

IMPERSONATING THE DEAD: MIMES AT ROMAN FUNERALS

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ROMAN ARISTOCRATIC AND IMPERIAL FUNERALS often had a theatrical quality to them. We are told of the presence of musicians and dancing satyrs as part of the procession (*pompa*) and the excessive, even feigned grief, on the part of mourners, some of whom were professionals.¹ Most striking of all was the performance of an actor (a “funerary mime”) who donned a mask that portrayed the likeness of the deceased and wore clothing that represented the highest offices and honors that the deceased had achieved. While dressed in this manner, the actor impersonated the deceased, imitating, and sometimes mocking, his well-known physical characteristics and movements and his words.² To our modern sensibilities such a custom might seem odd, but a recent commentator on Roman aristocratic funerals has pointed out how the tone of a single funeral celebration ranged from “the patriotic and somber, to sad, to joyous and festive.”³ The performance of this funerary mime, in which the dead momentarily came back to life in vivid form, apparently could reflect the full range of emotions on display at a Roman funeral. Despite recent studies on the Roman funeral, we still lack an analysis of the funerary mime that draws together all of the ancient evidence. Such an

¹ Musicians and professional mourning women can be seen on a relief from Aminternum (Flower 1996, pl. 6); our sole reference to comic dancers comes from Dion. Hal. 7.72.12; cf. Flower 1996, 105. For feigned grief, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.12.1 (his description of Drusus’ funeral): *Ceterum laudante filium pro rostris Tiberio senatus populusque habitum ac voces dolentium simulatione magis quam libens induebat . . .*; cf. *Ann.* 3.5.2, on Germanicus’ funeral.

² Some recent studies on the aristocratic funeral have discussed the presence of mimes; see above all, Flower 1996, 104–5, 125, who discusses this at the greatest length and argues that the *imago* of the deceased was first put on display at his own funeral and probably by an actor who impersonated him; *contra* Dupont 1987, 171; Arce 1988, 47; cf. Bodel 1999, 260, who mentions only the ancestors of the deceased being so portrayed, not the deceased himself; cf. also Purcell 1999, 183–85, who places the performance of the funerary mime in a larger context.

³ Flower 1996, 106.

analysis can shed light, as I hope to show, not only on the nature of the actor's performance, but also on what this performance might mean for our understanding of Roman funerals, both under the Republic and the Empire. Further light can be shed on the custom of the funerary mime by using Bakhtin's model of carnival as a way of demonstrating how in Rome certain carnivalesque elements could be interwoven into otherwise serious and even somber public events.⁴

The first source that describes the practice of the funerary mime most explicitly is a passage of Diodorus, quoted by Photius, which is taken from his discussion of the funeral of L. Aemilius Paullus, the famous conqueror of Perseus who died in 160 B.C.:

...τῶν γὰρ Ῥωμαίων οἱ ταῖς εὐγενείαις καὶ προγόνων δόξῃ διαφέροντες μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν εἰδωλοποιοῦνται κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χαρακτῆρος ὁμοιότητα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὅλην τοῦ σώματος περιγραφὴν, μιμητὰς ἔχοντες ἐκ παντὸς τοῦ βίου παρατηρηκότητας τὴν τε πορείαν καὶ τὰς κατὰ μέρος ιδιότητας τῆς ἐμφάσεως. παραπλησίως δὲ καὶ τῶν προγόνων ἕκαστος προηγείται τοιαύτην ἔχων διασκευὴν καὶ κόσμον ὥστε τοὺς θεωμένους διὰ τῆς ἐκ τούτων ἐμφάσεως γινώσκειν ἐφ' ὅσον ἕκαστοι τιμῆς προήχθησαν καὶ μετέσχον τῶν ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ καλῶν. (Diod. 31.25.2)⁵

Those Romans who by reason of noble birth and the fame of their ancestors are pre-eminent are, when they die, portrayed in figures that are not only lifelike as to features but show their whole bodily appearance. For they employ actors who through a man's whole life have carefully observed his carriage and the several peculiarities of his appearance. In like fashion each of the dead man's ancestors takes his place in the funeral procession, with such robes and insignia as enable the spectators to distinguish from the portrayal how far each had advanced in the *cursus honorum* and had had a part in the dignities of the state. (Loeb trans.)

In this passage, Diodorus describes not only the use of masks to portray the facial features of the deceased, but also the employment of

⁴ Bakhtin 1968, 1–58, esp. p. 6, for his brief comments on the phenomenon in Roman times, in which he explains how in the Middle Ages carnival existed separate from but alongside “official” institutions (both political and religious), whereas in Rome, features of carnival were woven into official ceremonies, such as funerals and triumphs; cf. 70. Cf. also the applications of Bakhtin's theory to classical subjects (e.g., Richlin 1992, 70–72, on Roman satire; Gowers 1993, 30–31, on food and feasting).

⁵ For a discussion of this passage, see Zadoks-Josephus Jitta 1932, 25, 28; Flower 1996, 100, 104–5. The other source for Paullus' funeral, Plut. *Aem. Paul.* 39, does not mention the presence of an actor.

actors (μιμηταί) to play the role of the deceased at the funeral. The word μιμητής can simply mean “imitator” in general terms, one who pretends to be someone or something else, but it can be used specifically of actors.⁶ Diodorus goes on to explain that this μιμητής, during the lifetime of the deceased, observed the gait or carriage (πορεία) of the deceased and “the several peculiarities of his appearance” (τὰς κατὰ μέρος ιδιότηας τῆς ἐμφάσεως). The result of this “lifetime” of observation was that the actor could perform these traits faithfully at his subject’s funeral. The translation of τὰς κατὰ μέρος ιδιότηας τῆς ἐμφάσεως as “the several peculiarities of his appearance” renders into English the ambiguities of the Greek without making clear precisely what is meant. By this phrase, Diodorus must mean gestures or other physical movements, since it should refer to something, such as gait or carriage with which it is paired, that actors could observe, imitate, and then perform for a large audience. By the same token, it is unlikely that this phrase refers either to distinguishing physical characteristics, such as facial features or expressions, since these would have been depicted by the mask itself, or, for that matter, to physical blemishes of the body, such as scars, which would have been concealed by the dress that the actor wore.⁷ Thus, Diodorus describes a performance in which an actor, wearing a likeness of the deceased and his insignia of office, imitated the gait and other physical movements of his subject.

One question is whether Diodorus is being anachronistic here, perhaps “retrojecting” to the mid-Republic a practice with which he was familiar from his own day (c. 60–30 B.C.). Two other sources provide corroboration for the general chronology of this practice, but some of the important details of the mime’s performance are present only in Diodorus’ account. The first source is Plautus’ *Amphitruo* (produced perhaps c. 188 B.C.⁸). The following lines from this play are spoken by Sosia in the presence of Mercury, who has taken on the former’s appearance:

⁶ E.g., Arist. *Pr.* 918b28. Elsewhere, Diodorus uses μιμητής to indicate someone who imitates someone else, but not an actor *per se*; see 29.6.2 (of soldiers who imitate their commanders) and 9.19.1 (the famous story of Phaleris and Perilaüs, of whom the latter imitates the sound of a bull through pipes).

⁷ Since Romans did frequently display their scars in public (see Leigh 1995), is it possible that such scars would have been depicted somehow on the body (or costume) of the funerary mime?

⁸ The chronology of many of Plautus’ plays remains uncertain; for the date of the *Amphitruo*, see Sedgwick 1949, 382; cf. Duckworth 1952, 54–55, with n. 42 on pp. 55–56.

nam hicquidem omnem imaginem meam, quae antehac fuerat, possidet.
vivo fit quod numquam quisquam mortuo faciet mihi. (*Amph.* 458–59)⁹

Indeed this fellow has got hold of my whole appearance, as it had been before. What no one will ever do for me when I'm dead is happening to me while I am alive.
(my trans.)

It is interesting to note that this passage describes the act of impersonation as “getting hold of my *imago*,” which encouraged the Loeb translator to translate line 459, “Here I am alive and folks *carry my image*—more than anyone will ever do when I'm dead [emphasis added].” This translation assumes that Sosia in line 459 is referring to the practice of having family members carry the busts of their deceased ancestors,¹⁰ but it is clear from the context that what really distresses him is that Mercury has taken on his whole appearance—that Mercury is impersonating Sosia. To make this impersonation clear on stage, Mercury was probably required to put on a “Sosia” mask,¹¹ but the implication of the passage is that the impersonation went beyond just this. Therefore, the *quod* of 459 must refer to the act of impersonation, which, in turn, this passage tells us, was something that usually occurred after death. This passage only indicates that living people portrayed the dead; it does not tell us whether or not the deceased himself was impersonated at his own funeral, as the passage from Diodorus clearly states,¹² although this certainly seems to be implied in Sosia's words. The passage also dates the practice of impersonating the dead to the period roughly contemporaneous with Paullus' funeral, thus corroborating the general chronology of Diodorus' passage.

The second source of note is Polybius' famous description of a generic aristocratic funeral of his day (c. 167–150 B.C.).¹³ After describing the *pompa* and *laudatio*, Polybius focuses on the image of the deceased on display at the funeral:¹⁴

⁹ On these lines, see Duckworth 1952, 93–94.

¹⁰ On this practice, see Toynbee 1971, 48, citing as evidence a marble statue of Augustan date that depicts a togate figure carrying an ancestral bust in either arm (now in the Capitoline Museum); Zadoks-Josephus Jitta 1932, pl. 6 a, b.

¹¹ The use of masks in Plautine comedy remains controversial; here I follow Duckworth 1952, 92–94.

¹² Flower 1996, 46–47, with n. 75 on p. 47; Cf. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta 1932, 29.

¹³ For the date of Polybius' stay in Rome, see Walbank 1972, 7.

¹⁴ Polyb. 6.53–54; on this passage, see Walbank 1957, 737–40.

ἡ δ' εἰκὼν ἐστὶ πρόσωπον εἰς ὁμοιότητα διαφερόντως ἐξειργασμένον καὶ κατὰ τὴν πλάσιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑπογραφὴν. ταύτας δὴ τὰς εἰκόνας ἔν τε ταῖς δημοτελέσι θυσίαις ἀνοίγοντες κοσμοῦσι φιλοτίμως, ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν οἰκείων μεταλλάξῃ τις ἐπιφανῆς, ἄγουσιν εἰς τὴν ἐκφορὰν, περιτιθέντες ὡς ὁμοιοτάτοις εἶναι δοκοῦσι κατὰ τε τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὴν ἄλλην περικολπὴν. οὗτοι δὲ προσαναλαμβάνουσιν ἐσθῆτας, ἐὰν μὲν ὑπατος ἢ στρατηγὸς ἢ γεγωνὴς, περιπορφύρους, ἐὰν δὲ τιμητὴς, πορφυράς, ἐὰν δὲ καὶ τεθριαμβευκῶς ἢ τι τοιοῦτον κατειργασμένος, διαχρύσους. αὐτοὶ μὲν οὖν ἐφ' ἀρμάτων οὗτοι πορεύονται, ῥάβδοι δὲ καὶ πελέκεις καὶ ἄλλα τὰ ταῖς ἀρχαῖς εἰωθότα συμπαρακεῖσθαι προηγείται κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἐκάστω τῆς γεγεννημένης κατὰ τὸν βίον ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ προαγωγῆς, ὅταν δ' ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐμβόλους ἔλθωσι, καθέζονται πάντες ἐξῆς ἐπὶ δίφρων ἐλεφαντίνων. (Polyb. 6.53.5-9)

This image is a mask reproducing with remarkable fidelity both the features and complexion of the deceased. On the occasion of public sacrifices they display these images, and decorate them with much care, and when any distinguished member of the family dies they take them to the funeral, putting them on men who seem to them to bear the closest resemblance to the original in stature and carriage. These representatives wear togas, with a purple border if the deceased was a consul or praetor, whole purple if he was a censor, and embroidered with gold if he had celebrated a triumph or achieved anything similar. They all ride in chariots preceded by the *fascēs*, axes, and other insignia by which the different magistrates are wont to be accompanied according to the respective dignity of the offices of state held by each during his life; and when they arrive at the Rostra they all seat themselves in a row on ivory chairs. (Loeb trans.)

Most important for our purposes is the description of those who wore the masks of the deceased. Members of the family chose men who resembled their deceased ancestors and had them wear the masks and the insignia of the highest office that these famous family members had achieved. Thus attired, the "actors" processed to the Forum where they seated themselves on curule chairs near the Rostra and became a *topos* of the *laudatio*.¹⁵

In general terms, Diodorus and Polybius seem to view the purpose of a Roman funeral in much the same way, for they both acknowledge the importance of the insignia of office as a marker of success to be displayed at the funerals of Roman aristocrats; they also emphasize the importance of the impersonator's performance as a way of demonstrating

¹⁵ For the funeral *laudatio* as a commentary on the *pompa*, see Flower 1996, 98; on the *laudatio* in general, see Vollmer 1891; Kierdorf 1980; Flower 1996, 128-58.

the achievements of the dead, especially in terms of service to the state. Differences remain. It is not clear from Polybius' account, for instance, whether the wearers of these masks were living members of the deceased aristocrat's household (e.g., family members, slaves, or freedmen) or professional actors hired for the purpose.¹⁶ Polybius also makes no mention of anyone wearing a mask that represented the man whose funeral was being celebrated, although his account does not preclude this possibility; nor does he say anything about the "actors" gesturing or otherwise imitating the physical movements of their subjects. Nevertheless, the three passages taken together demonstrate that the practice of having living people impersonate the dead at Roman funerals dates back to the mid-Republic. If Diodorus is guilty of "retrojecting" into the past a practice more familiar in his own day, then his account shows how the funeral ritual evolved from mid to late Republic. In this scenario, the use of actors would have come later, perhaps as part of the increasing professionalization of funerals. If, on the other hand, Diodorus can be taken at face value, as I believe he can, then his account can serve to flesh out the earlier sources by providing details about the nature of the impersonator's performance. The impersonation involved more than simply wearing the mask and insignia of the deceased; it also involved imitating his physical movements and gait. Moreover, we know from a passage in Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum* that Roman aristocrats regularly kept *histriones* in their retinues.¹⁷ The collocation of *histrion* and *coquos* in the Sallust passage suggests that the banquet was one possible venue for performances.¹⁸ An actor who was a member of the entourage of an aristocrat and who regularly performed for him at banquets would have been eminently qualified to play the part of the aristocrat at his funeral. Roman funerals, then, would have been highly professionalized from a much earlier period.

A source from the imperial period fills out the general picture even further. According to Suetonius, a mime appeared at the funeral of the emperor Vespasian and uttered words in imitation of the deceased:

¹⁶ Flower 1996, 99–100, argues that they were actors since they led the bier and did not follow it, as members of the family traditionally did.

¹⁷ *BJ* 85.39: *sordidum me et incultis moribus aiunt, quia parum scite convivium exorno neque histrionem ullum neque pluris preti coquam quam vilicum habeo*. For actors at dinner parties, see also Suet. *Aug.* 74.

¹⁸ For the performance of these actors at dinner parties (*convivia*), see Jones 1991 and D'Arms 1999.

sed et in funere Favor archimimus personam eius ferens imitansque, ut est mos, facta ac dicta vivi, interrogatis palam procuratoribus, quanti funus et pompa constaret, ut audit 'sestertium centiens,' exclamavit, 'centum sibi sestertia darent ac se vel in Tiberim proicerent.' (Suet. *Vesp.* 19.2)

Even at his funeral, Favor, the leader of a mime troupe, wore his mask and, according to the usual custom, represented the actions and words of the deceased during his lifetime. He asked the procurators, so that everyone could hear, how much his funeral procession would cost, and when he heard, "Ten million sesterces," he cried out: "Why don't you give me a hundred thousand and just pitch me into the Tiber!" (Loeb trans., adapted)

Suetonius includes this detail in his account of Vespasian's funeral because it affords him the opportunity to demonstrate two of Vespasian's best-known attributes—his frugality and his wit. In this passage, we are told explicitly that the *archimimus* (Favor) donned the mask (*persona*) of the deceased *princeps* and, while marching in the funeral procession, gave the customary (*ut est mos*) portrayal of Vespasian's actions and words (*facta ac dicta vivi*). Suetonius' language makes it clear that by his day such a theatrical display of the deceased was traditional. It is also noteworthy that Suetonius uses the word *persona* for the likeness of Vespasian that Favor wore, for this is the term normally used to indicate in particular a theatrical mask.¹⁹ The combination of a professional mime portraying the deceased and wearing a mask that was associated with the theater would only have underscored the theatrical elements of a Roman funeral. Furthermore, Favor's impersonation of Vespasian included words that served to portray the character of the deceased. In this way also, Suetonius' account differs markedly from those sources already discussed, which describe only the wearing of the mask and insignia of the deceased and, in the case of Diodorus, the imitation of physical movements. For these say nothing about the actors speaking in the manner of the deceased.

Also noteworthy in Suetonius' account is the lighthearted—even irreverent—nature of the mime's performance, poking fun, as it did, at one of Vespasian's best-known foibles—his frugality. Such a performance was especially appropriate for Vespasian's funeral since it was consistent with the character of the deceased, and this is perhaps the primary

¹⁹ The appearance of funerary masks and their similarity to theatrical masks is a much-discussed problem: see Flower 1996, 114–15, for the most recent discussion of the issues and relevant bibliography.

reason that Suetonius chose to include this detail. If such a performance were customary, and here we must admit that the fragmentary nature of the evidence discourages firm conclusions, then the mime's performance could have contributed to the festive, even "carnavalesque," atmosphere of Roman funerals. As I mentioned earlier, we hear from another source that dancing men impersonating jesting satyrs performed at funerals, whose purpose, it seems, was to mock the serious dancing that also took place.²⁰ (We will have more to say about this below.) This penchant for burlesque, even self-parody, in a funeral ceremony encourages the view that the mime's performance might have been typically mocking and irreverent, although again our direct evidence from the high empire is limited to Suetonius' description of the mime at Vespasian's funeral. Since the lighthearted and jesting atmosphere for the honor and burial of the dead is attested in our sources, it is curious that both Diodorus and Polybius either suppress or ignore it. Their accounts imply a much more somber and serious performance.

The lighthearted humor that Suetonius attributes to the mime's performance at Vespasian's funeral was also absent from the next funeral to be discussed—namely, the performance of a mime at Caesar's funeral in March of 44 B.C.,²¹ as described by Appian, whose account can be supplemented by Suetonius. The several extant sources on Caesar's funeral emphasize the mob rioting and violence that erupted in the course of the ritual.²² Appian's account, which is generally the most detailed, attributes this eruption of violence in part to the appearance of the dead dictator himself:

... καὶ πού τῶν θρήνων αὐτὸς ὁ Καίσαρ ἐδόκει λέγειν, ὅσους εὖ ποιήσῃ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, ἐξ ὀνόματος καὶ περὶ τῶν σφαγέων αὐτῶν ἐπέλεγεν ὥσπερ ἐν θαύματι· ἔμὲ δὲ καὶ τοῦσδε περισῶσαι τοὺς κτενοῦντάς με'. . . . (App. *BC* 2.146.611)

Somewhere from the midst of the lamentations Caesar himself was supposed to speak, recounting by name his enemies on whom he had conferred benefits, and of the murderers themselves, exclaiming, as it were in amazement: "Oh that I should have spared these men to slay me!"

(Loeb trans.)²³

²⁰ Dion. Hal. 7.72.12.

²¹ Flower 1996, 125, discusses this passage briefly.

²² Cic. *Phil.* 2.91; Plut. *Caes.* 68; *Brut.* 20; *Ant.* 14.6–8; Suet. *Iul.* 84; App. *BC* 2.143–47; Dio 44.35.4–50.

²³ This last statement came from *Armorum Iudicium* ("Judgment of Arms"), a tragedy of Pacuvius, as Suetonius informs us (*Iul.* 84.2). The *Armorum Iudicium* told the

One can see how this dramatic display of the return of the deceased, as if he had come back to life to rebuke his murderers, helped kindle the flame of the crowd's fury. Appian does not state explicitly that these words were spoken by an actor impersonating Caesar, but in light of the sources cited above, this is the most probable explanation for Caesar's sudden appearance at his own funeral.

Suetonius' description of Caesar's funeral both helps and hinders this interpretation:

Inter ludos cantata sunt quaedam ad miserationem et invidiam caedis eius accommodata, ex Pacuvi Armorum Iudicio: 'Men servasse, ut essent qui me perderent?' Et ex Electra Atili ad similem sententiam. (Suet. *Iul.* 84.2)

During the performances, some verses were sung from Pacuvius' *Judgment of Arms* that were intended to induce pity and hostility over his murder: "Did I save them to murder me?" And verses from Atilius' *Electra* expressed a similar sentiment.

Suetonius claims, as does Appian, that a line from Pacuvius' tragedy was spoken at Caesar's funeral and adds, for good measure, that a line from Atilius' Latin translation of Sophocles' *Electra*, expressing a similar sentiment (*ad similem sententiam*) was also spoken.²⁴ But he states that these lines were uttered *inter ludos* ("during the games"). Some scholars have concluded, understandably, that the *ludi* to which Suetonius is referring were funeral games in honor of Caesar.²⁵ While this conclusion is not entirely out of the question, it is improbable on the grounds that we hear from no other source about such games at Caesar's funeral. In fact, Caesar's young heir, C. Octavius, sponsored the festival in honor of

story of the contest for the armor of Achilles following his death at Troy. These words probably come from a speech of Ajax near the end of the play (Warmington 1957, 2.178). Cf. Cic. *Phil.* 2.5.

²⁴ Suet. *Iul.* 84.2.

²⁵ Westcott and Rankin 1918, 178. Robert Graves, in the Penguin translation 1979, 52, renders this "at the funeral games"; cf. Weinstock 1971, 350–53, with n. 11, p. 350, who claims that gladiatorial combat was held in the Forum after the funeral procession, citing Plin. *NH* 15.78 as evidence (*aeque fortuita eodem loco est vitis atque olea, umbrae gratia sedulitate plebeia satae, ara inde sublata gladiatorio munere Divi Iuli, quod novissime pugnavit in foro*). However, this passage must refer to gladiatorial combat that Caesar sponsored in connection with his triumphs of 46 B.C. On possible games at Caesar's funeral, cf. also Taylor 1931, 80, who follows Suetonius in stating that these lines were chanted "at the games preceding the ceremonies in the Forum."

Caesar's victory a few months later in July, which, as one source attests, functioned as Caesar's funeral games.²⁶ Suetonius is certainly capable of narrating events without following a chronological sequence. It is extremely unlikely, however, that he would have included mention of these games, whether funeral games or not, in his narrative of Caesar's funeral if they actually occurred four months later.

Suetonius' account also implies that these lines were spoken during a production of the tragedies in question, which could only have taken place amid the rest of the funeral celebration. In Suetonius' version, these tragedies were performed between the long train of people presenting gifts before Caesar's bier in the Campus Martius and Antonius' *laudatio* on the Rostra in the Forum. Again, we should not necessarily expect chronological exactitude in Suetonius' account, but it is difficult to imagine how a production of Pacuvius' tragedy could have been performed at any time during Caesar's funeral, especially once the crowd became restive and unruly. Are we to imagine that this performance took place in a theater? Or, instead, that it was put on hastily as part of the funeral celebration in the Forum? In that case, what was the stage? The circumstances of the funeral hardly seem conducive to such a performance. Certainly after the funeral, when the streets of the city were crowded and dangerous, the performance of a tragedy, as Suetonius and his commentators seem to want it, would have been impossible. Finally, what we know of the practice of funerary games argues against this interpretation of Suetonius' account. For instance, it is improbable that funerary games were ever included as part of the obsequies proper—that is, occurring between the *pompa* and the interment of the body. In fact, many attested funerary games lasted several days, which means that they must have taken place after interment.²⁷ In other words, our evidence suggests that the understanding of Suetonius' description of Caesar's funeral to include funerary games during the funeral itself is implausible.

²⁶ Serv. in Verg. *Aen.* 8.681, in *Ecl.* 9.47, in *Aen.* 1.287, in *Aen.* 6.790; Ramsey and Licht 1997, 48–54.

²⁷ The *ludi funebres* for M. Aemilius Lepidus (d. 215 B.C.) lasted for three days (Livy 23.30.15); those for M. Valerius Laevinus (d. 200 B.C.) lasted four days (Livy 31.50.4); those for P. Licinius (d. 183 B.C.) also lasted three days (Livy 39.46.2). *Munera* could take place long after the funeral proper: The best examples are the *munera* for Caesar's father, which took place during Caesar's aedileship in 65 B.C., some 20 years after his father's death (Plin. *NH* 33.53; Dio 37.8.1; cf. Plut. *Caes.* 5–9; Suet. *Iul.* 10.2), and for Caesar's daughter Julia, postponed partly because Caesar was in Gaul at the time of her death (Suet. *Iul.* 26.2–3; Dio 43.22.3 and 23.3; Plut. *Caes.* 55.4).

There are two ways to reconcile the accounts of Suetonius and Appian. The first is simply to understand that *inter ludos* refers to the performance of the funerary mime (trans. "during the performances")²⁸ and not to Caesar's funeral games. The second possibility is that when Suetonius read in his source(s) for Caesar's funeral that a mime uttered lines from tragedy, he assumed that a stage performance was meant, since such words from tragedy might have seemed to Suetonius unusual and inconsistent with the custom of the funerary mime based on his own familiarity with it; these words are especially in contrast to the humor displayed by Favor at Vespasian's funeral. The only way for Suetonius to make sense of the lines spoken from tragedy was to create a plausible context for their utterance—hence, the games that he mentions.

Another aspect of Suetonius' description of Caesar's funeral actually helps corroborate and flesh out Appian's account, for he tells us that there were actors (*scaenici artifices*) in the *pompa* at Caesar's funeral dressed in the garb that Caesar had worn in his triumphs.²⁹ This at least is consistent with Polybius' account, in which the "actors" dressed in the insignia of the highest magistracy that the deceased had achieved in life or in the gold-embroidered toga of the *triumphator*, if he had celebrated a triumph. These *scaenici artifices* at Caesar's funeral were dressed as Caesar, and it is probable that they pretended to be him during the funeral. Suetonius does not tell us how many such actors there were (he does use the plural), but we know that Caesar celebrated five triumphs in all,³⁰ and if it was possible to distinguish one triumph from another by dress or some other characteristic, then we can surmise that there were five Caesars, representing his five triumphs, marching to the Forum and then occupying curule chairs in a row near the Rostra. We are told that M. Antonius made reference to Caesar's conquests during his *laudatio* in Caesar's honor,³¹ and we can imagine that he punctuated certain points with a gesture to the appropriate "Caesar" seated in front of him. It was

²⁸ OLD s.v. *ludus* 2.

²⁹ He tells us this in the context of the violence with which Caesar's funeral concluded and the makeshift funeral pyre, which was constructed in the Forum; the actors tore off their clothing and consigned it to the flames; Suet. *Iul.* 84.4: *deinde tibicines et scaenici artifices vestem, quam ex triumphorum instrumento ad praesentem usum induerant, detractam sibi atque discissam iniecere flammae.* . . .

³⁰ Vell. Pat. 2.56.2; Suet. *Iul.* 37.1; Dio 43.19.1, 42.1; cf. App. *BC* 2.101.418, who only mentions the quadruple triumph of 46 B.C.

³¹ Dio 44.42.3–4; 44.45.3–4; 44.46.1, 5; cf. Suet. *Iul.* 84.2. Our ancient sources differ in their accounts of Antonius' *laudatio*. For a discussion, see Kennedy 1968.

one these "Caesars" in all probability who arose to name the dead dictator's enemies and to speak the lines from the tragedy of Pacuvius and from Atilius' latinized *Electra*.

In light of the other sources we have discussed, the performance of the mime at Caesar's funeral—in particular, the lines spoken from tragedy—was somewhat unusual, although it is impossible to state whether or not it was unprecedented. This raises the question of how this performance was conceived and organized, which, in turn, touches on the larger issue of who was responsible for Caesar's funeral; this can only be dealt with briefly here. We are told that Caesar left instructions for his funeral in the hands of Atia, mother of Caesar's heir, the future emperor Augustus, although we do not hear of her involvement from other sources.³² It is not clear to what extent the funeral, as our sources describe it, can be attributed to Caesar's own plans, although we can say that the mime performance, as Appian describes it, could not have been part of these plans, since the line from Pacuvius' tragedy is really appropriate only under the circumstances of Caesar's assassination.³³ Therefore, the mime's words during his performance at Caesar's funeral must have been the result of the funeral arrangements after Caesar's death. There are two possibilities for the suggestion of these lines for the mime's performance. Both our ancient sources and modern scholars tend to place the responsibility for planning Caesar's funeral squarely on the shoulders of M. Antonius, who saw to the publication of Caesar's will and delivered the *laudatio* at his funeral.³⁴ In Appian's account in particular, it is M. Antonius who took center stage, delivering the *laudatio*, orchestrating the performance, and displaying Caesar's cloak and body to the increasingly restive crowd,³⁵ and it is possible that he also arranged the particulars of the mime's performance.³⁶ Perhaps his ultimate objective was to ingratiate himself to

³² Nic. Dam. 17.48 (*FrGH* 90, F 130).

³³ Cf. Weinstock 1971, 354, who argues that Caesar's funeral was planned well in advance of his death and "was only modified at the last moment to take account of the murder."

³⁴ Cic. *Phil.* 2.91; *Att.* 14.10.1; App. *BC* 2.144–45; Dio 44.36–49; Flower 1996, 125–26.

³⁵ We should also note the involvement of L. Calpurnius Piso, Caesar's father-in-law, who had his hands on Caesar's will for a time and, according to one source, even conducted Caesar's body into the Forum for his funeral (App. *BC* 2.143.598).

³⁶ Antonius was known to have included actors in his entourage (Cic. *Phil.* 2.58)—an indication perhaps of his connection with theatrical professions that might have facilitated his arrangement of this performance.

the crowd, thus taking Caesar's place as champion of the people and, at the same time, turning the populace against the conspirators.³⁷

The second possibility is that the mime who spoke as Caesar did so extemporaneously, choosing a stock phrase from tragedy that seemed appropriate to the occasion. The one piece of evidence that might support this conclusion is that mimes in their performances on stage in this period often provoked crowds with words that were deemed to be politically topical. Such a performance took place at the *ludi Apollinares* in July of 59 B.C., when the mime Diphilus uttered the words *nostra miseria tu es magnus* ("Because of our misfortune you are great"), while gesturing toward Cn. Pompeius Magnus who was, at that time, striving to control politics in the city along with Caesar and M. Licinius Crassus. The audience boisterously demanded several encores.³⁸ In other words, a typical mime of the late Republic was apparently skilled in the art of crowd fomentation.³⁹ Suetonius also states that the mime's words at Caesar's funeral were chanted (*sunt cantata*), which suggests that the mime uttered the words and the crowd repeated them in response, acting in a sense as a chorus to an actor. Appian also describes the crowd at Caesar's funeral as acting as a chorus, but in his account, Antonius was *choregos*. In either case, the behavior of the crowd and, in fact, the whole tenor of Caesar's funeral, was conducive to the kind of performance that the mime put on.

³⁷ Antonius' political position, as one of the consuls for this year, was precarious in the absence of his political benefactor, the Dictator Caesar. In order to consolidate his power, Antonius first made overtures to M. Lepidus, who as *magister equitum* had troops under his command, and kept up negotiations with the conspirators. It was also necessary to gain the favor of the urban populace. He did this first by having Caesar's will publicly read (probably at a *contio* [public meeting]), which turned public opinion against the conspirators. He then arranged Caesar's funeral in a way that he hoped would provoke the crowd. In other words, Antonius had sound political reasons for wanting the mime to perform in the way that he did. For a discussion of the political circumstances surrounding Caesar's assassination, see Frisch 1946, 42–62; Wistrand 1981.

³⁸ Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3. The description of the mime's gesture appears in Val. Max. 6.2.9, who relates the same episode: "Diphilus tragoedus, cum Apollinaribus ludis inter actum ad eum verum venisset in quo haec sententia continetur, 'miseria nostra magnus es,' directis in Pompeium Magnum manibus pronuntiavit, revocatusque aliquotiens a populo sine ulla cunctatione nimiae illum et intolerabilis potentiae reum gestu perseveranter egit. eadem petulantia usus est in ea quoque parte 'virtutem istam veniet tempus cum graviter gemes.'" Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 53.1, for an example of the topicality of a mime performance from the early Principate.

³⁹ On actors as inciters of clagues in the late Republic and early Empire, see Aldrete 1999, 135–36.

It is worth taking a moment to reflect on the differences in the sources of the funerary mime that we have encountered thus far. The accounts of Polybius and especially Diodorus clearly show a high degree of professionalism in the performance of the mimes, but at the same time, these performances were mute, consisting only of an imitation of physical movements. It is also noteworthy that, in contrast to the descriptions of Polybius and Diodorus, the mimes at the funerals of Caesar and Vespasian both spoke, although the words that they uttered were of an entirely different character. Favor clearly was trying to portray characteristics of Vespasian familiar to his audience, and in his exchange with the procurators, he was "in character" as Vespasian himself. Suetonius also states that the mime customarily imitated the "words and deeds" of the deceased. At Caesar's funeral, however, the mime did not utter words that Caesar was known to have spoken, or ones that were especially reflective of his well-known characteristics—the mime was not "in character" in the same manner that Favor was at Vespasian's funeral. These differences in our sources might be evidence for the development of the function of the funerary mime from silent impersonation to spoken performance. It might also be possible to discern a second development in the spoken performance—from tragic lines to famous words of the deceased.

One possible explanation for the differences in the performance of the mimes at Caesar's and Vespasian's funerals is simply that Caesar's funeral was unusual,⁴⁰ whereas Vespasian's represented a kind of return to normalcy and tradition. We have only circumstantial evidence to suggest that mimes appeared at the funerals of the Julio-Claudian emperors. On his deathbed, Augustus described his life as if it had been a mime performance.⁴¹ However, no source for Augustus' funeral—not even Cassius Dio who describes it in some detail—mentions the presence of a mime. In the preparations for Augustus' funeral, there was an overt attempt on the part of Tiberius, perhaps reflecting Augustus' own wishes (he did, after all, leave instructions for his own funeral),⁴² to ensure that the people refrain from the kind of rioting that had engulfed Caesar's funeral. Augustus' successor published an edict with instructions for the people's behavior.⁴³ The senate followed suit with a decree stating that Augustus' body would be carried on the shoulders of senators from the

⁴⁰ Weinstock 1971, 354.

⁴¹ Suet. *Aug.* 99.1.

⁴² Suet. *Aug.* 101.4; Dio 56.33.1.

⁴³ Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.5.

Forum, where the *laudationes* were delivered, to the Campus Martius, where his body was to be cremated. This decree, in addition to conferring an extraordinary honor on the deceased *princeps*, was also meant to preclude the people from spontaneously taking up Augustus' body as they had Caesar's a half century before. To further prevent such mob action, Tiberius, whether taking his own counsel or following the explicit instructions of his predecessor, might have forbidden the performance of a mime, since it was such a performance that had helped foment the violence at Caesar's funeral.

Our evidence for mimes at the funerals of Augustus' successors is at best oblique and circumstantial. In Tiberius' case, we are told only that he received a public funeral (Suet. *Tib.* 75.3) and was eulogized by his successor (Dio 58.28.5). An inscription of an *imitator Ti. Caesari Augusti* does survive, but it is not clear if his task was to impersonate in mocking fashion the emperor Tiberius, either at his funeral or on other occasions.⁴⁴ Gaius burned a writer (*poeta*) of Atellan farce for a verse that contained a *double entendre* (*ambigui ioci versiculum*) that presumably could have been interpreted as being insulting to the emperor.⁴⁵ It is not clear whether or not this farce was ever performed. In any event, his funeral apparently did not include a mime performance.⁴⁶ Claudius' funeral included a lavish procession (*funeratusque est sollemni principum pompa* [Suet. *Claud.* 45; cf. Dio 61.35.2]), we are told, but again, no mention of a mime. It has recently been suggested, however, that Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* could be the published version of a mime performance at Claudius' funeral, but this must remain speculative.⁴⁷ Finally, there was a famous impersonation by an actor of Atellan farce of Nero's attempted murder of his mother Agrippina, for which the actor responsible was exiled, but again, no evidence exists for any kind of impersonation of Nero at his funeral.⁴⁸ One possible, albeit provisional, conclusion is that the custom of the funerary mime might have temporarily fallen into desuetude under the Julio-Claudian emperors through the influence of

⁴⁴ *ILS* 5225 = *CIL* VI 4886; Purcell 1999. We are told that he allowed himself to be mocked by a dwarf standing near his dining table (Suet. *Tib.* 61.6; on this practice, see Barton 1993, 107–8).

⁴⁵ Suet. *Gaius* 27.4.

⁴⁶ Gaius' body was only half-burned on a hastily made funeral pyre in the Lamian gardens (Suet. *Gaius* 59).

⁴⁷ Purcell 1999, 182–83.

⁴⁸ Nero's body was cremated in the Campus Martius, and then his remains were conveyed to the Pincian hill and deposited in the tomb of the Domitii (Suet. *Nero* 50).

the dynasty's founder and, ultimately, as the consequence of the unusual nature of Caesar's funeral. In such a scenario, the mime at Vespasian's funeral constituted a revival of what by then would have seemed a quaint antiquarian custom.⁴⁹ Suetonius' statement, then, that the mime at Vespasian's funeral was acting "according to custom" was a necessary reminder for his audience that such mimes had once been a common feature at funerals but had more recently disappeared.⁵⁰

The preceding discussion is suggestive of one possible scheme in our understanding of the development of the funerary mime's performance from Republic to Principate, namely, that we should view this development as being evolutionary. In other words, the performance of the funerary mime evolved over time and at some point in this evolution, the mute performance of the funerary mime became a spoken one, while the somber performance became more light-hearted and irreverent. Although attractive in certain ways, this view of the funerary mime's performance is hampered by a lack of direct evidence. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to trace an evolutionary development in any phenomenon when one can bring to bear only four or five data points. For this reason, it seems worthwhile to consider other possible ways of explaining the differences in our sources. One possibility is that the funerary mime had a standard set of options available for his performance. In other words, his performance could be mocking and irreverent, if the deceased or the family so desired it, or it could be more somber and serious. The differences in our sources simply reflect the different tone that the mime's performance took on at the different funerals under discussion. A final possibility is that all mime performances followed the same basic pattern, ranging from the somber to the festive, as Flower (1996, 106) describes the tone of the celebration as a whole, but some sources simply have chosen to emphasize certain elements over others. Since the words of the mime were crucial to Suetonius' description of Vespasian's character, he chose to include them, while Diodorus and Polybius, in the funerals that they describe, perhaps chose not to. Based on the evidence alone, no one of the above schemes can be ruled out. However, because the funeral celebration as a whole tended to be marked by a full range of emotions, perhaps it is best to think of the mime's performance as potentially embracing all of these.

⁴⁹ Vespasian did so perhaps partly to fill the void created by an absence of *imagines*, which he, as a member of an equestrian family, had no right to display; Flower 1996, 104.

⁵⁰ The episode further provided Suetonius the opportunity to demonstrate his antiquarian learning; cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 46.

We can conclude with one last source that describes a funerary mime performance from much later in the imperial period, demonstrating that this custom persisted even into the Christian period. Gregory of Nazianzus, in his second invective against Julian, describes that emperor's funeral in Tarsus (June, A.D. 363), following his failed campaign against the Persians:

μῆμοι γελοίων ἦγον αὐτόν, καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς σκηνῆς αἵσχεσιν ἐπομπεύετο καταυλούμενός τε καὶ κατορχούμενος, καὶ τὴν ἄρνησιν, καὶ τὴν ἡτταν, καὶ τὸ τέλος ὀνειδιζόμενος.

Greg. Naz. *Orat.* 5. [*Contra Julianum* II] 18.33 = Migne, *PG* 35.688A)⁵¹

Actors accompanied him with their mockeries, and he was escorted by the indignities coming from the stage, by flute-playing and dancing, and he was reproached for his apostasy, his defeat [at the hands of the Persians] and his death. (trans. MacCormack 1981, 133, slightly adapted)

Gregory's account of Julian's funeral presents certain difficulties of interpretation,⁵² mainly owing to his hostility to the Apostate. In the paragraphs immediately preceding his description of Julian's funeral, for instance, Gregory relates in some detail the funeral of Julian's predecessor, Christian emperor Constantius II (chaps. 16–17). The contrasting descriptions of the obsequies each man received at his death are meant to show the contrasting manner in which each led his life and further, and most importantly for Gregory and his Christian audience, the attitude of each toward the Christian god. Gregory's comparison of the two funerals is a rhetorical set piece, and there can be little doubt that he underscores the differences therein in order to make his case. Gregory refers to the rites performed at Julian's funeral as evidence for the emperor's lack of popularity and, ultimately, his failure to achieve his objective of restoring paganism to prominence in this period. Gregory's description of Julian's funeral *pompa* is part of a larger context in which Gregory asserts that Julian's departure for his campaign against the Persians was equally shameful, since the people in the cities through which he traveled sent him on his way with shouts and insults (φωναῖς

⁵¹ See Lugaresi 1997 for an Italian translation and commentary of this speech.

⁵² On Gregory's account of Julian's death and funeral in particular, see Lugaresi 1997, 61–71, with his commentary *ad loc.* For a discussion of his funeral as compared with that of Constantius II, see MacCormack 1981, 132–34.

δημοσίαις καὶ βωμολόχοις).⁵³ Gregory presents the performance of the mimes at Julian's funeral as another example of the popular fervor against the apostate emperor who had become an enemy of all Christians.

Gregory's account is clearly biased, but it cannot be dismissed out of hand since it contains elements that are consistent with the custom of the funerary mime, as we know it from other sources. For instance, Gregory describes insults cast at Julian, which shows a similar kind of irreverent humor as was on display at Vespasian's funeral. One unusual aspect of Gregory's account is that he describes more than one mime accompanying Julian's body, unlike Vespasian's funeral where apparently only Favor impersonated the deceased. Are we to imagine actors impersonating different aspects of Julian's character, e.g., Julian as pagan philosopher,⁵⁴ or Julian as military commander? There were multiple actors at Caesar's funeral, but apparently they all impersonated Caesar the *triumphator* as described above. Perhaps Augustus' funeral, in which several images of Augustus were on display, provides a closer analogy: A wax image depicted him in triumphal dress, an image of gold showed him in a *quadriga*, and a second image of gold emerged from the Curia Julia, perhaps depicting him as *princeps senatus*.⁵⁵ These images were intended to show the multiple roles that the *princeps* had played in politics and society. In any event, the fact that the insults cast at Julian were "coming from the stage" shows a connection to the theater, similar to the words uttered by the mime at Caesar's funeral, although in the latter instance, the words were taken specifically from tragedy.

On the other hand, Gregory's claims that these insults targeted Julian's apostasy, defeat, and deification create the impression that his funeral was a form of protest against the pagan emperor, as noted above. To test the accuracy of this assertion, we must try to imagine what gave rise to the tradition of Julian's funeral as Gregory records it. For this it will be necessary to take into account the attitude of Julian himself as well as that of his successor, Jovian. If we assume that the custom of funerary mimes had fallen out of favor as a result of the spread of Christianity,⁵⁶ it is highly improbable that Julian would have re-instituted

⁵³ Greg. Naz. *Orat.* 5 (*contra Julianum* II) 18.32 = Migne, *PG* 35.688A.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that a common subject of comic impersonation in the imperial period was the wise man or philosopher (Barton 1993, 140–41).

⁵⁵ Dio 56.34.1.

⁵⁶ Rush 1941, 193; he argues (citing Tert. *de Spect.* 10) that Christians rejected the practice of funerary mimes because of its association with the theater, which was a place for the demonstration of pagan vices.

this custom, since we know that he enacted legislation that discouraged funerals from becoming public spectacles. Grief, as he explains, was a private affair, and funerals should reflect this.⁵⁷ Whether or not he met with success is unknown, but his own funeral, as Gregory describes it, directly contravened this new legislation. Ammianus' brief account of Julian's funeral, in which he states that the emperor was buried with simple rites (*humili pompa*), in adherence to his own instructions, would also seem to argue against a lavish and theatrical performance.⁵⁸ Moreover, Julian also expresses an aversion to the theater,⁵⁹ which increases the likelihood that he would have objected to the performance of mimes at his own funeral. His brand of paganism was especially austere and puritanical.⁶⁰

There remains the possibility that Julian's funeral went beyond what the emperor would have wanted. The attitude of Jovian, Julian's successor, is at issue here, since we know that he was at least partly responsible for arranging the funeral.⁶¹ Would Jovian have deliberately mocked the beliefs of his pagan predecessor in an effort to ingratiate himself to Christians? This is unlikely, since the legitimacy of his own position depended in part on the prestige and dignity of his predecessor.⁶² Imperial funerals under the Christian emperors tended to underscore the continuity of the line.⁶³ We must acknowledge, however, that Julian's reign represented a disruption in the continuity of the line of succession after Constantine's death, inasmuch as his paganism was a departure from the religion of his immediate predecessors. Nonetheless, Jovian likely had more to gain from honoring than from disparaging the memory of his predecessor. At the same time, it is unlikely that Jovian would have arranged any rite that Christians found especially offensive—for instance, advertising Julian's penchant for animal sacrifice. One possible scenario that could serve to reconcile the various competing

⁵⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 9.17.5.

⁵⁸ Amm. 23.2.5: *corpus namque eius illuc relatum exsequiarum humili pompa in suburbano sepultum est, ut ipse mandar.*

⁵⁹ *Jul. Mis.* 339c–d. Perhaps also significant is that Libanius attributes Julian's anger against Antioch as provoked by the Antiochenes' use of a religious festival as an excuse for public entertainment (*Lib. Or.* 15.19; cf. *Jul. Mis.* 346b–c).

⁶⁰ Cf. Bowersock 1978, 79–93.

⁶¹ Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.26; cf. MacCormack 1981, 330–31, n. 199.

⁶² It is interesting to note by way of comparison that Julian treated the deceased Constantius with great honor at his funeral, even though they had had their differences (*Greg. Naz. Orat.* 5 (*contra Julianum* II) 17.24 = Migne, *PG* 686B; Bowersock 1978, 65).

⁶³ Cf. MacCormack 1981, 118–19.

interests is that two actors dressed as pagan philosophers (or perhaps one as philosopher, the other as *imperator*) impersonated Julian at his funeral. Such an appearance would have been a comparatively simple honor for the pagan emperor (in keeping with his wishes and still consistent with Ammianus' account of his funeral), and it perhaps was intended to demonstrate Julian's erudition and underscore his military successes rather than his religious leanings—the latter being an especially controversial and provocative subject. In this way, Jovian could have honored his predecessor in appropriate fashion without bringing offense to Christians. The actors would have mocked Julian through their impersonations, in a fashion entirely consistent with the irreverent nature of the funerary mime's performance, which Gregory then mistook to be indications of Julian's lack of popularity, thus misunderstanding the meaning and purpose of this custom.

It remains for us to place the performance of the funerary mime in a larger context. One way of understanding the Roman funeral ritual can be connected to the "carnavalesque" model. Anthropologists have determined that the funeral ritual of many cultures can be divided into three discrete stages: "The first stage, the 'rite of separation,' is a ceremony which moves those involved out of their normal conditions of life into the second stage, a liminal status."⁶⁴ The third stage is the "rite of aggregation," a return to normal life. The impersonation of the deceased was part of the second "liminal" stage, since in the mime's performance, the deceased was shown both as a corpse and as a living being, as if captured at that moment of transition between the mortal world and the afterlife. A second aspect of this liminal stage of the funeral ritual was an inversion, a reversal of normal behavior, which includes the common practice of having the relatives of the deceased adopt the role of mourners who wear dirty or disheveled clothing—an inversion of their normal appearance.⁶⁵ The jesting performances at funerals seem to be a part of this inversion. Death caused disruption, in routine and in the social order, and the jesting performances created a "carnavalesque" atmosphere—an atmosphere of ritualized disorder that would conclude with the disposal of the corpse. Thus, those involved in the funeral, the survivors of the deceased, could be seen to be exercising a modicum of control over an aspect of life (namely, death) over which they generally had no such control.

⁶⁴ Morris 1992, 10.

⁶⁵ Another example of this kind of inversion was in evidence at Germanicus' funeral, when the *fascies* were carried upside down (*versi fascies*; Tac. *Ann.* 3.2.2); for a discussion, see Scheid 1984.

The performances of the funerary mime, as it took place in the funerals of Vespasian and Julian, were the conflation of two separate but related phenomena: the act of impersonation, on the one hand, and mockery, insults and jesting, on the other. During the Republic, the impersonation of public figures often took place on stage, especially in the context of *fabulae praetextae*, performances put on during *ludi votivi* (games that had been vowed), which often represented the actions and words of famous men on the occasion of their returns to the city.⁶⁶ C. Asinius Pollio relates one of the most noteworthy of such performances at games put on by Cornelius Balbus, friend of Caesar, in Gades in 43 B.C. This *fabula* was a dramatic reenactment of Balbus' *res gestae*, in particular, of a journey that Balbus made at the beginning of the civil war between Pompeius and Caesar, the performance of which brought tears to his eyes.⁶⁷ Balbus was not unique in this regard, since we also hear of other such *fabulae*, mostly from the middle Republic, including Naevius' *Clastidium* (in honor of M. Claudius Marcellus), Ennius' *Ambracia* (in honor of M. Fulvius Nobilior), and Pacuvius' *Paullus*.⁶⁸ This last named is potentially significant for our purposes since its title character might have been the same conqueror of Perseus who was the subject of a funerary mime's impersonation. It is impossible to know whether the same mime would have been responsible for both performances—the *fabula praetexta* and the funeral—but Diodorus' account of an actor in the entourage of Paullus suggests that such an impersonation was rehearsed long before he died. This actor would have been suitably trained and prepared for the role of Paullus in the *fabula* of the same name. In any event, the impersonation of the deceased at his funeral was another way to honor the achievements of a great man.⁶⁹

One clear difference between the performance of the mime in a *fabula praetexta* and that of the funerary mime was that the latter could be marked by lighthearted, even irreverent and mocking, humor. The funerary mime could take on the role of comic buffoon. It is tempting to

⁶⁶ Here I follow the views of Flower 1995. See also Wiseman 1994 and 1998.

⁶⁷ Cic. *Fam.* 10.32.1–3; cf. Purcell 1999, 184.

⁶⁸ For a full list, see Wiseman 1998, 2–3.

⁶⁹ One noteworthy aspect of the *fabula praetexta* was that history, especially quite recent events, could be performed on stage, thus drawing closely together life and art, or real and ideal, which was a feature of the clown and fool in carnival (Bakhtin 1968, 8). If the funerary mime's performance was somber and serious, as the accounts of Diodorus and Polybius imply, then it, too, would have had a similar effect of turning the life of the deceased, as represented by the mask of the mime as well as the gestures that he made and the words that he spoke, into art or spectacle.

view the performance of the funerary mime as being typically mocking and irreverent, since such jesting and abusive language in a ritual context was a common feature of Roman culture. At banquets (*convivia*), abusive language and jokes were part of a wide array of possible verbal interventions between hosts and guests.⁷⁰ Roman emperors regularly kept *derisores*, whose responsibility it was to mock dinner guests.⁷¹ This mockery could take the form of impersonation or mimicry. We hear, for instance, of "fools" (*moriones*) and "clowns" (*lotopoioi*) at dinner parties, or guests imitating one another.⁷² Ritualized mockery occurred at weddings⁷³ as well as at triumphs; in the latter, it took the form of mocking verses sung or spoken by soldiers at their commander's expense. We should also mention the dancing that took place in the procession at public festivals⁷⁴ or at Roman funerals,⁷⁵ since the abusive language that I have mentioned above often took place in a festive atmosphere. The jesting and insults, especially at triumphs, probably served an apotropaic function, as a way of warding off divine and human envy;⁷⁶ this, in turn, served in a sense to limit the amount of glory an individual aristocrat could achieve and, in the context of the Republic, thus ensured that the political structure of the state, reliant as it was on shared power, would remain stable.⁷⁷ In other words, such abusive and jesting language could have an "equalizing" effect by bringing low one who is being exalted. One of the primary features of the carnival was precisely this notion of equality.⁷⁸

In a similar way, some have argued, in the case of imperial funerals, that the mocking impersonation of the deceased was a demonstration of the emperor's *civilitas*—his image as citizen that hearkened back to the aristocratic ethos of the Republic.⁷⁹ In other words, such a performance

⁷⁰ Roller 2001, 146–54.

⁷¹ Barton 1993, 107–8.

⁷² Purcell 1999, 182, with n. 3 on p. 190.

⁷³ Festus 245M (s.v. *praetextus sermo*).

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Suet. *Iul.* 49.4; 51; Dion. Hal. 7.72.10–11.

⁷⁵ Dion. Hal. 7.72.12.

⁷⁶ Cf. also the words of the slave who was instructed to remind the *triumphator* that he was only mortal ("respite post te! hominem te memento" [Tert. *Apol.* 33.4; cf. Dio 6.21]). On the soldiers' songs at triumphs, see Warren 1970, 65.

⁷⁷ This is Corbeill's 1996, 68, explanation: cf. Richlin 1992, 10; Barton 1993, 144.

⁷⁸ Bakhtin 1968, 10, describes this as "[t]he suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time. . . ."; cf. 246. On the image or pretense of equality at Roman banquets, see D'Arms 1990.

⁷⁹ Purcell 1999, 187–88. On the *civilitas* of the emperor in more general terms, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982. It has also been argued that imperial funerals combined aspects of

at an imperial funeral would have served to offer up evidence of the deceased's mortal status, even as he was about to be deified. The two pieces of evidence from the imperial period seem to confirm this. For instance, the mocking and irreverent tone of Favor's performance at Vespasian's funeral could have underscored that emperor's *civilitas* and humility—characteristics that were important parts of his public image.⁸⁰ Further, Gregory asserts that the deification of Julian was one of the particular aspects of the insults cast at him, although we should bear in mind that notions of the divinity of the emperor changed after the advent of Christianity. In a Christian context, any claims that Julian's supporters might have made for his divinity would have undermined the primacy of the Christian god. In any case, the emperor's *civilitas* was an expression of this notion of equality at such events.

To argue that there was a "notion of equality" at Roman triumphs or aristocratic and imperial funerals might seem outrageous at first glance, since those rituals served to celebrate the glory and achievements of a particular aristocrat and his family—to distinguish them from those who were watching and to elevate and extol, not bring low. It seems to me, however, that the main purpose of the abusive songs and language used at such events can only be explained as being apotropaic, with the ultimate purpose of keeping the honorands from rising too high. In other words, I would not suggest that at triumphs and funerals, as at carnival, there was a complete absence of hierarchical status distinctions, but rather that there was a tension that existed between the great glory that was being celebrated, on the one hand, and the fear that honoring someone in this way could lead to disaster, on the other.

It is also noteworthy that an actor, usually a man of slave or freed status, played the part of a Roman aristocrat or emperor at the funeral. In other words, the act of impersonation brought together the actor and aristocrat, two usually antithetical social categories. For a brief time, the actor, a mere slave, had the power and authority of aristocrat or emperor,⁸¹ thus becoming part of a kind of "Saturnalian" inversion, in which slave and master swap roles. In carnival, a fool is crowned king to preside

imperial cult ritual (*consecratio* and divination) with aspects of aristocratic rituals of the Republic, especially in the involvement of the senate in the process of *consecratio* (Price 1987, 58).

⁸⁰ Suet. *Vesp.* 12; Dio 65.10.3–6; Levick 1999, 179.

⁸¹ Sen. *Ep.* 80.7. Edwards 1994 discusses this passage in the larger context of an analysis of subversion of imperial identity in the theater under the reign of the emperor Nero.

over the banquet and then is abused when his "reign" is over.⁸² The analogy is not exact, but a similar kind of inversion could take place in both instances. Ultimately, this inversion or exchange of roles is related to the mockery of the honorand (abuse of the exalted) and the removal or mitigation of status distinctions. In other words, the Roman funeral contained elements of the carnivalesque in what seems to be rudimentary form compared to the fully developed, regularized and ritualized forms in carnival proper that is the focus of Bakhtin's study.

I hope that by collecting the source material for the funerary mime I have been able to elucidate this custom by showing the kinds of performances that were possible, even if we cannot conclude that one way of understanding these performances should be preferred over another. The funerary mime's performance, at least as it played out at the funerals of Vespasian and Julian, encourages the application of the carnivalesque model, since those performances seem to reflect the Roman penchant for comic impersonations at public festivals and spectacles, including mocking and abusive language and perhaps self-parody. But we should not forget that Polybius tells us how the parade of the dead come back to life made a strong impression on those who were just embarking on public careers, as they observed the kind of immortality enjoyed by their ancestors who had had illustrious political and military careers. The focus was on the family, as much as on the particular individual who had died, and on the glory and prestige one reaped from a life of service to the state. If we juxtapose the performances of the mimes at Caesar's and Vespasian's funerals—the one showing Caesar, a tragic figure in triumphal garb, the other, Vespasian, the witty and parsimonious emperor—we can see clearly how the tone of Roman funerals could range from the somber to the festive. The performance of the funerary mime at Caesar's funeral, with his stock lines from tragedies, transformed Caesar into a tragic figure to be pitied rather than—as at Vespasian's funeral—a comic figure to be mocked. If we are correct that a funerary mime's perform-

⁸² Bakhtin 1968, 5, 81, 197. Abuse and praise were two important elements of carnival that were closely intertwined at the Roman funeral. Abuse is death, praise an affirmation of life (Bakhtin 1968, 197–98)—appropriate sentiments at the celebration of the life and death of an important person. What's more, in the Roman funeral, these elements were focused on the same person, namely, the funerary mime performing as the deceased. The mime in his performance could jokingly abuse the deceased, as Favor did, but we also know from Polybius that those dressed as the ancestors of the deceased took their places near the Rostra and were praised by the speaker of the *laudatio*. Thus, abuse of and praise for the deceased was mediated through the mime and his performance.

ance could be a form of "inversion," honoring a great man through mockery, then the mime's performance at Caesar's funeral was an inversion of an inversion, using tragedy instead of comedy or humor to honor the deceased. The custom of the funerary mime had a remarkable lifespan that persisted through even the most dramatic change in the history of the Roman Empire—from pagan to Christian—and reminds us of the theatrical quality of Roman funerals and of Roman public life in general.⁸³

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