

Tyrants and Kings in the Latin Theatre (from Naevius to Accius)

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims at showing the importance of early Latin theatre with respect to the Roman view of forms of monocratic power such as monarchy and tyranny. While Plautus provides us with fundamentally neutral or positive examples of tyrants and kings, other playwrights of the third and second centuries BC such as Naevius, Terentius, Pacuvius and Accius propose a multifaceted image of these figures, indicating the ambivalent position of kings and tyrants in the Roman collective imagination of that period.

KEYWORDS: Accius, Ennius, Latin theatre, monarchy, Naevius, Plautus, Q. Fabius Maximus, second punic war, Terentius, tyranny – Accio, Ennio, monarchia, Nevio, Plauto, Q. Fabio Massimo, seconda guerra punica, teatro latino, Terenzio.

1. – The concept of *regnum* was particularly unpopular among the Romans. According to most ancient sources, the kingship of Tarquinius Superbus was so traumatic that from that moment onwards the Romans developed a strong and steadfast hatred for any kind of monocratic power that could remind them of Tarquinius Superbus' tyranny¹. In reconstructing this particular aspect of Roman imagination, as a rule modern scholars rely upon late republican sources, with only a few references to historiographical traditions datable to the second century BC. Accordingly, the evidence of the theatre – and most of all of early Latin playwrights – has remained unexplored, although it might significantly contribute to a better understanding of the Romans' attitude towards the idea of *regnum*². According to E. Fraenkel, «per la sensibilità dei Romani, anche in epoca repubblicana, il concetto di *rex* con tutti i suoi annessi è vivo in maniera diversa e più

¹ For instance, according to Tiberius Gracchus (Plut. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* 15, 5), the reason for Roman hatred for any kind of monarchy was Tarquinius Superbus' rule. See Martínez-Pinna Nieto 2009, 12-14, 97-98. See also Martin 1987, 114-118. Recently, Russo 2015a, 153-180, and Russo 2015b.

² On the usage of terms such as *rex*, *tyrannus*, *servitus*, etc., in opposite the concept of *libertas*, in Roma during the republican age, see Hellegouarc'h 1972, 559-566.

varia del *basileus* per gli Ateniesi»³. It is surprising that such a stimulating observation has been ignored in modern studies devoted to Roman perception of the idea of monarchy⁴. Indeed, the example of Athenian theatre can help one better understand Fraenkel's intuition. Kings and tyrants undoubtedly represent fundamental figures in the comic and tragic productions of Athens in both the Classical and the Hellenistic Ages: the fear of the instauration of a new tyranny often occurs in Athenian drama, which clearly indicates the importance that this theme had in the political life of Athens, most of all in the fifth century BC. As modern scholars have pointed out, the representation of terrible kings and evil tyrants in the Attic theatre had a specific didactic function in that these figures showed that even in a democratic city such as Athens the restoration of a tyranny was always possible⁵. The main aim of this paper, then, is to deepen Fraenkel's intuition in the light of the importance that tyrants and kings had in Roman tragic and comic productions.

The term *tyrannus* appears only twice in Plautus' corpus of comedies. In one case, a character of *Curculius* (285-286) mentions the word *tyrannus* in a list of Greek magistrates whom he intends not to obey: *nec strategus, nec tyrannus quisquam, nec agoranomus, / nec demarchus nec comarchus*. The context of the use of this word makes its meaning clear: «tyrant» here indicates not only a form of power, but also – even more significantly – alludes to the Greek origin which it shares with all the other positions mentioned in the verse (*strategus, agoranomos, demarchus, comarchus*). In this case, therefore, no trace of criticism or political condemnation is detectable: the tyrant is nothing more than a peculiar Greek agent of power whom the protagonist, significantly a slave, proudly opposes⁶.

The second occurrence of the term *tyrannus* appears in *Pseudolus* (703): *id te te turanne, te te ego, qui imperitas Psuedolo*. Also in this case no political criticism can be detected: here *tyrannos* indicates only a kind of power without any negative or positive moral connotation. Moreover, this verse is likely to be a parody of verse from Ennius defining the Sabine king Titus Tatius as a tyrant: *o Tite tute Tati tibi tanta turanne tulisti*⁷.

³ Fraenkel 1960, 186.

⁴ For an exploration of the Latin theatre as source of information relative to kings and tyrants in the Roman imagination, see especially Russo 2015a, 15-42.

⁵ In general, on the role of the tyrant in Greek theatre see Lanza 1977. On the relationships between mythical tyrants and political scene, see De Romilly 1969, 175-187.

⁶ As Allinson 1921, 391, emphasizes, a similar use of the term *tyrannos* occurs in a fragment of Menander, probably from the comedy *Arbitrate*.

⁷ 109 Vahlen = 104 Skutsch. The verse is quoted by Martianus Cappella (V 514) as an example of *homoeopropheron*, by Isidorus (*Orig.* I 35, 14) as an instance of *parhomoeon*,

In the light of these initial considerations, it is also interesting to underline the «quantitative» difference in the occurrence of *rex* and *tyrannus* in Plautus' corpus: while *tyrannus* occurs only twice, *rex* appears more than 52 times, which confirms that in the Plautine use the word *rex* was undoubtedly more common than the term *tyrannus*⁸. This peculiarity also stems from the fact that as a rule Plautus uses *rex* where *tyrannus* would have been more appropriate. If it is normal that Plautus calls Attalus (*Poen.* 664), Seleucus (*Mil.* 948) and Philip (*Pers.* 339) *rex* since they were all kings, it is surprising that he uses the same word to define tyrants such as Hieron of Syracuse (*Men.* 409, 902), Creon of Thebes (*Amph.* 194), and Agathocles of Syracuse (*Pseud.* 119). Clearly Plautus sometimes considers *rex* and *tyrannus* to be synonyms. This use, however, would not be an original invention of Plautus but rather, according to Servius, a typical Greek use⁹: *tyranni nihil intererat apud maiores inter regem et tyrannum, ut pars mihi pacis erit dextram tetigisse tyranni (ad Aen. IV 320); tyranni graece dixit, id est regis, nam apud eos tyranni et regis nulla discretio est; licet apud nos incubator imperii tyrannus dicatur, declinatur autem etiam haec τύραννος (ad Aen. VII 266)*. Modern scholars argue that the ideological and semantic overlapping of *rex* and *tyrannus* was a consequence of the political debate of the final decades of the republic, when these terms were politically charged. Servius, on the contrary, places its origin in the Greek world¹⁰, and specifies that, aside from its use as a synonym for *rex*¹¹, the correct meaning of *tyrannus* in Latin is *incubator imperii*.

In Plautus' usage, the idea of king is often associated with – or expressed through – derivatives of the Greek word *basileus* and refers to themes such as splendor and opulence, as Fraenkel observes¹²: «l'aggettivo *basilicus* e l'avverbio *basilice* sono usati da Plauto con parecchi sensi. Essi

and by the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as *eiusdem litterae nimia adsuitas* (IV 12, 18). Especially on this verse: Grilli 1965, 256; Valmagggi 1967, 29; Warmington 1967, 36; Frassinetti 1975, 38; Bandiera 1978, 89-90. Against the attribution to Ennius: Steuart 1924, 24-26, and Steuart 1925, 235, who proposes Lucilius (though with speculative arguments). For the context of this verse in the *Annales'* structure: Bandiera 1978, 90; Sheets 1983, 198; Skutsch 1985, 254-255; Slater 2000, 110; Erasmo 2004, 30. For Ennius fragments, in addition to the classical editions of Vahlen 1928² and Skutsch 1985, see Jocelyn 1967.

⁸ Lodge 1924.

⁹ Csapo 1989, 157.

¹⁰ According to Cic. *Rep.* II 49: *habetis igitur primum ortum tyranni, nam hoc nomen Graeci regis iniusti esse voluerunt*. On the late republican exploitation of the term *tyrannus*, see Dunkle 1967, 151-171.

¹¹ On the semantic and ideological contact points, in Greek, between *basileus* e *tyrannos*, see Parker 1998, 145-172.

¹² The term *basilicus* occurs in Plautus 12 times (*Pseud.* 458; *Mil.* 75, etc.). See also Ter. *Haut.* 117. According to Fraenkel 1960, 183, this specific feature of Plautus' production is

servono a indicare un'apparenza insolitamente splendida». For example, the humblest characters of Plautine comedies express their dreams of wealth and unrestrained joy by means of concepts which as a rule refer to the regal sphere: in *Capt.* 825, the parasite aspires to become *regum rex regalior*; in *Rud.* 931, dreams of abundance are expressed through forms such as *apud reges rex perhibebor*. The connection parasite-king is typical of Plautus' comedies: for instance, in *Capt.* 825, the parasite calls his master (*patronus*) «king». Elsewhere, *rex* refers to concepts such as incredible power or luxury (*Poen.* 272; *Curc.* 178)¹³. In these and other cases the king is constantly a symbol of power and wealth without being subject to execration or criticism¹⁴. The same characterization arises in a verse from *Stichus* (285), where a slave (the so-called *servus currens*) exhorts himself to overcome any obstacle he might find on his way and says: *si rex obstabit obviam, regem ipsum prius pervortito*. In this case Plautus clearly aims at emphasizing the contrast between the slave, a symbol of humility and poverty, and the king, a symbol of power and splendor.

As the frequent connections between the slave (or parasite) and the *dominus*/*rex* show, the analysis of the several occurrences of the term *rex* – including related words and derivatives from the Greek *basileus*, such as *basilicus* – reveals the insertion of the image of the king into Roman everyday life. As with the term *tyrannus*, the use of the word *rex* implies neither a negative connotation nor a judgment on the idea of king, who is nothing but a symbol of power¹⁵. If one compares, for example, Cicero's and Plautus' perspective on the concept of king, the peculiarity of Plautus' position is clearly seen: unlike Cicero, who with few exceptions considers kings as examples of cruelty and oppression, Plautus shows no concrete interest in such figures, who for him represent nothing more than a stereotype of wealth and power¹⁶. The problem is now to assess the reliability of the above-mentioned quotation of Servius: in other words, to what extent did the Plautine usage rely on previous Greek drama, which undoubtedly represented a constant model for Plautus' works? According

likely to be original and not influenced by his Greek models (above all Menander). *Contra* Csapo 1989, 160.

¹³ Fraenkel 1960, 182. On the other hand, this use seems also typical of Naevius (*Lyc.* 21) and Terentius (*Eun.* 405). On the relationship *rex*-parasite in Plautus see Lowe 1989, 161-163.

¹⁴ Barchiesi 1978, 63.

¹⁵ With respect to the connection between kings and slaves, which Fraenkel considers plautine, one should notice that Klearchos of Soli also affirms that tyrants typically possessed parasites, who were called *kolakes* (*ap.* Athen. VI 255).

¹⁶ On Cicero's perspective on the idea of *regnum*, see Sirago 1956.

to Fraenkel, the indistinct use of the terms *rex* and *tyrannus* is likely to be an original expression of Plautus' *usus scribendi* since in the Greek context the term *basileus* might never have meant «tyrant»: «Figure di re appaiono naturalmente nei miti eroici e per conseguenza nella tragedia [...], ma in tutti gli altri passi in cui si parla d'un *basileus* – e ciò avviene spesso – l'allusione si riferisce sempre a un personaggio determinato, per esempio ad uno dei reali despoti dell'Oriente oppure al Gran Re o ai principi di Cipro e, più tardi, ai Diadochi d'Egitto, di Siria etc.»¹⁷. This position, however, is contradicted by Servius, who attributes the lexical overlapping of the terms king and tyrant to Greek usage¹⁸. Indeed, an analysis of Menander's fragments confirms Plautus' dependence on the Greek model, but not with respect to this specific use. Typically, in the above-mentioned Plautine verse, the word *tyrannus* appears together in a list with other Greek magistracies (*Curc.* 285-286), reminding us of both Menander and Diphilus, who use the term tyrant in a similar way¹⁹. Still, in another fragment from Menander (538 K 1-6), kings and tyrants – symbols of greatest power – are equals by virtue of the fact both are destined to die sooner or later²⁰. Similarly, for Menander the image of a king/tyrant is also an example of splendor and wealth without moral criticism. However, it must not be forgotten that in Menander, as in other authors of New Comedy, the words *tyrannos* and *basileus* are lexically distinguished, whereas Plautus uses them as synonyms²¹. Indeed, in the Plautine usage the word *rex* includes a number of distinct Greek concepts (and related words) such as *basileus*, *tyrannus*, and *satrapes*²².

Thus, if from the semantic point of view it is possible to observe the contiguity between Plautus and his Greek models, on the lexical level the difference between them is undeniable, not to mention that Greek authors preserve traces of a different, multifaceted perception of the idea of tyrant which does not occur in Plautus. For instance, in the work of Philemon of Syracuse the image of the tyrant is associated with the idea of fear²³, while the playwright Demetrios proposes the contraposition of the concept of

¹⁷ Fraenkel 1960, 178-179, 183, n. 1.

¹⁸ Csapo 1989, 157.

¹⁹ *Men. Kol.* 90-94. For Diphilus: fr. 23 Kassel-Austin.

²⁰ Allinson 1921, 391, 485.

²¹ Csapo 1989, 154. Cf. Harsh 1936, 62-68.

²² Csapo 1989; Harsh 1936, 63. The verse 177 of Pacuvius' *Hermiona* seems to be translation of Eur. *Hec.* 816, which confirms the tendency, in Latin, to translate different kinds of monarchic power with the single term *rex*. Cf. Russo 2015b, 43-66.

²³ Fr. 31 Edmonds, 19.

freedom and the figure of the tyrant²⁴. It is therefore not accidental that Pherecrates wrote a comedy entitled *Tyrannis*²⁵. As a result, we can partially agree with Fraenkel when he argues that from the lexical point of view, Plautus renewed his Greek models by combining the meanings of the words *rex* and *tyrannus*. Since, however, he ignored the negative connotation of a king/tyrant, Plautus differed from his models from the semantic point of view as well.

The difference between Plautus and the Greek playwrights is even more striking when we compare his production with Aristophanes' works. Among Aristophanes' comedies, the *Wasps* in particular demonstrates the importance of the theme of tyranny as an expression of contemporary Athenian political life. In this comedy, Bdelycleon – a sort of supporter of monarchy – is accused by the chorus of hindering his father from carrying out his hectic activity as a judge. Bdelycleon's reaction to such accusations patently reveal Aristophanes' point of view on tyranny. The playwright stigmatizes the practice, which was evidently very common, of accusing all and sundry of tyranny, and suggests that in the political clash of that period one could be accused of tyranny on the basis of unimportant and even ridiculous pretexts. But this does not imply a positive picture of tyrants, who are also symbol of deviated power²⁶. Thus, while in Plautus kings and tyrants have mostly a positive or neutral image, in Aristophanes these figures, and most of all tyrants, have a negative connotation; this also occurs in authors of the New Comedy, though not consistently²⁷. While in the Greek context the staging of tyrants and kings had a generally political meaning (constantly in Aristophanes, sporadically later), in Plautus' works these figures are reduced to mere literary stereotypes, deprived of any political-ideological value. Thus, unlike the Greek usage, Plautus' production suggests scarce interest on behalf of the playwright – and presumably of his Roman audience – in figures such as kings and tyrants as symbols of a

²⁴ Fr. 3 Storey, 439.

²⁵ Kassel - Austin 1989, 175-178.

²⁶ Ar. *Vesp.* 488-499: «Everything is now tyranny with us, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish, the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and don't want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims, 'That is a man whose kitchen savours of tyranny!' If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks, 'Ha, you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think that Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?'» (transl. O'Neill 1938). Cf. *Lys.* 614; *Eq.* 40; *Vesp.* 461. In general, on this aspect see: Konstan 1985, 36-38; Davie 1979, 160-168.

²⁷ Barceló 1993, 129-149.

deviated form of government. This is probably due to a political context in which these concepts were not yet intensively exploited²⁸.

2. – Naevius also adopts the idea of king as a symbol of power, as a verse from *Tarentilla* (72-74 Ribbeck) shows: *quae ego in theatro hic meis probavi plausibus / ea non audere quemquam regem rumpere: / quanto libertatem han hic superat servitus* (a slave, the main character of the comedy, proudly claims his independence from any kind of power, including monarchic)²⁹. A similar meaning occurs in another fragment, though with a possible negative hint: *qui et regum filiis ... / linguis faveant atque adnutent haut <animis> subserviant*³⁰. Fronto, the direct source of the excerpt, quotes Naevius' verse as an example that nobody is allowed (or brave enough) to speak the truth before a king and his sons. The ideological connection between these fragments is undeniable since both make a king a symbol of oppression, by opposing him to the idea of freedom of speech³¹. According to some scholars, in the comedy *Tarentilla* occurrences of the concept of *rex* might represent a specific reference to some figure of the contemporary political scene such as P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus or Q. Caecilius Metellus, which in turn could suggest a sort of polemic between Naevius and the political élite³². According to Barchiesi, these verses show «quale risonanza sinistra potesse avere il termine *rex* in età repubblicana»³³.

Naevius, however, also knows positive examples of kings. In a verse from the tragedy *Lupus sive Romulus*, the playwright defines the king Amulius as a *rex sapiens*: *Vel Veiens regem salutat Vibe Albanum Amulium / comiter senem sapientem, contra redhostis menalus*³⁴.

The scholarly attention has commonly focused on the final part of the second verse, which terminates with a problematic *crux*. What does the

²⁸ According to Fraenkel 1960, 187: «il re come esponente della potenza e della magnificenza, e inoltre la coppia *rex e regina* sono simboli familiari ai Romani».

²⁹ Wright 1972, 239-242; Barchiesi 1978, 62; Reduzzi Merola 2005, 214; Reduzzi Merola 2007, 234; Beta 2014, 207; Santini 2015.

³⁰ 110-111 Ribbeck, quoted by Front. *Ep.* XXVIII 15-16 Van de Hout (= fr. 182 Gianascian, 54). It is uncertain whether the words *regum filiis* are Naevius' or Fronto's: for a discussion on this problem and on the various reconstructions proposed by scholars, see Van de Hout 1999, 71, with further bibliography. Cf. also Traglia 1986, 241; Marmorale 1950², 226.

³¹ Freedom of speech was a typical recurring theme of Greek tragedy. See, for instance, Soph. *Ant.* 509, 690.

³² Barchiesi 1978, 62. On the polemic between Naevius and the Metelli as a possible background of *Tarentilla*, see Santalucia 1999, 27-40.

³³ Barchiesi 1978, 61-63.

³⁴ Fest. 334 Lindsay; 5-6 Ribbeck.

word *menalus* mean? Answers to this question differ considerably. While it has been proposed correcting it to Maenalus, thus introducing a third character in the scene (besides the king Amulius and Vel Vibe from the Etruscan city of Veii), other scholars have tried to integrate the lacuna by interpreting this part of the verse as the answer of the king Amulius to the salutation of Vel Vibe³⁵. Besides the various philological and exegetical problems that this verse poses, in our perspective it is important to focus on the figure of Amulius, whom Naevius quite strikingly considers a wise king. Unlike the rest of the tradition which depicts Amulius as an evil tyrant and usurper, Naevius makes him a *rex sapiens*³⁶. Excluding the possibility that this expression might have been ironical, we must emphasize that in no way can the reference to the concept of *sapientia* be considered as a generic compliment³⁷. Rather it represents a reference to Roman political and moral values. It is not accidental that Cicero, for instance, considers *sapientia* to be one of the fundamental requisites of a monarch (*Rep.* II 11)³⁸. Furthermore, in ancient sources – including those from the period of Naevius – the concept of *sapientia* generally appears to be a fundamental quality of the *civis Romanus*, as indicated by the *elogium* of L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, who is defined as *fortis vir sapiensque*³⁹. Similarly, in 221 BC – which is just around the period of the staging of Naevius' *Romulus* – Q. Caecilius Metellus praises his father Lucius' *sapientia*⁴⁰. Finally, in describing a period of panic in Rome following a military defeat which is probably to be identified as the battle of Lake Trasimenus or Cannae, Ennius affirms that wisdom (*sapientia*) was replaced by violence (*stolida vis*) and that somebody tried to seize a *regnum* by making use of violence and disregarding *sapientia*⁴¹. Thus when Naevius presented Amulius as a wise king, his audience was perfectly

³⁵ Tandoi 1974, 262-273; Tandoi 1975, 61-63; Bettini 1981, 163-168, in part. 166, whose restoration of the text is: *comiter senem sapientem: contra redhostitur salus*. Cf. Boyle 2006, 52; Poccetti 2010, 114-115.

³⁶ There are various ancient sources depicting Amulius as a tyrant, for example Fabius Pictor quoted by Dion. Hal. I 75, 4-84, 1 (= fr. 4 Cornell, 49); cf. Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 3. Collection of sources on Amulius in Bruggisser 1987, 39-63.

³⁷ Tandoi 1975, 68.

³⁸ Cicero (*De Or.* I 37) states that the main qualities of Romulus were *consilium et sapientia*. On Romulus' wisdom see Linderski 2002.

³⁹ *ILLRP* 309 (cf. Radke 1991). On the relationship *sapientia-fortitudo* at the end of the third century BC see Earl 1960, 214-222. On the role of the concept of *sapientia* in Naevius and Ennius, see Klima 1971, 70-84. *Sapientia* also occurs in Ennius' work: Habinek 2006, 471-488; Magno 2003, 209-213. On the ideological background of the Hannibal period and for the exploitation of the concept of *regnum* see Russo 2015a, 153-180; Russo 2015b, 43-63.

⁴⁰ Plin. *HN* VII 239.

⁴¹ 268 Vahlen = 247 Skutsch. Cf. Valmaggi 1967, 76; Pascucci 1974.

able to understand the meaning of the concept of *sapientia* as a quality of a ruler. Aside from the reasons which could have induced Naevius to depict Amulius in this particular way, it is important to emphasize the occurrence of two opposite kinds of king in Naevius' work⁴². Unlike Plautus, who provides a stereotypical and empty picture of kings and tyrants, Naevius shows a more complex perception of this kind of figure and is conscious of the negative features of monarchic power.

3. – Like Naevius, Terentius also adopts a complex point of view of kings and tyrants. On the one hand Terentius sees kings as symbols of wealth and splendor; on the other hand, the playwright is aware of the ambiguous – and potentially dangerous – nature of monarchic power. With respect to the former characterization, the adjective *regalis* in *Pb.* 70 indicates wealth and fortune (as in *Eu.* 408), while in *Pb.* 339, *rex* is used to indicate the *patronus* of a parasite. However, in the same comedy (405) the verb *regnare* occurs with a different sense which cannot be considered as positive or neutral: *at tu qui sapiens es magistratus adi / iudicium de eadem causa iterum ut reddant tibi / quandoquidem solus regnas et soli licet / hic de eadem causa bis iudicium adipiscier*. By means of the verb *regnare*, the image of the king in these verses is of a man who considers himself to be above the law⁴³. Similarly, in *And.* 175-195 *regnum* describes an arbitrary and despotic power: when Aeschines, one of the characters, is accused of *regnum* due to his violent and arrogant habits, Sannio proudly declares his status as a free man in response to Aeschines' absurd, tyrannical requests: SA: *regumne, Aeschine, hic tu possides? ... SA: loris liber? AE: sic erit. SA: o hominem impurum! hicin libertatem aiunt esse aequam omnibus?*

The divergent characterization of regal power in Plautus' and Terentius' works is striking: while for Plautus kings are merely an empty symbol of power, for Terentius this power represents the negation of freedom and assumes an undeniable ideological connotation. The problem is now to understand the reasons for this difference. First of all, the chronology must be considered: *Phormio* was staged in 161 BC and *Adelphoe* in 160 BC, much later than the early productions of Plautus' comedies. In the period between the literary careers of Plautus and Terentius, the concept of *regnum* became an increasingly important aspect of political debate: the accusation of *regnum* began to be used as a propagandistic refrain, most of all because of figures such as Q. Fabius Maximus and P. Cornelius Scipio

⁴² On the early tradition concerning Amulius and the problem of Naevius see Russo 2015b, 23-28, 231-266.

⁴³ See the comment on the verse in Martin 1964; cf. Frangoulidis 1996, 182.

Africanus, whose behavior was often stigmatized as monarchical⁴⁴. It is thus possible that in writing his comedies, Terentius – like Naevius before him – could have been affected by the importance that the concept of *regnum* had been assuming in the political scene of Rome starting with the period of the Hannibalic war. Plautus, who lived in the same period, was not influenced by the political life of those years (at least from this specific point of view) and limited the use of concepts such as king and tyrant to the literary sphere.

4. – The ambiguity of a monarchy which can easily turn into a tyranny is a recurring theme in Ennius' production. In his *Thyestes* in particular Ennius provides us with a clear example of the closeness between a king and a tyrant. Besides the date for *Thyestes* (160 BC), which we know thanks to Cicero (*Brut.* 20), only a few fragments of the tragedy are available: approximately 11 fragments for a total of 17 verses according to Ribbeck's edition. Modern scholars have therefore tried to reconstruct Ennius' tragedy on the basis of Accius' *Atreus* and Seneca's *Thyestes*, both of which were influenced to a varying extent by Ennius' work⁴⁵. However, Ennius focuses attention not on Atreus (as does Accius), but on Thyestes (as does Seneca, and as the title already shows). It is thus not accidental that the character of Thyestes is developed quite clearly in Ennius' verses in spite of their slenderness, while in Accius' tragedy Thyestes appears only as guilty as his brother, Atreus, the real and only protagonist of the play⁴⁶. In Ennius' tragedy, Thyestes is a multifaceted character, undoubtedly guilty, but also a victim of the cruel revenge of Atreus, who is presented as the typical example of an evil tyrant⁴⁷. Thyestes is thus a symbol of tyranny, but he is also a father who, after seeing his sons die in a terrible way, cannot help regretting having betrayed his brother Atreus. As Lana has pointed out, Thyestes «non doveva essere un personaggio scolpito in un blocco di pietra insieme a sua fratello, come il Tieste acciano»⁴⁸. While Accius supposedly represented the typical idea of a tyrant (cruel, evil and despotic), Ennius staged the contraposition of a tyrant and his victim, who, not accidentally, was in turn a tyrant. The existence of a tyrant who was the victim of another tyrant showed the ambiguity of tyrannical power: tyrants can undoubtedly be cruel, but they can also suffer as victims like anybody else. In Ennius'

⁴⁴ Torregaray Pagola 1998, 177-187; François 2006; Russo 2015a.

⁴⁵ Lana 1959; La Penna 1972; Dangel 1987; Dangel 1988; Garelli-François 1998. However, Tarrant 1978 doubts that Seneca had ever relied on Accius.

⁴⁶ La Penna 1972, 364.

⁴⁷ Lana 1959, 324. Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* III 25-26, where Ennius' *Thyestes* is quoted.

⁴⁸ Lana 1959, 324.

perspective, power – however great – cannot preserve anybody from suffering and succumbing to injustice. Accordingly, Ennius' view seems to be closer to Terentius' than to Plautus': while Plautus does not express any opinion on tyrants and kings, Terentius and Ennius show and stress the problematical and ambivalent aspect of these figures. It is not accidental that Terentius' *Phormio* was staged in 160 BC, the same year as Ennius' *Thyestes*. According to some scholars, such attention to the concept of tyranny in the year 160 BC could be an expression of anti-Macedonian propaganda and refer to the murder of Demetrius at the hand of his brother Perseus: a perfect historical transposition of the myth of the Pelopides⁴⁹.

In addition, unlike Plautus, Ennius seems to better understand the difference between a king and a tyrant from both the lexical and the semantic point of view. In fact, the contrast of good kings and evil ones, who can always turn into tyrants, occurs frequently in his works: according to Ennius, a king must always keep himself far from violence as violence is typical of a tyrant and not of a wise king⁵⁰. Aside from the problem of Ennius' opinion of monarchy, which is beyond the scope of this paper, we can observe that in his tragedies Ennius presents a negative image of monarchy. A very pessimistic view of the idea of *regnum* arises from the following fragment, which scholars as a rule attribute to *Thyestes* (404-405 Vahlen = 381-382 Ribbeck = 320 Jocelyn = 150 Manuwald)⁵¹: *nulla sancta societas / nec fides regni est*. Significantly, Cicero (*Off.* I 26) quotes Ennius' excerpt as further proof of the injustices one can cause when one is possessed by *cupido regni*. Whatever the real provenance of this fragment, it certainly provides us with a negative image of *regnum* which is contrasted with concepts such as *sancta societas* and *fides*.

Also negative is the image arising from another fragment (402 Vahlen = 379 Ribbeck = 348 Jocelyn = 161 Manuwald): *quem metuunt oderunt, quem quisque odi periisse expetit*. Though the word *regnum* is not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that here the reference is to a king not only because Cicero, who is the source of the quotation, mentions it as proof that rulers are often hated rather than beloved⁵², but also because Ennius' words remind us of a verse spoken by Accius' *Atreus* (203-204 Ribbeck): *oderint, / dum metuant*. Though modern scholars have never emphasized the resemblances between the works of Ennius and Accius, it is possible that Accius

⁴⁹ Garelli-François 1998.

⁵⁰ See for instance 98 Vahlen = 97 Skutsch from the first book of the *Annales, astu, non vi sum summam servare decet rem*, which probably refers to Romulus. On Ennius' perspective on monarchy, see Russo 2015a.

⁵¹ Traglia 1986, 358, n. 20.

⁵² Cic. *Off.* II 23.

used Ennius' *Thyestes* as a model for his *Atreus*. Indeed, another verse from Accius' *Thyestes* is reminiscent of Ennius' *Thyestes*: Accius' words (651 Ribbeck) *multi iniqui atque infedele regni, pauci benevoli refer*, in my opinion, to Ennius' above-mentioned verse *nulla sancta societas / nec fides regni est* and both fragments emphasize the contrast between the concepts of *regnum ad fides*.

However, as already mentioned, Ennius provides a multifaceted picture of tyrants and kings who are not only symbols of despotic power. It is therefore interesting to observe the sympathy that Ennius shows towards Agamemnon in the tragedy *Iphigenia*. Ennius attributes these words to the king of Mycenae (228-229 Vahlen = 197-198 Ribbeck = 388-389 Jocelyn = 194 Manuwald): *plebes in in hoc regi antistat loco: licet / lacrumare plebi, regi honeste non licet*. Since this fragment transparently evokes Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis*, it has been possible to reconstruct Agamemnon's role in Ennius' work on the base of Euripides' model: Agamemnon, receiving the news that his daughter has joined the Achaean camp and knowing her sad fate, would like to cry, but he cannot since kings, unlike normal people, are not allowed to show weakness. Thus, in Ennius' works, once again a double and ambivalent acceptance of the idea of kings and tyrants arises: kings and tyrants can be evil, but in the end they are also human beings.

5. – Unlike Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius provide an essentially negative image of the concept of *regnum*. Significantly, a character Pacuvius' tragedy *Atalanta* defines those who are subject to a king as slaves (74-75 Ribbeck = 57 Schierl): *omnes, qui tamquam nos serviunt / sub regno, callent domiti imperium metuere*. Particularly interesting is both the expression *serviunt sub regno*, which actually compares *regnum* to a state of slavery, and the connection of this image with the idea of fear, confirming the negative sense of the idea of monarchy in Pacuvius' opinion. A similar view arises in a fragment from the tragedy *Dulorestes* (149 Ribbeck = 115 Schierl): *heu, non tyrannum novi temeritudinem?* Besides emphasizing the use of the term *tyrannus*, which represents one of the rare occurrences of this word in sources from the second century BC, in this verse the image of the tyrant reminds us of the idea of the king, which confirms that the semantic and lexical overlapping of these two terms was still valid in Pacuvius' tragic works. Also sinister is the tyrant who appears in another verse in *Dulorestes* (147 Ribbeck = 101 Schierl), *amplus, rubicondo colore et spectu protervo ferox*, which is reminiscent of another fragment of Pacuvius (382 Ribbeck = 290 Schierl): *voce suppressa, striato fronte, voltu turgido*. With these words Pacuvius provides us with a sharp image of a tyrant whose face is frightful

and horrible. Clearly such a face can only correspond to an equally terrible and cruel nature⁵³.

Pacuvius does not, thus, show any hesitation in outlining the figure of a tyrant or of a king: it is true that we have only a few fragments, but it is undeniable that the characterization arising from these is extremely negative. Plautus provides us with a «sterilized» image of tyrants and kings; Pacuvius does likewise, but from an opposite point of view. While Plautus presents tyrants as symbols of power and wealth, for Pacuvius (and Terentius before him) they are nothing but cruel oppressors.

The same characteristic applies to Accius' perspective: the sinister quotation (*Atr.* 203-204 Ribbeck) *oderint, dum metuant* indicates unequivocally that in Accius' works tyrants and kings are negative figures⁵⁴. Rashness and a cruel nature are typical features of tyrants in Accius' tragedies: *ferre exanclavimus / tyranni saevom ingenium atque execrabile* (*Diom.* 269-270 Ribbeck); *nec cum tyranno quisquam epulandi gratia / accumbat mensam aut eandem vescatur dapem*⁵⁵ (*Atr.* 217-218 Ribbeck). Tyrants are, moreover, opposed to the concepts of *fides* and *civis bonus*: Thyestes (*Atr.* 227-228 Ribbeck) accuses his brother of not respecting *fides*, while an anonymous character bitterly observes that tyrants do not love *boni*, but rather are afraid of them (*Atr.* 214 Ribbeck): *vigilandum est semper; multae insidiae sunt bonis*⁵⁶. According to Cicero, who often quotes Accius' *Atreus*, violence and anger were typical of both *Atreus* and *Thyestes*⁵⁷ since, as we have seen in Accius' tragedy (unlike Ennius' *Thyestes*) both brothers are evil tyrants⁵⁸. It is not accidental, thus, that *Thyestes*, towards whom Accius shows no sympathy, is accused of usurpation. In Accius' view, both brothers are guilty and neither *Atreus* nor *Thyestes*, the victim of the terrible revenge of *Atreus*, deserves compassion.

⁵³ La Penna 1979, 67; Schierl 2006, 558.

⁵⁴ On Accius' attitude towards tyrants and in particular on his *Atreus* and *Brutus*, with respect to Roman history, cf. Baldarelli 2004. On the moral perversions of tyrants in the Roman imagination, see also Cazzuffi 2013.

⁵⁵ On this verse see Lana 1959, 307, who argues that the use of the term *tyrannus* did not have a derogatory scope. Biliński 1958, 39, instead interprets the verse as a precise attack against *Atreus*. Cf. Berve 1967, 625-629, 695-704, 737-753; Lanciotti 1977, 134. Erasmo 2004, 106, fails to mention Plautus' evidence and considers this verse as «the earliest extant use, in Latin, of the term *tyrannus*».

⁵⁶ For the contraposition *fides* vs *tyrannus*, see Lana 1959, 309-311; La Penna 1972, 360, refers the verse to a passage from Cicero's *Pro Plancio*.

⁵⁷ Cic. *Off.* I 97; III 102; *De Or.* III 219.

⁵⁸ Lana 1959, 305-306, 320. According to Lana (320), «Tieste si muove sul medesimo piano di *Atreo* e parla il medesimo linguaggio, entrambi sono tiranni, efferati, violenti, orribili a udirsi nei loro propositi di sangue e vendetta».

Usurpation is one of the most frequently recurring themes of Accius' production. Apart from *Brutus*, which was often staged due to its strong antityrannical significance, other tragedies confirm the importance of this issue in Accius' works⁵⁹. A case of usurpation was certainly at the center of the tragedy *Diomedes*: Agrios, after usurping the kingdom of his brother Eneos and reducing him to misery, is murdered in retribution for his crime. This is probably the reason why a character in the tragedy attacks Agrios with the words already mentioned above (*Diom.* 269-270 Ribbeck): *ferè exanclavimus / tyranni saevom ingenium atque esecrabile*. Criticism of the tyrant was only part of a wider attack which supposedly exhorted people to revolt against the despot, as a further fragment suggests (278 Ribbeck): *multa ammittuntur tarditie et socordia*. As modern scholars have proposed, this verse is likely to be a criticism of those who preferred to obey the usurping tyrant⁶⁰. The exhortation to overthrow a tyranny also occurs in a fragment from the *Eurysaces* (380 Ribbeck: *quem admodum impetum occupemus facere ultro in regem*), which clearly refers to the myth of the usurpation of Telamon's throne: as *Diomedes*, so the tragedy *Eurysaces* stages the case of a tyrant (here described as *regem*) who usurps the power of a legitimate king⁶¹. It is thus not accidental that this same theme is also the main *Leitmotiv* of the tragedy *Brutus*, which depicts the tyrant Superbus as an illegitimate usurper of monarchic power⁶².

Like Pacuvius, Accius provides us with the precise image of a tyrant in his tragedy *Tereus* (Ribbeck 636-639)⁶³: *Tereus indomito more atque animo barbaro, / conspexit in eam; amore vecors flammeo, / depositus facinus pessimum ex dementia confingit*. The tyrant Tereus, who is accused of *stuprum* and other typical tyrannical habits, is presented here as a barbarian and an unrestrained figure who acts only according to his desires and foolish passions.

It is undeniable that Accius provides us with a very negative picture of tyranny – probably because of both the contemporary literary tradition with respect to this theme and the political value of the idea of tyranny in Rome in the last decades of the second century BC (i.e. the accusation that the Gracchi behaved as tyrants rather than as tribunes of the plebs). Sig-

⁵⁹ Dangel 1995, 17, especially stresses the political value of Accius' works. Cf. Ribbeck 1887, 242-244; Argenio 1961; La Penna 1979, 65. On Accius' *Atreus* and its political connotation, see also Leigh 1996, 171-197, 185.

⁶⁰ D'Antò 1980, 310-312; Dangel 1995, 357.

⁶¹ D'Antò 1980, 342; Dangel 1995, 330.

⁶² Gabba 1969, 377-383; Migliorati 2000, 157-180.

⁶³ Cf. Cic. *Att.* XVI 2, 3; VI 5, 1; *Phil.* I 36, which confirm the anti-tyrannical value of this tragedy: D'Antò 1980, 474; Manuwald 2001, 117; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2002.

nificantly, however, he also staged an example of a positive king⁶⁴. Indeed, in the tragedy *Telephus* the dramatist proposes a parallel between the concept of *virtus* and the figure of the king (625-626 Ribbeck): *nam si a me regnum Fortuna atque opes / eripere quivit, at virtutem nec quivit*⁶⁵. Probably influenced by the Telephus myth, Accius cannot help showing his audience that sometimes, though rarely, a king might also be a wise and appreciable ruler. Similarly, in his *Brutus*, Accius juxtaposed a positive example of a king (namely Servius Tullius) with the tyrant Superbus, though the tragedy essentially centered on the evil figure of the tyrant. As some scholars have already emphasized, the audience must have been able to recognize and appreciate the difference between the king-tyrant Superbus and Servius Tullius, who symbolized the wise king-legislator (40 Ribbeck): *Tullius, qui libertatem civitatem stabiliverat*. Whatever the freedom may have been, the ideological value of the fragment is clear: to the terrible and horrible Greek and barbarian *regna* depicted in many tragedies, Accius opposes a bright example of positive and wise monarchy, which is, not by chance, genuinely Roman⁶⁶. Such a view of Servius Tullius is not striking. Indeed, Servius Tullius was often celebrated in later sources as a sort of republican monarch for having given Rome its fundamental republican institutions.

6. – After analyzing the occurrences of words such as *rex* and *tyrannus* (together with related words, such as *regnum*, *tyrannis*, etc.), we must conclude that Servius' testimony is correct. According to Servius, unspecified *matores* were used to considering the terms king and tyrant as synonyms. Indeed, if we include the early Latin dramatists among these *maiores*, we cannot help noticing that one of the most frequently recurring characteristics of their works is in fact the indiscriminate use of these words as if they had the same meaning. Obviously, such a use also influenced the semantic confusion surrounding these two concepts, so that a king was often called «tyrant», and a tyrant a «king» regardless of their actual habits. On the other hand, Servius' claim that in the Greek context there was no actual difference between kings and tyrants either is at least debatable. In Greek ideology such figures were too important to be confused or even overlapped, and throughout Greek tragedy and comedy kings and tyrants are always clearly distinguished. It is in Latin that we often observe confusion (lexical as well as semantic) between these two terms. As a result, we can

⁶⁴ D'Antò 1980, 466, for the problems of the Greek models that Accius used in composing his tragedy. Cf. Di Benedetto 1965, 257-258; Dangel 1995, 287.

⁶⁵ Dangel 1995, 287.

⁶⁶ La Penna 1979, 65. *Contra* D'Antò 1980, 505.

agree with Fraenkel that such a use could be an original Latin innovation. This innovation would then be a genuine clue to the Roman view of the concept of monarchy. It is because of this indistinct perception of kings and tyrants that so often typical features of the former are attributed to the latter, and vice versa.

For Plautus a king is nothing but a symbol of power, legitimate or not; for later dramatists, however, original tyrannical aspects such as the contrast between tyrant/king and freedom, are often ascribed to kings⁶⁷.

From this perspective, the theatre appears to have been strongly influenced by the contemporary evolution of the political debate in Rome between the third and second centuries BC. It was during the Hannibalic period that the concept of *regnum* was first exploited to stigmatize both excessive and prolonged cases of dictatorship and extraordinary appointments, which were both perceived as a threat to republican institutions⁶⁸. Figures such Q. Fabius Maximus and P. Scipio Africanus were repeatedly accused of tyranny, though for different reasons: while the dictatorship of the *Cunctator* was perceived and presented by his adversaries as a form of «irresponsible tyranny», the *imperium extraordinarium* of Scipio Africanus was considered to be an expression of monarchical aspirations. It is therefore likely that the occurrence of these themes in the political debate also influenced contemporary tragic and comic representations, albeit with the undeniable exception of Plautus. With respect to Plautus' simplified and superficial view of the idea of monarchy, it is likely that this specific aspect of his theatre results from the strong influence that the Greek model, namely New Comedy, exerted on Plautus' works. Since in New Comedy tyrants and kings had already lost the meaning and role that they had had in Old Comedy, Plautus did not accept the ideological value of these figures either.

Thus, Servius' claim applies partially to both Greek and Latin usage: it is true that Greek playwrights sometimes used the terms *basileus* and *tyrannos* interchangeably, but it is also undeniable that they were able to perceive the difference between a king and a tyrant independently of the ideological value these figures might symbolize. Similarly, Latin playwrights (particularly Plautus) sometimes seem to use these words as synonyms but, as a rule, they distinguished a king from a tyrant, particularly in the later stages of ancient drama.

From the lexical point of view and particularly at the beginning of the tradition, it is undeniable that the word *rex* was preferred to the word *tyran-*

⁶⁷ On the concept of liberty in the Latin theatre see Reduzzi Merola 2007.

⁶⁸ Cf. Russo 2015a e Russo 2015b, 109-128.

nus, which means that *rex* was accepted in both a negative and a positive sense. It is perhaps this interpretation that makes it possible to understand the Romans' profound aversion to any form of monarchic power, whatever its title or origin.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Cornell *The Fragments of the Roman Historians*, ed. by T. Cornell, Oxford 2013.
- Edmonds *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, I, ed. by J.M. Edmonds, Leiden 1957.
- Gianascian *Scriptorum Romanorum quae extant omnia*, II, *Livius Andronicus, Cnaeus Naevius, incerti tragici et comici poetae*, ed. M. Gianascian, Venezia 1954.
- Jocelyn *The Tragedies of Ennius*, ed. by H.D. Jocelyn, Cambridge 1967.
- Kassel-Austin *Poetae Comici Graeci*, V, edd. R. Kassel - C. Austin, Berlin - New York 1986.
- Lindsay *Sextus Pompeus Festus, De verborum significatu quae supersunt cum Pauli Epitome*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, Leipzig 1913.
- Manuwald *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, II, *Ennius*, ed. G. Manuwald, Göttingen 2012.
- Ribbeck *Scaenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta*, I-II, *Tragicorum Romanorum fragmenta*, ed. O. Ribbeck, Leipzig 1897-1898.
- Schierl *Die Tragödien des Pacuvius*, Ein Kommentar zu den Fragmenten mit Einleitung, Text and Übersetzung, hrsg. von P. Schierl, Berlin - New York 2006.
- Skutsch *The Annals of Quintus Ennius*, ed. by O. Skutsch, Oxford 1985.
- Storey *Fragments of Old Comedy*, ed. by C. Storey, I, London 2011.
- Vahlen *Ennianae poesis reliquiae*, ed. J. Vahlen, Leipzig 1928².

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