

## **The Reflection Of Ancient Greek And Roman Theaters In Today's Culture Of Humor<sup>1</sup>**

Tahsin Emre FIRAT

*Dr., Atatürk University,  
ORCID Numbers: 0000-0002-7384-2853*

**Abstract:** *Today's humor culture substantially originates from theatrical genres which had displayed during the ancient period. Tragedy, comedy and satire examples which had come to the forefront in the Roman and Greek cultures during the ancient era give clues about the cultural structure of the era. These theatrical genres containing solemnity, satire, sarcasm and irony reflect tragic and humorous elements of the Ancient Roman and Greek culture. Fabula Crepidata / tragoedia, Fabula Praetexta (ta), Fabula Palliata / comoedia, Fabula Togata / tabernaria, Fabula Atellana, Mimus / planipes and Pantomimus are among the examples of the Ancient Roman and Greek theatrical culture. This study which will examine the aforementioned theatrical genres of the ancient period consists of a literature review. This study investigates the above-mentioned theatrical genres and their relation to today's culture of humor, with a focus on the historical transformation of performance-based culture of humor.*

**Keywords:** *Humor, satire, ancient theatre.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Ancient Greek and Rome are the civilizations where the theatrical culture and thus humor were appreciated immensely. Dionysus carnivals and Aristophanes comedies emerged in these cultures. In this context, it is necessary to consider theatrical genres that were displayed during the Ancient Greek and Roman era in order to interpret the verbal humor culture and its relationship with drama.

Laying the foundations of in the Bacchus and Dionysus festivals, theatrical genres draw their strength from opponent subcultures. It is remarkable that the Bacchus and Dionysus festivals have a carnivalesque and an opponent structure. The folk culture which is positioned against the formal culture at carnivals scrutinizes laughter, rhythms of nature and collective life, and resistance and function of body. Carnival culture is a way of self-expression as ridiculing all kinds of official positions and solemnity, making all social hierarchies upside down and hallowing codes of conduct, swear words, vulgarities, humiliations and all extravagancies specific to bodily lustiness (Bakhtin, 2001). In this respect, carnivals are a space of extravagancies. Individuals get the opportunity of experiencing their freedom to the full and presenting their selfhood fearlessly in the carnival environment.

Being the symbol of life, hope, enthusiasm and wine in the belief system of the ancient period the god Dionysus is thought to be outside the borders of the living space. At Dionysus festivals where social inequalities disappeared, people aimed to leave their personal identities aside and reach the Catharsis with celebration, wine, enthusiasm, and sexuality (Avcı, 2003). As a matter of fact, people who reached the Catharsis at these carnivals believed that they would purify from all evil spirits and lead a happier life.

The humorous atmosphere appearing at the Bacchus and Dionysus festivals allowed the birth of critical thinking, which was its original purpose, with the self-reliance provided by wine. Comedy elements at these festivals represent the opponent spirit which symbolizes the escape from the acceptance culture created by the hegemonic atmosphere.

Carnivalesque culture has facilitated the birth of many theatrical genres with the social transformation it has been through. Theatrical genres such as Fabula Crepidata / tragoedia, Fabula Praetexta (ta), Fabula Palliata / comoedia, Fabula Togata / tabernaria, Fabula Atellana, Mimus / planipes and Pantomimus are the products of the carnivalesque culture and are among basic elements shaping the humor genres of today. This study, which will be explained in general terms of the ancient genres, tries to reveal their relationship with modern theatrical genres.

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<sup>1</sup> This study includes a chapter written by the author of the PhD thesis.

Theatrical genres which had emerged in association with the birth of carnival culture can be accepted as the origin of performing arts. As a matter of fact, theatrical elements examined within the scope of the study, such as *Fabula Crepidata* / tragoedia, *Fabula Praetexta* (ta), *Fabula Palliata* / comoedia, *Fabula Togata* / *tabernaria*, *Fabula Atellana*, *Mimus* / *planipes* and *Pantomimus* make a reference to the origin of both comedy and tragedy elements.

The most distinctive quality of these genres which offer data concerning ancient ages is that they are a mirror of religious and cultural elements in terms of content. These theatrical genres which perform elements such as ancient myths, daily politics and diplomatic relationships have significantly affected today's performing arts with both their social effect and contribution to the democracy culture.

Based on social elements; the Ancient Greek and Roman theatrical culture has affected many cultural elements that have reached the present day. For example, the masks that are detailed above had laid the foundation of grotesque and comics. In this context, humorous elements within the ancient theatrical culture are remarkable. Funny details observed especially in comedy plays form the building stone of modern and postmodern humorous elements.

## II. *Fabula Crepidata* / Tragoedia

Ancient Greece is also called as *Fabula Crepidata* or *Tragoedia* and also *Fabula Crepidatum*, which is the most popular genre of solemn drama (Manuwald, 2011). This term is commonly used in Greek myths to express Ancient Greek tragedy. In this context, it is possible to state that *Fabula Crepidata* is a Roman adaptation of Greek tragedy (Beare, 1939).

The frame of this kind of plays is based on dramas taken over from Greece, Greek myth stories and elements that are modelled according to the structure of Greek tragedy and are generally adapted from certain Greek plays. The aforementioned Roman tragedies are considered as the modern version of Greek tradition.



**Image 1:** A Scene from Tragoedia Iphigenia

In *Fabula Crepidata*, the Roman tragedy writers were able to generate a large repertoire consisting of Greek tragedies and Greek myths and thus, created various heroes considering expectations of the modern audience and poetic intentions. Famous mythical figures were refictionalized for future plays based on people's demands. Even though myths do not allow to make great changes on historical heroes by their nature, this situation is possible with different interpretations in various derivatives of myths. Roman poets and writers also had the potential of dignifying the hero from various aspects in the subjects they chose (Manuwald, 2011).

The myths performed in *Fabula Crepidata* were largely chosen for building a national identity. For example, a narrative formed in a play on the Trojan War provokes the audience from all aspects and creates an awareness of being a Roman (Manuwald, 2011). It is aimed that the preferred events for creating a historical

consciousness create an emotional impact on society. In addition, the humorous details interspersed with the games increase the interest of people in these games.

Even though Greek tragedy has lost its importance today, it was remarkably respected by critics during its era. In addition, the names of only three tragedy writers who lived between 200 and 75 BC have reached the present day. They are; Quintus Ennius (239-169), Marcus Pacuvius (7220-7130), and Lucius Accius (170-786). Because the tragedies of these writers of the early period have not reached the present day, it is very difficult to assert precise claims about them. Additionally, based on the fragments, topics and contemporary discourses; it can be asserted that majority of these plays have been adapted from original works related to the Greek culture (Brockett, 2000).

Even though *Fabula Crepidata* also included the element of entertainment to struggle with other genres, it could not succeed it. Because the stories it tells and the historical context of the stories are of capital quality. On the other hand, the texts produced in the genre of *Fabula Crepidata* have always contained social criticism (Manuwald, 2011). To sum up, this genre has functioned as a means for indirect reflections of religious, moral, social and political issues concerning the Greek society in the public opinion.

It is possible to say that a lot of drama examples which are staged today and are usually described as tragedy, are originated from *Fabula Crepidata*. Today's tragedies are about life stories of elite people or mythology. Heroes in plays are either gods or noble people. In tragedies which are of serious quality in terms of genre; the language is neither abusive nor slang. In this respect, tragedies, which do not have a humorous aspect, have an utterly serious expression language and considerably resemble *Fabula Crepidata* that can be considered as their ancestor.

#### **Fabula Praetexta (Ta)**

Being the Roman derivative of *Tragoedia*; the term *Fabula Praetexta* originates from a dress type symbolizing the social position of individuals. In this drama genre, legendary phenomena related to the late Roman history and prominent people are depicted in a heroic way (Manuwald, 2011). In this sense, it is possible to express that *Fabula Praetexta* supplied with the Greek drama culture is a genre telling of legendary phenomena including mythological elements.

Additionally, *Fabula Praetexta* can be defined as a new drama play merging around the Roman and Greek gods or heroes, as well as Roman kings and people in general. This new play genre is named after *Toga Praetexta*, which is the official dress of Roman leaders (Szemerényi, 1975). On the other hand, the dresses called as *Toga Praetexta* were used while performing this play.

*Fabula Praetexta* bears a similarity with Greek tragedy but differentiates from it in terms of subjects. While *Crepidata* is about Greek legends and myths, *Praetexta* touches upon more realistic subjects. In *Crepidata*, legendary characters are portrayed, whereas in *Praetexta*, public figures such as kings, generals and judges are mostly portrayed (Manuwald, 2011).

The poet and comedy writer Naevius made great contributions to the emergence of this theatre genre. Naevius made an undeniable endeavor in terms of enriching the subjects of *Praetexta* and adding new styles. In addition, the stories told on the stage showed a parallelism with reality, which made him one of the most important matters (Erasmus, 2004). Because *Praetexta* draws its strength from the relationship of true stories with reality.

*Praetexta* which tells historical events that had occurred in Rome in a tangible way and is characterized by immediateness of political representation tries to create a historical awareness. This genre aims to build a social self-confidence especially against current events. In regard to the style, *Praetexta* displays common forms of the early period Roman drama, such as allegory and artificial word order. It makes more sense concerning Roman institutions than other dramatic genres by its nature (Manuwald, 2011). An apparent change has been observed in the identity of *Praetexta* in the course of time due to the transformation of historical conditions and the presentation of political events.

Embracing according to the meter-structure; Praetexta fragments usually reveal the rhyme array of the Roman drama and anonymous pieces and music presumably have a great importance in their transformation. Embracing the meter-structure of Praetexta; its expression types contain a similar structure with other dramas. It is also thought that Fabula Praetexta has similar aspects especially with Greek and Roman tragedy, which is another genre of solemn drama (Manuwald, 2011).



**Image 2:** A Mask Used in *Fabula Praetexta*

The only surviving example of the Roman style tragedy or *Fabula Praetexta* is *Octavia*. Even though Seneca is just a character within this play, there is an erroneous opinion that the work had been written by Seneca. The work which does not have an outstanding literary value tells of the death of Nero's wife (Brockett, 2000). The play is an example of tragedy focusing on the life of Valeria Messalina who was executed due to the crime of conspiring against Nero and also the life of her daughter Octavia.

In brief, *Fabula Praetexta* is a literary genre which was inspired by Greek tragedy, but is authentic in respect of subject and tells of personal heroism. When considering the stories told in *Praetexta*, it will be possible to see important events of the Roman history which has reached the large masses. In addition, these events are of prime importance in terms of understanding how Rome had been shaped historically. *Fabula Praetexta* is the ancestor of today's staged tragedies such as *Fabula Crepidata*. These two types of content do not contain humorous issues in terms of tragic themes.

### **III. Fabula Palliata / Comoedia**

*Fabula Palliata* or *Comoedia* is the first example of comedy in the Roman theatre. The term *Palliata* was used in the first century Before Christ to define all types of Greek drama. On the other hand, *Palliata* also makes a reference to the early period comedies. The term *Palliata* was derived from *Pallium*, which is a Greek style cloak. The reason for calling these plays as *Fabula Palliata* was that actors in these plays used to wear these cloaks (Szemerényi, 1975).

*Palliata* is based on the readapted reflections of chosen Greek comedies according to the conditions of the era. As this literary tradition dates back to the Hellenistic period in Greece, *Comoedia* which often changes the form historically assumed a structure taking care of family problems of citizens rather than political criticism in some periods (Manuwald, 2011).

The new comedy genre that sprang to life with *Fabula Palliata* touched upon many problems concerning humans and society. Indeed, the first examples of this genre can be seen in the comedies by Aristophanes. Aristophanes' comedy style spread to wide geographies and generated *Palliata* in Rome in further periods. In general terms, Greek comedy forms the basis of *Fabula Palliata* and many Ancient Greek plays exemplify that.

Aiming to provide a social relief; *Palliata* utilized the elements of entertainment intensely and also considered the anxiety of giving a social message. In these plays, social problems were satirized using humorous values. On the other hand, Roman comedy writers frequently used fictional characters and real life heroes in these plays.

Another significant aspect of *Fabula Palliata* is that it has the characteristics of a carnival in which social hierarchies are reversed. This condition which is a reflection of the comedy tradition inherited from Ancient Greece was gathered by the Roman society and acquired a new perspective. In this sense, it can be asserted that *Palliata* is another derivative of the carnivalesque culture (Beacham, 1991).

*Fabula Palliata* which is the most important examples for the works by Plautus and Terentius is a comedy genre in which Greek materials were gathered. Compared to tragedy; the genre is involved in daily life even further and contains a non-artificial meaning with the simplicity of daily life. In this sense, comedy which reflects social life in the purest way is a literary genre formed by public in terms of content.



**Image 3:** A Fabula Palliata Performance from Ancient Greece

On the other hand, the plays by Plautus and Terence made a great contribution to the spread of the Hellenistic culture. Three different properties of *Fabula Palliata* represented by the work of these two writers arouse interest concerning the Hellenistic civilization from some aspects. They can be summarized as reflecting social traditions included in the Ancient Greek lifestyle and drama and making a lot of references to the Greek mythology, legend and literature in comedies and plays that are performed with interpretation and imitation (Toliver, 1954).

Using the element of entertainment intensely; *Fabula Palliata* generated its own culture. The most distinctive characteristic of the genre performing fictional plays is the intense utilization of carnivalesque elements. *Fabula Palliata* has a great resemblance to modern comedies. Comedy, which is a theatre genre aiming to train people by making them laugh, suggests that a harsh reality lies behind all funny things. In this sense, *Fabula Palliata*, which is considered as an ancient comedy, is closely associated with today's humor culture.

#### **IV. Fabula Togata / Tabernaria**

*Fabula Togata* was named after *Toga*, which is a characteristic Roman dress. It is possible to define *Fabula Togata*, which bears a great similarity with *Fabula Palliata* in terms of form, as a Roman version of comedy (Szemerényi, 1975). There is almost no significant difference between *Fabula Togata* and *Fabula Palliata* except for the materials they addressed. On the other hand, *Togata* was never as popular as *Palliata* in terms of the period (Brockett, 2000). Such comedies were inspired by historical events and characters, handled a wide spectrum of subjects from royal palaces to a simple household and were performed publicly in many places like avenues and streets. Actors presented their theatrical performance in places called as *Scaenae Frons*. (Liapis, Panayotakis and Harrison, 2013). Addressing comprehensive subjects in the social context; *Tabernaria* contains solemn and mild drama elements.

Humorous elements in *Fabula Togata* can be distinguished from solemn ones with modesty of heroes and particular subjects. *Togata* embraces not only ordinary events, but also characters from various social classes such as labor, bourgeois, artisan or slave class within that series of events (Manuwald, 2011).

In *Fabula Togata* which substantially resembles Ancient Greek comedies, it is possible to encounter the traces of both city life and rural life. In this context, *Fabula Togata* presents a highly populist perspective

because it reflects its own characteristics against the high culture and voices the problems of local people in terms of plays being performed (Beare, 1940).

In ancient sources, Livius Andronicus is depicted as the inventor of *Togata*. However, the information is accepted to be generally unreliable as this fact has not been confirmed by other internal or external evidences. While writing an epic on *Praetexta* and the Roman history; Livius Andronicus transferred Greek literary genres (Manuwald, 2011). Thus, it can be stated that the abovementioned comedy genre is closely associated with the Greek tradition, *Praetexta*.

According to sources concerning the Roman art history, the oldest representatives of *Fabula Togata* are Titinius, L. Afranius and T. Quinctius Atta. All of them presented their works within the first century, BC. Among these names, L. Afranius is the most important one because the large part of his plays has reached the present day (Welsh, 2010).

The Roman culture made progress in various areas following the Second Punic War at the beginning of the second century, BC. Romans established close relationships especially with the Greek culture. Roman society explored an alternative way of life with that new cultural tradition. However, it is not possible that the process in which comedy was introduced coincided with the time of a reflex developed by the Romans to defend their basic values against external effects (Manuwald, 2011).

The similarity of *Fabula Togata* which belongs to the Roman culture with *Palliata* has already been mentioned. However, the most important distinction between these two comedy genres is that *Togata* is the closest genre to being the "mirror of life". In other words, *Fabula Togata* contains traces of social life in terms of its subject, characters and style. In addition, another distinction between the two genres is that as the young Seneca expresses; *Fabula Togata* symbolizes a midway between tragedy and comedy with meaningful statements including solemnity. Besides, Seneca claims that *Fabula Togata* also mentions philosophical problems (Manuwald, 2011). Thus, *Fabula Togata* identifies with them by gathering both art and philosophy.

In general terms, *Fabula Togata* which is the blended version of comedy with the Roman culture has a very intense depth in terms of discourse. This condition is closely associated with the cultural background it reflects. Because *Fabula Togata* remains among the important elements of the Ancient Roman theatre with cultural codes and empirical practices it contains.

*Fabula Togata* and *Fabula Palliata* are the two classical comedy genres that are closely similar to each other. In general sense, these two genres choose their subjects from daily life and satirize the general condition of human with a critical style. In this respect, the two genres which form the basis of today's comedies, are very close to modern humor in terms of content. Modern comedies choose their heroes from ordinary, illiterate or parvenue people and these people can be encountered frequently in society. In this respect, comedies mirror society and present perversions in society with the help of humorous images. On the other hand, comedies attempt to create a relatively humorous fiction of expression by reflecting streets and ordinary people directly in order to portray ugly events under the eyes of the audience in comedies which often prefer abusive and slang words.

Considering their direct correlation with humor; modern comedies simply exemplify today's humor culture. Comedies, which tell about people to people via the language and style of people, are crucial in terms of creating an emotional catharsis in society. In this sense, being a kind of mirror for people, comedies aim at creating a social awareness by mentioning about social problems and obliqueness with a critical style.

## **V. Fabula Atellana**

South Italian culture has made a great contribution to the enrichment of the Roman theatre. The most distinct contribution can be observed in *Fabula Atellana* which was named after Atella, a town near Naples. The genre had very likely been brought to Rome in 275, BC, during the first half of the third century. Little is known about the genre. Some researchers have claimed that it had probably been derived from *phylakes* or other play genres of South Italy. *Fabula Atellana* is a genre in which short stories, distinct improvisations and mythological burlesques in general are dominant. The most typical characteristic of the genre is that idiocratical and unchanging masks and costumes are used (Brockett, 2000).

There is not too much information about the period in which *Fabula Atellana* had been introduced. Almost all information about this matter are related with the period in which it had started to be seen in Rome (Manuwald, 2011). Therefore, it is possible to state that the genre of Atellana had found its actual identity in Rome. Identified with the Roman culture; Atellana contains rural elements by its nature.



**Image 3:** Some Masks Used in the Genre of *Fabula Atellana*

The most distinct characteristic of *Fabula Atellana* is the rural elements it contains. Everything about rural life is conveyed to the audience using the elements of the genre with a humorous language. In all performances; the artists told their problems in a successful language with sarcastic jokes, puzzles and local implications (Kohn, 2000).

When considering the archetypes of *Fabula Atellana*, it is possible to state that the genre had a completely earthly identity with the masks, improvisations and data concerning social life. Writers such as Pomponius and Novius argued that *Fabula Atellana* was a literary form of comedy which reached a certain popularity in Rome. On the other hand, majority of the examples of *Fabula Atellana* mentioned the life in a small town of the country and reflected rural life problems (Currie, 1976).

The works written by Pomponius and Novius in 100 and 75, BC are considered the archetypes of literalizing *Atellana* (Beare, 1930). The examples of *Fabula Atellana* during that period were written as short pieces with 300-400 lines and presented as the *exodia* of formal drama or the piece following the actual play. *Atellana* emphasizes rural decors, characters and speeches and its subjects usually include greediness, fights or sexual adventures. Rural atmosphere of the genre and its utilization as a small play following the actual play caused many Romans to associate the play with satire plays (Brockett, 2000).

When considering the dates of example texts of *Fabula Atellana* that have reached the present day; it was seen that while *Atellana* was on the rise, *Palliata* and *Togata* fell into a decline. Thus, it is possible that *Fabula Atellana* replaced *Palliata* and *Togata*, which could not meet the basic need of entertainment entirely and reveal a realistic Roman literature, for progress. Daily characters in *Crepidata* and *Palliata* such as fishermen and craftsmen were among remarkable elements in both Accius' tragedies and *Turpilius'* comedies and attracted a great attention by the audience (Manuwald, 2011). However, unlike traditional genres, *Atellana* increased its fame by including different elements. Subjects, characters and decor of *Atellana* simply reflected the daily life. In meaningful stories blending honesty with the element of entertainment, the legendary history of Rome was told. On the other hand, the genre contains elements of comedy due to its content. As a matter of fact, *Fabula Atellana* which combines humorous contents with rural culture has a critical identity.

There are four main characters that attract attention in *Fabula Atellana*. They can be explained as; Bucco, a vivacious and noisy snooty; Pappus, a funny old man; Maccus, a greedy clown and Dosennus, a scary-looking crookback. These characters would usually wear standard costumes. Therefore, many historians state that it is possible to encounter the traces of similar traditions in *Atellana* with *commedia dell'arte* of the former Italy (Brockett, 2000). The popularity of *Fabula Atellana* was maximized in the first century, BC. Then, *Fabula Atellana* lost its popularity and was replaced by *Mimus*. *Fabula Atellana*, in which the use of mask is quite common, is a theatral genre, in which individual performance is very determinative, and includes intense humor.

## VI. Mimus / Planipes

According to the Ancient Greek language, the term *Mimus* had been derived from the barefeet of actors. However, according to Latin writers, the terms of both *Mimus* and *Planipes* are used for the Roman version of this dramatic genre. On the other hand, the term *Mimus* is preferred more commonly and predominantly in the technical context (Manuwald, 2011).

In the general sense, *Mimus* is a comedy genre with a vulgar and obscene style. Performed in open air, the genre is among the important examples of the Ancient Greek comedy. It is thought that *Mimus* had emerged in the Megara region in the North of Athens during the 500s, BC. Even though the archetypes of *Mimus* have not reached the present day, the latter ones succeeded to be permanent using the myths. Athenians contributed to the genre by combining the examples of *Mimus* with their own phallic images (Brockett, 2000).

*Mimus* contains broad topics such as animal and bird imitations, singing, acrobatics and illusionism, including short acting performances. The examples of *Mimus* were observed at celebrations and similar organizations during a period as early as the fifth century. In this sense, it is possible to state that *Mimus* was the first professional way of entertainment for Ancient Greece. On the other hand, *Mimus* is considered to be the first in its area as it also included women in entertainments.



**Image 4:** A *Mimus* Example from Ancient Greece

Even though *Mimus* actors were not “Dionysus Artists”, they began to appear at Dionysus Festivals after 300, BC. Increasing demand in *Mimus* led to the opening of a school for “literary mime” writers in Alexandria and South Italy in 300-250, BC (Brockett, 2000). In *Mimus* plays, the characters would wear stuffed jumpsuits and short chitons and were mainly inspired by phallic elements. Generally, there is a wide spectrum of subjects from mythic burlesques to daily life. When detailing the subjects even further; it is seen that lovemaking, greediness, beating, theft and deceit are the favorite and common titles.

What attracts people’s attention in *Mimus* is the way of presenting the stage. Curtains or ornamented columns with painted panels between pictures or a platform with a varying height on poles stand out. The steps usually used by actors support the stage. The back of the stage shows a variation: Sometimes it consists of a portico and a door, whereas sometimes there are columns and ornamented motives and sometimes there is a window or a gallery on a second floor. Stage accessories are usually trees, altars, thrones, chests and tables (Brockett, 2000). The examples of *Mimus* in the first period used a curtain (*siparium*) reflecting comedy in the minds of ancient writers as a whole. The curtain used in these plays functioned as a door (*ostium*) before getting on the stage and hid people behind voices (Free, 1981).

Masks were commonly used in *Mimus*. However, actors did not use any masks in some cases as their facial expressions would not be understood. Thus, because *Mimus* was traditionally based on improvisation; dialogues and stage acts emerged inevitably. As the subjects in the chain of events of *Mimus* plays were generally and typically about sexual desire or some grotesquenesses; they came into prominence either with physical beauty or funny ugliness (Brockett, 2000).



Although all the actors in the Ancient Greek society had a lower social status, *Mimus* actors including both women and men, were considered more honorable because they reflected social reality. Therefore, the names of *Mimus* actors spread to the entire southern Europe. The most famous actors were Publilius Syrus and Mark Antony (Manuwald, 2011). When taking the latter examples of *Mimus into account*, they were not appreciated by Christians because their holy ceremonies and beliefs were frequently ridiculed on stage. Therefore, Christian writers began to state that *Mimus* was an artistically unproductive genre (Brockett, 2000).

Even though the genre of *Mimus* was imprinted on memories with intense social criticism and sexuality it contained, it was prohibited with the pressure of religious authorities and has barely survived with too few examples today. On the other hand, *Mimus* is the closest genre to today's theatre with gestures and mimics it contains.

*Mimus* which is an example of ancient comedies that had survived until the Medieval, is famous for satirizing everything of divine and social taboo quality. Thus, erotic elements were often used in *Mimus* plays which were not approved by the church. Making a great contribution to shaping the critical aspect of today's comedies; *Mimus* has enabled modern comedy to be more free by destroying all social acceptances that are considered taboo, via its heritage.

## VII. Pantomimus

The traditional *Pantomimus* historically dates back to ancient ages. Rooting in Ancient Greece; the genre is composed of various stage and dance shows. Indeed, Roman *Pantomimus* is also evaluated as the ancestor of modern ballet as it is basically a dance show with stories. *Pantomimus* which has been known in Greece since the fifth century, BC used to be performed by a group of dancers in Ancient Greece and individually in Rome. Just like former genres, *Pantomimus* was also inspired by mythological phenomena or history. While performing the events, a chorus usually accompanied by wind instruments remarkable (Brockett, 2000). In this respect, *Pantomimus* which also includes musical elements can be considered the ancestor of *Pantomime* today.

The most important characteristic of *Pantomimus* is that it has a male-dominant structure. All of the actors are male and even the role of woman is performed by a man. On the other hand, the performances are solo, which is the most important property distinguishing *Pantomimus* from *Mimus* significantly (Canko, 2016). *Pantomimus* had a solemn style in general, but it also included humorous elements from time to time. However, the humorous style within *Pantomimus* lost its popularity in a short time. Because *Pantomimus* turned into a genre of tragedy as it had solemn contents in terms of structure. Emperors and aristocracy usually had their own pantomime actors and there was an intense environment of competition regarding the skills of dancers. Although pantomime was also people's favorite genre, it was gradually overshadowed by *Mimus* after the second century, AD (Brockett, 2000).



**Image 5:** A Pantomimus Artist in Ancient Rome

The traditional *Pantomimus* actually emphasizes solo actors. These actors who became famous for their good looks and athletic qualities used their gestures and mimics intensely to portray a series of characters and conditions. They became popular with the complexity and delicacy of characters who were portrayed in a time when *Mimus* gradually became more obscene and exaggerated. In later periods of Rome, many special communities began to be seen in addition to public exhibitionists. They probably consisted of slaves possessed by the rich in order to entertain the household and friends (Manuwald, 2011).

The masks used in *Pantomimus* had also undergone a transformation in the course of time. While the masks looked simple in the archetypes of *Pantomimus* as mentioned above; they began to cover the whole face after the second century, AD (Brockett, 2000). This condition has become even more distinct in the modern pantomime and the masks have been replaced by face painting techniques. The main purpose of this change is to make mimics in the face more apparent with paints.

Modern style of *Pantomimus*, one of the rare ancient theatrical genres that has reached today by changing its style a little, is Pantomime. The masks used as the primal *Pantomimus* examples, have been replaced by paints in modern Pantomime. Thus, mimics have become more apparent and emotions conveyed to the audience have become semantically intenser. Actions or silent shows which are the main elements in Pantomime, have a universal expression (Aubert, 2005). Because expression of emotions via actions has a similar meaning for every nation. On the other hand, pantomime acting is an art reflecting all elements regarding human nature via movements. Pantomime art is an important assistant reflecting the thoughts, feelings, and actions of an ordinary person on the stage.

One of the most popular theatrical genres in the second half of the 1800s, pantomime has been freed from its traditional short form and gain an independent theatre play identity in the course of time. The Pantomime genre which is intensely staged in circuses, has been separated as English Pantomime and the theatrical Pantomime has gained a new form. In addition, Pantomime, whose humorous aspect has become more and more apparent, has also formed the basis of the primal types of silent motion pictures and has been involved among the principal types of modern humorous arts.

### **VIII. Evaluation and Conclusion**

Theatrical genres that are examined within the scope of the study are the equivalents of comedy and tragedy plays in the Ancient Greek and Roman culture. Rooting in stages and agoras; the ancient theatrical culture has a wide spectrum of subjects such as political satire, social problems, urban problems, historical myths and phenomena. These ancient theatrical genres that are based on drama presented a literally rich culture panorama on one hand and tried to perform even the smallest building stones of the ancient culture in detail on the other. The theatrical genres that are embraced within the scope of the study not only contribute to the tradition of social criticism, but also shape cultural elements concerning this matter.

Ancient genres of humor can well relate to our day. Today's performing arts represent a continuation of those genres in many aspects. *Fabula crepidata* and *Fabula praetexta* are the forerunners of today's theatrical tragedy with their inherent feel of the 'tragic' and they survived to this day without much change. The etymology of the term 'tragedy' derives from *tragos* ('goat') and *oidie* ('ode') and is thought to be a reference to the chorus dancing in return for a goat or around a goat to be sacrificed in ancient theater (Brockett, 2000). Its content follows the protagonist's fall from favorable circumstances, narrated before an audience with the help of dramatic elements.

On the other hand, *Fabula Atellana*, *Fabula palliata*, and *Fabula togata*, all closely related to modern day comedies, are intensely involved with humor and satire. The most important element identifying the comedy genre is *komos*, which literally means 'carousal' or 'revelry.' *Komos* is a ritual that represents the festivities in honor of the deity *Dionysos* (Duckvorth, 1952). These feasts provided a platform for the mockery of leading personalities, with music and dance, they were gatherings of satire and irony en masse. At this level, ancient comedies with their masks and exaggerated costumes were closely related to satirical comedies staged today. Satire and irony are performed with a humorous narrative in today's comedies, which are based on a subtext of humorous criticism of current social problems and inequalities.

Finally, *Mimus* and *Pantomimus* are the forerunners of the modern art of pantomime. These are based on individual performance and centered around impressions and humor, albeit with cultural variations. For example, pantomime is not popular in the Turkish cultural traditions, but much celebrated traditional storytellers called *meddahs* are in a way similar to it. Unlike the pantomime, however, *meddah* performance is based on oral traditions. It is an important element in the traditional Turkish culture and is a kind of storytelling which also involves impressions. On the other hand, impressions in pantomime are based solely on gestures and mimics

and this art form has a much wider audience in the Western culture. In parallel with this, Mimus and Pantomimus can also be considered the prototypes of today's stand-up performances.

In conclusion, theatrical performance in ancient times was based on satire, irony, parody, and, most importantly, humor. Similarly, comedy, which survived to date, are a reflection of the ancient period and they represent an important aspect of theatrical culture. The ancient carnival culture is replaced by the media and stage performance today. The theatrical culture is a kind of artistic carnivalesque, eliminating all social hierarchies and providing a relatively democratic environment. The stage where even the most marginal criticism can be expressed through use of humor is the modern agora. On the other hand, modern theater performed on stage is the continuation of ancient tragedy and comedy with its content of satire and irony.

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