

WHERE DID THE AUDIENCE GO?

The first two attempts at presenting the *Hecyra* to the public were failures. As we know from Terence's prologues, the performances were interrupted by an unruly audience. Beare¹ explains the nature of the disturbances thus: "The theatre had to compete with other forms of entertainment such as rope-dancing. Failure to make an immediate impression might result in empty benches, as the two prologues to Terence's *Hecyra* show." Beare's explanation was adopted by Duckworth:² "If a play had less appeal than some nearby attractions, such as a boxing match or a gladiatorial combat, they might rush from a theatre, as in fact happened in the case of the first two performances of the *Hecyra*."

Beare and others apparently believe that dramatic performances and other types of entertainment were given simultaneously, at nearby locations. The audience was free to move from one place to another, from the less popular attraction to the more appealing form of entertainment. A presentation abandoned by its audience was interrupted, since it was pointless to continue to perform in front of empty benches. Beare does not specify the site nor does he seem to mind the fact that the two performances took place on different occasions (see below).

The text of the two prologues, however, does not support the rather modern notion of an uninterested or disgusted audience leaving the

¹ W. Beare, *The Roman Stage*, (London 1964) 161; this passage had appeared already, in the same form, in the first edition of the book published in 1950, and was therefore known to Duckworth (note 2 *infra*); *v.* also p. 173. A similar description is found in J. Marouzeau, *Térence* (Paris 1947) 1.16: "le public ayant déserté la salle pour aller voir des athlètes et un acrobate."

² G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton 1952) 81-82.

auditorium and moving somewhere else. In the first prologue Terence briefly explains that the spectators were intent on seeing a new attraction (*novom vitium*, 2) of rope-walking, and because of that his play was not viewed (*neque spectari*, 3), nor could the audience become acquainted with it (*neque cognosci*). Therefore, he is justified in presenting it again as if he were presenting an entirely new play. Nothing said in the first prologue pertains to the site at which the *Hecyra*, or the rival rope-walking attraction, might have been presented. Nor is there anything that hints at the direction of the audience's movement. However, in the second prologue, Terence again describes the first, unsuccessful presentation of his play and adds more information: The audience expected to see performances of boxing and rope-walking (*pugilum, funambuli*, 33–34)³; fans of these performers gathered,⁴ there was a lot of noise, women conversed loudly, and as a result the actors were forced to withdraw from the stage before their time (*facere ut ante tempus exirem foras*, 35).⁵ Nothing is said about the audience going out. On the contrary, the words *exirem foras* indicate that the actors were the ones forced to leave. That the audience did not leave but rather stayed in its place is apparent also from the description of the *Hecyra*'s second unsuccessful presentation. This time the performance was already in process and the audience seemed to like it (*primo actu placeo*, 39), when it was rumoured that a gladiatorial show would be given (v. 39–40). From all sides people came running (*populus convolat*, 40)⁶, rioting (*tumultuantur*, 41), shouting (*clamant*, 41), and fighting for seats (*pugnant de loco*, 41). It became impossible to continue the performance, and the actors were unable to maintain their place on stage (*interea meum non potui tutari locum*, 42) and vacated it once more. Again, it is quite clear that the actors were the ones to leave and that the spectators stayed. Had the audience been rushing out they would have left their seats rather than fight for them. It is therefore

³ *Pugilum gloria*, Don. ad loc. *polyogia*, i.e. a lot of talk about boxers; cf. W. M. Lindsay, "Pugilum Gloria (Ter. Hec. 33)", CQ 25 (1931) 144–145.

⁴ Cf. Don. ad *Hec.* 35.

⁵ Perhaps "through the doors on the stage itself", cf. Carney ad. loc. in his *Hecyra* (Pretoria 1963).

⁶ "Leave empty benches", "rush from", as Beare and others interpret it, would be *evolat*, and not *convolat*.

probable that the gladiatorial show was presented before the same stalls (i.e. the same audience in the same seats), and either on the very stage where the performance of the *Hecyra* was in process, or in front of it.⁷

That boxers and others could perform on the same stage on which a dramatic performance was being presented is evident from Polybius' account of Anicius' triumph.⁸ In honour of his victory over the Illyrians Anicius celebrated a triumph in 167 B.C. For the occasion he hired Greek musicians, dancers and actors, and erected a large stage in the circus. The first to perform on it were flute-players who accompanied a dancing chorus. However, Anicius was not pleased with their routine performance. Instead he ordered them to engage in a mock-fight, with the musicians and dancers pretending to attack each other. The Greek performers obliged Anicius, to the delight and approval of the applauding audience. To add to the merriment two dancers entered the orchestra and four boxers mounted the stage with trumpeters and horn-players. The manner in which a tragedy was subsequently presented Polybius declined to describe on the grounds that it was too ridiculous. For the Greeks it was barbarous and tasteless entertainment, but it was precisely what the Roman crowds enjoyed.

Boxers were still popular two years later when the *Hecyra* was first performed⁹; in 165 B.C., however, the new attraction was the rope-

⁷ Don. ad *Hec.* 39: *hoc abhorret a nostra consuetudine, verumtamen apud antiquos gladiatores in theatro spectabantur.* Donatus understood from the passage that the *Hecyra* and the gladiatorial show were performed in the same place, but wrongly assumed that at the time of the republic gladiatorial shows were presented in the theatre, v. infra. Cf. also C. Saunders, "The Site of Dramatic Performances at Rome in the Times of Plautus and Terence", *TAPA* 44 (1913) 94; and L. R. Taylor, "The Opportunities for Dramatic Performances in the Time of Plautus and Terence", *TAPA* 68 (1937) 301. People did not give up their hard-won places easily. Cf. the anecdote told by Quintilian 6.3.63: *eques Romanus, ad quem in spectaculis bibentem cum misisset Augustus, qui ei diceret ego, si prandere volo, domum eo, tu enim, inquit, non times, ne locum perdas.* This was in the times of Augustus when more sitting places were provided for the spectators than in the times of the republic.

⁸ Plb. 30.22, quoted by Ath. 14.615 b-d. The games are not described by Livy, cf. 45.35,39.

⁹ According to the traditional chronology, in 165 B.C. at the Ludi Megalenses, cf. Duckworth (note 2 supra) 60 and n. 52, and the literature he quotes. The site of the performance could have been either a) the circus or b) the open space before the temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine, v. Cic. *Har. Resp.* 24, cf. E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (London 1962) 27-31 (esp. p. 30); Platner-Ashby, *A Topographical*

walkers. With the preferences of the Roman audience as described by Polybius in mind, one should not wonder that the comedy was forced off stage.¹⁰ Once the actors had left the boxers mounted the vacated stage and started to perform. The spectators stuck to their hard-won seats. This was essentially what happened during the second performance of *Hecyra* as well, at the funeral games of L. Aemilius Paulus in 160 B.C.¹¹

Dictionary of Ancient Rome (Oxford 1929) 324–325. a) For a long time the main popular entertainment in Rome was spectacles that took place in the circus. Initially, with the introduction of the *ludi scaenici*, tragedy and comedy were added to the former types of entertainment and also performed in the circus (Liv. 25.12.14; 30.38.10–12), since “the circus was the first public permanent building for spectacles,” M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton 1961²) 167. Even the *Ludi Apollinares* were celebrated in the circus (cf. Liv. *loc. cit.*). Apart from Anicius’ stage in the circus we know from Liv. 41.27 that the censors of 176 ordered certain works to be carried out in order to provide facilities for various types of entertainment, such as dramatic performances, chariot races, *venationes*, etc.; among other things they arranged for a construction of a stage for the use of the aediles and praetors of the various *ludi*. The text of Livy is corrupt but it seems that all these works, including the construction of the stage, were carried out in the circus. On this stage theatrical performances were presented, along with other types of entertainment. A stage in the circus, either temporary or more permanent, was therefore a common sight. Perhaps the stage of Anicius was still there in 165. The *Hecyra* could have been presented on it, and later, in line with Anicius’ fashion, the boxers could mount it. b) They might also have performed, however, on a temporary stage on the Palatine, where the rope-walkers would have more interesting possibilities of stretching their ropes than in the center of the circus arena. The ropes were probably stretched and ready for performance when the audience arrived in the morning for the *ludi*. Perhaps the sight of the rope, with its promise of the novel attraction, so intrigued the spectators that they could concentrate on the other presentations only with difficulty.

¹⁰ Some scholars, however, do not believe Terence’s account that adverse circumstances were to be blamed and seek to justify the failures by weaknesses they find in the play. Cf. e.g., Marouzeau (above, note 1) 3.14–16; T. Frank, “Terence’s Contribution to Plot-Construction”, *AJP* 49 (1928) 319–320.

¹¹ The site at which the *ludi funebres* of L. Aemilius Paulus were celebrated is not mentioned and is, therefore, open to conjectures. When we do have information on the site at which other *ludi funebres* were celebrated it is invariably the forum, cf. Liv. 31.50.4; 39.46.2–3; Plut. *C. Gracch.* 12, probably because of the fact that they featured gladiatorial fights and dramatic performances, but not circensian features, cf. Taylor (note 4 supra) 299; Saunders (note 4 supra) 93 states that *circenses* were included in the *ludi funebres*, but she cites no supporting evidence. The first gladiatorial fights were given in the Forum Boarium (212 B.C.); cf. Val. Max. 2.4.7; Liv. *Per.* 16. Later they were held in the Forum Romanum (Liv. 23.30, 31.50, 39.46), where they could be watched from the sitting places in the forum provided for the spectators by Maenius (cf. Fest. *s.v. Maeniana*), and even from the Capitol, cf. Cic. *Sest.* 124. Not until Hadrian do we hear of gladiatorial shows in the circus, cf. Dio Cass. 69.8.2; Fasti Ost. (ad annum A.D. 126) I.I.XIII,I, n. 5 in *Circo ... munus editum et consummatum ... paribus* 1835. Saunders (note 4 supra) 93, quotes Suet.

Gladiatorial shows were always the most popular type of entertainment in Rome.¹² Once one was announced the audience did not let a dramatic performance proceed. The spectators would stay in their places, the actors would leave, and the gladiators would put on their show.

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Div. Aug. 43 munera non in foro modo, nec in amphitheatro, sed et in circo et in septis as evidence that gladiatorial shows were performed in the circus in Augustus' times. However, after *histriones* there is a lacuna in the text and the word *munera* is a conjecture of Perizonius. Roth (on p. XXXIX–XL of his edition of Suetonius) proposed to insert *circensibus gladiatoribusque muneribus frequentissime editis interiecit plerumque bestiarum Africanarum venationes* on the basis of Augustus' description in *Res Gest. 22: venationes bestiarum africanarum meo nomine aut filiorum meorum et nepotum in circo aut in foro aut in amphitheatris populo dedi* (H. Volkmann, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* [Berlin 1969] 40), a source that Suetonius used extensively. Mommsen endorsed Roth's conjecture (*certe recte restituit Rothius*) in his *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Berlin 1883) 94; cf. also Gag e's second edition (Paris 1950) 40. From Roth's long insertion only the word *venationes* is certain, since it is required by the end of the sentence *venationes ... et aliquando nihil praeter venationem edidit*, and attested by the *Res Gest.* For establishing the site of gladiatorial shows in the circus the passage in Suet. is valueless. If the *ludi funebres* of L. Aemilius Paulus were held in the forum, as they undoubtedly were, then the second presentation of the *Hecyra* was held there as well. The audience did not leave the site and move to another place, but stayed in the Maeniana aedificia, and elsewhere, wherever a good view of the performance could be secured. The scenic presentation, and the gladiatorial fights were presented on the same site, on the same day, one presentation following the other. Polybius and Terence clearly indicate that no separate days were set aside for the different types of performances. It is also highly unlikely that these in charge of the *ludi* would arrange simultaneous performances that might compete one with the other, especially not on the occasion of the privately financed *ludi funebres*. Perhaps the unhappy experience of pairing different types of entertainment to the disadvantage of the more vulnerable ones prompted the final separation of the *scaenici* from the gladiatorial shows and the *circenses* (a permanent theatre was ordered built in 155 B.C. but was destroyed by order of the senate, Liv. *Ep.* 48; Vell. 1.15.3; Val. Max. 2.4.2). Separate days could be devoted to *scaenici* and *circenses* when each type of performance had its own home. At the time of Terence a permanent theatre did not exist, but at the time when Livy wrote his history there were three. Livy, perhaps, ascribed to much earlier times the division of the *ludi* into separate days devoted to *scaenici* and *circenses*, as he knew it, cf. e.g. Liv. 30.27.12; 33.25.1–3; 42.10.5.

¹² Cf. Cic. *Pro Sest.* 125 *equidem existimo nullum tempus esse frequentioris populi quam illud gladiatorium, neque contionis ullius neque vero ullorum comitiorum ... innumerabilis hominum multitudo.*