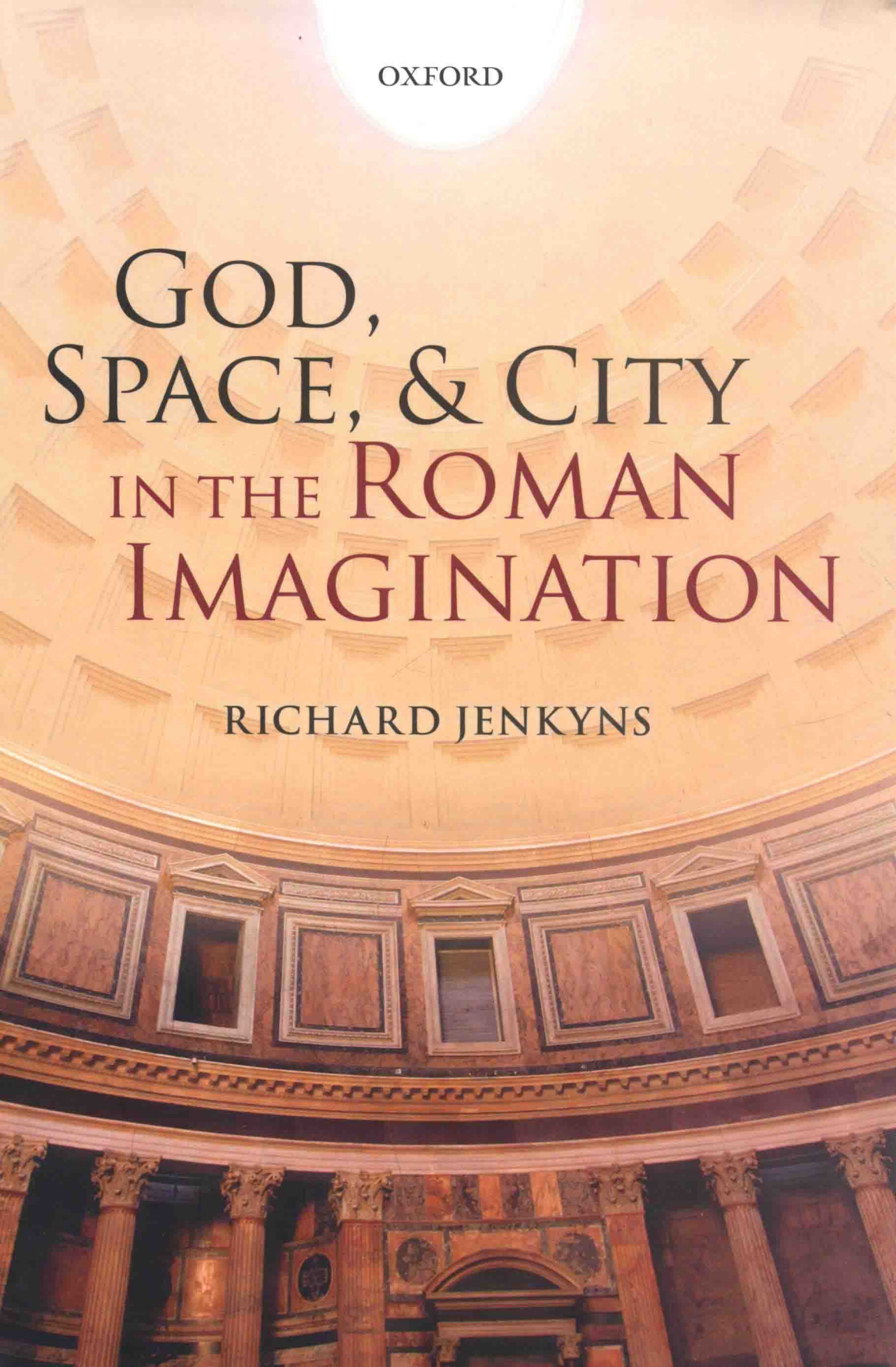


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GOD, SPACE, & CITY IN THE ROMAN IMAGINATION

RICHARD JENKYNs



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OXFORD
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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

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First Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013937760

ISBN 978-0-19-967552-4

Printed in the UK by
Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

GOD, SPACE, AND CITY IN THE ROMAN
IMAGINATION

To Ann

Preface

This book explores part of the ancient Romans' experience; I have conceived it as a single though diverse enquiry, with three principal elements, indicated by my title. I am concerned with the senses and with the life of the mind, with what the Romans saw and felt, and with how they interpreted the objects and ideas that they encountered. Sight is the sense that plays the largest, although not the only, part in this story. I examine the Romans looking at one another and at their city, and I discuss how they thought metaphorically about the way in which the gods and even the physical fabric of the city looked at them. The secular aspect of this takes me to the ways in which the Romans moved up, down, and around their metropolis, their attitudes towards it, for and against, and its place in their emotions and imagination. The sacred aspect leads me to consider how they apprehended the divine realm, in what sense they supposed that the gods were present in their town and in what sense they supposed that they were not. Both aspects take me to the body of the city: to its streets and open places and above all to its buildings.

Space has become a fashionable term in scholarship. Sometimes it is merely a modish alternative to place, or to distance; elsewhere it commonly denotes open space, considered in two of its dimensions—the parks, piazzas, and streets of a town, for example. In this book I usually employ the word 'area' for space in this sense. I have mostly reserved the word space itself for space in which all three dimensions signify—length, breadth, and height; that is, for the interior of buildings. Since the forums and porticos of Rome can be understood as interiors, rooms without roofs, they are also examples of space under this particular definition.

I have taken a period of about two hundred years, between the early first century BC and the early second century AD. I have also allowed in a few witnesses from the later second century. I have strayed beyond these time limits only occasionally, and then to cast light on the period from outside. I have used Greek and Roman historians who wrote about much earlier times, and here my interest has been primarily in the authors themselves and in how they interpreted those older epochs. Potential readers may want to know, and reviewers sometimes ask, what audience a book is meant for. I hope that this one will inform students and scholars, but I like to think that it has something to offer to anyone who is interested in the Roman world or in the kinds of human experience that it investigates. When I quote Greek and Latin authors in their own language, I translate them, sacrificing elegance if need be to preserve as much original nuance as possible. When I discuss the significance of a particular word, the issues at stake should be clear.

All study of the ancient world is a struggle against limitations. The historian of a more recent time can cite hundreds, even thousands, of voices; the historian of antiquity is not so lucky. Although I have used both visual and written evidence, and drawn on a wide range of sources—verse and prose, moralists and mischief makers, rich men and their hangers on, historians, orators, philosophers, technical

writers—for most of the book I have had to rely on only about four dozen authors. In principle, many thousands of ‘authors’ remain from the ancient world—the anonymous composers of those inscriptions which survive in such abundance—but my topic has invited only a very slight use of these. Notoriously, the sources are unrepresentative: women, children, slaves, and the peasantry who made up most of the population under Roman rule figure hardly or not at all, and most of what we can learn about them derives from witnesses who may be tendentious or uncomprehending. Even among the literate minority, those who were wealthy or secure enough to write, in a world where no livelihood could be earned by the pen except through patronage, were not typical, by virtue of having literary ambition. That, however, is always true: in every society, most people are not authors and do not wish to be. The cultural historian faces a further and fascinating difficulty. Some of my witnesses are deeply original minds, ‘riders in the chariot’, men who have seen a vision that others have not seen. Such genius is precious for its own sake, but it may not tell us much about the tone of the time. The issue is not simple: for example, some parts of Virgil’s vision were taken up, to become a permanent addition to the western imagination; other parts were not. For visionary mind I think especially of four among the authors of this period: Virgil and Lucretius (who play a large part in this book) and St Paul and the Fourth Evangelist (who do not). There is also a case to be made for Apuleius, the chief among those writers of the later second century AD to whom I have given room. I have brought together writers from different generations and of diverse type. I have been always conscious of the differences between them; sometimes I have spelled these out explicitly, but often not. Complete explicitness would have been unbearable for the reader.

Perhaps what we need for a study of the imagination is a mixture of the original and the commonplace. Luckily (for this purpose) a good deal of the writing that has survived from antiquity is the product of conventional minds, and we can often observe both originality and ordinariness and the interplay between them. Given the comparative paucity of sources, perhaps all one can say is this: we do the best that we can. I have written in the awareness that in any account of the ancient world there is rather little of which one can be absolutely sure, but again it would have been tedious for the reader if I had reported a scintilla of doubt every single time that I felt it. I add, however, that such scepticism might also be directed to more recent times, including our own. Anyone who has read the life of someone known to them, or an account of events in which they have been involved, will know how immediately factual errors occur, how invariably incident and anecdote are embroidered, quotations improved, and, more subtly, how easily tone, context, and character are distorted or misunderstood.

From one point of view, this is a lesser problem for my theme than for some other kinds of history. In general, I believe that the dead deserve justice as well as the living, and that we should be ready to praise and blame them, where the evidence allows; but because I am studying perception and emotion, for my own purposes it matters less whether (for example) Nero was a monster than that the Romans declared him to have been so. But in another way my subject may seem especially slippery, for it includes subjective states: the senses, thoughts, and emotions. However, the study of subjectivity is not, of itself, a surrender to subjectivity. It is an objective truth that subjective states exist; that people think,

love, grieve, hate, imagine, rejoice, believe, admire, worship. Any account of the past that leaves out the emotions leaves out much of the past as it actually was. To this it might be retorted that all history is necessarily incomplete and that, anyway, however desirable it might be to get inside the head of an ancient Roman, it is in practice impossible. The question of mentality—in the sense of a society's shared outlook—has interested historians a great deal. That in itself can seem elusive enough, and it may well be thought that the minds of individuals who lived two thousand years ago must be entirely inaccessible.

I address this issue in the course of the book. Here I will say only two things. The first is baldly practical: let us examine the evidence and see how far it takes us. The second is this: historians, it seems to me, have not sufficiently recognized the uses of imaginative literature. They cite poets on matters of fact, but seldom as evidence of inward states. So historians of religion mine Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* for information about what happened at a particular ceremony; but there is more to be learnt about religious experience by looking in the 'wrong' places, in Horace's informal verse, for example, or in Lucretius. Even pure literary criticism, which is one of the methods that I have used, can convey historical insights. Conversely, of course, literary study benefits from a historical grounding; some commonly held views about Augustan poetry, for instance, do not survive historical scrutiny. Insofar as there is a gap between aesthetic and historical methods of enquiry, I have tried to bridge it.

On almost every page I have been conscious of trespassing on other people's fields (though 'trespassing' is not quite the word, for there are rights of way). I have sought to write as far as possible from the primary sources, but where buildings are concerned, that claim needs a special qualification. We can still walk into the Pantheon, and a few other Roman monuments remain spatially expressive, but others are ruinous or have disappeared almost entirely. I could not have written about the Forum of Trajan without using the reconstructions of modern archaeologists. Since I am not an archaeologist, it is fortunate that some of those who are have explained ancient Rome to the layperson so clearly. For instruction on buildings and topography I have leant especially on the guides by Claridge and Coarelli and on the *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*. It is an exciting if disconcerting truth that our understanding of several of Rome's most important monuments has changed dramatically in the past few years, and there may be startling discoveries yet to come. I am not an expert on Roman religion either. In the very large literature on this subject, much is good and some things are outstanding; I have drawn on this work gratefully. Some questions that interest me, however, do not seem to have interested the scholars in this field, as far as I have been able to find; I have also come to think that certain generally held opinions about Roman religion need reconsideration. Some of these issues do not fit this book, but I have raised one or two of them.

To make the book I have had to read, look, think, ask, discuss, and write, all of which I have enjoyed. My greatest debt is to the Leverhulme Trust, for awarding me the Major Research Fellowship from 2007–10 that enabled the book to be written; I am grateful too for the light touch of their administration. Essentially, the whole book was written during that time, although I have made a few changes and additions since. A version of Chapter 8 appears also in *Memoria Romana*, ed. Karl Galinsky (2013). I owe thanks for help of various kinds to Darius Arya, Mary

Beard, Amanda Claridge, Anthony Corbeill, Janet DeLaine, Jaś Elsner, Karl Galinsky, Louis Godart, Giorgio Napolitano, Simon Price, Nicholas Purcell, Ann Schofield, and Michael Winterbottom. Thanks too to Jackie Pritchard for copy-editing, to Joanna Luke for the indexes, and at Oxford University Press to Sophie Basilevitch, Taryn Das Neves, Kizzy Taylor-Richelieu, and Hilary O'Shea. As usual, the faults are mine.

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THE PUBLIC EYE

How do we apprehend a city? We can bring to the immediate moment the power of imagination, drawing upon thought and memory, on what we have read and on what we have been told. Body and mind come together to give the fullness of our experience of town and country alike. Our senses are five—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—and there exists also that mysterious sixth sense, our awareness of where each part of our body is placed and how it is situated in relation to its surroundings. Of these senses, taste will not concern us in this book: taste might after a fashion be part of our feeling for a particular city through recollection of the local types of food and drink consumed there, but this issue does not arise significantly in accounts of ancient Rome. Cities may be odorous, and some cities may even have an aroma distinctive to themselves; it will indeed be a question how much Rome smelt, and how far people noticed it. Cities are likely to be noisy, because of traffic and voices always, and because of the music and applause of celebrations sometimes, or cries and shrieks at times of crisis and danger. There may also have been intervals of silence: before gas or electric lighting, cities were probably quieter (and more dangerous) at night than they have since become, although of course there were always drunks and revellers. Silence might also carry an emotional meaning, on occasions of grief or horror, for example. Even that elusive sixth sense will play a part in this enquiry, when we come to consider the experience of being within an enclosed space. But of all the senses, it is sight that takes the largest part in our sources, not least because looking and being looked at were so bound up with their ideas of politics, society, and religion, and it is here that we shall begin.

For his account of the Augustan age the historian Cassius Dio invented a speech by Maecenas in which that shrewd counsellor advises the emperor how to conduct himself: you will live, he says, 'in a sort of theatre of the whole world'.¹ Had Maecenas ever delivered such a speech, he would have spoken it in Latin, but Dio writes in Greek, and so the root meaning of 'theatre' is fully alive in his text: 'a looking on'. This is a third-century writer's idea of how a statesman more than 200 years earlier might have spoken, but it is accurately imagined. Cicero, inspecting the province of Sicily in the office of quaestor, told himself that 'the eyes of all' were casting their gaze upon him, and that he should suppose himself to be going about his business 'as it were in a kind of theatre of the world'.² A few years later,

¹ Dio 52. 34. 3.

² Cic. Verr. 2. 5. 35.

he developed the metaphor further in an epistle of advice to his brother Quintus, off to serve as proconsul of Asia: Quintus must appreciate that he has been granted a theatre, the whole of Asia, for him to show off his virtues—a theatre packed with people, vast in its dimensions, and with so impressive an acoustic that cries and demonstrations in it resonate as far away as Rome.³ That brings sound as well as sight into the metaphor, and reminds us that the idea had power in part because it came so close to a political reality: it was indeed in theatres that the populace made known its views of public men and public affairs.⁴ Recurrent in Cicero's letters are comments that such-and-such a statesman (himself especially) is being applauded in the theatres, while another is getting a cool or a hostile reception.⁵

Quintus was to serve as governor for a period of three years, and this led his brother to a further thought. Cicero's last and most vehemently urged exhortation is that Quintus should 'like good poets and conscientious actors' take especial pains with the concluding part of his work: let him be sure that his third year in post is 'perfectissimus atque ornatissimus', the most highly finished and splendidly adorned of all.⁶ In this last expansion of the metaphor the theatricality of the public man's life becomes more than spectacle and visible grandeur: it is now process, story, unfolding drama. This is an example of a Roman way of thinking and feeling which we may need some effort to appreciate. We tend to think of 'spectacle' as light, entertaining, even frivolous, but to the Romans it is visible glory, an expression of man's greatness.⁷ Similarly, the word 'theatrical' suggests to us artifice, insincerity, and self-advertisement, but in the Roman mind theatricality could be magnificent, solemn, and even tragic. So Livy does not diminish but rather heightens the awfulness of the national plight when he describes the Roman people, under attack from the Gauls, looking down from their fortress upon their city full of the enemy and turning their eyes and minds in terror this way and that, as though they had been placed by fortune to watch the spectacle ('ad spectaculum') of their country in collapse.⁸

To the philosopher even the divine realm could appear as show. In Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods* Balbus, his spokesman for the Stoic faith, declares that among the great gifts of the deities to humankind, nature has made them stand upright, so that they may look up at the sky and receive knowledge of the gods. For men live upon the earth not as mere inhabitants but 'like spectators, as it were, of the heavenly things above, a spectacle which concerns no other kind of living being'.⁹ In this conception the universe itself is spectacle and man the spectating animal. In a much lighter and more fanciful context Apuleius has Venus say that she must smear on a little beauty before joining the theatre of

³ Cic. *Q. fr.* 1. 1. 42 (1 SB).

⁴ Nicolet (1980), 361–73.

⁵ Cic. *Att.* 1. 16. 11, 2. 19. 3, 4. 15. 6 (16, 39, 90 SB); *Fam.* 8. 1. 1, 8. 7. 4 (78, 92 SB). Cf. Dupont (2003), 119–23.

⁶ Cic. *Q. fr.* 1. 1. 46 (1 SB).

⁷ Asked who 'this ubiquitous "we"' might represent, Williams (1993) answered that "'we" operates . . . through invitation . . . It is not a matter of "I" telling "you" what I or others think, but of my asking you to consider to what extent you and I think some things and perhaps need to think others' (171). The same applies here. 'We' in this book usually indicates either the author and reader together or what I take to be the common outlook of people today. 'Common outlook' does not of course imply that everyone thinks the same.

⁸ Liv. 5. 42. 3.

⁹ Cic. *Nat. Deo.* 2. 140.

the gods; and when the gods are assembled, the phrase is 'completo caelesti theatro', 'now that the heavenly theatre was full'.¹⁰ In this there lurks a sense that even deity enjoys the spirit of ceremony and display.¹¹

To the historian Polybius' Greek eye a pervasive theatricality in public life appeared distinctively Roman. It was also important: a matter of policy and social cohesion.¹² In his account of Roman institutions two ideas are recurrent: *enargeia*, brilliance of adornment and display, and *tragōidia*, a word not easily translated. Aristotle's understanding of tragedy seems not far from our own, not surprisingly, since it has done so much to shape it. But the Greek application of the term is not coterminous with our own usage. On one level, anything written for performance at the festival of the Greater Dionysia at Athens, other than the satyr plays, was a tragedy, and these included works with triumphant conclusions, like Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, and pieces like Euripides' *Ion* and *Helen*, which are closer in spirit to *Twelfth Night* than to *Hamlet*, and which we might prefer to class as comedies of manners. Sometimes 'tragedy' seems to denote something not far from 'the serious depiction of men and women in action'. Greatness or grandeur was also a large part of the idea, as Aristotle too insisted, and when prose writers use the term, public ostentation or magnificence is often prominent in their minds. But if we translate 'tragedy' merely as 'pomp' or 'theatre', we miss something important: we lose the sense of enactment, of a kind of storytelling, of inner significance behind the outward show, and even perhaps, at times, a kind of brilliant darkness. So it is worth putting up with the oddity and trying the experiment of preserving 'tragedy' in the translation.

The Romans' polity, Polybius thought, was superior above all in its attitude to the gods: *deisidaimonia* (literally, fear of the divine), which among other peoples is a matter of reproach, holds their state together. To an exceptional degree the visible religious being of the city is 'made tragic' (*ektragōidetai*) and this spirit is introduced widely into both private life and public affairs. It is done, the historian supposes, mostly for the sake of the populace, which, being fickle and susceptible to violent and irrational emotions, must be held in check by invisible terrors 'and suchlike tragedy'.¹³ Another Greek observer uses a like language: Plutarch tells of the ill feeling aroused by the house of Valerius Publicola on the Velia, hanging over the Forum, and adds that it was indeed 'rather tragic' (*tragikōteron*). And in another place he describes Antony in Alexandria: the gymnasium was thronged with people, and he and Cleopatra sat in golden thrones on a silver dais, with his sons below him, spectacularly dressed. Here he allocated kingdoms to the queen and to his sons, but the people thought this 'tragic and arrogant'.¹⁴ In such places 'tragic' may seem to mean little more than 'haughty' or 'overbearing', and indeed the conventional loftiness of tragedy (often symbolized by the buskins or high boots worn by the actors) is surely in Plutarch's mind as he writes about Valerius' house; but he can use the same language of a much more terrible event: the mass

¹⁰ Apul. *Met.* 6. 16, 23.

¹¹ On the words *theama*, 'spectaculum', etc.: Bergmann (1999), 10–13.

¹² Political use of spectacle: Feldherr (1998), 4–19.

¹³ Polyb. 6. 56. 6–11; cf. Bell (1997), 3–5. On the importance of the gaze elsewhere in Polybius: Davidson (1991).

¹⁴ Plut. *Publ.* 10. 2; *Ant.* 54. 3–6.

suicide of the Xanthians ‘appeared as a tragic sight to behold’.¹⁵ The significant fact is that a single word covers a range from the statesman going about his business in the city to the extremity of human disaster; the public life of Rome pulsates with a larger and deeper resonance.

Another historian, Florus, describes a battle at which the slaughter was so savage ‘that tradition relates that the gods themselves were present at the spectacle (interfuisse spectaculo)’.¹⁶ And Seneca was sure (so he said) that the gods ‘looked on (spectasse) with great joy’ at the last hours of Cato. The great man’s first attempt to kill himself failed, ‘for it was not enough for the immortal gods to look upon (spectare) Cato only once’. ‘Why indeed’, Seneca adds, ‘should they not look (spectarent) gladly upon their nursling as he slipped from life in so glorious and memorable a departure?’¹⁷ Here we ourselves may feel that the nobility of the spectacle has been allowed to crush compassion, but that is probably not what the philosopher meant. Like Florus (or Florus’ source) he is likely to have had in his thoughts Homer’s idea of the gods as divine spectators, looking on at Achilles’ pursuit of Hector, for example, as though it were a sporting competition, a race run for the prize of a tripod or a slave.¹⁸ The Homeric conception both dignifies the heroes and belittles them: the gods observe them eagerly, but their emotions are not deeply engaged. Like a sporting partisanship, their feelings are the simulacrum of passion rather than the real thing. They do not need to care, and therefore are they gods. In Seneca’s conception, however, there seems to be no belittlement: the gods care for Cato, he is their ‘nursling’, and they grant him the privilege of performing his last act before the grandest of all audiences.

The most Roman of all Roman enactments, and the one most laden with import, was the triumph. Polybius writes about ‘what they call triumphs’, in which the *enargeia* of military achievements is brought by generals under the view (*hupo tēn opsin*) of the citizenry.¹⁹ For him brilliance and public show are the essence of this institution. But we might go beyond *enargeia* and press a little further Polybius’ other idea, that of the tragic city. Plutarch relates that when Perseus’ children were led in Aemilius Paulus’ triumph, the Romans felt pity for them, many wept, ‘and for all of them the spectacle (*tēn thean*) was a mixture of grief and gratification until the children had passed by’.²⁰ It is possible to take this to mean that the two emotions were entirely distinct—the people felt nothing but sadness for the children and nothing but delight at the rest of the show—but this seems somewhat rigid and artificial. More natural is to understand it as a single experience in which pity and pleasure are intermingled. On this account the experience resembles the puzzling pleasure that we take in being moved by reading or seeing a tragedy. Aristotle said that tragedy stirs pity and terror; we might hazard the notion that the Roman spectators felt pity and a kind of awe.

It has been claimed that the triumph was an edgy and perilous affair; that the star of the show knowingly took a risk, aware that the parts of the ceremony might go wrong (as, for example, when Pompey was unable to get his elephants through

¹⁵ Plut. *Brut.* 31. 4: *tou theamatos tragikou phanentos idein*. The three almost consecutive words for seeing are striking. And the noun *theama* brings the ideas of seeing and theatre together in a way that translation cannot reproduce.

¹⁶ Flor. 1. 11. 4.

¹⁷ Sen. *Prov.* 2. 11–12.

¹⁸ Hom. *Il.* 22. 162–4 (and cf. 159–60).

¹⁹ Polyb. 6. 15. 8.

²⁰ Plut. *Aem. P.* 33. 4.

the gates of the city), or the victor's glory be eclipsed by the nobility of the defeated and the sympathy that their plight might arouse.²¹ That is very improbable. Throughout Roman history, until the emperors reserved this honour for themselves and their family, great men were always passionately eager to be awarded a triumph, and there is really no evidence at all that when they climbed into the victor's chariot, they thought themselves to be taking a gamble. One thinks of Cicero's endless wheedling to try and get himself a triumph on the basis of some petty skirmishing up country in Cilicia. Indeed, we can judge the power of the triumph over the Roman imagination by the way in which the moralists who try to deny its splendour seem to stumble in the attempt. Cato, fending off one of Cicero's importunities, told him that the Senate's judgement that a governor had administered his province in peace, with justice and clemency, was 'much more glorious than a triumph'. Cicero replied, with bitter courtesy, that he would not think of comparing the *triumphator's* chariot and laurel crown to the higher honour of Cato's praise.²² One can almost hear the grinding of the orator's teeth. Cicero disliked Cato, Cato must have known it, and both men were surely aware of the sarcasm behind the outward *politesse*. A few years earlier Cicero had jeered that Piso, as a good Epicurean, would disdain the triumph: 'These are empty things', he might tell himself, 'hardly more than gratifications for children'.²³ This was scurrilous and unscrupulous: the orator attributes such sentiments to his opponent because they are contemptible.²⁴ He does not suggest that Piso was afraid of a triumph because it might fall flat; the idea never occurs to him.

Livy describes a struggle between two consuls for public honour after a success in war. M. Livius secured the triumph, but his colleague, C. Claudius Nero, won the moral victory. The talk of the onlookers who followed Claudius all the way to the Capitol, says Livy, was that the other consul might go aloft on a chariot drawn by many horses, but the true triumph was to ride through the city on a single horse, and Nero, even if he went on foot, would be memorable either for the glory that he had won in the war or for the glory that he had spurned in this triumph.²⁵ This may seem to suggest that the outward apparatus of glory is unimportant—but no, not quite. Nero's spurning turns out to be not the refusal of public enactment but a visible representation of eloquent simplicity. Like the *triumphator* he has moved through the city, through the throng, and up to the Capitol; he has not so much rejected the triumph as created an alternative triumph. Livy calls the crowds 'spectantes', spectators, even though they are actors and participants in this event, it being their presence and enthusiasm that give Nero the victory in this battle for influence.

Juvenal includes triumphs and victory parades as instances of the vanity of human wishes, but in the very same poem he acknowledges that Marius would have been supremely fortunate had he died on the day of his triumph.²⁶ Propertius, asserting the primacy of private fulfilment over public honour, declares that

²¹ This is a recurrent theme in Beard (2007), especially ch. 4.

²² Cic. *Fam.* 15. 5. 2 (111 SB); 15. 6. 1 (112 SB). ²³ Cic. *Pis.* 60.

²⁴ Brilliant (1999), 225, on this passage: 'Cicero . . . had criticized the triumph most severely.' On the contrary.

²⁵ Liv. 28. 9. 15–16.

²⁶ Juv. 10. 133–41, 278–82.

the faithful embrace of his mistress is a victory worth more to him than conquering the Parthians: 'This shall be my spoils, this my kings, this my chariots.'²⁷ And Lucan alleges that he would rather 'lead the triumph' that was Cato's desperate march through the African desert than thrice climb the Capitol in Pompey's chariot.²⁸ But these extravagances only celebrate the triumph in the act of declining it: the highest praise that the poets can find for anything is to say that it exceeds even this greatest felicity. Vespasian is the one man who may genuinely have thought little of the honour: notoriously leery of pomp and show, he is said to have told himself on the day of his triumph that he was being an old silly.²⁹ But even if this was not ostentatious modesty (for after all, who would know what he said to himself if he had not let it be known?) or simple fiction, it is an exception that confirms the rule, for the point of the anecdote is to tell us something distinctive about this particular man. In any case, the triumph, now reserved for the emperor and his kin, had become less significant; and the fact remains, too, that he did go through with it.

When Julius Caesar triumphed over Gaul, his chariot axle broke as he passed through the Velabrum and he was almost thrown out, but the procession continued and he climbed the Capitol by the light of torches, with forty elephants bearing lamps to left and right of him. Suetonius notes the accident as a matter of record, but there is no sign that he regards it as ominous or embarrassing.³⁰ The expectation that public ceremony should be flawless in execution is very modern, and owes a great deal to photography and television, which have given these events colossal audiences and ensured that they will be endlessly replayed. In any case, the triumph was an interaction of the general and his soldiers with the people, and perhaps we should not even call it ceremony. We might think of the open-top bus inching its way through the town with the Cup Final winners aloft rather than, say, the State Opening of Parliament. As for those tears for the defeated, it runs counter to everything that the Romans tell us to suppose that they somehow subverted or endangered the glory of the day. It is also too simple: a fuller understanding of human nature and an appreciation of the theatricality of the Roman imagination may even see them as a further enrichment of the thrill.

So, at least, Seneca seems to have thought. In his *Trojan Women* a messenger describes two atrocities carried out by the victorious Greeks after Troy's defeat: Astyanax, Hector's young son, tossed to his death from a height, and the maiden Polyxena sacrificed to the dead Achilles. In most accounts the killing of Astyanax is a bluntly ruthless business, an act of realpolitik; Seneca turns it into a vast spectacle.³¹ Homer had shown Priam and the elders of the people watching the battle by the Scaean Gates, on a tower—a good viewpoint, it seems, but nothing special.³² Seneca makes it lofty, a summit from which the king directed the fighting, a showpiece of the city ('muri decus'). Every Greek and most Roman schoolboys knew that Troy was surrounded by a plain: this was the field on which the heroes fought and died. Despite this, Seneca has created crag and hill outside the city, close enough for the mass of the Greeks to look down upon the event,

²⁷ Prop. 2. 14. 23–4.

²⁸ Lucan 9. 599–600. He has referred before to Pompey's three triumphs, 8. 553.

²⁹ Suet. *Vesp.* 12.

³⁰ Suet. *Jul.* 37. 2.

³¹ Sen. *Tro.* 1068–87.

³² Hom. *Il.* 3. 146–55.