ŠÁRKA HURBÁNKOVÁ (MASARYK UNIVERSITY)

CHARACTERS AND COMIC SITUATIONS IN ROMAN COMEDY:
THE ATELLAN FARCE AND MIME

This study suggests how to examine two genres of Roman comedy, especially the preserved fragments, offering a more precise description and analysis of the comic characters in the Atellan farce and mime. For such a comparison it is important to focus on the few elements which appear throughout all the genres of Roman comedy; here, the characters and situations resulting from their interaction are examined. We should also compare all the characters that can be found in both the atellana *and* mimus *(even the stock characters) in order to discern possible concordance between them. It is evident that in both genres the same situations are repeated and they result from the interactions between comic characters, featuring a wide variety of vulgar people. In addition to these rude folk, their failed relatives and crude work occupations are depicted in the fragments.*

This study suggests how to examine several genres of Roman comedy, especially the preserved fragments of this literature. I would like to discuss the possibility of making a more precise definition of the comic characters in the Atellan farce and mime, focusing on characters and comic situations. These are the two main elements which appear throughout all genres of Roman comedy[1] and can be compared. I think that by analysing these two elements within the broad context of Roman comedy we can break down the prejudices concerning the perception of Roman comic genres and document the genres' intertwining.[2]

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[1]   For the definition of *Roman Comedy* see López, Aurora — Pociña, Andrés. 2007. *Comedia romana.* Madrid: Ediciones Akal.

[2]   In this report, I will compare only fragments of the Atellan farce and Roman mime, but currently I am working on my thesis entitled 'Characters and Comic Situations

The Atellan farce is a short satiric composition with Italic characters, four of whom are formed types called *personae oscae.* The Mime shows short scenes depicting vulgar situations acted by unmasked dancing actors or actresses. In the study of these two folk theatre genres we can see common characteristics as the Italic characters and folk culture[3] and the simple action of the play (naturally, we should take in consideration the influence of Greek mime on its Roman counterpart). This simple action is based on the realistic portrayal of human life eloquently acted by the actor-characters, including corporal expression and improvisation. The simple action of the play is also the most relevant characteristic from the literary and dramatic point of view. [4]

Characters Named in Titles and in Quotations from Fragments

For this study I chose only the titles and quotations of fragments[5] in which characters and their descriptions appear. If we follow the theory of

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in Roman Comedy', in which I examine Roman comedy as a unit and compare the characters and comic situations in *mimus*, *atellana, togata* and *palliata*.

[3] There is a question of how much the ancient non-literary genres were transformed by Latin authors into a literary form. I try to distinguish between the Italic elements in the literary Atellan farce in the article: Hurbánková, Šárka. 2008. "Personae oscae e il riso popolare nelle atellane." *Graeco-Latina Brunensia,* 13, 67–79.

[4] We should look at all comic genres from the same point of view. According to A. López — A. Pociña (2007: 24–25), there are five basic aspects to compare in these four genres: the aspect of the evolution of the drama, the scenic implementation, the action of the play, and the primacy of the literary or corporal expression. If we look at the Atellan farce and mime from this perspective, we can see common characteristics such as the Italic ambient and Italic characters. Thus, from the literary and dramatic point of view the most relevant aspect is the simple action of the play, which unfortunately ranked these two popular genres as those of minor importance.

[5] I worked with the edition by Paolo Frassinetti for the Atellan farce (Frassinetti, Paolo [ed.]. 1967. *Atellanae fabulae.* Roma: In aedibus Athenaei.) and with the edition by Mario Bonaria for the mime (Bonaria, Mario [ed.]. 1965. *I mimi romani.* Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.). From the latter edition I chose fragments only from the chapters *Fragmenta certa* and *Fragmenta dubia* (M. Bonaria1965: 35–90). I do not work with the titles and fragments in the chapter *Fragmenta spuria*, where M. Bonaria (1965:140–144), following various studies, explains why there are not real mimes. I do not work with the quotations and glosses from the chapters *Glossae mimicae* and *Fasti mimici et pantomimici* either, because these are not plays, but mostly glosses in which the characters do not act.

De Lorenzi[6] that the title of the play reflects the name of its main character, we can be quite sure that the character named in the title really appears in the play. However, this is not so clear if we look at quotations found in the fragments because the characters named in the titles may in fact only allude to others who do not appear in the play. An example:

> *'Aleo <ludas! : : si> ludam sane meae male olant manus.'* (Pompon. *aleones, I*)

According to Frassinetti (1967) we can see two direct speeches here. The first one starts with the vocative "*aleo*", so we can be quite sure that the crapshooters really acted in this play. However, often the name in the title and the quotation do not correspond. Generally it is guess work to determine any relationship between the title and characters. For example, in the following fragment called *Pannuceati* somebody speaks about his elder brother who drove him out of his home and then married a rich but ugly old woman:

> *'sed meus frater maior, postquam vidit me vi deiectum domo, nupsit posterius dotatae vetulae varicosae vafrae.'* (Pompon. *pannuceati, I*)

It is possible, but absolutely not certain, that the character who speaks here became one of the *pannuceati* (the paupers). However, we have another interesting matter in this fragment: a nice description of the old woman which is very similar to those of Plautus.

If we examine the fragments of the Atellan farce separately, we can get a sense of the quite rich characteristics of its four *personae oscae*: *Maccus, Pappus, Bucco* and *Dossennus*. But in these fragments there are many other stock characters who have been mostly omitted in earlier studies. Comparing the *atellana* and *mimus*, I suggest selecting all characters from both genres who share similar characteristics, and then clearly analysing them and determining any possible correspondences.

I also suggest separately comparing the characters cited in the titles with the quotations in the fragments. Below is a table clearly showing how often characters occur in both comic genres. The table shows the titles of the *atellana* and *mimus* in which identical or very similar characteristics appear.[7]

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6   De Lorenzi, Attilio. 1957. *Pulcinella. Ricerche sull'Atellana*. Napoli: Ist. della Stampa, 85.

7   Amongst the characters in the titles and in the quotations we can find many synonyms, such as *gemelli* and *gemini* or *manduco* and *esor,* etc. It should be very interesting to divide them into two groups called 'informal/vulgar' and 'formal' names. I think that we could deduce more about the real appearance of the characters in the folk genres from such a confrontation, but this is not the main task of this study. Nevertheless, I would like to concentrate on it in my future studies.

Comparison of the Titles of *atellana* and *mimus*

ATELLANA	MIMUS
Pompon. *augur*.	Laber. *augur*.
Pompon. *fullones*,[8] *decuma fullonis*, Novius *fullones*, *fullones feriati*, *fullonicum*.	Laber. *fullo*.
Pompon. *galli transalpini*.	Laber. *galli*.
Pompon. *macci gemini, macci gemini priores*. Novius *gemini*.[9]	Laber. *gemelli*.
Novius *hetaera*.	Laber. *hetaera*.
Pompon. *piscatores*.	Laber. *piscator*.
Novius *virgo praegnans*. Pompon. *maccus virgo*.	Laber. *virgo*.[10]

It is evident from this table that the most frequent protagonists in *atellana* and *mimus* were common people with various work occupations: half of the titles of *atellana* (27 out of 53) and a third of the titles of *mimus* (11 out of 32) refer to some kind of job. In the Atellan farce, titles containing **fullo** (fuller) in various forms occur five times, and in Laberius once; in addition, one *togata* from Titinius is named *Fullones*. In Plautus we find mention of fullers in his three comedies.[11] The fullers were common in the everyday reality of the rude social environment,[12] and that is why they became a frequent subject of Latin authors influenced by the Italic folk culture.[13]

The protagonists in these plays are very often close relatives. We find nearly identical titles, with names for twins such as **gemelli** or **gemini**, in the Atellan farces and mimes. Plautus' comedy *Menaechmi* is based on a mix up of twins — surely, this plot device is based on the Greek model. Nevertheless, many comic situations arise from this mix up because the brothers look identical but their characters are totally different.[14] The frag-

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8   Titin. *fullones.*

9   Titin. *gemina.*

10   Afran. *virgo.*

11   Plaut. *Aul.* 508, 515; *Pseud.* 782; *Asin.* 907.

12   The fuller's occupation was very dirty: they worked even with human and animal urine. Although it was only a slave's job, it was one of the first associated into the corporation. For more information about the fullers and their presence in Roman comedy, cf. Guardì, Tommaso. 1978. "I *fullones* e la commedia romana." *PAN studi dell'Istituto di filologia latina*, 6, 37–45.

13   There is no mention of *fullo* in Terentius. In Frassinetti, Paolo. 1953. *Fabulla atellana: Saggio sul teatro popolare latino*. Genova: Istituto di Filologia classica, 42–44, the expansion of the ancient improvised *atellana* with the arrival of the fullers in Rome from the countryside during the feast day of *Quinquatrus*.

14   The switching of people, objects, and topics is the engine of many comic situations

ment of Novius' *atellana* called **Gemini**[15] does not say as much to us as one preserved sentence in the fragment **Gemelli**[16] of Laberius. We can deduce more from four fragments, each with the title **Macci gemini**. I think that we can make use of the well developed *atellana* characters because we know in some detail the attributes of the protagonist named *Maccus*.[17] Amongst other things, he was a gullible or naive failure, frequently fooled by others. Thus, he could say two lines (with a clear sexual allusion) of four preserved.[18]

In Laberius, Novius, and Pomponius we can see **virgo** in the titles. Whilst three fragments from Laberius have this title, we can learn more from two titles from the Atellan farces, where some unusual aspects of this word appear. The contradictory juxtaposition of **virgo praegnans** is amusing and humorously corresponds with the quotation from the fragment.[19] *Maccus* seems to be an innocent in the title of **Maccus virgo**, but definitely not in the quotation.[20] Nevertheless, we cannot confirm with certainty that in the

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in Plautus (e.g. *Aul.* 390–449: exchange of the pots; *Most.* 806–842: swapping of the reasons for the visit of Theopropides at Simo's place, etc.). This is a reason to laugh for the spectator who knows what the character on stage does not know. Plaut. *Amph.* is based on the role reversal between Jupiter and Amphitruo and Mercurius and Sosia.

[15]   Novius *gemini*: '*o domus parata pulchrae familiae festiviter!*'

[16]   Laber. *gemelli*: '*non putami hoc eam futurum.*' We have sixteen fragments preserved from one *togata* called the *Gemina* of Titinius. See the fragments in López, Aurora [ed.]. 1983. *Fabularum Togatarum fragmenta: Edición crítica.* Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 71–74.

[17]   *Maccus* was the most common character of the Atellan farce because his name appears frequently in the titles. From the titles we know that he was an innkeeper, soldier, or corrupt mediator. If he had money he would not depend on it much and he would not treasure it as much as *Pappus* or *Dossennus*. As a soldier he was a rather ridiculous cully because he fought only with his roommate for a little food. He was a credulous or naive failure, frequently fooled by others. And he was often beaten and even exiled, but always remained cheerful. Considering the jobs he did, he had to be a slave who was happiest only with a full belly. (I determined this characteristic after analysing the fragments and the titles in which the name *Maccus* appears.)

[18]   Pompon. *macci gemini,* III, IV:
'*perii! non puella est. num quid abscondidisti inter nates?*'
'*incepi contui: conspicio coleatam cuspidem.*'

[19]   Novius *virgo praegnans*:
'*quanto ego plus sapivi, quin′ fullonem compressi Quinquatrubus.*'

[20]   Pompon. *maccus virgo*:
'*Praeteriens vidit Dossennum in ludo reverecunditer non docentem condiscipulum, verum scalpentem natis.*'

quotations found in the preserved fragments that the direct speech and the first person belong to the protagonist, even though it is very probable.[21]

Comparison of Quotations from *Atellana* and *Mimus*

The question arises of how to compare the quotations from the fragments. I suggest the following procedure: First, as shown above with regard to the titles, I chose those fragments in which the characters appear, and then divided them into three chapters according to their appearance: (1) Characteristics and Descriptions of the Characters (*atellana* 28, *mimus* 29), (2) Family Relations (*atellana* 18, *mimus* 8), and (3) Work Occupations (*atellana* 6, *mimus* 7).[22]

Second, I collected into these chapters those fragments of *atellana* and *mimus* in which the same or very similar characteristics appear.[23] I clearly summarised the selected quotations in three charts which show the characters and how often they are present in both comic genres. Almost every character has at least two occurrences in the Atellan farce or mime; thus, we can presume that these characters really acted in the play.

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[21]   If in the fragments below we presume that the direct speech in the first person, in those texts whose titles contain the name of *Maccus*, belong to *Maccus,* we have a problem with the interpretation of the quotation under the title of *Maccus virgo*: somebody says he saw *Dossennus* indecently amusing himself with his pupil instead of teaching him. I think that the title of the fragment indicates rather that *Maccus* is a pupil; thus, it is not he making this statement. Nor is this the voice of Dossennus, but instead a third person is the likely speaker.

[22]   Originally, I inserted quite a number of fragments in the fourth chapter, entitled 'Names, Nationalities, Mythic Characters and Gods'. But after comparing the fragments (*atellana* 8 and *mime* 5), I discovered there were no similar names, characters, or synonyms amongst them; thus, I did not focus on this chapter. You can find a very interesting study about the appearance of gods in *atellana* and *togata* in López, Aurora. 2000. "Los dioses en los subgéneros cómicos del teatro romano." In López, Aurora — Pociña, Andrés. *Estudios sobre comedia romana.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 89–95.

[23]   I selected only those fragments containing similar words or synonyms without reference to the titles. For clarity's sake, I did not include the titles in the table. Only the authors are cited after the quotations and the number of each fragment as it appears in the standard editions of *atellana* (P. Frassinetti 1967) and *mimus* (M. Bonaria 1965).

1. Characteristics and Descriptions of the Characters

	ATELLANA	MIMUS
SENEX, VETULUS/A, ANUS	*operaequ<e>…, actor cantor, cursor*, **senium** *sonticum* (Novius, 37) *calve, adportas nuntium nobis disparem, divisum: huic* **seni** *senium et metum* (Pompon., 138–139) *ipsus cum uno servo* **senex** *intestato proficiscitur.* (Pompon., 114) *Pappus hic in medio <in>habitat,* **senica** *non sescunciae* (Pompon., 110) *sed me exercet* **senica** *nequam, neque illo quid faciam scio.* (Pompon., 130) *ad Veneris profectust mane* **vetulus***, votum ut solveret* (Pompon., 131–132) *vis facere ut noverca* **vetulum** *derepente deserat?* (Pompon., 133) *sed meus frater maior, postquam vidit me vi deiectum domo, nupsit posterius dotatae* **vetulae** *varicosae vafrae.* (Pompon., 83–85) *iam ego inibi adero: dum ego revortor age,* **anus,** *accinge ad molas* (Pompon., 62)	*salva res: saltat* **senex** (Antiquiores mimographi, 1)
MULIER	**mulier** *ubi aspexit tam mirifice tutulatam truam* (Pompon., 93) *… simul intro veni, accessi ad patrem, prendi manum; in terram, ut cubabat, nudam ad eum ut conquexi, interim* **mulieres** *conspiciunt.* (Pompon., 170–172) *vocem deducas oportet, ut videantur* **mulieris** *verba. :: iube modo adferatur munus, vocem reddam ego tenuem et tinnulam* (Pompon., 53–55) *puerum* **mulieri** *praestare nemo nescit, quanto melior sit cuius vox gallulascit, cuius iam ramus roborascit.* (Novius, 22–23)	*quid est tibi ista* **mulier***? :: uxor:: similis, medius fidius* (Antiquiores mimographi, 7)

	ATELLANA	MIMUS
DOMINUS/A, ERUS	*longe ab urbe vilicari, quo **erus** rarenter venit: <id> non vilicari, sed dominari est mea sententia.* (Pompon., 41–42)	***dominus** <est> noster tua luculen-titate captus* (Laber., 113–114) *o **dominum** aequum et bonum* (Augusti aetatis mimographi, 193) ***domina** nostra privignum suum amat efflictim* (Laber., 24–25)
ASINUS, FATUUS, GURDUS	*nescio quis, molam quasi **asinus**, urget uxorem tuam: ita opertis oculis simitu manducatur ac molit.* (Pompon., 95–96)	***fatuus homo**, postquam rem habere coepit, est <e>mortuus* (Antiquiores mimographi, 4) *hic est ille **gurdus**, quem ego me abhinc menses duos ex Africa ad-venientem excepisse tibi narravi* (Laber., 26–27)
MANDUCO	*magnus **manduco**'s camellus ... cantherius* (Pompon., 111) ***Manducum*** (Incerti nominis reli-quiae, 1)	*prandiorum optimorum **esorem** optimum fuisse* (Fragmenta dubia, 209–210)
CONVIVA	*postquam conveni omnes **convivas** meas* (Pompon., 16)	*ubi perna cocta est, si **convivae** apponitur non gustat pernam, lingit ollam aut caccabum* (Fragmenta dubia, 211–212)

Senex or *vetus* appears quite frequently in the Atellan farce. We even have a very nice typology of the old man amongst the four characters of *atellana*: he is a jadish old-fellow called *Pappus* who, after *Maccus,* is the second most frequent protagonist in the Atellan farce.[24] In the first quotation of *atellana* we can see an actor's career: first the actor was 'in operis artificum scaenicorum',[25] then he stood at the top of the tree as an 'actor cantor' who could sing, and in the end he was a 'cursor' — not old, but not allowed to sing.[26] In the very end he became an unneeded old man:

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24   *Pappus* is the old father of a troublesome son. He tries to be politician — he is a free-man — and he longs for any promotion, but mostly he is unsuccessful. He is unlucky even in his personal life: his wife always pesters him, and at other times his own son wants to deprive him of his future wife and to beat him up. Maybe he wants to forget his failures, and that is why he leaves civic affairs behind and retires in the country. Even if *Pappus* is very old, he is stubborn and strives hard to make his dreams come true. (I was able to summarise these characteristics after analysing the fragments be-low the titles in which the name of *Pappus* appears.)

25   Cf. Gell. *N. A.* II,3,4.

26   Cf. A. De Lorenzi (1957: 111).

'senium sonticum'.[27] The first quotation from the *mime* in the chart shows us a stubborn old fellow, for whom even Hannibal before the gates did not stop during his performance.[28]

In addition to other common characters such as *mulier* or *dominus*, in the Atellan farce and mime we very often find some bonehead (*asinus*, *gurdus*, or *stupidus*) who acts in many funny sketches with a companion. It is possible that in *atellana* it was *Maccus* or *Bucco* who, according to the etymology, had huge mouths and puffy faces as a result of making excuses for everything[29] and eating much. Eating is a common theme in both genres: there are messmates, fights for a bit of food,[30] and blatant gluttony and drunkenness.[31] Having food and a full belly are marks of prosperity, and consequently happiness, which is why it was a frequent theme through the folk genres and the culture of humour. In *atellana* there is a glutton *manduco*, which may have been a characteristic of both *Maccus* the fool and gluttonous *Bucco*, but possibly it was an independent type of comic character.

2. Family Relations

	ATELLANA	MIMUS
UXOR	*qui habet **uxorem** sine dote, pannum positum in purpura est* (Novivs, VS, 84) *noli, quaeso, irascere; more fit, moriri quisque **uxorem** ut suam velit* (Pompon., 28–29)	*quid est tibi ista mulier? :: **uxor**:: similis, medius fidius* (Antiquiores mimographi, 7) *duas **uxores**? hercle, hoc plus negoti est, inquit cocio: sex aediles viderat* (Laber., 79–80)

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27 Cf. P. Frassinetti (1967: 78 and 135).

28 Cf. Serv. *Aen.* 8,110.

29 In Italian, somebody who is contrarian and has many excuses is 'sboccato.' For a detailed analysis of the etymologies of four *personae oscae* cf. P. Frassinetti (1967: 2), or Della Corte, Francesco. 1975. "Maschere e personaggi in Plauto." *Dioniso,* 46, 163–93.

30 Pompon. *Maccus miles, II.*
    'cum conturbenale <ego> pugnavi, quia meam cenam <cenavit>.'

31 Laber. *aulularia.*
    'homo ebriacus somno sanari solet.'
    Laber. *hetaera,* I.
    'ebriulati mentem hilaria arripuit.'

	ATELLANA	MIMUS
UXOR	*nescio quis, molam quasi asinus, urget* **uxorem** *tuam: ita opertis oculis simitu manducatur ac molit.* (Pompon., 95–96) *dolasti* **uxorem** *:: nunc eapropter me cupis concidere? :: etiam rheto-rissas* (Pompon., 78–79) *Vos istic manete: eliminabo extra aedis* **coniugem.** (Pompon., 31)	**uxorem** *tuam et meam novercam consectari lapidibus a populo video* (Laber., 185–187)
MATER	*cum natus <se> artivit* **matri** *inter femina fortiter* (Novivs, 42)	*nunc tu lentu`s, nunc tu susque deque fers:* **mater familias** *tua in lecto adverso sedet,servos sextantis utitur nefariis verbis* (Laber., 43–46)
NOVERCA	*vis facere ut* **noverca** *vetulum derepente deserat?*(Pompon., 133)	*uxorem tuam et meam* **novercam** *consectari lapidibus a populo video* (Laber., 185–187)
FILIUS, FILIA	*cum* **natus** *<se> artivit matri inter femina fortiter* (Novius, 42) *quod tu, mi* **gnate,** *quaeso ut in pectus tuum demittas tamquam in fiscinam vindemitor.* (Novius, 4–5) *Sequimini; <i> prae, mi* **nate;** *sequere, temeti timor!* (Novius, 19) **filias** *habeo temulentas: sed eccas video incedere* (Novius, 83)	*...ne in re bona esse videam nequam* **filium** (Laber., 90–97)

It seems that in these two comic genres there were often female characters; in the mime women even acted. There is a wife without a dowry or an unfaithful woman. There is a woman who is going to be stoned to death and a wife who is going to be put out of the way. Simply put, women are an onus and obstruction.

Drunken daughters and the troublesome son fail to show any familial happiness. Anyway, those unfortunate types create the best comic situations and are not missing in any family in the comedies.

It is interesting that *pater* occurs frequently in *atellana* (seven times, connected mostly to *Pappus*), but in the preserved fragments of the mime there is no mention of this word.

3. Work Occupations

	ATELLANA	MIMUS
FULLO	exsilui de nocte ad molam **fullone** festinatim (Pompon., 14) dantor Dossenno et **fullonibus** publicitus ciboria (Pompon., 26) quanto ego plus sapivi, quin' **fullonem** compressi Quinquatrubus (Novivs, 94–95)	coicior in **fullonicam** (Laber., 127)
SERVUS	ipsus cum uno **servo** senex intestato proficiscitur (Pompon., 114) si sciam quid velis, quasi **servi** comici conmictilis (Pompon., 136)	cellas **servorum** converri (Publil., 188) nunc tu lentu`s, nunc tu susque deque fers: mater familias tua in lecto adverso sedet, **servos** sextantis utitur nefariis verbis (Laber., 43–46)
MERETRIX	quae peditibus nubere poterant, equites sperant **spurcae** (Pompon., 151–152)	quo quidem me a matrona mi pudore prolubium **meretricium** progredi coegit (Laber., 47–49)

The fullers can be found even in the quotations of the preserved fragments of *atellana* and *mimus*. In one instance, we find amongst them the free-loader *Dossennus*, who ate with them at the expense of the city. Such social parasites feature as comic characters in many comedies. It seems that in *atellana* this role was played by a sly hunchback[32] named *Dossennus* who greedily sought after money.[33]

The lord and slaves are also frequent characters. The lord is the one who gives orders and the trashy slave (*servos sextantis*) is the one who tries to elude those orders, as we seefor example in 'a double-dyed slave from the comedy' (*servi comici conmictilis*).

Conclusion

When comparing the folk theatre genres that are preserved only in fragments I think it is necessary to examine them as a unit in the wider context

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[32] According to Horatius, Plautus saw parts of himself in *Dossennus* when he acted as a social parasite (It appears that Plautus played *Maccus* and *Dossennus*); cf. Hor. *epist.* 2,1,170–4.

[33] In one mime from Laberius (Laber. *virgo,* I) we detect a direct allusion to a freeloader: *'alienum appetonibus viae expeditae deverticula s<unt>.'*

of Roman comedy. To make such a comparison it is important to focus on the few elements which appear throughout all comedies; in this article, I have chosen to examine the characters and the situations that arise from their interaction.

We should also compare all the related characters found in the *atellana* and *mimus* (even the stock characters) to discover possible concordance between them.

It is evident that in both genres the same situations are repeated and result from the rudeness of the comic characters. The origin of the Atellan farce and mime came from the rude social environment (surely of Italic sources in the *atellana*, as may be the case in some of the *mime*), and therefore a huge variety of vulgar people, as well as their failed relatives and crude work occupations, appear in the fragments. It is the everyday delights and worries of these comic characters which make them relevant and familiar to the viewing public.