

# Resonant Self-World Relations in the Context of Representations of Ritual Practices in the Comedies of Plautus

Blaž Ploj, Classical Philology (Latin)

University of Graz | Supervisors: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ursula Gärtner (Graz) / Prof. Dr. Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt)

Start 2018

## Topic

The comedies of Titus Maccius Plautus, mostly based on episodes from everyday life, depict the strongly stereotypical urban family life while turning traditional Roman values upside down. The various religious rituals that Plautus transferred to the stage indicate a deliberate play with ritual conventions, with the aim of enhancing the comic effect. The rituals transposed and transformed in this way provided an important field of reference for the audience during the performance and thus established a comprehensible relationship between lived religion, the comic stage and the audience response.



Mosaic with a scene from a comedy. From Pompeii. 2nd c. BCE (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples)

## Research Questions and Sources

By setting the rituals on the comic stage, a double relationality is generated, which on the one hand brings to light the relationship between lived religion and stage fiction and on the other hand lends a definable framework to the audience's response. Starting from this double relationality, the project focuses on the following questions:

- How were religious rituals transposed to the comic stage and how were they transformed?
- What position and role do representations of rituals take in the structure of the drama and the dramaturgy of the play?
- What was the audience's response to representations of rituals on stage?

Five comedies by Plautus in which the performative implementation of rituals plays an important role in the development of the plot:

*Curculio, Mercator, Mostellaria, Poenulus, Rudens.*

## Aim

- Description and contextualization of the formal, material, performative, dramaturgical and socio-cultural aspects of representations of rituals on the comic stage.
- Definition of the reception of representations of rituals in theatre.

## Methods

- Considering the performative character of rituals, I derive my considerations from the performance, which can be deduced from the extant dramatic texts.
- Since the contemporary reception of Roman comedy is hardly or not at all documented, I use the concepts of the implicit reader (Wolfgang Iser) as well as the horizon of expectation (Hans Robert Jauss) in order to draw conclusions on the level of reception.
- Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextuality is used as a descriptive instrument for the theatrical realization of rituals on stage. Drawing on Genette and the common performative character of ritual and theatre, the concept of hyper-performativity is being introduced.
- Based on the theory of resonance (Hartmut Rosa), the aim is to grasp and describe self-world relations both at the level of performance and at the level of contemporary reception.



Altar with the depiction of a ritual. From Rome, Imperial period (Museum of Antiquities, Royal Palace, Stockholm)

## Next steps

Having collected the source material, defined the methods and analyzed the plays *Rudens* and *Mostellaria*, I now focus on the examination of *Curculio*, *Mercator* and *Poenulus*.

## Results so far

In Plautus' plays,

1. representations of rituals are either inserted at certain points (often marking decisive turning points in the plot) or they form a connecting link in the play between the beginning and the end;
2. rituals are transformed or combined at will in their theatrical implementation - usually to produce comic effects or to add to the suspense;
3. representations of rituals can either generate a vertical agency on stage, or they can be banalized to the point of grotesqueness.

### Images

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metres\\_of\\_Roman\\_comedy#/media/File:Scena\\_di\\_commedia,\\_musicanti,\\_da\\_villa\\_di\\_cecerone\\_a\\_pompei,\\_9985,\\_03.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metres_of_Roman_comedy#/media/File:Scena_di_commedia,_musicanti,_da_villa_di_cecerone_a_pompei,_9985,_03.JPG)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_ancient\\_Rome#/media/File:Stockholm\\_-\\_Antikengalerie\\_Opferszene.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome#/media/File:Stockholm_-_Antikengalerie_Opferszene.jpg)

### Contact:

Blaž Ploj  
University of Graz, Institute of Classics  
IGDK „Resonant Self–World Relations“  
blaz.ploj@uni-graz.at

