto, nisi ludos nunc faceret, huic nostro sermoni interesset* ('All this I personally discussed with the philosophers themselves while I was in Athens, for our friend Marcus Marcellus urged me to do so. He is now serving as curule aedile, and if he were not putting on the games at this moment, he would surely be taking part in our conversation'). Cicero weaves several narrative threads together by linking the setting of the *ludi*, the dynamics of the conversation in 91 BCE, Crassus' experience of interacting with Greek philosophers in Athens, and, by extension, Cicero's real-life educational trip to Greece. As before, a man of high status and dignity such as Crassus needs to be prompted by a younger politician (here the curule aedile Marcellus) to even enter into a dialogue with philosophers, but the memory he has of the interactions feed into his contributions to the conversation in Tusculum. Cicero's construction of a line of ancestors reaching back to the generation of Scipio Aemilianus (the protagonist of *De re publica*) and Scaevola is mindful of conforming to the expected pattern for official Roman sojourns in Greece: Scaevola was praetor in Rhodes in 120 BCE, Antonius had a stay in Athens for a few days before acting as proconsul in Cilicia in 102 BCE, and Crassus visited Greece after his quaestorship in Asia in 111 BCE. In short, the contact of the two older generations of Roman *nobiles* with the realm of Greek philosophy may be authorised only in an official political capacity. Cicero, on the other hand, will visit Greece for a study trip – a novelty of his generation that would lead to further adjustments to Cicero's exploitation of the Greeks for his cultural project.⁴⁵⁹

3.4a) Socrates in Rome: philosophy as aristocratic play

As outlined above, a central task Cicero set for himself in *De oratore* is to normalise the practice of Greek philosophy in an aristocratic Roman environment and supply a theoretical foundation for a rethinking of Rome's societal makeup.⁴⁶⁰ Time and again, he returns to the prejudice that

trips at face value since Cicero is the only source for their existence. The coordination of these *nobiles'* experiences with his own background (esp. their chats with Greek intellectuals) fits the creative nature of his tendentious reconstruction of the republican past all too well.

⁴⁵⁹ LP 1981: 107; In *Brut.* 304-16, he later details his own educational biography.

⁴⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that the opening of the *Phaedrus* already presents an idyllic image of the countryside remote from the buzz of the city, which engenders leisurely philosophy. Overall, the Greek models Cicero was drawing on were manifold, and he used them freely and strategically as they fit his agenda, cf. Leidl 2019: 424, and the résumé in LP 1981: 3 (Hermagoras, Plato, New Academy, Aristotle, Isocrates).

philosophy is nothing but hot air without any concrete benefits in Roman power politics – a notion he seriously refutes. Expanding upon Habinek’s study of satire as aristocratic play (to which the chapter title alludes), I am going to address Cicero’s conceptualisation of philosophy as play to demonstrate that *ludus/ludere* can signify an inconsequential type of speech with preparatory function laying the groundwork for speech acts uttered by holders of *auctoritas* in politically relevant contexts.⁴⁶¹ Habinek’s analysis of *ludus* as a formative stage for the development of elite male power rests on precisely the evolutionary plot Cicero performs with concepts of play in *De oratore*.⁴⁶² What Habinek interprets as a property of the concept that underpins all Roman thought, turns out to be a particular, individual strategy adopted by Cicero. Cicero sought to sway his elite readers’ preconceptions about the role of Greek *paideia* in Rome’s upper-class in a different direction – away from the strict separation of *otium* versus *negotium* and the relegation of learning and aesthetics into a depoliticised realm of leisure to a reformed understanding of *otium* and the activities performed therein as the necessary preparation for responsible political activity. As much as Cicero may present pre-eminent *nobiles* of the not-too distant past at play with each other as giving Greek practices a home amongst Rome’s ruling class, he is chary not to morph them into the ludicrous Greeklings without a sense of Roman realpolitik who were dominating contemporary schools.⁴⁶³

Canonical philosophers such as Plato are treated with greater respect. Cicero leaves several traces for the reader to showcase his indebtedness to Plato on multiple axes.⁴⁶⁴ It is as an exemplar of seriously playful philosophy and as a theorist of education that Plato matters to him in *De oratore*. Scholars have long diagnosed Plato’s deep concern with the connection between state structures and the role of educational institutions in the *Republic* and especially his late work *Laws*.⁴⁶⁵ Concurrently, he worked out an increasingly sophisticated theorisation of play and its relationship with education as he grew older. Here is just one illustrative example from the conversation between the Athenian stranger and Clinias in book 1, here embarking on a definition of *παιδεία*. The Athenian declares:

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Halliwell 1991: 282 for the notion of play in Greek thought as not liable to any practical effects or consequences. He posits a fundamental polarity between playful and consequential laughter which is pervasive in Greek literature.

⁴⁶² Cf. Habinek 2005a and 2005b.

⁴⁶³ For the constant anti-Greek thread running through *De or.*, cf. LP 1981: 141 where they collect all the pertinent passages.

⁴⁶⁴ On Cicero’s use of Plato, see Schütrumpf 1988; Gotter 1994; Schofield 2021a. In a moment of hopelessness, when writing *Att.* 4.6, Cicero weaves three texts by Plato into his letter (*Laws*, 5th and 7th Letter). It is thus also Plato’s biography that Cicero found a stimulating model to think with. Plato was clearly a more wide-rangingly important figure for Cicero than as a mere source of quotes.

⁴⁶⁵ Press 2012: 164; on education in the *Laws* also Patterson 2013; Russon 2013. The *Laws* and the *Republic* were so important that Cicero even copied their titles and latinised them for his other philosophical dialogues in the 50s, *De Legibus* and *De Re Publica*.

[...] φημι τὸν ὁτιοῦν ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἐκ παίδων εὐθὺς μελετᾶν δεῖν παίζοντά τε καὶ σπουδάζοντα ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πράγματος ἐκάστοις προσήκουσιν [...] καὶ (*scil.* χρή) πειρᾶσθαι διὰ τῶν παιδιῶν ἐκεῖσε τρέπειν τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας τῶν παίδων, οἳ ἀφικομένους αὐτοὺς δεῖ τέλος ἔχειν. κεφάλαιον δὲ παιδείας λέγομεν τὴν ὀρθὴν τροφήν, ἣ τοῦ παίζοντος τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς ἔρωτα μάλιστα ἄξει τούτου, ὃ δεήσει γενόμενον ἄνδρ' αὐτὸν τέλειον εἶναι τῆς τοῦ πράγματος ἀρετῆς.

(*Leg.* 1.643b-d)

What I assert is that every man who is going to be good at any pursuit must practise that special pursuit from infancy, by using all the implements of his pursuit both in his play and in his work. [...] So, by means of their games, we should endeavour to turn the tastes and desires of the children in the direction of that object which forms their ultimate goal. First and foremost, education, we say, consists in that right nurture which most strongly draws the soul of the child when at play to a love for that pursuit of which, when he becomes a man, he must possess a perfect mastery.

Instrumentalising play from early childhood on could bring about perfectly fitted citizens, so the Platonic story goes. This thought experiment in social engineering with the aid of child's play is particularly pointed in Greek due to the common root of the central concepts: παῖς, παίζω, παιδιά, παιδεία.⁴⁶⁶ Beyond such conceptual reflection, Plato also thematises the genre of the written philosophical dialogue as a form of self-indulgent play, for instance in the *Phaedrus*, a work of great significance to *De oratore*. At the dialogue's end, Socrates asserts that written treatises are feeble imitations of real interactions and a mere play for the philosopher, which is still far superior to simpler pleasures and can inspire avid students to continue the practice after reading:

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ · ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ἐν γράμμασι κήπους, ὡς ἔοικε, παιδιᾶς χάριν σπερεῖ [...] ὅταν <δὲ> ἄλλοι παιδιαῖς ἄλλαις χρῶνται [...] ἀντὶ τούτων οἷς λέγω παίζων διάξει./ ΦΑΙΔΡΟΣ · Παγκάλην λέγεις παρὰ φαύλην παιδιάν, ὃ Σώκρατες, τοῦ ἐν λόγοις δυναμένου παίζειν, δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἄλλων ὧν λέγεις πέρι μυθολογοῦντα.

(*Phdr.* 276d-e)

Sokrates: But he will sow and write the gardens of letters it seems for fun [...]. But whenever others resort to other amusements, [...] instead of these he will spend his time amusing himself with the things I'm talking about. Phaedrus: You're talking about a very fine form of amusement, Socrates, compared with a base one – that of one who is able to amuse himself with words, telling tales of justice and other things you mention.

Following a similar trajectory, the unfolding of Cicero's dialogue can be mapped on a scale from juvenile play to adult mastery. There is, to be sure, no sudden wholesale celebration of the generally disparaged concept of *ludus*. For the most part, the pejorative tendencies of *ludus* that

⁴⁶⁶ The same wordplay reoccurs later in *Leg.* 7.803d: οὐτ' οὖν παιδιὰ πεφυκυῖα οὐτ' αὖ παιδεία ποτὲ ἡμῖν ἀξιόλογος. The literature on this topic is substantial, cf. most comprehensively Kidd 2019; see also Gundert 1965; Guthrie 1975; Krentz 1998; D'Angour 2013.

Plautus and Lucilius had promoted for their counter-normative literary agendas is unflinchingly brought to the fore. The standard view is, for instance, unmistakably expressed in *De or.* 2,72: *omnium ceterarum rerum oratio, mihi crede, ludus est homini non hebeti neque inexercitato nec communium litterarum et politioris humanitatis experti* ('Believe me, for a man who is not dull-witted, not unpracticed, not entirely devoid of general education and cultural refinement, discoursing on any other subject is child's play'). This is Antonius juxtaposing Cicero's ideal hallmarks of an orator defined by training (*neque inexercitato*), 'general knowledge' (*communium litterarum*), and the more sophisticated idea of *humanitas* he develops in the dialogue (*politioris humanitatis*) with the ability to give a speech on any topic (*ceterarum rerum oratio*) only after acquiring theoretical knowledge of the *ars rhetorica*.⁴⁶⁷ The latter approach is marked as insufficient since producing a speech on any given subject is understood to be a piece of cake (*ludus est*).

What is striking, however, is the list of prerequisites Antonius mentions in passing (*exercitatio, litterae, politior humanitas*). These are precisely the desired qualities Roman students acquire through Cicero's curriculum. Then and only then will wide-ranging rhetorical expertise ensue. The experiences of a study trip to the Greek world to hear philosophers and rhetoricians which he shared with his brother Quintus, the work's addressee, create a congenial community of Roman men of learning united by a common intellectual background. Yet, the Greek training of one's youth can only ever be a starting point. Consistently, Cicero makes fun of what the Greek rhetorical and philosophical schools have fallen to, criticising them as propagators of a childish education that fails to synthesise moral excellence with oratorical brilliance: *non tamen arbitror tibi hos libros in eo fore genere, quod merito propter eorum qui de dicendi ratione disputarunt ieiunitatem bonarum artium possit inludi*. (2,10: 'I do not believe that you will think this is one of those treatises on the theory of speaking that deserve to be ridiculed for the cultural barrenness of their authors'). Quipping to his brother that he should not mistake his work for a dry rhetorical handbook and himself for a mere teacher of rhetoric, Cicero emphasises that the pedagogical approach of present-day schools can only be classified as a childish pastime fit for mockery: "*nec vero te, carissime frater atque optime, rhetoricis nunc quibusdam libris [...] insequor ut erudiam [...] ut ipse iocari soles, unum putasti satis esse non modo in una familia rhetorem.*" (2,10: 'dearest and most excellent brother of mine, I am certainly not going to bother you now and try to educate you with one of those handbooks

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Gildenhard 2011: 201-16 with an overview of Cicero's uses of *humanitas*, a term that comes closest to the Greek notion of *paideia* (thus identified by Gellius NA 13.17.1); LP 1981: 116 point to the semantic shift of *humanitas* between *De or.* 1.32 and 1.35 (from civilisation to urbane cultivation).

of rhetoric [...] as you yourself like to joke, you were of the opinion that one rhetorician was enough not just for a single family’).

The developmental narrative Cicero delineates for the attainment of rhetorical excellence evolves from the lack of complexity of youthful thought and style to the richness and variety of mature speech fuelled by sharpened intellect.⁴⁶⁸ The latter can only be achieved through a thorough grasp of the subject matter, which Cicero repeatedly postulates as the *sine qua non* of successful oratory – compare *quae nisi subest res ab oratore percepta et cognita, inanem quandam habet elocutionem et paene puerilem* (1.20: ‘unless the orator has firmly grasped the underlying subject matter, his speech will remain an utterly empty, yes, almost childish verbal exercise’) and the very similar *haec autem oratio, si res non subest ab oratore percepta et cognita, aut nulla sit necesse est aut omnium inrisione ludatur* (1.50: ‘And unless the orator has fully grasped the underlying subject matter, such speech is utterly impossible – or at best everyone will make fun of it’).⁴⁶⁹ As one of his chief missions is to return to the prelapsarian state where oratory and philosophy were one single art in the possession of outstanding philosopher-statesmen, Cicero downgrades both rhetoric without philosophy and philosophy without rhetoric as child’s play (*puerilem*) that his more cultured aristocrats rightfully make fun of (*inrisione ludatur*).⁴⁷⁰

Cicero strives to differentiate his own plans for an all-round learnedness from those kinds of education that appeared too beholden to their Greek background, with their dull handbook-like precepts and their overemphasis on theoretical systematicity over practical utility. Accordingly, he belittles such Greek-style education and assigns it only to not yet fully formed young *nobiles*.⁴⁷¹ As an antidote against such trivialising tendencies, he returns repeatedly to the notion of *artes liberales* or *ingenuae*.⁴⁷² His inclusion of Greek cultural

⁴⁶⁸ Conceptually, stylistic terminology can be grouped between the binary poles ‘barrenness/thinness’ (*ieiunus*, *exilis*, etc.) versus ‘fullness’ (*ornatus*, *copia*, etc.). A breakdown of the variegated terminology for style in *De or.* is given by May/Wisse 2001: 35-6. For the philosophical problem how language and object are related and the role of rhetoric to express the complexity of the perceptible world, see Rose 2018.

⁴⁶⁹ The Catonian tenet to valorise content over style should also remain untouched: *si verba, non rem sequeremur, confici nihil posset* (1.243).

⁴⁷⁰ This is a key tenet of the work Cicero comes back to throughout this work, cf. LP 1981: 41-2 and 55 with references to further passages in *De or.* and later works.

⁴⁷¹ E.g., 1.5: *pueris aut adulescentulis nobis [...] inchoata ac rudia [...] vix hac aetate digna*; 1.20: *omnium rerum magnarum atque artium scientiam consecutus. [...] inanem [...] elocutionem et paene puerilem*; 2.1: *nobis pueris [...] illa puerili institutione*; 3.38: *nam alterum traditur litteris doctrinaque puerili*; 3.48: *puerilis doctrina*. The dearth of experience marring Greek theoreticians’ lectures is brought out pointedly in Catulus’ anecdote of the Peripatetic Phormio, who makes a fool of himself by educating Hannibal on military affairs (2.74-6). Interestingly, Crassus’ final use of the lexeme *puerilis* rids it of its pejorative connotation by combining it with his model of an education that is fit for upper-class free men: *institutus liberaliter educatione doctrinaque puerili* (3.125).

⁴⁷² 1.17: *eruditio libero digna*; further 1.72; 1.73; 3.21; 1.187; 3.125; 3.58. LP 1981: 162 point out that *artes liberales* are not identical with Cicero’s ideal *orator perfectus*. They do, however, form a basis for the all-encompassing learning that Crassus in particular champions.

heritage into the Roman context is, however, not always recognised as a version of education which was only just beginning to take root in Rome and which Cicero himself was particularly invested in.⁴⁷³ One can see a coming-of-age story unfold in the text, ranging from Cicero and Quintus' memories of youthful impressionability for Greek *paideia* to an eventual domination of its theory and practice by the end of the Tusculan conversation when Antonius and Crassus supersede the standard rhetorical handbook topics (invention, arrangement, memory, style, delivery) with the mature Ciceronian blend of traditional Roman morality, expertise in Greek theory, and oratorical experience.⁴⁷⁴

Labelling Greek learning without a test in practice as *ludus* suitably combines the chauvinistic depreciation of purely theoretical Greek knowledge which, Cicero claims, any talented Roman can easily acquire in a few hours of free time.⁴⁷⁵ It came in handy that this was prefigured by Plato who had not only instrumentalised play as a bedrock of a well-ordered society but had also imagined the Socratic method as playful communication with a serious intent.⁴⁷⁶ Socrates had already been enshrined in the Greek imagination as the archetype of a mix between seriousness and playfulness – even outside of Plato's influential portrayals, cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.8: τοιαῦτα μὲν περὶ τούτων ἔπαιζεν ἅμα σπουδάζων ('This was how he would talk on the subject, half joking, half in earnest'). Cicero adopts this provocative paradox and integrates the notion of philosophy as serious play into his dialogue, tellingly in Strabo's lecture on humour.

Strabo classifies a number of joke types, among which is a treatment of *dissimulatio* (*De or.* 2.269):

urbana etiam dissimulatio est, cum alia dicuntur ac sentias, non illo genere, de quo ante dixi, cum contraria dicas, ut Lamiae Crassus, sed cum toto genere orationis severe ludas [...]; ut noster Scaevola Septumuleio illi Anagnino [...].

"Irony", that is, saying something different from what you think, is also elegant and witty. I don't mean the kind I mentioned earlier, saying the exact opposite (as Crassus did to Lamia),

⁴⁷³ See the discussion in LP 1981: 39-40. They refer to the Isocratean notion of ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία and the Aristotelian ἐλευθέριος παιδεία, taking for granted that Cicero was merely trying to translate this system for a Roman audience. Tempest 2020: 480 shows that with Varro's lost *Disciplinarum Liber* there was a lively concern with pedagogical issues among late republican intellectuals. He was probably the first Roman to elaborate a system of *artes liberales*, which, however, did not match Cicero's much more wide-ranging conception in *De or.* (494).

⁴⁷⁴ Wisse 2002a: 375-6 on Cicero's break with the handbook style to be found in rhetorical schools and his own youthful *De inventione*, which he degrades in *De or.* 1.5 as *quae pueris aut adolescentulis nobis ex commentariolis nostris inchoata ac rudia exciderunt, vix hac aetate digna, et hoc usu [...]*; later, he declares a record of a philosophical conversation superior to a set of instructions that are more suited to the education of young boys: *De or.* 1.23: *non ab incunabulis nostrae veteris puerilisque doctrinae quendam ordinem praeceptorum, sed ea, quae quondam accepi in nostrorum hominum eloquentissimorum et omni dignitate principum, disputatione esse versat.*

⁴⁷⁵ *De or.* 3.86.

⁴⁷⁶ Schofield 2023: 284 calls the contrast between play and seriousness a favourite Platonic trope, which feeds into the conception of Platonic dialogues themselves as products of serious play, cf. *Phdr.* 278a for the contrast παιδιὰ and σπουδή with regard to written discourse.

but being mock-serious in your whole manner of speaking, [...]. Like our friend Scaevola did when dealing with Septumuleius from Anagnia [...].

It soon becomes clear which Greek concept Cicero is trying to render in Latin here:

hoc in genere Fannius in annalibus suis Africanum hunc Aemilianum dicit fuisse et eum Graeco verbo appellat εἰρωνία; sed uti ei ferunt qui melius haec norunt Socraten opinor in hac εἰρωνείᾳ dissimulantiaque longe lepore et humanitate omnibus praestitisse.

Fannius says in his Annals that Scipio (the younger one, Aemilianus) engaged in this type of humor, and he calls him (using the Greek word) ‘ironic’. But like those who have a better knowledge of such things, I think that Socrates by his refined wit far excelled all others in this ‘irony’, this dissembling.

Cicero’s method is familiar by now. He lifts from authors contemporaneous with his republican *exempla* (here Fannius, who was consul in 120 BCE) whatever he can find that suits his purpose. Here, readers meet a well-known cast (Crassus, Q. Scaevola, Scipio Aemilianus – with explicit emphasis that we are dealing with the latter), who are adduced to lend past republican credence to ironic utterances and highlight how seemingly Greek cultural practices have long been present in Rome. Strabo dodges the admission that he knows a great deal about the Greek tradition (*qui melius haec norunt*) but is then quick to identify Socratic irony with just those terms that Cicero is otherwise deeply invested in across the dialogue (*lepore; humanitate*). After Cicero has made out a fitting Greek exemplar in Socrates, he takes no time to gather Roman manifestations of irony in use (Crassus on Lamia, Scaevola on Septumuleius).⁴⁷⁷ The acculturation of Greek irony in Rome is complete once Cicero supplies his readers with an appropriate translation of εἰρωνεία, interestingly not one abstract noun but a periphrastic verbal construction: *severe ludas*.

More important than one central concept is the expression of a social practice – one appears stern but actually behaves playfully. Cicero lucidly clarifies at this moment of the conversation that many of the playful speech acts he performs in practice in the text and is now even theoretically expounding in Strabo’s lecture can be understood as a Roman version of Socratic irony.⁴⁷⁸ This results in major alterations: the communal search for truth undergirding Socrates’ investigations and use of irony becomes subjugated to the strict obedience to social hierarchies.⁴⁷⁹ Instead of a philosophical method guided by rational principles, doing

⁴⁷⁷ Socrates is consequently lauded for the qualities that educated Roman statesmen should display, cf. *Rep.* 1.10 (16): *leporem Socraticum*.

⁴⁷⁸ Zetzel: 2022: 30 n. 32.

⁴⁷⁹ Straume 2020 contextualises Platonic philosophy in the environment of the democratic *polis*, where *paideia* became the emblem of citizen identity since a high level of individual education was required for the participation of male adults in political decision-making.

philosophy in Rome meant coming to grips with the expectation that what the holder of the greatest power says becomes a truth that ought not to be challenged.⁴⁸⁰ In the wake of Cicero's adaptation of Socratic (and by extension Platonic) irony, the serious play of this communicative mode obtains a new meaning.⁴⁸¹ Rather than ensnaring interlocutors in mind-boggling aporias to drive home the message that conventional assumptions are baseless, Cicero remodels Plato and Socrates in just the same way as Plautus and Lucilius.⁴⁸² Socrates' philosophical insights are marginalised in favour of his skills as a witty conversationalist.⁴⁸³ Plato figures above all as a first-class orator and an icon of the kind of irony that fits Cicero's context much better than 5th-cent. Athens. When Antonius reads the *Gorgias* together with Charmadas in Athens, he implies that Plato's mocking of orators had to be ironic since he was such a masterful orator himself: *in hoc maxime admirabar Platonem, quod mihi in oratoribus inridendis ipse esse orator summus videbatur* (1.47).⁴⁸⁴ And there are many more such instances of irony across *De oratore*.

In his prologue to book two, Cicero states in his own voice that Crassus and Antonius' protestations of a medium-range or even non-existent learnedness in matters Greek are nothing but a show – a pose identical to Lucilius' alleged *bon mot* about his ideal readership: *atque ita se uterque graviorem fore, si alter contemnere alter ne nosse quidem Graecos videretur* (2.4: 'Thus, each reckoned that he would carry more authority, the one if he was seen to despise the Greeks, the other if he seemed not even to know of them'). Cicero fashions their refusal to speak *à la mode grecque* as a Roman version of Socratic irony, a carefully crafted self-image both *nobiles* constructed for themselves to avoid offence or ridicule in Rome. The Ciceronian conception of irony as serious play therefore differs starkly from Plato's philosophical technique. He regards irony as a safety mechanism and mitigating tactic against potential transgressions of social etiquette and his prized aristocratic unanimity. Crassus' and Antonius' poses conform to the protocols of traditional Roman culture, at least, Cicero suggests, back in 91 BCE when professing Hellenophilia could still be deemed unwelcome by elite peers.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. the joke featuring the patron Scipio Nasica and his client poet Ennius recounted in *De or.* 2.276 and the analysis by Dupont 2012: 37-9. She explains how this episode was funny to a Roman audience, which instantly understood the requirements of strictly policed social hierarchies.

⁴⁸¹ Vlastos 1987 traces the evolution of the term εἰρωνεία from a negative signification (wilful deceit) in Greece, arguing that the modern notion of irony (a type of humour where one says the opposite of what one means) goes back to Cicero's reception of the concept.

⁴⁸² Press 2012: 120 for the pedagogical structure of the Socratic *elenchus*. Out of a conversation with a friendly master arises a game of question and answer, which gradually peels back the layers of meaning behind conventional ideas to reach philosophical enlightenment.

⁴⁸³ McConnell 2019: 351-2.

⁴⁸⁴ In Crassus' reconstruction of the lost unity of oratory and philosophy in Greece and Rome, Plato is labelled *non linguae solum, verum etiam animi ac virtutis magister*, a perfect specimen of the kind of teacher Cicero himself strives to be (3.139).

Positing irony is also an effective strategy for reinterpreting statements that are taken out of context. By consequence, Plato's censure of orators can be refashioned as an ironic speech act no person in possession of *urbanitas* should take seriously. The dissembling and concealment of true motives that Plautine slaves had displayed to hoodwink their masters has now turned into a witty game that constitutes and unites a close-knit group of aristocrats.

It is against this backdrop that the numerous 'deconstructive moments' of *De oratore* need to be analysed. The serious playfulness Cicero invokes is expressed on all levels of the dialogue: between Cicero and his addressee Quintus in the prologues, as well as by the chief interlocutors within the fiction of 91 BCE.⁴⁸⁵ The impish irony Cicero's discourse displays provides, on the one hand, an opportunity to showcase Cicero's notorious humour and, on the other hand, to sneer at elite peers and criticise them in a veiled and equivocal manner.⁴⁸⁶ My reading differs from interpretations that see the modern critic's main task in unmasking such slippages as giving access to a deeper truth.⁴⁸⁷ I contend, on the other hand, that Cicero himself has intentionally left traces of his self-reflexive wit to cast himself as a model of urbane irony in communication with his implied readers. There is, in fact, nothing covert about this approach that would need unveiling. On the contrary, these tactics are in plain sight, aiming to produce knowing readers who may become just as witty as Cicero, the *urbanitas* instructor, himself.

Right at the end when Crassus closes off the discussions, Cicero offers a final example of a this time trenchant use of irony: *ac vellem, ut meus gener, sodalis tuus, Hortensius, adfuisset* (3.228 'I wish that my son-in-law Hortensius, your close friend, had been present'). Irony operates here in a more complex fashion, as the praise of Hortensius (3.230: *cui quamquam faveo, tamen illum aetati suae praestare cupio...* – 'although I am quite well disposed to him, nevertheless I want him to be the best of his own generation') is easily construed as insincere. Cicero had at the time of composition of *De oratore* already attained ascendancy in Roman oratorical circles, leaving his main rival Hortensius far behind.⁴⁸⁸ Packaging a put-down of Hortensius, who ultimately failed to live up to high expectations, into superficial praise of his competitor is a striking final example of Cicero's transposition of Socratic irony into a Roman

⁴⁸⁵ At the end of book one (1.265), Scaevola leaves the scene with a quip about Antonius' feigned ignorance: *simul adridens "neque enim" inquit "tam mihi molestus fuit, quod ius nostrum civile pervellit, quam iucundus, quod se id nescire confessus est*. In 1.74, he laughingly lays bare Crassus' rhetorical tricks: *ridens Scaevola [...] artificio quodam es consecutus*. On Scaevola's propensity for jesting, cf. *Att.* 4.16.3, where he appears as a *ioculator senex*.

⁴⁸⁶ On the reception of Cicero as a jester, see Del Giovane 2022.

⁴⁸⁷ Zerba 2002: 318 stresses the 'actorliness' of elite performances and posits that Cicero could not but reveal them as such. In a similar vein, Fox 2007 argues for a self-ironic, sceptical Cicero, who clearly perceived the fissures of late republican self-representation.

⁴⁸⁸ Wisse/Winterbottom/Fantham 2008: 376-8.

context.⁴⁸⁹ The benefit of this *dissimulatio* that functions as a distinguishing feature of Rome's urban upper-class is the openness of its intended meaning. Whereas the joke targets Hortensius, it is just noncommittal enough that appearances of sociability and consensus are kept up and no one seriously loses face. On the other hand, those readers well-versed in Plato might recognise the allusion to the *Phaedrus*, which transports them – as in a ring composition – back to the intertextual dialogue Cicero had opened up at the start.⁴⁹⁰ A reader would have to be intellectually refined enough to spot the allusion, potentially trace it back to Plato's dialogues after Cicero had carefully left hints to Plato throughout the text, to then relish this learned subtlety. In so doing, readers would acquire just the right amount of erudition and wit that Cicero wants to foster.

3.4b) Plato's games and Cicero's training

At the bottom of this strategy lies not joy in deconstruction but a serious intention to bring back order to Rome and nurture a more cultivated and less combative ruling class, whose shared culture of learning can penetrate the realm of politics and resolve its discord. In the clearest instantiation of Crassus' key point about the dire split of rhetoric and philosophy, he lays out in a grand historical sketch how steadfast moral values, universal knowledge, and the ability to use speech effectively to govern communities were still unified in pre-Socratic Greece and republican Rome.⁴⁹¹ After giving an account of the most intellectually gifted Greek thinkers who devoted themselves entirely to the pursuit of knowledge, Cicero launches an analogy with men used to hard, daily labour, who are forced by circumstance to halt their activities:

ad pilam se aut ad talos aut ad tesseras conferunt aut etiam novum sibi ipsi aliquem excogitant in otio ludum, sic illi a negotiis publicis, tamquam ab opere aut temporibus exclusi aut voluntate sua feriat totos se alii ad poetas, alii ad geometras, alii ad musicos contulerunt, alii etiam, ut dialectici, novum sibi ipsi studium ludumque pepererunt atque in his artibus, quae repertae sunt, ut puerorum mentes ad humanitatem fingerentur atque virtutem, omne tempus atque aetates suas consumpserunt.

(*De or.* 3.58)

They often turn to ball games and dicing, or even think up some new game for themselves during their leisure time. Something similar happened to the people I mentioned. Being either shut out from the affairs of state, just as from work, by the stormy circumstances of the time, or having taken time off from these of their own accord, they transferred their attention entirely, some to the poets, some to mathematics, some to music; and others, such as the dialecticians, even produced a

⁴⁸⁹ See, however, the complimentary tone towards Hortensius at the beginning of *Brutus* (1-6).

⁴⁹⁰ In *Phdr.* 279b, Socrates prophesies a glorious future for Isocrates, a thinly veiled barb at one of Plato's contemporaneous rivals and equally a founder and head of his own school, cf. Press 2012: 16.

⁴⁹¹ The exemplarity of both Greeks and Romans is underlined by the use of the plural in the sense of 'men like...': *illi Lycurgi, [...] Coruncanii nostri, Fabricii, Catones, Scipiones* (*De or.* 3.56).

new passion and game for themselves to pursue. And in these arts, which were devised to educate children's minds in humane culture and virtue, they spent all of their time –yes, their whole lives.

The passage is seminal for the pedagogical philosophy underpinning *De oratore*. When constrained by external forces, leisure may give rise to games of all sorts that were popular with common people in Rome (*pila, tali, tesserae*). Such a time-out even engenders the creativity to come up with new games (*excogitant in otio ludum*). Cicero then moves a rung up on his imaginary ladder of noble education: poetry, geometry, music, and as he reiterates, even dialectic philosophy can be thought of as *ludus* for the young aristocrat. Play is directly grouped with *studium*, a noun that denotes serious effort and emotional investment in an activity (*novum sibi studium ludumque pepererunt*). The *artes* generated from the Greek thinkers' creative leisure then produce – in good Ciceronian fashion – *humanitas* and *virtus*, truly worthwhile endeavours one can easily spend a lifetime with (*aetates suas consumpserunt*).

Cicero's underlying strategy of justifying his own *studia* and the fruits they promise to bear is hard to miss. As he himself was just two years earlier prohibited from political life in exile (*a negotiis publicis [...] exclusi*), the best Greek thinkers found ways to amuse themselves, and what is more, their leisurely occupations even perfectly manage to train young minds for the continued wellbeing of the state. By introducing Hellenic educational subjects (geometry, music, dialectics) into his tableau of Roman upper-class leisure, Cicero has laid the foundation for a justification and political utility of his upcoming literary-philosophical projects in Greco-Roman theory in case he may again be forced to retreat from public life. His underhanded claim is that Greek-style education is able to nurture core Roman values, and *De oratore* gives a practical demonstration of it. The coordination of *ludus* and *studium* renders them almost interchangeable notions while keeping the ancillary status of philosophy and a wider Greek-influenced culture of learning as a domain of play firmly in place. Still, *ludus* is uplifted to a real producer of worthy outcomes once it is imagined as a training ground for bright intellects in the Greek fashion before the Socratic catastrophe.⁴⁹²

This explains the unusually large number of passages in the dialogue in which Cicero finds it convenient to talk about the practice of playing games, either to vividly illustrate an argument or to proffer genuinely Roman examples of play. In Strabo's disquisition on humour, Cicero reports about a certain Titius, who is supposed to have been an expert ball player: *ut in*

⁴⁹² See Bishop 2019: 24 on the shift of the term *praeclara studia* from earlier works to *De Or.*; similarly, Baraz 2012: 95 for Cicero's increasing realisation that philosophical *studia* had to offer an alternative to public engagement; also Stroup 2010: 37-65 on the transformation that *otium* undergoes in this process. More generally on the scholarly activities and personal networks of prominent aristocrats in the late republic, see Volk 2021.

illum Titium [...] cum studiose pila luderet (2.253: ‘For instance, the joke about Titius, when he eagerly played ball’). In book three, Crassus picks up the thread and recalls Titius again: *ut si velim ego talis optime ludere aut pilae studio tenear [...]; at alii [...] vehementius quam causa postulat, delectantur, ut Titius pila, Brulla talis* (3.88: ‘for instance, if I wanted to become an excellent dice player, or if a passion for playing ball possessed me [...]. But other people take a keener delight in such things than the matter demands – for example, Titius in ball playing and Brulla in dice’).

Important parallels in these passages concern the demonstrative *ille* to emphasise how well-known both Titius’ skills and Scipio Africanus’ dictum were (*illum Titium; illud Africani*), and secondly, the link Cicero constructs between ball games and the notion of ‘serious pursuit’ (*studiose; pilae studio*).⁴⁹³ Although Crassus adheres to decorum by clarifying how out of place it is to indulge in ball or dice games too seriously (*vehementius...postulat*), he enhances the status of such games as one of many *studia* that Romans may spend their time with and, crucially, have already done so in the past.⁴⁹⁴ Titius and Brulla seem to have attained renown for their excellence, or at least that is how Cicero wants these exemplary players to be remembered.

It is no wonder that the technique of using games to aid one’s philosophical argumentation is derived from Plato. To pick just one example from the *Phaedrus*, in his speech on the difference between the lover and the non-lover, Socrates adduces a comparison between these two types and the game of *ostrakinda* where a potsherd or a shell was painted black on one side, white on the other, and then tossed to decide which team would chase the other.⁴⁹⁵ For Cicero, ball games often serve as a comparandum. To vividly illustrate one of his core ideas that a good orator requires broad knowledge, Crassus moves from ball games to sculpting and ultimately the noble arts which prepare for legal, contional, and senatorial speeches (1.73: *iudiciorum contionum senatus*).⁴⁹⁶ He is again at pains to draw a line between more refined and less reputable *artes* but deploys ball game imagery to underline his point about the value of training in oratory even if not all aspects of it may be useful in every moment of being tested in practice: *ut qui pila ludunt non utuntur in ipsa lusione artificio proprio palaestrae, sed indicat ipse motus didicerintne palaestram an nescient* (1.73: ‘Those who play ball do not in the game

⁴⁹³ LPR 1989: 270-1 provide the little that is known about Titius. He is referenced again in *De or.* 2.48: *sediciosum civem et turbulentum*. *Brut.* 255 calls him *loquax, solutus et mollis*, and makes him into a namesake of a dance style.

⁴⁹⁴ The idea that *ludi* should be carried out with moderation and chosen so as to be fitting for young noblemen reappears in *Off.* 1.104: *suppeditant autem et campus noster et studia venandi honesta exempla ludendi*.

⁴⁹⁵ *Phdr.* 241b: ὀστράκου μεταπεσόντος. For children’s games in Plato, see Sprague 1984 and Schofield 2023.

⁴⁹⁶ Chapter 73 as a whole compares various *artes* with oratory, a discipline which, according to Crassus, should be supported by skills in all ‘noble’ arts (*omnibus ingenuis artibus*).

itself use the skills peculiar to the palaestra, but by their very movements betray whether or not they have learned the exercises of the palaestra’).

The rare abstract noun *lusio* is attested from Cicero and here for the first time, which reveals his creativity with **lud-* lexemes.⁴⁹⁷ Given the etymological speculations popular among Cicero’s scholar friends, it is tempting to read the introduction of *lusio* as a ploy to verbally distinguish trivial forms of play from the progressively more serviceable *ludus* and to coin a more explicitly verbal noun that decouples the act of playing from *ludus* as an institution. A conspicuous line from Cicero’s letters to Quintus from November 54 BCE provides a parallel: *quo ludi committebantur, in Tusculanum proficiscens ducensque mecum Ciceronem meum in ludum discendi, non lusionis* (QFr. 3.4.6: ‘on the opening day of the games, as I leave for my villa in Tusculum. I am taking my son with me, to learn at my school, not to play’). In the cultural context of a heightened awareness of the linguistic resources of Latin and etymological inquiries into the history of lexemes to restore their original semantic nucleus, Cicero’s distinction between *ludus* and *lusio* as a more functional and a more trivial and purposeless kind of play seems an inspired choice that was in line with his elevation of *ludus* in the service of his own self-fashioning.⁴⁹⁸

3.5) Getting ready for the fight with Cicero, the *ludi magister*

Play with the conceptual and etymological link between παιδεία and παιδιά is a *topos* of Plato’s dialogues. As Cicero was elaborating an alternative position in Roman society as a the practically experienced and philosophically trained master statesman, he played with *ludus* as a vital concept, in which the two spheres of education and play could merge in just a single lexeme.⁴⁹⁹ Cicero adopts the underlying proposition of Plato’s thought that play could be an instrumental preparation for fostering various roles and professions, which are invaluable for a healthy society. In the process, he made sure to excise the paederastic elements of the educational scenarios in Platonic dialogues and systematically tweak *ludus* as an institution of

⁴⁹⁷ It appears also in Varro’s *Logistorici: ab huiusmodi lusionibus radices crudelitas agere solet* (quoted in Laes 2021: 122 n. 25). Hülsen 1933: 376 surmises that *lusio* was a technical term for gladiatorial games, but the Ciceronian data does not support this claim.

⁴⁹⁸ This would also solve the problem of the perceived mismatch between school and play, which strangely had the same signifier in Latin. Zetzel 2018: 37 dubs Varro’s etymologising as a search for a ‘primordial signifier’ where linguistic sign and signified object converge.

⁴⁹⁹ Steel 2005: 71-2 regards Cicero’s construction of the ideal orator-statesman decoupled from the mechanics of office-holding as a radical innovation introduced through the back door.

education and training towards the cultivation of a martial, masculine ethos. He thereby drew a sharp distinction between partly enfeebling and purely self-serving Greek παιδεία and virile Roman *ludus* that disciplines young Romans for real battles, however broadly conceived.

The acute attention Cicero gives to spatial coordinates to conjure up the appropriate ambience for his literary and cultural project encompasses beside the *ludi* as dramatic and religious festivals also a rich array of typically Greek educational institutions. Thus, although the traditional framework of the *tirocinium fori* with experienced Roman politicians acting as models to imitate for the young provides the backbone of teaching in *De oratore*, the blending with Hellenic educational traditions introduces a foreign element into the well-oiled machine of aristocratic Roman knowledge transfer. It is fittingly in a passage on training and imitation in book 2 that Antonius first couples *ludus* with the *forum*, the place in which the normatively ordained training of a young orator ought to unfold: *vidi statim indolem [...] et eum sum cohortatus ut forum sibi ludum putaret esse ad discendum, magistrum autem quem vellet eligeret* (2.89: ‘I immediately recognized his talent, and [...] encouraged him to treat the forum as the school where he could learn, and to choose the teacher he preferred’). Antonius here relates his advice to young Sulpicius to eschew theoretical training in favour of practical lessons in the *forum* with the best orators at the time, later suggesting Crassus as the perfect role model.

It is notable that Cicero describes Antonius’ ideal *tirocinium fori* in the language of sub-elite education (*ludus; magister*), which must have been a daring combination given the inferior social roles of *ludi magistri*.⁵⁰⁰ But the analogy does not end here. Only a few chapters later, Antonius launches a critique of current rhetorical schools: *hoc in ludo non praecipitur; faciles enim causae ad pueros deferuntur* (2.100: ‘This precept is not taught in the schools, for the cases entrusted to the boys are simple ones’). His speaking position is marked by Cicero as overtly ironic considering that he sneers at the simplicity of legal cases taught in schools while simultaneously adopting the role of the teacher elaborating his own precepts (cf. 2.99: *riserit aliquis fortasse hoc praeceptum; est [...] magisque monitoris non fatui quam eruditi magistri [...] hoc enim primum praecipiemus* – ‘Now someone might perhaps laugh at the following precept [...] a piece of advice from someone who is no fool, rather than something a learned teacher might say – but this is the first rule we shall give him’).⁵⁰¹

The rhetorical ploy is a common one throughout *De oratore* – openly condemning overeducation (*eruditi magistri*) as hair-splitting within a communicative frame that displays

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Horster 2011.

⁵⁰¹ I omit the fairly redundant addition *haec est enim in ludo causarum formula fere* (1.100) in my analysis, which editors have either deleted or placed after *accusatur*.

exactly this behaviour. What is more, Antonius is presented as self-aware of his paradoxical stance.⁵⁰² After all, he is the *nobilis* tasked with opening the debate on day two, which becomes more ostentatiously playful after Scaevola's departure and the arrival of the known philhellenes Catulus and Strabo.⁵⁰³ After Crassus succeeds in convincing the newcomers to stay at his villa for the day and join the conversation, Antonius takes over Scaevola's function as the 'play master' from book one by setting the tone as follows:

"audite vero, audite," inquit "hominem enim audietis de schola atque a magistro et Graecis litteris eruditum. et eo quidem loquar confidentius, quod Catulus auditor accessit, cui non solum nos Latini sermonis sed etiam Graeci ipsi solent suae linguae subtilitatem elegantiamque concedere. Sed quia tamen hoc totum quicquid est, sive artificium sive studium dicendi, nisi accessit os, nullum potest esse, docebo vos, discipuli, id quod ipse non didici, quid de omni genere dicendi sentiam."

(*De or.* 2.28-9)

"Lend me your ears, I say, lend me your ears! For you will be listening to a schoolman, taught by a teacher, someone learned in Greek letters! And I shall speak all the more confidently, seeing that Catulus has also come to listen; for he speaks with precision and refinement, not only in Latin (to which our people can attest), but also in Greek (as even the Greeks themselves concede). But, still, since this entire art, or practical activity, of speaking (whichever it is) cannot exist unless it is a bit mouthy, I shall teach you, students, what I have not learned myself, namely what I think about every facet of speaking."

The situation is outright ridiculous. Some of the topmost senators are congregating at Tusculum to play student and teacher. Antonius makes no secret of his disdain for Greek forms of education, points out Catulus' penchant for the aesthetic niceties of both Latin and Greek, and trumpets his plan to follow Greek principles in teaching what he has never learnt himself. The reaction of the group signals they have enjoyed Antonius' absurd shtick (2.30: *adriserunt*), Catulus does not begrudge Antonius the jibe at his love for matters Greek, and every possible tension is dissolved by the communal spirit of *urbanitas*.⁵⁰⁴ By reminding his readers of the

⁵⁰² Cf. 2.90: *hoc sit primum in praeceptis meis*; also 2.196 where Antonius teaches Sulpicius and Catulus by giving them precepts (*vos doceo, Sulpici, bonus ego [...] atque eruditus magister*). LPR 1989: 35 *ad loc.* point to the meta-communicative aspect of Antonius' speech.

⁵⁰³ On Catulus and Strabo and their relationship with Greek learning, see LPN 1985: 204-6; *De or.* 2.28b-33 and 3.29-30 for their distinct speaking styles; In *Brut.* 132: *Iam Q. Catulus non antiquo illo more sed hoc nostro [...] eruditus*, Catulus is styled as an exponent of a new aesthetic. Even though he was ten years older than Crassus, he showed greater openness to all things Greek. He was also a poet of homoerotic, Hellenising epigrams. Hence, although he belongs to the generation of Crassus, he represents a new, innovative elite that enters on day two after Scaevola has left. Together with Strabo, he is marked as philhellenic and humorous, and a serious writer of poetry. For Strabo's tragedies, cf. Val. Max. 3.7.11; his rivalry with the poet Accius is treated in *Brut.* 177 with all the aestheticising buzzwords.

⁵⁰⁴ The indefiniteness of this discourse to a Roman mind is again stressed by the phrase *quicquid est*. It is intriguing that Catullus' counter-cultural poetics is flagged up in a similar way in the programmatic c. 1.8-9: *quidquid hoc libelli/qualecumque*. Antonius' ventures into philosophy are therefore placed just as much outside generic conventions and the standard value system as Catullus' *nugae*.

shared playfulness at this significant entry point into the philosophical disputation of book two, Cicero signals that the entire ensuing conversation unfolds under the screen of Ciceronian irony. The *nobiles* play Greek teacher and make fun of their own silliness at the same time. This is Cicero's approach to imagining a distinctly odd scenario (aristocrats casting themselves as subaltern teachers and school kids), and by enfolding it within a play frame, diluting its transgressive aspects.

He opts for the Greek loanword *schola* here, which is employed in a universally pejorative sense in *De oratore*.⁵⁰⁵ In the same vein, *gymnasium* and *palaestra* are stamped as noticeably Greek training/educational spaces that combine athletics and philosophical investigation.⁵⁰⁶ As the *ludi* evoked in the three prologues provide a suitable framework for traditionally un-Roman behaviour, *gymnasium* and *palaestra* offer imagined and real-life settings in which Cicero's interlocutors locate their discourse. Young Sulpicius is so delighted to hear Crassus lecture that he exclaims he far prefers Crassus' Tusculan estate, labelled both *palaestra* and *gymnasium*, to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum: *magnam habeo, Crasse, huic palaestrae et Tusculano tuo gratiam et longe Academiae illi ac Lycio tuum hoc suburbanum gymnasium anteponam* (*De or.* 1.98).⁵⁰⁷ The pointers to Cicero's own Tusculan villa, which he had fitted out with two gymnasia named Lyceum and Academia, are striking.⁵⁰⁸

The implicit or overt homoeroticism of these educational centres in the Greek world must now cede in Cicero's imagination to hyper-masculine training centres that prepare the youth for warfare, or of course oratory on the speaker's platform, which is persistently likened to fighting a battle. As a dialogue such as the *Phaedrus* is rife with sexual innuendo, Cicero is anxious to stress that his envisaged pedagogy squares with Roman military ideology.⁵⁰⁹ The

⁵⁰⁵ Other occurrences of the lexeme are 1.56: *clamabunt credo omnia gymnasia atque omnes philosophorum scholae*; 1.102: *impudentiam, qui cum in schola adsedissent*; 1.105: *cotidianam loquacitatem sine usu neque ex scholis cantilenam*, and the abovementioned 2.13; see also Zetzel 2022: 114.

⁵⁰⁶ Reid 2020 examines the roots of Plato's philosophical imagery in the *gymnasia* and *palaestrai*, which philosophers sought out to gather audiences and students in Athens, supplanting the goal of reaching beauty of the body with beauty of the soul. In *De or.* 2.21, Antonius counters Crassus with an alternative cultural history of Greek educational institutions and their functions. He maintains that even in the present the Greeks would prefer athletics over waffling philosophers: *nam et saeculis multis ante gymnasia inventa sunt quam in iis philosophi garrere coeperunt, et hoc ipso tempore, cum omnia gymnasia philosophi teneant, tamen eorum auditores discum audire quam philosophum malunt; qui simul ut increpuit, in media oratione de maximis rebus et gravissimis disputantem philosophum omnes unctionis causa relinquunt*.

⁵⁰⁷ Müller 2012: 45 defines the villa as spatial alternative to the philosophical schools in Greece, which might offer professionalised teaching but remain cut off from the necessities of real-world political activities.

⁵⁰⁸ LP 1981: 197. In the meta-dramatic discussion of *De or.* 2.15-28a, Catulus reflects on the surroundings which cannot but conjure up Greek philosophical schools: *num tandem aut locus hic non idoneus videtur, in quo porticus haec ipsa ubi inambulamus, et palaestra et tot locis sessiones gymnasiorum et Graecorum disputationum memoriam quodam modo commovent?*

⁵⁰⁹ Παῖς was after all another term used to designate the ἐρώμενος in paederastic relationships, cf. *Phdr.* 241c, where Socrates addresses Phaedrus as his 'boy'. The line continues beyond the dialogue when Socrates hints at Isocrates as his παιδικά ('darling'), and Phaedrus becoming the lover of Lysias (*Phdr.* 278b). The erotic charge of

simultaneous contrasting and linkage of the domains of war and play is captured by Antonius in *De or.* 2.84:

[...] *ad ludendumne an ad pugnandum arma sint sumpturi. aliud enim pugna et acies, aliud ludus campusque noster desiderat. ac tamen ars ipsa ludicra armorum et gladiatori et militi prodest aliquid.*

[...] whether they are going to take up arms for sport or for battle. Battle on the front line requires one sort of thing, sports on our Campus Martius quite another. Yet, the artful use of arms in sport also has some value for both the gladiator and the soldier.

Antonius sets up a binary between childish rhetorical handbooks which are mere playthings (*ad ludendumne*) and oratory in practice (*ad pugnandum*). At first, Antonius distinguishes sharply between the concepts *ludere*, *ludus*, *campus* and *pugnare*, *pugna*, *acies*. In the second clause, however, he asserts the utility of both worlds for the gladiator and the soldier. The usefulness of *ludere* lies in the preliminary stage of preparation for an actual fight in the arena or the ultimate test on the battlefield (*gladiatori et militi*). Such a conception of *ludus* subordinates the aspect of self-sufficient play completely to the concept's *telos* for a system of elite values that revolve around physical prowess and martial valour.

Just as Cicero reimagined *studia* as enterprises in which politically relevant knowledge and skills are generated, so he configured *ludus* more forcefully than any Roman writer before as an essential training ground for the cultivation of skills that he considered incumbent on aristocratic interaction.⁵¹⁰ A concomitant gambit is the use of his linguistic versatility and expertise to approximate the source of prestige that he himself was lacking to the domains in which he surpassed his peers.⁵¹¹ Giving speeches in the forum is consequently compared ceaselessly to fighting in the frontline or being a gladiator in the arena, and physical training in the Campus Martius or even the Greek *palaestrae* and *gymnasia* are equated to a soldier's task.⁵¹² Starting from *De or.* 1.6-7, Cicero rhetorically asks if every person of sound mind would

Socrates' retreat with Phaedrus to the countryside, their exchange of speeches about *eros*, and the spectre of paederasty that hangs over the whole dialogue has left its traces on *De or.*, cf. Gunderson 2000: 187-222. He raises questions of homosociality but does not pursue it as a fundamental educational principle of Plato's dialogues that Cicero transformed for a Roman audience.

⁵¹⁰ E.g., 1.157: *in castra atque in aciem foresem*, referring to the 'graduates' of Isocrates' school who chose different occupations in which to gain distinction; also 2.94: *sed eorum (scil. of Isocrates pupils) partim in pompa, partim in acie inlustres esse voluerunt*; oratory becomes martial arts in 2.317: *exordium dicendi vehemens et pugnax non saepe esse dicebat; sed si in ipso illo gladiatorio vitae certamine*; 3.200: *hic nobis orator ita conformandus est et verbis et sententiis, ut quem ad modum qui utuntur armis aut palaestra non solum sibi vitandi aut feriundi rationem esse habendam putent*; 1.242: *cum amentatas hastas acceperit, ipse eas oratoris lacertis viribusque torquebit*; examples from later works are *Brut.* 37 and *Or.* 42.

⁵¹¹ Steel 2005: 36.

⁵¹² He may have drawn inspiration from Isocrates *Antid.* 15.180-2, where Isocrates establishes a dual foundation of all human skills, mental and physical, with the former being trained by philosophy, the latter by gymnastics. He argues against a strict separation of the two and similar methods for honing those skills: οὐ πολὺ διαστησάμενοι

not grant military generals' exploits greater usefulness (*utilitas*) and significance (*magnitudo*) to the Roman community than those of the anyway few and far between respectable orators (*quis [...] non anteponat oratori imperatorem?*). Dugan has called Cicero's strategy of displacing the *imperator* and installing the *orator* as a general in the toga (*imperator togatus*) his 'togate discourse' – a core element of his self-fashioning after his consulship.⁵¹³ It is handy, in this respect, that *ludus* and *magister* are polyvalent terms, denoting both 'school' and 'gladiatorial school' as well as 'teacher' and 'trainer of gladiators'.⁵¹⁴

By the same token, it is not surprising to see Cicero rejig the meaning of *ars ludicra* to make it accord with this ideal of aristocratic upbringing. Gone are the associations of *ludere* as a foreign, politically unproductive, childish activity. Instead, the noun phrase *ars ludicra* is stripped of the earlier sense of histrionic dance that Plautus had given it and becomes firmly embedded in martial upper-class education.⁵¹⁵ While playful dance is an intensely physical activity, too, it has no other purpose but to entertain and provide pleasure. Such a self-contained understanding of play was anathema for Cicero's agenda in *De oratore*. The pairing with the noun *exercitatio* in the second passage in which the adjective occurs underscores this: *quique ea, quae agenda sunt in foro tamquam in acie, possunt nunc exercitatione quasi ludicra praediscere ac meditari* (1.147: 'Already at this stage, by practising in mock exercise, they can learn in advance and train the things that must be done in the front line of the forum, so to speak').⁵¹⁶

Cicero also ensures that the practice of training gladiators is grouped as an *ars*, albeit not an honourable one. In 3.83, Catulus expresses his amazement at Crassus' wide-ranging knowledge of Greek theory, which the latter counters by comparing several activities (acting, fighting as a gladiator, singing) with his theoretical sketch of the perfect orator.⁵¹⁷ Some people, Crassus claims, like a certain Samnite gladiator coach, love practising their *ars* without end,

τὰς παιδείας ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, ἀλλὰ παραπλησίαις χρώμενοι καὶ ταῖς διδασκαλίαις καὶ ταῖς γυμνασίαις καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐπιμελείαις (182).

⁵¹³ Dugan 2005: 63.

⁵¹⁴ Elsewhere Cicero cracks a joke that rests on yet another meaning of both *ludus* and *magister* ('brothel' and 'agent to dispose of a debtor's property'). The joke is dissected in Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.51. He was undoubtedly aware of the evocative potential of these words. More on this in Del Giovane 2022: 293.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Plaut. *Aul.* 626-7, where Euclio adopts the comic slave role: *continuo meum cor coepit artem facere ludicram/atque in pectus emicare. sed ego cesso currere.*

⁵¹⁶ Note how *exercitatio ludicra* directly feeds into accomplishments in battle and the forum. Contrast also *Nat. D.* 102: *at ipsi tamen pueri etiam cum cessant exercitatione aliqua ludicra delectantur* with *Acad.* 2.6: *Quasi vero clarorum virorum aut tacitos congressus esse oporteat aut ludicos sermones aut rerum conloquia leviorum.* The last example shows that Cicero could foreground the playful aspect of *ludicer* (*ludicos sermones*) when he wanted to.

⁵¹⁷ The orator's skills are kept at a distance from the denigrated pursuits mentioned, cf. 3.87: *eadem ratio est harum maximarum artium.* Nevertheless, actor, gladiator and singer are invoked as examples against which the orator's required abilities can be measured. In 3.220, Cicero sharply distinguishes the effeminate movements of actors from those trained with weapons and in the palaestra.

while others have mastered a skill early in life: *at Q. Velocius puer addidicerat; sed quod erat aptus ad illum totumque cognorat, fuit, ut est apud Lucilium, “quamvis bonus ipse/Samnis in ludo ac rudibus cuivis satis asper”* (3.86: ‘Quintus Velocius, by contrast, learned this skill when he was a boy, but because he had a knack for it and had mastered the whole thing, he was, as Lucilius says, “ever so good a Samnite himself, in the game with the practice swords, a tough enough match for any man”). The *magister Samnitium* continues to train all day even in old age (3.86: *summa iam senectute est et cotidie commentatur*), but Velocius’ toughness (*satis asper*) equalled that of a gladiator already in boyhood. The *ludus* is here conceived of as a training ground that cultivates desirable attributes in young Roman males, and again Lucilius serves as the source for this episode.

Antonius later resorts to Samnite gladiator imagery as he goes on to expound the arrangement of a speech, here addressing the prologue: *eius modi illa prolusio debet esse, non ut Samnitium, qui vibrant hastas ante pugnam, quibus in pugnando nihil utuntur, sed ut ipsis sentiis, quibus proluserint, vel pugnare possint* (2.325: ‘an orator’s preliminary skirmishes should not be like those of the Samnite gladiators, who, before the fight, brandish spears that they don’t at all use in combat; on the contrary, they should be such that he can really use the thoughts of the preliminaries as weapons in the actual fight as well’). After conceptualising the prologue of a speech as *principium* throughout the passage (from 2.315), Antonius maps the image of Samnite gladiators’ brandishing of spears, which are never used in the actual fight, onto the orator’s verbal warm-up in the prologue. Orator and gladiator are fused metaphorically, words are conceived as weapons, and public speech as a fight in the arena.⁵¹⁸

Regarding his perfect *ludus*, Cicero inaugurates new differentiations, which set apart his vision of schooling from competing institutions. For this reason, he has Crassus take a determined stance against the recent pedagogical vogue of rhetorical teachers in Latin. They threatened to make oratorical training available to broader stretches of society, which would jeopardise the elite’s monopoly on the cultural capital furnished by Cicero’s planned syllabus and his new role as the prime teacher of bright young noblemen.⁵¹⁹ The question of extending citizenship to the Italian allies, which eventually led to the Social War, a fraught problem almost

⁵¹⁸ The verb *procludere* first occurs in this passage. The noun *prolusio* is also first attested in Cicero. Before *De or.* in *Div. in Caec.* 47: *sin mecum in hac prolusione nihil fueris, quem te in ipsa pugna cum acerrimo adversario fore putemus?*

⁵¹⁹ For the historical background of Crassus’ censorial intervention against this new trend and the ultimate failure to suppress Latin-speaking rhetorical schools, see Wisse 2002b: 344. By the time of writing, rhetorical training for young Romans must have been a reality which Cicero contrasts with his decidedly elitist educational scheme. Hömke 2018: 58 intriguingly observes that the expulsion of the *rhetoires Latini* in 92 BCE coincides quite well with Cicero starting his *tirocinium fori* in 91/90 BCE. Cicero chose a period for his dialogue that was rife with changes in education to prove that his vision could combine the best of both worlds.

entirely eclipsed from the debates in 91 BCE, is tightly connected to Crassus' actions as a censor.⁵²⁰ Crassus launches a diatribe against these new *rhetoires Latini: etiam Latini, si diis placet, hoc biennio magistri extiterunt* (3.94: 'less than two years ago there even appeared – heaven help us! – Latin teachers of speaking'), lambasting them for erecting a 'school of shamelessness' (3.94: *impudentiae ludus*). References to *impudentia* or the very similar noun *ineptia* occur prominently in *De oratore* with regard to the lack of tact displayed by the Greeks, who are cast as utter strangers to Roman high-class social etiquette.⁵²¹ Consequently, Cicero makes his readers imagine an *impudentiae ludus* as a place that subordinates Roman social mores to the theoretical import from the Hellenic world, instructing the young in Greek rhetoric without making the effort of integrating this knowledge – in both theory and practice – into the prevailing power structures of Roman, in particular urban, society.

Due to the possibility of incurring the charge that he was trying to dangerously Hellenise the young, Cicero evidently looked for models other than Plato to build up his notional credentials as a schoolmaster. A key figure in this regard was Isocrates, the canonical Attic orator, who stood out from his contemporary Greek peers as a paragon for the marriage of historical *exempla* and philosophy.⁵²² In two excerpts from the second book, Cicero pairs *ludus* with references to the Greek thinker: *Isocrates, magister ist<e orat>orum omnium, cuius e ludo tamquam ex equo Troiano meri principes exierunt* (2.94: 'Isocrates [...], the teacher of all of those well-known people who issued from his school as true masters, as if from the Trojan Horse'); and 3.35-6:

diligentissimeque hoc est eis, qui instituunt aliquos atque erudiunt, videndum, quo sua quemque natura maxime ferre videatur: etenim videmus ex eodem quasi ludo summorum in suo cuiusque genere artificum et magistrorum exisse discipulos dissimiles inter se ac tamen laudandos, cum ad cuiusque naturam institutio doctoris accommodaretur. 36) cuius est vel maxime insigne illud exemplum, ut ceteras artes omittamus, quod dicebat Isocrates doctor singularis se calcaribus in Ephoro, contra autem in Theopompo frenis uti solere.

It is the responsibility of those who provide instruction and education to observe very carefully where each pupil's natural abilities seem to lead him. In fact, when we look at the schools run by expert teachers, who were superior in their own different types, we see that each one

⁵²⁰ Flower 2010: 166 on the relationship between school closure, its founder Plotius Gallus, and a growing number of Italians speaking in Roman courts.

⁵²¹ The remarkably detailed examination of the lexeme *ineptus* by Crassus begins with Catulus' wish to join the spectacle of Crassus lecturing in Greek mode. He brings up the anxiety of appearing *ineptus* (2.13), which he then repeats in anticipation of Crassus' feelings (2.16: *dum vereare tu, ne sis ineptus*). In response, Crassus enagages in a cultural comparison, alleging that since the Greek language has no word for the concept of *ineptia*, the Greeks were incapable of respecting the rules of appropriate social behaviour: they talk too much, have no respect for the right occasion and disregard the affordances of status and age (2.17-18). Dupont 2012 tackles similar questions with a focus on *pudor* in elite communicative contexts.

⁵²² Marincola 2014; also Griffin 1994: 692, who points out that Cicero strove to return to the ideal championed by Isocrates: combining rhetorical theory with history and philosophy.

produced pupils who were different from one another and still praiseworthy, since every teacher adapted his instruction to the natural abilities of each individual pupil. 36) The most striking example of this (to leave aside the other arts) is probably that the incomparable teacher Isocrates said that he always used the spurs on Ephorus, but the bridle on Theopompus.

Isocrates receives persistent praise in *De oratore*.⁵²³ In addition, Isocrates as a cultural model who managed to fuse excellence in public speaking with philosophical insight does not only offer an excellent fit for Cicero's *orator perfectus* in *De oratore*, but proved to be an attractive paradigm in later dialogues as well.⁵²⁴ Even though the adverb *quasi* (*ex eodem quasi ludo*) gestures to a (feigned) hesitation about making this exact comparison, in the end Cicero elaborates an analogy between the magnificent outcomes of Isocrates' teaching efforts and his own agenda in *De oratore* – an idea which he would come back to later in his career.⁵²⁵ Through a dark irony of history, the conceptual connections he began to establish in the mid-50s became sad reality for him under Caesar's dictatorship when he effectively became a schoolmaster for Caesar's companions, teaching them declamations without any import in the political sphere.⁵²⁶

In conclusion, Cicero's ludic philosophising among friends subjects young Roman minds to a highly ambitious training programme that seeks to equip them with the required skills to reach excellence in the forum and the senate. Both protagonists of Cicero's philosophical drama, Antonius and Crassus, pose as teachers during the dialogue, and the various cross-references between Cicero's life deduced from the letters and his philosophical fictions create a dazzling blur between fiction and historical reality. Even as early as the writing of his first major philosophical dialogue, he was toying with the metaphorical mapping of the

⁵²³ Cf. LPW 1996: 136 *ad loc.* with relevant passages, and LP 1981: 64-5, specifying that Isocrates chiefly appears in the role of the teacher and not as an orator or a philosopher. Yet, he is lauded as *pater eloquentiae*, too (*De or.* 3.10). Useful on Isocrates' significance for Cicero as a philosopher, orator, and teacher is still Smethurst 1953; cf. also Muir 2015. See also Press 2012: 16 on the difference between Plato and Isocrates with regard to writing, which may have influenced Cicero when he launched his literary career more seriously.

⁵²⁴ *Brut.* 204 contains the same anecdote about Isocrates' adaptation to his students' needs. See also *Fam.* 1.9.23 for Cicero's adaptation of rhetorical theory according to Aristotle and Isocrates: *Aristoteliam et Isocratiam rationem oratoriam*. Too 1995 interprets the political dimension of Isocrates' views on *paideia* as he appropriated Athenian democratic ideals with the stance of an oligarch, replacing the democratic *polis* with the cultural hegemony exerted and expressed through the written texts of an individual, superior teacher-citizen.

⁵²⁵ Cf. *Brut.* 32: *Isocrates, cuius domus cunctae Graeciae quasi ludus quidam patuit atque officina dicendi*. Here again, *quasi* reveals Cicero's perceived need to express that this analogy is not exactly neat. Still, the idea is activated in his readers' mind. On this tactic, see Gildenhard 2011: 267 on *quasi divinus*, and Cole 2013: 186, likewise addressing Cicero's discourse of divinity and the frequent qualifiers *paene*, *quasi*, *sicut*. He holds that Cicero purposefully evoked unconventional metaphorical mappings and simultaneously softened their disturbing force through such qualifying adverbs.

⁵²⁶ Even at that point, comparing his activities to a *magister* in a *ludus* and the socio-cultural implications these associations carried remained an uncomfortable thought that he sought to qualify with *quasi*, cf. *Fam.* 9.18.1: *ludum quasi habere coeperim*. Gildenhard 2007: 34 notes that Cicero only explicitly styles himself schoolmaster in the *Tusculans* – under more desperate political circumstances for him. The intellectual foundation of this idea, however, is laid in *De or.*

terms for educational institutions (*gymnasium, palaestra, schola, ludus*) onto his own country escape in Tusculum, by inference figuring as a *magister* in his very own *ludus*.

His attempts at imagining a new position for himself as the supreme teacher of Rome's upcoming ruling elite underlies his preoccupation with pedagogical issues in *De oratore*. His strategy of wrapping the dialogue in his adapted version of Socratic irony, however, allows for a reception that regards his propositions as one big, grinning joke played with upper-class men about town and all those who might read the text as such in the future. *Ludus* was, of course, far from an unproblematic concept to employ freely, but it did offer the distinct advantage of being the only Latin lexeme to denote a Roman educational establishment.⁵²⁷ If he wanted to attain his goal of showcasing Roman superiority over the Greeks (especially contemporary rhetorical schools) also in pedagogical matters, an institution that was untainted by Greek heritage was called for.⁵²⁸ I maintain that *ludus* was precisely that. The consistently expressed admiration for Isocrates (*doctor singularis*) and his school (dubbed *ludus* throughout) at the expense of the more culturally influential Academy and Lyceum hint at Cicero's strategic choice of models and his efforts at elevating *ludus* into a culturally significant institution, at which Rome's future elite could be both rhetorically and philosophically trained to retrieve the much-needed consensus of the aristocracy.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ Horster 2011: 93 lists *ludus* beside *schola* and *didaskaleia*.

⁵²⁸ Crassus expresses Cicero's *translatio studii* in a nutshell in *De or.* 3.95: *etiam Graecis erunt anteponendi*.

⁵²⁹ For Cicero's attempts at making himself into a canonical figure by co-opting Greek models, see Bishop 2019; also van der Blom 2010: 294-34 for his 'self-exemplarification'.

Conclusion: play in the Roman imagination

This study has taken its starting point from the observation that the English term ‘play’ and its closest equivalent in the Latin language, *ludus*, do not straightforwardly map onto one another. While the abundance of toys and games from Greco-Roman antiquity that archaeologists have unearthed leaves no doubt that play behaviour was a constant of the ancient world – and can, in fact, be safely regarded as a universal of human life –, the concept of play in the Roman imagination is still remarkably different from ‘play’ in Anglophone cultures. In the preceding chapters, I have shown that with respect to the realm of ideas our understanding of Roman play and its relation to the production of texts needs serious revision. An ardent quest for a unifying semantic core dominates prevailing notions of a Roman concept of play. My historicising investigation has instead stressed that play as conceptualised in the Latin language is an ever-shifting target, especially by virtue of the remarkable semantic breadth of the noun *ludus* and the corresponding verb *ludere*. Play lexemes in Latin are pliable signifiers in the hands of the authors who employ them creatively with reference to their own socio-political standings, chosen genres, and unique styles and interests.

Outlining the major semantic shifts the discourse of play underwent over the course of the Roman republic is not just an exercise in conceptual history. The polysemy of *ludus/ludere* helped to render play a foundational notion for the ways in which Plautus, Lucilius, and Cicero thought about literature and society, thereby turning the concept into a key component of literary production in the republic across a wide range of genres. The ludic aspects of their world-making align with their adoption of generic frameworks and modes of authorial self-fashioning that are manifestly aestheticising and thus opposed to the fundamental tenets of Rome’s aristocratic political culture. My case studies tried to identify each author’s aesthetic and cultural agenda, and how each utilised a discourse of play to advance it. The ensuing account of the historical permutations of this discourse attests to the creative potential of *ludus* (and associated lexemes) during the republican centuries. What is more, the inter-relations between the conceptions of play found in Plautus’ comedies, Lucilius’ satires, and Cicero’s *De oratore* turned out to be intimately intertwined and best studied together.

Paradoxically, throughout the period studied, play is, generally speaking, a secondary and depreciated concept, associated with subalterns such as children, women, slaves, non-citizens, and cultural outsiders. Yet it is just the inferiority it connotes that Plautus, Lucilius, and Cicero exploit to introduce cultural innovations. Under the veneer of discourse and practices which are marked as un-Roman, Plautus works out a blueprint for the expression of

an aesthetic programme that later Latin writers would draw upon. The main characters in his comedies are othered by the social categories of ethnicity, civic status, age, or gender, which qualifies them in the topsy-turvy world of comedy to take up roles of power. The means for them to authorise themselves into the main agents of the plot is to become comic playwrights themselves who do what, by implication, the real-life dramaturge Plautus does – devise comic *ludi*.

Play for Plautus is largely imagined as an act of deception, a cunning play with words, identity, and social roles. He inverts the stereotype of the wily Greek, who trumps others by playing tricks on them, into the hallmark of his conception of play and his self-fashioning as a producer of humorous fictional plots. Characters within the stage fiction offer a mirror-image of the playwright and thereby a template for imagining what the strange new intellectuals in society who hail from Hellenised areas of the Mediterranean are doing with the novel literary medium and with a new literary form of the Latin language. Concomitantly, Plautus recurrently deploys an idiom of aesthetic evaluation, which supplies audiences and later readers of his work with a fundamental grammar to describe intellectual brilliance and cultural refinement – just the qualities he deviously ascribes to himself as the creative genius behind his plays. Plautus thus uses the play worlds of his comedies as well as the rich concept of *ludus* to construct a cultural domain through his writings in which he himself could gain ascendancy.

The creativity Plautus displays with regard to Latin play terminology is not only connected to his articulation of a literary-aesthetic programme but also extends to the world beyond the stage. By insinuating that he is in fact the sole master of *ludi* in Rome, he co-opts the civic and religious festivals, enveloping them in his discourse and forever reconstituting their meaning. At the same time, the use Plautus made of the polysemy of the Latin concept of play to promote himself as the main attraction of the games is mitigated by the pejorative associations of his comedies with Greek guile and cunning slaves. Play remains a subaltern category after all, and Plautus' aestheticising take on language and its power to construct reality in deviant ways could easily be considered of no import in the Roman field of power.

Plautus' comedies also frequently feature the verb *ludere* in the sense of 'mock, make fun of, joke'. Slaves and young men are the chief exponents of this discursive practice, which would gradually make a career in upper-class circles. Lucilius is the decisive figure in transporting play rhetoric from its socially subordinated base into an aristocratic context. Though there are major difficulties connected with any attempt to reconstruct the historical Lucilius, let alone his literary agenda, the benefits of an approach via historical context are evident. Lucilius' programmatic *ludus* and *sermone*s can in this way be situated within elite

leisure, and the play element of the new genre presumably only later called satire can be understood as the transfer of a comic paradigm into the milieu of the nobility. This pose epitomises the ironically inferior posture of an *eques* among the highest cadres of society who took to writing comic verse. One can glean from Lucilius' discourse of play and a survey of the most debated fragments that he places his poetry in a contrastive relationship to the model of Ennius, creating a parody of a client poet's epic by casting the characters of his verse and his authorial persona as comic types. Lucilius' relationship with Scipio Aemilianus has in the later reception of his work been imagined as more irreverent and playful than Ennius' 'good companion' paradigm suggested. I have made the case that already in the fragments of the satires Lucilius projected an image of Scipio that could encompass banter and participation in aristocratic life that marked a new stage in the relationship between poetry and power. Being the first Roman knight to devote himself seriously to the production of poetry, Lucilius is peculiarly interested in probing the aristocratic value system by extending the commemorative function of literature to leisure activities of the elite so that play, banquets, scholarly studies, and literary culture could receive an unprecedentedly probing and forthright representation.

The final stage in this overview of the republican discourse of play was represented by Cicero's *De oratore*. Cicero continues the scholarly work done on early authors such as Plautus by Rome's first 'philologists' and writers like Lucilius, quotes Plautus directly, and makes use of multiple facets of Plautus' conception of play. Transforming the sense 'play as trickery', which had been vital for the comedian into Cicero's gentlemanly ideal of urbane irony, the ex-consul foregrounds the educational side of *ludus* and carries on the discursive strand 'play as banter and verbal games'. Gone is the servile trickster element, making way for an evolutionary narrative that conceives of play as a preliminary stage in a continuing process of maturation. Plato serves as the intellectual backbone of this instrumental view of play, and the Greek language with its etymological links of play and education are the inspiration for Cicero's oblique self-fashioning as the supreme teacher of an upcoming generation of young *nobiles*.

This brief presentation of the main argumentative lines has touched upon a whole smorgasbord of topics: from the overly Hellenised play of social inferiors in the *palliata* and their attempts to create a cultural space for expertise, over the knightly play that has produced a distinctly Roman anti-epic genre, to the functionalisation of play for instructional purposes by a *consularis*, who desired to leave a literary legacy and influence Roman politics via a different channel after reaching and then falling from the apex of political power. Yet, this sketch also gives a glimpse of the variety of strategic uses to which Latin writers put *ludus/ludere* in a fast-evolving society from the mid-3rd to the 1st cent. BCE. While there is a

stability in the devaluation and othering of play in the aristocratic context across this history, individual writers exploit their power to shape the world of discourse in Latin in idiosyncratic ways – and the polysemy of *ludus/ludere* provides a semantic complexity that is fit for this purpose.

This story has limited itself to three prominent republican writers who have decisively shaped the discourse I have studied in its genealogy. There is sufficient overt dialogue between Plautus, Lucilius, and Cicero to treat them as a coherent set to study the evolution of a discourse of play during the Roman republic. Play and *ludus* are certainly significant categories for authors writing with the canon of Cicero and earlier republican writers as a background. Horace's *ludi* in the *Sermones* and beyond, (pseudo-)Virgil's youthful play poetry, and of course Ovid's games of love are but the canonical examples for possible future examinations of the development and change of thought about play in Latin.⁵³⁰ Beyond classical antiquity, the learned games of Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus or Nicholas of Cusa, and the ways in which they carry on a discourse of play in Latin are further potential avenues that have largely been explored discretely from their classical precedents.⁵³¹ Yet, these will be games for others to play.

⁵³⁰ On Ovid, the self-styled *lusor amorum*, see Morgan 2003; Peirano 2012: 56-9 for play in the *Culex*; for Horace's rewriting of Lucilius in *Sat.* 1.5, see Gowers 1993a.

⁵³¹ For collected papers on the idea of play in the Renaissance, see Hempfer/Pfeiffer 2002; also Matuschek 1998, who traces humanist conceptions of play down to modern (literary) theory.

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