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**Vergil on the stage of the mime and the pantomime**

The purpose of this paper is to address the implications arising from the use of Vergilian themes on the stage of the mime and the pantomime. I will consider issues in relation to the reception of Vergil in antiquity, the interplay of theatrical and non-theatrical genres in Rome, the adaptation of texts for performance, and the dynamics of the relationship between 'high' and 'low' forms of literary culture in antiquity.

Evidence for the exploitation of material from Vergil's works by mimic and pantomimic actors covers a wide period from Vergil's lifetime to the fifth century CE. We are told that the mime-actress Cytheris gave recitals from the *Eclogues* in the theatre, with Cicero in the audience, to huge popular acclaim. This is not an isolated theatrical event in the history of the reception of the *Eclogues*, if we are to judge from (and believe) the author of the *vita Vergili*, who refers to repeated theatrical performances of the *Eclogues*. Such an impression is confirmed by the speaker in Tacitus' *Dialogus* (referring to Vergilian verses heard in the theatre in Vergil's presence), and the irate Jerome who castigates Christian priests for abandoning the study of the Gospel, reading comedies, and knowing by heart the bucolic love-affairs of Vergil. Moreover, specific episodes from the *Aeneid* (the death of Turnus, the unfortunate love-affair of Dido) were taken up as themes presented time and again on the pantomimic stage, while the conversation between Aeneas and Anchises in the underworld is, according to Augustine, a familiar theatrical scene in the minds of his readers.

In my presentation I would like to consider the 'problem' of having high-brow Vergilian works (or individual scenes from these works) added to the low mimic and pantomimic repertoire. Although mime influenced widely divergent literary genres (love-elegy, satire, the novel), it was regarded as inferior in comparison not only to other types of Roman theatre but also to the rest of Latin literature. This is hardly surprising. Mime with its imitation of base things and worthless characters was pre-eminently the genre of crude realism in antiquity: a maskless actor or actress, usually a slave or freedman/freedwoman, would expose himself/herself to the public gaze, and satirize people and contemporary events with inelegant and uncouth words that belonged to the vocabulary of the lower classes. Likewise, a certain mismatch is observed between the low reputation of pantomime actors and their appeal to large audiences, including members of the Imperial family.

So, what does it mean to have one of your poems recited by a mime-actress in front of a full theatre? Is there any tension between, on the one hand, the social/theatrical status and, indeed, the sex of the performer and, on the other, the Vergilian text that is delivered on stage? In what way were these texts adapted for stage-performance? How do Vergil's pastoral and epic compositions compare to other literary genres dramatized or parodied by the irreverent mimes? Who benefited in terms of literary reputation from this theatrical exploitation of bucolic tales and the stage re-enactment of Aeneas' tragic love-affair with Dido? Vergil or the theatre of the mime?