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‘*UBI NEC PELOPIDARUM*’ (*TrRF* ADESP. F 83):
DO CICERO’S QUOTATIONS DERIVE
FROM POMPONIUS’ ATELLAN FARCE?



ABSTRACT: Unattributed Republican fragments with mythological content are often linked to tragedies, despite a tradition of mythological Atellan farce. Pomponius and Novius both wrote Atellan farces with mythological titles and are both named in Cicero’s works. Turning to Cicero’s letters, this article will examine Cicero’s repeated quotation of: *ubi nec Pelopidarum facta neque famam audiam* (*TRF*³ Incert. fr. 64 = *TrRF* Adesp. F 83). Cicero’s repetition of fr. 64 will be compared to the evidence for Pomponius’ Pelopid farces, *Atrous* and *Agamemnon Suppositus*, to argue that Cicero’s letters quote from mythological farce.

INTRODUCTION

CICERO PROVIDES a rich source for Republican tragedy, both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the Thyestean tragedies in particular, Cicero preserves three of four extant fragments from Ennius’ *Thyestes* and thirteen of twenty fragments from Accius’ *Atrous*, appropriating these lines to illustrate his own arguments.¹ However, Cicero both reports and distorts quotations from tragedy to suit his own texts. What is yet more challenging for scholars of fragments is Cicero’s tendency to quote freely, not always attributing the lines to a particular playwright. As a result, scholars typically attribute lines with mythological content to tragedies, rather than considering other genres such as farce. Since we can never attribute fragments

* My sincerest thanks go to the “anonymous reviewer” of the *Logeion* for the helpful feedback, which has improved the content of the article.

1. N.B. Cicero is responsible for 78 of 180 unattributed fragments presumed to come from Republican tragedy, see Schierl (2015) 45.

with absolute certainty, here I aim to raise Cicero’s quotation of mythological farce as a valid possibility. In so doing, I will highlight Cicero’s use of dramatic quotation for political parody and consider how this parody may be interpreted differently if we suppose him to quote from farce rather than tragedy. This will establish different potential layers of humour in Cicero’s quotation and invite further study into Cicero’s quotation of mythological drama, by making a case for quotations of farce in Cicero’s works.

Thus, this study will examine Cicero’s various quotations of “ubi nec Pelopidarum” from across his letters and in his *Philippics*, to consider whether Cicero could possibly be quoting from mythological farce. Cicero refers to different sections of the same line throughout his letters, and once again in his *Philippics*:

- Cic. *Att.* 14.12.2 Sh. B. = Adesp. F 83a Schauer (henceforth abbreviated: Sch.): *ubi nec Pelopidarum* (44 BC)
 Cic. *Att.* 15.11.3 Sh. B. = Adesp. F 83b Sch.: *ubi nec Pelopidarum facta neque famam audiam* (44 BC)
 Cic. *Fam.* 7.30.1 Watt = Adesp. F 83c Sch.: *ubi nec Pelopidarum no men nec facta audiam* (44 BC)
 Cic. *Fam.* 7.28.2 Watt = Adesp. F 83d Sch.: *ubi nec Pelopidarum* (46 BC)
 Cic. *Phil.* 13.49 = Adesp. F 83e Sch.: *nec facta nec nomen audiat* (44 BC)

For clarity, the quotations from the letters will be referred to here as the ‘ubi nec’ quotations and the quotation in Cicero’s *Philippics* which does not include this tagline will be discussed in full below. Both Ribbeck (*TRF*³ Incert. fr. 64) and Schauer’s edition (*TrRF*) will be referenced throughout, when focusing on Cicero, Schauer’s F 83a-e references will be used alongside the line references of Cicero to demonstrate the quotation context. The citations cluster around 46-4 BC and the variety may indicate that Cicero quotes from memory, rather than text. This presents a number of challenges to scholars trying to attribute the fragments to a story, author or genre. Firstly, we cannot be sure that we have a complete metrical line. Secondly, the word order is varied, (*nec nomen / nomen nec / facta neque*), which suggests the play is not quoted precisely and faithfully. As a result, finally, we cannot use scansion to determine to which genre the line belongs.

Nonetheless, this series of quotations recur in similar quotation contexts. Though “ubi nec Pelopidarum” is quoted once in 46 BC, the remaining iterations of this appear in 44 BC, the year of Caesar’s death and thus significant

political upheaval in Rome. The quotation is used as an aphorism for the ruling class in Rome and is part of Cicero's humour, as he jokes that those in power are, like the Pelopids, a new generation of the same cursed line. However, what this article aims to consider is whether Cicero is quoting tragedy for comic effect, or whether he is exploiting the comedy of mythological farce.

Cicero's 'ubi nec' quotations offer a useful mythological case study to examine because Pelops' descendants are famous from Roman tragedies. Accius' *Atreus* dramatized Atreus preparing a revenge feast for his brother Thyestes, in which Atreus fed Thyestes' sons to him to avenge Thyestes' adultery with Atreus' wife Aeropë. Ennius' *Thyestes* dramatized Thyestes' exile after the feast and may have included Thyestes' rape of his own estranged daughter Pelopeia, in order to father his avenger Aegisthus.

VARIANTS AND ATTRIBUTIONS

This Thyestean content has led Buzick to attribute Cicero's quotation in *Ad Fam.* 7.30 to Republican tragedy:

*ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta audiam*²

Buzick makes the case for a quotation from tragedy, given that Cicero quotes from tragedy elsewhere in the same works. Champlin follows Leigh's attribution of Cicero's many and various quotations of "ubi nec Pelopidarum" to Accius' *Atreus*.³ This attribution is made on the bases that Cicero quotes variations of the line to make an anti-tyrannical comment, much as he does with the *oderint dum metuant* maxim attributed to Accius' *Atreus*, and that Cicero is our main source for Accius' *Atreus*, quoting two-thirds of the surviving fragments.

Baldarelli has similarly attributed the "ubi nec" quotations in *Letters to Atticus* to Accius' pre-Trojan Pelopid plays, since it best encapsulates the tyranny Cicero discusses. Baldarelli quotes from Cicero's fifteenth letter to Atticus and cited his fourteenth alongside it:

*ubi nec Pelopidarum facta neque famam audiam*⁴

2. Buzick (2014) 88-9 = Adesp. F 83c Sch.

3. Champlin (2003) 306 n. 31; Leigh (1996) 193 n.44.

4. Cic. *Att.* 15.11.3 Sh. B. = Adesp. F 83b Sch. Baldarelli (2004) 43-3 cites Cic. *Att.*

Baldarelli follows Ribbeck’s example in attributing the fragment to *Atreus* and, like Champlin and Leigh, highlights Cicero’s use of Accius’ tragedies for political commentary. Baldarelli also makes the point that Cicero quotes the latter part of this line in his *Philippics* a text, which quotes most of Accius:⁵

Moveri sedibus huic urbi melius est atque in alias, si fieri possit, terras demigrare, unde Antoniorum “nec facta nec nomen audiat,” quam illos, Caesaris virtute eiectos, Bruti retentos, intra haec moenia videre.

It would be better for this city to be moved from her foundations and to migrate to other lands, if that were possible, where she would “hear neither deeds nor name” of the Antonii, than to see once more inside her walls men who were thrown out by Caesar’s prowess and held back from returning by Brutus.

(Cic. *Phil.* 13. 49 = Adesp. F 83e Sch.)

I agree that Cicero is quoting a play about Atreus’ terrible feast for Thyestes and that this reflects the anxieties of his own time. However, I will consider if Atreus was presented in a farce and how Cicero’s *Philippics* and the repeated quotation in his letters read differently if we suppose that Cicero is quoting from a farce about Thyestes’ feast, rather than a tragedy.

The farce that I suggest Cicero quotes from is Pomponius’ *Atreus*, though there remains debate as to whether this *Atreus* is by the tragedian, Pomponius Secundus, or the author of farce Pomponius Bononiensis. Nonius’ lexicographical treatise preserves the single attributed fragment of the *Atreus* and simply names the author “Pomponius”. Thus, the task remains, to consider whether Cicero’s “ubi nec Pelopidarum” could be quoted from mythological farce and to examine if the fragment of Pomponius’ *Atreus* found in Nonius might present the farce in question. Though no definitive attribution can be made, this enquiry will raise new possibilities as to how we collate and attribute fragments. Rather than simply asking which plot or playwright Cicero quotes, I aim to ask which genre this quotation is from in the first instance.

Indeed, Warmington and Ribbeck attributed Cicero’s “ubi nec” quotations to an unknown tragedy, on the basis that it addresses the Pelopid family.⁶ Here I will evaluate whether it is possible that Cicero is quoting from

14.12.2.

5. Baldarelli (2004) 42-3.

6. Incert. fr. 73 Warmington = Adesp. F 83d Sch. = Cic. *Fam.* 7. 28.2; 30.1; *Att.* 14.8.1;

Pomponius Bononiensis' Atellan farce *Atreus* by first examining whether such a farce could have existed. Then, I will explore the comic tradition of the Pelopid myth, particularly the Thyestean feast because, given Thyestes' cannibal banquet, readers most often associate it with a tragic plot despite its appearance in comedy. Finally, I will consider the political context in which Cicero uses this quotation and highlight how this might read differently depending on the genre Cicero quotes from. This will allow me to uncover new possible readings of Roman fragments and consider how these readings shape our understanding of Cicero's text in turn.

NONIUS p. 144 M.: POMPONIUS SECUNDUS' TRAGIC *ATREUS*
OR POMPONIUS BONONIENSIS' FARCICAL *ATREUS*?

Given that the *Atreus*' play had been made famous by Accius' tragedy, a non-tragic *Atreus* may seem counter-intuitive to modern readers. However, it has long since been noted that Atellan farce encompassed a subset of mythical farces, with plays such as *Hercules Coactor*, *Armorum Iudicium*, *Ariadne*, *Atalanta*, *Sisyphus*, *Agamemnon Suppositus* and *Atreus* being attributed to Pomponius Bononiensis.⁷ Duckworth points out that these mythological farces find precedents in Greek mythological burlesques of the fourth century, a tradition which appropriated tekhnophagy and reshaped Thyestes' story in a comic vein.⁸

Only one fragment attributed to Pomponius' *Atreus* survives, quoted in Nonius' lexicographical treatise:⁹

ATREVS
nunc te obsecro,
stirpem ut evolvas meorum <me>que notifices mihi

14.12.2; 15.11.3.

7. Duckworth (1971) 11; Denard (2007) 147; Debouy (2010) 161; Manuwald (2014) 593; Panayotakis (2015) 94.

8. Duckworth (1971) 13; Haley (2019).

9. N.B. Ribbeck attributes this to Imperial tragedian Pomponius Secundus in his *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*³ but points out that this would be Nonius' only mention of the tragic Pomponius, having elsewhere praised Pomponius [Bononiensis], the author of farce. Ribbeck similarly suggests that fragments of this *Atreus* may be misattributed to Accius' tragic *Atreus*.

ATREUS

Now I beg you,
explain my lineage and tell me

(Non. 144, 21-3 = *Atreus* F 1 R³ = *Atreus* F 1 Sch., my translation)

As Debouy points out, Nonius is “the main author through whom Atellane farces are known to us”, since 130 of 164 extant fragments from Pomponius (80%) are quoted by Nonius.¹⁰ But despite this, Ribbeck attributes Nonius’ quotation to the *Atreus* of Imperial tragedian Pomponius Secundus, as does Schauer.¹¹

Most recently, Degl’Innocenti Pierini has made the case for attributing this fragment to Pomponius Secundus based on four lexical arguments. Firstly, that *obsecro* often appears in the tragic works of Livy, Ennius and Accius.¹² But Degl’Innocenti Pierini concedes that the word also appears in Plautus and Terence. Secondly, that *evolvo* is most frequently used to tragic effect in Ovid and Virgil’s works, thus suggest that this is a tragic fragment.¹³ However, these are not tragic examples. Thirdly, that *stirpem* echoes the infidelity of Aërope and Atreus in Accius’ *Atreus* and Seneca’s *Thyestes*.¹⁴ Yet, this could equally reflect a farcical parody of this tragic phrasing. Finally, Degl’Innocenti Pierini suggests that *notifices* presents a neologism which, though she concedes it might be evidence for the fragment coming from farce, she ultimately argues could have been part of Pomponius Secundus’ style.¹⁵ We cannot eliminate the possibility that this fragment is tragic since Degl’Innocenti Pierini highlights key tragic features within it, but neither can we ignore the possibility that a farce author could be mocking tragic style and diction.

Indeed, Welsh and Panayotakis, contest that this fragment could be from Pomponius Bononiensis’ farcical *Atreus*. Welsh contends that Nonius p. 144 M. echoes the phrasing of Pomponius Bononiensis’ farcical *Ar-morum Iudicium* fr. 9:

10. Debouy (2010) 158.

11. Ribbeck (1897) 197; Schauer (2012) 159.

12. Degl’Innocenti Pierini (2018) 35.

13. Degl’Innocenti Pierini (2018) 36.

14. Degl’Innocenti Pierini (2018) 39.

15. Degl’Innocenti Pierini (2018) 40.

*tum prae se portant ascendibilem semitam
quam scalam vocitant*

then they carry each other along the climbable path
rather than calling for a ladder

(fr. 9 R³, my translation)¹⁶

Panayotakis agrees and further adds that the paratragic tone of Pomponius' *Agamemnon Suppositus* fr. 4-5 echoes Nonius p. 144 M.:

*ne quis miraretur, cum tam clare tonuerit
ut, si quis dormitaret, expergisceret*

so that nobody would be surprised, whenever it thunders so loudly
that, if one was falling asleep, he would start to wake up.

(fr. 4-5 R³, tr. Panayotakis)¹⁷

Panayotakis suggests the second line scans as an iambic senarius and both of these fragments, like Nonius p. 144 M., stagger a result clause in the second line to add pomp to the tone of the speech.

In Nonius p. 144 M. in particular, Atreus' reference to "children" suggests that Thyestes' sons are referred to here, as in subsequent episodes only Thyestes' son Aegisthus survives, though of course Atreus could refer to his legitimate sons Agamemnon and Menelaus. Atreus' dialogue suggests that the drama focused on Atreus' preparation of Thyestes' sons (*stirpem*) for the cannibal feast. Nonius' failure to name Secundus, as he often does when citing tragedian's names, alongside the verbal parallels in mythological farce, suggest there was indeed a farcical *Atreus* by Pomponius Bononiensis.

So, whilst we cannot position this securely attributed fragment to a speaker or scene in Pomponius' *Atreus*, the above fragment suggests a farce by Pomponius Bononiensis that dramatized the feast existed. Despite the macabre nature of Thyestes' cannibalistic banquet, it was presented in Greek comedy: Diocles is credited with a *Thyestes* B, suggesting he wrote two Thyestes comedies, and the feast was appropriated for comedy

16. Welsh (2013) 275-76.

17. Panayotakis (2015) 94-95.

in Aristophanes’ *Proagon*.¹⁸ In Roman comedy, Thyestes’ feast is used to mock the comic *cena* of Plautus’ *Rudens*:

CHARMIDES: *scelestiozem cenam cenavi tuam
quam quae Thyestae quondam aut posita est Tereo.*

LABRAX: *perii! animo male fit. contine quaeso caput.*

CHARMIDES: The dinner of yours that I ate was more criminal than the one that was once put before Thyestes or Tereus.

LABRAX: I’m dead! I’m feeling sick. Please hold my head.

(Plaut. *Rud.* 508-10, tr. de Melo)

Here Plautus’ Charmides uses the teknophagic feasts of Tereus and Thyestes to disparage the quality of the meal. The outcry of Plautus’ Labrax not only recalls Thyestes’ nausea, as Highet has suggested, but also alludes to a tragic recognition scene where the heads of the dead sons are presented to their respective fathers.¹⁹ In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for example, Procne throws her son Itys’ head at his father Tereus, having fed Tereus their son’s flesh.²⁰ In Seneca’s subsequent *Thyestes* Atreus presents a sickened Thyestes with the heads of his sons, recalling Aristophanes’ parody of Euripides’ *Thyestes* in *Proagon*:

*οἴμοι τάλας τί μου στρέφει τὴν γαστέρα;
βάλλ’ ἐς κόρακας· πόθεν ἂν λάσανα γένοιτό μοι;*

I’m wretched, what’s turning my stomach?
Go to hell! Where’s the toilet?

(Ar. fr. 477 Kassel – Austin, my translation)

*ἐγευσάμην χορδῆς ὁ δύστηνος τέκνων·
πῶς εἰσίδω ῥύγχος περικεκαυμένον;*

18. Suda δ 1155, Ar. fr. 478 Kassel – Austin.

19. Highet (1942) 463-4 compares the vomiting at Aesch. *Ag.* 1598, Sen. *Thy.* 999, 1041-2 and Tereus’ nausea at Ov. *Met.* 6.663. cf. Sharrock on paratragedy in Plautus’ *Rudens* (2009) 204-19 and Brown (2014) 404-06 on the influence of Atellan Farce on this scene in particular.

20. Ov. *Met.* 6.658-59.

I've tasted—a wretch—the guts of my children.
How could I look at a roast pig-snout now?

(Ar. fr. 478 Kassel – Austin, my translation)

Thus, Plautus' *Rudens*, when compared with Aristophanes' *Proagon*, serves to suggest that Thyestes' teknophagy could be mocked as a comic feast, with particular reference to its tragic presentation, as both Plautus' and Aristophanes' play on the recognition scenes including the sons' heads suggests.²¹

Therefore, the title of Pomponius' *Atreus*, the reference to children in the attributed fragment, along with the inclusion of Thyestes' feast in both Greek and Roman comedy both indicate that the feast episode could be dramatized effectively by Pomponius Bononiensis as a farce. Thus, the evidence suggests we should consider farce as a potential source for the fragment that Nonius cites in 144 and, in light of this should examine if Cicero might have quoted this farce in Ribbeck's Incert. fr. 64.

QUOTATIONS IN CONTEXT

Turning to Cicero's texts, we find that whereas Cicero's quotations of Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* typically feature in his philosophical discourses or orations, they are frequently repeated in his letters. Yet as Baldarelli points out, part of Incert. fr. 64 is also quoted in Cicero's invective against Mark Antony in Cicero's *Philippics*.²² The myth of the Pelopids is often politicized by Cicero because of the fraternal struggle for the throne presented in the Atreus-Thyestes conflict. However, Cicero is not necessarily quoting from tragedy here since, unlike the securely attributed tragic Pelopid fragments, Incert. fr. 64 most commonly occurs in Cicero's letters to candidly discuss exile:

Ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta aut famam audiam.

Where nevermore of Pelops' line I will hear the fame or deeds.

(Cic. *Fam.* 7.28; *Att.* 14.12 = Incert. fr. 64 R³ = Adesp. F 83d Sch.)

21. Cf. Manuwald on Plautus' paratragedy and play with generic expectations (2014) 583-85.

22. Baldarelli (2004) 42-3.

As Goldberg points out, “*ubi nec*” is most commonly quoted as Cicero’s tagline for “I wish I were not here in Rome”, which emerges through its repeated quotation within the letters.²³ However, Goldberg’s claim that Cicero’s quotation of the line lacks political bite in the letters seems unlikely, since Cicero uses this quote to highlight the political degeneracy of Rome, even in the vaguest of terms. Moreover, in his *Philippics* of 44 BC Cicero paraphrases this quotation to equate Mark Antony, who became a triumvir after the assassination of Caesar that year, with the cursed Pelops. Yet Cicero’s previous letters cite a different figure which, as we shall see, had been equated with the mythological Pelops: thus, despite Goldberg’s claim that the quotation lacks political bite, it is used to attack different political figures.

In his letters Cicero conflates the mythological Pelops, father of Atreus and Thyestes, with contemporary politician Pelops of Byzantium. Plutarch explains Cicero’s quarrel with Pelops of Byzantium in his biography:

καὶ σχεδὸν αὐτῆ τε τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μία καὶ δευτέρα πρὸς Πέλοπα τὸν Βυζάντιον ἐν ὀργῇ τιμὴ γέγραπται, τὸν μὲν Γοργίαν αὐτοῦ προσηκόντως ἐπικόποντος, εἶπερ ἦν φαῦλος καὶ ἀκόλαστος, ἥπερ ἐδόκει, πρὸς δὲ τὸν Πέλοπα μικρολογουμένου καὶ μεμψιμοιροῦντος ὥσπερ ἀμελήσαντα τιμὰς τινὰς ἀτῶ καὶ ψηφίσματα παρὰ Βυζαντίων γενέσθαι.

This is almost the only one of his Greek letters (there is also a second, addressed to Pelops of Byzantium) which was written in a spirit of anger; and Gorgias he properly rebukes, if, as he was thought to be, he was worthless and intemperate; but towards Pelops he shows a mean and querulous spirit for having neglected to obtain for him certain honorary decrees from the Byzantians.

(Plut. *Cic.* 24, tr. Perrin)

Thus, Cicero uses this line in his letters as a personal slight, exploiting the association with the wretched Pelops of myth for comic effect. As such, Cicero uses “Pelops’ line” to refer to contemporary Romans thereafter, as Goldberg suggests. By extension, Cicero associates the feuding descendants of Pelops (Atreus, Thyestes, Agamemnon and Orestes) to the followers of Pelops of Byzantium, presenting them as a wretched lot. Yet in order to

23. Goldberg (2007) 579.

consider whether Cicero is quoting from comic *farce*, we should turn to the context of the letters in question.

The line is first quoted particularly explicitly in *Letters to Atticus*, written in April 44 BC. Here Cicero discusses the role of his “liberators”, Caesar’s assassins, yet reflects on the political instability in Rome following the Ides of March and the subsequent rise of Mark Antony:

quidem semper erunt clari, conscientia vero facti sui etiam beati; sed nos, nisi me fallit, iacebimus. itaque exire aueo ‘ubi nec Pelopidarum,’ inquit.

They have won eternal glory, and happiness too in the consciousness of what they did; but for us, if I am not mistaken, there is only humiliation ahead. So, I long to be away ‘Where nevermore of Pelops’ line’ as the poet says.

(Cic. *Att.* 14.12.2 = Adesp. F 83a Sch., tr. Shackleton Bailey)

Thus, Cicero’s association of Pelops of Byzantium with the mythological Pelops comes to signify Cicero’s inability to win favour in an unstable Rome. Given that Pelops of Byzantium did not win favours for Cicero, Cicero does not find favour with “Pelops’ line” a suitable pseudonym for hostile politicians. In isolation, the quotation provides a superficial pun and anonymises Cicero’s enemies, who would have been well-known to the friends he is addressing in the letters. Thus, when compared with the quotation of this line later on in *Letters to Atticus*, it appears as a comic refrain.

In June 44 BC, Cicero’s concern for his safety escalates and he contemplates fleeing Rome:

itaque etsi ne antea quidem dubitavi, tamen nunc eo minus, evolare hinc idque quam primum, ‘ubi nec Pelopidarum facta neque famam audiam’.

Hence, though I had no doubts even before, I am now all the more determined to fly from here, and as soon as I possibly can, ‘where nevermore of Pelops’ line I’ll hear the deeds or fame’.²⁴

(Cic. *Att.* 15.11.3 = Adesp. F 83b Sch., tr. Shackleton Bailey)

The urgency is emphasised by the complete quotation as Cicero suggests he will flee beyond reports of Rome (*facta neque famam audiam*). However, by repeating the line or part of it throughout his letters, Cicero

24. N.B. This has no addressee, but is arranged in *Letters to Atticus*.

presents the quotation as a recurring joke through intertext. The quotation glosses the reference to Cicero’s enemies, making them less immediately identifiable, but the onerous repetition presents a refrain the reader would recognise as part of a comedy: a repeated line that punctuates the action and draws in the audience. For Cicero, the state of Rome seems dire enough to align with the myth of the wretched Pelopids, yet relentless enough to be tediously funny.

The quotation recurs in *Letters to Friends*, as at the beginning of 44 BC Cicero reflects on his departure from Rome in correspondence with Curius:

Ego vero iam te nec hortor nec rogo ut domum redeas; quin hinc ipse evolare cupio et aliquo pervenire ‘ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta audiam.’ incredibile est quam turpiter mihi facere videar qui his rebus intersim. ne tu videris multo ante providisse quid impenderet tum cum hinc profugisti.

I no longer urge you or ask you to come home. On the contrary, I am anxious to take wing myself and go to some place ‘where nevermore of Pelops’ line I’ll hear the name or deeds.’ You cannot imagine the sense of personal dishonour I feel at living in the Rome of today. Farsighted indeed you turn out to have been when you fled this country.

(Cic. *Fam.* 7.30.1 = Adesp. F 83c Sch., tr. Shackleton Bailey)

The pun on Pelops’ name is repeated, suggesting shared knowledge between writer and recipient, whilst empathising with Curius’ own decision to leave Rome. Cicero’s comedic repetition of this quotation draws in a reader of the collected epistles and includes them as an audience member to share in the fatigue associated with political instability. In his first quotation of the line to Curius, Cicero uses it as a shorthand for “the Rome of today”, suggesting the contemporary relevance of the drama from which it is taken. Indeed, in White’s survey of contemporary literature quoted in Cicero’s letters, Cicero tends to quote from his own works, which suggests to me that Cicero is quoting a favourite line from a performance of Atellan farce, rather than referring to a written copy of a tragedy.²⁵

Cicero himself emphasises his comedic repetition of this quote in November of 46 BC:

25. White (2010) 101-2.

Sed quod tu, cui licebat, pedibus es consecutus, ut ibi esses 'ubi nec Pelopidarum' (nosti cetera), nos idem prope modum consequimur alia ratione.

However, what you have done, and were free to do, by locomotion, i.e. to live 'where nevermore of Pelops' line ...' (you know how it goes on), I am achieving more or less in a different way.

(Cic. *Fam.* 7. 28.2 = Adesp. F 83d Sch., tr. Shackleton Bailey)

Here Cicero highlights the repetition of the state of affairs using the quotation as a refrain and relying on shared knowledge to complete the sentiment (*nosti cetera*). Thus, Cicero's repetition of the fragment as shared knowledge creates intertext between his letters for both Atticus²⁶ and Curius,²⁷ as on each occasion he discusses leaving Rome initially in 46 BC, before Caesar's assassination and thrice again in 44 BC. Cicero is not simply relating the same problem to different addressees, but is also reemphasising the persistent instability in Rome.

When considering the repetition of the quotations in across the letters, Buzick has concluded that Cicero is quoting from tragedy. Buzick claims that Incert. fr. 64 is likely to be tragic because it is quoted in tandem with quotations from Greek drama, that "may have originated in a comedy or a tragedy" and that in one instance Cicero quotes in tandem with a tragic aphorism "*prius undis flamma*" ("Sooner fire would mingle with water") to convey a tragic tone in his letters.²⁸ Though I am not convinced that these nearby quotations suggest that Incert. fr. 64 is tragic, particularly since the Greek quotations could be comic, Buzick's resulting examination of how Cicero quotes Incert. fr. 64 is thorough and worth re-examining should we consider Incert. fr. 64 to be farcical.

For example, Buzick rightly points out that Cicero's repetition of Incert. fr. 64 is "Cicero's way of expressing frustration with the entire political class".²⁹ I would add that not only is this repetition comedic, but it is also comic in so much as reflects a convention of extant Roman comedy. Sharrock classifies such repetition of another's lines as a "comic echo", citing

26. Cic. *Att.* 14.12. 2; 15.11. 3.

27. Cic. *Fam.* 7. 28. 2; 30.1.

28. Buzick (2014) 91-2.

29. Buzick (2014) 89.

examples from across Plautus’ extant comedies.³⁰ Here I do not suggest that Cicero quotes a comic echo, but that his repeated quotation of *Incert. fr. 68* serves as one. Cicero aligns his departure with that of Curius and labours the absurdity of the new regime by repeating the refrain.

As a result, Cicero’s repeated quotations of *Incert. fr. 68* take on a comic tone. “*Ubi nec Pelopidarum...*” becomes an aphorism for hopelessness and suggests a desire for a speedy escape from Rome when addressing Curius. But when addressing Atticus in 44 BC, in the months following Caesar’s assassination, the line introduces discussion of Roman politicians in Cicero’s inner circle: such as his son-in-law Dolabella,³¹ his friend Hirtius and Hirtius’ co-consul Pansa.³² In Cicero’s *Letters to Atticus XIV*, written in April of 44 BC, Cicero expresses concern about Octavian’s supporters calling him Caesar and notes Octavian’s desire to avenge Caesar’s assassination before quoting “*ubi nec Pelopidarum.*”³³ Cicero’s quotation thus professes a desire to physically leave Rome and evidences his inability to abandon Roman politics with tragicomic flourish.

In Cicero’s *Letters to Atticus XV* this desire is confirmed by a meeting with Cassius and Brutus, Caesar’s assassins, in which Cicero advises Brutus not to return to Rome for the sake of his safety. Thus, ironically, Cicero’s Letters remind us that their recipients have not escaped the “name or deeds” of Rome by leaving the city, because Cicero himself is reporting them. The refrain functions as a comic escape, much as the Atellan farce functioned as a comic *exodium* following a tragic performance. A quotation from Atellan farce would especially suit Cicero’s desire to flee to the provinces, since the genre depicted life in the rustic Italian provinces and followed a tragedy, which Caesar’s assassination was. Quoting from farce would allow Cicero to present life imitating art.

With this in mind, Buzick’s suggestion that Cicero invokes the “language of tragedy” when quoting *Incert. fr. 64* could equally suggest that Cicero is quoting from a mythological farce that is aping tragedy, as we have found to be the case in Pomponius’ *Bononiensis fr. 4-5, 9* and Nonius p. 144 M. above.³⁴ Thus I suggest that Cicero is not only quoting the line in a comic manner but may be quoting *Incert. 64* from a comic genre, such as

30. Sharrock (2009) 178.

31. *Cic. Att.* 15.11.4.

32. *Cic. Att.* 14.12.2.

33. *Cic. Att.* 14.12.2.

34. Buzick (2014) 92.

Pomponius' Atellan farce, given the lack of references from contemporary tragedy in his letters. For example, when criticising Tiro for using florid language, Cicero claims to use everyday language:

verum tamen quid tibi ego videor in epistulis? nonne plebeio sermone agere tecum? nec enim semper eodem modo. [...] epistulas vero cottidianis verbis texere solemus.

But tell me now, how do you find me as a letter writer? Don't I treat you in colloquial style? The fact is one's style has to vary [...] As for letters, we weave them out of the language of the everyday.³⁵

(Cic. *Fam.* 9.21, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

Therefore, in reiterating the line Cicero is engaging with his correspondent and the public reader of his letters, quoting time and again a line from a popular genre which, in turn, mocks formal tragic diction, creating layers of parody.

In fact, if we return to Cicero's latest paraphrase of *Incert. fr.* 64 in the *Philippics*, we find that Cicero has been quoting Mark Antony's own letters to use as evidence against him in the passage that follows:

Quid huic facias qui hoc litteris memoriaeque mandarit, ita sibi convenisse cum Dolabella ut ille Trebonium et, si posset, etiam Brutum, Cassium, discruciatos necaret, eadem ipse inhiberet supplicia nobis? [...] Hanc ego epistulam, patres conscripti, non quo illum dignum putarem, recitavi, sed ut confessionibus ipsius omnia patefacta eius parricidia videretis. [...] Moveri sedibus huic urbi melius est atque in alias, si fieri possit, terras demigrare, unde Antoniorum "nec facta nec nomen audiat," quam illos, Caesaris virtute eiectos, Bruti retentos, intra haec moenia videre.

What are we to do with a man who puts in a letter, for the record, that he had arranged with Dolabella for him to kill Trebonius and, if he could, Brutus and Cassius, first putting them to the torture, while he himself should inflict the same cruelties upon us? [...] I have read out this letter, Members of the Senate, not because I thought the author of it worthy of being heeded, but to let you see all his treasons laid bare by his own confessions. [...] It would be better for this city to be moved from her foundations and to migrate to other lands, if that were possible, where she would "hear neither deeds nor name"

35. Cf. Morello (2014) 200.

of the Antonii, than to see once more inside her walls men who were thrown out by Caesar's prowess and held back from returning by Brutus'.

(Cic. *Phil.* 13.18, 21)

Therefore, although Incert. fr. 64 is heavily politicised in Cicero's quotations to provide a commentary on Rome after Mark Antony became Consul in 44 BC, the quotation appears in Cicero's letters or in tandem with his use of letters in the *Philippics*: unlike the securely attributed tragic fragments. Thus, Buzick's suggestion that Incert. fr. 64 reflects Cicero's frustration with Rome is clear, but whereas Buzick claims Cicero to invoke tragic diction, I propose that Cicero is mocking tragic diction by quoting a parody of tragedy in mythological farce. Cicero's letters comment on how politics affects the individual, whilst Atellan Farce presented tragic heroes outside of tragic performance. Were Cicero quoting farce when quoting Incert. fr. 64, he would mock the mundanity of the ongoing political crisis in Rome and ridicule his own claim that letters should reflect everyday language, by quoting a farce in which the speaker apes formal tragic diction.

A 'COMIC' CICERO?

Thus, when Cicero writes epistles, his quotation habits shift to *cottidianis verbis* and the language of colloquial dramas, as he does when introducing cutting off his quotation of Incert. fr. 64 in both *Letters to Atticus* and *Letters to Friends*.³⁶ Moreover, not one securely attributed fragment of either Ennius' *Thyestes* or Accius' *Atreus* is quoted in Cicero's letters. As Sutton points out, Cicero does not disparage farce as he does mime,³⁷ and in his letters to Atticus he makes his familiarity with farce performances clear.³⁸

So, could Cicero be quoting Pomponius' mythological farce in his letters? Scholars acknowledge the role of humour in Cicero's orations as a means of engaging a listener. Geffcken identified Cicero's use of comic motifs in the *Pro Caelio*, prompting Leigh to examine the relationship between

36. Cic. *Att.* 14.12.2; *Fam.* 7. 28.2.

37. Cic. *Fam.* 9.15. 2, Sutton (1984) 32-33.

38. Cic. *Att.* 9.16.7

Republican comedy and Cicero's oratory.³⁹ But whilst both Geffcken and Leigh highlight Cicero's juxtaposition of the mythical and the mundane as a comic feature, neither considers mythological comedy to be a potential influence on Cicero's work.

In *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero distinguishes between mythological tragedy and mundane comedy:

modo et Atreus commemorabantur a nobis, heroicae personae, inita subductaque ratione nefaria scelera meditantes. Quid? levitates comicae parumne semper in ratione versantur?

We alluded just now to Medea and Atreus, characters of heroic legend, planning their atrocious crimes with a cool calculation of profit and loss. But what of the frivolous scenes of comedy? Examples of the abuse of reason from comedy, do not these show the reasoning faculty constantly employed?

(Cic. *Nat. D.* 29. 72, tr. Rackham)

Though Cicero differentiates tragic Atreus from comic characters, he polarises tragedy and comedy—not the subgenre of farce—to highlight the common function of reason in each, despite their differences.

Returning to Cicero's *Letters to Friends*, in July 46 BC Cicero addresses Paetus, explaining that a mime accompanied Accius' *Oenomaus* tragedy instead of the customary Atellan farce:

Nunc venio ad iocationes tuas, quoniam tu secundum 'Oenomaum' Acci non, ut olim solebat, Atellanam sed, ut nunc fit, mimum introduxisti.

Now I come to your jests, seeing that you have followed up Accius' *Oenomaus* with a mime à la mode instead of the old-fashioned Atellan farce.

(Cic. *Fam.* 9.16.170, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

This suggests that Cicero was familiar with farces, having seen them in combination with tragic performances. More specifically, in 44 BC, around the time Cicero repeatedly quotes fr. 64, his attention is on the palliatae that complement tragic performances as well as the political upheaval following Caesar's assassination.

39. Cic. *Orat.* 1.129-30, 251, 258-9; 2.242, Geffcken (1973) 7; Leigh (2004) 300.

As Wright points out, Cicero seems to refer to Pomponius Bononiensis’ Atellan farces when writing to Curius in February 44 BC:

vides enim exaruisse iam veterem urbanitatem, ut Pomponius noster suo iure possit dicere ‘nisi nos pauci retineamus gloriam antiquam Atticam’.

You see how the sources of ancient wit have dried up. So that our Pomponius can rightly say ‘save the few of us that keep the ancient glory of Athens.’

(Cic. *Fam.* 7.31.2 = Incert. fr. 191 R³, tr. Shackleton Bailey)⁴⁰

This suggests that Cicero was familiar with Pomponius’ farce and discussed it in his *Letters to Friends*. Moreover, as Panayotakis points out, of the 143 fragments already attributed to Pomponius Bononiensis, three are quoted for literary rather than linguistic reasons: one in Cicero, one in Seneca and one in Lactantius.⁴¹ Thus, ignoring Cicero’s familiarity with farce may lead us to misattribute dramatic quotations to tragedians because they contain mythological subject matter, despite the fact that Pomponius and Novius both wrote Atellan farces with mythological titles and are both named in Cicero’s works. Moreover, in Cicero’s letter to Marius he jokes that Marius will not miss “Oscan” plays (farces), since he could choose to stage them in the Senate. Therefore, Cicero’s references to farce need not be apolitical.⁴²

ATREUS, COMEDY AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY

If we are to consider “Pelops’ line” to be a quotation of Pomponius Bononiensis’ mythological farce, it could be quoted from either *Agamemnon Suppositus* or *Atreus*, given the mythological content. Since Thyestes’ feast was alluded to in Roman political commentary, Pomponius’ *Atreus* seems the most likely farce from which Cicero would quote here as it most likely parodied the appetite for autocracy displayed in Accius’ tragic *Atreus*.

Indeed, Wright points out that Cicero quoted Accius’ *Atreus* frequently to illustrate key points in his philosophical and rhetorical treatises.⁴³ Seneca

40. Wright (1931) 64.

41. Panayotakis (2015) 90.

42. Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3.

43. Wright (1931) 32. E.g., *Tusc.* 4.55.77, *De Or.* 3.217-219. So too Ennius’ *Thyestes* (in Sicyon), Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.107.

attributes Accius' *Atreus* to the days of Sulla to disparage the dictator, whilst Suetonius claims *oderint dum probent* "let them hate me so long as they obey" (a reworking of the *oderint dum metuant* "let them hate so long as they fear" maxim of Accius' *Atreus*) to have been spoken by Sulla himself.⁴⁴ Thus, Cicero quotes Accius' *Atreus* as an example of tyranny in his treatises, and Accius' tragic *Atreus* fragments resonate in Imperial political commentary. Moreover, Varius was commissioned to commemorate the battle of Actium, for which he produced a *Thyestes*, and Leigh's study exposes the cannibalistic themes in contemporary historiography to demonstrate the tragedy's contemporary significance.⁴⁵ Ultimately when discussing Roman politics *Thyestes*' feast is used as the analogy *par excellence*.

As a result, when Cowan discusses this fragment in comparison to *Thyestean* themes in Lucretius' satire, he not only attributes it to tragedy given the mythological content, but also compares it to the messenger's desire to flee in Seneca's *Thyestes*.⁴⁶ If we compare Cicero's assimilation of Pelops of Byzantium to the mythical Pelops, we too find that it suits the closure of a play on *Thyestes*' feast, given that *Thyestes* retreats from the feast into exile:

Ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta aut famam audiam.

Where nevermore of Pelops' line I will hear the fame or deeds.⁴⁷

(Incert. fr. 64 R³ = Adesp. F 83 Sch., my translation)

This placement would also provide dramatic irony because *Thyestes*' feast triggers the cycle of vengeance in "Pelops' line" that audiences encounter in *Agamemnon*, *Electra*, *Orestes* and the *Iphigenia* tragedies. The repeated crimes of the Pelopids are reflected in the repeated quotation of the fragment of Cicero's letters, adding another level of irony since, despite his departure from Rome, Cicero hears the name and deeds of "Pelops' line"—a pseudonym for Roman politicians. The repetition of "nevermore" (*nec ... nec*) is particularly tongue in cheek when the letters are read as a collection. Thus, with respect to the specific placement in the mythical episode I agree with Cowan. Yet when comparing Cicero's comic quotation pattern to the

44. Suet. *Tiber.* 59.2. Cf. Haley (2021) 54-8.

45. Leigh (1996) 185-87.

46. Cowan (2013) 127. Sen. *Thy.* 623-26.

47. Incert. fr. 73 Warmington = Cic. *Fam.* 7. 28.2; 30.1; *Att.* 14.8.1; 14.12.2; 15.11.3.

tradition of Thyestes in paratragedy and burlesque, I suggest that this fragment is from Pomponius' *Atreus*.

In Abbott's survey of Republican theatre in Roman political discourse, he concludes that passages that "apply to politicians or public events of their own time occur mainly in tragedy," as I suggest is the case with Accius' *Atreus*.⁴⁸ He then differentiates passages that "refer to contemporary politics (which) are to be found in the lighter forms of the drama," which I suggest Cicero himself achieves in his epistolary quotation of mythological farce.⁴⁹ Tragedy focuses on politicians, lighter genres allude to the politics of the day.

Sutton notes that "political barbs were inserted (or at least perceived) in Atellan farce in the Empire."⁵⁰ But we cannot suggest Cicero's repeated quotation was a barb in the context of the lost drama. That said, when viewing the fragment in Cicero's letters, two layers of political commentary are at work. Firstly, the association of political foes with cursed paratragic figures, mocked in farce for their overblown status, is called to mind in the quotation. Secondly, the political posturing of Cicero is apparent in the subtext, because he light-heartedly quotes this mythological content twice in his *Letters to Friends*, twice in his *Letters to Atticus* and once more in his invective against Antony; the *Philippics*.⁵¹ In each context Cicero is fantasising about fleeing the political turmoil of Rome, using the quotation as a comic escape from a turbulent reality. This suggests that he is quoting from a lighter, popular genre aligning his epistolary persona with the plebeian masses.

Indeed, in *Letters to Atticus* Cicero indicates the importance of political commentary in lighter genres such as mime because of their popularity:

Duas a te accepi epistulas heri. ex priore theatrum Publiliumque cognovi, bona signa consentientis multitudinis. plausus vero L. Cassio datus etiam facetus mihi quidem visus est.

I had two letters from you yesterday. The first told me about the theatre and Publilius—good signs of popular accord. The applause for L. Cassius struck me as really rather funny.

(Cic. *Att.* 356.4.2, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

48. Abbott (1907) 55.

49. Abbott (1907) 55.

50. E.g., Suet. *Tib.* 45.1; *Calig.* 27.4; *Nero.* 39.3; *Galba.* 13.1.

51. Cic. *Fam.* 7.30.1; 7.28.2 Watt; Cic. *Att.* 14.12.2; 15.11.3 Sh. B.; Cic. *Phil.* 13.49.

Much like Sutton's examples from the Imperial period, Cicero indicates the political commentary in mime here, as Publilius wins applause for Caesar's assassin Cassius.

Abbott has long since pointed out Cicero's use of popular theatre to gauge public opinion, as demonstrated in *Letters to Atticus*:⁵²

Tu si quid πραγματικὸν habes rescribe; sin minus, ῥοῦφι ἐπισημασίαν et mimorum dicta perscribito.

If you have any news of practical consequence, let me have it in your reply. If not, tell me all about the demonstrations in the theatre and the actors' jests.

(Cic. *Att.* 14.3.2, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

Of course, Cicero is discussing mime in these instances rather than farce. However, Cicero's focus on popular dramas in his letters emphasises the shared experience of theatre-going among the masses by addressing dramas that were not circulated as texts.

This contributes to the "epistolary realism" discussed by Morello and best summarised by Cicero himself:⁵³

Ut scribis ita video, non minus incerta in re publica quam in epistula tua, sed tamen ista ipsa me varietas sermonum opinionumque delectat. Romae enim videor esse cum tuas litteras lego et, ut fit in tantis rebus, modo hoc modo illud audire

Evidently it is as you say, things are as uncertain in the political field as in your letter; but it is just this diversity of talk and views that I find so entertaining. When I read a letter of yours I feel I am in Rome, hearing one thing one minute and another the next, as one does when big events are toward.

(Cic. *Att.* 2.1.5, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

This emphasises the role of the epistles a replacement for *viva voce* political discussions in Rome, which Cicero recaptures by quoting colloquial drama: charged with mythological content and political applications.

Ultimately, Cicero advocates comic quotations in his treatises; he favours farce and constructs a colloquial epistolary persona in his letters, all of which

52. Abbot (1907) 55, cf. Cic. *Att.* 14.2.1; Sutton (1984) 29.

53. Morello (2014) 198-99.

suggests that Cicero could be quoting farce in his *Letters to Friends* and *Letters to Atticus*. When comparing the Pelopid fragment to the tradition of Thyestes' feast in comedy and historiography, it seems that this fragment could come from Pomponius' farcical *Atreus*, appropriated by Cicero for his own political satire. Fragment 64 not only suggests that mythological farce travestied tragic plots, but also indicates that we cannot assume that mythological fragments must be tragic, or that Cicero's quotations avoided comic genres.

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