

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910777695403321
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Titolo	Roman tragedy [[electronic resource] ] : theatre to theatricality // Mario Erasmo
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Austin, : University of Texas Press, 2004
ISBN	0-292-79754-0
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (224 p.)
Disciplina	872/.0109
Soggetti	Latin drama (Tragedy) - History and criticism Theater - History - To 500 Theater - Rome
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. 193-205) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Frontmatter -- CONTENTS -- PREFACE -- Introduction THEATRE TO THEATRICALITY -- One CREATING TRAGEDY -- Two THEATRICALIZING TRAGEDY -- Three DRAMATIZING HISTORY -- Four CREATING METATRAGEDY -- Five METATRAGEDY -- APPENDIX Tragedies listed by Dramatist -- NOTES -- BIBLIOGRAPHY -- INDEX
Sommario/riassunto	Roman tragedies were written for over three hundred years, but only fragments remain of plays that predate the works of Seneca in the mid-first century C.E., making it difficult to define the role of tragedy in ancient Roman culture. Nevertheless, in this pioneering book, Mario Erasmo draws on all the available evidence to trace the evolution of Roman tragedy from the earliest tragedians to the dramatist Seneca and to explore the role played by Roman culture in shaping the perception of theatricality on and off the stage. Performing a philological analysis of texts informed by semiotic theory and audience reception, Erasmo pursues two main questions in this study: how does Roman tragedy become metatragedy, and how did off-stage theatricality come to compete with the theatre? Working chronologically, he looks at how plays began to incorporate a rhetoricized reality on stage, thus pointing to their own theatricality. And he shows how this theatricality, in turn, came to permeate society, so that real events such as the assassination of Julius Caesar took on theatrical overtones, while Pompey's theatre opening and the lavish

spectacles of the emperor Nero deliberately blurred the lines between reality and theatre. Tragedy eventually declined as a force in Roman culture, Erasmo suggests, because off-stage reality became so theatrical that on-stage tragedy could no longer compete.

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