When Horace wrote,

me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum  
Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi  
noscent Geloni, me peritus  
discet Hiber Rhodanique potor.

(The Colchian, and the Dacian who pretends not to be afraid of the Marsian cohort, and the Geloni at the end of the world will know me, the learned Spaniard will study me, and the drinker of the Rhône.)

he meant exactly what he wrote.¹

THE ROMAN EXPERIENCE OF POETRY

parve (nec invideo) sine me, liber, ibis in urbem,  
ei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo! . . .  
vade, liber, verbisque meis loca grata saluta.  
Ovid, Trist. 1.1.1  2, 15

(Little book, without me and I’m not jealous you will go to Rome, alas, something your master’s not allowed to do. . . . Go, book, greet with my words the places I long for.)

I am interested in how the Romans read and enjoyed poetry.² There is now a widely held consensus that for the poets of the Republican and


². This chapter focuses on Latin and poetry, primarily Republican and Augustan poetry, though some of the evidence adduced on this topic by me and others concerns prose or
Augustan periods, “The author’s texts were intended primarily for a relatively small circle of hearers at recitations.”

That is, they assume the audience was small, indeed intimate, and the medium of communication was oral and aural, an immediate “performance” of some sort to a literal “audience” of some sort. The poets, however, say that they wrote for people far away, both in space and in time. The writers therefore assumed that their audience was large, indeed potentially unlimited, and that the medium of communication was written, a text of some sort. These two ideas are at variance.

The doctrine that literature was intended for the ears is enshrined, for example, in the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*:

The literary life of Greece and Rome retained the characteristics of an oral culture…. Nearly all the books discussed in this history were written to be listened to…. In general it may be taken for granted that throughout antiquity books were written to be read aloud, and that even private reading often took on some of the characteristics of a modulated declamation. It might be said without undue exaggeration that a book of poetry or artistic prose was not simply a text in the modern sense but something like a score for public or private performance.

The problem with this type of sweeping (and vastly influential) summation is that it unfortunately oversimplifies a more complex picture. As the evidence considered below and in other papers in this collection make clear, the Romans enjoyed poetry (and literature in general) in four basic ways, each with its own social parameters: in recitations, as entertainments at convivia, through professional lectors, and by private reading. The last has generally in the past received the greatest amount of attention. More recently, however, much important work has been done on the performance of Roman literature.

I am a bit concerned, however, that like Luther’s drunken man on horseback, we may be in danger of slipping off the other side, and oddly enough losing sight of the role of books in the hands of individual readers. The recitations and other means of listening to literature were very important to the social life of the capital, but what emerges from the

5. How important they may have been outside Rome is a question for later.
many and detailed descriptions the Romans have left us of what William Johnson has called “reading events” (2000, 602) is a fairly clear picture showing that each of these other ways of enjoying literature was considered and presented as preparatory, ancillary, or supplementary to the main event, the unmarked case of private reading.

Each of these, it must be emphasized, was indeed a reading event. That is, each involved someone reading from a book. The first three merely use different types of mediation between the text and the audience in the strict sense. We do not find literature being performed from memory without a text in front of a reader. Indeed, one of the things that marks theatrical performance is not only the assumption of roles (pretending to be someone you are not), but precisely this absence of a visible text, and great pains were taken to distinguish the readers of texts from the actors of plays.

The purpose of this chapter is to reexamine this now widely accepted idea. It falls into four parts. The first analyzes in some detail the intellectual underpinnings of the idea that poets wrote primarily for performance. The second looks at some instances of the considerable evidence for solitary, private reading as the unmarked norm for how Romans experienced texts. The third examines the various occasions for public, communal readings of texts to see what they do, and do not, tell us about the Roman reading of literature. Finally, after this background, I turn to the questions that especially interest me: How did the poets themselves want their poetry to be experienced? Did they expect to be listened to or to be read? Did they write with listeners or with readers in mind? What does their poetry say about its own reception?

To state the conclusions at the beginning, I hope to show that the assumption that Rome can be considered an “oral” society in any meaningful sense because of certain types of vocal performance of certain types of literary texts in certain contexts (some rightly understood, some not) is mistaken. The testimony from Latin poets and other writers indicates quite clearly that poets intended their works to be read, by readers, in books. They wrote to tell us, quite explicitly, that they hoped to reach a readership larger than those who happened to be present at any particular performance, a readership extending through space and time, far beyond the confines of the city of Rome or the poet’s own life.

I. THE STANDARD VIEW AND ITS UNDERPINNINGS

Some Recent Examples

First some quotes to illustrate the claims of this widespread view of how Roman literature circulated:

Books were not the normal means by which the writer reached his audience. My argument is that... what makes the work known to the public is performance, not publication.
The Romans even as late as the first century A.D. still felt that performance was the real thing and a written text . . . was not in itself a substitute for performance.

Romans were more accustomed to the sound than the sight of a literary text. In the Augustan age it seems clear that the written text continued to be felt as no more than the basis for a performance.\(^6\)

This view of the primacy of performance leads to an odd conclusion:

The “Aeneid” is in a sense an anachronism, a literary dinosaur even in its own day: its carefully planned plot structure, its detailed craftsmanship, made it incompatible with performance, and there was no other way in which the poem could reach a large audience.\(^7\)

Any theory that makes Vergil out of touch with the basis of successful poetry probably needs to be looked at again.

This common view has not been without its critics: “For the student of the Golden Age of Latin poetry, the reading of books is a particularly important subject. It is commonly misrepresented, through romantic preconceptions about oral culture.”\(^8\) However, such objections have been largely overlooked in favor of the handbook formulation. Recent examples might include such flat statements as the following:

Many of the nineteenth and twentieth century readers of Roman elegy have read these poems [elegies] as if they were ancient versions of Romantic male confessions . . . This approach ignores the conditions of poetic composition, presentation, and response which prevailed in the late republic and early empire and which presuppose a dramatic, communal performance and response. Roman elegy and drama share more than themes, characters, situations, and vocabulary. Although works in these genres were recorded in

6. Quinn 1982, 82, 83 n. 23, 90, 91, and 145. I quote liberally from Quinn 1982 as not only the most detailed treatment but also as the most influential (directly or indirectly). Many studies however simply take the “orality” of Rome as a given. Examples will be cited below. Cavallo, Fedeli, and Giardina 1993, and Cavallo 1999 are largely derivative. Quinn’s seminal essay tends toward imaginative reconstruction (e.g., 85, 149) and is oddly self contradictory. So contrast the last statement with (142): “In the Augustan age [which seems to include Cinna’s Zmyrna (Cat. 95)] the poet thinks of himself as a writer rather than a performer.” Fantham 1996, 38 (cf. 42, 214) shows similar formulations: “So we should imagine the cultured book lover listening to more often than perusing his texts”; however, she rightly emphasizes the role of the book in transmitting literature outside of Rome (10).

7. Quinn 1982, 144. The contradictions of the purported chronology of orality are never resolved. Roman literature was first oral (like Greece); then written (down to Catullus, with some overlap into the Augustans); then oral (with the rise of the recitation), when apparently Romans forgot how to read books, leaving poor Vergil a whale beached on the sands of time; and then written again (84 9). Part of the problem in many discussions is a confusion between what has survived and what was there: thus, early Rome is thought to be all drama (Plautus and Terence) and so labeled “oral.”

8. Hutchinson 1984, 100, citing Kenney, above. So, too, Morgan 2001, 81, who, though he believes that the Romans normally read aloud, writes, “The Roman upper classes who were the core audience for this poetry . . . still had an essentially bookish culture rather than a performative one.”
writing, they were produced for, and experienced primarily in, oral delivery and performance—a format that much more accurately renders all the dimensions of elegy than does silent reading. Every elegist composed with the expectation that his poems would be performed in dramatic readings. Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Sulpicia could not have conceived of the private, internalized forms of reading practiced by nineteenth and twentieth century readers.9

A recent series of articles and a book has presented a picture of Catullus as a performer of “dinner party recitals” in search of “upward mobility” and “self-promotion”.10

The basic assumptions that Catullus’ poetry is consciously composed for readers and that his texts were first disseminated, individually or collectively, in written form underlie almost all contemporary studies of the poet. The author is sympathetic to those who have been misled by the “apparently straightforward evidence” of Cat. 1, 14b, 16, 32, 35, 36, 65, 68, and 116, “among others”:

It is not hard to understand, then, why such beliefs persist, even in the face of new investigative approaches that treat all Greco Roman poetry as fundamentally oral and performative in nature.11

These common assertions rest on three interrelated presuppositions that need to be questioned in turn. The first, and by far the most influential, is the persistent belief that the Romans regularly read aloud, or perhaps could only read aloud.12 The second is the idea that the practice of reading aloud somehow made Rome an “oral,” “oligoliterate,” or “per-

10. Skinner 1993, 62, 63. The belief that poetry had to be performed here mixes with what I find to be a misunderstanding of Catullus’s social world and an imposition of a “patron” to “client” relationship.
11. Skinner 1993, 61; again note the lumping together of Greece and Rome. How 1, 14b, 16, 32, 35, 36, 65, 68, and 116 ought to be understood is not explained, and this approach seems to privilege “new investigative approaches” over Catullus’s own words. Cf. Skinner 2001, in which the proper interpretation of the poems turns on “stance, tone, gesture,” “facial expression” (58), “a sweeping gesture” (63), “body language” (66; see also 71). Both articles are at odds with another set of studies, in which Skinner looks for complex patterning in Catullus’s poetry books and assumes that the interpretation of certain poems depends upon their place in the collections. See Skinner 1981, and 2003: poems 69 92 need a “sequential reading” (2003, 107 9), but Cat. 67 (dialogue with the door) depends on the audience being able to see that the Catullus standing before them is a tall redhead (67.46 48). How then could such a site specific, audience specific piece of performance art have ever been published?
12. For example, Brill’s New Pauly (2: 726 27 Der Neue Pauly 2: 815), “Book: Private and public reading” (“Lesen und Vorlesen”) simply conflates the two: “In antiquity, the most common way to read a book was to read it out aloud, which, particularly in public readings, made it necessary for the reader to adapt his voice in intonation and modulation to the specific character and rhythm of his text. A good reading was almost like the interpretation
formative” culture, although exactly how and exactly what is meant by these terms are never clearly stated. Here we need a working definition of an “oral” culture. The third is a somewhat understandable reaction to generations of scholars who simply assumed that the ancients read exactly like we do. The impact of oral theory on the study of Greek literature has been enormous, and one effect has been a desire to try to find ways to apply the Greek model to Rome. This has led in turn to a desire to exoticize ancient reading, to make the ancients as different from us as they can. The focus tends to be exclusively on the ways that the Romans experienced literature other than our supposed norm of private/silent reading. Three features in particular are singled out: the use of *lectores*, the institution of the *recitatio*, and the practice of readings as communal entertainment. These are examined below. This focus is combined with an exaggerated notion of what these different ways of experiencing literature might actually mean for cultures both ancient and modern.

Eyes and Ears

The first factor is the most fundamental, the most pervasive, the most persistent, and yet the most easily discredited. Knox, more than thirty-five years ago, showed that a reader reading alone, silently to himself, was unremarkable in the ancient world. There is no need to repeat here the overwhelming evidence, and William A. Johnson’s recent “Towards a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity” (2000) traces the history of these persistent weeds and uproots them more thoroughly than ever before. of a musical score.” So, too, Blanck 1992, 71, still relying on the same old proof text of Augustine’s supposed wonder at Ambrose’s silent reading (*Conf.* 6.3); n. 29, below.

13. “Oligoliterate”: a nonce formation by Goody and Watt 1968, 36, “suggesting the restriction of literacy to a relatively small proportion of the total population,” describing Egyptian, Sumerian, and (less accurately) Chinese societies with complex writing systems that required a trained priesthood or elite. This term has been misapplied to Rome by Barton 2001, 71 n. 189, and others. Note that the decision to label Rome as an oral society is curiously based entirely on the role of reading and literature.

14. The desire may not be confined to modern scholars. Joseph Farrell, at the Semple Symposium that was the origin of this volume, pointed out that part of the reason for Cato’s stories of ancient *carmina*, which so influenced Macaulay, may have been a desire to create for themselves a heroic literary antiquity comparable to the Greeks (Cic. *Brut.* 71 75; cf. Varro, *De Vita Populi Romani*, fr. 84 Non. 56 M, prob. the same source). The passage shows a palpable need to compete with Homer and to push Roman literary history back before Livius Andronicus and Ennius. For the history and influence of these supposed “ballads,” see Momigliano 1957, Williams 1982, 55. For more recent work, see Habinek 2005, 39, 43 4.


Although the view that the Romans were constrained to read aloud is untenable, it is, as the quotations above show, the most important foundation for the view that Roman literature had to be performed in order to exist.

The question I am interested in, however, is different. I am less concerned with how the Romans read, that is, whether they realized the words of the books before them silently, by moving their lips, muttering under their breath, reading aloud, or making the welkin ring. What I am concerned with (and by) is the now dominant view that because Romans sometimes read the words in front of them in an audible voice, it somehow follows that recitations and other forms of performance before a group were the usual or indeed the only way in which Romans experienced poetry.

There is still considerable confusion over what are three rather basic points. First, oral composition, oral communication, and oral transmission are three quite different things.  

Second, silent/aloud and private/public are two quite different contrasts, and none necessarily implies any other. One can read silently and privately (what we take to be the unmarked case). One can also read aloud and privately (rehearsing lines, memorizing or savoring a poem). One can read aloud and publicly (an academic lecture, an author’s book tour), or silently and communally (everyone reading the same passage in a classroom or a church, a group of people looking up at a monumental inscription, the news crawl in Times Square, or movie subtitles).

Third, most poetry—except parts of Ezra Pound—is better read aloud. That is, poetry has an aural element (sound patterning). This does not make it oral (properly understood and defined). Further, the claim that all Greek and Roman poetry was intended for the ear is demonstrably false: there are poems intended only for the eye—acrostics, picture poems, and the like—from Nicander onward. Poems in the shape of eggs or wings, in which one has to read inward (first verse, then last, then second, then second to last, etc.), cannot be read aloud.

17. See Finnegan 1977, 16 24; Gentili 1988, 4 5; Rosalind Thomas 1992, 6.
19. This is a common mistake. For example, Skinner 1993, 63, says rightly that some poems “cry out for oral delivery.” But so do Lindsey’s “The Congo,” Noyes’s “The Barrel Organ,” and Fearing’s “Dirge.” Skinner 2001, 65, insists that in Cat. 10, “the dialogic quality of the narrative . . . indicates that the poem must have been composed for performance.” But Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man,” is more dialogic still.
20. See Habinek, ch. 6, in this volume. For Roman examples: “Q. ENNIUS FECIT” as an acrostic in a poem by Ennius (Cic. Div. 2.111); the first and last eight lines (with 1,056 in between) of Ilias Latina (Neronian or Julian) spelling out ITALICUS SCRIPST; a poem in the shape of wings by Laevius (22 FPL Blänsdorf, imitating Simias, AP 15.24). See Lombardo 1989, Courtney 1990, Ernst 1991; OCD s.v. “acrostic” (the promised article on “pattern poetry” will be found instead under “technopaignia”).
What Do You Mean “Oral”?

The second presupposition is that Rome was an oral culture, at least in some sense. We first need to define the term. The differences between Rome and a predominantly oral culture such as archaic Greece can be shown in one important fact, which I have not seen mentioned in the various treatments of the oral performance of poetry at Rome. In an oral culture, X sings a poem to Y, who in turn sings it to Z. It is this last stage of oral transmission that marks an oral culture proper. So burning Sappho loved and sang, and later Solon heard his nephew singing one of her songs and asked the young man to sing it again so that he might learn it (Ael. ap. Stob. Flor. 3.29.58).

We can get a better idea of the differences between written and oral by examining with some suspicion the recurring and misleading metaphor of reading as the interpretation of a musical “score.”21 Those who maintain that for the Romans “performance was the real thing and a written text . . . was not in itself a substitute for performance” must necessarily maintain that for the Romans to read to themselves was a failed reading, a poor second best, that they read to themselves only when they could not get a better performer to read to them, as is the case with drama. If we are to continue with music as a metaphor, the only proper and obvious analogy is folk song.22 Here it is important to realize that we are speaking about oral circulation. Did the audience (in the strict sense) for Roman poetry go to hear a performance, learn the song/poem by ear, and then go home with it in their memories, to perform it later for others?

It is clear that they did not. There is no example known to me of any person who performed a Latin poem or a speech before a second person, who in turn transmitted it orally it to a third.23 Instead authors or other performers read from written texts to audiences, who, if they wished to experience that text again, obtained a written copy.24 Because this point

21. Originating with Hendrickson 1929, 184 (Johnson, 2000, 597 n. 10), who, however, deploys the metaphor to indicate the wonder of the earliest listeners to the earliest readers; cf. Saenger 1982, 371. Quinn 1982, 91, defends the notion of a “score” against the text of a drama; repeated by Cavallo 1999, 73.

22. For a brilliant analysis of the intertwining of oral, manuscript, and print in even the oldest layer of English ballads, see Fox 2000, 1 10.

23. The two nearest cases I know are instructive. (a) One of the Elder Seneca’s anecdotes of remarkable feats of memory that tells of a man (Greek or Roman is not specified) who heard a poem and recited it back to its author, who could not himself repeat it (Cont. 1. pref.19). (b) Horace Sat. 2.4, his witty parody of the Phaedrus, in which Catius is in a hurry to write down the rules of the gourmet lecture he’s just heard yet despite Catius’s phenomenal memory (6 7) it’s just not the same as being there (90 91). See below for Mart. 7.51, in which Pompeius who has memorized Martial’s poetry still reads it to another fan out of books.

24. See the examples below. For the written text, which distinguishes a recitation from an oration, see Pliny 2.19.2; and Dupont 1997, 45; Markus 2000, 144, 152. The process is laid out by Starr 1987, esp. 213 16; Valette Cagnac 1997, 111 69, esp. 140 7.
has been misunderstood so often, it may be necessary to repeat that performance is not the same as an oral culture. Though literature at Rome could be (but need not be) *presented* orally on occasion, literature at Rome did not *circulate* orally. Rather, Roman authors explicitly directed their books to a group of men and women who could read them.

**Reading Aloud Now**

Don’t you read or get read to?

—Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 21

The third factor is an odd forgetfulness of the fact that the features that are held to have made Rome an “oral” or “performative” culture are not the exotic practices of a distant land and time but things we are all familiar with, both in how people read books in the recent past, and how we read them today. The evidence that is used to conclude that Rome was an oral society, that books were merely scores for performance and so on, is richly available for most of history without such overstatements being drawn. The Romans, in short, show the same mixture of private reading and shared reading that has been a feature of literate Europe from the Hellenistic Age through the Middles Ages to the Renaissance and to the present day. The practice of public reading does not indicate a lack of private reading, nor does private reading cancel out communal enjoyment.

Let me offer three scenes from English literature to query the sorts of arguments being made for Rome.

Goldsmith one day brought to *the club* a printed Ode, which he, with others, had been hearing read by its author in a publick room at the rate of five shillings each for admission. One of the company having read it aloud,


26. Two famous statements: Lucil. 592 5 Marx (*Cic. De orat*. 2.25): “Persium non curo legere, Laelium Decumum volo” (“I’m not interested in Persius reading me, I want Laelius to read me”); Hor. *Sat*. 1.10.72 90: “contentus paucis lectoribus” (“I’m content with a few readers”).

27. For this mixture, see the sensible remarks of Chartier 1989, 103 20, and 1994, esp. 1 17 (both primarily on early modern France). See also Darnton 1990, esp. 165 7) and the revised version 2001, esp. 164 5 for his critique of Engelsing’s proclamation of a *Leserevolution* c. 1750 (Engelsing 1969 and 1974). For English literary history, see the stimulating study by Fox 2000, esp. the opening essay, 1 50. Coleman 1996, in an effort to redress the balance for Chaucer, effectively ignores all private reading, and rules out at the beginning many possible counterexamples from her survey. Saenger 1982, frequently adduced by scholars in Early Modern Studies, believes that Latin was always written without word divisions, as do Fantham 1996, 37, and Gamel 1998, 81.
Dr. Johnson said, “Bolder words and more timorous meaning, I think never were brought together.”


“Mr. Martin, I suppose, is not a man of information beyond the line of his own business? He does not read?”

“Oh yes! that is, no I do not know but I believe he has read a good deal but not what you would think any thing of. He reads the Agricultural Reports, and some other books that lay in one of the window seats but he reads all them to himself. But sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the *Elegant Extracts*, very entertaining. And I know he has read the *Vicar of Wakefield*.”

Jane Austen, *Emma* (1815), ch. 4

“For I aint, you must know,” said Betty, “much of a hand at reading writing hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You mightn’t think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices.”

Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), bk. I, ch. 16

In Boswell, we have a recitatio; in Austen, reading aloud as a form of entertainment; in Dickens, a lector.

The problem is that, speaking broadly, scholars have tended to ignore the fact that reading aloud to others both publicly and privately has long been (and still is) a common activity. 28 It is incorrect to claim that the bad “printed ode” was “something like a score for public or private performance,” though it was indeed performed both publicly and privately; that the *Elegant Extracts* were “felt as no more than the basis for a performance,” though Mr. Martin gave a very entertaining performance; that reading a Victorian newspaper was “almost like the interpretation of a musical score,” no matter how many voices he do the police in. The mistake comes in assuming that one of the ways in which a text could be used (recitation) was the only or primary way it could be used, and furthermore assuming that recitation represented the author’s intention or expectation of the only way in which it could be used.

II. READING WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

Alia vero audientis, alia legentis magis adiuvant.

(You get more out of some things by listening, others by reading.)

—Quintilian 10.1.16

28. For a satiric scene from early twentieth century domestic life, see Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (1919), ch. 7. We today continue to enjoy books in a number of different ways, many of which correspond closely to Roman practices. It is curious that this monolithic view of what “we” mean by “reading” remains so popular in an age of public readings, book groups, radio broadcasts, audio CDs, and iPods.
Thanks to Valette-Cagnac, Dupont, Johnson, and others, a more balanced picture has emerged, and we can begin from two obvious facts. First, the Romans read to themselves; second, the Romans read to each other. Because the first fact oddly enough seems to be in danger of being forgotten or ignored, it needs to be pointed out that Romans did in fact read books while alone. We discover people reading all the time, with no need for, or mention of, company. I have chosen a few examples, out of potentially hundreds, in which the circumstances are sufficiently detailed to let us know that the reader had the book in his own hands and was reading by himself. 29 So, Cicero goes down to young Lucullus’s villa to consult some books of Aristotle. There he bumps into Cato, who is sitting in the library, surrounded by piles of Stoic philosophers, reading all by himself. 30 In a later anecdote, Cato reads the _Phaedo_ all alone just before he commits suicide. He does not read aloud to friends; he does not get a _lector_ to read to him. He reads and rereads the book by himself inside his tent and then stabs himself. 31 Several jokes by Martial crucially depend on the social fact that people regularly read alone. In 3.68.11–12 after a warning to the _matrona_ that the poems are now going to get a little blue:

_Si bene te noui, longum iam lassa libellum ponebas, totum nunc studiosa leges._

29. Most examples of _legere_ (and its derivatives) do not, of course, specify that the reader is alone, because reading alone is the unmarked case. Two examples. Sen. _Ep._ 46: Seneca has received a new book from Lucilius; he has read it himself and is going to reread it; the style and the effect are _as if_ he had heard it: “De libro plura scribam cum illum retractavero; nunc parum mihi sedet iudicium, tamquam audierim illa, non legerim.” Note the contrast between _legerim_ and _audierim_. So, too, in the famous misunderstood anecdote about Ambrose _Conf._ 6.3: “cum quibus quando non erat, quod perexiguum temporis erat, aut corpus reficiet necessariis sustentaculis aut lectione animum” (“When he was not with the crowds, which was only for the briefest of moments, he refreshed his body with the minimum of necessary food or his mind with reading”); that is, reading is _assumed_ to be solitary. The marked case of reading aloud has its own proper term: _recitare_. See Valette Cagnac 1997, 267, on etymology and semantics: “D’ou l’emploi privilegé du verbe _legere_ en contexte prive, pour designer une lecture individuelle, solitaire.”

30. Cic. _Fin._ 3.7 10 (the setting for the third dialogue): “quo cum venissem, M. Catonem, quem ibi esse nescieram, vidi in bibliotheca sedentem multis circumfusum Stoicorum libris. erat enim, ut scis, in eo aviditas legendi, nec satiari poterat, quippe qui ne reprehensionem quidem vulgi inanem reformidans in ipsa curia soleret legere saepe, dum senatus cogeretur. . . . quo magis tum in summo oti oto maxime copia quasi helluari libris, si hoc verbo in tam clara re utendum est, videbatur.” (“When I got there, I saw M. Cato, who I didn’t know was there, sitting in the library surrounded by many books of the Stoics. His zeal for reading was so great, you know, and unsatisfiable, that disdainng the empty censure of the mob, he was accustomed to read even in the Curia while the senate was assembling. . . . All the more then, when at complete leisure and with such a supply, he seemed to be having a veritable orgy of books, if one can use such an expression of so important a matter.”) Cf. Plut. _Cat. Min._ 19. The whole scene shows how common were reading, reading by oneself, and reading silently to oneself (Cicero does not mention hearing Cato vocalizing as he snuck up on him).

(If I know you well, you were tired of this long book and about to put down it, but now you’ll read the whole thing eagerly.)

The matrona is explicitly said to hold the book in her own hands; there is no lector. He follows it up with 3.86.1–2:

Ne legeres partem lasciui, casta, libelli,
praedixi et monui: tu tamen, ecce, legis.

(I warned you not to read this part of my naughty book, O chaste lady, and yet here you are, reading it.)

He makes the same joke (and the same point) in 11.16.9–10:

Erubuit posuitque meum Lucretia librum,
sed coram Bruto. Brute, recede: leget.

(Lucretia blushed and put down my book, but that was when Brutus was present. Go away, Brutus: she will read.)

No audience, no lector, only the matron alone with her dirty book in her own hands. 32

A number of descriptions of the daily round mention the same thing: a quiet morning spent reading by oneself. Cicero describes how after the morning crowd recedes, he reads or writes, provided he is not holding office hours; then exercise. 33 Horace describes his modest life: sleep till ten, then in silence, all by himself (tacitum), he reads or writes; then exercise. 34 Seneca’s ideal day is the same: bed, reading; then exercise. 35 On a less than ideal day, when he is sick, he progresses from reading to writing. He does both of these activities alone; only later do friends arrive. 36 Pliny imagines his own perfect day: reading, and writing, with

32. Cf. Ov. Trist. 2.243 80 on women and reading. For other examples in which the individual reader is explicitly said to hold the book in his/her hands, see Cat. 44.19, Hor. Ep. 1.19.34, Ars 446 9, Prop. 3.3.19 20, Pliny 9.22.2, cited below.
33. Cic. Fam. 9.20 (193 SB): “ubi salutatio defluxit, litteris me involvo; aut scribo aut lego. veniunt etiam qui me audiant quasi doctum hominem quia paullo sum quam ipsi doctor. inde corpori omne tempus datur.” Reading is for time when one is alone.
34. Sat. 1.6.122 23: “ad quartam iaceo; post hanc vagor, aut ego lecto / aut scripto quod me tacitum iuvet, ungor olivo.” That is, he reads or writes in bed or on his couch, cf. Ep. 2.1.112 (rightly Kiessling and Heinz 1958, 127; see n. 44, below). Morris 1968, 110 11: “I.e. he finds pleasure in his reading or writing, without needing any companion to express it to.” Serafini 1966, 94: “fra me e me, in silenzio.” Fedeli is driven to desperation when his presuppositions encounter the plain sense of the text (1994, II.2, 461): “tacitum si riferisce qui solo alla scrittura, considerato che la lettura avveniva ad alta voce.”
35. Sen. Ep. 83.3: “totus inter stratum lectionemque divisus est; minimum exercitationi corporis datum.”
no one to bother him; then exercise. He loves his villa precisely because he can read by himself. 37

Not only did Romans read silently to themselves, they read silently to themselves even when other people were present. 38 So a famous anecdote:

During a leisure moment, Caesar was reading one of the books about Alexander and became lost in thought for a long time, and then he began to cry. His friends were amazed and asked the reason: “Doesn’t it seem to you worthy of grief that when Alexander was my age he had already ruled for so long, but I’ve never done anything remarkable?” 39

Cato the Younger, as the other senators shuffled into the Curia, used to while away the time with a book, reading to himself. 40 Cicero and Trebatius read side by side in silence each with his own books at Tusculum. 41 Pliny read a volume of Livy to himself, sitting quietly beside his mother, while Vesuvius erupted on the horizon (6.20.5). Severus used to enjoy Martial’s poetry so much that he took the books to parties and the theater. 42

37. 1.9.4: “in Laurentino meo aut lego aliquid aut scribo aut etiam corpori vaco”; 1.22.11: “sollicitudine . . . qua liberatus Laurentinum meum, hoc est libellos et pugillares, studiosumque otium repetam”; 2.17.8: “Parieti eius in bibliothecae speciem armarium insertum est, quod non legendos libros sed lectitandos capit”; 8.9: “Olim non librum in manus, non stilum sumpsi, olim nescio quid sit otium quid quies.” Cf. 1.3, 2.2, 2.8, 5.6, 6.20.2, 8.19 (using studium, studia, or the like). So, too, for Bassus in retirement (4.23.1): “multum disputare, multum audire, multum lectitare”; audire here means “listen to philosophical conversation” rather than “listen to books being read”; see the discussion of the opposition by Valette Cagnac 1997, 62 71.

38. As Gavrilov 1997, 63, points out, this is the point of the misused anecdote about Augustine finding Ambrose reading silently: “What puzzled Augustine is not Ambrose’s method of reading [silently] in and of itself, but his resorting to that method in the presence of his parishioners” (his emphasis).

39. Plut. Caesar 11.5 6: σαλάθες οὖσας ἀναγνώσκοντα τι τῶν περὶ Ἀλέξανδρον γεγραμμένων αφόρα γενέθαι πρὸς ταύτῳ πολὺν χρόνον, εἶτα καὶ δικρύσθη τῶν δὲ φώνων βαθμασάντων τὴν αἰτίαν εἴπειν “οὐ δοκεῖ ἦμιν ἄξιον εἶναι λύπης, εἰ τιμλοῦστος μὲν ὅπις Ἀλέξανδρος ἤδη τοσοῦτον ἐξέδωκον, ἐμι δὲ λαμπρῶν αὐθέν ὁποῖο χρόνον πέτρωται;” The situation is clear: Caesar read silently to himself, while surrounded by friends, who noticed the tears but did not hear the text.

40. Cic. Fin. 3.7 (quoted above, n. 30); Plut. Cat. Min. 19.1; also Val. Max. 8.72, who specifies Greek books.

41. Cic. Top. 1.1.1: “Cum enim mecum in Tusculano esses et in bibliotheca separatim uterque nostrum ad suum studium libellos quos vellet evolverat, incidisti in Aristotelis Topica quaecdam, quae sunt ab illo pluribus libris explicata. Qua inscriptione commotus continuo a me librorum eorum sententiam requisiisti.” (“When you were with me in the Tusculum villa, and each of us separately in the library for our own study were unrolling the books we wanted, you happened upon something called Topics by Aristotle, which had been explicated by him in several books. Intrigued by the title, you immediately asked me for the subject of the books”). The picture is clear: Cicero and Trebatius in the same room, reading their own books silently; then Trebatius breaks the silence to ask Cicero a question.

42. Mart. 2.6: “haec sunt, singula quae sine ferebas/per conuia cuncta, per theatra”; the implication is that he read them there in preference to the regular entertainments or conversation on offer; cf. 7.76 for conuia and theatra. Nauta 2002, 93, interprets this
III. READING WITH AN AUDIENCE

Sunt qui audiant, sunt qui legant.
—Pliny 4.16.3

Lectores

One practice in particular has been used to exoticize the Romans and to claim for them the status of an oral culture, and that is the use of professional readers (lectores, anagnostae). So for example, Pliny describes another ideal day, that of Spurinna (3.1):

In the morning he keeps to his study couch, at the second hour he calls for his shoes, walks three miles and exercises his mind no less than his body. If there are friends present, serious conversations are expounded; if not, a book is read, sometimes even when friends are present, but only if they do not mind. Then he sits down, and the book again or conversation in preference to the book… Having bathed, he lies down and postpones dinner for a while. Meanwhile he listens to someone reading something lighter and easier. During all this time, his friends are free to do the same or something else if they prefer.

That is, Spurinna, like Horace, begins the day in solitary reading or writing. Later, in company, he enjoys listening to books, both serious and light. But as Sloppy and others show, having someone read to you while you do something else was (and is) a common practice, and hardly implies that the society in question was oral or performative in any meaningful sense.

That passage differently, as referring to friends who “re use” the epigrams “at various types of social gatherings”: “Of course the symposiast will not read the book in silence, but will recite it out loud to his drinking companions.” The interpretation seems to depend on the idea that silent reading was impossible. Further, although this idea might work for the dinner party, it does not for the theater, unless Severus is supposed to be an actor reciting on stage.

43. The evidence is assembled in RE XII.1 (1924), 1115 6, and Starr 1991, who rightly remarks (337): “Roman society was not, of course, an ‘oral’ society in the sense in which anthropologists use the term. Roman literature is profoundly dependent on books and access to them by both writers and readers.”

44. Not with the Loeb, “stays in bed.” Sherwin White 1985, 206: “Couch or sofa; he is not still under the blankets”; OLD s.v. lectulus C. “used for study”; see RE 23 (1924) 1101 3, and n. 47 below.

45. “Mane lectulo continetur, hora secunda calceos poscit, ambulat milia passuum tria nec minus animum quam corpus exercet. Si adsunt amici, honestissimi sermones explicantur; si non, liber legitur, interdum etiam praesentibus amici, si tamen illi non gravantur. Deinde considit, et liber rursus aut sermo libro potior… Lotus accubat et paulisper cibum differt; interim audit legentem remissius aliquid et dulcius. Per hoc omne tempus liberum est amici vel eadem facere vel alia si malint.” See Johnson 2000, 621 2, for Spurinna’s day. Liber legitur seems to be a set phrase; cf. Pliny 9.36.4 and n. 65 below.

46. Other modern literary examples of the house lector could include Marya Dmitrievna Akhrosimova’s day in War and Peace (Bk. 8, Ch. 6), or Mademoiselle Bourienne, whose ambition extends beyond reading aloud to Nicholas Bolkonski.
Spurinna’s use of a *lector* does not, of course, mean that he was unaccustomed to the sight of a book. Indeed, Pliny tells us that Spurinna spends the first hour of the day reading by himself. Pliny’s account allows us to see exactly what the *lector* was for. The *lector* fills in those periods when it would be inconvenient or impossible for the master to read by himself. Spurinna’s *lector* reads to him while the master is trotting round the walking path, and during the rest break after the walk and the bath. This desire to improve the shining hour with literature marks Spurinna as a man of exceptional culture.

The role of the *lector* has sometimes been misunderstood. The use of a *lector* was not in place of reading by oneself; it was in addition to reading by oneself. Pliny makes this point clear. He has an eye infection and is confined to bed in a dark room: “Here I’m abstaining not only from the pen but even from reading—with difficulty, but I’m doing it—and I’m studying with ears alone.” In other words, Pliny considers solitary reading the norm; a *lector* is handy when he cannot read by himself. The *lector* was part of the entertainment staff of great households, but the presence of a *lector* no more indicates that upper-class Romans were incapable/unwilling/unaccustomed (the exact claim is often not clear) to read for themselves than the presence of secretaries shows that they were incapable/unwilling/unaccustomed to write for themselves.

**Places for Hearing Poetry**

Romans could both read poetry for themselves and have it read to them. The question now is which was more important. Did the people who

---

47. Rightly Westcott 1898, 174, “studies on his reading couch”; Sherwin White 1985, 206: “So too Pliny who keeps to his room studying much longer than Spurinna, ix.36.2.” Cf. Hor. Sat. 1.6.122 23, quoted above (n. 34). Later in the day, Spurinna retires to compose Greek and Latin poetry, which as Catullus and Ovid show, cannot be divorced from reading (see n. 105). The two are frequently conjoined under *studia* (see n. 37).

48. Pliny the Elder used the *lector* precisely to fill in all those moments when he could not read himself (cf. Pliny Ep. 3.5.8, 14); see Horsfall 1995, 52. What is “evidently unusual” (rightly Johnson 2000, 605) is his mania about wasting time.

49. 7.21.1: “hic non stilo modo verum etiam lectionibus difficulter sed abstineo, solisque auribus studeo.” Rightly Nauta 2002, 137.

50. For the use of secretaries and readers, see Horsfall 1995. For *lectores* at dinner parties, see below. Further, in the effort to co-opt the presence of *lectores* to make Rome into an oral culture, there is a tendency on the part of some scholars to exaggerate the difficulties of reading a manuscript (e.g., Quinn 1982, 82, 91; Starr 1991, 343). In fact, everyone did quite well with manuscripts for thousands of years, and even today all of us routinely read letters scrawled in a wide variety of hands, without the need of “professional” readers. Nor does anyone comment on the lack of professional readers among the Greeks, who did without word divisions, or the Semites, who did without vowels. In short, unless one is prepared to claim that Cicero, for example, wasn’t “much of a hand at reading writing hand,” and found the task of making out a book written in his native language simply too difficult to undertake without the assistance of trained slaves, it is best to drop this particular line of argument.
knew Horace and other poets come to know them *primarily* through listening or through reading? That is, did Roman poetry circulate orally? As we have seen, it did not.

At first glance the question about the relative importance of reading or being read to seems difficult to answer, a matter of unrecoverable percentages of reading to oneself versus attending recitations perhaps. However, a clear answer emerges once we examine more closely and critically the actual role of reading aloud in the production and circulation of Latin poetry. We need to be more precise about the circumstances in which Romans heard verse read to them.

Most previous discussions distinguished two areas: staged public performance by professionals, people other than the author; and formal readings by the poet, that is, *recitationes* proper.\(^{51}\) Besides these more formal venues, Johnson has recently and rightly turned our attention to a third area, that of private, intimate entertainments, dinner parties and the like, as a site for the performance of poetry.\(^{52}\)

We have only a few uncertain instances of the first type of performance. The anecdotes about Vergil are clearly treated as exceptions due to his enormous success.\(^{53}\) The vagueness of the tales does not allow us to know whether these performances were staged readings of Vergil’s text or mimes based on Vergilian matters.\(^{54}\) Ovid said that his own poems were

---


52. Johnson 2000. Quinn (1982, 146 7, 154) adds two other venues, by creating a type of formal poetic competition in the Temple of the Muses on the basis of Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.37 39, and makes a distinction between large and small recitations based on misreading of Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.41 42 (150, 154; Horace is merely saying he does not write plays for the theatre; see Quinn’s own remarks: 1982, 146, 147, 155; and nn. 144, 145 below).

53. The only solid evidence is Tac. *Dial.* 13: “populus, qui auditis in theatro Virgilii versibus surrexit universus et forte praesentem spectantemque Virgilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum”; this seems to refer to Vergil’s verses inserted into some theatrical piece rather than a reading as such. *Vit. Don.* 26: “Bucolica eo successu edidit, ut in scena quoque per cantores crebro pronuntiarentur,” the *quoque* making it clear that public recitation on stage was unusual. The only other piece of evidence is so dubious that even Servius (*E*. 6.11) guarded it about with many a “dicitur”: “It is said that the line was recited by Vergil to great acclaim, so much so that later when Cytheris (who was ultimately called Lycoris) sang (cantasset) it in the theater, Cicero was amazed and asked whose it was. Later when he finally saw him, he is said to have said (to his own praise and that of Vergil), ‘O second hope of great Rome,’ which Vergil later transferred to Ascanius (Aen. 12.168). So the commentators say.” Any modern scholar capable of believing this farrago (Cicero in the theater with Cytheris, Cicero having to ask who the author of the *Eclogues* might be, Cicero bursting out with a particularly useful half line) will believe anything. See Quinn’s discussion 1982, 152 4.

54. Bell 1999 chooses the *Aeneid* as proof that “the public performance of poetry enabled its dissemination to audiences that did not necessarily possess a wealth of intertextual knowledge acquired from libraries and the mellifluous lips of slaves” (264). For him, “although there is no certainty that this incident ever happened, the anecdote offers a good reminder that some excerpts of Vergilian verse could be made accessible to an audience simply through performance” (266 7). Apparently *ben trovato* is preferable to *vero*. 
“danced” publicly, and his language points to adaptation rather than recital. Whatever form these stage shows may have taken, they are far from showing the primacy of performance over text. Instead, the staging of poetry by people other than the author could only have occurred after there was an independently circulating, written text. Further, the fact that a book (nearly any book) is capable of being read aloud or adapted for the stage is not in itself significant. Cervantes has furnished ballets; T. S. Eliot has been turned into a musical; Joyce has been turned into films. Despite the fact (if it is a fact) that the Eclogues were put on stage, they remain a book, intended for readers. Vergil says so (Ecl. 3.84–85):

Pollio amat nostram, quamuis est rustica, Musam:
Pierides, uitulam *lectori* pascite uestro.

("Pollio loves my Muse, though she is rustic. Pierides, feed up a calf for your reader.")

Recitationes

The second venue, the recitation, is the most familiar. That a work could become known—in the first instance, in any case—by the poet reading aloud to a limited audience (in the strict sense) is not at issue. Famous occasions include Vergil reading the completed Georgics to Augustus and parts of books 2, 4, and 6 of the Aeneid to the imperial family. One of Vergil’s recitations was the occasion for someone in...
the audience to cap “Nudus ara, sere nudus…” with “habebis frigore febrem.” Macer, Horace, and Propertius, among others read their verses to audiences that included the young Ovid (Trist. 4.10.44–50, Vit. Hor.).

Even here, however, the notion of “performance” needs to be interrogated. Elaborate precautions were taken to avoid tainting the poet-performer with the infamia of the actor. The reciter was always seated; he always had a text open before him; he did not use his hands; he avoided facial expressions. The poet must not be mistaken for an actor.

**Convivia**

About readings at private functions we are oddly ill-informed. That books could be read aloud as dinner entertainment is clear from several sources. Atticus employed a lector for the task. Pliny says that at his small dinners the choices are a reader, a lyre player, or a comedy troupe; performing (hypocrisin), for the verses sounded good when Vergil recited them, but the same ones were empty and mute without him.” This is so obviously a case of sour grapes (who exactly found or finds Vergil’s verses inanes mutosque?), that I am surprised anyone takes it seriously. If Vergil’s success depended on his personal appearances, it is difficult to explain the stage shows, much less the survival of the author’s work after his death. Juvenal says quite the opposite about the performance of Vergil’s verses (11.182): “quid refert, tales versus qua voce legantur?” Quina is so dominated by the idea of the recitation that he can ask (1982, 93): “How many people in the generation after Virgil’s death ever attained what one could call a working knowledge of the poem?” Thousands upon thousands would be a good answer. Vergil became an instant classic. If Ovid (Am. 1.15.25 26: “Tityrus et segetes Aeneiaque arma legentur, / Roma triumphati dum caput orbis erit”) won’t do for the “generation after,” perhaps one might glance at Q. Caelius Epiropa, who began lecturing (praegere: Suet. Gram. 16) on Vergil almost immediately, or at the elder Seneca: Vergil is already providing taglines (Con. 7.1.27, 7.5.9, Sias. 3.7, 4.4: all Aen.); learned men argue about his style (Suas. 1.12, 2.20), and show a knowledge of his prose works [!] (Con. 3 pr. 8). Quotations in the younger Seneca are too numerous to list.

60. Vit. Don. 43; G. 1.299; cf. Serv. ad loc. and ad Ecl. 6.11. Not “the waggish pen of some anonymous parodist” (Thomas 1988, ad loc.). Also not proof of “the high sophisti cation of the literary public” (Morgan 2001, 81), even if the story is true.


62. Pliny 2.19.1 4. Pliny 9.34 has been misunderstood. Pliny is wondering whether to use a lector to deliver his next recitation: “Ipse nescio, quid illo legente interim faciam, sedeam defixus et mutus et similis otioso an, ut quidam, quae pronuntiabit, murmure oculis manu prosequar?” (“I don’t know what I am to do while he is reciting. Should I sit there fixed and mute and like someone at leisure, or as some do, should I accompany what he is going to say with murmur, eyes, hand?”) The actions are not those of the reciter (how could he speak and accompany his own words with a murmur?), but of certain audience members, the equivalent of those who beat time to the music during concerts.

63. Hor. Ep. 2.1.109 10 dictant refers to dictation (composition) rather than recitation: Brink 1982, 3: 147 50; cf. what seems to be the situation at Mart. 9.89.

64. Nepos Att. 14: “Nemo in convivio eius alius audivit quam anagnosten; quod nos quidem iucundissimum arbitramid: neque umquam sine aliqua lectione apud eum cenatum est, ut non minus animo quam ventre convivae delectarentur.” See below, on Cic. Att. 16.2, 16.3.
sometimes only the book at dinner, with the music and comedy later.\textsuperscript{65} His uncle also had books read at dinner.\textsuperscript{66} Martial as host says he will \textit{not} read a thick book (\textit{crassum volumen}) at his modest party (5.78.25). Only Seneca mentions a genre, the philosophy of Quintus Sextius, but there seems to be a prejudice toward the philosophical and the “useful.”\textsuperscript{67}

Poetry might, of course, be read aloud at banquets, but it is curious how little we hear of it. Cicero and the republican and Augustan poets write about many parties but they never once write about poetry being performed at parties.\textsuperscript{68} Later poets and prose authors are quite clear that poetry was occasionally read aloud during dinners,\textsuperscript{69} but the general

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} 1.15.2: “Audisses comoedos vel lectorem vel lyristen vel quae mea liberalitas omnes.” 9.36.4: “Cenanti mihi, si cum uxore vel paucis, liber legitur; post cenam comoedia aut lyristes.” Cf. 9.17.3 (cited below).
\item \textsuperscript{66} 3.5.12: “super hanc [mensam] liber legebatur”: clearly prose.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Sen. \textit{Ep.} 64.2: “lectus est liber.” So Varro (\textit{Men. Sat.} 340 Astbury Gell. 13.11.5): “In convivio legi non omnia debent, sed ea potissimum, quae simul sint \textit{biofeleis} et delectent”; for this use of \textit{biofeleis}, cf. Sex. \textit{Emp. Adv. Math.} 1.296 (on the uselessness of poets and grammar). Spurinna’s choices for morning readings also seem to have been on the didactic side, though the afternoon readings are “remissius aliquid et dulcius”; see Johnson 2000, 621 2. Quinn maintains, 1982, 83, n. 23: “In the case of a literary work (as opposed, e.g., to a didactic work), what makes the work known to the public is performance, not publication.” In fact we have more examples of “didactic” works being read aloud in social settings than “literary” works. The distinction, however, is special pleading to eliminate the fact that no one can imagine any social setting in which the 142 books of Livy were read aloud. For didactic works, Macer read about snakes to Ovid (\textit{Trist.} 4.10.43); Calpurnius Piso gave a recitation of his \textit{Catasterismi} (Pliny 5.17).
\item \textsuperscript{68} Cicero enjoys parties but never mentions any readings at them apart from the single instance of his own \textit{De Gloria} (see below); the pleasures are those of conversation, for example, \textit{Fam.} 9.24.2 3 (362 SB), 9.26 (197 SB, the famous dinner with Cytheris), \textit{Att.} 2.14.1 (34 SB, dinner with Clodia), 2.18 (38 SB), 9.1.3 (167 SB), 13.52 (353 SB: a huge dinner party for Caesar: \textit{“στροφήδων οὖθεν in sermone, φιλόλογα multa”: not then the recitation of poetry, but literary conversation, with the assumption that guests had already read poetry); cf. \textit{Off.} 1.144: reciting your upcoming court speech is not appropriate for parties.
\item \textsuperscript{69} The best evidence is Pers. 1.30 40 (and even here the goal is to leave behind a book: 40 43); Juv. 11.179 82 (\textit{Iliad} and \textit{Aeneid} rather than Spanish dancing girls at Juvenal’s modest dinners); Mart. 3.44.15, 3.45, 3.50 (the bad poet Ligurinus who recites \textit{everywhere}), 4.8.7 12 (Martial’s books suitable for Caesar’s dinners), 5.16.9, 7.51 (quoted below), 7.97, 10.20 (a book for Pliny), 11.52 (two friends alone: Martial won’t recite but Cerealis may); Gell. 2.22.1 2: “Apud mensam Favorini in convivio familiari legi solitum erat aut vetus carmen melici poetae aut historia partim Graecae linguae, alias Latinae. Legebatur ergo ibi tunc in carmine Latino ‘Iapyx’ [of a wind in Hor. \textit{Odes} 1.3.4, 3.27.20, Verg. \textit{A.} 8.710].” Note that even here Latin poetry does not seem to feature prominently and is missing from the initial list. Further evidence might be the musical settings of Pliny’s poetry (4.19.4, 7.4.9), and Statius’s (\textit{Silv.} 3.5.65), but no specifics are given as to where these were performed. Julianus recites from memory several early Latin love poems (Gell. 19.9), but this again is part of dinner conversation, meant to triumph over some snooty Greeks, not entertain them (see n. 94).
\item There are also the parodies of dinner entertainments at Trimalchio’s: Trimalchio composes (pretends to improvise?) three verses with the aid of \textit{codicilli} and recites from memory verses he claims are by Publilius Syrus (\textit{Petr. Sat.} 55). He also reads aloud from a Latin book during the Greek performance by the \textit{Homeristae}. Habinnas’s slave declaims in a
impression left by the sources is that poetry, even in the houses of the learned, played little part in entertainment and took second place to dramatic and musical performances.⁷⁰

Performance at banquets and the like must be sharply distinguished from the upper-class social ritual of the *recitatio*. It is clear that the job of reading as entertainment was given over to professionals who were slaves or freedmen, while the host and guests remained reclining at table. Neither host nor guest stood up and “performed” at parties.⁷¹ Here, of course, we must distinguish between formal performance of texts as dinner entertainment and the informal exchange of poetry between learned persons, in other words, poetry as part of the conversation and φιλολογία that Cicero praises.⁷² So Martial makes it clear that it is bad manners for a host to subject his guests to his verses, much less compel a guest to perform.⁷³

The popular picture of poets “singing for their supper”—more or less literally—is backed by no evidence. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Just as the Romans took elaborate precautions to separate the noble reciter from the ignoble actor, so they avoided any hint of acting for another’s pleasure. Such a role would have been an insult to any freeborn man and runs the danger of tainting him with the *infamia* of the stage.⁷⁴ It would rank him with the *comoedi*, *lyristes*, and *lector* whom Pliny actually employs to entertain his guests, and only a step above the *scurrae*, *cinaedi*, and *moriones*, whom he decries in others.⁷⁵

singsong style (*canora voce*) a farrago of Vergil and Atellane farce. For commentary see Horsfall 1989; Courtney 2001, 106 7. Some examples occasionally cited (for example, by Mayor 1872, I, 173–82, in his massive note on Juv. 3.9) are not germane. Hor. *Odes* 3.11.6, a hymn to Mercury, cannot be used as a description of Roman daily life. Mart. 4.82: nothing about other people being present and everything points to private reading. Mart. 11.52:

---

⁷⁰ So Augustus (Suet. *Aug*. 74): “et aut acroamata et histriones aut etiam triviales ex circio ludios interponebat ac frequentius aretalogos.” His *lectores* were to read him to sleep (78). Cf. Pliny 6.31.13: Trajan’s modest dinners include *acroamata*, but no mention of reading. Spurinna’s *lector* is not part of a dinner entertainment; that slot is reserved for the performance of a comedy (Pliny 3.1.9). Nep. *Att*. 14 makes clear that readings were not the first thing that one thought of under the heading *acroamata*.


⁷² For example, Cat. 50; Mart. 2.71, 11.52; Gell. 19.9; Quint. 10.7.19. Again, Trimalchio provides the parodic limits.

⁷³ Mart. 3.44.15, 3.45, 3.50, 9.89; n. 69 above. Ligurinus’s recital is not “entertainment”; it is merely a failure of the poetic mutuality that ought to attend an intimate party; so, too, Mart. 1.63.

⁷⁴ Tacitus makes clear the revulsion that Romans felt for the degradation of performance: *Ann*. 14.14 16, and esp. 14.20: Nero and senate force noble Romans to pollute themselves with the stage under the pretext of speeches and poems (“ut proceres Romani *specie orationum et carminum* scaena polluantur”).

⁷⁵ Pliny 1.15.2, 9.17.3: “Quam multi, cum lector aut lyristes aut comoedus inductus est, calceos poscunt.” Not everyone appreciates readings.
Accordingly, nowhere in Catullus, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, or Ovid do we find a single suggestion that the poets ever “performed” at their own or anyone else’s *convivia*. They all issue numerous invitations to parties of various sorts, to friends of various standings (including their “patrons”), but never once do they say that they will perform. They describe going to numerous parties, but never once suggest that their duties included performing there. Neither Persius nor Juvenal was reticent about the horrors of the literary life, but they never mention being forced to provide dinner-theater entertainment as one of them. Martial, too, never shows a single case, and as Nauta rightly observes (2002, 96):

> Indeed, it must be doubted whether Martial ever held full dress recitations. Whenever he boasts of his popularity as a poet, he refers not to his hearers but to his readers. There are only a few passages where he represents himself as reciting, and there the situation seems to be one informal social exchange rather than performance for large invited audiences: he always recites to one specified person, who sometimes reciprocates by reciting in turn.

No guest is ever made to sing for his supper.

The Role of Performance in the Circulation of Roman Poetry

> Ubi sunt qui aiunt ζωόντις φωνῆς?
> (What nonsense that is about the living voice!)

—Cic. *Att.* 2.12.2 [30 Shackleton Bailey; his trans.]

76. For example, Cat. 10, 13; contrast the informal mutuality of poetic exchange in Cat. 50 and Martial (below). This is the point of Tacitus’s picture of Nero attempting to force into existence dinner parties of poets (*Ann.* 14.16).

77. The poet in Persius 1.30 40 is dead and derives no benefit from the professional reader who performs his works (rightly Korfmacher 1933, 283). For Bramble (1974, 100 5) the poet is only “metaphorically dead.” Juvenal 7 has the bad patron rent a lousy house for his poet client, but does not have him summon the poet to perform at his home.

78. Nauta goes on to say (96 7), “However, there is some evidence, both circumstantial and internal, that there was one social occasion at which Martial gave oral presentation of his poetry throughout his career. This occasion is the dinner party or symposium.” However, he offers no evidence from Martial (his other examples are Greek and do not speak about a poet performing his own works), apart from the two passages in which Martial says he will not perform (5.78.25, 11.52.16). This leads to a weak and speculative conclusion: “If Martial’s satiric epigrams were indeed performed at symposia, they would fulfil the same function (but on a higher level of sophistication) as the *scurrae, cinaedi, moriones*, mentioned by Pliny,” showing exactly why Martial did not perform such tricks.

When we look closely at what actually happened at these various types of performances, six very important facts emerge.

1. Not only did Romans not go to performances in order to hear poetry and pass it on to others in the manner of folk songs, it is quite clear that they did not learn, or expect to learn, any poetry there themselves. This can be illustrated by two telling anecdotes from Pliny. He writes to a friend after attending a three-day-long *recitatio* (4.27). From all of this he manages to remember a mere eight lines (all about him, and he is a trifle hazy about line 2). But when the poems are published in a book, he will send his friend a copy. In another letter (3.21), he announces that Martial is dead. He recalls part of a poem (again about himself; Mart. 10.20.12–21): “You ask what are the verses that won my gratitude. I would refer you to the very book-roll, if I did not have some of them by heart. If you like these, you can look up the rest in the book.”

A poem of Martial shows the same thing (2.6.1–10):

I nunc, edere me iube libellos.
Lectis uix tibi paginis duabus
spectas eschatocollion, Seuere,
et longas trahis oscitationes.
Haec sunt, quae relegente me solebas
rapta exscribere, sed Vitellianis;
haec sunt, singula quae sinu ferebas
per conuiuia cuncta, per theatra;
haec sunt aut meliora si qua nescis.

(Now go and tell me to publish my poetry books. You’ve only read two pages and you’re already looking for the final sheet, Severus, and heaving up long sighs. But these are the very poems that, when I reread them to you, you grabbed and copied out and on Vitellian tablets. These are the ones you used to carry as individual poems in the fold of your toga to every dinner party to every theater. These are those poems or even better ones you don’t know about.)

Martial’s friend asked him to read his poems and called for encores at the time (*relegente*), but in order to enjoy them later Severus copied them out on special tablets and read them to himself. Pliny and Martial make it clear. Poetry did not circulate orally. It circulated in books.

80. 4.27.5: “ad hunc gustum, totum *librum* repromitto, quem tibi, ut primum *publicaverit*, exhibebo.”
81. 3.21.4: “Quaeris, qui sint versiculi, quibus gratiam rettuli? Remitterem te ad ipsum volumen, nisi quosdam tenerem; tu, si placuerint hi, ceteros in libro requires.” Martial himself is explicit that these very verses arrived at Pliny’s house in the form of a book (10.20).
82. Cf. 7.51, in which Pompeius Auctus has memorized and will recite Martial’s verse. Note: (a) the usual way to learn about a poet’s verse is to buy his books; (b) Pompeius has learned and memorized Martial, not by attending lectures, but by reading his books;
2. A recitation gave only the penultimate draft of a work in progress. Pliny, for example, is explicit about the role of books after the recitation: “And so, if any of those who were present [at my recitation] care to read these same things, he will understand that I have changed or eliminated some things, perhaps in keeping with his judgment, even though he said nothing to me.” The role of the recitation, says Pliny, is to get criticism from men of taste before releasing his book. In numerous passages he makes plain a standard sequence of events: there is studying, then writing, followed by a shakedown recitation; after that, circulating drafts to friends, followed by correction, all of which culminates in a written, public book. Again, the evidence is clear. The polished final thoughts of the poet circulated only in books.

3. The performances usually consisted only of bits and pieces of a full work. Cicero mentions reading aloud at dinner only a single time in his entire correspondence, and his description has important implications for understanding the way books were used for these entertainments. Cicero is sending Atticus a revised draft version of his De Gloria, which he describes in two letters.

"De Gloria" misi tibi. custodies igitur, ut soles, sed notentur eclogae duae quas Salvius bonos auditores nactus in convivio dumtaxat legat. mihi valde placent, mallem tibi. (16.2.6 = 412 SB)

("I am sending you my 'On Glory.' You will keep it safe, as you always do, but make sure to mark the two selections for Salvius to read, but only to kind listeners at a banquet. They please me enormously; I'd rather they pleased you."

sed tamen idem σώνταγμα misi ad retractatius et quidem ἀρχέτυπον ipsum crebris locis inculcatum et refectum. hunc tu tralatum in macrocollum lege

(c) though he has the books he has read down cold, when it comes time to recite them to another, he turns back to the published text.

83. 5.3.10 11: “Atque adeo si cui forte eorum qui interferuntur curae fuerit eadem illa legere, intellege me quaedam aut commutasse aut praeterisse, fortasse etiam ex suo iudicio, quamvis ipse nihil dixerit mihi.” Cf. Severus in Martial 2.6 discussed above.


85. For example, 1.5.2: recitaret et publicaret (two distinct stages), 1.8, 2.5, 3.10, 3.13, 3.15 (Pliny has heard the poetry recited, but he cannot give a final judgment till he has read the book), 4.5, 4.7, 4.20, 5.3, 5.5 (Fannius was at work on a fourth volume, encouraged by how many people were reading the first three), 5.12, 5.17, 7.4 (his verses composed, recited to friends, written out, copied, then read by others and even set to music by Greeks), 7.17 (spelled out, step by step), 7.20, 8.3, 8.4, 8.7, 8.15, 8.19, 8.21, 9.1, 9.13, 9.18, 9.20, 9.26, 9.28, 9.34, 9.35, 9.38. Ovid’s difficulties in exile show the same sequence (Trist. 3.14.37 52): first comes reading, then writing, then a trial recitation.

86. In other words, keep it from being made public, as Atticus had failed to do before (Att. 13.21a.1 327 SB); see Shackleton Bailey 1965 70, ad loc.
arcano convivis tuis sed, si me amas, hilaris et bene acceptis, ne in me stomachum erumpant cum sint tibi irati. (16.3.1 = 413 SB)

(“I am sending you the same old treatise in a revised state, in fact the original, with things rewritten or stuck between the lines in numerous places. Once it is copied onto special sheets, read it privately to your dinner guests, but, please, only when they are happy and well fed, so they don’t get angry at me, when they should be angry at you.”)

Cicero still has not finished with the book, and he asks that Atticus have his slave Salvius read portions at a dinner party. For this particular performance a clean copy is made of two selections on special large-size papyrus in order to make a reading script. In short, although it was always possible to create a performance copy from a book, not all books were intended as performance copies.

Pliny makes clear that this sort of excerpting was standard. A friend’s recitation consisted only of selections. Pliny will give detailed criticisms when he gets the chance to read the entire book. After subjecting his friends to a two-day recitation of his own poetry, he claims:

The audience agreed on calling for this, despite the fact that others skip various things and claim credit for skipping, while I skip nothing and tell them that I am skipping nothing. I read everything so that I can correct everything, which those who read selections cannot do. Their way is more modest and maybe more respectful. Mine is more open and friendly.

87. For the cubit broad macrocollum, see Pliny HN 13.80, Cic. Att. 13.25.3 (333 SB); Johnson 1994.

88. That Cicero further refined the text is clear from the fact that this version seems to be a single volume work, whereas the published De gloria was in two volumes (Off. 2.31). See Shackleton Bailey 1965 70, ad loc. For Salvius, see also Cic. Att. 9.7.1 (174 SB), 13.44.3 (336 SB). This reading seems to be envisioned less an entertainment than as a further tryout recitatio (though in absentia) before a critical (but not too critical) audience.

89. Johnson 2000, 616, also uses the metaphor of scripts: “Bookrolls were not, in gross terms, conceptualized as static repositories of information (or of pleasure) but rather as vehicles for performative reading in high social contexts” and writes of “the conceptualization of the bookroll as a performance script.” Though I agree with his observations, I will venture to disagree with this particular formulation. This is certainly one of the ways and one of the settings in which a bookroll could be read. But, as Johnson notes (600 6, 618), reading aloud among friends was not the only way in which a text could be enjoyed, and literature was, of course, read in contexts other than the “high social.”

90. 3.15: “Videor autem iam nunc posse rescribere esse opus pulchrum nec supprimendum, quantum aestimare licuit ex tis quae me praesente recitasti . . . Igitur non temere iam nunc de universitate pronuntio, de partibus experiari legendae.”

91. 8.21.4: “Hoc assensus audientium exequit; et tamen ut ali transeunt quaedam imputantque quod transeant, sic ego nihil praeterero atque etiam non praetererim me dico. Lego enim omnia ut omnia emendem, quod contingere non potest electa recitantibus.” For electa, cf. 3.5.17, and 4.14.6 (of written texts). The full paragraph shows how close Pliny’s situation is to Cicero’s. Cf. also Pliny 9.27, an interrupted reading, cited below.
We are faced with an unmistakable fact. Recitations and private readings could be counted on to supply only fragments of a poet’s work.⁹²

4. There seem to be no recorded instances of a restaging of a recitation. Pliny, for example, goes to many such but each one is for a single author, for a single work, for a single time. Poets never seem to present the same work (or same section of a work) twice in a series of recitations. A recitation is a strictly one-off performance.

5. There are no recorded instances of a public recitation of the ancient Greek poets.⁹³ We do, however, hear of a few occasions on which Greek poetry was performed at Roman banquets by professional entertainers.⁹⁴

6. There was no Dead Poets Society. Living authors read their own works, but there seem to have been almost no opportunities for hearing the poetry of any previous generation.⁹⁵ One of the few examples deserves to be examined closely because it has been misused. Quinn (1982, 91) claims that books were read only by “professionals,” that everyone else got their poetry by listening to others read (publicly or privately), and that “those who were not in some way professionals probably consulted a text only to clear up a particular point, or to get a better impression of a work which they had heard performed.” The following incident is cited as proof.

---

⁹². As indeed they would have to. It is difficult to imagine (and more to the point, there are no records of) a twelve day recital for the Aeneid at a book a day, fifteen days for the Metamorphoses, or an eighteen day marathon for Ennius’s Annales.

⁹³. Contrast Cicero’s contemporary, Philodemus; Cic. Pis. 70 71: “multa a multis et lecta et audita”; that is, both studied (lecta) and lectured on (audita).

⁹⁴. Plut. Mor. 622c, 711b, Gell. 19.9.1 5, all mention Anacreon and Sappho, and Gellius adds other more recent erotic elegies; Gell. 2.22.1 2: “vetus carmen melici poetae.” An example of bad behavior: Sen. Ep. 27.5 8, Calvisius Sabinus, the ignorant freedman, who has eleven slaves, nine assigned to memorize each of the lyric poets plus two more for Homer and Hesiod. He occasionally exhibits them to the annoyance of his guests. Luc. Adv. Indoc. should be compared throughout.

⁹⁵. Suet. Gram. 2.3 mentions two activities of the early grammarians who followed Crates of Mallos: making commentaries, and popularizing through recitation: “ut carmina parum adhuc divulgata vel defunctorum amicorum vel si quorum aliorum probassent, diligentius retractarent ac legendo commentandoque etiam ceteris nota facerent” (“They carefully went over poems that had not yet circulated widely either of dead friends or others of whom they approved, and by reading and commenting they made them known to others”). As an example of reading to an audience, Suetonius mentions only “ut postea Q. Vargunteius Annales Ennii, quos certis diebus in magna frequentia pronuntiabat” (“Q. Vargunteius read aloud the Annales of Ennius on fixed days to a large audience”). Even here, note that for Suetonius the grammarians’ activities center on a written text: “ut C. Octavius Lampadio Naevii Punicum bellum, quod uno volumine et continenti scriptura expositum divisit in septem libros . . . ut Laelius Archelaus Vettiasque Philocomus Lucilii saturas familiaris sui, quas legisse se apud Archelaum Pompeii Leneaeus, apud Philocornum Valerius Cato praedicant.” The product was also a written text: Suet. Gramm. 8 (M. Pomplius Andronicus on Ennius), 14 (Curtius Nicias on Lucilius), 18 (Crassicius on Cinna), 24 (Probus on the early poets). See Kaster 1995, 60, 63 7.
Gellius (18.5) tells of an occasion in his youth when Antonius Julianus heard that a professional reader (anagnostes), who preferred to be called by the neologism Ennianista, was reading aloud in a theater. They listen and have a lively debate to prove that Ennius wrote the word *eques* not *equus*. Afterward Julianus goes and consults a very old and expensive edition to verify the reading.

There are three things to notice, each of which has been misunderstood. First, Gellius shows that such an occurrence was not common. Someone trying to create a Latin version of a Homerista by doing shows of Ennius was a novelty act. Second, these were not people getting to know Ennius through an oral performance. These were people who have already read and studied a classic text with professional teachers. Third, what was rare about Julianus's action was not the act of consulting a text, for people in Gellius read and compare published texts all the time. What was rare is the antiquity of the volume consulted. Quinn's "professionals" are simply the educated population of the Latin-speaking world.

The Role of Books in the Circulation of Roman Poetry

Tolle, lege, tolle, lege.

—Augustine, *Confessions* 8.29

96. 18.5: "Atque ibi tunc Iuliano nuntiatur anagnosten quendam, non indoctum hominem, voce admodum scita et canora Ennii annales legere ad populum in theatro. 'Eamus' inquit 'auditum nescio quem istum Ennianistam': hoc enim se ille nomine appellari volebat. Quem cum iam inter ingentes clamores legentem invenissem legebant autem librum ex annalibus Ennii septimum hos eum primum versus perperam pronuntiantem audivimus."

97. Cicero does the same; he does not summon an Ennianista to recite to him; he reads the books (Orat. 48: "antiqui...libri"). Gellius is disappointed to discover that Julianus seems to have cribbed his whole show of erudition from old commentaries on the passage. Again, commentaries are for texts, not oral performances.

98. Rightly pointed out by Starr 1989. Ennius is also read aloud on the occasion of a public holiday (Gell. 16.10.1).

99. 18.5.7: "Cumque aliquot eorum, qui aderant, 'quadrupes ecus' apud suum quisque grammaticum legisse se dicerent..."

100. For example, texts of Cato (2.14.1, 10.13.3), Claudius Quadrigarius (9.14), Catullus (6.20.6), Cicero (1.7.1, 1.16.15), Fabius Pictor (5.4.1), Sallust (9.14.26, 20.6.14), and Vergil (1.21.2, 9.14.7).

101. There is a certain circularity of argument: anyone who reads a book is a professional; therefore only professionals read books. The very distinction between "professionals" and others is tendentious and anachronistic. In what sense are the literary miscellanies, showing profound reading, listed by Gellius (praef. 6 7) of Pliny the Elder, Masurius Sabinus, Alfenus Varus, Suetonius, not to mention Pollio, Varro, or Gellius himself, the work of "professionals"?
The picture we are given of Roman poetry (and literature in general), therefore, is very curious. It is a poetry rich in intertextuality, one that relies on a profound knowledge of previous Greek and Latin literature, but there seem to be no opportunities to hear that literature, which we are told is the only way most people encounter it.

On the contrary, the Latin poets themselves are very clear about how they came to know the great body of Greek and Latin poetry. They read it in books. Horace read Lucilius. Horace read the authors of Old Comedy. Catullus 68.33 ought to be decisive: I can’t write, he says, nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me, “because I don’t have a large number of books with me.” Catullus is paralyzed; his library is back in Rome and he only brought a single box of books. The very creation of poetry depends on reading literature in books.

If we now ask our question in a slightly more emphatic form—Did the people who knew (not knew of, but really knew) Roman poetry come to know it primarily through listening or through reading?—there is a clear answer. If you wanted to hear poetry once, there were plenty of opportunities (too many, said Pliny). Making an initial acquaintance of a poet at a recitation was easy. However, if you wanted to enjoy the same poem twice, you had to resort to the written text. Even in the case of private gatherings, anyone who had the text read to him, should he wish to reexperience the reading, got hold of the text. He did not ask the host to restage the reading.

The six observations made above entail six important conclusions about the role of books.

(1) If you wanted to learn, memorize, or even merely reexperience a poem, you studied the book.
(2) If you wanted to know the poem in the final form that its author intended, you bought the book.
(3) If you wanted to experience the complete work, you had to get the book.
(4) If you wanted to hear that strain again, there was only one possibility, and that was reading the book.
(5) If you wanted to know the poetry of Callimachus, or any other Greek, you went and found the book.
(6) If you wanted to know the poetry of Martial, or any other dead poet, you had to hunt for the book.

102. Even the Emperor Augustus himself, though fond of reciting his works to friends and reading improving works to the Senate (Suet. Aug. 85), reads Greek and Latin literature with his own hands (89: “In evolvendis utriusque lingue auctoribus”).
103. Sat. 1.10.56: “nosmet Lucili scripta legentis.”
104. Unlike Hermogenes (Sat. 1.10.18): “Illi, scripta quibus comoedia prisca viris est, / hoc stabant, hoc sunt imitandi; quos neque pulcher / Hermogenes umquam legit.”
In short, performance was a lousy way of getting to know literature. Pliny has read the poetry of Cicero, Calvus, Pollio, Messala, Hortensius, Brutus, Sulla, Catulus, Scaevola, Sulpicius, Varro, various Torquati, Memius, Lentulus, Seneca, and Verginius Rufus, not to mention those non-senators, Accius, Ennius, Vergil, and Nepos; he has no idea if they gave recitations or not.107 “Nearly all the books discussed in this history were written to be listened to,” says the handbook.108 Cicero says the exact opposite: “One can derive much greater pleasure from reading lyric poetry than hearing it.”109 Going to a recitation was not a substitute for reading. It was a (sometimes tedious and socially obligatory) prelude to reading. Listening to someone else recite a book at a dinner party was not a substitute for reading. It was a (mostly pleasant) entertainment for the highly literate who already loved and read books. Pliny praises a youth for being litteratus, “well-read.”110 Neither Pliny, nor anyone else, praises someone as cultured because he attended a lot of recitations or went to a lot of dinner parties.111

Dupont rightly labels the recitation “An event of little consequence.”112 Of little consequence, but not completely unimportant. It is merely that their import has been generally misunderstood. The public reading of verse had only a very limited role in the circulation of literary texts. Instead, it was part of the process of the production of Roman poetry. Performance was not a substitute for the publication of the written text; it was merely one possible (and far from mandatory) precursor to it.113

Mime offers an instructive contrast. We read a great deal about the circulating texts of poets, the older playwrights, orators, historians, and prose writers of various sorts. We read nothing about the circulating texts of the mimes, despite their staggering popularity. This is because the mime genuinely was “a score for public or private performance.”114

107. Pliny 5.3.5 7.
109. Tusc. 5.116: “et si cantus eos forte delectant, primum cogitare debent, ante quam hi sint inventi, multos beate vixisse sapientis, deinde multo maiorem percipi posse legendis iis quam audiendiis voluptatem.” The remark is the more telling because Cicero is not writing to inform us about Roman modes of reading; this is an offhand remark to show that deafness is not that bad. Contrast Quint. 11.3.4 on the ability of actors to make even great verse better and mediocre verse seem great.
110. 6.26.1: “ipse studiosus litteratus etiam desirius.”
111. This is the whole point of Lucian’s satire on the ignorant book collector. Quintilian never mentions attending parties or recitations as a source of learning; he does, however, mention reading books.
113. See Fantham 1996, 16, 64, 218; Starr 1987, 213 14; Valette Cagnac 1997, 116 39 (though she does label recitations “indispensable”); Dupont 1997, 48. Hor. Ars imagines both an author reading his lines to a critic (438: recitares) and a critic marking up a book of those lines (445 50); the budding author (385 90) is to write (scripseris), let qualified judges hear his work, then put the written text (membranis) away for nine years before publishing it (edideris).
Once performed, its life was over. That is one of the reasons we do not have any texts of Roman mimes, except precisely for the “literary” mimes of Liberius and Syrius.\(^{115}\)

The Romans read aloud to each other. That is not in dispute. However, as the examples from English literary culture make clear, reading aloud does not take the place of other forms of reading. No one is (or at least should be) arguing that the only books were the luxury display items ridiculed by Catullus, Seneca, and Lucian;\(^ {116}\) that books could be brought out only at recitations or parties; that any time Romans wanted to read poetry they had to hire a hall or invite friends over for dinner.\(^ {117}\) In sum, even as Cicero did not owe his detailed knowledge of Latin drama solely to attending plays,\(^ {118}\) so the occasional performance of poems on the stage, at recitations, and parties was not the vehicle for the circulation of Latin verse, and cannot account for the detailed knowledge of previous Greek and Latin poetry that educated Romans evinced and that the understanding of contemporary Latin poetry demanded.\(^ {119}\)

I want to draw attention away from the figure that currently seems to fascinate us—the performer—to the book he held in his hand. What happened to a book of poetry once it reached the \textit{últimos Britannos}—read silently or aloud to oneself, read aloud by a professional \textit{lector}, read aloud to a small group of friends, read aloud to a vast crowd—is not as important as the fact that it had first to reach Britain.\(^ {120}\) And it did not get there through the medium of wandering bards, nor by repetitions from memory

\(^{115}\) Again, a comparison with modern society may be illuminating. It is easy to buy a novel, a book of poetry, even many plays. However, only a very few movie scripts (generally classics) are published, primarily to be studied by professionals. This is because movies \textit{are} meant only for performance.

\(^{116}\) Cat. 22, Sen. \textit{Tranq.} 9.4 7, Luc. 31 (\textit{Adv. Indoc. “The Ignorant Book Collector”}). As Johnson shows (2000, 614 15), one of Lucian’s complaints is precisely that the man treats reading (reading aloud at banquets) solely as an occasion for showing off and does not read the texts by himself with any understanding (2, 3, 18, 20, 28). Cf. Seneca’s story about Calvisius Sabinus (Ep. 27.5 8).

\(^{117}\) Though certain scholarly formulations seem headed in this direction.

\(^{118}\) Wright 1931, 31 79; \textit{Brut.} 71: The plays of Livius Andronicus are not worth \textit{rereading}.

\(^{119}\) Thus the \textit{Homeristae} can “stage” Homer, yet no one asserts that such performances can account for the detailed knowledge of all forty eight books of Homer evidenced by Roman writers (see \textit{RE Suppl.} 3 [1918], 1158). Equally, the tasteless vogue at Rome (decried by Plut. \textit{Mor.} 711c) for turning some of Plato’s dialogues into little plays was not the way in which most Romans learned Plato.

\(^{120}\) See Fantham 1996, 10; Starr 1987, 213 16. Milesian tales are carried in the baggage of the Romans killed at Carrhae in 53 B.C. (Plut. \textit{Crass.} 32); Gallus’s elegies are in Egypt by round 20 B.C. For literature at the ends of the world: Vergil (\textit{Aen.} 9.473) is at Vindolanda (Tab. Vindol. II.118); Catullus might have been copied, too (Tab. Vindol. II.119); \textit{libros} in a fragmentary context (Tab. Vindol. II.333). See Bowman 1994, 91 2; Bowman at al. 1994, 65 8, 315: “There is no reason to doubt the availability of books.” By the first century Vergil is in Egypt and atop Masada: Gallazzi 1982; Cotton and Geiger 1989, 31 5 (no. 721); Bowman 1994, 92; Bowman et al. 1994, 66.
by people who happened to have been present at some distant *recitatio* or mime adaptation at Rome. It arrived in the form of a written text.¹²¹

### A Textual Society

Literate Rome was a textual society. A few further examples from Pliny the Younger, so frequently trotted out as chief witness to the domination of the *recitatio* and the oral dissemination of literature, reveal how much.

- There are people waiting for Pliny’s speeches, first to hear them and then to read them (4.16.3).
- It is not the case that the written text is considered a copy or record of the oral presentation. Pliny explicitly states that the opposite is true: the written text is the model and archetype for the speech as actually delivered.¹²²
- Poetry is read out of books. If you take the elegies of Passenus Paulus (descendent of Propertius) in hand, you will read a polished work.¹²³
- Poetry exists in books, which an individual reader picks up; parts can be memorized after the book is read.¹²⁴
- Pliny will gather his hendecasyllables into a book, which he will label and send to his friend (4.14); later the book is being read and copied, and *even* performed (*legitur, descriptur, cantatur etiam*: 7.4.9). Notice the force of *etiam*: being read and being copied are the proofs of popularity; performance is an unexpected bonus.
- Pliny is proud his books are on sale in Lyon (9.11).
- A man in from the provinces has read Pliny out there (4.7).
- The Spaniard who came to Rome just to catch a glimpse of Livy came because a *text* of Livy had made it out to Cadiz (2.3).
- Pliny urges a poet to publish his works: recitations are all very well, and individual poems may circulate without the author’s permission, but only publication will allow them to spread as far as the Roman language has spread.¹²⁵

¹²¹. So, too, prose. Cic. *Sulla* 42 43: the testimony of the Catilinarian witnesses is copied and sent throughout the world (“Itaque dico locum in orbe terrarum esse nullum, quo in loco populi Romani nomen sit, quin eodem perversum hoc indicium pervenerit”). Pliny *HN* 35.11: even so difficult a work as Varro’s group of 700 portraits—a difficult work to read aloud—was distributed “in omnes terras.” Pliny 4.7: Regulus recites a life of his son, then has a thousand (*mille*) copies transcribed and sent throughout Italy and the rest of the Empire with a request to have it read to the people there.

¹²². 1.20.9: “est enim oratio [the text] actionis [the delivered speech] exemplar et quasi ἀρχηγὸν . . . sequitur ergo, ut actio sit absolutissima, quae maxime orationis similitudinem accipiat.”

¹²³. 9.22.2: “Si elegos eius *in manus sumpseris*, leges opus tersum molle iucundum, et plane in Properti domo scriptum.” No lector, no audience; a reader with a book in his hands.

¹²⁴. 3.21.4: “quae est versiculi, quibus gratiam rettuli. remitterem te ad ipsum *volumen*, nisi quosdam ternerem. tu, si placuerint hi, ceteros in *libro* requires.” Cf. 9.22.

¹²⁵. 2.10.1: “hominem te patientem vel potius durum ac paene crudelem, qui tam insignes *libros* tam diu teneas! Quousque et tibi et nobis invidebis, tibi maxima laude, nobis
Pliny writes to a friend about a comedy that he heard the poet recite. He does not write, “Come to Rome and hear it,” or “I’ll recite it to you the next time we meet,” or “Have your lector read it to you,” not even “This book will recreate for you the atmosphere of the original reading”; but simply “I’ll force him to cough up a copy and send you the book to read, or rather to learn by heart; for I know once you pick it up you won’t be able to put it down.”

Pliny comments after the two day recitation of the Panegyric: “Of course, I am well aware that I have recited for a few what I wrote for everyone.”

Pliny writes, “I don’t want to be praised when I recite, but when I’m read.” He could not be more explicit: the goal of literature is not a transitory recitation but the permanent text.

One short letter should be quoted more fully (9.27):

Quanta potestas, quanta dignitas, quanta maiestas, quantum denique numen sit historiae, cum frequenter alias tum proxime sensi. Recitauerat quidam uerissimum librum, partemque eius in alium diem reseruauerat. Ecce amici cuiusdam orantes obsecrantesque, ne reliqua recitaret. Tantus audiendi quae fecerint pudor, quibus nullus faciendi quae audire erubes cunt. Et ille quidem praestitit quod rogabatur (sinebat fides); liber tamen ut factum ipsum manet manebit legeturque semper, tanto magis quia non statim. Incitantur enim homines ad noscenda quae differuntur.

(“I have often been aware of how much power, dignity, majesty and even divinity there is in history, and just lately I have realized it again. A man had been reciting a very honest book and left part of it for another day. Up come the friends of so and so, begging and pleading him not to recite the rest. So great is the shame of hearing what they had done, though there was none at doing what they now blush to hear. And he did what they asked; his loyalty to the truth allowed it. But the book, like their deeds, remains; it will remain and will be read forever. All the more for not being read immediately; for what is withheld only makes people want to know it more.”)
The evidence from Pliny and others is overwhelming: literature is, and is meant to be, disseminated in books.\textsuperscript{130} Pliny in writing to his friend Suetonius makes it plain: “Allow me to see your name on the title; allow me to hear that the books of my dear Tranquillus are being copied out, read, and sold.”\textsuperscript{131} Not a word about performance. Martial in A.D. 101 assumes the book trade to be worldwide (12.2). His own books are doing quite nicely in Vienne (7.88), are being read in Britain (11.3), and carried throughout the Roman Empire (8.3.4–8).\textsuperscript{132}

Thus, although any given work may have made its initial appearance before the public at a recitation in Rome, it owed its existence to books. This is true even of the most oral of all Latin literary arts, that of oratory.\textsuperscript{133} When someone who had not been present at a trial wished to know what was said, he did not ask Cicero or any member of the original audience to rerecite the speech for him. He read the written text.\textsuperscript{134} Even those who had been present but wanted to reexperience his oratory read the author’s written text.\textsuperscript{135} Much that was written was not recited; nothing was recited that was not written.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{130} White 1993, 59 and this volume. The poets are keen to have copies of their works in the public libraries of Rome: Hor. \textit{Ep.} 2.1.214 18, 2.2.92 94; Ov. \textit{Tr.} 3.1.59 72, \textit{Pont.} 1.1.5 10; Mart.5.5, 12.2.78. Again, this is hard to reconcile with a society in which poetry is supposedly disseminated orally.

\textsuperscript{131} 5.10.3: “Patere me uidere titulum tuum, patere audire describi legi uenire uolui mina Tranquilli mei.” Harris 1989, 225 6, claims that Tac. \textit{Dial.} 10.1 2 shows that “it is assumed to be the \textit{recitatio}, not the book, which will make the man famous.” However, the contrast in this rhetorical set piece is between the lasting effects of the orators’ speeches (laws, convictions) and the evanescent effects of the poets’. Just a little later (\textit{Dial.} 12.5), the argument is countered: “nec ullus Asinii aut Messallae \textit{liber} tam inlustris est quam Medea Ovidii aut Varii Thyestes”: speeches and plays are all in books. In fact, \textit{Dial.} 10.3 shows that people are indeed coming in from Spain, Asia, and Gaul, and asking to see Saleius Bassus. The tragedy \textit{Cato} that starts the \textit{Dialogus} is a book (\textit{librum} 3.1), soon to be published (\textit{emitteres}).

\textsuperscript{132} Mart. 1.2: a special traveling edition is available for sale so you can take his books on a long journey. His books have traveled with the army to the Getae and Britain (11.3). Books normally are sent from Rome to Spain, not the other way round (12.2). Old Greek books for sale in Brundisium: Gell. 9.4.1. Romans circulated outside Rome; so did their books; see n. 120. See Salles 1994, 153 6; Nauta 2002, 91 141 (a detailed and nuanced review).

\textsuperscript{133} Even drama may have been more textual than we imagine. Like speeches, plays circulated in scripts; they were read as well as staged and restaged. So Ambivius Turpio says he worked \textit{ne cum poeta scriptura evanesceret} (Ter. \textit{Hec.} 13). For the textualization of Shakespeare, see Erne 2003.

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Att.} 1.13.5, with Cicero adding embellishments. See Fantham 1996, 8. Cf. Ov. \textit{Pont.} 3.5.7.

\textsuperscript{135} So Cicero’s young fans begging for his omnibus volume of consular speeches of 60 BC: \textit{Att.} 2.1.3: “oratiunculas autem et quas postulas et pluris etiam mittam, quoniam quidem ea quae nos scribimus adulescentulorum studiis excitati te etiam delectant.” Not that an author himself might not choose to reread his polished, written speech before an audience of especially tolerant friends, for example, Pliny 7.17.

\textsuperscript{136} Cf. Pliny 3.10.2: Pliny recites only part of a eulogy that he has written.
We can now finally turn to the poets. Here is what Catullus wrote in a book (36.1): “Annales Volusi cacata charta.” Notice, not “a waste of an afternoon, having to listen to someone read it,” not “displeasing to the ear,” not “poorly performed,” but “shitty sheets.” Catullus read (not heard) the poets he then loved or hated. Calvus sends him a horrible book (libellum), in revenge Catullus will send him the full content of the bookshops (librariorum...scrina) containing Caesus, Aquinus, Suffenus (14). “Aurelius and Furius had read the kiss poems (16.13, legisti). Of course; Catullus was a poet, and wrote to be read.” Suffenus writes bad books, which you, alas, must read (22). Caecilius’s girlfriend has read the draft of his epic (35). Catullus read the speech of Sestius and so caught cold; he will never pick up another in his hands (recepso) (44). Cinna’s Zmyrna is now published (edita), and as a written book it will travel the entire world (95), a book so complex that it soon acquired a commentary by Crassicius Pansa (Suet. Gramm. 18). The writing of commentaries is impossible to reconcile with a supposed primacy of oral performance (see nn. 95, 107).

Going to recitations seems to play remarkably little part in the poets’ literary life, though they write much about that part of their existence. Catullus, as Wiseman notes, never tells us of a single one. Though Horace is forced to go to some recitations out of duty (Ep. 2.2.67, 95, 105), and to give some himself (Sat. 1.4.73–74, Ep. 1.19.35–49, 2.1.214–17), they have no part in his ideal life in Rome (Ep. 2.2.2.67, 105). Instead he prefers to read (Sat. 1.6.122). Propertius reads a lot of poets (2.34.85–92); he goes to a lot of parties, but never mentions a recitation. Ovid heard the poets in his youth (Trist. 4.10.44–50), but writes about recitations mostly to say that he cannot give them in exile (Trist. 3.14.39–40, 4.1.89–90, 4.10.113, 5.12.53, Pont. 4.2.35–38). In short, though recitations undoubtedly occurred, they were of little interest to the poets who flourished around the turn of the millennium.

137. Wiseman 1985, 124, his emphasis. But so strong is the stranglehold of Quinn 1982 (cited in support of this statement), that on the same page he claims for Catullus, “What mattered artistically was the oral performance.” These two statements are irreconcilable. Two pages later Wiseman is surprised to find that “Catullus has plenty to say about poetry, his own and that of his friends and enemies. It is striking that he never refers to public performance or an audience of listeners, but only to poems written down on writing tablets, to be read.” Nor does Cicero refer to recitations of poetry (Off. 1.147 refers to public approval). One might get by with claiming that Catullus and Cicero were before the age of the recitation (see n. 7, on the chronological difficulties), appealing to the Elder Seneca’s testimony (Cont. 4 praef. 2) that Pollio was the first to give recitations, which, however, is incorrect; see Dalzell 1955; Rawson 1985, 52.

138. See Quinn 1973, ad Cat. 44.12 on legi.
We can now answer our question: Did the republican and Augustan poets write with readers or listeners in mind? The evidence is overwhelming. Because Rome was not an oral culture, and because literature did not get passed down by oral transmission in unbroken succession from generation to generation or place to place, all claims to poetic immortality or worldwide fame must rest on the existence of written, physically enduring texts. That books—not performances—were the medium through which all poets make themselves known to the world is the unmistakable testimony of Catullus (14, 22, 95), Horace (Sat. 1.10.72–74; Ars 6, 372–73, 386–90), Propertius (2.34.87–90: scripta Catulli . . . pagina Calvi), and Ovid (Am. 1.15.25–30). 139

Let us turn to the poets’ own works. Quinn claims, “He [the poet] refers to his audience sometimes as his ‘readers’ (lectores) and sometimes as his ‘listeners’ (auditores).” 140 In fact, the republican and Augustan poets never use auditor of the audience of their finished verse. 141 The poets never speak of people “listening” to their books. There is not a single example of Catullus, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, or Ovid writing of the reception of their poetry: “When you hear my lines . . . As you sit listening to my poetry . . . When you next attend a party and someone recites my poetry to you . . . .” 142 Instead they write, again and again, about their readers.

139. Starr 1987, 223, seems to imply that publication was something new on the scene: “Authors in Pliny’s time may have wanted to reach further beyond the narrow circles of their own friends and their friends’ friends. It would be misleading to think of this as an increase in authors’ ambitions, because this might seem to imply that earlier writers were men of modest ambitions. Rather, the change may have represented a somewhat broader conception of the potential audience for a literary work”; so, too, Fantham 1996, 64, dating the change to the Augustan poetry book. However, the broadest possible conception of the potential audience had been present in Roman literature since its beginning. Ennius hoped for (Annales 1.12 Skutsch) and achieved (Lucr. 1.119) fame throughout Italy; Lucretius hoped for an aeternum leporem on his words (1.28); Catullus modestly hoped his book would last for more than one generation, whereas Horace and Ovid looked forward to the entire civilized and yet to be civilized world as their readership.

140. Quinn 1982, 87.

141. The word auditor is used exactly five times by the Augustan poets (never by Catullus or Lucretius): once in Ovid Pont. 4.2.35 of the kind of trial recitations before friends that he cannot now stage in exile; four times in Horace: Sat. 1.10.7, of the mimes of Liberius contrasted with polished poetry; Ars 100 and 149 of the theater (see esp. 112 3, and n. 144 below). In Hor. Ep. 1.19.39, auditor has nothing to do with recitations; see n. 145 below.

142. Even the few places in which they do use audio or the idea of “listening” are revealing. Catullus and Tibullus never write of “hearing” poetry, their own or others’, only reading and writing. Horace asks people to “listen” only when picturing himself as a singing bard (Odes 3.25.4, 4.2.45) or within the fictive conversational setting of the Sermones, and the fiction of a fiction of conversation in Epistles (Ep. 1.14.31, 1.17.16; cf. Ars 153), and these are always when Horace is delivering a moral “lecture.” Being listened to is not for lyric poetry but for the theater (Ep. 2.1.187, Ars 100, 149, 153, 180, etc.; n. 145). Propertius uses “listening” twice, once in the fiction of conversation (1.1.37 38); the other instance is telling: Prop. 2.13.11 12, a reading to be sure, but a private one in Cynthia’s lap (Cf. Ov. Ars 2.283 84). So, too, Ov. Trist. 3.7.18 26: private lessons with Perilla, reading their verses to
So Catullus assumed he would be read, and in books, by people far away in time:

Libelli . . . quod . . . / plus uno maneat perenne saeclo. (1.10)
(May this book last through the years for more than one age.)

sed dicam uobis, uos porro dicite multis
milibus et facite haec carta loquatur anus. (68.5 6)

(But I shall tell you Muses [how Allius helped me], and you in turn tell it to many thousands and see to it that this page speaks when it is an old woman.)

Catullus has readers (lectores, 14b.2), not listeners.

Horace had readers (Ep. 1.19.35). He assumed that he would be read and in books (Sat. 1.10.4, Ep. 1.20, Odes 2.20, 3.30). Used copies of his books will be sent to the provinces (Ep. 1.20.9–13). He wants readers with his book open in their hands (Ep. 1.19.34):

\[\text{iuuuat immemorata ferentem ingenuis oculisque legi manibusque teneri}\]

(I rejoice that I bring things previously unknown and that I am read by free eyes and held by free hands.)\textsuperscript{143}

He goes on to say explicitly that he writes for the eye not the ear, for the private reader not the theatrical public (Ep. 1.19.35–40):\textsuperscript{144}

\[\text{scire velis, mea cur ingratus opuscula lector}
\text{lauet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus:}
\text{non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor}
\text{inensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis;}
\text{non ego nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor.}\]

(You want to know why the ungrateful reader praises and loves my little works at home, but unfairly disparages them out of doors? I do not buy

each other (cf. Cat. 50) but his published verse is in libelli (27). Ovid (Am. 1.8.2, Trist. 4.9.23 24, Pont. 2.2.95, 3.9.39, 4.15.39) speaks of “listening” only within the fiction of conversation or letters (e.g., Pont. 4.5.1 2: “Ite, leues elegi, doctas ad consulis aures / uerbaque honorato ferte legenda uiro”). Pont. 2.5.33 is interesting: “Qui si forte liber uestras peruenit ad aures”; it does not mean “if someone has read my book to you,” but “if you have heard about the existence of a previous book.” Salanus, the addressee, is reading the poetic letter of Ovid before him (“versus / legis et lectos,” 19 20).

\textsuperscript{143} Mayer 1994, 266: “H.’s ideal reader . . . ’gets to grips with’ the text personally, without the services of an anagnostes, who was a slave.”

\textsuperscript{144} For Horace the contrast is not between reading and recitation, but between poetry (for readers with books) and drama (for spectators with seats): “qui se lectori credere malunt / quam spectatoris fastidia ferre superbri” (Ep. 2.1.214 15).
the votes of the fickle public with the expense of dinners and the gift of worn out clothes. I do not for I am the disciple and protector of great writers think it worthy to suck up to the tribes of literary expounders and their lecture platforms.)

Readers love Horace's books when they read them in private, but they carp at him for not currying their favor. Horace wants readers not listeners. Horace's *monumentum aere perennius* (*Odes* 3.30.1) is not a voice reciting a poem. It is a book.

Propertius assumed that he would be read, and in books:

et turpis de te iam liber alter erit. (2.3.4)

(And now there will be a second cruel book about you.)

sat mea, sat magna est, si tres sint pompa libelli,
   quos ego Persephonae maxima dona feram. (2.13.25 26)

(My funeral procession will be enough, big enough, if it is only three books that I can bear as the greatest gifts to Persephone.)

ista meis fiet notissima forma libellis. (2.25.3)

(Your beauty will become the most famous of all because of my books.)

at Musae comites et carmina cara legenti,
   nec defessa choris Calliopea meis.
fortunata, meo si qua's celebrata libello!
   carmina erunt formae tot monumenta tuae. (3.2.15 18)

(Yet, the muses are my comrades and my songs are dear to the reader, nor has Calliope tired of my choruses. Fortunate woman, whoever is celebrated by my book. My songs will be so many memorials to your beauty.)

"Tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro
   et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?" (2.24.1 2)

("Is that how you talk, when you are a piece of gossip as a result of your famous book and your Cynthia is read all over the forum?")

Holzberg claims, “the author’s texts were intended primarily for a relatively small circle of hearers at recitations.”

145. This passage has been misunderstood since Lambinus, but Fraenkel (1957, 348 9) pointed out the correct meaning long ago: “*auditor* appears often as synonymous with *discipulus.*” Horace disdains two distinct groups: the bribable public and the professors.

people who had read Propertius’s first book were not all friends of the poet. They did not attend his readings because they knew about his private life. Total strangers were speculating about his private life because they had read his book.

The picture Propertius paints of his reader in 3.3.19–20 is quite precise:

ut tuus in scamno iactetur saepe libellus,
quam legat exspectans sola puella virum.

(So that your book, which a girl reads all alone as she waits for her man, may get often tossed aside onto the bench.)

She is not at a lecture, not at a party, not being read to. She is alone (sola) and holding the book in her hands and reading it to herself.

Propertius intended his verses for readers far away in time and space (1.7.13–14):

me legat assidue post haec neglectus amator
et prosint illi cognita nostra mala.

(Let the neglected lover in years to come read me studiously and may he profit from learning about my misfortunes.)

Propertius got his wish. The witty lover who parodied his verses, and the neglected lover who scrawled his verses years later on walls in Pompeii had read his books.

Ovid assumed that he would be read, and in books, books that could be promulgated in a second edition (Am. epigr.). He hoped that he would be read throughout time and throughout space, everywhere that Latin was read:

147. Skinner 1993, 63, for example, makes the proper interpretation of Catullus 4 limited to “listeners personally acquainted with the author.”

148. Propertius is very clear: he had become a topic of gossip (fabula), because total strangers (toto foro) had read (lecta) his successful book (noto libro). See Allen 1950, 257. To this list add Prop. 2.7.17 18: his fame for erotic servitude has traveled to the ends of the earth.


150. CIL 4.1520: Candida me docuit nigras odisse puellas (cf. Prop. 1.1.5) and CIL 4.4491 Prop. 2.5.9 10: nunc est ira recens, nunc est discedere tempus. / si dolor aferit, crede, redibit amor. The evidence from Pompeii has been carefully analyzed by Franklin 1991, esp. 87 8; see also Gigante 1979, 163 83, and Milnor, ch. 12, this volume. The people who wrote the opening lines of the Aeneid (more or less successfully) on the walls of Pompeii were not bragging that they had been to a recitation in which someone had read to them. They were bragging that they themselves knew how to read. Whether they were good at it or not is another matter.
nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,  
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,  
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,  
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam. (Met. 15.876 79)

(My name will be never be erased, and wherever Roman power spreads itself over conquered lands, I shall be read by the mouth of the people, and through all ages, if the prophets' predictions have any truth, in fame shall I live.)

His name can never be blotted out (indelebile) from the page.\textsuperscript{151} His immortality is guaranteed by the physical existence of his books.

dumque suis uictrix omnem de montibus orbem  
prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar. (Trist. 3.7.51 52)

(And while from her hills Mars’ own Rome surveys the conquered world, I shall be read.)

Quanta tibi dederim nostris monumenta libellis,  
o mihi me coniunx carior, ipsa uides.  
Detrahat auctori multum fortuna licebit,  
tu tamen ingenio clara ferere meo;  
dumque legar, mecum pariter tua fama legetur,  
nec potes in maestos omnis abire rogos. (Trist. 5.14.1 5)

(How great are the monuments I have given you in my books, you can see for yourself, my wife, dearer to me than myself. Fortune may take away much from the author, but you will be made famous by my talent. While I am read, your fame will be read equally with me.)\textsuperscript{152}

Ovid is the most widely read author in the whole world (Trist. 4.10.128: \textit{et in toto plurimus orbe legor}).\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{151} This text demonstrates an important methodological point. Whereas the metaphors of listening, speaking, singing, and so on are available to all poets, the act of reading (in literary contexts) is not a metaphor. So one can speak of the “audience” for a silent film; Yeats can urge Irish poets to sing whatever is well made without intending them to take actual harps in actual hands (“Under Ben Bulben”); Whitman writes “I sing the body electric” in a published poem (in fact an addition to that poem). See Nauta 2002, 137 8 on metaphors of “listening”; and n. 142 above.

\textsuperscript{152} And cf. Am. 1.3.25, 1.15.7 8, Ars 2.740, Rem. 363, Trist. 2.118, 4.9.17 26. His claims to immortality grow more insistent precisely as books become his only possible means of contact with his readership.

\textsuperscript{153} So, too, Mart. 1.1: “Hic est quem legis ille, quem requiris, / toto notus in orbe Martialis / argutis epigrammaton libellis” (“Here is the one you read, the one you want, Martial, known throughout the world for his clever books of epigrams.”) Cf. 5.13.3, 5.60.4 5, 6.60 (contrast 6.61), 11.3, 12.2.
Ovid in exile shows one of the many problems with any theory that the only real poetry for the Romans was performed poetry. If so, we should then expect to find a clear difference between “normal” poetry, meant for performance by the poet in front of an audience, and “abnormal” poetry, which the author was forced to send to unknown readers. In short, the *Amores* (in this theory written for recitation at Rome) ought to have not just a different subject but ought to be an utterly different kind of composition from the *Tristia* or the *Ex Ponto*.\(^\text{154}\) We ought to be able to hear the difference in the *Fasti* between verses written at Rome to be performed and those written from Tomis to be read. We ought to be able to hear at once that Martial Book 12, sent from the ends of the earth to Rome, is utterly different from his other books of epigrams, sent from Rome to the ends of the earth (2.1, 11.3, 5.61, 12.2, 12.5).

That poets expected their poems to be read out of books is shown not only by the descriptions of presentation copies of the verses (Cat. 1; [Tib.] 3.1, Ov. *Trist.* 1.1, Mart. 4.10), but also by the fact that draft versions were sent to selected readers, even when some of the poems had been recited to the very person now receiving the finished volume or prepublication proofs.\(^\text{155}\) Catullus’s friend Caecilius sent him a draft of his *Magna Mater* (Cat. 35). Vergil sent drafts of portions of the *Aeneid* to Augustus when he was away on campaign (*Vit. Don.* 31; cf. Macr. *Sat.* 1.24.11). These poets could very well have recited these works.\(^\text{156}\) They did. But they also chose to treat their verses as written words intended to be read by someone at a distance even in the earliest stages of dissemination. Quinn maintains (1982, 156):

> Performance is always implied. Even when contact with a writer takes place through a written text, that text was thought of as recording an actual performance by the writer... it is offered as, so to speak, a transcript of a performance which the reader recreates for himself.

But this is simply not the case. As often as poems offer themselves as fictive representations of the poet’s speaking voice (e.g., Cat. 4, 5), they come in the guise of fictive letters, drawing deliberate attention

---

\(^\text{154}\) Cf. the opening of *Pont.* 4.1.

\(^\text{155}\) So for the finished volume: Cat. 1 to Nepos, though he has heard or read some of the poems; Horace’s *Odes* to Augustus (*Ep.* 1.13). For a draft to be criticized: Pliny 3.15. Augustus read the first book of Horace’s *Satires* (Suet. *Vit. Hor.*). So, too, for prose, for example, *Cic. Att.* 13.21a (SB 327), 15.14.4 (SB 402), 15.27.2 (SB 406), 16.11.1 (SB 420). For Pliny, see above, esp. 1.8, 9.28. See Starr 1987, 213; Valette Cagnac 1997, 145.

\(^\text{156}\) Horace pictures the critic listening as the poet reads his verses (*Ars* 438 44), but also picking up the written book and reading, emending, annotating, and crossing out (445 50). Even in the case of *recitatio*, as Dupont notes (1997, 45): “We are dealing with a real ‘writer,’ that is someone who has entrusted his text to the page.” Cf. Valette Cagnac 1997, 116 25.
to their status as written texts (e.g., Cat. 14, 50). Even the *Sermones* ("Conversations") are written for readers.  

Accordingly, we must distinguish three different groups to whom the poet directed his verses: (1) the original addressee(s), (2) the immediate audiences (in the strict sense), and (3) the ultimate readership (in the strict sense). There may or may not be an original addressee. The addressee may or may not be fictional. There is a naive tendency on the part of some modern readers to accept the fictive situation (that we are reading a letter, overhearing a conversation or monologue or whatever) as real. Catullus may have indeed written his variations on Sappho, and then read it aloud or sent it by messenger to Lesbia, but nothing compels us to this belief any more than we believe that—or, more to the point, have ever even wondered if—Lovelace actually wrote "To Althea from Prison" to an Althea from a prison. As to the immediate audience—the happy few who happened to be friends of the poet or to be in Rome at the moment of a recitation—who heard the poems as they were being worked over, we know nothing about them or about the words they heard apart from a few stray anecdotes.

Only the readers remain, to whom the Roman poets explicitly addressed their books. What Horace's *Odes* looked or sounded like before publication is beyond all conjecture. What we do know, and the only thing we and all the poet's intended readers were meant to know, is the written, published, public text.

---

157. *Sat.* 1.10.72 4: "saepe stilum vertas, iterum quae digna legi sint / scripturus, neque te ut miretur turba labores, / contentus paucis *lectoribus*."  
158. Cf. Fantham 1996, 8: "A reading public can be assumed among the elite in Cicero's day, but most works of this period will have had both an immediate audience and a subsequent readership." Dupont 1997, 48 9: "The publication of a text gives it a new status in society: from private discourse it becomes public discourse. The book that emerges from the recitatio has as its potential audience the Roman people in their entirety." So Ov. *Trist.* 5.1.23; these are now *publica carmina*. For what was involved in "publication," see also Van Groningen 1963; Quinn 1982, 169 71; Kenney 1982, 3 32, esp. 10 12, 19 22; Starr 1987, 215; Valette Cagnac 1997, 140 58.  
159. Who were Flavius (Cat. 6), Veranius (9, 12, 28, 47), Varus (10, 22), Furius (11, 16, 23, 26), Aurelius (11, 15, 16, 21), or Asinius Marrucinus (12)? Does it really matter?  
160. Scholars speak of "letters in verse," for example, Kroll 1923, 89, or Quinn 1973, 235, on Cat. 50.  
161. The prison in any case was real; Westminster Gatehouse from April 30 to June 21, 1642.  
162. Note how Pliny (5.3.5 7) says he has no idea if any of his distinguished predecessors in light verse gave readings or not.  
163. I hope to deal with the consequences of the circulation of Roman poetry for its interpretation in future articles.