

A Book of Verse Beneath a Bough: Literature for Recreation in the Early Principate*

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That literary genres are social institutions is now a generally accepted view, and we have gradually come to treat aspects of the reception of literature, whether by reading or in oral performance, as also institutionalized. This paper aims to examine the relations between genres, reading¹ institutions and another cardinal cultural institution of Roman society, that of *otium*. To be precise, what I intend to suggest is that the Romans distinguished not only between different types of *otium*, but also between different parts of the hours of leisure, each considered to fulfill a different function, and that various types of reading were consequently assigned to different portions of the *otium*. I shall also try to show that their attitude to *otium* changed in time and that this change brought with it a modification in the attitude of Roman readers to some poetic genres.

My main concern in this discussion is with the reception of what we generally term 'light poetry', a cluster of poetic types whose dim boundaries I shall attempt to delineate presently. But it should first be emphasized that what I propose to examine is the manner in which 'light poetry' was received, and not whether and to what extent it was read or by what audience. The amount of production in these genres, together with the number of quotations from them in other extant works, even make it unnecessary to rely on the evidence of Martial, who likes to boast that he is read by everybody in Rome and throughout the world.² We may, I believe, safely assume that 'light poetry' was popular in many sections of the Roman reading population.³ My discussion will therefore turn on the ideology which accompanied the reading of such poetry, or rather on the means by which those who did read it explained such an indulgence to themselves and to others. For they do seem to have needed such an explanation, in view of the severe censure some very influential persons pronounced on such poetry. The famous *dictum* of Cicero, cited by Seneca, that he would not have read the lyric poets even if he had had twice as long a life,⁴ accords, for instance, with what Cicero has to say in *Tusculanae*

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¹ Throughout this paper I shall be using the term 'reading' in a wide sense, referring both to listening to oral performance and to reading a written text.

² E.g. 5.13.3, 6.60, 6.64.8ff., 7.97, 8.61, 9.97.3, 11.24.6; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 7.4.7, 9.11.2.

³ And, as suggested by M. Citroni, *Poesia e lettori in Roma antica: Forme della comunicazione letteraria* (Rome, 1995), 207-13, 475-82, these poetic forms were gradually becoming popular in ever widening circles of the Roman reading population.

⁴ Sen. *Ep.* 49.5: *Negat Cicero, si duplicetur sibi aetas, habiturum se tempus quo legat lyricos* (= *Hortens.* fr. 12 Grilli). The term *lyricus* was used by Romans to designate all types of light verse, such as Laevius' *Erotopaegnia* (Porphyr. *ad Hor. C.* 3.1.2-3), the poems of Serenus (Serv. *ad Verg. Aen.* 2.15) and even those of Archilochus (Dion. *GL Keil* 1.483.5-6, if the reconstruction of the text is correct).

Disputationes 4.71, where Alcaeus, Anacreon and Ibycus are condemned for their amatory verse.⁵ And Cicero's censure is not isolated. Quintilian admits only part of lyric poetry into the curriculum of the *grammaticus* and banishes from it all elegy, hendecasyllabi and Sotadic verse (*Inst.* 1.8.6). Though he includes both lyric and iambic poetry in his reading list for pupils of rhetoric, in discussing the Greek lyric poets suitable for their reading he omits Sappho, Anacreon and Ibycus altogether, and suggests caution in reading Alcaeus, who, as he says, at times 'also wrote trifles and descended to erotic verse' (*Inst.* 10.1.63).⁶ Even when, in a passage to which I shall presently return, he recognizes that accomplished orators wishing to improve their abilities might find it useful to compose light poetry, his wording is concessive: *Ne carmine quidem ludere contrarium fuerit* (*Inst.* 10.5.15), which clearly indicates that the license to practise such composition was not at all self-evident. Like Cicero in *in Pisonem* 71,⁷ Apuleius too regards the reading of lascivious poetry as unsuitable to the court of justice (*Apol.* 86),⁸ while in Gellius we find signs of embarrassment at such reading even among friends at the dinner table. In chapter 19.9 of the *Noctes Atticae* he tells us that when a group of Greek youths present at a dinner party boldly declared the Romans incapable of producing erotic poetry of any worth, his rhetoric teacher, Antonius Julianus, rose to meet their charge by citing four erotic epigrams by poets of the Sullan age. But even in this patriotic outburst *pro lingua patria tamquam pro aris et focis* (§8), Julianus begins his reply by scornfully admitting the superiority of the Greeks in all *asotia atque nequitia Alcinoium*,⁹ such as the pleasures of adornment, food and the wantonness of ditties, and only then goes on to read the Latin amatory epigrams, which he does covering his head 'as Socrates is said to have done when making a certain indecent speech' (*permittite mihi, quaeso, operire pallio caput, quod in quadam parum pudica oratione Socraten fecisse aiunt*, §9). Julianus seems to have missed a point of Socratic irony in the *Phaedrus*, since as this dialogue evolves it becomes apparent that Socrates' shame did not result from the erotic topic itself, but from the need to say things that might offend the mighty deity Eros.¹⁰ But this little slip of Julianus very nicely betrays the crucial

⁵ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.71: *quid denique homines doctissimi et summi poetae de se ipsis et carminibus edunt et cantibus? Fortis uir in sua re publica cognitus quae de iuuenum amore scribit Alcaeus! nam Anacreontis quidem tota poesis est amatoria. Maxime uero omnium flagrasse amore Reginum Ibycum apparet ex scriptis* (for the specific condemnation of Anacreon and Ibycus see also Philod. *Mus.* 4 col. xiv 7-13); cf. *Pis.* 70-71; *Parad.* 3.26.

⁶ Passages from Quintilian are quoted from M. Winterbottom's translation in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1972), with some minor changes. Other translations in this article are based on those in *LCL*.

⁷ Cf. *Sest.* 119.

⁸ See S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford, 2000), 54.

⁹ See below, n. 15.

¹⁰ Though in 237A Socrates says he covers his head so as not to get confused through shame in looking at Phaedrus (μη βλέπων πρὸς σέ ὑπ' αἰσχύνῃς διαπορώμαι), later on he declares that he intends to render his palinode with his head bare, and not covered out of shame as it was before (243B). It is, therefore, neither the erotic subject nor Phaedrus' looks which cause him to cover his head, but the fact that in his first speech he claims one should grant favours to the μη ἐρῶν rather than to the lover. Since Julianus specifically identifies the covering of his head with Socrates' attitude in the *Phaedrus*, I cannot agree with O. Murray

difference between the Greek and the Roman attitudes to erotic topics. What Socrates did out of fear of the gods, Julianus adopts as a *manière* of embarrassment when forced to commit a breach of etiquette in public.

To this evidence regarding reading, we may also add the recurrent apologies of writers of erotic and otherwise 'light' poetry, and not only those of poor Ovid, who really paid heavily for it, but also those of Statius, Martial, Pliny, Hadrian, Apuleius and Ausonius,¹¹ all of whom echo Catullus' requirement not to identify the poet's own moral behaviour with that of his poetic persona, or else attempt to establish precedents for their poetic endeavours by supplying lists of distinguished Romans who dared to compose similar poetry. But perhaps the most telling evidence for the constant censure of 'light' poetic forms in Roman society is to be found in the recurrent image of Cato, that collective super-ego figure of the Roman elite, which haunts Martial's poetry, as if always looking over his shoulder with a frown. *Non intret Cato theatrum meum, aut si intraverit, spectet*, he says in the preface to his first book of *Epigrams* referring to the anecdote about the younger Cato's leaving the theatre so as not to disturb the licentious performance of a mime, and in the poem he dedicates to Pliny, it is the approval of the *Catonnes* that is the ultimate test for the timely presentation of his light poems (10.20[19].21).¹² Sociologists and Bakhtinian literary critics would tell us that societies will always find ways to keep their *Catonnes* out of the theatre and similar institutions. So once we have established that the Romans too had to find a way to keep Cato at a distance when reading light poetry, we may turn to examine how they did this.

But first we should attempt a finer delineation of the poetic forms which needed such an outlet. In the majority of the instances we have looked at it is clear that the censure is directed mainly against erotic poetry, which not only has the reputation of aiming to arouse its readers sexually, but also, as William Fitzgerald puts it,¹³ actually befouls their mouths by putting dirty words into them, a bad enough breach of etiquette by Ciceronian standards.¹⁴ But we have strong reasons to believe that this censorious attitude extends to a much wider range of 'light poetry', for which erotic verse stands merely as a prototypical example. Referring to Cicero's objection to reading the lyric poets, Seneca indiscriminately explains: *illi ex professo lasciuunt* (*Ep.* 49.5). Quintilian's

that he is adopting 'the proper sympotic manner' of the Greeks. See 'Symposium and Genre in the Poetry of Horace', *JRS* 75 (1985), 39-50, at p.43.

¹¹ *Ov. Trist.* 2.353ff.; *Stat. Silv.* 1 *praef.*, 4 *praef.*; *Mart. Epig.* 1.4.8; *Plin. Ep.* 4.14.5, 5.3.3ff.; 7.4.6 = fr. 1. *FPL*; *Hadr. fr.* 2 *FPL*; *Apul. Apol.* 9-11; *Auson. Cent. Nupt.* 130, p. 153 Green; and see A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*² (New York and Oxford, 1992), 2-13.

¹² Cf. *Mart. Epig.* 9.27.14, 9.28, 11.2.1-4, 11.5.13-14, 11.39.15 (a censorious *paedagogus* called a 'Cato'); also *Hor. Ep.* 1.19.12-14; *Phaed.* 4.7.21-24; *Sen. Ep.* 123.11; *Petr.* 132.15 (*quid me constricta spectatis fronte Catones?*); *Sentius Augurinus fr.* 1.7 *FPL* (*Plin. Ep.* 4.27.3, perhaps dependent on *Mart. Epig.* 10.20[19] — see H. Dahlmann, 'Die Hendekasyllaben des Sentius Augurinus, Plinius, ep. 4, 27', *Gymnasium* 87 [1980], 167-77); *Tac. Dial.* 10.6; and further V. Buchheit, 'Catull an Cato von Utica (c. 56)', *Hermes* 89 (1961), 345-56, at pp. 353-5; Richlin (n. 11), 11-12.

¹³ W. Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), 63. Cf. *Mart. Epig.* 4.6.

¹⁴ E.g. *Off.* 1.126-7; *de Or.* 2.242, 252; *Sen. Contr.* 1.2.23; see Richlin (n. 11), 13-26.

censure of Alcaeus is somewhat more cautious. In some of his poems, he says, *et lusit et in amores descendit* (*Inst.* 10.1.63). Though he thus distinguishes amatory poetry from other types of light verse, his condemnation of *erotica* extends to these as well. Statius, as we have seen, finds it necessary to apologize for the poems written *stilo remissiore* of his *Silvae* (1 *praef.*), most of which are not even remotely erotic.

The differentiation between *seria* and *lusus*, *delectaria*, *desidia* or *nugae* is of course a very common one. But what is 'serious'? Since gods, empire, politics and the forum certainly are, and love, dice and *symposia* clearly are not, a distinction between private and public concerns may serve as one criterion of what may be deemed 'serious'. But perhaps the most important criterion for such a differentiation is the one between usefulness and pleasure, dating back to Plato and Hellenistic poetic theories, often evoked in Cicero, and phrased in the dichotomy Horace tries to bridge: *Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae | aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae* (*Ars* 333-334).¹⁵ Martial, on the other hand, is quite happy with giving pleasure alone: *Seria cum possim, quod delectantia malo | scribere*, he says in 5.16.1-2, and in the preceding epigram: *Non prosint sane, me tamen ista iuuant* (5.15.6).

Some of our difficulties in delineating the exact boundaries of the Roman concept of 'light poetry' seem to arise from the fact that the category of the 'useful' does not always correspond to the traditional classification of poetic genres. Among the censured types of poetry we thus find, apart from epigram and elegy, also bucolic poetry, which would be considered a type of 'Epos' in school-room classifications;¹⁶ lyric is at times indiscriminately condemned, at others differentiated, as we have noted in Quintilian; and while iambic poetry is in general closely associated with the disreputable epigram, satire is sometimes rejected for its licentious language, sometimes deemed beneficial because of its important role in exposing the ailments of society. Similarly whereas comedy, the so-called 'mirror of human life', is sometimes included among the

¹⁵ See also *Ars* 343-344; cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.72: *poetis... in quibus nulla solida utilitas omnisque puerilis est delectatio*. See further in J. Tate, 'Horace and the Moral Function of Poetry', *CQ* 22 (1928), 65-72; J.F. D'Alton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism* (London, 1931), 483-8; P. De Lacy, 'Stoic Views of Poetry', *AJPh* 69 (1948), 241-71, at pp. 249-51; C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry*, vol. I *Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles* (Cambridge, 1963), 128-9; vol. II *The 'Ars Poetica'* (Cambridge, 1971), 352-3; D.A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*² (London, 1995), 85-6, 94-5; E. Asmis, 'Epicurean Poetics', in D. Obbink (ed.), *Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus, and Horace* (New York and Oxford, 1995), 15-34. Note also that the allusion to *Od.* 8-9 and the Phaeacian φιληθονία in Gellius' *nequitia Alcinoium* (19.9.8), though a commonplace in ancient descriptions of the pleasures of food, drink and poetry (e.g. Hor. *Ep.* 1.2.27-31; Macr. *Sat.* 7.1.14), is especially frequent in philosophical discussions of the functions of poetry (e.g. Plat. *Rep.* 3, 390A-B; Arist. *Pol.* 8.2, 1338a13-30), and of Epicurean poetic ideas in particular (Heraclit. *All.* 79; Ps.-Plut. *Vit. Hom.* 150 Keaney-Lamberton; Ath. 12, 513A-C). See further E. Kaiser, 'Odyssee-Szenen als Topoi, II', *MH* 21 (1964), 197-224, at pp. 213-23; Asmis, *op. cit.*, 16-17.

¹⁶ Though in accordance with Hellenistic practice Quintilian lists Theocritus among the epic poets, he seems to feel that bucolic poetry is a distinct literary type (*in suo genere Theocritus*, *Inst.* 10.1.55). By the time of Diomedes *bucolica* is no longer listed with epic, but as an independent genre (Keil, *GL* I.486).

respectable genres, old comedy in particular is often held in disrepute together with mime and its literary form, the *mimiambi*. Though we do not have an explicit and comprehensive list of the poetic genres Roman society considered questionable, some representative selections of them are at times listed in our sources. Pliny thus couples his 'light verse' with comedy, mime, lyric and Sotadic poetry (*Ep.* 5.3.2), and in Tacitus' *Dialogus* Aper betrays his prejudices in saying there is something venerable in all types of literary expression, but then specifying: *nec solum cothurnum uestrum aut heroici carminis sonum, sed lyricorum quoque iucunditatem et elegorum lasciuias et iamborum amaritudinem et epigrammatum lusus et quamcumque aliam speciem eloquentia habeat* (Tac. *Dial.* 10.4). And if the specialization of Muses is anything to go by, Thalea, who is mainly a patron of comedy in the Greek world (e.g. *AP* 9.504, 505; *Plut. Mor.* 745A), seems to preside over all light poetry for the Romans.¹⁷

But how can one and the same society produce both such an abundance of 'light poetry' and such an overwhelming ideological objection to it? The assumption of distinct types of audiences is a common explanation. There were those who, like Cicero, would not read such poetry at all (at least once they were no longer young and frivolous), and others who simply did not share his ideological objection to 'light poetry' and similar *nequitia*. Among the latter we might include Epicureans, women and other social sectors whom lack of pedigree, financial means or talent debarred from what in Roman terms would be serious and respectable occupations. And of course there were also those frivolous by nature, *umbratici* as they were sometimes called, whether they were idling with poetic trifles in the shade of a *platanus* in the countryside or in an urban *domus*.¹⁸ We may, I believe, assume that such a clear-cut distinction between two types of people would not have been alien to the mind of either Cicero or Catullus.¹⁹ I am not that sure it would have been embraced by, say, Memmius, Calvus, Hortensius or Caesar. Some Roman dignitaries might have found it politically advantageous to be viewed as somewhat *risqué*, and others might well have indulged in light reading in private, while condemning it in public, as Martial likes to suggest.²⁰ Or as Paul Zanker puts it: 'Far from Rome and its tradition-bound constraints, even a conservative aristocrat could indulge in

¹⁷ E.g. bucolic poetry: Verg. *Ecl.* 6.2; Calp. *Ecl.* 6.77; lyric: Hor. *C.* 4.6.25; Ov. *Ep.* 15.84; elegy: Ov. *Ars* 1.264; *Tr.* 4.10.56; 5.9.31; Sid. *C.* 9.261; epigram: Mart. 4.8.12, 4.23.4, 7.17.4, 7.46.4, 8.73.3, 9.26.8, 9.73.9, 10.20[19].3; nugatory hexameter: *Culex* 1; comedy: Stat. *Silv.* 2.1.116. And note the frequent description of Thalea as *lasciua*, and the etymological interpretation of her name as deriving from θαλιάζειν — 'merry-making' (e.g. *Plut. Mor.* 746E; see below, n. 42). Though in the Augustan age the assignment of provinces to the Muses was still vague, some poets were already assigning them responsibility for specific literary types (cf. Prop. 3.3.33); see R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book I* (Oxford, 1970), ad C. 1.24.3.

¹⁸ J.E.B. Mayor, *Thirteen Satires of Juvenal with Commentary*² (London, 1872) ad Juv. 7.105, 173; J.-M. André, *L'otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine* (Paris, 1966), 93 n. 20, 478-80; J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, 1969), 136-9.

¹⁹ Note Catullus' insistence on ideologically loaded terms such as *nugae*, *otiosus*, *ludo*, *delicati*, especially in poems 1 and 50. I tend to take poems 49 and 56 with Buchheit, *art. cit.* (n. 12), as also embracing the ideological distinction between the serious and the frivolous.

²⁰ Mart. *Epig.* 4.49.10, 11.16.9-10; cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.35-36; Stat. *Silv.* 4 *praef.*

the most frivolous distractions of Greek culture'.²¹ But while we may suppose that Cicero's views had not yet reached their compelling ideological status in his own generation, they do seem to dominate the writings of later authors, such as Quintilian, the younger Pliny and Gellius, and it is here that we encounter a new manner of accommodating light reading within that severe ideology.

To understand how this mechanism of circumventing a hostile ideology worked we should turn our attention to *otium*. That reading is an occupation for one's free time hardly needs demonstration. In Roman literature we find this explicitly pronounced at least from the time of Cicero and Lucretius. The spare time of a gentleman, that is whenever he was debarred from fulfilling his *officium* by a public holiday or by forced retirement, was, according to Cicero's ideas, to be dedicated to literary preoccupations. But this *otium litteratum*, as he calls it (*Tusc.* 5.105), consisted solely of reading and discussing serious literature such as historiography, philosophy and the respectable poetic genres, which may be deemed profitable to an orator as enriching his knowledge, providing him with noble ideas or improving his stylistic versatility. There was no room here for light reading, which explains Cicero's statement that he would never have any time (*negat ... habiturum se tempus*) for reading it.²²

But life under the early principate could not but bring a change in the attitude to *otium* of the Roman aristocratic elite, which very often found itself hindered from practising its intellectual skills in political life. In Seneca's dialogue *de Otio* we already find a concession to an Epicurean style of life of pure *otium*: *uiuere otioso licet*, he says, as long as this *otium* is given mainly to contemplation and the study of philosophy, which may at least be deemed of value to human ideas, if not directly beneficial to the state (8.1).²³ For Pliny, though he was always an active member of forensic and political life, *otium* is often the preferred time, much cherished, carefully thought out and often talked about.²⁴ For Gellius it is the centre of life, and his *Noctes Atticae*, as he says explicitly in his preface, is primarily meant to lure its readers to the pursuits suitable for a gentleman's spare time, to a *delectatio in otio atque in ludo liberalior* as he puts it (*praef.* 16).²⁵

Yet even those for whom *otium* came to play such an important role in life maintained a sharp distinction between the respectable pursuits of an *otium litteratum* and the reading of light poetry. One way of sanctioning such reading on the one hand, while keeping it distinctly separated from serious study on the other, was to assign it special temporal boundaries, parallel, in a way, to the spatial ones suggested by Zanker. Among public holidays, the traditional setting of Cicero's learned discussions, reading light

²¹ P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 25.

²² For *otium litteratum*, see André (n. 18), 279-334.

²³ See further J.-M. André, 'Otium et la vie contemplative dans les *Lettres à Lucilius*', *REL* 40 (1962), 125-8; W.A. Laidlaw, 'Otium', *G&R* n.s. 15 (1968), 42-52.

²⁴ E.g. *Ep.* 1.9.6: *O rectam sinceramque uitam! O dulce otium honestumque ac paene omni negotio pulchrius!* and the whole passage 5-8, 1.3.3 and the passages discussed below; see further A.-M. Guillemin, *Pline et la vie littéraire de son temps* (Paris, 1929), 14-16; W. Eck, 'Cum dignitate otium: Senatorial domus in Imperial Rome', *SCI* 16 (1997), 162-90, at p. 187.

²⁵ Also *praef.* 12, 19, 23.

verse was conceded to the *Saturnalia*, when *nequitia* was sanctioned by custom and religion. 'While mid-December affords you a little leisure, judge the jests you read' says Martial (*Epig.* 7.28.7-8),²⁶ and, as shown by Mario Citroni, the same line of defence also serves Ovid in his apology in book 2 of the *Tristia*.²⁷

Similar time limitations were also assigned to light poetry during the leisure hours within the daily routine, namely dinner-time and especially the time of the *symposium* which followed it. 'My book is a dinner guest and a reveler', says Martial (*Epig.* 5.16.9). After 4 p.m., if we need a precise moment, since *hora libellorum decuma est* (ib. 4.8.7; cf. 13.2.10); or better still: 'when the fifth drink is mixed, but before it cools' (ib. 2.1.9-10; cf. 4.82.5-6). This insistence on the right portion of the day is particularly prominent in the famous poem dedicated to Pliny (ib. 10.20[19]): 'But mind you don't knock tipsily on the eloquent door at a time which is not yours', Martial says in lines 12-13, and then in line 19: *Haec hora est tua*, referring to the time of the *symposium*, in which such reading would be allowed even by the strictest of censors, the ever present *Catones*. The same time of day is assigned by Quintilian to reading elegy (*Inst.* 10.1.58); Pliny prefers comedy (*Ep.* 9.36.4); the setting of Gellius' chapter 19.9, where amatory poems were both read and discussed, is also a *symposium*. Gellius also tells us that at a dinner party he attended at the villa of his friend the poet Julius Paulus, Laevius' *Alcestis* was recited (19.7.2), and that at Favorinus' table either an old piece by one of the lyric poets or something from history was usually read (2.22.1).²⁸ Though it is clear that Greek sympotic customs played an important role in introducing the habit of reading light verse into the Roman *cena*,²⁹ we may suspect that this licence might well have had another justification, a practical one: with all the food and drink Martial insists on, the time after dinner would simply be unsuitable for any of the more serious pursuits of an *otium litteratum*.

But assigning special times to the reading of light poetry was not the only manner in which the Roman elite managed to accommodate it to the prevailing serious attitude to *otium*. In the period we have been examining, we may also note a slight, but significant, change in the functions ascribed to *otium*. As pointed out by Jean-Marie André,³⁰ writers of the early principate display a gradual increase in their insistence on the necessity of relaxation and relaxation from daily toil that leisure activities can provide. The idea is not new, and we find it occasionally in Cicero's dialogues, for instance in Crassus'

²⁶ *Otia dum medius praestat tibi parua December, | exige, sed certa, quos legis, aure iocos.* Cf. 4.14.7; 10.18 (17).

²⁷ M. Citroni, 'Marziale e la Letteratura per I Saturnali (poetica dell'intrattenimento e cronologia della pubblicazione dei libri)', *ICS* 14 (1989), 201-23.

²⁸ Also Pers. 1.134 *post prandia Callirhoen do*, whatever sort of light entertainment this stands for (see below, n. 47).

²⁹ Cf. e.g. Macr. *Sat.* 1.1.3 (though for the serious guests described in that work, even the context of a *cena* within the *Saturnalia* allows only for *alacritatem lascivia carentem* [ib. 2.1.8]); and see O. Murray, *JRS* 75 (1985), 39-50.

³⁰ Jean-Marie André, 'L'otium chez Valère-Maxime et Velleius Paterculus ou la réaction morale au début du principat', *REL* 43 (1965), 294-315; idem, 'Le *de Otio* de Fronton et les loisirs de Marc-Aurèle', *REL* 49 (1971), 228-61. Also J.P. Toner, *Leisure and Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1995), 25-32.

words in the *de Oratore* 2.22: *oti fructus est non contentio animi, sed relaxatio*.³¹ But whereas in Cicero the necessity of relaxation is concessively recognized, as long as it is not allowed to interfere with the more serious pursuits of an *otium litteratum*, and never in confessedly autobiographical passages, in Valerius Maximus leisure is already associated primarily with recreation: *Otium*, he says, *praecipue subnecti debet, non quo euanescit uirtus, sed quo recreatur* (chapter 8.8). And similarly Seneca, in *de Tranquillitate Animi* 17.5: *Danda est animis remissio; meliores acrioresque requieti surgent*.³² Later we find the idea commonly expressed in Quintilian, Statius, Martial, the younger Pliny, Fronto and Gellius,³³ often with reference to the *exempla* of Scipio and Laelius, Scaevola and Crassus, at times with a comparison of the need for such recreation to the necessity of sleep, at others with ample discussion of the types of activities best suited for relaxation. The manner in which one seeks relaxation thus becomes a part both of the self-representation of gentlemen such as Pliny and Gellius and of the portrayals of emperors, whether favourable or disparaging. *Otio prodimur* says Pliny in his *Panegyricus* (82.9), and goes on to compare the vile *laxamenta* of Domitian with the honourable ones of Trajan. Fronto's letters are full of admonitions to Marcus as to the necessity of relaxation and how it is to be gained. And the diversions of the emperors are almost a standard item in their portrayals in the *Historia Augusta*.³⁴

Here reading of light poetry found an ideological niche which allowed it to be deemed not an idle pleasure or a tolerable pastime (*διαγωγή*),³⁵ but a profitable activity, providing the relaxation from intellectual effort necessary to ensure the continuation of more serious mental toil.³⁶ Thus, in *Ep.* 7.9.9, Pliny recommends his own practice of writing light verse to Fuscus Salinator, saying *fas est et carmine remitti*, 'not of the long and continuous type', he makes clear, 'but of the polished and short kind, which interrupts your duties and responsibilities, and is called "light verse" (*lusus uocantur*)'.³⁷ Pliny is much bolder in his famous defence of his poetic trifles in letter 5.3.2: 'So as to

³¹ See the whole passage *de Or.* 2.19-22; and cf. *Off.* 1.103-4; *Hort.* fr. 6 Grilli.

³² Cf. *Ov. Pont.* 1.4.21-22; *Sen. ad Polyb.* 6.4.

³³ *Quint. Inst.* 1.3.8, 10.3.26-7; *Stat. Silv.* 4.4.33-34; *Fro. Fer. Als.* 3 (pp. 227-33 v.d.H.²), *Marc. Caes.* 3.7.1 (p. 40); *Gell.* 14.5.1, 15.2.5, 18.2; for the idea cf. also *Arist. EN* 10.6, 1176b33-77a1; *Dist. Cat.* 3.6 (Boas).

³⁴ E.g. *HA, Hadr.* 26.2-5; *Marc.* 6.8-10; *Ver.* 4.6-10; cf. *Tac. Ann.* 4.67.5; *Philostr. VS* 490.

³⁵ Cf. *Arist. Pol.* 8.2, 1338a22.

³⁶ In this respect the development I propose, which involves a clear differentiation between recreation as a harmless pastime and as an actually profitable activity, differs widely from that suggested by I. Watt for the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England (*The Rise of the Novel* [Harmondsworth, 1957], 47-52), who contends that this genre came to be regarded as a legitimate pastime for the ever increasing leisure hours of new social sectors other than the elite. Note also that the change I am concerned with here occurs within the ideological framework of the Roman elite, and does not involve other social strata, though there might well have been developments in their reading habits as well; see, for instance, Citroni, *loc. cit.* (n. 3).

³⁷ On Pliny's attitude to light verse, see further P.V. Cova, *La critica letteraria di Plinio il giovane* (Brescia, 1966), esp. 36, 112-15; F. Gamberini, *Stylistic Theory and Practice in the Younger Pliny* (Hildesheim, 1983), 103-10; D. Hershkowitz, 'Pliny the Poet', *G&R* n.s. 43 (1995), 168-81.

aggravate my offence, I shall thus respond to my critics: I do indeed often write verse which is far from serious; for I also listen to comedy, watch mime performances, read lyric poetry and appreciate Sotadic verse; besides I sometimes laugh, make jokes and have fun, and to sum up all these types of innocent relaxation briefly, I am a man' — *utque omnia innoxiae remissionis genera breuiter amplectar, homo sum*. Here both the composition and the reading of light verse are numbered among legitimate and harmless recreative activities of the type usually held in suspicion.³⁸ And being a Man is what for Pliny ultimately justifies indulgence in such harmless relaxation. That a man cannot, and should not, always be serious, is not a normal constituent of the Roman ideal of *humanitas*, but for Pliny it is. The idea recurs in a letter in which he tells Maturus Arrianus about a recitation of his verse that he held, as he says, in order to accustom his poems to being heard by a leisured audience in the dining-room (*utque... adsuescerent et ab otiosis et in tricilinio audiri*; 8.21.2). Pliny opens his letter by saying: 'In literature as in life, I think it is a becoming sign of humanity to mingle grave and gay (*Vt in uita sic in studiis pulcherrimum et humanissimum existimo seueritatem comitatemque miscere*)', though he is then careful to add that he always puts duty before pleasure and serious work before amusement. *Ipse*, he says elsewhere (2.2.2), *ad uillam partim studiis partim desidia fruor*, and in praising the epigrams and mimiambics of Arrius Antoninus, a man he credits with a distinguished political career and unquestionable virtue and prestige, he adds 'but it is for your recreation that I admire you more (*ego tamen te uel magis in remissionibus miror*) because you season your seriousness with pleasantry, your gravity with charm' (ib. 4.3.1).

Quintilian is not as enthusiastic about relaxation as Pliny is, but he too finds the composition of verse suitable for relaxation, comparing it to the leisurely rest and the temporary respite from the strictures of diet even athletes allow themselves (*Inst.* 10.5.15). And as for reading poetry, at the beginning of his syllabus for the school of rhetoric Quintilian evokes Theophrastus in recommending it as useful for the training of the orator's style, but finds it especially suitable for the refreshment of the weary minds of those engaged in daily legal activity. 'Consequently', he proceeds, 'Cicero recommends the relaxation provided by the reading of poetry — *in hac lectione Cicero requiescendum putat*' (10.1.27).

This is usually taken to refer to Cicero, *Pro Archia* §12 and §16. It is, however, doubtful that we should take these passages from a speech in which Archias' achievement and service to the community are of crucial importance to Cicero's case, as necessarily expressing the orator's own ideas about the uses of reading. As a whole, Cicero's argument in this speech relies much more on the traditional function of poetry, that is to celebrate the laudable deeds of great men, and he is careful to suppress any mention of Archias' epigrams, referring specifically only to his poem on the Cimbrian war (§19) and the promised piece on events during Cicero's recent consulate (§28). But since

³⁸ The apparent allusion to Ter. *HT* 77 (*homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*) has often been noted but, since in the original context it expresses Chremes' willingness to pay attention to the affairs of other people, it does not seem to add much to Pliny's argument. It seems, therefore, that it is the absolute meaning of the words *homo sum* that Pliny wants for his argument, perhaps with the additional sense of a common human interest suggested by the independent proverbial usage of Terence's line.

Archias' epigrams, apparently his major poetic achievements, were undoubtedly known to Cicero's audience, he anticipates their objection by adding (§16): 'And even if this great fruit could not have been found in it, and if pleasure alone could have been sought in these pursuits, I think you would nevertheless deem them a relaxation of the mind most suitable for a man and a gentleman — *animi remissionem humanissimam ac liberallissimam iudicaretis*'. 'Furthermore', he adds, 'such poems do not harm our public duties, while giving us pleasure at home, and in our spare hours at night, on journeys and in our country villas'.

We may, therefore, conclude that the idea that reading poetry, perhaps even light poetry in particular, may be deemed beneficial for its recreative capacity, was not alien to Cicero and his age, though we cannot be sure that he himself shared this view, which seems to contradict his attitude in less biased passages. An explicit rejection of light reading as an occupation suitable for a gentleman's *otium* might have been included at the beginning of his *Hortensius*. In fr. 6 of this dialogue according to Grilli's reconstruction, Hortensius states that he is not interested in what would render his mind more acute, but in what would relax it (*quaero enim non quibus intendam rebus animum, sed quibus relaxem ac remittam*), presumably after the conversation turned to the topic of *otium*. The young Catulus then says something about tragedy and comedy (frs. 8-10), Lucullus recommends historiography, and finally philosophy becomes the main issue of the dialogue. If, as Grilli assumes, it is in this part of the *Hortensius* that Seneca found Cicero's denunciation of the lyric (fr. 12), the fragment might well represent the vehement objection of one of the interlocutors to the suggestion to devote one's *otium* to such poetry and find relaxation in reading it. It is tempting to assume that the original proposal was put in the mouth of Catulus as a continuation of his discussion of tragedy and comedy, and perhaps even with some reference to his father's toying with the composition of erotic epigrams.

But though the idea that poetry, as well as music, could serve as a means of relaxation was recognized by Cicero and his contemporaries, as indeed already by Aristotle,³⁹ let us note a slight turn given it by Roman authors of the Flavian and Antonine age.⁴⁰ In *NA* 19.9.5 Gellius explains his decision to include an Anacreontic poem in his book: *ut interea labor hic uigiliarum et inquietas suauitate paulisper uocum atque modulorum adquiesceret*. The passage reveals a striking similarity in both terminology and ideas to lines 5 to 8 of Catullus' poem 68a. There, Catullus is answering a friend's request to write something comforting for him, since Mallius (if this is the correct reading of the name) cannot find solace either in love or in old poems:

quem neque sancta Venus molli *requiescere* somno
 desertum in lecto caelibe perpetitur,
 nec ueterum dulci scriptorum carmine Musae
 oblectant, cum mens anxia *peruigilat*:

³⁹ *Pol.* 8.7, 1341b41f. (effect of music); cf. *Plat. Leg.* 2, 653D; and *Verg. Ecl.* 5.45-6 for a comparison of the effect of (light) poetry to that of sleep.

⁴⁰ See also *Stat. Silv.* 5.3.98 for the recreative effect of comedy (*lasciua Thalia*). I could not, however, find any reference to the recreative capacity of light poetry in Martial, who requires that his readers approach his poems when they are already relaxed (*fronte remissa*, *Epig.* 4.14.11-12).

But let us note that what both the poem Mallius asks for and the *ueterum scriptorum carmen* fail to do is to relieve his sadness, whereas Gellius' use of the Anacreontic poem is to rest his mind from intellectual effort, and more specifically from the nocturnal toils of his *otium* pursuits. We thus see that for Gellius clearly, and, as we have seen, possibly also for Quintilian and Pliny, the relaxation provided by reading or composing light verse is not from the daily wear and tear of the courts but from the mental efforts of an *otium litteratum*. Such recreative reading is thus kept distinct from both *negotium* and the respectable *otium*, and becomes a *divertissement* specifically germane to the leisure of those normally engaged in intellectual activity.⁴¹

Furthermore, since reading poetry of the more respectable types formed part of the pursuits of the *otium litteratum*, this particular manner of recreational reception appears to have become specifically reserved for the lighter poetic forms which were excluded from it. This is not to say that we do not find references to other literary forms being read for the sake of recreation. In a letter Marcus Aurelius sends to Fronto (*Ant. Imp.* 4.1.3, 105 v.d.H.²) he asks his teacher to let him have something to read, by Fronto himself, by Cato, Cicero, Sallust or Gracchus, or by one of the poets, since he is in need of relaxation (χρήζω γὰρ ἀναπαύλης). What he wants therefore, he continues, is 'something whose reading may cheer and relieve him from the cares that beset him'. For Marcus, therefore, recreative reading is not associated with any literary genre in particular, and certainly not with the light genres. In *Med.* 6.12, he even speaks of his philosophical pursuits as something to turn to when he is in need of relaxation. But then conscientious emperors did not have as many free hours as Gellius to dedicate to an *otium litteratum*, and being a devoted Stoic does not encourage indulgence in any sort of gratification.

The Greeks were always less fastidious in their attitude to light verse. True, Dio of Prusa recommends that those interested in an instant public career should not waste time on lyric, elegy, iambic poetry and dithyrambs, but leave them to the men of leisure (τῷ σχολῆν ἀγούντι, *Or.* 18.8), but his reasons for this are practical rather than ideological. Plutarch, on the other hand, even hesitates as to whether the bibulous atmosphere of a Roman *cena* is respectable enough for reciting the venerable Sappho and Anacreon (*Mor.* 711D). Less specifically Plutarch does count New Comedy (712B-D) and the singing of lyric poetry (712F-713C) among the types of entertainment appropriate for people relaxing over their wine at the dinner table, and we can note that though one of his major concerns in *Questiones Convivales* is that a symposium should aim to provide not only pleasure but also some (intellectual) profit (e.g. 711A), this is represented as an exceptional attempt to modify, but not reject, the general Greek consensus which classes all sympotic entertainments as play (ἐν παιδιᾷς μέρει, *Mor.* 710F) and associates them with relaxation (ἀνεσις, 711A).⁴² Admittedly, this is circumstantial evidence. We do

⁴¹ It is possible that a similar idea lies also behind a strange biographical detail provided by Servius concerning the circumstances in which he started writing his treatise *de Metriis Horatii: Horatium, cum in campania otiarer, excerpti* (*GL* Keil 4.468.6). It seems that what Servius wants us to note is that before Horace became the subject of his professional inquiries, he too regarded him as recreative reading only.

⁴² Note that Plutarch associates the Muse Thalea primarily with θαλάζειν and the symposium (*Mor.* 746E), though he is aware of other etymological interpretations of the name (745A, 746C).

however find the recreative capacity of reading explicitly adduced by a Greek concerning another literary type. In the preface to his *Verae Historiae* Lucian says: 'Men interested in athletics and in the care of their bodies think not only of condition and exercise, but also of relaxation (ἀνεσις) ...; in like manner intellectuals (οἱ περὶ τοὺς λόγους), after much reading of serious works, may profitably relax their minds (ἀνίεναι τὴν διάνοιαν) and put them in better trim for future labour. It would be appropriate recreation (ἐμμελής ἢ ἀνάπαυσις) for them if they were to take up the sort of reading that instead of affording just pure amusement ... also boasts a little food for thought' (*VH* 1.1-2) which, as he suggests, his present work may provide. Lucian thus acknowledges that intellectuals may find legitimate relaxation in reading literature of a type aiming mainly to amuse, while recommending his marvellous tales as something that can afford such relaxation and also offer some intellectual profit. We should not, of course, take his last claim too seriously, but since this passage is probably as parodic as the rest of the work, it suggests that such claims were a commonplace of prefaces, perhaps together with the comparison to the relaxation of athletes, which we also encounter in Quintilian *Inst.* 10.5.15.⁴³ We might even guess which type of works proclaimed such capacities in their prefaces — the fabulous travel narratives of authors such as Ctesias, Iambulus and especially *The Incredible Things Beyond Thule* of Antonius Diogenes, which according to Photius (111b35) were the main target of Lucian's *VH*. Photius also tells us that in the preface to his novel Antonius dedicated his work to his sister who was 'fond of learning' (φιλομαθῶς ἔχουσα, 111a33, 111a41), which led Ewen Bowie to assume that this novel 'was intended for the light relief of the πεπαιδευμένοι'.⁴⁴

We do not know whether the genre of fabulous travelogues was still in vogue in Lucian's day. But at that time we witness the flourishing of the Greek novel, a 'light' literary type similar in many ways to that parodied by Lucian. Can we assume that the niche of recreative reading accommodated this genre too? The almost complete silence of external sources concerning the novel was for long considered a sign that it was literature for specific, and not very respectable, sectors of the literate populace: women or the *semidocti*. Recent studies, however, have shown that this genre too is heavily dependent on the canonical literary types, and therefore could not have been fully appreciated by any but the most learned audience, the same that also read Lucian or frequented the performances of the new Sophists.⁴⁵ If we take the fact that the Greek novel is hardly mentioned in contemporary sources as an indication that it was not considered respectable enough to be talked about, it might have been in need of a justification similar to the one required for 'light poetry' in the Roman world. An *argumentum ex silentio*, however, is a weaker proof of the existence of a hostile ideology than the overt objections and explicit apologies that we find in the Roman world. Furthermore, unlike

⁴³ See also D.Chr. 18.6.

⁴⁴ E. Bowie, 'The Ancient Readers of the Greek Novel', in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 1996), 87-106, at p. 106, cf. p. 103. B.E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), 235 assumes that Lucian's *Metamorphoses* had a similar preface.

⁴⁵ See S.A. Stephens, 'Who Read Ancient Novels?', in J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore and London, 1994), 405-18; E. Bowie, 'The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World', *ibid.* 435-59; *idem*, *art. cit.* n. 44.

Antonius' work and its parodies in Lucian, most Greek novels begin *in medias res* and do not have prefaces in which the niche of recreative reading could have been adduced. Yet one novel, Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, does have a preface, in which we find the proclamation that this book has the power to relieve its readers from pain and mental anguish (ὁ καὶ νοσοῦντα ἴασεται καὶ λυπούμενον παραμυθήσεται, *praef.* 2).⁴⁶ We find a similar view concerning the effect of story-telling in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: it can take the mind off the roughness of the road: *iugi, quod insurgimus, aspritudinem fabularum lepida iucunditas leuigabit* (*Met.* 1.2; cf. 1.20).⁴⁷ If Apuleius' words may be taken as self-referential, then here too, as in Longus, we find the idea that stories of the sort they tell may be used as a distraction from the toils of everyday life. Admittedly, however, neither speaks of a distraction that could also have a beneficial effect beyond the duration of the narrative speech-act itself by refreshing the minds of readers and enabling them to resume their serious activities.⁴⁸

In the course of history we find this special niche of recreative reading occupied by other non-canonical or suspect literary types. In the Middle Ages, as shown by Glending Olson,⁴⁹ it accommodated Plautine comedy, the poem on *Aucassin et Nicolette*, the *Fabliaux* and late medieval court lyrics. More recently we may name the detective story as a genre deemed 'light' and not altogether respectable, yet sanctioned by occupying this niche of suitable recreational reading for intellectuals, side by side with gardening or chess. In the ancient world too, as we have seen, this niche seems always to have been available. In some periods, such as the late first and the second centuries, it was assigned to specific literary types in particular, providing a living space for works that were not deemed reputable or profitable in other respects. In the same period we also find an increased preoccupation with leisure, and with its recreative function in particular, and it is likely that the two developments were connected. It is just possible that they were also connected with the flourishing of 'light' poetic forms that we seem to witness in second-century Rome.⁵⁰ But since we cannot be sure that the fragments of Annianus

⁴⁶ For the idea that literature, like music, can relieve anguish or pain, cf. e.g. Eur. *Med.* 197; Hor. *C.* 2.13.37-38, 4.11.35-36, *Ep.* 1.2.31; Ov. *Pont.* 1.5.53-5; Plut. *Mor.* 143D, 710E.

⁴⁷ Roman readers seem to have treated Apuleius' novel in the same way that they treated 'light poetry': 'cum ille neniis quibusdam anilibus occupatus inter Milesias Punicas Apulei sui et ludicra litteraria consenesceret' (*HA, Clodius Albinus* 12.12). Cf. *Petr.* 132.15, which may also be taken as self-referential to the *Satyrica*. If Persius' *post prandia Callirhoen do* (1.134) refers to Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoë*, as has sometimes been suggested, it may be taken as yet another indication that the Romans regarded the novel as a 'light' literary form. But the identification is not at all certain; see W. Kißel's commentary on Persius (Heidelberg, 1990), 287, n. 591; B.P. Reardon, 'Chariton', in Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel*, (n. 44), 309-35, at pp. 315-17.

⁴⁸ Note also that the idea does not appear only in the novel, and occurs, for instance, in the preface to Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* (τὰ ἄχθη σοι κουφιεῖ τῆς γνώμης, 480).

⁴⁹ G. Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982), 128-63.

⁵⁰ For Latin poetry of the second century, see P. Steinmetz, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Literatur des zweiten Jahrhunderts nach Christi Geburt* (Wiesbaden, 1982), 314-40; idem, 'Lyrische Dichtung im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.', *ANRW* II.33.1 (1989), 259-302; A. La Penna, 'La cultura letteraria latina nel secolo degli Antonini', in *Storia di Roma*, II *L'impero*

and the evidence of Apuleius and Gellius provide us with the full picture of Roman poetry of the Antonine age,⁵¹ it might not be safe to suggest that the accommodation of 'light' literary forms in this niche of recreative reading in an age for which recreation was such an important issue also resulted in an increase in the production of such poetry.

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mediterraneo, 3 *La cultura e l'impero* (Torino, 1992), 491-501. It is, of course, also possible that the flourishing of 'light' poetic forms in the second century was encouraged by Hadrian's example.

⁵¹ Note that, only a few years earlier, Juvenal was still speaking of a whole range of literary types composed in his day.