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THEME

NOSTALGIA AND PLAYING WITH LATIN

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Contents

Editorial Note iii

Dialogue

JACQUELINE ARTHUR-MONTAGNE
The Comic Latin Grammar in Victorian England 2

SCOTT J. DIGIULIO
Reading and (Re)Writing the *Auctores*: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscellany 33

PIET GERBRANDY
The *Hisperica Famina* as an *Ars Poetica*: An Interpretation of the A-Text 60

Response piece

CATHERINE CONYBEARE
Playfulness, Pedagogy, and Patrician Values 81

Editorial Note

We are pleased to offer you this fourth issue of JOLCEL, which is the last of our four-part thematic series on the relations between Latin schooling and the production of Latin literature. In the first issue, we looked at the way in which the strong association between the Latin language and formal education shaped the character of European literature. The second issue demonstrated what this Latin basis in education means for texts written in literary peripheries. In the third issue, we took a closer look at the dual life of texts as literary and as classroom authorities. Lastly, in this fourth issue, our theme is the mixture of nostalgia and playfulness that often characterizes the writing of Latin: nostalgia for the lost nativity of the language, for the idea of a bygone golden age of literature, or simply nostalgia for the school; and play as a means to deal with this nostalgia and make it productive.

The article by Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne perfectly illustrates this combination of nostalgia and playfulness by means of the Victorian *Comic Latin Grammar*, which is part functional Latin textbook, part parody on Latin education. Arthur-Montagne shows how the parody of Latin turns into a parody of the people who know Latin, namely those who have used their little knowledge of Latin for social advancement. The *Comic Latin Grammar* lures its readers by evoking the days of companionship and shared jokes in grammar school, only to then mercilessly make the reader the butt of the joke.

In the second article by Scott J. DiGiulio, melancholy for ideals of Latin erudition spurs on the creation of new miscellanies during the Renaissance. DiGiulio applies new insights from the study of Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* to Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, written thirteen centuries later. He shows how the aesthetic paradigm of *varietas* underlying the writing of miscellany offers both erudition and enjoyment. As Catherine Conybeare states in her response (found at the end of this issue): "The work is a magnificent Wunder-

kabinett of language, a repository of arresting linguistic curiosities and obscure allusions that wears lightly what is in fact a prodigious achievement of learning."

In the third article, Piet Gerbrandy takes us to seventh-century Ireland while writing about the *Hisperica famina*, a small but multi-authored corpus of Latin texts of which several different versions are still extant. Focusing on the so-called A-text, which is the most coherent, Gerbrandy attempts to show that "one of the weirdest manifestations of Latinate culture" at once also functions as an *ars poetica*, one that is suited for the times of upheaval and loss of Latin literary culture in which the *Hisperica famina* originated. He suggests that the A-text was written by an English scholar looking back on his school days in Ireland, and describes a text that with its irony, self-mockery, and in-crowd intellectual dynamics is reminiscent of the *Victorian Comic Latin Grammar*.

Finally, in her reflections on these three essays, Catherine Conybeare highlights various patterns in the way in which three very different texts (that is, a seventh-century hermetic text, a fifteenth-century miscellany, and a nineteenth-century comic grammar) not only play with the Latin language but also with its traditions and its melancholic connotations of a youth and a glory that lie always in the past. Conybeare ends her contribution with a plea to continue this tradition of making fun with Latin, but also, perhaps more importantly, to be more inclusive "and let others in on the joke."

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J O L C E L

JOURNAL *OF* LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM *AND* EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne, "*The Comic Latin Grammar* in Victorian England," JOLCEL 4 (2020): 2–31. DOI: 10.21825/jolcel.vi4.8569.

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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are "Reading and (Re)Writing the *Auctores*: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscellany" by Scott J. DiGiulio (pp. 33–58) and "The *Hisperica Famina* as an *Ars Poetica*: An Interpretation of the A-Text" by Piet Gerbrandy (pp. 60–79). The response piece is "Playfulness, Pedagogy, and Patrician Values" by Catherine Conybeare (pp. 81–87).

The Comic Latin Grammar in Victorian England

JACQUELINE ARTHUR-MONTAGNE

High Point University, NC

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the first scholarly analysis of *The Comic Latin Grammar* by Percival Leigh, a satirical textbook of Latin grammar published in London in 1839-40. Sections I and II analyze the role of Latin education and the rapid publication of Latin grammar books during the nineteenth century. Sections III and IV conduct close readings of *The Comic Latin Grammar* to assess its techniques of parody and allusion. I conclude that the textbook achieves its satire of Latin learning by embedding two tiers of humor in its lessons designed for two types of readers: those with and without a background in Classical education. In this way, Leigh uses parody as a mechanism for constructing and enforcing social boundaries, but also satirizes the use of Latin as a shibboleth for polite society.

***

From the second century of the Roman Empire, a thorough knowledge of Latin grammar—and the Latin authors who exemplified 'good' grammatical principles—became one prerequisite for entry into the social and political elite of Western Europe.[1] Quintilian, who provides a definitive reading list of canonical authors and their literary styles,[2] was among the first in a long line of pedagogues to

[1] I wish to extend my appreciation to the anonymous reviewers of this paper, who equipped me with a more robust understanding of Victorian literary production. I am also grateful to RELICS at the University of Ghent for the opportunity to present this research and to Susan Stephens, for the initial encouragement to read *The Comic Latin Grammar*.

[2] Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.20–131.

promote Latin education as initiation into the ruling class, or at least into the exclusive circle of the cultured. The philological foundation of high culture was no different on the island of Britain, which was among the earliest destinations for scholars and Latin manuscripts after the fifth-century conquests of Rome.[3] Britain's love affair with the Latin language is apparent both in the medieval clerical tradition and in the organization of the earliest universities, Oxford and Cambridge, which placed instruction in the Classics at the forefront of their curricula.[4] The reliance on Latin as the cornerstone of scholastic activity in the United Kingdom passed largely unchallenged until the mid-eighteenth century, when statesmen and educators identified the need for more practical subjects in schools and presses increasingly published books in English.[5] At the same time, Latin learning became increasingly 'popularized' as a growing middle class in the United Kingdom sought Classical education as a path to prestige. By the nineteenth century, Latin's paradoxical status as a language of little utility but great value made it a perfect target for Victorian humorists, who capitalized on the snobbery of schooling as the comedic setting. Knocking Latin and its gatekeepers from their lofty pedestal was well in keeping with a new Victorian sensibility that celebrated the progress of the modern era.

This paper analyzes a satirical textbook entitled *The Comic Latin Grammar*: *A New and Facetious Introduction to the Latin Tongue* and published between 1839 and 1840 (hereafter *Comic Grammar*).[6] This grammar exhibits the humor and style visible in other comedic works of the mid-nineteenth century, such as *Punch* magazine and the novels of Charles Dickens; indeed, there is reason to believe that the grammar's author, Percival Leigh, was connected to both.[7] It participates in a larger body of parodic publications in the nineteenth century that target the purveyors and institutions of establishment knowledge. This included the *Comic Almanack* of 1835, which built upon the satirical traditions of the *Poor Robin*

[3] On the foundation of Latin schools in late antique Britain, see Putnam Fennell Jones, "The Gregorian Mission and English Education," *Speculum* 3, no. 3 (1928): 335–48 and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899*, vol. 1 (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), 1–7.

[4] On the outgrowth of Classical scholarship and philology in Britain from the 17th-18th centuries, see James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 65–73.

[5] Christopher Stray, "Education and Reading," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, ed. David Hopkins and Charles Martindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79–102.

[6] Percival Leigh, *The Comic Latin Grammar: A New and Facetious Introduction to the Latin Tongue* (London: Charles Tilt, 1840). The earliest edition of the *Comic Grammar* was published at the end of 1839, as is apparent from a review on page 6 of *The Planet*, December 1, 1839. This would seem to confirm an excellent suggestion by one of my reviewers that Tilt published the volume in anticipation of the Christmas market.

[7] The first editions of the *Comic Grammar* were published anonymously but are widely attributed to Percival Leigh. His biography and attribution are discussed further in the second section of this paper.

almanac and spoofed the social calendars of urbane Londoners.[8] It also encompasses Leigh's *The Comic English Grammar* (1840) and Gilbert Abbott A'Beckett's *The Comic History of England* (1847) and *The Comic History of Rome* (1852), all examples of a burgeoning genre of parody textbooks for the enjoyment of schoolboys and adult readers alike. At the nexus of this literary activity was the illustrator John Leech, who had studied alongside Leigh at St Bartholomew's Hospital, and contributed etched plates and engraved vignettes to many of these publications. As the satires of the 1830s and 1840s placed increasing emphasis on visual caricature, Leech's cartoons defined a generation of parodic writing on the "march of intellect" and the consequences of unprecedented social mobility.[9]

The *Comic Grammar* was written as a functional textbook: each of the 163 pages venture to teach some philological lesson or another. The *Comic Grammar*'s more explicit interest, however, is in creating a parody of Latin learning, from the perceived absurdities of the language itself to the people who valorized it. The word "parody" evokes many associations: ridicule, comedy, slapstick, invective. But the defining characteristics of parody are neither humor nor hostility, but imitation and distortion. First used to describe mock-epics and comic plays of Classical Greece, parōdẽ (παρῳδή) expresses the idea of "singing after the style of the original, but with a difference."[10] Introducing that element of "difference" in parody often elicits laughter, but some parodies aspire to a form of critique more intellectual than comedic. The more subtle and allusive the distortion, the more cerebral its effect. Furthermore, the targets of parody often extend beyond the object of imitation. The parody of an author or text may also implicate the audiences, attitudes, and values associated with the original. It is for this reason that parodies have the paradoxical capacity to reinforce the very artifacts and interpretative communities they satirize; their allusions most reward those who are already "in on the joke."

In this study, I investigate parody as a mechanism for constructing and enforcing social boundaries. While the *Comic Grammar* purports to "[hold] up the Latin Grammar to ridicule,"[11] I claim that its readers are the true targets of the book's satire, as well as the contemporary intellectual climate that prioritized Classical learning. The *Comic Grammar* achieves this satire by embedding at least two tiers of humor within its lessons. On the one hand, the textbook represents an accessible work of nineteenth-century humor, written for the upwardly mobile. Many of its jokes require no real knowledge of Latin, but merely a passing familiarity with figures of the Classical tradition. A more educated reader of the text,

8 Frank Palmeri, "Cruikshank, Thackeray, and the Victorian Eclipse of Satire," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 4 (2004): 755–57.

9 Henry Miller, "John Leech and the Shaping of the Victorian Cartoon: The Context of Respectability," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42, no. 3 (2009): 267–91.

10 The earliest use of παρῳδή occurs at Arist. *Poet.* 1448a12. See Frank Lelièvre, "The Basis of Ancient Parody," *Greece & Rome* 1, no. 2. (1954): 66–81.

11 Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 13.

on the other hand, detects a sophisticated layer of allusions to the specific texts and structure of Latin lessons in Victorian era schools. By invoking the conventions of Classical learning at the schoolboy level, the *Comic Grammar* activates a collective memory of Latin, not as a language, but as an avenue of social advancement. In this way, the *Comic Grammar* creates a division between those with a shared consciousness of Latin schooling and those who merely aspire to it. But while the result of this tiered humor may be to identify the "haves" and "have nots" of Classical education, neither class of reader escapes the textbook's satirical bite.

1 The Victorian 'Grammar Rush'

In the decades between 1820 and 1880, the study of Latin in Europe and the Americas benefited from a surge of new grammars published in rapid succession. German students of Latin would have benefited from books like Krebs' *Antibarbarus* (1843) and Menge's *Repetitorium der lateinischen Syntax* (1873). In Italy, Latin-learners read Carducci's *Elementi di grammatica latina* (1829) and Salvadore Manzi's *Grammatica latina* (1847). English-speakers enjoyed perhaps the greatest variety of all, from Adler's *Practical Grammar of the Latin Language* (1858) to Donaldson's *Elementary Latin Grammar* (1872). The Eton College *Introduction to the Latin Tongue* released over twenty new editions in the nineteenth century. We find similar output of grammars even in Czech and Russian, necessitated in part by the policy of the St. Petersburg Academy of Science to publish treatises in Latin.[12]

More surprising still than the sheer volume of Latin grammars was its timing at the turn of the late modern era, when Latin ceased to be an active language of communication. In his study of the history of Latin, Leonhardt demonstrates that that the 'grammar rush' of the mid-nineteenth century occurred when Latin had lost most of its practical value. "These grammars were written in large part because people no longer heard, spoke, or wrote Latin as a matter of course," he explains. "People who do not actually speak a language regularly need reference works."[13] Texts written in Latin, he shows, accounted for less than a quarter of all published texts in the eighteenth century.[14] By the nineteenth, the language had concentrated within academies for dissertations, certificates, and ceremonial speeches. Academic journals increasingly published papers in their national languages, and

[12] On the role of Latin in the St. Petersburg Academy, see Ludmilla Schulze, "The Russification of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Arts in the Eighteenth Century," *The British Society for the History of Science* 18, no. 3 (1985): 305-335 and Michael Gordin, "The Importation of Being Earnest: The Early St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences," *Isis* 91 (2000): 13-23.

[13] Jürgen Leonhardt, *Latin: The Story of a World Language*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 273.

[14] Leonhardt, *Latin*, 246.

French began to replace Latin as the important intellectual tongue nearly everywhere but Germany.

The accelerated production of Latin grammars for populations that no longer used Latin conversationally points to a key paradox: as the practical value of learning Latin decreased, the status of the Classical tradition as a pedagogical tool and criterion of high culture increased. Although the *lingua Latina* was being supplanted by a *lingua franca* in the West, educators continued to support the study of Latin all the more fervently, citing one of two reasons.[15] The first, stemming from German neo-humanism, was that the Classical languages were beneficial precisely *because* of their non-utility: the study of an ancient and refined language elevated the human spirit. Cicero and Virgil, as models for imitation, opened pathways to intellectual sublimity and propelled the student to new heights of liberal thinking. The second reason –opposed to the first and emerging from the natural sciences – was that Latin was an inherently logical language and could sharpen analytical skills. As mathematics and the sciences came to challenge the primacy of Classics as the core of the educational curriculum, the concept of Latin as a formulaic system of knowledge enabled teachers to defend its use in the classroom. It also reimagined aptitude in Latin as a predictor for one's proficiency in scientific disciplines; Latin could be employed "to separate the good students from the bad."[16]

The use of grammars to standardize learning and to differentiate high- and low-performing students was especially prevalent in nineteenth-century Britain.[17] In the early 1800s, public schools in the United Kingdom developed entrance examinations that tested, among other subjects, adolescents' abilities in Greek and Latin. In response, preparatory schools reoriented their curricula to prepare younger boys for these examinations and a new market of textbooks emerged, tailor-made to the individual exams. As Stray has documented, "When the new local and middle-class examinations began in the 1850s, they immediately generated a market for standardized textbooks [...] one finds books advertised as suitable for particular examinations – even for specific times of the year."[18] The selection of a particular grammar book therefore communicated one's pedagogical preferences and academic aspirations. Stray also examines the motivations of individual schools and presses to produce grammars under their own names, which became a "stable source of profits" for academic publishers.[19] At the same time, a growing market of working-class readers created a popular industry of self-guided

[15] Leonhardt, *Latin*, 245–76.

[16] Ibid., 271.

[17] For a broad view of the textbook market during this period, see Leslie Howsam et. al., "What Victorians Learned: Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Schoolbooks," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 12, no. 2 (2007): 262–85.

[18] Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 55.

[19] Stray, *Classics Transformed*, 56.

grammars, such as Beard's Latin course in *Popular Educator* or the many series of interlinear editions. In this way, Classical education as a criterion of high culture was expressed even among working class audiences.[20]

The popularization of the Classical tradition is also evident in the emergence of a new category of theatrical performance in the Victorian era: epic burlesques drawn from Homer and Virgil. The publication date of the *Comic Grammar* in 1839-40 marks something of a midpoint in the development of the epic burlesque genre, falling within decades of Thomas Dibdin's *Melodrama Mad! Or, the Siege of Troy* (1819) and F. C. Burnand's *Ulysses* (1965). The latter dramatist also made regular contributions to *Punch*, which may reveal a degree of overlap or inspiration between printed and performed parodies of the Classics. More significant to this study, however, is manner in which such burlesques appealed to a broad cross-section of Victorian society. Both the dramas and their printed advertisements, as Rachel Bryant Davies has noted, communicated "multiple valences for audiences with varying levels of familiarity with the Homeric epics."[21] What educated gentlemen might have regarded as hilarious satires of the Trojan War stories may in contrast have represented a first encounter with Greco-Roman antiquity for viewers with less exposure to Classical education. The diversity of experience and education that audiences brought to the burlesques may also account for the mixed reception of the dramas. While the performances were "enormously successful," critics from publications like *The Literary Gazette* and *Universal Review* could at once describe the burlesques as degradations of the Classical tradition and too clever by half for the unschooled.[22]

These institutionalized attitudes towards the Classics provide a helpful context for understanding the publication of grammars during this period; they also clarify how those at the top of the pedagogical pyramid justified continued instruction in a language with little practical value. The ideals of neo-humanism and the sciences, however, have little to say about the real experience of reading these grammars or of the intellectual environments they constructed. Some accounts of Classical learning in the modern era elide two important aspects of the Latin education in Victorian England. First, despite the fact that competency in Latin marked one's membership among the literati, it is not clear that all or even the majority of students who studied Latin with such grammars achieved any real fluency. We should not assume that the surge in the publication of Latin grammars was matched by a surge in the competency of contemporary Britons to speak or read Latin. In fact, Skilton has demonstrated that mediocrity in the Classical languages became a trope in Victorian fiction. Characters within the novels are

[20] On the rigidity of the Classical curriculum in spite of its inutility for middle class students, see Robert Ogilvie, *Latin and Greek: A History of the Influence of the Classics on English Life from 1600 to 1918* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 97–99.

[21] Rachel Bryant Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 6.

[22] Bryan Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques*, 14–15.

often seen to engage with Greco-Roman culture in a fumbling or superficial way, which Skilton interprets as an effort to connect with a readership characterized more by the Latin they had forgotten than the Latin they remembered.[23]

The Victorian novels are an especially helpful place to detect the practicalities of Latin learning because they speak to an audience that experienced the Classics in the schoolroom without necessarily ascending to the peaks of Classical scholarship. In Thackeray's *The Adventures of Philip* (1861-62), for example, the venerable Lord Ascot exhibits both the expectation that aristocrats know Latin and also a foggy understanding of the language. When another character in the novel departs, he comments, "Exit Governor. What's the Latin for Governor?" Thackeray describes Ascot as a figure of "much native humor, but not very profound scholarship."[24] This is one example of many in *Philip* where characters struggle to remember a particular word or name they once learned in the course of their schooling. An episode in the *Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) by Trollope stages another poignant moment in which a character confronts his loss of Classical languages – in this instance, Greek rather than Latin. In an effort to distract himself from a broken heart, the secretary Johnny Eames resigns himself to hard labor: translating Homer into English. But after purchasing a copy of the *Iliad* at half price, he realizes how difficult a challenge this would prove:

> On the next day he was cooler and wiser. Greek he thought might be tedious as he discovered that he would have to begin again from the very alphabet. He would therefore abandon that idea. Greek was not the thing for him, but he would take up the sanitary condition of the poor in London.[25]

This episode encapsulates the idea of the Classical languages as a challenging and noble pursuit, by which Johnny hoped to distinguish himself as a gentleman. But in some ways, the fact of having learned Greek, only to forget it, paints a more typical portrait of the educated Englishman in the nineteenth century.

The second nuance that Skilton brings to studies of Classical education in Victorian England is his claim that social status and communal intellectual identity were forged as much through the classroom experience as through the knowledge of Latin itself.[26] When nineteenth-century novelists embedded Classical "tags" in their narratives, these quotations activated a romantic memory of schoolboy days, of memorizing and rewriting the opening lines of the Classical

[23] David Skilton, "Schoolboy Latin and the Mid-Victorian Novelist: A Study in Reader Competence," *Browning Institute Studies* 16 (1988): 39–55.

[24] William Thackeray, *The Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1871), 44.

[25] Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, vol. 3 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1915), 353–54.

[26] On the dominance and experience of the Classical tradition in the Victorian classroom, see David Turner, *The Old Boys: The Decline and Rise of the Public School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 131–33 and 173–75.

texts most commonly used in the grammar schools. In Thackeray and Trollope, he argues, "Latin automatically means youth, companionship, and nostalgia [...]. The ancient camaraderie is at once re-established."[27] Among the most memorable aspects of this experience were the Latin roll call (*adsum*), the recitation and repetition of purple passages from the canon, and the unrelenting persona of the schoolmaster. We get a rare taste of the structure and atmosphere of such classes in a transcript of Victorian learning: the minutes of a series of Latin and Greek classes at Winchester College, led by the *magister* Edmund Morshead (c. 1890). Excerpts from *The Mushri-English Pronouncing Dictionary*, published by Stray, reveal the classroom to be a stage for the performance of intellectual authority.[28] The schoolmaster Morshead bolsters his authority by making frequent references to the Classical dictionaries and reference works that support his teachings ("και is oxytone. I have looked it out in my dictionary!").[29] But these transcripts in the *Dictionary* also attest that schoolboy challenges to this authority were part and parcel of the learning experience. Spoofing on the lessons of the *magister* appears to have been a central component of learning Classical languages, and the identity of the student was forged in communal opposition to the instructor. This reciprocal relationship is visible in another passage from the *Dictionary*, where a boy named Chitty answers Morshead's instruction to translate *τίς πότε* through repetition.[30] In an owl-like hoot, Chitty's response – "Who-who?" – is met with raucous laughter and an insult by the instructor: "Chittay, do not be an oaf!" This faceoff between student and teacher, as preserved by the class minutes, illustrates the realities of Classical learning in a way that traditional grammars and pedagogical experts cannot.

The depiction of student-teacher exchange in Morshead's classroom bolsters Skilton's claim that Classical schooling fostered a camaraderie among young men in Victorian England. The schoolboy reliance upon and resistance to authority generated a social code among its participants, one that was built upon the Classics but did not require a perfect recall of the ancient languages. In concluding this background information, I want to call special attention to the comedic technique of Chitty's response to Morshead: the humor of the joke is twofold. On the one hand, the simple act of making animal noises in class (the avian "who-who") remains perhaps the most time-honored method of eliciting laughter from one's peers. It represents a juvenile strand of humor, built for the classroom and antithetical to the lofty ideals of Classical learning. On another level, however, Chitty's hooting disguises a deeper layer of laughter accessible only to those who know Greek. "Who, who?" is in fact an acceptable translation of an emphatic use of the

[27] Skilton, "Schoolboy Latin," 46.

[28] Christopher Stray, "Schoolboys and Gentlemen: Classical Pedagogy and Authority in the English Public School," in *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning*, ed. Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29–46.

[29] Ibid., 33.

[30] Ibid., 33–34.

interrogative pronoun in the Classical languages, a lesson one only acquires through instruction or reading of one's grammar. In this way, one cannot enjoy the full parody of the Greek without already being an initiate of the Greek. Whether the author of the *Dictionary* embellished the minutes of this episode or whether Chitty indeed arrived at this joke in the spur of the moment cannot be determined. But it nonetheless provides an example of the comedic techniques that other Victorian authors employed in their mockery of the Classics, as we observe in the *Comic Grammar* as well.

2 Context of *The Comic Latin Grammar*

The *Comic Grammar* was published anonymously in London, with numerous reprints during the nineteenth century. Its London publisher, Charles Tilt, was known for illustrated publications and lithographs and he maintained a store on Fleet Street with large display windows.[31] In addition to helping authors cut costs on illustrated publications, Tilt also released his own editions of inexpensive "handbooks for children." This collection of twelve bound books was sold in a wooden case and included abridged classics like *Little Esop* and *Little Robinson Crusoe*.[32] Given the specialization of the publisher, it might be reasonable to conclude that the *Comic Grammar* was intended as a novelty for schoolchildren, either those encountering the study of Latin for the first time or completing the course of their studies. The book includes more than fifty illustrations, some of them full page. The text of the *Comic Grammar* is widely attributed to Leigh and the illustrations to Leech, both of whom were affiliated with the satirical magazine, *Punch*.[33] Leigh was known to both Thackeray and Dickens, and his other publications include a *Comic English Grammar* and *Portraits of Children of the Nobility*.[34] These titles reveal Leigh's keen ability to taunt British society from its roots up. His satire centers on institutions of education as a critical lens into contemporary values. As Noordegraaf notes, "Not only did Leigh make many a humorous observation on the linguistic usage of the lower classes, he also levelled sharp criticism against his social equals and superiors."[35] Leigh's double-edged

[31] On Charles Tilt, see chapters 18-19 of Robert Patten, *George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art: Volume 1: 1792-1835* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

[32] Alyssa Currie, "The Victorian Thumb Bible as Material Object: Charles Tilt's *The Little Picture Testament* (1839)," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 84 (2016): 10.

[33] The earliest record that I can find that identifies Leigh and Leech as the author and illustrator of the *Comic Grammar* respectively is Mark Lemon, *Mr. Punch: His Origin and Career* (London: Jas. Wade, 1870), 22–23.

[34] Little is known of Percival Leigh. See Rosemary Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher, eds., *Victorian Prose: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 215 and Alan Young, *Punch and Shakespeare in the Victorian Era* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 34–45.

[35] Jan Noordegraaf, "Murray's Dutch Mirror: On Rewriting the *English Grammar*," in *Two Hundred Years of Lindley Murray*, ed. Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 1996), 115.

humor was not, I suspect, written for schoolchildren, but rather employed the conventions of schooling as a broader critique of grown-up society.

One possible challenge to the hypothesis of an adult readership for the *Comic Grammar* is explicit signaling to a youth readership in the preface and prologue of the text. In the first section of the book, the author describes his work as a "'desirable addition' to the breakfast of the young gentlemen."[36] Separately, in the introduction, he claims that "holding up the Latin Grammar to ridicule is likely to produce in the minds of youth" a "beneficial effect."[37] Even an earnest reader will find it difficult to take such pedagogical promises seriously in an introduction that denigrates the poets Byron, Shelley, and Goethe as "wet blankets" and praises the *Pickwick Papers* as a revolution in the republic of letters.[38] The frequent references to young men as readers of the *Comic Grammar* nonetheless raise the possibility that at least some buyers or recipients of the book were in fact of school age, and that the jokes within supplied Latin students with an arsenal of comic hijinks. A more persuasive interpretation of this prefatory framing, however, is that the author strives to activate a nostalgia for the classroom.[39] Skilton's suggestion that Latin learning in the novels evokes camaraderie and the collective memory of youth proves relevant here. In the preface the author connects the concept of the grammar book with the memory of (mis)behaving in Latin class:

> The "Comic Latin Grammar" can, certainly, never be called an imposition as another Latin Grammar frequently is. We remember having the whole of it to learn at school, besides being—no matter what—for pinning a cracker to the master's coat-tail. The above hint is worthy the attention of boys.[40]

This new *Comic Grammar* represents both a guidebook and a remedy for Classical learning. Here the author shows us how tightly the process of studying Latin was entwined with the subversion of Classics in the classroom. The *magister* was a welcome target, both because of his authority and because this authority rested on the oldest and most traditional of studies. The pleasure of the *Comic Grammar* lies in its willingness to engage in what the author openly acknowledged to be "literary high treason": to treat the most reverent subject with utter irreverence.

[36] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 5.

[37] Ibid., 13.

[38] Ibid., 9–10.

[39] Brian Maidment, "'Larks in Season': The *Comic Almanack*," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 84 (2016): 18: "*The Comic Latin Grammar* also took endless delight in parodying the typographical structures of the 'grammar', using numbered lists, daft examples, mnemonic verses, italics, bold headlines, and the like to suggest the traditional patterning of a dull school textbook. The result was perhaps too sophisticated for 'the use and amusement of schoolboys', but it is easy to see the pleasures on offer to those educated readers who had previously undergone the tedium of a classical education."

[40] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 5.

Whether or not Leigh designed his textbook with younger readers in mind, the *Comic Grammar* certainly found adult admirers. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* reviewed the book as "the most richly comic work […] we have ever seen" and praised its ability to "beguile [the reader] into a competent knowledge of Latin grammar."[41] Another periodical, *The Literary World*, also predicted success for the book: "The public will buy it, and, what is more, read and enjoy it: its pages really contain a good deal of useful matter."[42] Copies of the *Comic Grammar* appeared in the 1850 *Catalogue of the Mercantile Index of New York*, as well as the 1890 *British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books*. In these indices, the *Comic Grammar* was listed alongside other grammars, which may indicate that the libraries regarded them as serious textbooks or that they had no other category of classification. A Dutch adaptation of the text, *De vermakelijke Latijnsche spraakkunst*, was published in 1866 by the novelist Jacob van Lennep.[43]

A certain Chilton Mewburn, who attended St. Paul's School in London in 1844, recalled that the Latin lessons of the *Comic Grammar* stuck more firmly in his adult memory than all the Latin classes he had learned as a child: "I can indeed remember the first line of *Lily's Latin Grammar* […] but such is the perverseness of human nature that I can still reel off far more of the *Comic Latin Grammar* which appeared about that time."[44] These advertisements and anecdotes situate the textbook at the crossroads between comedy and pedagogy. They do not substantiate the *Comic Grammar*'s claim to a more effective method for learning Latin, but suggest – as evidenced by Mewburn's recollections – that its humorous lessons made a required subject bearable. It is notable that *testimonia* on the textbook dwindle at the turn of the twentieth century; there are few discussions or direct allusions to the *Comic Grammar*, aside from catalogue entries and bookseller's price lists.[45] This is not true for other comedic projects with which Leigh and Leech were affiliated. *Punch* magazine, for instance, achieved its peak circulation in the 1940s. The *Comic Grammar*'s popularity may have been limited to the Victorian era because of its topical humor, but also due to the narrowing market of readers who had studied Latin. As educational reforms in the late nineteenth century curtailed the requirement of Latin classes, the jokes of the *Comic Grammar* had little relevance to a later readership.

[41] William Tait, "*The Comic Latin Grammar;* a New and Facetious Introduction to the Latin Tongue; with numerous illustrations," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1840), 62.

[42] John Timbs, "New Books," *The Literary World* 40, December 28, 1839, 199.

[43] In fact, van Lennep appears to have plagiarized both of Leigh's comic grammars (Latin and English) and faced accusations of this during his own lifetime. See Noordegraaf, *Murray's*, 7-9.

[44] Robert Gardiner and John Lupton, eds., *Res Paulinae: The Eighth Half-Century of St. Paul's School* (West Kensington: St. Paul's School, 1911), 10–11.

[45] By the early twentieth century, the illustrations of John Leech were already considered classics of the Victorian age, as we see from an exhibition of his works in New York. The Grolier Club published this collection as *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Works by John Leech (1817-1864)* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1914). The *Comic Latin Grammar* is included from pages 25–29.

3 Pig Latin

Thus far this paper has reviewed Victorian education and grammar books as a historical backdrop to the publication of the *Comic Grammar*. The second half of this study examines the textbook's response to this social and intellectual context through close readings of its passages. In both the introduction and the discussion of the *Mushri-English Pronouncing Dictionary*, I proposed that the humor of the *Comic Grammar* operates on two levels: (1) as a superficial spoofing on the Classical tradition and (2) as a sophisticated parody of texts and conventions from the Latin classroom. This section investigates comic moments of the first sort in the book: jokes that require no extensive knowledge of Latin. Beyond simply reproducing and explaining these jokes, I attempt to answer what this tier of humor tells us about the popular appeal of the book. As Leigh and Leech strive to attract different segments of a literate market, what do they believe middle class readers will find funny? How do the mechanics of this humor operate? And where might we detect that the *Grammar* is in fact turning its satirical lens back onto the buyers? In the conclusion of this section, I provide one example of a known reader of the *Comic Grammar* who exemplifies the intended audience of this first tier of humor.

The most accessible level of satire in the *Comic Grammar* requires no thorough knowledge of Latin or the Classical tradition. It satirizes pedagogy and intellectual culture writ large, mixing jabs with topical jokes about Victorian England. On the third page of the text, for example, we are greeted by "Toby the Learned Pig," who is credited with removing the 'w' from the Latin alphabet and whose doctoral attire makes a mockery of the *magister* (fig. 1). Toby stands on two cloven feet and holds his textbook before him, as if to begin dissertating before a room of schoolboys. He wears spectacles and dons the robes of a

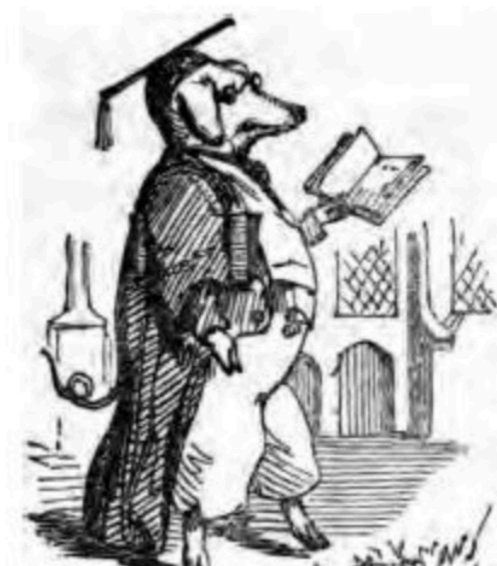


Figure 1: John Leech, "Toby, the Learned Pig," *Comic Latin Grammar*, 17.

professor. Toby is the first of many abuses that the *Comic Grammar* hurls against Latin teachers. Much like the *Mushri-English Pronouncing Dictionary*, this book places the persona of the *magister* at the nucleus of its humor. In the chapter on nouns, for instance, Leigh uses the interactions between student and schoolmaster as the template for the case system.[46] In the nominative: "*magister jurgatur*, the master jaws." In the dative: "*protendo manus magistro* – I hold out my hands to the master." In the accusative: "Whom do you laugh at? (behind his back) *Derideo magistrum* – I laugh at the master." And in the ablative: "*Deprensus magistro* – caught out by the master." In this way, the noun system is organized as a mini-narrative of the classroom. The routine of the Latin lesson – lecture, penalty, mockery, and apprehension – provides the blueprint for learning one's second declension endings. The scene is focalized through the student, and therefore invites the reader to identify with the role of the wayward pupil. The "master" remains the medium through which the student learns the lesson, but the lesson also takes place at the master's expense.

The master remains the butt of another pig-related joke in the chapter on substantive nouns. After a sample sentence that shows the use of the genitive case with ellipsis, the author informs us that the word "pig" can "denote a variety of little things, which it is sometimes necessary to keep secret."[47] Some examples of "the pig" in the classroom include pinning a tail on the schoolmaster's coat, putting wax on his stool, hiding away food in the corners of the dormitory when the master conducts inspections, or skipping class to travel into town. The joke concludes with word humor as the author emphasizes that these "pigs" can become a "bore" when at last the master discovers them. On one level, this discourse on pigs and bores aims at the same schoolboy nostalgia that was activated in the satirical narrative on noun cases with the *magister*: it reminds the reader that the dusty memories of learning Latin have as much to do with antics as academics. On a more critical level, however, this long reflection on the meaning of "pig" also invites us to read between the lines for hidden meanings.

One place we might begin to detect a deeper message is in the caricature of Toby on the third page of the *Comic Grammar*. For "Toby the Learned Pig" (also known as the "Sapient Pig") was not merely a cartoon from the textbook, but also a famous curiosity of the early nineteenth century. Toby was a trick pig who appeared in London's Spring Gardens to play cards, read the time, and spell words. In 1817, Toby's owner published the pig's memoir ("written by himself") which reads like an Apuleian tale of travel and self-discovery.[48] According to the memoir, the pig's education spanned every subject from Pythagorean philosophy to Shakespearean drama. The book remains a curiosity of the Regency, but also a reflection upon its values. At a time when any individual might improve his station through

[46] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 22–23.
[47] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 74.
[48] Nicholas Hoare, *The Life and Adventures of Toby, the Sapient Pig* (London: H. Lyon, 1817).

learning, why not a pig? By including an allusion to this memoir, therefore, the *Comic Grammar* pokes farmyard fun at the hallowed halls of the university. Perhaps every professor of Latin is merely a pig in doctoral disguise! But the textbook also invites a more cynical interpretation: that the object of mockery is not the scholar, but the notion of self-advancement beyond one's station. In this way, Toby the Pig stands as an emblem of progressive aspirations. For the *Comic Grammar*, perhaps, a pig who reads Latin and wears academic robes is… still a pig.

A similar commingling of the Classical and contemporary culture occurs in the *Comic Grammar*'s chapter on relative clauses. One sample sentence on antecedents pits the third-century Emperor Heliogabalus against Edward Dando in an eating competition: "Heliogabalus, at one breath, swallowed two dozen of oysters, which beats even Dando out and out."[49] Dando, an infamous gourmand of 1830s London, became famous for consuming vast quantities of shellfish at oyster houses before informing the waitstaff of his inability to pay. His culinary misdeeds found their way into the *Morning Post* on several occasions, which decried him as a "terror of shell-fish dealers."[50] The fun in the comparison of Dando and Heliogabalus rests not on a deep learning of ancient history, but rather upon the Victorian perception of the emperor as a glutton. This reputation likely stems from Heliogabalus' sensationalized biography in the *Historia Augusta*,[51] but reemerges in Victorian spoofs on the Roman Empire. Whiting's *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853), for example, ponders whether "Heliogabalus [was] born for oysters, or oysters for Heliogabalus."[52] This example demonstrates that the most accessible tier of humor in the *Comic Grammar* targets not the Classical tradition so much as popular perceptions of the Classics. One need not have read ancient histories of Heliogabalus to be in on the joke; more important is one's membership in a culture of Classical appreciation, a community that understands Roman history as a resource for contemporary analogies.

[49] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 71: "Heliogabalus, contento spiritu, viginti quatuor ostrearum demersit in alvum, quod Dandoni etiam longe antecellit."

[50] "Death of Dando the Oyster Eater," *Morning Post*, September 1, 1832, 4.

[51] *Hist. Aug*. 17.19: "primus fecit de piscibus insicia, primus de ostreis et leiostreis et aliis huiusmodi marinis conchis et locustis et cammaris et scillis."

[52] Sydney Whiting, *Memoirs of a Stomach* (London: W. E. Painter, 1853), 33. See also John Doran, *Table Traits, with Something on Them* (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), 405.

One final instance of this "entry-level" humor in the *Comic* is the convergence of Classical and American culture. In the chapter on impersonal verbs, Leigh notes the absence of a nominative subject in such phrases. One sample sentence of this grammatical phenomenon invokes the figure of Socrates: "mirificum visum est Socratem in gyrum saltantem videre."[53] A loose translation of this example arrives on the following page with an illustration of Socrates performing a minstrel dance: "It seemed wonderful to behold Socrates jumping Jim Crow." Here Socrates waves his left hand and swings his feet in a garish imitation of the blackface performance, clearly modeled on "Jump Jim Crow" illustrations from American sheet music in the 1830s (fig. 2-3).

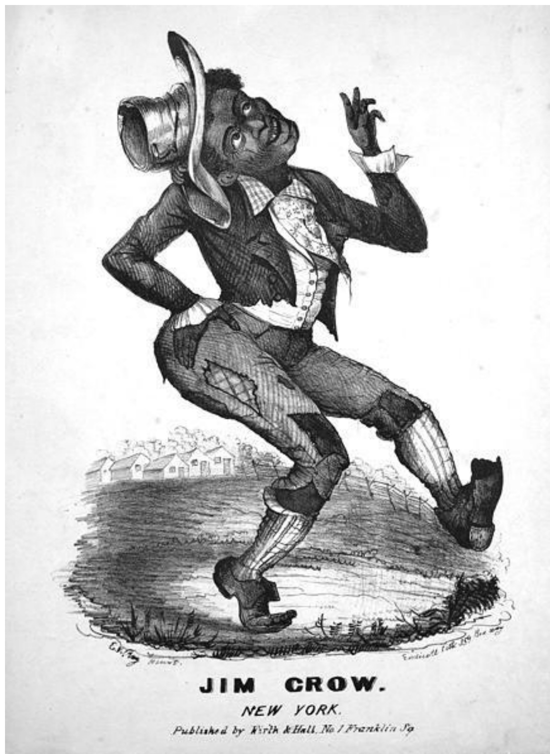
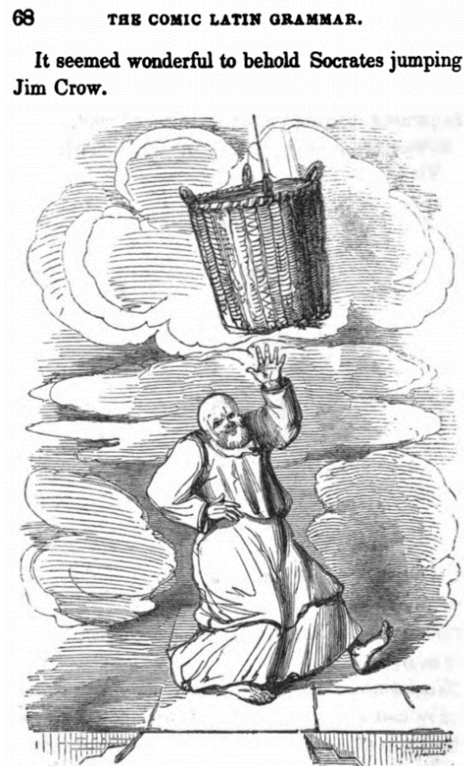


Figure 2: Jim Crow (New York: Firth and Hall, 1829), 1.


68 THE COMIC LATIN GRAMMAR.

It seemed wonderful to behold Socrates jumping Jim Crow.

Figure 3: John Leech, "Socrates jumping Jim Crow," *Comic Latin Grammar,* 68.

Hanging above his head is a basket, alluding to the comic depiction of the philosopher in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Socrates in the *Comic Grammar* does not wear blackface, which would suggest that the notion of the philosopher dancing is the source of comedy, rather than the satire of African-American culture. And yet the image is clearly intended to provoke by reducing the greatest thinker of the ancient philosophical tradition to a mere stage performer.

It is not clear whether Leigh or Leech had ever witnessed a minstrel show or simply based their dancing Socrates on Jim Crow images circulating during the early nineteenth century. Blackface minstrelsy entered Britain in the 1830s as a solo performance genre and became in the decades thereafter a widespread

[53] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 67.

form of theatrical entertainment involving an entire troupe.[54] Thomas "Daddy" Rice first performed his signature "Jump Jim Crow" song in the Surrey and Adelphi Theatres in 1836, only four years before the publication of the *Grammar*. A market of "Jim Crow" merchandise—hats, cigars, and spin-off books and songs—flourished as the caricature of the American South caught fire across all social classes. What British audiences made of the racial humor and ethnic stereotyping in such performances is difficult to assess. Some scholars have evaluated the genre as a response to slavery abolition laws in the British Empire, while others have examined the popularity of "Jump Jim Crow" in light of its innovative dance style.[55] In the context of the *Comic Grammar*, the invocation of blackface performance appears less concerned with racial humor than debasing the Classics.[56] Race does play a factor in other illustrations of famous Roman figures as archetypes from minstrel shows. The chapter on active and passive verbs show us Brutus and Caesar in the style of "Zip Coon" the black dandy (fig. 4). And in the chapter on Latin adverbs, Caesar is depicted once more as a strapping black man "astonishing" white natives (fig. 5). The question is not merely whether these images encapsulate prejudices of the period (certainly they do), but for whom they were designed. The *Comic Grammar* deploys racial humor as the lowest common denominator. While there is no evidence on contemporary responses to the racial humor of the *Comic Grammar* within its surviving *testimonia*, we can identify one case study of a reader anticipated by this "first tier" humor. William Thomas Fernie, a physician of late Victorian England, published a number of manuals on wellness and medicinal treatments. His books, bearing titles like *Herbal Simples* and *Precious Stones for Curative Wear*, offered advice on the use of plants and gems in everyday ailments. But they also showcase the breadth of Fernie's literary interests. His manual on *Animal Simples* (1899) features a quotation from Shakespeare's *King Henry IV* on the title page; the text within quotes from medieval medical treatises, Victorian novelists, and translated passages of Latin (apparently from periodicals and interlinear editions). Fernie also uses Latin from the *Comic Grammar* in two quotations. In the first instance – a chapter on venison – Fernie quotes a line of culinary wisdom:

[54] Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2008), 4–15.

[55] On the former, see Robert Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 42-79. For the latter, see Pickering, *Blackface*, 9-10 and Robert Hornback, "'Extravagant and Wheeling Strangers': Early Blackface Dancing Fools, Racial Impersonation, and the Limits of Identification," *Exemplaria* 20, no. 2 (2008): 197–222.

[56] Contrast this with the representation of slavery in burlesque adaptations of Homer, as described by Bryant Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques*, 22-23.

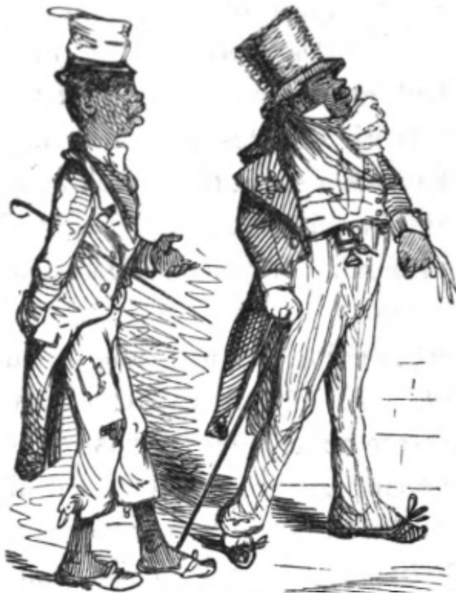


Figure 4: John Leech, "Brutus and Caesar," *Comic Latin Grammar*, 40.

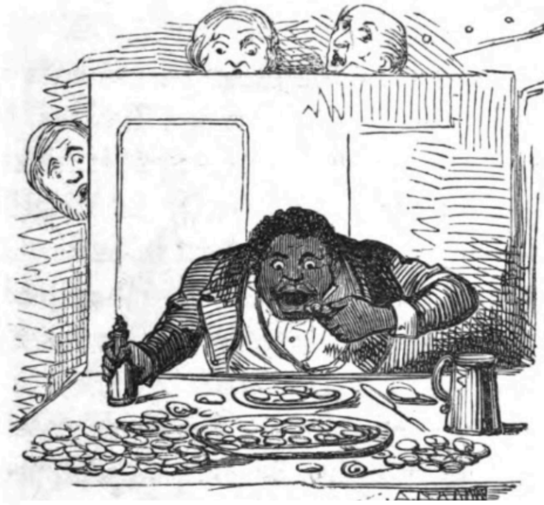


Figure 5: John Leech, "Caesar Astonishing the Natives," *Comic Latin Grammar*, 57.

> "*Quod olfactu foedum est, idem est esu turpe*," says the *Comic Latin Grammar*; that which is foul to be smelled is also nasty to be eaten (except venison, onions, and cheese).[57]

The Latin quote, its translation, and the parenthetical statement are taken directly from the *Comic Grammar*, as Fernie cites. What is striking here is that Fernie does not need the Latin quote to justify his recommendation of venison; the phrase he requires is "except venison, onions, and cheese." I suspect that he merges the translation and the parenthetical statement because he does not know enough Latin to recognize that the clause of exception is not in the Latin quote. This is further suggested by his alternation of the punctuation of the quote. In the *Comic Grammar*, the clause of exception is printed as its own sentence; in Fernie, it is placed in parentheses. Either Fernie cannot read Latin, or he has changed the formatting of the sentence so that the Latin would appear to support his claims to someone who cannot translate Latin.

That Fernie desires the appearance of erudition without possessing a genuine knowledge of Latin, is suggested by his second quotation from the *Comic Grammar* in a chapter on chicken meat. Here he advises the reader on which parts of the bird are most medicinal and explains: "Quoth the *Comic Latin Grammar*: '*Pectoribus inhians, molles en deserit alas,*' which means, as translated by an eminently practical schoolboy, 'Intent upon the breast, lo! he deserts the tender wings'."[58] The quote, which indeed appears in the *Comic Grammar*'s chapter on

[57] William Fernie, *Animal Simples: Approved for Modern Uses of Cure* (Bristol: John Wright, 1899), 505. The quote is from Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 125.

[58] Fernie, *Animal*, 185.

prosody,[59] has some vague relevance to the avian advice in the medical book. There is even a hint of irony in Fernie's reference to the "eminently practical schoolboy." But the physician does not seem to recognize the deeper philological joke of this line, which spoofs a verse from Virgil's *Aeneid*. The correct verse in Latin is memorable to schoolmasters for its unusual lengthening of *ūs* in *pectoribus* and reads: "pectoribus inhians, spirantia consulit exta ("gazing into their chests, [Dido] consults the breathing entrails," *Aen*. 4.64). The *Comic Grammar*'s sophisticated joke is to take a reverent line of a religious haruspicy in Virgil and transform it into dinner-table humor. The textbook reimagines Dido as a diner who "considers the breasts" of a cooked fowl and then "abandons the tender" wing meat. Fernie has likely selected this Latin passage from the *Comic Grammar* because he believes it to be a relevant Classical allusion to chickens. In so doing, he reveals himself to be as much as much the butt of joke as Virgil.

Leigh and Leech, of course, could never have anticipated that their Latin jests would wind up in the pages of a medical volume. Their prologue advertised the text as light Latin learning for young minds. And the degree to which Fernie regarded these quotations as a source of Classical authority is also unclear. Perhaps he included them as curiosities or entertaining snippets in order to balance out his use of weightier authors like Sextus Placitus and Bartholomeus Anglicus. Fernie nonetheless represents the sort of reader that the *Comic Grammar* targets with its first-tier humor, and here "targets" carries both a commercial and critical connotation. On the one hand, the text as printed by Charles Tilt targets a commercial market of aspiring middle-class readers. As Skilton has argued for nineteenth-century fiction, "Plenty of men with a thorough Classical training existed who could still use their Latin and Greek actively, but they did not keep a mid-Victorian novelist in business."[60] Fernie is precisely the sort of reader whom Leigh and Leech might envision as their purchasing audience: socially-mobile men and women who valued the trappings of gentility. While this group possessed a shaky command of Classics at best, a few lines of Latin with a witty translation offered a path into polite society. But the *Comic Grammar* also targets such readers in a critical way, as sources of humor themselves. Toby the Learned Pig and Socrates jumping Jim Crow embody this popularization of the Classics: they were both participants in and parodies of this process. In this way, the *Comic Grammar* takes aim at precisely the sort of reader like Fernie, who has the pretensions to know Latin without the foundation of a Classical education.

4 Dog Latin

If indeed the *Comic Grammar* proved the commercial success that reviewers predicted, then the book almost certainly had more buyers in the mold of William

[59] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 185.

[60] Skilton, "Schoolboy," 43.

Fernie than of Latin schoolmasters. But while many of its jokes were designed for easy laughs, there nevertheless exists a more sophisticated tier of humor that only those with an educated understanding of the Classics may "unlock." In the previous section, for instance, we encountered a spoof on a line from *Aeneid* 4: a parody that Fernie appears to have missed in his quotation, but one that a capable reader of Virgil might well have remembered from meter drills. This section examines more jokes of this sophisticated tier in order to analyze how the *Comic Grammar* enforces the social boundaries of the Classically educated, at the same time as it purports to facilitate the process of learning Latin.

The insider jokes of the *Comic Grammar* require some reading between the lines of the text. But for a Latinist, allusions and parodies lie in plain sight. The first chapter of the book, for instance, presents its audience with an immediate test by which true students of Latin may identify themselves. This chapter divides the branches of the language into three:

> Of Latin there are three kinds: Latin Proper, or good Latin; Dog Latin; and Thieves' Latin. Latin Proper, or good Latin, is the language which was spoken by the ancient Romans. Dog Latin is the Latin in which boys compose their first verses and themes, and which is occasionally employed at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, but much more frequently at Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow. Thieves' Latin, more commonly known by the name of slang, is much in use among a certain class of conveyancers, who disregard the distinctions of *meum* and *tuum*. Furthermore, it constitutes a great part of the familiar discourse of most young men in modern times, particularly lawyers' clerks and medical students.[61]

Neophytes will see little more in this passage than a mockery of philology and may take a special pleasure in learning that the hallowed halls of Britain's universities teach only "dog Latin." But initiates will recognize a parody of a literary model: the opening lines of the *De Bello Gallico*. Just as in this passage, Caesar begins his treatise by explaining that "Gaul as a whole is divided into three parts," and then proceeds to survey the inhabitants of each territory in more detail. Part of the irony in the *Comic Grammar*'s parody of the *De Bello Gallico* is that Caesar crafted this introduction for an audience with little personal experience of Gaul. His first chapter concerns itself with geography and definitions; he provides a mental map of river boundaries and mountain ranges that Romans have not seen. He sketches the characteristics of the individual tribes so that we may better understand the actors in his narrative. The *Comic Grammar* has selected Caesar's introduction as a model for precisely these qualities: the text does not presume any foreknowledge of its subject matter. But in the same breath, it deploys this allusion as a dog whistle to Latinist readers that a second layer of humor is afoot.

[61] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 15.

The *De Bello Gallico* was and remains a standard school text in Latin classes, both because of the fame of its author and its reputation among the ancients for its prose style. Caesar's name appears in Erasmus' *De Ratione Studii* (1511) alongside Cicero and Sallust as the three most important prose authors for a young man to read. In the decades before Leigh and Leech, we find the opening lines of *De Bello Gallico* included as reading specimens in the *Leeds Grammar School Magazine* (1828) and the *Quarterly Journal of Education* (1831). The second class of Thomas Key's Latin program at the University of London took examinations on *De Bello Gallico* in 1829.[62] Leigh could therefore be reasonably certain that the formulation of Caesar's work would be recognizable to those who had studied Latin in school and that it would evoke memories of slogging through its complex subordinate clauses.

Caesar is not the only school author to undergo this treatment in the *Comic Grammar*. In a lesson on locatives, Cicero's great counsel that *parvi sunt foris arma, nisi est consilium domi* ("weapons are of little value abroad unless there is good judgment at home") is co-opted as a crack against the Canadians.[63] Sallust's sober account of Catiline becomes a parable of populist disgruntlement: "*pulvere nitrato Catilina senatum subruere voluit*. Catiline wished to blow up Parliament. Catiline was a regular Guy."[64] The love story of the *Aeneid* is used to teach students about the use of *opus* with the ablative case, but also about marriage contracts: "Dido had need of a husband. Aeneas had need of a dinner."[65] Cato is castigated as a grump, and Ovid is reimagined as an opera-lover.[66] The canonical authors from one's childhood Latin classes reappear as fleshed-out personalities, familiar and resented. "All names of the male kind you masculine call, *ut sunt* (for example), *Divorum*, Mars, Bacchus, Apollo, the deities all, And Cato, *Virgilius*, *virorum*. Latin's a bore, and bothers me sore, Oh how I wish that my lesson was o'er." These types of jokes—many of them puns or cheap shots against polite society—elicit little more than groans from a modern readership. But this humor only seems trivial to those who know such stories prior to reading the *Comic Grammar*. Without a foundation in the Classics, the reader cannot appreciate Catiline as a predecessor to Guy Fawkes or the idea of Aeneas playing the lover in exchange for a hot meal. Another possibility is that Leigh designs these juvenile jokes to resemble the tenor of classroom humor, thus transporting the reader back to the boyish pranks of grammar school.

The most important model that the *Comic Grammar* parodies, however, is no work of Classical literature but of contemporary pedagogy. *An Introduction to the Latin Tongue* was first published in 1758 for the students of Eton College and

[62] As described in the awarding of prizes in "The London University," *The Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle* 90, July 15, 1829, 447.

[63] Cicero, *Off.* 1.76: *parvi enim sunt foris arma, nisi est consilium domi.*

[64] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 114.

[65] Ibid., 76.

[66] Ibid., 71 and 124 respectively.

quickly became a favorite among Anglophone teachers. This Eton grammar takes a mirthless approach to Latin; in the place of pictures are complex charts and lists with mechanical explanations.[67] The *Comic Grammar* imitates its sober form and content, but with a satirical twist, as a comparison of select passages with an 1833 edition of the Eton grammar reveals:[68]

***An Introduction to the Latin Tongue* (1833)**	***The Comic Latin Grammar* (1840)**
The nominative case cometh before the verb, and answereth to the question 'who?' or 'what?' as, 'Who teaches?' *magister docet*, the master teaches. (p. 3)	The nominative case comes before the verb [...]. It answers to the question, who or what; as in, Who jaws? *magister jurgatur*, the master jaws. (p. 22)
Of verbs, there are two voices: 1, The Active, ending in *o*; as, *amo*, I love; 2, The Passive, ending in *or*; as *amor*, I am loved. (p. 20)	Verbs have two voices...The active ending in *o*—as *amo*, I love. The passive ending in *or*—as *amor*, I am loved. In these two words is contained the terrestrial *summum bonum*—In short, love beats everything – cock-fighting not excepted. *Amo! Amor!* (p. 38)
The relative agreeth with its antecedent in gender, number, and person; as, *Vir sapit, qui pauca loquitur.* The man is wise, *who* speaketh few words. (p. 69)	The relative and antecedent hit off very well together; they agree one with the other in gender, number, and person, as *Qui plenos haurit cyathos, madidusque quiescit,* *Ille bonam degit vitam, moriturque facetus.* "He who drinks plenty, and goes to bed mellow, Lives as he ought to do, and dies a jolly fellow." (p. 70)

[67] On the authority and use of the Eton grammar at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Christopher Stray, *Classics in Britain: Scholarship, Education, and Publishing 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 332.

[68] Dozens of editions of the Eton grammar were published after the first in 1758, with slight variations in content and title. I have chosen this edition because of its proximity to the date of the publication of the *Comic Grammar*: John Davis, *An Introduction to the Latin Tongue, Compiled for the Use of Eton College* (Belfast: Simms and McIntyre, 1833).

For most of the topics and sample sentences in the "straight" Eton grammar, the *Comic Grammar* has a humorous equivalent. Its method of parody is to replicate basic lessons of the Eton grammar but then fill the sample passages with jokes. In creating an almost chapter-by-chapter spoof of the Eton text, the *Comic Grammar* communicates to its audience in several ways. First, Leigh demonstrates his own mastery of Latin language by using the premier textbook on its grammar. Parody marks an elevated form of humor because its success depends on the author's command of the original. In these jokes, Leigh shows himself an adept classicist.

Second, by selecting the Eton grammar as his exemplar, Leigh mocks the pinnacle of Classical pedagogy in Victorian England. The Eton grammar had earned this privileged position among Latin textbooks by its status as the dominant grammar in English-speaking schools. Adapted from the *Lilly's Grammar*, the Eton grammar became the most widely-used text in eighteenth-century British public schools.[69] Furthermore, the grammar maintained this status for nearly a century by opposing the composition of new standardized Greek and Latin grammars: into the 1830s, Eton would endorse no new texts or revised editions except for those published at Eton.[70] For this reason, Leigh could assume that the Eton grammar would be a successful medium by which to communicate to a Classically-educated audience. A Victorian reader who had studied Latin in school had likely done so with the Eton grammar in hand. Eton College's well-known opposition to the development of new grammars may also have been a motivation for the composition of the *Comic Grammar*. One way to thumb a nose at the Etonian resistance to newfangled grammars was to compose a perfect parody of its lessons: the teachings replicate Eton's concept for concept, but take creative liberties with the Latin examples and translations.

The parodies of Eton in the *Comic Grammar* aspire not merely to be funny, but also subversive to the former's social messaging. The Eton grammar includes sample sentences from Classical Latin authors, but far more are contemporary moral maxims composed in Latin. In the parallel passages above on relative pronouns and antecedents, the Eton grammar describes the wise man as one who can hold his silence; for the same syntactical concept, the *Comic Grammar* celebrates the jovial drunkard. While the Eton grammar teaches the degrees of adjectives by emphasizing virtues (*doctus*, *doctior*, *doctissimus*), the *Comic Grammar* teaches the same lesson by ranking grammars according to their charm: "The Eton Latin Grammar is *lepidus* [...]. The Charter House Grammar, is *lepidior* [...]. The Comic

[69] On the composition of the *Eton Latin Grammar* and Eton's royal patronage in the late eighteenth century, see Christopher Stray, "Paradigms of Social Order: The Politics of Latin Grammar in 19th-Century England," *Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas Bulletin* 13 (1989): 14–16.

[70] Stray, "Paradigms," 17: "In 1835, Thomas Arnold tried to interest the headmasters of Eton and Harrow in [producing a standard public school grammar], suggesting that each school should contribute a section, but the attempt came to nothing."

Latin Grammar is *lepidissimus*."[71] In this way, Leigh creates a topsy-turvy vision of the Eton grammar, in which the pedagogical architecture remains the same but the values conveyed through that structure are quite the reverse. What the educated reader quickly recognizes is that this parody has little to do with Latin; mockery fixates upon the ideological import of learning the Classics and Latin's status as a marker of gentility. For "insiders" in this Latinist tradition, the *Comic Grammar* demonstrates how Latin can also be used as a marker of satirical wit and social subversion.

Although the parodies of the Eton grammar construct a circle of "insiders" who recognize the *Comic Grammar*'s pedagogical model, Leigh does not exactly disguise the relationship between the two. The name "Eton" is planted on fifteen occasions throughout the text, hinting at an antagonistic relationship between the book and its model. In only one these instances is the reference to Eton openly derisive: "*exitio est avidis alvus pueris*. The belly is the destruction of greedy boys. Particularly those of *Eton* College." In most other places, the author cites the Eton grammar as an authority. To learn more information about irregular comparative adjectives, for example, the *Comic Grammar* recommends the reader enumerate "the exceptions to this rule, mentioned in the Eton Grammar."[72] In other cases, Leigh quotes a sample sentence and translation from the Eton grammar, and then appends a humorous observation immediately thereafter, as in: "*Urbi pater est, urbique maritus*.—Gram. Eton. He is the father of the city, and the husband of the city. He must have been a pretty fellow, whoever he was."[73] These encouragements for the reader to consult or compare with the Eton grammar may be interpreted as further signaling by the author about his own education. But in the gestures towards Eton ("we have no wish to detract in any way from the merit of the illustrious poet in the Eton Grammar"[74]) the reader also detects sarcasm. Etonian Latin is both the target and the medium of this more sophisticated tier of humor. In fact, a later edition of the text in Leigh's compilation, *Paul Prendergast* (1858), was explicitly titled *The Eton Comic Grammar*.

Just as in the case of conceptualizing "first-tier" readers of the *Comic Grammar*, it is helpful here to consider an example of a Classically-trained insider whom Leigh and Leech target with this deeper critique of Latin *through* Latin. Lewis Carroll, the Latinate penname of Victorian author Charles Dodgson, was another of the earliest known owners of the *Comic Grammar*. A first edition of the textbook, which was published when Carroll was only eight years of age, was sold with his estate after his death in 1898. We do not know when or how Carroll acquired a copy of the book; he may have received it as a gift during his early years at the Richmond Grammar School or purchased it himself during his lectureship at the University of Oxford. In either case, Carroll was an accomplished Latinist. His

[71] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 33–34.
[72] Ibid., 34.
[73] Ibid., 73.
[74] Ibid., 62.

first literary compositions were in Latin verse, the earliest an 1844 poem about the setting of the sun.[75] But Carroll also had a knack for Latin wordplay and schoolboy humor of the sort we see in the *Comic Grammar*. In 1853, he wrote a mock-epic entitled "The Ligniad" for his friend George Woodhouse, a double-pun on *Iliad* and the Latin word for "wood" (*lignum*) as an allusion to his friend's name.[76] His 1888 poem, "A Lesson in Latin" puns on the linguistic similarity of *amare* ("to love") and *amaris* ("bitter") to indicate that the most important lesson he and his peers learned in Latin class was that love hurts.[77]

Carroll never mentions the *Comic Grammar* by name in his writings, but he may have included an allusion to the text in his Alice books. In the second chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the heroine encounters a mouse and attempts to communicate, twice crying out in the vocative, "O Mouse!" Carroll explains this formal address in parentheses, noting:

> (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother's Latin Grammar, 'A mouse—of a mouse—to a mouse—a mouse—O mouse!')[78]

When Alice's address in English proves unsuccessful, she tries with the opening line from her French textbook ("Ou est ma chatte?"). Because the line of French has been identified with a real French textbook from the nineteenth century, Selwyn Goodacre postulated that Alice's reference to a Latin grammar must also point the way to a real Latin book, and identified this as the *Comic Grammar* in Carroll's possession.[79] As Goodacre notes, the noun "mouse" (*mus, muris*) is not used as a paradigm in Victorian grammars because of its grammatical irregularity. But in Alice's glance at her brother's grammar, she may have misread the Latin word *musa* ("muse") as "mouse," and thus determined "o mouse" to be the correct vocative address for such a creature.

The *Comic Grammar* does include a funny noun declension of *musa musae* in the form of rhyming couplets: "*Musa musae*, the Gods were at tea, *Musae musam*, eating raspberry jam."[80] If Carroll owned a copy of the textbook at this time, he might have used the poem as inspiration for Alice's address. But there are two possible challenges to Goodacre's theory: the first is that the *Comic Grammar* never includes the vocative translation of the noun "o muse!" that Alice has in mind during her conversation with the mouse. The second is that many other Victorian grammars use *musa* as a paradigm (although not the Eton grammar and

[75] The poem appears in Stuart Dodgson, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1989), 23.

[76] Edward Wakeling, *Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 28–29.

[77] Dodgson, *The Life*, 276–77.

[78] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1866), 24.

[79] Selwyn Goodacre, "In Search of Alice's Brother's Latin Grammar," *Jabberwocky* 4, no. 2 (1975): 27–30.

[80] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 29.

few English grammars published prior to the *Comic Grammar*). Carroll may therefore have taken the idea from a different text entirely, or simply from the common usage of *musa* as a paradigm in nineteenth-century Latin classes. One possible point in favor of Goodacre's reading lies in Carroll's famous wordplay on the Latin *jam* in his second Alice book, *Through the Looking Glass*. Here the White Queen chides Alice that she cannot have jam today because, "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday – but never jam *to-day*."[81] This odd rule in the White Queen's kingdom has nothing to do with edible jam, but with the Latin adverb *jam* which can express the meaning "now," but only in past or future time.[82] If indeed Carroll had a fondness for the *musa* poem in the *Comic Grammar*, this notion of a wordplay on *jam* and jam may have come from that same poem, which imagines the gods "eating raspberry jam" at a tea party. But this hypothesis remains speculative at best.

Whether or not Carroll used the *Comic Grammar* in his Alice novels, his knack for Latin wordplay exemplifies the qualities that the Leigh envisioned for his most educated audience. The textbook appeals to readers who possess both the facility in Latin and the whimsy to enjoy its satire. As a buyer or recipient of the textbook, Carroll did not come to the *Comic Grammar* for Latin instruction. For readers of this tier, Leigh's textbook serves not to teach but to recall the memory of Latin teaching and, in so doing, to reinforce a sense of belonging. It reminds Carroll and readers like him of their membership in an elite circle of young men who attended the best schools and received a Classical education, in which Latin served as a code of social recognition. But with its parodies of the Eton grammar, the *Comic Grammar* also advances a critique of this practice. Elite groups invariably disguise the mechanisms by which they achieved and maintain their power in the vestments of gentility. Leigh in turn holds up these disguises to the light and reveals them for what they are: the pretensions of a bygone era. Gentlemen who communicate their status through the purple passages of a long-dead literature are made to confront the silliness and inutility of continuing this institution.

Conclusion

In the introduction to the *Comic Grammar*, Percival Leigh defends his humorous treatment of the Latin language on the basis of his historical moment. Tracing time from Hesiod's Golden Age to the modern era, he claims that comicality has heretofore emerged "in isolated sparks and flashes."[83] But at last in Victorian England, silliness tinges every innovation: railroads and air balloons "have something

[81] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1872), 94.

[82] Angelika Zirker, "Alice was not surprised: (Un)surprises in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books," *Connotations* 14 (2004): 26-28.

[83] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 9.

funny about them." The medical profession is a tragi-comedy of quackery and quasi-scientific dissent. The British legislature has made a mockery of the law. How, in such an environment, can teachers expect students of Latin "to learn what they cannot laugh at"? Leigh's survey of comedy across the ages also touches on poetic geniuses past, crediting Horace's *Satires* as "comical enough" and imagining the laughter at Shakespeare "performing the part of the Ghost, in his own play of *Hamlet*." He espouses a proto-Darwinian theory of literary humor, in which the comic strains of previous generations have at last culminated in the authors of nineteenth-century Britain. The moment has arrived in which the Classical tradition can be funny for teachers and students alike.

Leigh's theory of comedic evolution could not, of course, be substantiated even if it had been proposed with serious intent – and serious intent was antithetical to the very essence of his textbook. But I suspect that amidst the silliness of his pedagogical project Leigh correctly identified his era as a critical moment in which the ridicule of curricular conventions could take place. The *Comic Grammar* was composed and published at a turning point in the history of Classical education: a juncture when the social value of Latin remained high as its practical value plummeted. The British market for grammar books and interlinear texts expanded during the first half of the nineteenth century in response to an unforeseen readership that desired not to master Latin, but to achieve the appearance of a Classical education. Self-starters like William Fernie needed a few clever lines to ease their passage into polite society; longstanding members of the literati like Lewis Carroll took an "insider" pleasure at memorializing schoolboy lessons learned and largely forgotten. The *Comic Grammar* welcomes both types of readers, and this paper has disentangled the different techniques by which it appealed to both. But I have also tried to demonstrate that the satirical lens of the *Comic Grammar* did not stop at the Latin language. It swept with equal interest over the institutions and professions that perpetuated class divisions on the basis of Classical education. It invites novice readers to reconsider the rationale and practicality of learning Latin for appearance's sake; it asks Eton veterans to acknowledge the silliness of using Classical tags as a shibboleth of intellectual status. If there is one tag that the *Comic Grammar* truly embraced and that encapsulates its parodic moral, however, we find it waiting in the chapter on adverbs: "satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum."[84]

[84] Leigh, *Comic Latin Grammar*, 135 quoting Sall. *Cat.* 5.4: "Plenty of eloquence, not enough wisdom."

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NOTE

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Reading and (Re)Writing the Auctores: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscellany

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ABSTRACT

This essay examins the influence of Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* (2nd c. CE) on Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* (1489); in particular, it reconsiders the manner in which the aesthetics of *varietas* are deployed in each as part of the broader literary program. First, by exploring ideas of *auctoritas*, this essay suggests that Gellius' own preferred categories influenced Poliziano's sense of the canon and contributed to the development of his own authoritative persona throughouth Preface of the *Centuria prima*. Second, in examining the ways in which both authors describe their use of literary diversity, it becomes increasingly evident that both see their prose works as operating within a broader aesthetic of variety. After illustrating how both authors articulate these values, the essay concludes by examining two sets of chapters in the *Centuria prima* in which variety is put to use for didactic purpose, in a manner similar to the *Noctes Atticae*. While the influence of Gellius has long been acknowledged, including by Poliziano himself, this essay offers a reading of each author that reveals additional literary purpose underlying their use of the aesthetics of variety.

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1 Introduction

The influence of ancient miscellanistic literature, and especially the *Noctes Atticae* of the Antonine author Aulus Gellius, was profound in the Renaissance, with no fewer than fifteen discrete examples of humanists adapting the form for their own uses.[1] Perhaps the most important of these is Angelo Poliziano and his *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* (1489): written when he was thirty-five years old, a client of the Medici and professor at the Florentine *Studio*, his collection gathers together one hundred different chapters of material, excerpting and translating broadly across the Classical tradition and asserting his own emendations and interpretations against those of his rivals.[2] The collection represents a *tour de force* in which Poliziano focuses in particular on obscure passages or other textual problems that had been inadequately addressed by his predecessors. In some ways his *Miscellanea* are typical of his output more broadly, marked by his extensive learning and an allusive style akin to the Alexandrian poet-scholars of the *Mouseion*, and he applies this deft hand to the scholarly questions that he investigates.[3] In this essay I present a reading of Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* alongside his primary model, the *Noctes Atticae*.[4] While the former's debt to the latter is well-established, my aim is to reconsider Poliziano's engagement with the

1 Ancient miscellanistic literature inspired a range of new genres of scholarly work throughout the Renaissance. For the influence of the model in humanist scholarship, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, « La miscellanée: histoire d'un genre, » in *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: Publications de l'École nationale des chartes, 2003); Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 117–32; Angus E. Vine, *Miscellaneous Order: Manuscript Culture and the Early Modern Organization of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). On Gellius' influence specifically see Anthony Grafton, "Conflict and Harmony in the *Collegium Gellianum*," in *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, ed. Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Michael Heath, "Gellius in the French Renaissance," ibid., ed. Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

2 On Poliziano generally, see Aldo Scaglione, "The Humanist as Scholar and Politian's Conception of the *Grammaticus*," *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961); Ida Maïer, *Ange Politien: La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469-1480)*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1966); Emilio Bigi, *La cultura del Poliziano e altri studi umanistici* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1967); Anthony Grafton, "On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977); Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Peter Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli: Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

3 On Poliziano's Alexandrianism and the links made in modern scholarship, see Clare E. L. Guest, "*Varietas*, *poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano," *Hermathena* 183 (2007): 9 n. 2; for Poliziano's own cultivation of the connection in the *Miscellanea*, see Andrew R. Dyck and Alan Cottrell, eds., *Angelo Poliziano: Miscellanies*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), I.viii, nn. 3 and 4.

4 Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own. In citing Poliziano's *Miscellanea*, I follow the edition and numeration of Dyck and Cottrell, *Miscellanies*. Eric MacPhail, "Angelo Poliziano's Preface to the *Miscellaneorum Centuria Prima*," *Erasmus Studies* 35, no. 1 (2015) also offers an edition, translation and brief commentary identifying the primary classical intertexts of the Preface to the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*. For Gellius, I follow Leofranc Holford-Strevens, ed., *Auli Gelli Noctes Atticae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

didactic and aesthetic features of the *Noctes Atticae*. The form of the *Miscellanea* itself draws most heavily on the miscellanies of the imperial period such as the *Noctes Atticae*, as Poliziano himself claims.[5] While the literary form of miscellanistic texts has been typically neglected by classicists, recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in these texts.[6] In particular, it is increasingly clear that despite claims to haphazard organization and a reputation as mere compilations of material from other authors, the ancient miscellany has a distinctive aesthetic that benefits from intensive, intratextual reading. [7] The newfound appreciation for the sophistication of these works can illuminate the composition of the *Miscellanea*; miscellanistic compilation reflects a specific aesthetic paradigm, predicated upon variation that produces numerous distinctive intratextual effects.[8] Gellius in

[5] While no genre of "miscellany" was recognized or named as such in the ancient world, such miscellanistic compilations were a common literary form throughout the imperial period; see Teresa Morgan, "The Miscellany and Plutarch," in *The Philosopher's Banquet: Plutarch's Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire*, ed. Frieda Klotz and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49–54; Katerina Oikonomopoulou, "Miscellanies," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, ed. William A. Johnson and Daniel Richter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Such texts participate in a broader phenomenon of encyclopedism in the ancient world, standing at one end of the spectrum of texts grappling with the proliferation of knowledge in the Roman empire; see Jason König and Greg Woolf, "Encyclopaedism in the Roman empire," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 52–58 (on miscellanies). On the range of literary manifestations of this encyclopedic impulse in the pre-modern period, and the problems of defining an encyclopedic text, see Robert L. Fowler, "Encyclopaedias: Definitions and Theoretical Problems," in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997); Daniel Harris-McCoy, "Varieties of Encyclopedism in the Early Roman Empire: Vitruvius, Pliny the Elder, Artemidorus" (PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 8–49; König and Woolf, "Introduction," 1–5, 13–20.

[6] Gellius in particular has benefited from an increasing number of critical studies, including the landmark Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Leofranc Holford-Strevens and Amiel D. Vardi, eds., *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Erik Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae: Aulus Gellius and the Fantasy of the Roman Library* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Wytse Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist: Roman Cultural Authority in Attic Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Eleanor M. Rust, "*Ex Angulis Secretisque Librorum*: Reading, Writing, and Using Miscellaneous Knowledge in the *Noctes Atticae*" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southern California, 2009); Joseph A. Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture: Text, Presence, and Imperial Knowledge in the Noctes Atticae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[7] Among other examples, see Jason König, "Fragmentation and Coherence in Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions*," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Paulas, "How to Read Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*," *American Journal of Philology* 133, no. 3 (2012); Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christian Jacob, *The Web of Athenaeus* trans. Arietta Papaconstantinou, ed. Scott F. Johnson (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013); William Fitzgerald, *Variety: The Life of a Roman Concept* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), esp. 149-95.

[8] To be sure, the organizational principles underlying texts of an encyclopedic nature like Gellius' and Poliziano's are challenging to interpret precisely for the reason that they reflect a different conception of knowledge and the relative value of its different fields; see König and Woolf, "Introduction," 15–

particular makes ample use of this model as part of his intellectual project, which is grounded in the cultivation of critical thought and reading practices.[9]

In the first part of this essay, I consider the ways in which Gellius' and Poliziano's attitudes towards authority complement one another. For both, the authority of the *veteres* is central, and contributes to their sense of canonicity and the importance of reading these works with care. In the second part of the essay, I focus on *varietas* and the miscellanistic form itself. In choosing to align his work with this model of ancient encyclopedic scholarship, Poliziano subsumes the authority assigned to Gellius and other compilatory authors in the Middle Ages through the Quattrocento into his work. His choice of the miscellanistic form allows him to challenge his reader from both an intellectual and an aesthetic standpoint, becoming the ideal medium for Poliziano's philological virtuosity and crafting a collection that has a practical and educative function for his envisioned audience. To be sure, Gellius and Poliziano have different purposes, aesthetic and otherwise, in mind for their works; but reconsidering the two alongside one another sheds light on the influence of the *Noctes Atticae*, and can further our understanding of the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* as a work of literature.[10]

2 Reading, *Auctores*, and Authority in Gellius and Poliziano

Among the ancient miscellanists, Gellius' work in particular is concerned with precisely how an ancient audience should read the vast quantity of literature that was in circulation in the Antonine period. In the Preface to the *Noctes Atticae,* Gellius outlines a technique for reading the work, a strategy which reflects his own interests in how and why people choose to read and interact with texts.[11] In particular, he singles out his judicious selections, choosing to include only those items that would stimulate the inquiring and engaged mind. Ultimately, if his readers do not have time to think actively and reflect, Gellius suggests that they leave the *Noctes Atticae* behind, as his work requires close, active reading in order to derive the most enjoyment and benefit out of the text.[12] The Preface thus introduces several reading practices that instruct the audience how to evaluate and

16; Christel Meier, "Organisation of Knowledge and Encyclopedic *Ordo*: Functions and Purposes of a Universal Literary Genre," in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997).

[9] See, for instance, Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*; Scott J. DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies of Reading (Gellius): Miscellany and the Active Reader in *Noctes Atticae* Book 2," *Classical Philology* 115, no. 2 (2020).

[10] Poliziano's *Miscellanea* were similarly influential after their publication as scholarly and literary models; see Pierre Laurens, « La poétique du Philologue: Les *Miscellanea* de Politien dans la lumière du premier centenaire, » *Euphrosyne* 23 (1995): 356–67.

[11] See Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*, 33–36, 66–84; DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies."

[12] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 19.

to critique literature properly, in order to inculcate an appreciation of Roman literature and Gellius' place within this tradition.[13]

Gellius places great emphasis on *how* to read; we should also consider *what* Gellius wants us to read. Gellius fashions a distinctive canon, one that is retrospective and focused on the models of the past: indeed, passages from several of his preferred authors, like Cato and Claudius Quadrigarius, only survive thanks to the quotations that he provides.[14] At least in part, this is because for Gellius, these earlier authors are masters of Latin. Time and again throughout the *Noctes Atticae*, the old authors (*veteres*) are held up as being of the greatest benefit for readers; the knowledge of these authors carries weight and *auctoritas* itself. Those trying to read Latin literature and master the language should focus as these texts as they represent truest sources of good Latin usage.[15]

In an example from late in the work, we can see this preference in action—as well as how Gellius establishes authority.[16] Once, when he was a young man, he was present when the imperial tutor Marcus Cornelius Fronto teased a poet-friend about the latter's misuse of the word *harena*. Fronto himself possesses weight and authority throughout the *Noctes Atticae*, thanks to both his standing as one of the great thinkers about the Latin language in Gellius' day and his personal connection to Gellius himself.[17] Fronto's authority further derives from his knowledge an earlier author that stated his poet-friend's usage was wrong—Julius Caesar. When presented with this challenge, the poet defends himself, but ultimately concedes the authority of antiquity: "ac fortassean de 'quadrigis' veterum auctoritati concessero [...] Tunc permotus auctoritate libri poeta [...]"[18] After he pushes back on several of the claims, and Caesar's book itself is produced, he further bows to its authority. At this point Gellius allows Fronto to offer further interpretations of Caesar's words that seem definitive, but Gellius cannot let the matter sit there. He ends his treatment by finding an exception in the works of Varro to the rule that Fronto laid out. Fronto was concerned with appealing to the authority of old authors for proper usage; Gellius imitates his authoritative teacher in an effort to bolster his own learning.

13 Gellius appears to envision his prose work as innovative, analogous to collected poetic genres like Statius' *Silvae*, and influences Poliziano in this respect; see Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196-97.

14 On Gellian archaism, see René Marache, *La critique littéraire de langue latine et le développement du goût archaïsant au IIe siècle de notre ère* (Rennes: Plihon, 1952); David W. T. Vessey, "Aulus Gellius and the Cult of the Past," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.34, no. 2 (1994).

15 Thus Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 178: "*Auctoritas* is the highest principle in Gellius' eye; neither *ratio* nor *consuetudo* can take its place."

16 Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 19.8.

17 On Fronto in the *Noctes Atticae*, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 131–39; Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist*, 37–65.

18 Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 19.8.6, 10. "And perhaps I'll concede to the authority of the ancients about *quadrigae* [...] Then the poet, moved by the authority of the book [...]"

If such imitation of authorized texts lies at the heart of Gellius' task, we can see a negative example in his treatment of Seneca the Younger, whom Gellius sets up as a straw man representative of the excesses of Neronian Latin.[19] Gellius introduces Seneca's objection that Cicero went out of his way to show that he had read Ennius, suggesting that Seneca included this "most stupidly" (*addidit insulsissime*).[20] Gellius then scornfully cites Seneca's apology for Cicero's incorporation of Ennian verses: "atque ibi homo nugator Ciceronis errores deprecatur et 'non fuit' inquit 'Ciceronis hoc vitium, sed temporis; necesse est erat haec dici, cum illa legerentur'."[21] Seneca dismisses the introduction of Ennius' poetry as a ploy of Cicero to restrain the very brightness of his style: "Ciceronem haec ipsa interposuisse ad effugiendam infamiam nimis lascivae orationis et nitidae."[22] Seneca also claims that Vergil introduced characteristics of Ennian poetry into his own verses to ensure that his audience would be able to recognize those elements and thus appreciate Vergil's work as a result: "ut Ennianus populus adgnosceret in novo carmine aliquid antiquitatis."[23] This detail about Vergil's practice reinforces what has become apparent in Seneca's attitude toward Cicero: that in these authors, Ennius only appears as a nod to the tastes of contemporary audiences. In particular, Gellius excoriates his predecessor's taste, dismissive of some of Gellius' preferred authors, and he frames his critique as a defense of educational standards grounded in an appreciation of archaic and classical Latin literature. Gellius' discussion aims to emphasize Seneca's faulty opinions, summed up briefly by Quintilian in his claims that Seneca slandered archaic styles in order to support his own: "cum diversi sibi conscius generis placere se in dicendo posse quibus illi placerent diffideret."[24] Gellius' criticism of Seneca, then, closely follows the tradition of Quintilian's influential assessment, and the rejection of the *auctoritas* of the Republican authors is at the center of the debate.[25]

[19] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.2. In so doing, Gellius is playing within a polemical tradition that is well-established in his time. See Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 276; William J. Dominik, "The style is the man: Seneca, Tacitus, and Quintilian's canon," in *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in society and literature*, ed. William J. Dominik (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 65.

[20] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.2.6.

[21] Ibid., 12.2.8: "and then that trifling man apologizes for Cicero's errors and says that 'this is not a fault of Cicero, but of his time; it was necessary that these things be said, when those verses were being read.'"

[22] Ibid., 12.2.9: "[he said that] Cicero had inserted these very things to avoid the accusation of having a style that was too extravagant and brightly polished."

[23] Ibid., 12.2.10: "so that people who were aficionados of Ennius' work might recognize something of its antiquity in the new poem."

[24] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.1.126: "since, being aware that his own style was quite different, he lacked confidence that he could please those that were pleased by them." Citations of Quintilian follow Michael Winterbottom, ed., *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae Libri Duodecim*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[25] Quintilian fought against the rise of contemporary rhetorical practice and sought a reversion to earlier Ciceronian models, which was the presumed topic of his lost *De causis corruptae eloquentiae*; cf. Dominik, "The style is the man," 51–53.

This sense of authority translates into the realm of manuscripts and books as well. Gellius relishes his encounters with old manuscripts and purported autographs: he regales his reader with an account of discovering a reading in a manuscript of Cicero that had been corrected by Tiro,[26] direct and indirect consultation of autograph editions of Vergil,[27] and texts of Ennius corrected by Lampadio.[28] Gellius' discussion of euphony at 13.21 is illustrative of this reverence for the authority of (material) antiquity: following the grammarian Valerius Probus, the reading *urbis* for *urbes* in Vergil is given credence because Probus "read it in a book corrected by [Vergil's] own hand" (" 'quem ego' inquit 'librum manu ipsius correctum legi' "),[29] and Gellius himself supports a reading in Cicero of *peccatu* for *peccato* because he "found it in one and another book edited by Tiro of the most ancient fidelity" ("hoc enim scriptum in uno atque in altero antiquissimae fidei libro Tironiano repperi").[30] Similarly he reports encountering a copy of Livius Andronicus in a library in Patras that was "of an awe-inspiring age" (*verendae vetustatis*); he trusts its readings on the basis of its age and purported fidelity.[31] In each case, the antiquity of the manuscript, and its proximity to the *veteres* themselves, confers authority. Gellius thus circumscribes his actual sources, eliminating those like Seneca that do not appeal to, and respect the authority of, their elders.

How does Poliziano's approach compare? In terms of his philological method, he shares Gellius' interest in pursuing the oldest manuscripts, considering them to be more accurate than those that were produced closer to his own time.[32] But for as much as he endeavors to collect material and offer learned disquisitions on these texts in a way that is indebted to figures like Gellius, his principles of inclusion seem to differ. His sense of the literary figures that are authoritative and deserving of attention is vastly expanded from Gellius: he includes reference to virtually every Latin canonical figure in his work. In contrast to Gellius' focus on *auctoritas*, narrowly defined and connected to age, in his own preface Poliziano resists appealing to authority without justification, as his contemporaries had.[33] In the second half of the Preface to the *Miscellanea*, his concern rests with the

[26] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 1.7.1.

[27] Ibid., 1.21.2, 2.3.5, 9.14.7.

[28] Ibid., 18.5.11. On these manuscripts generally, see Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius*, 190-92; he considers the manuscripts and their readings to be likely forgeries, though Gellius treats them as authentic. On the question of forgeries compare James E. G. Zetzel, "*Emendavi ad Tironem*: Some Notes on Scholarship in the Second Century A.D.," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973).

[29] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 13.21.4.

[30] Ibid., 13.21.16.

[31] Ibid., 18.9.5.

[32] For Poliziano's preference for older manuscripts and the parallels in Gellius' approach, see Grafton, "On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context," 166–72.

[33] Alessandro Daneloni, "*Auctores* and *Auctoritas* in the Preface to Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*," in *Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Yolanda Plumley, Giulio Bacco, and Stefano Jossa (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011) surveys Poliziano's attitudes and reads his discussions of *auctores* within the context of polemics against his contemporaries.

assignation of fabricated passages to the ancient *auctores*, or even the wholesale invention of such figures, that had been perpetrated by other humanists.[34] By contrast, his own work is thoroughly grounded in the ancient *auctores*, and he provides a list of those figures at the outset to establish his own authority and bona fides.[35] Critically, it is not purely the age of the cited authors that authorizes their inclusion, but Poliziano's own deep knowledge of and acquaintance with those texts. Moreover, in discussing his own work, he presents a mélange of different references to the Latin literary tradition, subsuming the figures he cites into his own authoritative posture.

This is evident even at that outset of his preface: he notes that authors are accustomed to protect their favorites and attack their opponents, and claims that these figures are sometimes taunted by slight figures like himself or Cluvienus ("tum saepe a tenuioribus et gregariis velutique postremae notae, qualis ego vel Cluvienus, etiam proceres illi (ut ita dixerim) et antesignani quidam literarum sugillantur"), a direct reference to Juvenal's first satire that casts Poliziano as a satirist attacking the contemporary scholarly scene, and prepares his reader for the litany of references to come.[36] He suggests that he is not concerned with challenging the authority of the learned *per se*, but with ensuring that those that follow them in their studies are not led astray ("ac non id quaesivimus, ut aliquam doctis hominibus, veluti labeculam, aspergeremus, sed id cavimus potius, ne sub illorum auctoritate studiosorum fides periclitaretur").[37] His warning reworks Cicero's *In Vatinium,* one of Cicero's more strongly invective speeches, and its challenges to the word and character of Vatinius.[38] Poliziano openly states his concern is not principally to question the authority of his targets, yet the source text that he refashions here runs counter to that claim: he reworks a canonical text in order to absorb its literary heft. In fact, his use of no less an authority than Cicero appears to redirect the invective against Domizio Calderini, a primary target of Poliziano's ire, particularly for his fabrication of sources and failure to adhere to the authority of the ancients.[39] Poliziano may claim not to attack other learned men, but by incorporating Juvenal and Cicero into his persona and redeploying one of the orator's speeches, Poliziano reveals both his deftness as an author and

[34] Filippo Beroaldo and Domizio Calderini are the primary targets of such claims, though others certainly fall within this category; see Daneloni, "*Auctores* and *Auctoritas*," 76–77

[35] Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 1.

[36] Ibid., I Pref. 1. "Then too the generals, so to speak, and the vanguard of literature are often buffeted by less important, rank-and-file men of the least reputation, 'such as Cluvienus or I'."

[37] Ibid., I Pref. 2. "And I did not seek to sprinkle some stain, so to speak, on learned men, but rather we took care that the trust of students under their authority not be put in danger."

[38] Cic. *Vat.* 41: "Sed cum T. Annium tanto opere laudes et clarissimo viro non nullam laudatione tua labeculam adspergas…" See MacPhail, "Angelo Poliziano's Preface," 66.

[39] Poliziano's attacks on Calderini later in the *Miscellanea* evoke preying upon the credulity of students (e.g. *I Misc.* 9.4, "ubi non fucum facit et lectoris credulitatem ludificatur"). On Polizano's hostility towards Calderini, see Carlo Dionisotti, "Calderini, Poliziano e altri," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 11 (1968).

his mastery of the canon. In this regard, he casts himself as a writer from antiquity—building his work out of dense intertextual references, which abound throughout his corpus. While he is aware of the distance between himself and the ancients he integrates himself into the tradition of classical literature to buttress his broader intellectual project. From the beginning of the Preface the stylistic virtues of *docta varietas* ("learned variety"), predicated upon the dense fabric of references across the canon, begin to emerge.[40]

Poliziano even appeals to the canon for his use of unaccustomed or recondite language. As he suggests, while a reader might not immediately recognize a word that he chooses to use, this is a sign that one ought to return to the canonical Latin works. Perhaps more striking, Poliziano acknowledges that he responds to those that challenge him by appealing to only as much authority as he needs ("si quis ubi quid refellitur multarum vel auctoritatum vel rationum moles desiderat, at victoriam sciat illic a nobis non victoriae quaeri satietatem").[41] The implication that one only needs a certain number of authorities, ostensibly those that he had included in his list of authors at the outset of the work, upon which to base their claims underlays Poliziano's statement. Indeed, he explicitly labels these authors as *honesti*, suggesting the general quality of the sources that he has followed:

> Enimvero ne putent homines maleferiati nos ista, quaeque sunt, de faece hausisse neque grammaticorum transilivisse lineas, Pliniano statim exemplo nomina praetexuimus auctorum, sed honestorum veterumque duntaxat, unde ius ista sumunt et a quibus versuram fecimus, nec autem quos alii tantum citaverint, ipsorum opera temporibus interciderint sed quorum nosmet ipsi thesauros tractavimus, quorum sumus per litteras peregrinati.[42]

His sources are old, *veteres*, and in this regard, he follows Gellius' preferred qualities, though Poliziano's reasoning for preferring the older sources, based in his philological methodology, is distinct from Gellius; in fact, it is not their age but

[40] *Varietas docta*, most forcefully articulated in the Preface to the *Centuria prima* (esp. *Misc. I* Pref. 3) can best be summed as the eclectic imitation of ancient literature by Poliziano, intertextually enhancing the fabric of his own works. On the aesthetic generally, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, « La 'docte variété' chez Ange Politien, » in *La varietas à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris: Publications de l'École nationale des chartes, 2001); on *varietas* in Poliziano's *Silvae*, see Guest, "*Varietas*, *poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano"; Dustin Mengelkoch, "The Mutability of Poetics: Poliziano, Statius, and the *Silvae*," *Modern Language Notes* 125, no. 1 (2010). For an example of the aesthetic in the *Nutricia*, see below.

[41] Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I Pref. 6. "If anyone desires heaps of many sources or reasons when something is refuted, let him know that victory is sought by me, not a surfeit of victory."

[42] Ibid., I Pref. 16. "But, so that idlers not think that I have drawn my work, whatever it is, from the dregs, nor that I have overstepped the lines of the *grammatici*, I have woven out immediately, following the example of Pliny, the names of the authors, but only the reputable and ancient ones, from whom my work takes its license and from whom I compiled; but I have not included those whom others have only cited, whose works are lost to time, but those whose treasures I myself have handled and per whose letters I have wandered."

Poliziano's direct knowledge of them that bestows authority. Further, in calling the sources *honesti*, indicative of their authenticity as well as their educative qualities, Poliziano suggests the nobility of character that they might confer. Only texts that can lead to personal improvement, then, can qualify as authoritative.

These displays of learning also emerge in his personal correspondence, in which he fastidiously depicts his mastery of the canonical texts of antiquity as a marker of his own, personal authority. And yet, what is perhaps most notable about his learning is his fundamental eclecticism. For as much as he claims in the Preface to the *Miscellanea* to focus only on those old and noble authors, he resists the slavish imitation of Cicero, common both in antiquity and in the early Renaissance, instead interspersing the full range of Latin authors throughout his work to elevate the appearance of his learning and to enrich his own style. This encyclopedic approach, evinced by his author-table in *Miscellanea*, reflects the breadth of his influences; indeed, Poliziano went so far as to say in the *praelectio* to his course on Statius and Quintilian that "we should not simply dismiss as inferior everything that is different" ("neque autem statim deterius dixerimus, quod diversum sit").[43]

But the question remains as to where authority seems to lie, and what authors should be read. In this regard, Poliziano is likely looking to his most prominent ancient model, as he sees in Gellius a paradigm for interacting with antiquity, personally reading and assembling texts that provide utility. He can also extract lessons about determining the authority of the books themselves, rather than just authoritative authors—Poliziano's preference for earlier manuscripts, for instance, has good basis in Gellius' working methods. Both also share an inclination towards the earlier authors (albeit with their different understandings of what weight that age carried), especially with respect to understanding how those authors shaped those that came after. In Gellius' case, his reading of earlier works is more focused on extracting linguistic or antiquarian detail from a canon, which he helps to set. For Poliziano, his scholarly, almost scientific, impulse to read broadly, and to recognize the importance of earlier works on the later, enabled him to begin to reconstruct and explicate with authority a tradition of classical Latin.

3 *Varietas* and Critical Reading: Poliziano and the Gellian Model

While Poliziano's discussions of authority reflect his attitudes towards the scholarship of his day, the choice of the miscellanistic compilatory format is still remarkable. In the Preface he goes to some lengths to articulate the tradition to which his work belongs, and in so doing offers an overview of how his work

[43] Poliziano, *In Quint. et Stat.*, 878. I follow the text of Eugenio Garin, ed., *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento* (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952). The sentiment and phraseology are drawn directly from Tac. *Dial.* 18.3, during Aper's defense of modern rhetoric. On the challenges of reading Aper's speech, see Sander M. Goldberg, "Appreciating Aper: The Defence of Modernity in Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*," *Classical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1999).

functions on not only a scholarly, but an aesthetic level. As a poet himself Poliziano's talents were not confined to philology; in fact, his poetic output demonstrates his concern for motifs including *varietas* that he recognizes from the ancient world.[44] How then does Poliziano articulate his aims and methods in the Preface to the *Miscellanea*, particularly with respect to the aesthetic considerations that apply to his work? Throughout the first half of the prefatory epistle to the *Miscellanea*, he engages broadly with questions of his formal approach rather than his content itself or his more polemical assertions (to which he turns in the second half of his preface). Many features of Gellius' own preface in the *Noctes Atticae* recur throughout Poliziano's, illuminating his debt to the Antonine author and encouraging the reader to compare the two approaches.

Most explicitly Poliziano's choice of variety identifies his work with that of ancient compilers, including Aelian and Gellius, both of whom he mentions by name.

> At inordinatam istam et confusaneam quasi silvam aut farraginem perhiberi, quia non tractim et continenter sed saltuatim scribimus et vellicatim, tantum abest uti doleamus, ut etiam titulum non sane alium quam *Miscellaneorum* exquisiverimus, in quis Graecum tamen Helianum, Latinum sequimur Gellium, quorum utriusque libri varietate sunt quam ordine blandiores.[45]

After gesturing to Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and further examples by Aristoxenus, Poliziano concludes by deflecting blame for the use of variety, should it be considered a fault in his work, and arguing that he is merely imitating the heterogeneity of nature: "denique si varietas ipsa, fastidii expultrix et lectionis irritatrix, in *Miscellaneis* culpabitur, una opera, reprehendi rerum quoque natura poterit, cuius me quidem profiteor tali disparilitate discipulum."[46] While he had positioned himself as a satirist at the outset of his Preface, here in one of his clearest programmatic statements Poliziano identifies himself with the broader tradition of miscellanistic and compilatory literature that proliferated in the ancient world. What is most striking in his apology for the miscellaneity of his work is the extent to which his own preface directly incorporates elements of his classical predecessors. His framing of this connection evokes the language of *varietas* that appears in Gellius' own Preface. A significant volume of his vocabulary has

[44] Guest, "*Varietas*, *poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano" suggests that the Greek quality of *poikilia* may be more apt category for Poliziano's variety, focused as it is on an *enkyklios paideia*.

[45] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 3. "But I should be so far from regretting that my work is called disordered and mixed as if a forest or a hodgepodge, since I did not write it in a connected or unbroken manner but skipping about and picking out pieces here and there, that I even selected no other title than *Miscellanea*, in which I follow the Greek Aelian and the Latin Gellius, each of whose books are more pleasant because of their variety rather than their order."

[46] Ibid., I Pref. 3: "Finally, if variety itself, the feature that wards off fastidiousness and incites reading, should be faulted in the *Miscellanies*, a single work, nature itself should be reprehended, whose pupil I confess myself to be with respect to such heterogeneity."

its roots in Gellius: Poliziano's claims of a disordered, confused mélange evoke Gellius' own comments on the compiled learning of miscellanistic texts ("variam et miscellam et quasi confusaneam doctrinam"),[47] and the adverbs *saltuatim* and *vellicatim* are attested only in fragments of Sisenna on the manner in which he composed his work that survive through Gellius' citations.[48] Even his final claim, on the very ordering of his work, elicits the prefatory remarks of miscellanists like Gellius, who claimed that he used a chance ordering ("usi autem sumus ordine rerum fortuito")[49] and assembled his work out of his assorted reading ("indigeste et incondite ex auditionibus lectionibusque variis").[50] While he manipulates some of these connections—he fully embraces the miscellanistic quality that Gellius and other (especially Roman) authors make a show of rejecting—, he places his *Miscellanea* fully within the genre of ancient collections. In providing a putative genre for his work and claiming affiliation with these classical figures, Poliziano evokes a set of expectations about the intellectual purpose, and the aesthetic quality, of his own collection upon which he will reflect throughout much of the prefatory epistle.

As he continues to frame his work, Poliziano cites a range of ancient sources (Julius Caesar, Varro, Valerius Messalla, Cicero, Pliny the Elder, and Quintilian) to justify his own investigations into minutiae, following the precedent of the ancient authorities. By evoking the range of works that he does, Poliziano echoes Gellius' own attempts to address potential objections from his readers that the work might contain material that is too abstruse: "quod erunt autem in his commentariis pauca quaedam scrupulosa et anxia, vel ex grammatica vel ex dialectica vel etiam ex geometrica, quodque erunt item paucula remotiora super augurio iure et pontificio, non oportet ea defugere quasi aut cognitu non utilia aut perceptu difficilia."[51] Gellius then defends his collection from a further sequence of hypothetical objections that topics might be treated elsewhere or otherwise be needlessly recherché. His response emphasizes the importance of learning of all kinds, and the variety of information—from the esoteric to the commonplace—necessary for true erudition. Two points are noteworthy: first, if a treatment seems superficial, Gellius notes that his purpose was to point out a path for his readers to learn for themselves.[52] Second, should the reader encounter a mistake or a dis-

47 Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 5: "a varied and mixed and, as it were, jumbled-up learning."

48 Ibid. 12.15. Sisenna *FRHist* 26 F130: "Nos una aestate in Asia et Graecia gesta litteris idcirco continentia mandavimus, ne vellicatim aut saltuatim scribendo lectorum animos impediremus" ("I have recorded the things that were accomplished in Asia and Greece in one summer more or less in order, so that I not hinder the minds of readers by writing piecemeal or jumping around.")

49 Ibid., Pref. 2.

50 Ibid., Pref. 3.

51 Ibid., Pref. 13. "But if there are in these essays a few things that are narrow or troublesome, either from grammar or dialectic or even from geometry, and likewise there are a small number of things that are even more obscure on pontifical or augural law, one ought not to flee from those things as if they were not useful to know or hard to understand."

52 Ibid., Pref. 16.

agreement between authorities within the *Noctes Atticae*, they should meditate upon the perceived inconsistency and the interaction of the sources.[53] For Poliziano, however, there is a different underlying purpose: by permitting himself the same faults to which the ancients were entitled, he inscribes himself among their company. He claims the authority of the ancients for himself, while looking on the variety of material that he draws upon as emblematic of the *varietas* that enhances both literary enjoyment and the natural world.

He moves on, however, to address other potential complaints, including the objection that he should treat material that is too recondite and obscure: "iam si cui parum quaepiam enucleata fortasse etiam nimis dura obscuraque videbuntur, certe is nec ingenio satis vegeto nec eruditione solida fidelique fuerit."[54] In articulating the challenge underlying his work, he once again evokes Gellius and several of the defenses noted above, in particular his suggestion that, should a reader encounter something new or unknown, they should consider why it was included. As an essential element of the program of the *Noctes Atticae,* Gellius challenges his reader with difficult material as a spur to encourage his audience to pursue their own study of the liberal arts in greater depth ("quasi libamenta ingenuarum artium dedimus"),[55] and as a result the work will help to sharpen the memory, improve the reader's speech, and make their diction more pure—in short, the *Noctes Atticae* will invigorate the reader's mind ("ingenia hominum vegetiora").[56] In contrast, Poliziano envisions his work not as a tool for enhancing the erudition of the otherwise uneducated; he explicitly rejects those that lack the already-sharpened mind that would appreciate his explications, directly alluding to Gellius' claims about what he would effect in his readers.

Poliziano's criticism of his potential reader centers on their facility of Latin, and in particular their knowledge of archaic and other irregular vocabulary. The *Miscellanea* abound with the sort of archaizing language, drawn from deep reading of the classical tradition, that typified Poliziano's style.[57] Should those that are less learned find his diction strange, this shortcoming in their own stores of knowledge will be remedied through greater acquaintance with the canon.[58] Such

53 Gellius' response to his potential objectors is predicated upon a critical reading practice with roots in the methodologies advocated in Plutarch's writings on reading and education; see DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies," 246–48. Poliziano's own knowledge of Plutarch was extensive, quoting works from across the Plutarchan corpus, including the works on education and reading that informed Gellius. See Fabio Stok, "Plutarch and Poliziano," in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, ed. Sophia A. Xenophontos and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2019); for the *Miscellanea* specifically see 413–15.

54 Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 5. "If, perhaps, some points seem too hard or obscure to anyone, certainly that person doesn't have a quick-enough mind and a firm and reliable education."

55 Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 13: "I gave an offering of the liberal arts, as it were."

56 Ibid., Pref. 16.

57 On Poliziano's Latin generally see Silvia Rizzo, "Il Latino del Poliziano," in *Agnolo Poliziano: Poeta, Scrittore, Filologo*, ed. Vincenzo Fera and Mario Martelli (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998); for his contributions to restoring the Latin lexicon in particular, see esp. 119–24.

58 Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 5.

reading is central for the discerning reader to the appreciate Poliziano's miscellanistic project. In fact, he generalizes to claim that such works "are not offered for sale to the crowd but are prepared only for the few" ("in hoc genus scriptionibus, quae non se populo venditant sed paucis modo parantur").[59] Those that fall into the former category, who may have only read a smattering of Cicero, will ultimately not appreciate his endeavors, and are thus unqualified to criticize his work. His inclusion of difficult vocabulary reaching back into the classical tradition is configured as a challenge, confronting his readers with a test of the breadth of their own reading, and thus qualification to engage with his *Miscellanea*. In so doing, Poliziano offers hints of Gellius' own prefatory challenge, in which a number of lines of Aristophanes' *Frogs* act as a shibboleth; as he explicitly notes, the passage—which he leaves unidentified beyond its author—is meant to "enflame the hostility and envy of unlearned men" ("male doctorum hominum scaevitas et invidentia irritatior") and to keep away "the hated, uninitiated crowd from my game of the Muses" ("profestum et profanum vulgus a ludo musico diversum").[60] Both the *Noctes Atticae* and the *Miscellanea* require select readers, and the prefaces to each explicitly prescribe the knowledge required to engage with their content productively.

Poliziano concludes his defense of diction by appealing to customary habits of use, noting that the authority of the ancients can support his choices when they appear to run contrary to common use, *consuetudo*, as defined by contemporary authorities. One should look instead to the habits of superior authors for guidance. In this he follows Quintilian, who suggests the importance of *consuetudo* in the formation of one's manner of speech: "consuetudo vero certissima loquendi magistra, utendumque plane sermone, ut nummo, cui publica forma est."[61] Poliziano's reflections then culminate with reference to the *Letters* of Cyprian, noting that "custom without truth is the origin of error" ("consuetudo sine veritate vetustas erroris est").[62] Within its context, Cyprian's dictum demonstrates his preference for scripture to tradition; Poliziano repurposes Cyprian's theological point for his literary purpose, suggesting the importance of textual authority alongside the tradition of customary use. He merges Quintilian's canonical attitude that common use is the best teacher despite its lack of authority with Cyprian's desire for textual primacy: the *consuetudo* of the *auctores* themselves serve as his model, and thus his own apparent divergence from the common use of his day is justified.

Moving from diction to content, Poliziano notes his inclusion of potentially obscure material by evoking Gellius' own prefatory apology:

[59] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 6.

[60] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Pref. 20. On the rhetoric of initiation for Gellius' readers, see Martin Korenjak, "Le *Noctes Atticae* di Gellio: i misteri della *παιδεία*," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 16, no. 1 (1998); on testing the audience, see DiGiulio, "Gellius' Strategies," 248–50.

[61] Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 1.6.3: "But custom is the surest teacher of speech, and we ought to use speech, just like a coin, that has the public stamp."

[62] Cyprian, *Ep.* 74.9 (cited as Poliziano I Pref. 7).

> Denique si **paucula respersimus interim scrupulosa et anxia**, quodque verius subacida, vel ex philosophia, cuius iam pridem sumus candidati, vel ex orbe illo disciplinarum quae studio sapientiae famulantur, at ea stomachum tamen lectoris praedulcibus marcentem recreabunt fortassis et exacuent.[63]

Proper learning requires balance between what readers might find more accessible and the more obscure fields like philosophy that Poliziano investigates. To ameliorate the difficulty of reading such material he claims that he alternated his topics between the hard and the pleasant. To round off this section of his discussion, Poliziano notes that he did not overlook the style of his collection, recognizing the importance of balancing beauty and utility:

> Nec enim defieri apud nos etiam patimur quam sint amoena magis et oblectatoria, ne dixerim illecebrosa, quam vel utilia vel necessaria, siquidem est (ut ait Varro) aliud homini, aliud humanitati satis, etiamque citra emolumentum speciosa interim petuntur non hercle minus quam sine specie compendium.[64]

Of particular note here is the vocabulary with which Poliziano describes the pleasing contents of his work. The adjective *oblectatoria* is attested in classical Latin only in Gellius, where it is used to describe diverting and enjoyable riddles,[65] but perhaps more striking is Poliziano's use of *illecebrosa*: for Apuleius and especially Gellius the word applies specifically to intellectual allure and the seductions of learning.[66] Such works, he notes, should be attractive for the readers while still providing some benefit ("citra emolumentum speciose"), nor should they only serve as a shortcut to learning that lacks refinement ("sine specie compendium").[67] In expressing his desire to strike a balance between the utilitarian and the

[63] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 8. "Finally if I have sprinkled throughout here and there things that are narrow or troublesome, that is to say things that are truly half-sour, either from philosophy, for which I have been striving for a long time, or from that whole sphere of fields that serve the purpose of wisdom, then perhaps those things will refresh and sharpen the appetite of the reader that has become jaded by things that are especially sweet."

[64] Ibid., I Pref. 8. "For I do not let my writings go without the things that are more pleasant and delightful, not to mention seductive, than useful and necessary, even supposing that (as Varro says) one thing is enough for a man, and another for mankind, and since attractive features are sought without regard for benefit no less, by God, than benefit is sought without ornament."

[65] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.2.lem. See *ThLL* 9.2.82.55-7.

[66] Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture,* 27–33.

[67] Poliziano possibly has Gellius' own claims about his work as a kind of shortcut to learning in mind: "modica ex his eaque sola accepi quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio ducerent" (Gellius*, Noctes Atticae,* Pref. 12: "I took moderately from these works, and only things that would lead eager and quick minds to a desire for respectable learning and consideration of the useful arts by way of a quick and easy shortcut"). Cf. Quintilian *Inst. Or*. 1.4.22: "dum ostentare discipulos circa speciosiora malunt, compendio morarentur" ("while [teachers] prefer to show their students the showier parts, they hinder them with shortcuts").

appealing Poliziano firmly situates himself in the Gellian mode, with the concomitant embrace of a miscellanistic aesthetic.

It is this distinctive choice to which Poliziano returns as he discusses the style in which he composed his *Miscellanea*. His own writing, he claims, will straddle the divide between the rough-hewn and the polished to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Poliziano's comments on the more ornate style suggest his own miscellanistic project, as he evokes the image of a mosaic: "ita e diverso vermiculata interim dictio et tessellis pluricoloribus variegata delicatiores hos capiet volsos et pumicatos."[68] Poliziano's image of the mosaic has a deep history in the Roman literary tradition: for Cicero and Quintilian it described a stylistic fault, while humanists saw the mosaic as an ideal image for their own endeavors as they pieced ancient culture together.[69] Within miscellanistic literature, *tesserae* take on added significance: Gellius uses the image of mosaic tiles to represent the puzzles that learned Romans might use to sharpen their wits that abound in the *NA*, and by extension the work itself.[70] In fact these *captiones* are expressly termed *tesserulae*, with Gellius noting that they are markers that represent something other than themselves.[71] The mosaic is an ideal metaphor for miscellanistic literature, as it focuses the reader's attention on individual details alongside the broader set of arguments; if Cicero and Quintilian are ambivalent in their rhetorical treatises, in Poliziano's hands the metaphor becomes a literary virtue, mediated through the lens of ancient miscellanistic literature.[72] The essential feature of variety is for the

[68] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 9. "So on the other hand a style that is wavy and varied with mosaic-tiles of many colors will capture the more discerning that have been plucked and smoothed with pumice."

[69] Poliziano is not the first to use this metaphor, which originates in the ancient world with a fragment of Lucilius cited several times by Cicero. In the preceding generation Leon Battista Alberti made of use of the image in his *Profugiorum ab aerumna* to describe the stylistic harmony between *brevitas*, *copia*, and the reordering of ancient learning into new patterns. Such imagery can be read as programmatic, recognizing the aesthetic potential inherent in compilation, as in Alberti's own *Intercenales*; see Roberto Cardini, *Mosaici: Il "nemico" dell'Alberti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 2–7. On the lineage of the imagery see Eric MacPhail, "The Mosaic of Speech: A Classical Topos in Renaissance Aesthetics," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 250–53; Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 70–73. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, 197–98 connects the image with Poliziano's principle of *inaequalitas*, the mixing of passages of different length. Martin L. McLaughlin, "Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*: Postmodern Poetics in a Proto-Renaissance Poem," in *Italy in Crisis: 1494*, ed. Jane Everson and Diego Zancani (Oxford: Routledge, 2000) situates the imagery within Poliziano's broader poetic program and his opponents' hostility towards that program.

[70] Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae*, 135–40; Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, "Saturnalian Riddles for Attic Nights: Intratextual Feasting with Aulus Gellius," in *Intratextuality and Latin Literature*, ed. Stephen J. Harrison, Stavros Frangoulidis, and Theodore D. Papanghelis (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 440–43.

[71] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae,* 18.13.2: "ubi conveneramus conplusculi eiusdem studii homines ad lavandi tempus, captiones, quae sophismata appellantur, mente agitabamus easque quasi talos aut tesserulas in medium vice sua quisque iaciebamus." For the connection between intellectual activity and play, as well as further exploration of the *captiones* as *tesserulae*, see Joseph A. Howley, " 'Heus tu, rhetorisce': Gellius, Cicero, Plutarch, and Roman Study Abroad," in *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision*, ed. Jesper Majbom Madsen and Roger Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 185-86.

[72] Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 72–73.

appearance of segmentation to be minimized so that the brilliance of the whole may be recognized.[73] While Poliziano moves on to apologizes for the style of his essays, positing that they will be easy to follow and "simple in their elegance" ("simplices munditiae"),[74] he directly alludes to Horace *Odes* 1.5; the connection only serves to reinforce Poliziano's claims to the classical aesthetics of miscellanistic literature through his appeals, direct and indirect, to the ancient *auctores*.[75]

His own verse history of the poets and poetics, the *Nutricia* (one of the constituent poems of the *Sylvae*), demonstrates similar attention to issues of *varietas*, as Poliziano harmonizes his scholarly and literary enterprises.[76] The poem is in effect an epigrammatic garland, interleaving different poets and genres and producing a unified work despite this diversity. Indeed, Poliziano moves rapidly between authors in inventive ways: for instance, his catalogue of love poets moves from Tibullus and Propertius, both of whom receive brief mention (539–44), to Gallus (544–47), to Calvus (548–50), and then to Philetas of Cos (550–53) and Mimnermus (552-53). But he does not tarry there for long, alluding to Vergil *Eclogues* 1 and turning to the Greek bucolic poets (Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion, 555–56) and their Roman successors (556–57) before arriving at Pindar, who inaugurates the discussion of lyric poets and receives an extensive, and allusive, summation of his life and career.[77] Poliziano's virtuosic display expands his accounts of lesser-known authors and contracts those of the primary exemplars, allowing him to emphasize his expertise, in terms of both his knowledge of the canon and his ability to connect relatively disparate figures through distinctive topoi.[78] His *imitatio* is not limited to the ancients, though; as Peter Godman has noted, in the immediately following section of the *Nutricia* Poliziano rewrites Petrarch's own canon of erotic poets in the *Laurea Occidens*, reversing the order to put emphasis onto Sappho.[79] Like Callimachus, whose diversity of output he celebrates (*Nutricia* 426–33), Poliziano demonstrates in his poem his encyclopedic knowledge of the classical tradition while still concerned with employing an

[73] For this conclusion, especially as it relates to Cicero's use of the image, see Shane Butler, *The Matter of the Page: Essays in Search of Ancient and Medieval Authors* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 39-42.

[74] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I Pref. 10.

[75] Hor. *Carm.* 1.5.4-5: "Cui flavam religas comam / simplex munditiis?" In antiquity, Horace was considered to be a master of the aesthetics of variety; see Fitzgerald, *Variety*, 111–15.

[76] References to the *Sylvae* follow Francesco Bausi, ed., *Angelo Poliziano: Silvae* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996). On the poem and its place in Poliziano's program see Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 31–79.

[77] As noted by Poliziano, *Silvae*, in loc., the Pindaric works cited are those listed in Hor. *Carm.* 4.2.13-24, and the language of this section of the *Nutricia* is indebted to *Carm.* 4.2 in particular; the list also has parallel in Quint. *Inst. Or.* 10.1.51-64, as Poliziano supplements Quintilian's canon and expands upon lesser-known figures.

[78] Guest, "*Varietas*, *poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano," 41–43 emphasizes these topoi as important features of Poliziano's *varietas* in action in the *Nutricia*.

[79] Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli,* 73–74.

aesthetic of variety, juxtaposing different authors and genres in provocative ways that situate his labors within the tradition of ancient and contemporary scholar-poets.

Varietas, then, is the dominant aesthetic paradigm within which Poliziano situates his scholarly endeavors; the *Miscellanea* are no exception, with Gellius as his primary ancient exemplar. Within the Preface to the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima,* Poliziano goes to great lengths to affiliate himself with this classical mode of variety, with close attention to the ways in which Gellius, among others, describes his project. While this rhetorical stance advocating for *varietas* and miscellanism is openly declared at the outset, the actual manifestation of this style of composition in the work remains to be seen. Poliziano's own statements suggest that he will not follow any predictable order, and that he will alternate or otherwise move between different topics with little rhyme or reason. He adheres to this practice for the most part throughout both Centuries of the *Miscellanea*, though there are numerous instances in which topics recur across adjacent chapters. Such pairing is not uncommon in ancient miscellanistic texts; for Gellius in particular, these connections and repeated references are integral to the didactic program of his work.

Exemplary in this respect are two chapters on Sybarites, *Misc. I* 15–16, in which Poliziano takes as his starting point in each case Ovid's epistle to Augustus that comprises the entirety of the second book of the *Tristia*. In the first instance, Ovid's reference to the author of the *Sybaris* (*Tr.* 2.417) affords an opportunity for Poliziano to display the breadth of his reading, citing Lucian, Philo, and Martial against Domizio Calderini's conjecture about the author's identity.[80] He moves beyond this initial question to comment on the general habits of the Sybarites, as reported in a broad range of sources, before concluding by discussing their dances and use of music in battle. Poliziano uses the identity of the work's author to demonstrate his own extensive reading, moving freely from one genre to the next. The beginning of the next chapter immediately flags the connection to the previous, alerting his reader that his Ovidian citation comes from same letter as the previous ("Ovidius idem in eadem ad Augustum epistola sic ait").[81] The lines that he goes on to discuss (Ovid *Tristia* 2.443-4) follow shortly after those from the previous chapter, in which Ovid continues to catalogue authors that were not exiled for their literature. For Poliziano Ovid once again provides a springboard to demonstrate his broad reading as he illuminates the identity of the Aristides used as a source by Sisenna. He attempts to reconstruct the identity of this Aristides through Plutarch, Appian, Zosimus, and Lucian; after establishing Sisenna's Aristides to be the author of the *Milesiaca*, he then turns to the qualities of the Milesians themselves and their tales.

[80] Calderini *Comm. in Mart.* 12.96.

[81] Poliziano, *Miscellanea*, I 16.1.

In his broader discussion, Poliziano cites, among others, Martianus Capella's claims about Milesian literature: "Ex quo Marcianus: 'Nam certe' inquit 'mythos, poeticae etiam diversitatis delicias Milesias.' "[82] His invocation of the "delight of poetic diversity" is suggestive of the powers of variety, and he goes on to cite both Vergil (*Georgics* 4.334-5) and Horace (*Epistles* 1.17.30-1) on Milesian luxuries.[83] Horace and Vergil are offered as sources, which seems justification enough for their inclusion, but they also connect to the broader idea of poetic diversity: not only was Horace an exemplar of *diversitas poetica*, but Vergil offered a cross-generic model with which Poliziano engaged regularly.[84] He does not linger over these sources, but concludes by pointing to sensational details on the *deliciae* of the Ionians that he found in the *Suda*. By the end of the chapter, the connections between *Misc. I* 15 and *I* 16 are reinforced as Poliziano focuses on the excesses of the Milesians. Poliziano uses his references to Ovid's *Tristia* to explore the *deliciae* of two proverbially luxurious peoples from the ancient world; Poliziano even anticipates the inclusion of the Ionians in *I* 16, noting at *I* 15.3 that the Sybarites cultivated a relationship with the Ionians as they were known to be the most luxurious of the Greeks. The *Tristia* passages offer an initial opportunity for these extensive discussions, replete with varied sources from across the canon and each selected for their value as supporting evidence. But the invocation of Martianus Capella's comment on *poeticae diversitatis deliciae* activates for the reader one of the central themes of miscellanistic literature: namely, the enjoyment to be had from reading diverse material collected together. The *deliciae* of the Sybarites are problematized as excessive, and even those of some of the Milesians and Ionians are challenged as vulgar. The literary virtue of diversity, however, encourages the reader to appreciate the breadth of material introduced and, perhaps, to reflect upon the connections that Poliziano develops between his two chapters. In many ways this evokes the *varietas docta* that typified his poetic works, and his citations of Horace and Vergil within the context of this discussion heightens the poetic effect.

We may observe something similar in two paired chapters, *Misc. I* 54 and *I* 55, in which Poliziano discusses different arguments found in Quintilian. In these essays Poliziano explicates what Quintilian calls the "horned puzzles" and the "crocodiline puzzles," respectively ("ambiguitates... *κερατίναι* aut *κροκοδίλιναι*").[85] In the case of the former, Poliziano explains this irrefutable argument, derived from Seneca *EM* 49.8 and Gellius *NA* 18.2.9; after noting its presence in Lucian (*Symp.* 23, *Dial. mort.* 1.2, *Somn.* 11), he turns to a number of other dialectical

[82] Poliziano, *Miscellanea I* 16.2: "From which Martianus says 'For certainly myths, as well as the Milesian delights of poetic diversity'."

[83] For Vergil, see R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); for Horace, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ed., *Q. Horati Flacci Opera* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1985).

[84] Guest, "*Varietas*, *poikilia*, and the *silva* in Poliziano," 30–36 identifies the importance of Vergil as an example of *copia*, especially within the context of Poliziano's *prolusio* to his course on Vergil, the *Manto*.

[85] Quintilian, *Inst. Or.*, 1.10.5.

problems and instances of this form of riddle throughout his reading. Similarly, he provides a cogent explanation for the crocodiline riddle, drawn from Doxopater, and once again looks to Lucian (*Vit. Auct.* 22) to explain the logic of the puzzle. He concludes that the crocodile riddle is akin to what he had previously discussed ("sicuti supra ceratinen") and returns to Quintilian's name for these problems.[86] Once again Poliziano has explicitly connected his discussions of minute, related problems across these two chapters while making good on his promise of variety, at least in terms of his sources.

Perhaps more than the chapters on the Sybarites and the Milesians, it is striking that Poliziano's explication of the two rhetorical terms, part of the same sentence in Quintilian, is divided across two chapters. Why does Poliziano separate them? On the one hand, it allows him to develop each argument in detail, but on the other the focus on *captiones* named for animals may challenge his reader to apply the habits of mind that those riddles aim to cultivate. Something similar is at stake in the Gellian context of the horns-sophism, in which Gellius and his fellow Romans play intellectual games during the Saturnalia; in fact, the passage is itself intratextually linked to his discussions of riddles as *tesserulae*, discussed above, through this particular setting.[87] For Gellius, such intellectual indulgence is a suitable activity for his and his fellow Romans' leisure, but only if it serves to fortify their intellect: "Saturnalia Athenis agitabamus hilare prorsum ac modeste, non, ut dicitur, remittentes animum—nam 'remittere' inquit Musonius 'animum quasi amittere est'—sed demulcentes eum paulum atque laxantes iucundis honestisque sermonum inlectationibus."[88] Such captious puzzles need to serve a purpose beyond simply delighting the reader or providing diversion: there must be practical benefit. Poliziano has a similar outlook here, as the juxtaposition encourages his readers to think critically about the different kinds of argument that are presented and the ways in which he went about unraveling their challenging features.

More than a pleasing diversion on sophisms, the discussion of the *ceratinae* and the *crocodilinae* also segue into the following philological inquiries, each of which centers on different animals in Latin authors.[89] *Misc. I* 56 examines Martial's claim that the rhinoceros has two horns in the *Liber Spectaculorum* (22.5) and proceeds to dismantle Calderini's own exegesis of the lines as Poliziano adduces sources beyond the single example, Pausanias, that his predecessor had

[86] Poliziano, *Miscellanea,* I 55.3.

[87] On the Saturnalia in the *NA*, see Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae*, 135–40; Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*, 50-51; Egelhaaf-Gaiser, "Saturnalian Riddles for Attic Nights," passim.

[88] Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.2.1. "We used to spend the Saturnalia at Athens merrily and temperately, not, as is said, relaxing our minds—for Musonius says "to relax the mind is like losing the mind"—but diverting them a little bit and indulging in pleasant and improving allurements of conversation." Keulen, *Gellius the Satirist*, 278 n.33 emphasizes that the reference to Musonius "draws attention to the thin line between intellectual relaxation and reprehensible frivolity."

[89] On the manner in which Poliziano merges his philological acumen with other fields of knowledge, especially the animal realm, see Gaston Javier Basile, "Poliziano's *Elephanti*: A Case Study of *Miscellanea* II 46," *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 43 (2018).

cited. In fact, he posits that Calderini has misunderstood the Greek text and applied his mistaken reading to his explanation of Martial. In *Misc. I* 57, Poliziano attempts to identify the *tetraones*, a kind of bird that appears in Suetonius' *Life of Caligula* (22.3). He uses this passage as an excuse to explore the manuscript tradition of Pliny the Elder, recognizing an error in an otherwise excellent and authoritative manuscript housed in the Medici library through comparison with Suetonius.[90] In an exemplary display of his philological method, Poliziano corrects the erroneous reading in the Medici manuscript and presents his emended text. As in the previous chapter, in which the "horned ambiguity" of the rhinoceros was not primarily an end in itself but rather an opportunity for Poliziano to demonstrate his philological prowess, his ultimate concern here rests not with the narrow question of the identity of a bird but with the application of the passage to another, seemingly unrelated question.

Each of the texts from which Poliziano begins in *Misc. I* 56 and *Misc. I* 57 presents an interpretive crux that he then goes on to elucidate: those textual issues serve as the springboard for different analyses and the display of Poliziano's own extensive reading. The thematic connection between the two chapters (i.e. interpretive problems involving animals) is fairly evident at first glance, but considered in their wider context within the *Miscellanea*, a set of intratextual interactions emerges across all four of the chapters in this sequence. While loosely unified by their interest in animals and animal-derived terminology, the first two chapters in sequence introduce the concept of animals-as-riddles; the Gellian intertext sharpens Poliziano's own use of such riddles as hermeneutic tools, representative of a method of thinking that he demonstrates in his subsequent discussions. Such intratextual layering is an essential feature of the miscellanistic collection—ranging across ancient authors from Gellius and Aelian to Catullus and other poets—and one of the central didactic features of *varietas*. For a reader that engages with the entirety of the *Miscellanea* and reads each chapter, connections between Poliziano's varied readings, and the benefits of his aesthetic choice, become increasingly evident. His collection demonstrates a *varietas docta* that is directly connected to his encyclopedic learning, and the *Miscellanea* not only models his habits of mind but offers the opportunity for his readers to refine their own interpretive powers. In this respect, the *Miscellanea* are not simply a collection of scholarly notes assembled together by Poliziano to advertise his philological skill; rather, they are a reflection of his habits of mind, steeped in his deep knowledge of the *auctores*, and able to connect the various branches of learning together seamlessly. His work embodies many features of the ideal ancient miscellany, representing a harmonious balance between his authoritative critical posture and his aesthetic virtuosity.

[90] Dyck and Cottrell, *Miscellanies*, in loc. identify the manuscript in question as BML Plut. 82.1. For Poliziano's knowledge of and work on Pliny, see Paolo Viti, "Poliziano e Plinio: Il cap. 61 della I centuria dei *Miscellanea*," in *La Naturalis Historia di Plinio nella tradizione medievale e umanistica*, ed. Vanna Maraglino (Bari: Cacucci, 2012), 153–60.

4 Conclusions

As novel as Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* were when they first appeared, his methodology of collecting notes on varied readings, heavily influenced by Gellius, increasingly began to hold sway among the scholars of the Renaissance.[91] The genre became a dominant model of classical scholarship, in no small part because of the influence of Poliziano's work and his method; in this regard the vitality of the miscellanistic compilation is evident. However, the *Miscellanea* are no mere works of scholarship, but literary endeavors in their own right that unite Poliziano's intellectual interests with his extensive talents as a poet and author. The choice of *varietas*, with its roots in the ancient miscellanistic tradition, afforded him the opportunity to highlight both sets of talents simultaneously. Further, his ancient models for such works make clear one of the other principal advantages of such variety: by challenging the reader with different concepts or texts in close proximity, the miscellanist provides an opportunity for their audience to internalize the lessons of the text and reapply them in different contexts. In this regard, the various *tesserae* that make up the mosaic of a miscellanistic work may each be read individually as well as alongside one another; the fuller context pushes the reader to appreciate the lessons of individual chapters while acknowledging the sophistication of the whole. For Gellius, and for Poliziano, this is assuredly part and parcel of their miscellanistic projects.

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[91] As Grafton, "Conflict and Harmony in the *Collegium Gellianum*," 337 notes, "[t]hrough Poliziano and his rivals and readers, Gellius shaped the origins of modern classical scholarship, infecting generations with his besetting interests in textual criticism and the comparison of Latin texts with their Greek counterparts."

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NOTE

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The Hisperica Famina as an Ars Poetica *An Interpretation of the A-Text*

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ABSTRACT

Hitherto the group of seventh-century texts and fragments known as *Hisperica famina* has defied interpretation. Following suggestions made by, amongst others, Andy Orchard, I propose to read the A-text as an ambitious piece of literature, in which linguistic competition, hilarious though it may be, is seen as a tool to cope with the anxieties of living in an inhospitable world. After offering a new perspective on the text's dialogic structure, suggesting that the main narrator is an Englishman recalling his student years in Ireland, I read the descriptions of sea and fire as metapoetical symbols and the final section on a cattle raid as an allegory. Subsequently, I pay attention to irony and self-mockery, to conclude that the text is not only about words and grammar but has literary, social, and existential value as well.

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1 The Origins of the *Hisperica Famina*

The *Hisperica famina*, a small corpus of Latin texts presumably written in the second half of the seventh century by scholars educated in Ireland, constitute one of the weirdest manifestations of Latinate culture that I know of. The corpus consists of four or five separate texts transmitted in different manuscripts dating from the ninth and tenth centuries. Divergent though they may be in form and scope, the similarity in subject matter, syntax and, particularly, vocabulary is sufficient to assume a common origin in Irish schools.[1] In this article, I will focus on

[1] Paul Grosjean, "Confusa caligo. Remarques sur les *Hisperica famina*," *Celtica* 3 (1956): 65-67; Michael Herren, ed. *The Hisperica Famina: I. The A-Text* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies,

the so-called A-text, usually considered the most coherent specimen of the Hisperic corpus.[2] It is my aim to demonstrate the text's literary, social, and perhaps even existential value.

Both Aldhelm (ca. 640–709), abbot of Malmesbury, and the Venerable Bede (ca. 672–735) refer to a trend among seventh-century English youngsters to spend a few years in Ireland in order to study liberal arts and theology.[3] When, sometime at the end of the seventh century, Aldhelm welcomes home his young friend Heahfrið, who had spent six years in Ireland, he expresses his irritation at Heahfrið's educational route with a parody of what he believes to be the Irish way of writing Latin. His letter opens with a preposterous broadside of alliterations in which Greek, or Greekish, words abound, dazzling the reader to the extent that one has to peruse the sentence for a few minutes at least in order to see Aldhelm is merely saying "praise the Lord."[4] While paying due respect to Irish scholarship, he emphasizes the recent flourishing of intellectual culture in England, suggesting that the verbal and dialectical prowess of Theodore and Hadrian equals or even outstrips the pedantry of Irish scholars.[5] In gently bullying Heahfrið, Aldhelm displays his own compositional virtuosity, thereby establishing an alliance between himself and the young man, warning him to be cautious in displaying the

1974), 38. The word *Hispericus* seems to be a misspelling of *Hespericus* (a word not extant in classical Latin), derived from *Hesperia* (Occident). Accordingly, "Hisperica famina" could be translated as "words from the West." When using the word themselves, the interlocutors may suggest that their way of speaking Latin is the only correct one, as Hesperia is an ancient name of Italy.

2 John Carey, "The Obscurantists and the Sea-Monster. Reflections on the *Hisperica Famina*," *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–2004): 42, gives an overview over the corpus, referring to Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 7–10. The B-text seems to be a variant of the A-text, in which particularly the final narrative is completely different; the D-text offers fragments of the so-called essays; the transmission of both B and D is lacunose; the C-text is only a glossary. In addition, some scholars include a fifth fragment (E) in the corpus.

3 Aldhelm, *Epistula* 5, in *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald (Berlin: Monumenta Germaniae Historica 15, 1919), 486-94. Beda Venerabilis, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 192 (ch. 3.25). More recently, Aldhelm's letter was edited and extensively commented upon by Scott Gwara, in "A Record of Anglo-Saxon Pedagogy: Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Heahfridum* and its Gloss," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 6 (1996): 84–134. Aldhelm's prose style is intricate and learned in itself, but the opening of the letter to Heahfrið is an extreme instance, which confirms its parodic nature.

4 "Primitus pantorum procerum praetorumque pio potissimum paternoque praesertim privilegio panagericum poemataque passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes stridula vocum simphonia et melodiae cantilenaeque carmine modulaturi ymnizemus..." Aldhelm, *Epistula* 5, 488; this is about one third of the first sentence. Gwara, "A Record," 122, suggests that the alliteration of the *p* may be a joke at the expense of the Irish, seeing that Old Irish lacks the phoneme /p/: "Words beginning in /p/ would have been garbled by an Irishman." As to the Greek vocabulary, Gwara believes Aldhelm's knowledge of that language to have been very restricted.

5 Theodore (602–690), from Tarsus, and Hadrian (ca. 635–710), from Northern Africa, both arrived in Canterbury in 668. Theodore became bishop, Hadrian abbot. Apart from being familiar with the Latin tradition, these scholars also knew Greek.

linguistic skills and theological views he acquired in Ireland. Anxious not to offend Heahfrið, however, he explicitly stresses the humorous intent of his words.[6]

Adducing Aldhelm's letter has become usage among scholars discussing the date and the provenance of the so-called *Hisperica famina*.[7] Apart from the evidence found in Aldhelm and Bede, several arguments have been brought in to prove the *Hisperica famina* must have an Irish background. Macalister considered their lingo one of the "secret languages of Ireland."[8] A seminal article by Grosjean pointed to paleographic errors typical of Irish scribes.[9] Smyth saw similarities in cosmography between the *Hisperica famina* and a few texts indubitably hailing from seventh-century Ireland.[10] Seeing that one *collecta* in the *Bangor Antiphonary* bears a resemblance to the B-text of the *Hisperica famina*, Stevenson suggested Bangor as a possible place of composition.[11] Of course, Michael Herren's monumental edition of the A-text should take away any hesitation in attributing this elusive poem, if it is a poem indeed, to scholars situated in or connected with an Hibernian milieu.[12] In what follows I will concentrate on the A-text (henceforth *HF*-A).

2 *HF*-A: Status and Synopsis

As becomes clear when comparing the four texts known as *Hisperica famina*, *HF*-A is only one version of what must have been a wildly protean work. Apparently, the 'faminators'[13] felt free to adapt existing material to specific purposes, depending on the demands of their audiences. Every version may have had its own specific communicative context, in which the readers or listeners experienced it as a more or less independent work, although it is difficult to say anything definitive about Hisperic literature in general, given the lacunose transmission of the texts.[14]

In oral literature, the simultaneous circulation of divergent versions of what we are accustomed to call a "work" is a perfectly normal situation, as may be

6 Aldhelm, *Epistula* 5, 493, lines 12–17.

7 Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 36, quotes part of Aldhelm's letter. Following suggestions by Stevenson, I restrict the denomination "Hisperic" to the corpus of texts known as *Hisperica famina* A-E.; Jane Stevenson, "Bangor and the *Hisperica Famina*," *Peritia* 6–7 (1987–88): 203–6.

8 Robert S. Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (Cambridge: University Press, 1937), 62–89.

9 Grosjean, "Confusa caligo," 51–53.

10 Marina Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1996), passim.

11 Stevenson, "Bangor," 208–13. While her arguments to situate the narratives of *HF*-A and B in a coastal area of Ireland are convincing, the connection to Bangor is based on little textual evidence.

12 Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 39–45. In "Hisperic Latin: 'Luxuriant Culture-Fungus of Decay'," *Traditio* 30 (1974): 411–19, Herren offers additional arguments for situating Hisperic Latin in an Irish context, referring to local traditions of polemic exchanges of songs by *filid* (416–17).

13 This word is a modern coinage often used to refer to the authors, scholars, or scribes who created the corpus.

14 Herren, "Hisperic Latin," 419: "The *Famina* themselves do not seem to be finished examples of this *genre*, but rather experimental models."

illustrated by numerous Homeric hexameters transmitted through quotations and on scraps of papyrus that have not been incorporated in the canonical texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[15] Across the Greek world, every rhapsode, schoolmaster, or scholar cherished his own version of Homer. The *Iliad* we read in our modern editions may be a superb redaction prepared by Hellenistic scholars, but it would be inaccurate to see it exclusively as the real thing and discard the other versions as spurious. The same holds for many medieval literary texts, which often give the impression of having gone through the hands of numerous scribes, who deliberately made alterations at their own discretion, presumably thinking they improved the available material. Wikipedia operates in a similar way.

Accordingly, we cannot consider *HF*-A the most "complete" version of the *Hisperica famina*, since any version might have boasted a particular completeness in its own context. However, *HF*-A is transmitted in a form that appears to have been considered complete by the scribes, given the *explicit* "HISPERICA FINIUNT FAMINA AMHN";[16] moreover, the Vatican manuscript "gives a clear, very readable text, with but a few corrections."[17] Complete or not, *HF*-A presents itself as a more or less coherent text. Assuming that its first audiences experienced it as a thematically connected series of episodes or essays, we may at least try to interpret it as a unity, and see what happens.

Before discussing crucial passages in detail, it may be helpful to offer a succinct synopsis of *HF*-A.[18] The general make-up is clear. In the opening passage, we hear an expert in Hisperic Latin calling attention to the arrival of a group of new students. Subsequently (from line 20), he engages in a comic debate with at least one of the newcomers, who is satirically derided as a boorish nitwit (1–115). We may have trouble to determine exactly which lines are spoken by whom, but it seems plausible to suppose an exchange of speeches at least in the lines 87–115, while 53–60 must be a response to the first speaker. The next passage (116–32), captioned in the manuscript as "the twelve offences against Ausonian diction," may be the final part of the debate.[19] An extensive narrative follows in which the daily occupations of the students are described, embedded in an evocation of the cyclic rhythms of nature and agriculture (133–357). Lively dialogue is an important aspect of this passage.

While the first half of *HF*-A is concerned with the dealings of the scholarly community, the second half consists of seemingly loosely connected pieces

[15] The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University hosts a website supervised by Gregory Nagy, titled *The Homer Multitext* (www.homermultitext.org), which intends to make available the entire textual tradition.

[16] Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 112.

[17] Ibid., 11.

[18] I use and cite Herren's text, leaving out his capitals and typographical markers of textual problems, while adding capitals to geographical adjectives like "Hispericus" and "Ausonicus." Elucidation of lexical and morphological particularities may be found in his commentary and appendices.

[19] *Ausonicus* (i.e. Italian) appears to be a synonym of *Hispericus*.

demonstrating the art of description, called "essays" in modern scholarship.[20] Nine chapters are devoted to heaven, sea, fire, the fields, wind, the equipment of the students, a bookcase, a writing tablet, and a chapel (358–560), while the tenth section is a short prayer (561–70). *HF*-A is concluded by a story with the truly Irish theme of a cattle raid (571–612).[21]

Over the last sixty years, some interesting interpretations of *HF*-A have been propounded. Despite many disagreements on details of style and narrative structure, there seems to have grown a consensus as to the communities in which the *Hisperica famina* must have circulated. Most scholars believe the texts to be products of insular schools, either written by teachers or by students.[22] This is obvious by the content of *HF*-A, half of which concerns the pedantic debates and logistical worries of a band of scholars or students somewhere in a coastal region of Ireland. The lexical inaccessibility of the *Hisperica famina* precludes their dissemination among non-initiates.

3 Literary Value

Scholarship has been reluctant in attributing literary value to *HF*-A, chiefly because of its scholastic character. To be sure, there are good reasons to assume *HF*-A was conceived as a textbook to instruct beginners in esoteric Latin, and particularly in outlandish vocabulary, given the propensity to simple syntax.[23] In numerous instances, one piece of content is successively expressed in different ways, apparently to show off a virtuosity in finding or coining synonyms (in rhetoric known as *copia verborum*).[24] In addition, the supposed lack of meaningful

[20] In the rhetorical treatises of (Late) Antiquity students are instructed in the art of description, traditionally called *ecphrasis*. Gabriele Knappe, "On Rhetoric and Grammar in the *Hisperica famina*," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 145–53, believing *HF*-A to be school text about rhetoric, argues that the essays may have been a series of exercises in ecphrasis modelled on Priscianus' *Praeexercitamina*. Although Knappe's attempt to connect *HF*-A with Priscianus in particular is not convincing, the descriptive nature of the essays is obvious and may well have its origins in the tradition of rhetorical schools. In responding to Knappe's proposals, Giuseppe Pipitone, "Costruzione retorica e 'intratestuale' degli *Hisperica Famina*," *Latomus* 76 (2017): 199, mistakenly has her comparing the essays in *HF*-A with instructions given by Donatus.

[21] Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 41–55, on the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.

[22] Discussion in Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 6–7, 39–44.

[23] Grosjean, "Confusa caligo," 55, thinks *HF*-A comprises "des modèles à graver dans la mémoire, des manuels scolaires." Phillip W. Damon, "The Meaning of the *Hisperica Famina*," *American Journal of Philology* 74, no. 4 (1953): 398–406, sees connections with the *suasoriae* of Roman schools. Michael Winterbottom, "On the *Hisperica Famina*," *Celtica* 8 (1967): 127–39, also situates *HF*-A in an educational context. Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 13–19, after having discussed earlier views, cautiously concludes that much is "still unexplained." See also Knappe, mentioned above (note 20). Carey, "Obscurantists," 43–44, argues that the authors must have been teachers.

[24] Stevenson, "Bangor," 205–6, offers an extreme view: "within the category 'an item of clothing', almost any word is equivalent to any other word, and the same garment may be referred to by any of them. [...] not only registers such as poetic, archaic or whatever but also any kind of fine distinction are all

information found in the so-called essays (*HF*-A 358–612) is adduced as indication of the faminators' limited ambitions.[25] Moreover, the impossibility to categorize *HF*-A as belonging to a particular literary genre should testify to the authors' big-hearted inclination to inclusiveness: by putting into practice a host of different genres, ranging from dialogue and epic narrative to satire and ecphrasis, they provide their students with multiple types of models, irrespective of their compatibility.[26] In sum, most scholars tend to emphasize the poor quality of *HF*-A as literature, no matter whether it be poetry or prose.[27]

Let us attempt to refute these arguments. First, the presumed educational purpose of the text does not *eo ipso* prove the faminators waived all literary pretentions. Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Pliny's *Naturalis historia*, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*,[28] Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis*, and Fulgentius's *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae* are examples of sophisticated creative writing, notwithstanding their instructional aims.[29] Second, the far-fetched nature of Hisperic vocabulary as well as its tendency to repetitiveness, synonymy, and semantic overabundance are features shared by texts as divergent as Homer's epics, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, and, again, Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis*, although we must concede that *HF*-A is an extreme case. Third, *Kreuzung der Gattungen* is highly appreciated in experimental literature. The combination of narrative with didactic, so typical of *HF*-A, is found in Vergil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, while the *Pentateuch* and Boethius's *Consolation* virtually cover the entire gamut of literary genres, from laudatory lyric to philosophical instruction. Fourth, most scholars do not even try to interpret the essays as literary creations. Marina Smyth, for one, used them in her survey of Irish cosmology in the seventh century, only to conclude that the faminators had little scientific competence,[30] which may be true —but it sounds like blaming James Joyce for his muddled account of Dublin infrastructure. Finally, literary value depends on taste and may change over the centuries. Eighteenth-century continental classicists despised Shakespeare for his negligence in observing the Aristotelian rules of unity. Today, no sane critic would deny *Hamlet* its classical status. It is not my intention, of course, to claim that *HF*-A should be rated among the Great Books, but I truly believe it will be worthwhile to take it seriously as a piece of creative writing.

cast aside. It could almost be described as an anti-poetic technique." On *copia verborum* see e.g. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.15.

[25] Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 13–14.

[26] Ibid., 11–13.

[27] Grosjean, "*Confusa caligo*," 57–58; Stevenson, "Bangor," 202, 205–6. And see Herren, "Hisperic Latin," 411, referring to Eóin MacNeill.

[28] Gerbrandy, Piet. "Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* as a Literary Work." *Hermes* 148, no. 1 (2020): 38–52.

[29] Needless to say, I do not claim that the faminators knew these texts. The similarity is a typological one.

[30] Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*, passim.

The first to endeavour a serious interpretation of *HF*-A as a literary text was Andy Orchard in an important article in *The Journal of Medieval Latin*.[31] Orchard calls attention to the central metaphor of scholarship as warfare, to a pair of Homeric similes possibly deriving from Vergil's *Aeneid*, and to the careful evocation of daybreak and nightfall. He convincingly demonstrates the verbal echoes structuring the order of the essays, suggesting, for instance, the close coherence of the four parts successively dedicated to heaven ("De caelo," 358–80), sea ("De mari," 381–425), fire ("De igne," 426–51), and earth (452–76), seen as representing the four elements.[32] Given the fluidity of the Hisperic tradition it is tricky to attribute too much significance to the structure of this particular text, which may well be due to an aleatory process of composition, but Orchard is certainly right in trying to extract as much meaning as possible from the impalpable material.

I partly disagree with Orchard's view of the text's structure. Taking the subheadings in the manuscript as point of departure, Orchard sets apart the opening dialogue followed by the exposition on the twelve offences against grammar (1–132), and considers the remaining part (133–612) a collection of twelve essays, the first and final of which are narratives. An additional argument for this arrangement seems to be the text's predilection for the number twelve, which certainly does turn up in several lines.[33] It seems quite arbitrary, however, to exclude the paragraph on stylistic errors (116–32) from the series of essays, since it too is preceded by a heading in the manuscript. Moreover, the narrative nature of the concluding section (571–612), which may be interpreted allegorically (as I hope to demonstrate), makes it a perfect counterpart to the opening half of *HF*-A (1–357), while a prayer (561–70) would be a suitable copestone to the succession of essays. In Table 1, I offer my view of the text's structure (see p. 76).

Orchard's largely successful approach has been followed by later scholars. John Carey,[34] focussing on the (completely different) final narratives of both *HF*-A and the B-text, pays attention to parallels with Vergil's *Aeneid* and Caelius Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale*,[35] as well as with similar tales in classical, biblical, and Old Irish literature. Danuta Shanzer, evaluating earlier scholarship, thinks it hard to indicate direct connections with specific classical authors, but certainly agrees that particularly *HF*-A shows the faminators' familiarity with topoi well-known from

[31] Andy Orchard, "The *Hisperica famina* as Literature," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 10 (2001): 1–45. Orchard could refer to few earlier initiatives in literary approaches, e.g. Michael Herren, "The Sighting of the Host in *Táin Bo Fraích* and the *Hisperica Famina*," *Peritia* 5 (1986): 397–99, mentioned by Orchard on page 2, note 9.

[32] Orchard, "*Hisperica famina*," 13–20. In the manuscript, the essay on the earth lacks a subheading.

[33] Ibid., 12, 39–42.

[34] Carey, "Obsurantists."

[35] The case for Sedulius was already made by Neil Wright, "The *Hisperica Famina* and Caelius Sedulius," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (Winter 1982): 61–76.

different literary and rhetorical traditions.[36] Sarah Corrigan follows Orchard's suggestion to search for connections with insular *enigmata*, stating that in order to solve the riddles it is necessary to know which sources the faminators had in mind.[37] Unfortunately, the parallels with Pliny the Elder she adduces are far from compelling. Finally, Giuseppe Pipitone, after having summarized Orchard's article extensively, rightly points to the fact that *HF*-A's enigmatic aspects could be compared with similar trends in poems by Optatianus and Ennodius, as well as the prologue to the *Anthologia Latina*.[38] However, as Pipitone agrees, it is impossible to prove that these texts where known in seventh-century Ireland and England.

In my contribution to the ongoing debate, I will first concentrate on some aspects of the dialogues, next explore the possibility to interpret the description of natural phenomena as metapoetical symbols and then propose to read the concluding passage as an allegory. Finally, I will probe into the text's humour and irony. My analysis may shed light on the literary status, the seriousness, and the social functions of the *Hisperica famina*.

4 Dialogue and Polyphony

The dialogical nature of the first half of *HF*-A has always been evident, but to distinguish the individual interlocutors is difficult.[39] Even so, we should attempt to assess the effects of the polyphonic structure.

In the first place, while the geographical setting must be Irish and marine,[40] the narrator does not speak Irish and, consequently, cannot be an Irishman.[41] For instance, he asks his companions to address the locals, since "Ausonica me subligat catena, ob hoc Scottigenum haud cripitundo eulogium" ("the Ausonian chain [i.e. Latin] binds me, therefore I do not thunder Irish eloquence" 273–4);[42] and he talks about the "condiment of Irish oil" (*Scottigeni conditura olei* 299), an

[36] Danuta Shanzer, "Hisperic Faminations," in *Through a Classical Eye. Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian, and Latin Literature in Honour of Winthrop Wetherbee*, ed. Andrew Galloway and R.F. Yeager (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press 2009), 48–50.

[37] Sarah Corrigan, "Hisperic Enigma Machine: Sea Creatures and Sources in the *Hisperica Famina*," *Peritia* 24–25 (2013–2014): 59–73.

[38] Pipitone, "Costruzione retorica," 185–202.

[39] Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 12–13, discussing interpretations by Jenkinson, Damon, and Winterbottom. Francis J.H. Jenkinson, ed. *The Hisperica Famina* (Cambridge: University Press, 1908); Damon, "The Meaning"; Winterbottom, "*Hisperica Famina*."

[40] Orchard, "*Hisperica famina*," 4–6. *HF*-A 294 (salt water), 381–425 (intimate knowledge of the sea); see Stevenson, "Bangor," 212–13, and Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*, 252–65.

[41] By "narrator" I do not mean the author but, following narratological usage, the main "voice" relating the story; in its turn, the main narrator may adopt different voices in order to present the story from different perspectives. In my view, the main narrator coincides with one of the text's speakers, *in casu* one of the newcomers from England. Accordingly, he is a character in his own story.

[42] Winterbottom, "*Hisperica Famina*," 129, referring to the so-called "Colloquia Hisperica" (ca. 1000), suggests to connect the "ban on speaking anything other than Latin" featuring in one of the colloquies to the *Ausonica catena* in *HF*-A 58 and 273. However, this obligation must be meant to function within the community of students, not when dealing with their non-academic neighbours.

expression someone living in Ireland would not use. Probably, he comes from England, like Aldhelm’s friend Heahfrið. Since, on the other hand, the first speaker addresses the bunch of tyros as an authority on Hisperic Latin (1–52), this man must be an Irish scholar. Challenged by this *miles gloriosus*, one of the newcomers gives a rather modest retort (52–60) which, nevertheless, already shows advanced skills in Hisperic stylistics, as he uses three Greek words (*cyclo* 52, *scemico*, *logum* 55), two morphologically different versions of the Latin word for “temporal” (*temporei* 52, *temporalis* 57), and two synonyms for this particular brand of Latin (*Hispericum* 54, *Ausonica* 58). He also masters Hisperic word order, which places adjectives at the beginning of a sentence, verbs in the middle, and nouns at the ending. And he flaunts Hisperic’s penchant for lexical variation in semantically similar phrases: “sonoreus faminis per guttura popularet haustus” (“a draught of sonorous wording from my throat would be devastating [you]” 59)[43] is more or less repeated in: “inmensus urbani tenoris manasset faucibus tollus” (“an enormous torrent of urban style would have flown from my gullet” 60). In other words, the newcomer knows how to play the game, so the tone of his utterance must be ironic. And if he does not take himself seriously, how could he be impressed by his blustering senior? Indubitably, the non-Irish narrator, who may be identical to the newcomer, has a playful outlook on Hisperic life and conversation, which certainly implies a large measure of self-mockery.

This is not to deny the dialogue its competitive quality. Two types of models, or rather parallels, spring to mind. The first is Vergil’s pastoral poetry, in which shepherds vie with each other in erotic as well as poetic competence. In *Eclogue* 7, to give only one example, the (apparently Mantua-based) Arcadians Corydon and Thyrsis alternately sing verses of each four lines, not only to recommend their own dwellings as fit for making love but to rival in descriptional inventiveness.[44] Unfortunately, it is doubtful if Vergil’s bucolics featured in seventh-century school curricula in Ireland and England.[45]

A more obvious parallel is found in the vernacular literature of Ireland, where vehement exchanges in verbal virtuosity between heroes or heroines is far from unusual. What makes this a plausible model is the prowess displayed by the speakers in devising or reproducing successions of far-fetched metaphors, similar to the

[43] Here, I take *populare* to have its classical meaning of “devastate”; Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 129, believes it is derived from *populus* and *pullulare*, and gives as translation “to populate” or “to produce, germinate,” which works well in line 301.

[44] Vergil, *Ecloga* 7.21-68.

[45] Orchard, “*Hisperica famina*,” 3-4, 34-35, has little doubt the authors of *HF*-A knew (at least part of) the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*. Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 24-26, thinks they had some knowledge of the *Eclogues* as well; in “Hisperic Latin,” 417, Herren suggests that at least part of *HF*-A 87-115 could be seen as amoebaean. On Irish learning in general see Michael Herren, “Classical and Secular Learning among the Irish before the Carolingian Renaissance,” *Florilegium* 3 (1981): 118-57; on the English connection: Rosalind Love, “Insular Latin Literature to 900,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 120-57.

kennings known from the Old-Norse *Edda*.[46] A beautiful instance is the sequence of near-poetic speeches made by the three ladies from Ulster in *Fled Bricrend* ("Bricriu's Feast"), a stunning tale of heroic rivalry probably dating from the eighth century.[47] In heavily alliterating lines, Fedelm, Lendabair, and Emer not only boast of their royal kin and dazzling beauty, but in particular extol the martial skills of their husbands. While Lendabair takes nine lines to commend Conall, Emer's praise of Cuchulainn is a masterpiece of self-indulgent oratorical power thrice as long as Lendabair's, culminating in a riddle-like enumeration of the hero's feats. To quote only a couple of lines, in Henderson's translation:[48]

> Springing in air like a salmon when he springeth the spring of the heroes,
> Rarest of feats he performeth, the leap that is birdlike he leapeth,
> Bounding o'er pools of water, he performeth the feat cless nonbair;[49]
> Battles of bloody battallions, the world's proud armies he heweth,
> Beating down kings in their fury, mowing the hosts of the foemen.

Similarly, in *HF*-A the bantering dialogue between the first speaker and the newcomer reaches its climax in a succession of six speeches replete with robust imagery, including the exposition on the twelve offenses against correct diction (87–132). In my view, the structure of this passage is amoebaean. Although we do not have an external clue as to which lines are spoken by whom, it seems clear that two scholars try to outdo each other. I would structure the dialogue as follows (see also Table 1, p. 76):

(I) The first speaker, having branded his junior a cuckolded bumpkin (67–86), bursts out in a Homeric simile comparing his verbal energy to a devastating torrent (87–92). (II) The newcomer responds with an equally violent comparison which represents his eloquence as a blaze sweeping away his puny opponents (93–97). (III) The senior scholar, now, in a simile introduced by the same conjunctive particle as was the first one (*ceu* 87, 98), compares his elocutionary powers to the lethal aggression of a serpent specialised in killing cattle (98–102). (IV) Next, his adversary, changing his tack, comes up with a series of *adynata* meant to stress the absurdity of the first speaker's claims (103–9): that he would have the resources "to pour forth an Hisperic flood from his eager gullet" is supposed to be

[46] Andy Orchard, ed. *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore* (London etc.: Penguin, 2011), xxxii–xxxiii. As noted above, several scholars associate the Hisperic texts with Latin or Anglo-Saxon enigma-literature (e.g. Orchard, "*Hisperica famina*," 12–13, and Corrigan, "Hisperic Enigma Machine").

[47] George Henderson, ed. *Fled Bricrend. The Feast of Bricriu* (London: David Nut, 1899), 22–29. The speeches cannot properly be termed poetry, since a regular metrical pattern is lacking, but in form they are clearly distinct from the narrative parts of the story. The characteristics are: alliteration, "short jerky sentences," and "a certain laconic and somewhat oracular diction" (157). These characteristics are typical of *Hisperica famina* as well. Henderson's rendition, though, is not as jerky as he claims the Irish text to be.

[48] The passage may be compared to *HF*-A 23–36.

[49] Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, 29: "feat of nine."

as unlikely as touching the stars, counting all the grains of sand, and living on the bottom of the ocean. (V) This statement is countered by a set of four analogies illustrating the vast gap separating the talents of the two rivals (110–15): the senior scholar simply eclipses his opponent as the sun wipes out the stars and the racket of soldiers in battle obscures the buzz of honeybees.[50] (VI) The next section, notorious for its complexity, has usually been interpreted as an enumeration of grammatical blunders (116–32). Maybe the scribe is right in separating these lines from the preceding combat, but the tone still sounds derogatory, while four snake metaphors emphasize the fatal effects of bad Latin (*uipereo* 119, *toxico* 124, *uenenoso* 126, *reguloso* 128).[51] I will return to this passage later.

Although the next section (133–357), subheaded *incipit lex diei* in the manuscript, includes many amusing pieces of dialogue, the atmosphere is different from the first part. If lines 1–132 are spoken by two interlocutors, in *lex diei* a third voice is introduced. Since this epic (or should we say "bucolic," or even "georgic"?) narrator is not an Irishman, he may well be identical to the junior student of the first section. It is evident that the report of the students' daily occupations participates in different generic conventions. Most conspicuous are the extensive descriptions of sunrise (133–45) and the awakening of birds, cattle, sheep, swine, horses, dolphins, and farmers (146–89).[52] It is hard to prove the faminators knew more than a few lines of Vergil culled from grammatical treatises, but it is tempting to see this part of *HF*-A as an imitation of similar passages in the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*.[53]

Anyway, the polyphonous nature of our text is clear. Satirical dialogue, evocation of the countryside, and narrative of the scholars' foraging make way for a series of essays in, again, different voices. This alternation of generic affiliations reminds one of multi-voiced compositions like the Bible-book *Numeri*, Roman satire, Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis*, and, of course, James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[54] A literary work does not have to be generically homogeneous in order to make up a convincing whole. Polyphony and heterogeneity may, on the contrary, testify to the authors' versatility, encyclopedically demonstrating their prowess in representing as many facets of the world as possible.

[50] The bee is frequently used in poetical contexts, e.g. Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 10.53–54, Horace, *Carmen* 4.2.27–31. In *HF*-A the humble insects turn up in lines 41–43 and 112–113, in both cases as an image for the recently arrived students.

[51] *Reguloso*: presumably to be interpreted as a translation from Greek βασιλίσκος, "the royal viper"; Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 133.

[52] The passage is mirrored by a (much shorter) description of nightfall (303–18). See Orchard, "*Hisperica famina*," 10–12.

[53] Herren, "The Sighting of the Host," 397–99, also compares *HF*-A 1–6 and 44–48 to similar scenes in the Irish story, suggesting the faminators consciously parodied literary texts.

[54] Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is mentioned by Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 5, referring to remarks made by E.K. Rand.

5 Metapoetical Symbols and Allegories

The essay on the sea (381–425) covers many well-known aspects of the marine element, ranging from its cosmological position to storm and shipwreck and from the workings of the tide to the life of fish and dolphins, possibly also referring to salt production.[55] Notwithstanding the concrete and tangible nature of the description, the opening lines (381–89) strongly suggest a metapoetical import as well:

de hoc amplo Anfitridis licumine 381
loquelosum cudere nitor tornum.
hoc spumans mundanas obuallat pelagus oras,
terrestres anniosis fluctibus cudit margines,
saxeas undosis molibus irruit aulonas, 385
infimas bomboso uortice miscet glarias,
astrifero spargit spumas sulco.
sonoreis frequenter quatitur flabris
ac garrula fatigat notus flustra.[56] 389

While in the first Homeric simile Hisperic eloquence was compared to a violent torrent (87–92), the sea may carry programmatic meaning too. Both passages emphasize the water's noisy power, both mention the whirling of pebbles (*uortice glarias* 91, 386). Liquidity and loquacity are linked by alliteration (381–82). The forging (*cudere* 382) of a wheel of words is analogous to the ocean's beating (*cudit* 384) of the beaches, while this circular object (*tornum* 382) corresponds to the encircling movement (*obuallat* 383) of the sea.[57] The verb *spargit* (387) recalls the nouns *sparsio* (37) and *sparginem* (40), both denotating a spraying of words. Finally, the waves are *garrula* (389), an adjective frequently attached to streams in classical poetry, which draws attention to the water's speechlike quality.[58] The sea being a mighty natural force enclosing the domain of civilisation, speech may wield enormous power as well, encompassing the entirety of human strivings. At the same time language may be as unwieldy as the ocean. This is, in my view, a central topic in *Hisperica famina* at large.[59]

[55] Salt production may be referred to in 399-402 and 422; Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*, 252–65.

[56] "Concerning the vast liquid of Amphitrite, I strive to hammer a loquacious wheel. This spuming ocean surrounds the world's shores, with aged billows it hammers the terrestrial margins, with watery masses it assails the rocky hollows, with thundering eddies it churns the deepest pebbles, it sprays its foam up to the starry furrow. Often it is beaten by sonorous gusts and the southern wind wears out the garrulous waves."

[57] *Anniosis*, derived from *annus* and translated as "aged" by Herren, may hint to *anulus*, "ring."

[58] E.g. Ovid, *Fasti* 2.316; Calpurnius Siculus, *Ecloga* 4.2.

[59] Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 41–42, quoting Macalister, refers to an eighth-century text in Irish that distinguishes classes of scholars according to the sweeping quality of their eloquence: one type is named *ansruth* (big river), another *sruth do aill* (mountain torrent). In classical Latin, Horace's poem on Pindar (*Carmen* 4.2), whose poetry descends like a torrent, is an obvious parallel; and see Quintilian's

Similar arguments can be used to make plausible the metapoetical meaning of fire, first by juxtaposing the second Homeric simile to the essay on the subject. This is the simile (93–97):

> ueluti rosea aestiui laris ueternas cremat pira rubigine amurcas,
> ac aruca fauellosis minorat robora tumulis,
> ciboneus torridum spirat clibanus ructum,
> fragosas flectit per laquearia flammas,
> aequali doctoreas torreo feruore cateruas.[60]

There are numerous lexical correspondences between this passage and the essay *De igne* (426–51).[61] Both sections stress fire's destructive energy.[62] The essay, however, also deals with technical applications of the dangerous element. It performs (*plasmat* 433) many services,[63] e.g. in cooking, forging,[64] heating damp dwellings and dispelling darkness. Moreover, the firemaker's dexterity is referred to as *sollerti* (441), "ingenious" or "skilled," in classical Latin an epithet often used in connection with the verbal arts.[65] Again, a potentially harmful force of nature serves as a metaphor for the powers of speech.

HF-A is concluded by the section subheaded *De gesta re* (571–612). It relates the story of a band of brigands successfully raiding a foreign country and killing its inhabitants. In contrast to the rest of the text, here the narrator, in a different voice again, adopts a detached point of view, neither referring to himself nor addressing the reader or an interlocutor. I propose to construe this chapter as an allegory on the life of the faminators. Needless to say, allegorizing does not rule out the possibility to read the story as what it is in the first place. After all, tales of cattle raids are familiar in Irish literature. As the story constitutes the final part

comparison of Homer to the ocean (*Institutio oratoria* 10.1.46). Gregory Hays, "Flumen orationis," in *Insignis sophiae arcator. Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Michael Herren on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Gernot R. Wieland, Carin Ruff and Ross G. Arthur (Turnhout: Brepols 2006), 1–27, discussing the use of water metaphors (streams and springs in particular) in rhetorical and poetical contexts, offers a wealth of material from Greek and both classical and medieval Latin sources (including the Bible); he refers to *HF*-A 5, 56–60, and 87–92 (at 1, 9, 27).

[60] "Just like the red fire of a summer's blaze burns the aged olive trees with its blight [or: redness] and reduces the dry oaks to mounds of ashes, [like] a fiery furnace exhales its torrid eructation and directs its crashing flames through the ceiling, with equal fervour do I scorch the learned throngs."

[61] *Rosea* (93), *roseus* (426); *laris* (93, 439), *laricomi* (426); *cremat* (93), *concremaret* (451); *pira* (93, 446; Greek: πῦρ); *rubigine* (93, 428); *ciboneus* (95, 433; possibly derived from Hebrew *gey ben hinnom* (*gehenna*)); *torridum* (95), *torret* (429), *torrida* (449); *clibanus* (95, 448); *ructum* (95), *ructu* (451).

[62] In 432 the verb *spargit* is used again.

[63] The verb *plasmare* and its cognate *plasmamen* occurs fourteen times in *HF*-A; in four instances, all preceding the essay on fire, the word refers to linguistic skills (6, 23, 40, 61).

[64] See *cudere* in the essay *De mari* (382, 384).

[65] E.g. Horace, *Ars poetica* 407; Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 20.1.33.

of *HF*-A, however, this would be an anticlimax. A book on how to speak and to write Hisperic Latin deserves a satisfying ending.[66]

It is certainly possible to note verbal echoes linking the story to the first part of *HF*-A, but that would be a little beside the point.[67] Allegory does not need lexical support. More relevant is what happens. Here, we have a barely cultivated country inhabited by fiery farmers who try but dramatically fail to chase away a band of armed raiders, eventually succumbing to the enemies' superior strength. So, it is the invaders who win. After having defeated the locals, they go back home (611–12):

> hinc reduci tramite paternum remeantes in solum
> fabulosam exprimunt accolae soriam.[68]

The main booty being a saga of heroic exploits, we may surmise this band of robbers is essentially the same as the levy of students arriving in the first lines of *HF*-A. Having been ridiculed by the Irish scholars as a sorry pack of intruders, they fight their way into the cultural community and, in the end, triumphantly live to tell the tale. *HF*-A is the upshot of their story. Full of irony as it is, it may count as the English newcomers' revenge on their arrogant seniors. Of course, this irony implicates the narrator himself, who industriously struggled to be "one of the guys."

6 Irony and Self-Mockery

Many details point to the playful atmosphere of *HF*-A. First of all, the description, in the *lex diei* section, of the scholars' activities hardly refers to intellectual occupations. Armed with shillelaghs, they roam about in search of alms and food, apparently not bothering the loss of time due for Hisperic studies, not to mention the complete lack of liturgical obligations. To be sure, by day one group of students is bound to stay at home, possibly to study their textbooks (213–21), but what they actually do is not clear at all. And some students make complaints about their being knocked up in the morning, claiming they spent part of the night "in lectorial sentry" (207), which gives the impression of being a feeble excuse not to rise. However, when night falls and tasks are allocated, again one party of students is supposed to lucubrate (354). But if both day and night only one third of the community studies things Hisperic, the institute seems to fall short of academic efficiency.

[66] In a similar way, the B-text is concluded by a great narrative titled *De gesta re*, which is more than twice as long as the one in *HF*-A. A new edition of this passage is offered in Carey, "Obscurantists," 56–59.

[67] Most notable *caterua* (8, 497); *cidones* (35, 601); *gigantes* (606), which may recall *ciclopes* (27); and *toxicus* (124, 608).

[68] Then by backward paths returning to their paternal soil the inhabitants express a heap of stories.

Six of the essays conclude in laconically breaking off the argument, purportedly in order not to annoy the reader (379–80, 474–76, 509–12, 529–30, 545–46, 559–60), which, given the bulk of impracticable information the writer has already offered by then, does not sound credible. After all, what the reader expects is nothing but useless eloquence. The section on the book satchel, for instance, comes to an end with this sentence (529–30):

> caetera non explico famine scemata,
> ne doctoreis suscitauero fastidium castris.[69]

If no less than sixteen lines are devoted to the dullest details of the satchel's construction, there seems to be no reason why the description might not continue for some time. The smartly varied formula of dismissal is one more example of the faminators' staggering impudence.

The pinnacle of effrontery is reached in the section on the twelve offences against Ausonian diction (116–32), which Gabriele Knappe convincingly proved to be an enigmatic summary of three chapters from Donatus' *Ars grammatica* (3.1–3).[70] The passage could be paraphrased as follows:

> Now I will explore the twelve grammatical faults. Two of them are particularly harmful: barbarism and soloecism.[71] Barbarism occurs on two levels (in speaking and writing) and manifests itself in four different ways: by the addition, deletion, substitution, or transposition of letters. The other one, soloecism, is equally dangerous. But there are ten more crimes against the Italian gold. Which of these offences can you detect in my speech?[72]

Read as the climax of the amoebaean exchange between the senior and the junior scholar, the latter invites his opponent to demonstrate in detail where his diction falls short of Hisperic usage, suggesting of course that it does not. However, a snake may be lurking in the grass. To begin with, four times the apprentice compares faulty Latinity with the mortal attacks of venomous serpents, as I mentioned above: "facinora quae uerbalem sauciant uipereo tactu struem" ("crimes that wound the verbal construction with a viperous touch" 119–20); "statutum toxico rapit scriptum dampno" ("it [i.e. barbarism] carries off an established letter with toxic damage" 124); "stabilem picturae uenenoso obice transmutat tenorem" ("it transforms the steady course of writing with venomous obstruction" 126); "quo Hispericum reguloso ictu uiolatur eulogium" ("[the fault] that violates

[69] "I do not explain in words the remaining formations, lest I arouse nausea in the scholars' barracks."

[70] Knappe, "On Rhetoric and Grammar."

[71] Barbarism is an incorrect combination of letters within a word, soloecism inaccurately combines words within a phrase.

[72] In my view, it is impossible to have *in hac assertione* (132) referring to anything else than what the speaker just said himself.

Hisperic eloquence by an adder's strike" 128).[73] The same speaker had used serpentine imagery before to make clear the devastating force of his speech (98–102),[74] but now this violence seems to be turned against language itself.

To understand what the faminator is doing, we have to consult the pages in Donatus to which he obscurely alludes.[75] Of the twelve *uitia* our speaker only mentions barbarism and soloecism, apparently pleading not guilty of these charges. But what about the ten faults that are so conspicuously suppressed? At least four of them appear to be typical of the ways in which classical Latin is wilfully transformed into Hisperic usage. It would not be difficult to demonstrate how the faminators turn vices into virtues by systematically applying *acyrologia* (*impropria dictio*: choosing the wrong word), *pleonasmos* (*adiectio uerbi superuacui*: adding a superfluous word), *perissologia* (*superuacua uerborum adiectio sine ulla ui rerum*: superfluous addition of words without any new information), and *macrologia* (*longa sententia res non necessarias comprehendens*: a long sentence comprising unnecessary elements). Possibly, our interlocutor is serious in defending the correctness of his speech, but the ironic narrator certainly wants us to remember Donatus' criticism of grammatical mistakes.[76]

7 *Ars poetica*

If *HF*-A is a polyphonous mock-didactic text about speaking and writing artificial Latin, an obvious parallel is Horace's *Ars poetica*.[77] The structure of this mercurial classic seems to defy outrageously its own tenets of unity, simplicity, and well-considered composition, rambling from one subject to another and dilating upon problems largely irrelevant to Roman literature.[78] Subverting self-imposed poetical rules, though, is a serious matter, since it compels the reader to reflect upon the conventions of composition and interpretation. Accordingly, I propose to read *HF*-A as a seventh-century *ars poetica*.

In the first place, the text cheerfully indulges in lexical and morphological virtuosity just to demonstrate the infinite potential of the Latin language to transform itself. "Make it new," to quote Ezra Pound.[79] Second, Hisperic Latin has

[73] See n. 51 on *reguloso*, which may be a pun on the rules (*regulae*) of grammar.

[74] The first speaker had used this metaphor as well: *pitheum rostrum* (35): the python's beak.

[75] Donatus, *Ars grammatica* 3.1–3, in *Grammatici Latini* 4, ed. Heinrich Keil (Hildesheim: Georg Olms 1961 [1864]), 392–95.

[76] If, as I contend, the junior scholar speaking these words is identical with (or: a younger version of) the main narrator, it adds to the passage's irony.

[77] There is no reason to believe that Horace's poetry was known in seventh-century Ireland and Britain. The similarity is a typological one, based on the assumption that scholars and professionals in literature may sometimes feel the urge to take an ironical distance from their own concerns, realising that outsiders might see them as lost in esoteric games.

[78] Scholarship on Horace's *Ars* is immense. An accessible overview of modern literature is given by Andrew Laird, "The *Ars Poetica*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 132–43.

[79] Pound, Ezra, "Canto 53," in *The Cantos* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 265.

also a sociological aspect, since its preposterous difficulty must be meant to help forge a community of like-minded intellectuals excluding those not initiated. An obvious parallel may be found in the playful *mores* of modern students' unions.

Third, the patently humorous aspects of the text do not rule out the possibility that it has an existential meaning as well. As we have seen, the power of words is central to *HF*-A: the "wheel of words" encircles the land like the ocean does (381–3) and fire, possibly a metaphor for language, performs innumerous services (*innumera ciboneus plasmat seruitia aestus* 433). Both the power of language as such and the social cohesion of an in-crowd of Latinate intellectuals in an environment of poverty, lurking anarchy, and permanent warfare may count as effective tools to cope with the challenges of life. Imagine this faminator, perhaps a greying monk somewhere in England, recalling with a smile his student days in Ulster.[80] He fully grasped the existential importance of literature.

[80] Of course, the fact that the *narrator* of *HF*-A is not an Irishman does not prove that the *author* cannot have been one. It would even enhance the text's irony.

Table 1: *Hisperica famina* A: structure, with subheadings from the manuscript in italics.

I	**1–357**	**Dialogue and narrative: the Hisperic way of life**
A	1–132	Dialogue between expert and newcomer
	1–53	Interlocutor 1 (expert): arrival of new scholars; verbal attack
	54–60	Interlocutor 2 (newcomer): modest response
	61–86	Interlocutor 1: go home
	87–115	Amoebaeic exchange
	87–92	Interlocutor 1: my is speech like a torrent
	93–97	Interlocutor 2: my speech is like fire
	98–102	Interlocutor 1: my speech is like a viper
	103–9	Interlocutor 2: your claims are absurd (*adynata*)
	110–15	Interlocutor 1: your claims are absurd
	116–32	Interlocutor 2: *De duodecim uitiis ausonicae palathi* (the dangers of grammatical faults)
B	133–357	*Lex diei*: the faminators' daily life as told by one of them; descriptive and narrative passages; some dialogue
II	**358–570**	**Ten models of *ecphrasis***
	358–80	*De caelo* (heaven)
	381–425	*De mari* (sea)
	426–51	*De igne (fire)*
	452–76	The fields
	477–96	*De uento* (wind)
	497–512	*De plurimis* (clothing, equipment, weapons)
	513–30	*De taberna* (book container)
	531–46	*De tabula* (writing tablet)
	547–60	*De oratorio* (chapel)
	561–70	*De oratione* (prayer)
III	**571–612**	***De gesta re*: narrative of a cattle raid**

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NOTE

This contribution is the response piece to a larger dialogue of three articles that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are "*The Comic Latin Grammar* in Victorian England" by Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne (pp. 2–31), "Reading and (Re)Writing the *Auctores*: Poliziano and the Ancient Roman Miscellany" by Scott J. DiGiulio (pp. 33–58), and "The *Hisperica Famina* as an *Ars Poetica*: An Interpretation of the A-Text" by Piet Gerbrandy (pp. 60–79).

Playfulness, pedagogy, and patrician values

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What do a seventh-century hermetic text, a fifteenth-century miscellany, and a nineteenth-century comic grammar have in common? That sounds like the beginning of an obscure scholarly joke.

If it were, that would not be inappropriate. For one thing that all these texts share is a delight in the Latin language and its possibilities for play. The three papers in this issue, analyzing these three disparate works, implicitly celebrate the sheer pliancy of Latin and its range of communicative possibilities over a magnificent thirteen centuries.

These texts have another very important factor in common. They were all written for readers whose first language is not Latin. Their playfulness and their didacticism turn out to be deeply intertwined.

This is obvious, of course, in the case of *The Comic Latin Grammar*, a rather laborious example from the venerable tradition of English mockery of Latin culture. Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne gives an example designed to demonstrate the cases of the second declension: "*Magister jurgatur*, the master jaws. *Derideo magistrum*, I laugh at the master." This tradition of mockery is vigorously sustained through light verse of the Victorian and Edwardian periods ("What is this that roareth thus? / Can it be a motor bus? / Yes! the noise and hideous hum/ Indicant motorem bum..."—and so on through the grammatical cases). It continues in the efforts of Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle, channeled through the inimitable schoolboy Nigel Molesworth in the mid-twentieth century (Molesworth interrogates the Latin master: "Would you perhaps explane why latin never deals with the exploits of nero and one or two of the fruitier emperors. Or empresses for that mater" [all errors *sic*]). And it comes all the way into the present, with the standup comedy of Eddie Izzard in the twenty-first century (he closes a seven-minute skit on the encumbrances of the Latin

language—especially Roman numerals—with a typical twist, as he expatiates on the superiority of "English, the language that you speak and I speak, the language that's become the *lingua franca*—whatever the fuck that means—around the world").

When my father was at medical school in London in the 1960s, the annual revue—a sort of feast of fools: songs and sketches put together by the junior doctors for a glorious evening mocking their august senior colleagues and the institution as a whole—contained a song that played on the identity of the Latin *bufo*, toad, and the name of a popular pregnancy test: "You do the *bufo bufo* while you're making hay,/ You can't undo tomorrow what you did today… Do not cross the *bufo bufo*: / She's not an ordinary toad." For years, I had thought that this was simply an example of playful Latin erudition among the medical students. Upon investigation, I now learn that the test was quite literally performed by injecting the urine of women into toads: if the woman was pregnant, her hormones would, within a few hours, cause the toads to produce eggs. The song remains playful and clever, but the connection is not as abstruse as I had supposed. However, the fact that Latin served as Izzard's *lingua franca* for these young doctors only two generations ago is indisputable: there are plenty of asides in the revue that assume some basic knowledge of the language.

The playfulness of Poliziano's *Miscellanies* is perhaps easier to miss, but it is an important part of their texture. Scott J. DiGiulio observes that they need "intensive, intratextual reading." This is a laudable goal, but rather earnest when Poliziano himself says that he has composed the work *saltuatim et uellicatim*—two wonderful adverbs used by his antiquarian predecessor Aulus Gellius and pretty much no-one else. The work is a magnificent Wunderkabinett of language, a repository of arresting linguistic curiosities and obscure allusions that wears lightly what is in fact a prodigious achievement of learning. Poliziano's preface to Lorenzo de' Medici, which (by contrast with the main text) oscillates between defensiveness and self-assertion, claims that his inspiration is the consummate *varietas* of nature herself. But if that is so, it is a version of nature that veers towards oddities and misfits—often amusing ones. Take, for example, the story from Africanus of the disgruntled Sybarite flute player that closes *Misc.* 1.15. The Sybarites had trained their horses to dance at banquets to certain tunes on the flute: the flute player delivered the Sybarite cavalry to their enemy simply by playing the tune on the battlefield, whereupon the horses "reared up on their hind legs, shook off their riders, and displayed … the triple-time dance they had learned at home." Sex is often used as a hook for an episode that will pursue more abstruse themes: *Misc.* 1.83 begins by quoting one of Catullus' most obscene epigrams, and then discusses what it means to say that the (cuckolded, fellating) uncle of the poem has become a 'Harpocrates,' arraying passages from Plutarch, Varro, Tertullian, Augustine, and even (cited in Hebrew) the Psalms. (I am reminded of Erik Gunderson's observation in his book on Aulus Gellius: "For an antiquarian there cannot be too many answers to a question.") If the reader is dissatisfied, it is their

own fault—they are *nec ingenio satis uegeto nec eruditione solida*, they lack "a lively intellect and a sound education"—though Poliziano has, he says, flung in some vulgarities to make the book *uendibilior* (*Misc*. pref. 5). Where *The Comic Latin Grammar* was designed for use in schools, the *Miscellanies* evokes the preternaturally learned reader who is refining his Latin skills with their help. The *Grammar* is redolent of ink blots and mechanical classroom chants through the cases and the conjugations; the *Miscellanies* conjures a virtual library, a dream world of learned texts through which the aspiring scholar can wander at will, sifting obscure data and plucking pertinent exempla.

The *Hisperica Famina*, on the other hand, suggests an unruly rural community of reluctant learners. One of the advantages of insisting on reading the *Hisperica Famina* as a literary unity is that (as Piet Gerbrandy makes clear) it brings the sheer playfulness of that text into the foreground. Its polyphony is not a muddle but a joyful contest of voices: the neophyte and the master at the beginning strive to outdo each other in florid language; the little essays with which the work (or at least, the A-text) closes are delightful vignettes of parodic didacticism, complete with handy formulae to deter further inquiry. "innumera congellat plasmamina, / quae non loqueloso explicare famulor turno" ("the chapel contains innumerable objects, which I shall not struggle to unroll from my wheel of words"). I use Herren's translation here, which strives against the text for some sort of clarity; I simply cannot imagine how one could translate it into English in a way that captured the cascade of crazy coinages and grecizing neologisms in the text. The result feels like the love-child of Prudentius and Cúchulainn, spouting Latin learned from Vergilius Maro Grammaticus.

One of the paradoxes of the *Hisperica Famina*, as Gerbrandy points out, is that it combines outlandish vocabulary with simple syntax. We may perhaps infer from this that its compositors and readers—presumably native speakers of Old Irish or Old English, not Latin—were gaining pleasure precisely from the play of sound and the accumulation of rarefied verbal knowledge. The nimbus of Greek (*plasmamina* above is not atypical) added to the pleasure. Consider the simile near the beginning of the work that describes the group of scholars as bees:

> Velut innumera apium concauis discurrunt examina apiastris
> melchillentaque sorbillant fluenta alueariis,
> ac solidos scemicant rostris fauos. (vv. 42–45)[1]

[1] "As when countless swarms of bees run to and fro in their hollow hives / and swallow floods of honey *from their beehives*, / and make their solid combs with their probosces." (tr. Herren, addition italicized)

In the second line, particularly, sense is all but subsumed in mellifluous sound effects. This is the sort of linguistic striving that Aldhelm seems playfully to mock in the letter (quoted by Gerbrandy) to his protégé Heahfrið. But Aldhelm himself, of course, was more than capable of extraordinary feats of verbal virtuosity. The preface to the hexameter section of his opus geminatum *De Virginitate* is enlivened by an acrostic on the phrase *metrica tirones nunc promant carmina castos* ('now let metrical songs promote chaste recruits') which runs vertically from top to bottom of the line beginnings and from bottom to top of their endings. In this excerpt, the poet is praying to God for support and aid,

> **N**e praedo pellax caelorum claudere lime**N**
> **U**el sanctos ualeat noxarum fallere scen**A**,
> **N**e fur strofosus foueam detrudat in atra**M**,
> **C**onditor a summo quos Christus seruat Olimp**O**,
> **P**astor ouile tuens, ne possit rabula rapto**R**
> **R**egales uastans caulas bis dicere puppu**P**,
> **O**mnia sed custos defendat ouilia iam nun**C**.[2]

Just like the *Hisperica Famina*, albeit in a somewhat less anarchic manner, the poem plays with near-synonyms and with aural effects: three alliterative descriptions of the devil (*praedo pellax, fur strofosus, rabula raptor*), for example, culminating in the explosive onomatopoeic *puppup*. This is an insulting, disdainful fart, a diabolical victory cry; Aldhelm seems to have been the first person to put it in writing, though it is also found in Hrabanus Maurus, Dunstan, and Abbo of Fleury.

The play with sound and synonyms, the fascination with the peculiarities of the Latin language, that is common to all these texts—from Aldhelm and the *Hisperica Famina* all the way to *The Comic Latin Grammar* and beyond—suggests the ludic as a site of learning. This is the 'artful play' that Mary Carruthers celebrates in the first chapter of her book *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (*Nemo* as an inexhaustibly amusing dialogue participant, for example) or that is at the basis of many of the dialogues printed by Eleanor Dickey in *Learning Latin the Ancient Way* (see the instructive conversation between a hung-over *paterfamilias* and a reproachful interlocutor: "non potest/ turpius/ nec ignominiosius/ euenire/ quam heri gessisti," ("it

[2] "... lest the tricky pirate should close the threshold of heaven / or cheat the saints by devising harm; / lest the devious thief should thrust into the black pit / those whom Christ creator saves from highest Olympus, / a shepherd watching his flock; lest the raging despoiler should / twice say 'puppup' as he destroys the royal folds: / may the guardian defend all his sheep-pens even now."

is not possible/ more shamefully/ or more disgracefully/ to turn out/ than [what] you did yesterday").

Dickey observes in her introduction that "because non-native speakers have different needs from those of native speakers the Latin grammars designed for Greek speakers were actually more useful [than those for native speakers] in the Middle Ages." This brings me back to the point that all the works under consideration here were composed for, and by, non-native users of Latin. The emphasis on sound and on recondite vocabulary bespeaks the estrangement effect characteristic of learning a second language. When the learner understands a sentence imperfectly, they focus on individual words or sounds; sometimes this makes them seem funny, sometimes speciously profound. (We can simulate the effect simply by repeating a word or phrase in our own language until its sense falls away and it degenerates into a sequence of sounds.) The process of estrangement provides, in any case, the grains of mockery and derision that flourish in the response to Latin across the centuries, and which seem to have been sown as Latin gradually assumed the status of non-native language.

An important aspect of the dynamics of mockery is that it implicitly acknowledges the power of what is mocked. There is an excellent example of this from the period when Latin was still the first language of both author and audience. In Plautus' play *Poenulus*, when the Carthaginian referred to in the title finally comes on stage, he is burbling in a vaguely Semitic nonsense-language that is clearly intended to imitate Punic (which was indeed a Semitic language); the name of one of the play's protagonists, Agorastocles, is ominously dropped into the middle of the nonsense. Then suddenly the Carthaginian changes mode, and speaks in perfect Latin: "deos deasque ueneror, qui hanc urbem colunt" ("I revere the gods and goddesses who take care of this city"). This makes the joke even better when, a little later, Agorastocles' slave Milphio claims to be able to translate the language himself, and garbles the results. Bear in mind, meanwhile, that this play was first produced in the middle of the Punic wars: Carthage was an active enemy of Rome, the greatest challenge yet to its dominion. The portrayal of the Carthaginian, Hanno, is in fact a notably generous one; but the linguistic joke gets its piquancy from the fact that Punic is a language of power *and the characters on stage need to understand it and cannot*. As far as I know, after Carthage fell in 146 BCE its language was no longer mocked. Why would it be? It no longer represented a threat to be defused, however temporarily, with satire.

This takes us back to my father and his cohort of medical students, laughing at the senior doctors (and in the '*bufo bufo*' song, perhaps rather anxiously, at the possibility that they would get someone pregnant—the cohort of 'they' being, of course, almost entirely male). It takes us back to Poliziano, who casts himself at the beginning of his preface as a second Juvenal, a humble satirist who from his lowly position can puncture the grandiosity of other Latin writers. Or—more directly—it takes us

back to the mockery through the centuries of multitudes of hapless *magistri* and their pedantry and pretensions.

This situation comes about because the extraordinary thing about the Latin language is the way in which, from the fall of Carthage onwards, it has quietly aligned itself with political, social and economic power. In more fraught, contested and explicit ways it has also, of course, been aligned with the power of Christianity. As a result, for most of its many centuries of existence—and to a degree unlike that of any other European language (French is the closest rival, over a far more confined span)—Latin has not been *only* a language. Latin is a symbol. It is a symbol of culture; of aspiration; of fitness to rule.

No wonder the study of Latin appeals to so few minority participants (with the possible exception of those invested in same-sex relationships—though even that engagement comes at the cost of highly selective vision). No wonder Black Latinists, in particular, have such difficulty finding congenial textual spaces in which to work. The power of Latin tends not to let them in on the joke—or rather, the 'joke.' A symbol is much harder to interrogate, to examine, to reshape or displace than a mere language.

Look at what the Latin language meant for Poliziano and his peers. It gave them access, not just to a tradition, but to an entire way of being. Taking Aulus Gellius as his model of encyclopedism, Poliziano could take his place in a transtemporal parade of the erudite, proudly purveying his recondite knowledge. He describes his essays as *simplices munditiae*, in a loud echo of Horace *Odes* 1.5 and the exquisite Pyrrha, who was *simplex munditiis*. He offers his essays to the reader, therefore, as elegant but cruel young ladies with whom they too may wish to toy. His readers are real men. They are *certainly* not gay: excerpt after excerpt and its surrounding commentary display a prurient interest in the marks of a man who wants a man, and particularly a manly man (e.g. *Misc*. 1.7, on those "qui digito scalpunt uno caput" ("who scratch their head with one finger")). One fears that the implied gender dynamics have seeped into the brand new translation of Dyck and Cottrell: in the above essay, a mere *nota*—the aforementioned scratching—becomes a 'mark of infamy'; and why, in *Misc*. 1.96 (*Quanta in muribus salacitas*) are the male mice *salacissimos*, 'very salacious,' when a few lines later the *salacissimam* female mouse is translated as being 'randy'? Be that as it may, the audience for the original essays is clearly male, and the culture that received it homosocial. I need hardly say that the same goes for both the *Hisperica famina* and *The Comic Latin Grammar*.

Arthur-Montagne observes in her essay on the *Comic Grammar*: "Elite groups invariably disguise the mechanisms by which they achieved and maintain their power in the vestments of gentility." The statement seems incontrovertible; it is made the more piquant by the fact that, in 'gentility,' she evokes the fabulously protean word *gentilitas* that started by tracing connections of family (*gens*), went on to designate

non-Jews in New Testament texts and pagans in later Christian texts, was promoted over time to the prefix in 'gentleman,' and finally gave modern English its saccharine yet corrosive concept of the 'genteel.' I am more doubtful, however, about Arthur-Montagne's immediately subsequent sentence: "Leigh [the author of the *Comic Grammar*] ... holds up these disguises to the light and reveals them for what they are: the pretensions of a bygone era."

Was the acquisition of Latin "the pretension of a bygone era" when the *Comic Grammar* was published in 1840? This in no way vitiates the paper as a whole, but I'm not sure I would support the point even if it were made for 1940. Arthur-Montagne notes that Latin by the nineteenth century had the "paradoxical status" of being "a language of little utility but great value." The missing link is how even apparently useless activities, when endowed with so much social capital, may intersect with the acquisition of very real power. It was arguably part of the rumpled mystique (now not so much rumpled as shredded) of the current British prime minister Boris Johnson that he had read classics at Oxford, and that trite Latinisms and Latin phrases found their way readily into his speech. Disclaimer: I too read classics at Oxford; I too am prone to trite Latinisms. But I have no intention of parlaying them into political power. I merely observe that, at any rate in the British context, it remains possible to do so.

Having said this, the hold of Latin on general cultural life is undoubtedly diminishing. Given that this hold has generally taken exclusionary forms, this seems to me an excellent thing. One small example: I recently wrote a review of a book on Alaric the Goth for the *Times Literary Supplement* (issue of October 23, 2020). When I received the proofs, the review had been entitled—in a deliciously apt echo of Cicero's speeches *In Verrem*—'Civis romanus non erat.' But clearly, between then and publication, a more senior editor wielded the red pen. The review was published under the more democratic title, 'Citizen of the world, but not Rome.'

So what can we do with Latin now? We can work to make its acquisition and the cultural knowledge to which it gives access far more inclusive. After all, there is no other single language in Western culture that gives its readers so many points of entry to so many different places and times and styles of reading and writing and thinking. These three widely diverse papers together form an excellent illustration of that fact. There are so many ways in which Latin can be enticing. But only if it is demoted from its symbolic status and loses its classist charge; only if its literature becomes subject to vigorous interrogation.

What else? Well, we can play with Latin. We don't have to be burdened. We can rewrite tradition, and let others in on the joke. These papers show, explicitly or implicitly, what fun we can have with it.