ROMAN LITERATURE UNDER NERVA, TRAJAN AND HADRIAN

Literary Interactions, AD *96–138*

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CHAPTER 8

Amicable and Hostile Exchange in the Culture of Recitation

Matthew Roller

The literary and social practice of recitation figures prominently in the works of Martial, Plutarch, Pliny, Tacitus, Juvenal and Suetonius, to name some key authors active in the period this volume covers. By 'recitation' I refer to the practice of reading out a prepared but provisional text, representing an author's literary work-in-progress, to an audience – whether an intimate gathering, or larger and more 'public' one – that will notionally provide suggestions for improvement before the author finalises and 'publishes' the work.[1] The kinds of work-in-progress attested as being recited range over virtually every literary genre: epic, lyric, elegiac, dramatic and epigrammatic poetry, as well as historiography, oratory and dialogue (at least) among prose genres.[2] As a stage of the editing and revising process in which authors and audiences confront each other directly, it seems fair to describe recitation as an arena of literary interaction par excellence. Fundamentally, recitation is a social activity, involving a group of participants

I thank the auditors who attended my recitation of this work at the 'LINTH 2' conference in Rostock, June 2014. None of them embarrassed me with frank criticism, but I inferred some critical judgments from their gestures, murmurs and silences. I then circulated a revised draft to the volume editors, Chris Whitton and Alice König, who generously offered discreet suggestions for improvement. I hope this chapter is imprinted with the values and interests of this literary community, and that it interacts appropriately with other members' contributions – as well it should, given the sociality and amicable reciprocity of the writing and editing process.

[1] By 'recitation' I mean the socio-literary practice in general; when I speak of '*a* recitation' I mean a specific event in which a particular author reads out a particular work to a particular audience. The use of the English word 'recitation' to label this activity is a scholarly convention. The Latin verb *recitare* means 'to read out to an audience from a prepared, written text'; this verb and its associated nouns *recitatio/recitator* are indeed used to refer to this literary activity (*OLD* s.v. 2). However, other lexical items may be used to label this activity: the verbs *legere* and *audire*, and the associated nouns *lector*, *auditor* and *auditorium*. Recitation may also be described or referred to without any of these lexical items appearing. Furthermore, *recitare* and *recitatio* may refer to other kinds of 'reading out', such as of laws, letters, wills, or other documents to audiences in lawcourts, assemblies, army camps, or the senate (*OLD* s.v. 1). Rarely *recitatio/recitare* refers to the reading out of a finished, published literary text, rather than a work-in-progress: Mart. 2.71.3, Suet. *Claud.* 42, cf. Gell. 18.5.1–6. For semantics see Valette-Cagnac 1997: 23–4, 111; Binder 1995: 268–70.

[2] On the genres recited see Binder 1995: 296–7.

gathered at one time and place. Each participant takes on a role – reciter or auditor – to which specific expectations about comportment attach. The verbal exchange in a recitation event, which is synchronic and collocal, imprints the resulting literary work in ways different from the imprint created by interactions of a more specifically 'textual' sort. By 'textual' interaction I mean the situation in which an author selectively appropriates, responds to and reworks elements of a completed, 'published' text that he reads – whether that text is itself synchronic and collocal (produced by the author's contemporaries and acquaintances, a dynamic much discussed in this volume)[3] or was produced at another place and time. Furthermore, since recitation involves a social actor performing before a judging audience, the overall protocols of social reciprocity and exchange govern how the participants' roles are defined and their comportment is judged. These judgments, in turn, affect the relative prestige and social standing of the participants. These social consequences of recitation are no less important, and perhaps more important, than the strictly literary consequences. My aim in this chapter is to investigate, through the lens of exchange theory, the literary and social interactions that occur in recitation, and the consequences of those interactions. I focus in particular on exchanges that are represented either as amicable or as hostile, considering the impact these divergent flavours of interaction have on the literary production and social standing of the participants.

Cooperation, Competition and Exchange

At the outset of this investigation, however, some background about recitation is required. The earliest surviving references to the practice under discussion date to the 30s BC. We hear of non-senatorial, 'professional' poets reciting their works in progress, whether in controlled (e.g. domestic) spaces for select, invited audiences, or in civic arenas for indiscriminate audiences. These poets, who typically plead poverty, present themselves as seeking economic gain no less than literary fame.[4] The first author of senatorial status to recite his own literary works is allegedly Asinius Pollio, also

[3] On textual interactions among contemporary authors who may or may not also have interacted socially, see Kelly, König, Mratschek and Whitton in this volume; also Gibson for a thought experiment on the relationship between social and textual interaction.

[4] Horace and other contemporary poets reciting: Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.22–5, 73–8; *Epist.* 2.1.219–23; *Ars* 438–52 (see below), 470–6. Virgil reciting: Serv. ad *Aen.* 4.323, 6.861; Gell. 6.20.1. Binder 1995: 269–75 discusses these early recitations; Markus 2000: 171–4 considers how Juvenal handles the trope of the impoverished poet reciting.

in the 30s to 20s BC.[5] Among senatorial and equestrian reciters, as we shall see, the focus is less on money and fame than on the discharging of reciprocal social obligations and achieving high standing in the community of the like-minded. Besides poetry, aristocrats also recite historiography and oratory – literary genres particularly associated with their own social class. Over the subsequent 150 years, recitations by 'professional' poets and by aristocrats composing in various genres are mentioned or described frequently enough to lend the impression that such activity is routine.[6] The era of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian, however, furnishes our richest information about this activity by far. Not only does the Younger Pliny abundantly describe (or prescribe) the contemporary culture of recitation, but additional striking descriptions appear in Juvenal, the post-Domitianic books of Martial, and Plutarch. Furthermore, Tacitus and Suetonius, the principal historical writers of the Trajanic and Hadrianic era, provide much of our information about the practice of recitation in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian eras. While these authors do not directly describe recitation as practised in their own day, they reveal their awareness of and interest in recitation precisely by noting its prevalence and discussing its praxis in the periods about which they write. Whether the efflorescence of information about recitation, both contemporary and earlier, in the era of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian is an artefact of the texts that happen to survive, or reflects an actual uptick in the social and literary significance of recitation in this era, is difficult to say: perhaps a bit of both.[7]

Let us begin our more focused investigation by describing some well-documented features of recitation that may, at least on their surface, appear to constitute paradoxes. The first paradox is as follows. On the one hand, those who recite their literary works to assembled audiences, and who attend recitations given by others, form a *cooperative* community characterised by a shared commitment to improving one another's works in

[5] Pollio: Sen. *Contr.* 4.*pr.*2 (with Dalzell 1955; Binder 1995: 272–3); Seneca actually says Pollio was 'the first of all Romans' to recite his works to an invited audience. A generation or so later are T. Labienus (Sen. *Contr.* 10.*pr.*8) and Sextilius Ena (Sen. *Suas.* 6.27; though Ena's status is uncertain).

[6] 'Professional' poets reciting in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods: Pers. 1.13–23 and *passim*; Petr. *Sat.* 90–3; also, numerous poems from Martial's early (Domitianic) books portray Martial himself and other poets reciting: e.g., *Epig.* 1.29, 38, 52, 63, 66, just from book 1. These poets' status is not always clear, though Martial seems to address them as social equals and rivals. Senatorial aristocrats, including some emperors, who recite in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods are attested at Ov. *Pont.* 3.5.37–42; Sen. *Ep.* 122.11–13; Tac. *Ann.* 4.34, 14.19, 16.4, *Dial.* 2–3, 23.2; Suet. *Tib.* 61.3, *Claud.* 41, *Nero* 10, *Dom.* 2.2, *Vita Lucani*; Plin. *Ep.* 1.13.3, 7.17.11–12. For all texts up to Pliny's day that refer to recitation, see Binder 1995: 269–96.

[7] My brief historical survey here is a modification of Roller 2011: 215. Uden 2015: 94–8 takes a different view, arguing that Pliny's engagement with recitation is a rearguard action defending an institution in decline.

progress.[8] Participants assume one of the roles that this activity makes available, and their comportment is governed by norms associated with the role they assume. Everyone agrees, that is, to observe the rules of play. And 'play', in a key sense, it is. For the literary activity of composition and recitation, at least among elites, is normally classified as *otium*, 'leisure time'. This is time not devoted to *negotia,* the civic duties and other economically or socially beneficial activities through which lofty Romans strive for pre-eminence and distinction. On the other hand, members of the recitation community also *compete* with one another: as we shall see, they strive for approbation in their reciting as well as in the works they eventually publish. Thus they are engaged in constructing hierarchies in which each participant strives to be ranked as high as possible relative to the others. This quest for social distinction is more characteristic of *negotia* than of *otium.* This, then, is the first paradox: members of the recitation community both cooperate and compete; and their activities, though 'officially' carried out under the banner of *otium*, include features that are more typical of aristocratic *negotia.*[9]

Now for the second paradox. As noted already, works presented in recitations are not finished but 'in progress', provisional and subject to change. The recitation's avowed purpose is to elicit from the audience candid feedback, in a relatively controlled and private environment, by which the author will improve his work prior to publishing it as a finished work – that is, before he releases it to be copied and circulated widely through his social network or via booksellers.[10] Yet, at the same time, some participants in these events do describe what goes on in them – obviously, for otherwise we would know nothing whatsoever about recitation as a social and literary activity. We hear, for example, how specific works are received by an audience, and how audience members and reciters comport themselves in relation to the norms associated with the roles they assume. Thus the recitation event in practice is rather less private and controlled than the ideology of provisionality would lead one to expect. Audience judgments can

[8] On the literary community that is both presupposed and constructed by recitation, see e.g. Gurd 2012: 105–26 (recitation is usually the province of what he calls 'genetic' readers, a community of known specialists or connoisseurs); also Dupont 1997: 52–4; Barchiesi 2004: 22–4 (and *passim*); Johnson 2010: 42–56, 73.

[9] On recitation's declared limitation (among elites) to the sphere of *otium,* and the paradox whereby it nevertheless takes on features of aristocratic *negotia*, see e.g. Valette-Cagnac 1997: 114–15; Roller 1998: 289–98 and 2011: 215–17; Johnson 2010: 44. On Plinian *otium*, see Bütler 1970: 41–57; Gibson and Morello 2012: 169–99.

[10] On provisionality, Delvigo 1990: 91–2; Dupont 1997: 48–50; Fantham 1999: 222–3; Parker 2009: 208–14; on what 'publication' (*editio*) means, see Starr 1987: 215 (and *passim*) and Johnson 2010: 52–3.

and do escape into the larger world via the reports about these events that circulate orally and in writing. Consequently, recitation manifests some of the dynamics of public performance, in which a judging audience gathers around a performer, evaluates his performance by the standard of the community's values, compares it to the performances of other contemporaries or predecessors, and then monumentalises it so that people elsewhere and at other times will know of it. In particular, recitation takes on key features of public oratory as performed in the late Republican *contio*, the law courts, and the senate of the late Republic and early Empire – all quintessential arenas of aristocratic *negotia*. To summarise, then, the second paradox is that any given recitation is both a 'private', off-the-record event produced for a restricted audience, and also a public, visible, spectacular performance that is potentially available to a broad audience extending well beyond that particular event's immediate participants.[11]

These two paradoxes are homologous – indeed, they are opposite sides of the same coin. To view reciters and their audiences as a cooperative community committed to furthering a shared literary enterprise underpins the ideology that recitations are 'private', provisional, candid and secret: everyone seeks to help everyone else improve their work, without exposing them to broader criticism or ridicule, as this community collectively pursues its literary vision. Conversely, to view the community as competitive, and intent on constructing social hierarchies, accounts for the more 'public', spectacular dimension of the recitation event: the competitive ethos causes judgments passed on works to escape the boundaries of the particular event and become more widely known. Yet we should not be surprised that recitation has these two, somewhat opposed, faces – which is to say, these paradoxes are more apparent than 'real'. If there are any universals in Roman aristocratic culture, one is surely that cooperation and competition are inextricably combined in any number of social venues. In the senate, aristocrats compete ferociously for magistracies and honours, even while the body must function more or less effectively as a whole in order to govern. In battle, aristocratic cavalrymen and commanders are part of a highly coordinated, disciplined military unit, yet seek to outstrip their peers through conspicuous displays of valour. Similar analyses could be offered for advocacy in the courts, performances in the declamation halls, and – as several contributions in this volume demonstrate – other domains of specifically literary interaction.[12] Furthermore, the tension between

[11] For this paradox, see Valette-Cagnac 1995: 13–14 and 1997: 114–15; Roller 1998: 294–6.
[12] On competition and cooperation in other literary domains, see e.g. Harries and Kelly in this volume.

competition and cooperation, besides being visible in diverse social contexts, also persists over time, albeit in ever-changing ways. Indeed it is noteworthy that recitation emerged and established itself as a new arena of competition and cooperation precisely in the Augustan and early Julio-Claudian era. Perhaps aristocrats were compensating for the reduced opportunities for competitive status-building in what had previously been the premier arenas for oratory – the public *contio*, certain *quaestiones* and other courts, and to some extent the senate. So as some traditional venues for competing in eloquence withered or took on new forms in the early Empire, Roman aristocrats constructed new competitive arenas to fill the lacuna.[13]

In the balance of this chapter I hope to shed new light on the competitive-*cum*-cooperative culture of recitation by analysing it in terms of exchange. The social norms that govern conduct in the recitation, like so many other social norms, are fundamentally matters of reciprocity. Modern exchange theory is well suited for analysing social systems that include both cooperative and competitive elements, since the theory posits mechanisms that create social bonds (i.e. cooperative, communitarian elements) that are also hierarchical (i.e. competitive). Regarding recitation, those who participate and thereby assert their membership in the recitation community incur obligations that they may be judged to have discharged appropriately or inappropriately through their very conduct as participants. The degree to which an individual participant's conduct manifests this community's norms – hence whether he engages the community in an amicable or hostile way – provides grounds for other participants to include or exclude him, or rank him higher or lower in the community's social hierarchy. Membership and standing in this community therefore depends upon the management of reciprocal obligations. In the sections to follow, I examine how these obligations are defined and managed.

Three Obligations within the Recitation Community

Marcel Mauss, the foundational figure in the modern study of exchange and reciprocity, asserted that membership in a community constituted by exchange entails a threefold obligation: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate.[14] Within the recitation community, I propose that this threefold obligation takes the following

[13] Recitation as a 'substitute' domain of eloquence: Dupont 1997: 44–5; Osgood 2006: 536; Roller 2011: 215–19 (each in different ways).

[14] Mauss 1990a: 8–14.

form: the obligation to recite works in progress, the obligation to attend such recitations, and the obligation to provide appropriate feedback to the reciter. Let us examine the evidence for these three obligations in turn. Regarding the obligation to recite, consider a letter of Pliny (*Ep.* 2.10) in which the author gently upbraids his addressee Octavius Rufus – a senior senator, and correspondent on literary matters – for writing poems but not reciting them:[15]

> Hominem te patientem uel potius durum ac paene crudelem, qui tam insignes libros tam diu teneas! . . . (2) Quousque et tibi et nobis **inuidebis**, tibi maxima laude, nobis uoluptate? . . . Magna et iam longa exspectatio est, quam frustrari adhuc et differre non **debes** . . . (4) Dices, ut soles, 'amici mei uiderint' . . . (5) . . . sed dispice ne sit parum prouidum, sperare ex aliis quod tibi ipse non **praestes**. (6) Et de editione quidem interim ut uoles: recita saltem quo magis libeat emittere . . . (7) Imaginor enim qui concursus quae admiratio te, qui clamor quod etiam silentium maneat . . .
>
> You're an unyielding man, or rather stubborn and almost cruel, holding back such distinguished books for so long! (2) How long will you **begrudge** yourself the greatest praise, and us the greatest pleasure? . . . We've long harboured a great expectation, which you **ought** not still to be disappointing and putting off . . . (4) As usual, you'll say, 'But my friends will see to it [sc. after I am dead].' . . . (5) . . . but consider whether it's not short-sighted to hope from others what you will not **offer up** to yourself. (6) Regarding publication, meanwhile, do as you wish: but at least recite, to inspire yourself to publish . . . (7) In fact I picture what a gathering, what wonderment, what acclamation, even what silence awaits you . . .

Pliny overtly deploys the language of social obligation (*inuides*, *debes*, *praestes*, emboldened in the Latin text and translation) to imply that one who claims to be a poet, or is known to be composing verses, assumes an obligation to recite his work-in-progress to the community of the like-minded, and not hold it back. This community is the 'us' (*nobis*, 2) who will praise Rufus and take pleasure in his poetry, and in whom the 'expectation' of a recitation (*exspectatio*, 2) resides; it is this community that Pliny predicts will assemble, marvel, applaud and so on (*concursus*, *admiratio*, *clamor*, 7) at the longed-for recitation. Indeed, one is hardly a poet at all should one fail in the obligation to recite, as a one-couplet epigram of Martial reveals with devastating brevity: *Nil recitas et uis, Mamerce, poeta uideri:* | *quicquid uis esto, dummodo nil recites* ('You don't recite, Mamercus,

[15] In *Ep.* 1.7.5 Pliny is eager to hear Rufus' verses; *Ep.* 9.38 suggests Rufus may finally have published them. On Pliny's addressees, see in brief Birley 2000a, along with Sherwin-White's (1966) notes ad loc.; more comprehensively, the individual entries in *PIR*^{2}.

yet you wish to be deemed a poet: be whatever you want, provided you don't recite', *Epig.* 2.88). The first verse asserts that Mamercus' failure to recite his poetry calls his claim to membership in the community of poets into question – the converse of the norm articulated by Pliny, that a poet incurs the obligation to recite. The second verse turns this logic inside out: Martial pronounces himself content to accept Mamercus' claim to being a poet, *provided that* Mamercus does not recite. The contradiction between the two verses conveys the joke: for the implication is that Mamercus' poetry is so awful that Martial will simply concede his claim to being a poet, to avoid having to sit through a recitation.[16]

Pliny reiterates this norm, and adds other obligations incumbent on authors, in *Epistles* 8.12. He addresses Cornelius Minicianus, a literary equestrian from northern Italy.[17] The topic is an upcoming recitation by Titinius Capito, another high-ranking equestrian with literary interests. I quote the letter in full, to show the pervasiveness of the language of social obligation, and to indicate the range of those obligations as Pliny describes them.

> Hunc solum diem excuso: recitaturus est Titinius Capito, quem ego audire nescio magis **debeam** an cupiam. Vir est optimus et inter praecipua saeculi ornamenta numerandus. Colit studia, studiosos amat fouet prouehit, multorum qui aliqua componunt portus sinus gremium, omnium exemplum, ipsarum denique litterarum iam senescentium reductor ac reformator. (2) Domum suam recitantibus **praebet**, auditoria non apud se tantum **benignitate mira** frequentat; mihi certe, si modo in urbe, **defuit numquam**. Porro tanto turpius **gratiam non referre**, quanto honestior causa **referendae**. (3) An si litibus tererer, **obstrictum** esse me crederem obeunti uadimonia mea, nunc, quia mihi omne negotium omnis in studiis cura, minus **obligor** tanta sedulitate celebranti, in quo **obligari** ego, ne dicam solo, certe maxime possum? (4) Quod si illi **nullam uicem** nulla quasi **mutua officia deberem**, sollicitarer tamen uel ingenio hominis pulcherrimo et maximo et in summa seueritate dulcissimo, uel honestate materiae. Scribit exitus illustrium uirorum, in his quorundam mihi carissimorum. (5) Videor ergo **fungi pio munere**, quorumque exsequias celebrare non licuit, horum quasi funebribus laudationibus seris quidem sed tanto magis ueris interesse. Vale.
>
> I make apologies for this day alone: Titinius Capito is going to recite. I don't know which is greater: my **obligation**, or my desire, to hear him. He's an

[16] Alternatively, the second verse may mean that a recitation of this work will expose Mamercus' incompetence and thereby demolish, rather than sustain, his claim to being a poet (likewise at *Epig.* 8.20). But this interpretation seems less pointed.

[17] On Minicianus' literary interests (*studia*) cf. *Ep.* 7.22.2. He also receives letters on other topics: *Ep.* 3.9, 4.11.

> outstanding man, to be counted among the leading lights of the age. He cultivates literature (*studia*); he loves, cherishes, and promotes producers of literature (*studiosi*); he is the harbour, the protection, the asylum of many who try their hand at writing; an exemplum for all; he has restored and made anew literature itself, which was long in decline. (2) He **supplies** his house to reciters, and attends readings held elsewhere with **amazing generosity**: me, at least, he's **never failed**, provided he was in town. Besides, **the better the reason for reciprocating, the more shameful it is to fail to reciprocate**. (3) If I were entangled in a lawsuit, I would feel **bound** to someone who stood bail for me: as things are, since all my effort (*negotium*) and concern is directed toward literature, am I any less **bound** to someone whose exceptionally diligent attendance gives him, if not the only **claim upon me**, certainly the greatest? (4) But even if I **owed him no return, no (so to speak) reciprocal duties**, I would still be attracted by the man's genius, which is really splendid, outstanding, and charming even when treating very serious topics; or by the dignity of his theme. He writes about the deaths of famous men, including some who were very dear to me. (5) So I see myself as **discharging a pious duty**: those whose funerals I could not attend, their funeral orations (of a sort) I may now be present for – late, to be sure, but that much the more true. Farewell.

Let us focus on the rhetoric of this letter. Pliny insists that he is obligated to attend Capito's upcoming recitation, in part because of all Capito has done for the community of reciters: he has provided his house as a venue, he turns up at all the *auditoria* (i.e. to attend recitations given by other members of the community), and in particular he has never failed to attend Pliny's recitations without good excuse. Therefore, Pliny is bound: he cannot possibly fail to reciprocate these services, and a proper return consists in attending Capito's recitation. The letter is awash with the language of gift exchange and reciprocal obligation (emboldened above): *debere*, *praebere*, *deesse*, *obligari*, *obstringi*, *gratiam referre*, *munus fungi*, *benignus*, *mutuus*, *officia*, *uices*. Such obligations, Pliny makes clear, are incurred by all members of the literary community to any particular member who is as diligent in his service to that community as Capito is. Yet Pliny also insists on his personal obligation, due to Capito's dedicated attendance at Pliny's own recitations.[18] There is also Capito's subject matter. He is reciting the deaths of famous men, some of them recently dead figures who were dear to Pliny. In this regard, to attend Capito's recitation is also to

[18] Pliny makes a show in his letters of holding himself strictly accountable for attending others' recitations, hence for maintaining amicable exchange relations: e.g. *Ep.* 1.13.5 *Ego prope nemini defui; erant sane pleri amici*; also 5.21.1. Yet he equally makes a show of *not* holding others strictly accountable. Thus in *Ep.* 1.13.5–6 he hopes not to appear to be reckoning up a (monetary) balance: *ne uidear, quorum recitationibus adfui, non auditor fuisse sed creditor*. See also below.

'discharge a pious duty' (*pio munere fungi*) to the memory of those to whom Pliny feels a connection.[19] Indeed, this letter itself seems to participate in the general balancing of obligations to friends and peers that Pliny herein describes. For the opening phrase, 'I make apologies for this one day', may hint that he is withdrawing from, or justifying a proposal to reschedule, some arrangement previously agreed with his addressee Minicianus. Such a prior arrangement obviously entails an obligation, but this letter explains why that obligation is necessarily trumped by a greater one to Capito, at least for the one day Capito will be reciting. Pliny's defensive claim that, at the moment, all his effort and care (*negotium*, *cura*) is devoted to his literary efforts (*studia*) rhetorically corroborates his overall effort in this letter to elevate the status of this particular recitation so that it can reasonably claim parity with the sorts of obligations traditionally considered more 'serious' (*negotia*).[20] Many additional texts, from Pliny, Martial and other authors, also express or imply the dual obligation that the three texts just discussed already document. Namely: within the community of producers of literature there is a concrete obligation to give recitations, and a similar obligation to attend recitations given by other members of this community.

Let me now document the third obligation within this community – the obligation to provide appropriate feedback when one is an auditor of another's recitation. To grasp what counts as 'appropriate feedback', let us examine more closely the idea that a recitation presents work-in-progress that the audience should help the author edit and improve prior to his publishing the work. The atmosphere of such recitations is deftly sketched by Pliny in a number of letters, themselves addressed to friends with literary interests who either attend recitations, interact with people who do, and/or read and comment on Pliny's 'polished' drafts subsequent to his own recitations. In *Epistles* 7.17 Pliny writes, 'I want to be praised not when I recite, but when I am read. Therefore I pass over no type of editing: first I work over what I have written; then I read it to two or three people; then I give others a version to be marked up . . . and finally I recite to a larger crowd,

[19] The implication is that these men were murdered under Domitian, and no proper exequies were then possible. But now, under Trajan, commemoration can finally take place, and Capito's recitation of his work *Exitus illustrium uirorum* (if that is the title) is a step in that direction. Tacitus' *Agricola* appears motivated by the same impulse (*professione pietatis*, 3.3; also *Agr.* 1–3 in general).

[20] *Ep.* 8.21.1–3 similarly parades its weighing and prioritising of obligations, with the opposite result: the claims of a client in a law court, to which Pliny was unexpectedly summoned, had to be honoured notwithstanding the recitation he had previously scheduled himself to deliver, and to which he had invited auditors.

and if you believe me, that is when I edit most keenly.'[21] In *Epistles* 8.21 he articulates more specifically the audience's role in this process of editing: 'And besides, what do your companions have to offer, if they assemble for their own amusement? It's a spoiled person, behaving like a stranger, who would rather *hear* a friend's good book than help *make* it good.'[22] The language of social proximity and distance – 'companions', 'strangers', 'friends' (*sodales*, *ignoti*, *amici*) – again asserts the normative closeness of the community of those who write, recite and attend literary recitations; and that Pliny speaks of what the auditors have to 'offer' (*praestant*) towards improving the reciter's work folds the requirement to 'offer' *something* into this community's reciprocal obligations more generally.

But what exactly should the auditors be offering? In *Epistles* 5.12, Pliny remarks that a particular recitation provided just the kind of feedback he needed: 'Intending to recite a little speech I am thinking to publish, I invited some people to keep me on my mettle – just a few, so that I would hear the truth . . . I got what I was looking for: I found people to give me the benefit of their counsel, and spotted some additional things myself to correct. I've corrected the book, which I've sent to you.'[23] This letter seems to indicate that, in Pliny's view at least, the recitation provides the opportunity for the author to receive preliminary comments and editing suggestions on new work via oral, face-to-face interaction with members of the literary community. Recitation represents an early stage of the process of refining new work, and (normatively) has a relatively 'private', cooperative character. The editing process eventually moves into a more textual form of interaction, with texts of revised work circulating among members of the community for further and perhaps final editing. This progressive, oral-to-textual form of editorial interaction – driven by a norm of reciprocity and a

[21] *Ep.* 7.17.7 *Nec uero ego dum recito laudari, sed dum legor cupio. Itaque nullum emendandi genus omitto. Ac primum quae scripsi mecum ipse pertracto; deinde duobus aut tribus lego; mox aliis trado adnotanda . . . nouissime pluribus recito, ac si quid mihi credis tunc acerrime emendo* (additional justifications at §§14–15). The addressee of this letter, one Celer (of uncertain identity), evidently belongs to the recitation community: he has allegedly informed Pliny that the question has arisen – on the occasion of Pliny's recitation of an oration – whether orations should be recited at all (§2). Celer therefore either attends recitations himself, or discusses them with people who do. In §14 Pliny asks Celer to edit the post-recitation revised draft of this oration.

[22] *Ep.* 8.21.5 *Et alioqui quid praestant sodales, si conueniunt uoluptatis suae causa? Delicatus ac similis ignoto est, qui amici librum bonum mauult audire quam facere.* Pliny subsequently (§6) asks his addressee, Maturus Arrianus, to read and edit a collection of poetry that Pliny has revised following recitation.

[23] *Ep.* 5.12.1–2 *Recitaturus oratiunculam quam publicare cogito, aduocaui aliquos ut uererer, paucos ut uerum audirem. . . .* (2) *Tuli quod petebam: inueni qui mihi copiam consili sui facerent, ipse praeterea quaedam emendanda adnotaui. Emendaui librum, quem misi tibi* (similarly *Ep.* 3.18.8–9, 8.21.6). Pliny's addressee, Terentius Scaurus, is otherwise unknown. But since he is called upon to edit Pliny's post-recitation revision, he evidently belongs to this literary community.

corresponding sense of obligation among members of this literary community – may extend to the finished works themselves, potentially accounting for aspects of textual interactivity analysed by other contributors to this volume (more on this in the conclusion). Returning to recitation, 'appropriate feedback' evidently consists of audience responses that aim to save the author-reciter from errors and solecisms, sharpen his expression, and the like, in the early stages of the revising and refining process. Providing such feedback is evidently as much an obligation for members of this community as the obligation to recite what one has written, and to attend recitations given by others.[24]

Pliny provides fascinating detail regarding the precise form appropriate feedback takes, along with further justification for reciting, in *Epistles* 5.3, addressed to his literary friend Titius Aristo:[25]

> (8) Itaque has recitandi causas sequor, primum quod ipse qui recitat aliquanto acrius scriptis suis auditorum reuerentia intendit; deinde quod de quibus dubitat, quasi ex consili sententia statuit. (9) Multa etiam a multis admonetur, et si non admoneatur, quid quisque sentiat perspicit ex uultu oculis nutu manu murmure silentio; quae satis apertis notis iudicium ab humanitate discernunt.
>
> (8) I adhere to the following reasons for reciting: first, because the reciter attends more keenly to his writing out of respect for the auditors; second, because whatever the reciter is doubtful about, he decides, as it were, according to the judgment of an advisory council (*consilium*). (9) Furthermore, he is advised on many points by many people, and if he is not advised, he discerns what each one thinks from their expression, eyes, nods, hands, murmurs or silence: by such signs they distinguish sufficiently clearly their true judgment from their polite assent.

Once again, Pliny tasks the auditors of a recitation with offering critical judgments by which the author can improve his work. Their supposed cooperation with one another and with the reciter in furthering a shared literary enterprise is neatly encapsulated in the image of the *consilium*, an advisory body, constituted to achieve just this end. Yet, in order to extract those critical judgments from his audience, the reciter must apparently be an expert in corporeal semiotics. For Pliny seems to concede that the

[24] In general on proper audience conduct at recitations, Binder 1995: 303–5.

[25] Better known as a jurist, Aristo evidently belongs to the community of reciters: like Celer in *Ep.* 7.17 (n. 21), Aristo has reported to Pliny (§1) that people have criticised Pliny for reciting works of a particular genre, in this case lyric poetry. Aristo's report suggests that he either attends recitations himself or talks about them with people who do. On Pliny's interactions with Aristo see Harries in this volume.

audience is not always disposed to offer bald criticism directly to the reciter; their instinctive kindness (*humanitas*) does not allow that. Instead their 'true' judgments (*iudicium*) are conveyed by their expression, gesture, and (perhaps involuntary?) vocalisations, which constitute 'sufficiently clear indications' (*notae satis apertae*). These indications are what the reciter must be able to interpret in order to improve his text.

It is instructive to compare this indirect form of criticism with the more direct form practised by the great Augustan poet Quintilius Varus, as described by Horace (*Ars poetica* 438–44). Varus minced no words when critiquing other poets' recitations: 'If you recited something to Quintilius, he used to say, "Please correct this, and this." And if you tried in vain two or three times and said you couldn't do better, he'd tell you to delete your ill-turned verses and put them back on the anvil. If you preferred to defend your fault rather than change it, he'd waste no further word or empty effort to keep you from loving, all alone without rival, yourself and your writings.' Such perfectly frank and candid criticism is evidently absent from the kind of recitation event Pliny imagines, and indeed would be considered the height of rudeness, as we shall see.

Other texts from our period also imply that the norms of recitation include providing critical feedback to the reciter but preclude 'candid' criticism. In *Epigrams* 8.76, Martial portrays a tug-of-war over precisely this matter. '"The truth please, Marcus, tell me the truth; there's nothing I'd rather hear." So you always beg and ask me, Gallicus, when you recite your books or plead a case for your clients. It's hard for me to deny you what you ask. Hear, then, something that is truer than true: you do not really want to hear the truth.' Here Gallicus, the reciter, (reasonably) seeks feedback from his audience. Martial, as auditor, cannot or will not provide the (implicitly negative) 'frank' critique he thinks is warranted; nor, he suggests, does Gallicus really want to receive that criticism, his protestations notwithstanding. Therefore, Martial declines to ruffle the smooth surface of this relationship, at least not face-to-face. Yet we note that he is willing to expose his interchanges with Gallicus, and his implied judgment of Gallicus' poetry, to the reading audience of his published poem. Hence, he applies different social forms and norms to interactivity on the page from those he applies face-to-face (see below). A particular social dynamic, portrayed more overtly in other poems, may be at work here that explains Martial's reluctance to be candid. In *Epigrams* 10.10 Martial describes how his attempts, as a 'poor' poet, to cultivate a wealthy patron are trumped by an aristocrat who, notwithstanding his higher status, performs client services more impressively than Martial can. 'Am I to leap to my feet

frequently for him [sc. the wealthy man we are cultivating] as he recites his poems? Yet you stand and at the same time put both your hands to your lips' – that is, he displays his approval more demonstratively than Martial. In this situation, the quality of the reciter's poetry is beside the point: the would-be clients praise effusively in any case, seeking to ingratiate themselves in hopes of establishing a relationship that will channel resources to them. What matters here is not the wealthy patron's recitation of his poetry and his auditors' critical evaluation of it, but the auditors' demonstrative performance of appreciation, and the wealthy patron's evaluation of his auditors' performance. The actors are in the audience, as Shadi Bartsch once put it.[26] Thus the obligation to provide 'appropriate' critical feedback in the recitation may be pre-empted by other social needs – particularly the 'poor' professional poet's alleged need to shoehorn an economically beneficial relationship into the armature of a notionally more egalitarian, aesthetic relationship among members of a literary community.

Pliny's literary circle, which includes his fellow reciters and auditors along with a fair number of his epistolary correspondents, is composed largely of senators and high-ranking equestrians. The broadly shared economic, cultural and social interests among members of the senatorial–equestrian aristocracy tend to minimise dynamics of inequality such as Martial portrays.[27] Yet even absent a social structure in which subalterns ingratiate themselves, Pliny's literary community is strikingly averse to offering overt or frank criticism of a reciter's expression, style or content. Assuredly no such criticism would be offered within the bounds of the recitation event itself, and perhaps not even via discreet subsequent commentary or correspondence. Consider *Epistles* 2.10, which we discussed earlier, in which Pliny urges Rufus to recite his poetry. He imagines the likely audience response to such outstanding verses, based on the responses his own recitations have received: 'I picture what a gathering, what wonderment, what acclamation and even what silence awaits you: for I am

[26] Bartsch 1994. Similarly *Epig.* 12.40, where Martial is cultivating a rich man from whom he hopes to receive substantial gifts or perhaps a bequest. 'You lie; I believe you. You recite bad poetry; I praise it. You sing, I sing (etc.).' Being agreeable, pliant, and quick to praise (no matter what) are among the strategies that those in need of resources employ when seeking to ingratiate themselves with people who can provide those resources.

[27] Age differentials may, however, produce similar effects, even within the aristocracy. In *Ep.* 6.6.6 Pliny asks a fellow senator to support the young Julius Naso's candidacy for office, noting that Naso's credentials include his diligent attendance at Pliny's recitations. Saller 1982: 122–3 speaks of aspiring younger aristocrats as 'protégés' of older, established ones, rather than as 'clients'; he reserves patronage vocabulary for relations between persons of sharply different social and economic status.

delighted by silence no less than applause when I speak or recite, provided it's a keen and focused silence that is desirous of hearing more.'[28] This vision of the polite, applauding, (at worst) sometimes silent audience – discharging its obligation to attend Rufus' recitation and provide appropriate feedback – accords with the image of the polite auditors Pliny evokes in *Epistles* 5.3, discussed above, whose *humanitas* precludes overt expression of their (negative?) *iudicium*. Elsewhere too Pliny remarks on the praise his own recitations receive, or describes the praise that he, as an auditor, bestows on other reciters during their recitations.[29] But he never shows himself, or any other member of this community, offering frank, overt criticism of the style, expression or content of recited works à la Quintilius Varus. If there is any space for critical views to be communicated within the recitation, perhaps they take the form of murmurs, nods, gestures and silences as described in *Epistles* 5.3.[30]

The three instances I have found in which Pliny overtly criticises the content or style of a recited text seem to be exceptions that prove this rule. Twice Pliny complains that his bête noire Regulus recites work with inappropriate content, and once Pliny offers mixed praise (at best) for Silius Italicus' poetry. Yet Pliny seems not to have attended Regulus' recitations, but instead heard about them from others; and he does not speak about any particular recitation by Silius, but only of Silius' general practice. Thus, while Pliny airs these criticisms to the particular addressees of his letters, and ultimately to his letters' wider readership, he never offered them directly to the reciters, either at the actual recitations (for he seems not to have attended these) nor in discreet subsequent communications.[31]

[28] *Ep.* 2.10.7 *Imaginor enim qui concursus quae admiratio te, qui clamor quod etiam silentium maneat; quo ego, cum dico uel recito, non minus quam clamore delector, sit modo silentium acre et intentum, et cupidum ulteriora audiendi.*

[29] *Ep.* 3.15.3–4, 3.18.8–9, 4.19.3, 4.27.1–2, 5.17.2–4, 6.17 (see below), 6.21, 9.27.

[30] At *Ep.* 7.17.11 Pliny describes how the Claudian-era senator and poet Pomponius Secundus decided from the 'silence or applause' of a large recitation audience (*ex populi uel silentio uel assensu*) whether something should be removed or retained. Here silence apparently implies disapproval, while at 2.10.7 (n. 28) it may imply enthusiasm.

[31] Criticism of the content of Regulus' recitations: *Ep.* 1.5.2–4; 4.7.1–2. Criticism of Silius' style (as revealed in his recitations): *Ep.* 3.7.5. Pliny himself receives criticism not in recitation events themselves, it seems, but via third parties who report what people are saying about his recitations. He claims to hear from his correspondents that some people questioned whether it was fitting for a senator of his stature to write and recite light poetry (*Ep.* 5.3); whether oratory should be recited at all, by Pliny or anyone else (*Ep.* 7.17; he poses the same question himself at 2.19); and that he is a poor reciter of poetry in particular (*Ep.* 9.34). Such criticism never concerns the general content, style or expression of the works being recited (a point carefully made at *Ep.* 5.3.2), but either overarching matters of propriety or very local matters of presentation.

Hostile Exchange in the Recitation Community

Pliny uses his letters as a vehicle for criticising audience members at recitations who fall short of his standards of comportment. In *Epistles* 1.13 he laments a tendency among auditors to cut corners on their obligation to attend: they delay entering the recitation hall until the reciter is well along or even nearing the end; or they leave before the end, some boldly walking out and others – who have the good grace to be embarrassed – escaping surreptitiously. Sometimes they do not show up at all, despite timely invitations and reminders. Such behaviour contrasts sharply, of course, with Pliny's own practice: he proclaims, 'To be sure, I've almost never been absent for anyone.'[32] Indirectly, Pliny is acknowledging that some people maintain an alternative calculus of exchange. They hold that their time is precious, hence they count their attendance as a favour or gift-offering to the reciter, imposing a gift-debt for which gratitude and reciprocity is owed. Such a view contrasts with Pliny's view that attending recitations is a fundamental obligation of all members of this literary community. Though Pliny here rejects the alternative calculus and criticises those who act in light of it, in another letter – *Epistles* 3.18, where he describes his own recitation of the *Panegyricus* – he makes a show of considering the value of his auditors' time. He claims to have invited his friends to come 'only if convenient' and 'if they really had time', knowing full well (he says) that it is never convenient to attend a recitation. To his delight, however, not only did his friends show up, but they insisted that he add a third day of reciting to the two days originally scheduled – not as an honour to himself, but in observance of the obligation they owe to the community of literature-lovers in general.[33] While acknowledging that the value of auditors' time is an issue, then, he boasts that his auditors in this case cleave to the communal norms and values that he himself holds.

In *Epistles* 6.17 Pliny describes another way audience members can fall short of his ideal. This letter's topic is 'a twinge of indignation' (*indignatiuncula*) Pliny felt when attending the recitation of a 'highly polished book' (*liber absolutissimus* – presumably of poetry, though Pliny does not specify the genre).[34] The cause of his annoyance is this: a few audience

[32] *Ep.* 1.13.2, 5 *equidem prope nemini defui.* Cf. n. 18.

[33] *Ep.* 3.18.4–5 *Cepi autem non mediocrem uoluptatem, quod hunc librum cum amicis recitare uoluissem, non per codicillos, non per libellos, sed 'si commodum' et 'si ualde uacaret' admoniti (numquam porro aut ualde uacat Romae aut commodum est audire recitantem) . . . per biduum conuenerunt . . .* [sc. *et*] *ut adicerem tertium diem exegerunt.* (5) *Mihi hunc honorem habitum putem an studiis? Studiis malo, quae prope exstincta refouentur.*

[34] For the stylish rendition of *indignatiuncula* I thank Chris Whitton. Pliny's addressee, (presumably Claudius) Restitutus, receives the letter ostensibly because he shares Pliny's respect for literature, and

members 'listened as if they were deaf and dumb: they did not open their lips or stir a hand, and didn't stand up even from being fatigued at sitting'.[35] Recall that the movement of audience members' hands, lips and bodies are key signs of their judgment of the work, which the reciter-*cum*-semiotician must be able to interpret. In withholding such signs, these auditors fail in their obligation to provide appropriate feedback to the reciter. Pliny pillories them for their comportment: 'Why such seriousness, such wisdom? Why, rather, such laziness, arrogance, lack of manners, even madness, to spend the whole day in order to give offence, and to leave as an enemy someone to whom you had come as a close friend?'[36] In the terms used in this chapter, these auditors' comportment has turned amicable exchange into hostile exchange. Instead of unifying the community around a shared literary enterprise, underpinned by the threefold obligation we have been discussing, these audience members are stirring up antagonism and hostility, turning a friend into an enemy, and fraying the community more broadly (note that they have offended Pliny), precisely in their purposeful refusal to discharge the obligation of providing appropriate feedback. They have, to be sure, shown up for the recitation, thereby fulfilling the second obligation – but their presence only makes their showy refusal to interact appropriately in their role as audience members all the more galling. Better, probably, to have failed in the second obligation and simply not to have shown up at all.

What could audience members possibly be aiming for, in engaging in such behaviour? Pliny's subsequent words are telling (*Ep.* 6.17.4):

> Disertior ipse es? Tanto magis ne inuideris; nam qui inuidet minor est. denique siue plus siue minus siue idem praestas, lauda uel inferiorem uel superiorem uel parem: superiorem quia nisi laudandus ille non potes ipse laudari, inferiorem aut parem quia pertinet ad tuam gloriam quam maximum uideri, quem praecedis uel exaequas.
>
> Are you yourself more eloquent? All the more should you not be spiteful; for the spiteful person is lesser. So whether you perform better or worse or the same, praise [sc. the reciter] whether he is inferior [sc. to you], superior, or the same: praise your superior because you cannot yourself be praised unless

likewise gives reciters the benefit of the doubt (§5 *quis uno te reuerentior huius operis, quis benignior aestimator?*). Hence he should understand and share Pliny's 'twinge of indignation'.

[35] *Ep.* 6.17.1–2 *Recitabatur liber absolutissimus. Hunc duo aut tres, ut sibi et paucis uidentur, diserti surdis mutisque similes audiebant. Non labra diduxerunt, non mouerunt manum, non denique assurrexerunt saltem lassitudine sedendi.*

[36] *Ep.* 6.17.3 *Quae tanta grauitas? Quae tanta sapientia? Quae immo pigritia arrogantia sinisteritas ac potius amentia, in hoc totum diem impendere ut offendas, ut inimicum relinquas ad quem tamquam amicissimum ueneris?*

> he is praiseworthy; praise your inferior or equal because it matters to your own glory that a person you surpass or equal seem as great as possible.

In posing the rhetorical question 'are you more eloquent?', Pliny implicitly acknowledges – under the guise of criticising bad behaviour – that recitation can be a competitive arena governed by the logic of performance in the public eye. Specifically, he infers that the problematic audience members believe themselves superior to the reciter, are consequently expressing their disapproval, and are seeking to elevate themselves over him in the perceived hierarchy of literary achievement. The remaining audience members must weigh these competing claims to pre-eminence; hence the 'spectacularity' of what are in effect rival performances by the reciter and the disrespectful audience members. Pliny himself, as a member of that audience, is one judge of these performances; obviously he prefers that of the reciter to that of the auditors, though a few other audience members judged the other way.[37] Yet Pliny's objection to the rude auditors is not so much to the substance of their claim – for he seems willing to entertain the possibility that they are, in fact, more eloquent, or better poets – as to their strategy. According to Pliny, one comes out best in the competitive arena if one simply *praises everything*. The rising tide of praise lifts all boats, one's own in particular. Here, then, Pliny theorises the strategy we have already seen him assert as a norm and carry out in his own practice: to say or signal nothing overtly negative about the style or content of any other reciter's work. Of course, the auditors Pliny criticises here would not agree that simply praising everything is a good competitive move. For tearing down one's competitors – 'going negative' – is a tried and true strategy for elevating one's own standing in the eyes of observers external to the competition. Thus, even as Pliny asserts a norm of conduct in the recitation, he reveals that others do not abide by it; actual social interactions may be considerably messier and less pleasant than Pliny's ideal would allow. The universal praise for which Pliny argues does, however, have the advantage of maintaining the *appearance* of a cooperative and harmonious community, keeping reciter and audience on friendly terms even as it also (in Pliny's view) elevates the auditor's standing relative to the reciter. Pliny disapproves of engaging in baldly competitive, hierarchy-establishing behaviour within the recitation, but is prepared to countenance such behaviour insofar as it *appears* to be consistent with, or decently masquerades as, cooperative, all-for-one and one-for-all behaviour.

[37] *Ep.* 6.17.1 *duo aut tres, ut sibi et paucis uidentur, diserti*: here the *pauci* must be other auditors who align themselves with the rude ones (*sibi*).

Among his contemporaries, Pliny is not alone in this view. Plutarch too, in a lengthy discussion of the comportment proper to those who listen to lectures, deems it de rigueur for auditors to be polite and attentive, and to find reasons for bestowing praise notwithstanding the availability of reasons for finding fault. To be sure, significant differences separate the scenarios discussed by Plutarch and Pliny: Plutarch writes for a Greek audience, targeting youths who are new to being auditors, and he focuses in particular on the situation of listening to a philosopher, which should notionally confer moral benefit on these young auditors. Plutarch deals only tangentially with literary recitation of the Plinian sort, while Pliny never discusses or considers the pedagogical dynamic that concerns Plutarch. Nevertheless, the norms for audience comportment that these two authors assert are strikingly similar, regardless of the differences in the performance situations.[38]

An especially striking assertion of proper behavioural norms, spurred by an even more egregious violation of those norms (in Pliny's view), is described in *Epistles* 6.15. Pliny addresses Voconius Romanus, an equestrian friend with literary interests. Voconius evidently attends recitations, as Pliny does, though neither man attended the recitation under discussion in this letter. In any event, Pliny assumes that Voconius shares his views about proper audience comportment.[39] Pliny begins the letter as follows:

> Mirificae rei non interfuisti; ne ego quidem, sed me recens fabula excepit. Passennus Paulus, splendidus eques Romanus et in primis eruditus, scribit elegos. Gentilicium hoc illi: est enim municeps Properti atque etiam inter maiores suos Propertium numerat. (2) Is cum recitaret, ita coepit dicere: 'Prisce, iubes . . . ' Ad hoc Iauolenus Priscus (aderat enim ut Paulo amicissimus): 'Ego uero non iubeo.' Cogita qui risus hominum, qui ioci.
>
> You weren't there for an amazing thing: neither was I, but the story was still fresh when it reached me. Passennus Paulus, an equestrian luminary who is outstandingly learned, writes elegies. This is a family tradition for him:

[38] Plut. *Mor.* 44a–46d (= *De recta ratione audiendi* 13–16). Arrogance of auditor who is completely undemonstrative, as if trying to make others think he could do better: 44a–b. Those who are best are also most generous with their praise: 44c. Auditor's obligation to find something to praise: 44e–45b. Proper bodily comportment for auditors: 45c. Appropriate and inappropriate expressions of approval: 45f–46c. Plutarch also considers how young auditors may be reproved for their poor deportment by the philosophers whom they have come to hear, and how they should receive such criticism (46c–d) – a dynamic Pliny does not consider, as this expressly pedagogical dynamic is foreign to his recitation community. I am grateful to Katarzyna Jaźdźewska for discussion of the similarities and differences in the audience-worlds described by Plutarch and Pliny. For more on Plutarchan pedagogy, see Uden in this volume.

[39] For Voconius' literary interests see *Ep.* 3.13, where Pliny sends him a draft of the *Panegyricus* to edit and correct, apparently prior to reciting it (*Ep.* 3.18).

> for he comes from the same town as Propertius and even counts Propertius among his ancestors. (2) When he was giving a recitation, he began to speak thus: 'Priscus, you bid . . . ' At this Javolenus Priscus, who was present as a very close friend to Paulus, said, 'But I don't bid!' Imagine people's laughter and jokes.

Pliny vouches for the high quality of the poetry Paulus was reciting when he characterises him as 'outstandingly learned' (*in primis eruditus*) and reports his claims to be descended from Propertius (evidently a declaration of literary allegiance and aspiration). The opening words of Paulus' recitation, *Prisce iubes*, are hexametric, presumably the first words of an elegiac poem. Roman authors frequently claim to write at the request or with the support of a friend or patron; such a claim provides a vehicle for naming and honouring someone with whom the author wishes to affiliate himself for aesthetic or economic reasons.[40] In this case the dedicatee Priscus, far from acceding to the convention and accepting the honour of being so named, pointedly exposes the fictionality of the trope (a fictionality that everyone already recognised) and thereby openly spurns the honour, perhaps because he does not wish to be associated with or seen to be endorsing the poetry Paulus produces. The audience is amused and the reciter is mortified. In exchange terms, Priscus rejects the gift Paulus proffers in the most humiliating way, transforming amicable exchange – Priscus was present, recall, 'as a very close friend' – into hostile exchange. According to Pliny's values and norms, Priscus has failed in his obligation to provide appropriate feedback, for he has violated the tacit principle of levelling no criticism and causing the reciter no discomfort at his own event.

This passage has sparked considerable scholarly debate regarding what, if anything, Paulus did wrong to warrant such a slapdown; what kind of criticism, if any, Priscus is really levelling; and how Pliny's own commentary here shapes his readers' (and our own) understanding of these events.[41] It is clear, however, that Pliny judges Priscus to be out of line, and believes he should have known better. He writes that Priscus has a public career and gives rulings on points of civil law, making his antics at the recitation all

[40] So, e.g., Pliny himself does in *Ep.* 1.1.1 – the first letter in the collection – addressed to Septicius Clarus: *Frequenter hortatus es ut epistulas . . . colligerem publicaremque*; similar (and roughly contemporary) are Quint. *Ep. ad Tryphonem* 1.1.1 (*Efflagitasti cotidiano conuicio ut libros . . . emittere inciperem*) and Tac. *Dial.* 1.1 (*Saepe ex me requiris, Fabi Iuste, . . .*). These are prose texts, but the dedicatory trope is identical. On the rhetoric and ideology of this trope, see Janson's classic discussion (1964, esp. pp. 60–4); also Beck 2013: 299–300.

[41] Beck 2013: 297–300 surveys previous scholarship; also Schröder 2001.

the more remarkable.[42] That is, Pliny implies that the standards of conduct incumbent on a public figure engaged in his *negotia* are equally binding upon that figure as an auditor at a recitation. Though recitations by definition take place in the realm of *otium*, Pliny here can equate the social and political stakes for reciter and audience with the stakes of the *negotia* they perform in the civic realm.[43] Indeed, this recitation as Pliny describes it has a spectacular, competitive dynamic. The audience, by its laughter, judges that Priscus has gotten the better of Paulus, and that a hierarchy has consequently been established. Word has gotten out ('the story is fresh'), and Pliny himself further amplifies it by relating it first to Voconius and then to the broader readership of his letters. Yet Pliny rejects this audience judgment, as he also does in *Epistles* 6.17 (discussed above). He is sympathetic to the reciter, and dismisses Priscus as 'mad'.[44] How else could such comportment by an auditor, such treatment of a friend who is reciting, be understood?[45]

There is a further dimension to Pliny's criticism of Priscus. As we have seen, Pliny objects to Priscus violating the (Plinian) ideal of the recitation event as a cooperative enterprise by like-minded community members to help one another publish the best books possible. This ideal is achieved when all parties conscientiously discharge their duties to recite, attend and provide appropriate feedback – i.e. when amicable exchange prevails. Priscus, in Pliny's view, has turned the event into a competitive, hierarchy-establishing spectacle characterised by hostile exchange and the abandonment of at least one obligation, that of providing appropriate feedback. Yet Pliny, even as he avows his commitment to the ideal, and even as his rhetoric here and elsewhere places him on the side of confirming these idealising norms, is himself complicit in violating these norms. First, by

[42] *Ep.* 6.15.3 *Interest tamen* [sc. *Priscus*] *officiis, adhibetur consiliis atque etiam ius ciuile publice respondet: quo magis quod tunc fecit et ridiculum et notabile fuit.*

[43] For the *negotium*-like stakes recitations may take on, see above and n. 9; also *Ep.* 7.17.11 (with Roller 2011: 216–17), 8.12.3, 8.21.3. On Javolenus Priscus, his rulings on civil law, and Pliny's possible competition with him, see Harries in this volume.

[44] *Ep.* 6.15.3–4 *Est omnino Priscus dubiae sanitatis . . . interim Paulo aliena deliratio aliquantum frigoris attulit. Tam sollicite recitaturis prouidendum est . . . ut sanos adhibeant.*

[45] On aggressive, reciter-deflating interruptions by audience members, see Barchiesi 2004. Auditors can fail or transgress in their obligation to provide appropriate feedback in other ways too. Martial is preoccupied with auditors who memorise the poems he recites, and then recite them as their own (*Epig.* 1.29, especially rich in exchange language; also 1.38, 52, 53, 63, 66, 72; 10.100; 12.63). Such theft or plagiarism – taking where giving is expected – sows distrust, transforming the normatively amicable exchange that binds the recitation community together into hostile exchange that cleaves the community asunder. Spahlinger 2004 offers a social and literary analysis of the plagiarism theme in Martial; Seo 2009 discusses its exchange dynamics.

articulating these norms in his letters, and by describing how they are exemplified or violated in his own or others' comportment during recitations, Pliny is exposing to the public eye – the readership of his letters – precisely those exchanges and judgments that he overtly insists do not belong in the public eye, but should be kept within the bounds of the recitation event. That is, in the very act of describing what should be kept secret, and in insisting on that secrecy, he betrays the secret.[46] Second, as we have also seen, Pliny consistently fashions himself in his letters as an ideal member of the recitation community, one who manifests in his own behaviour the norms of amicable exchange and obligation fulfilment that he holds so dear. Sometimes he portrays the addressees of his letters, or certain other auditors, as equally ideal; he also chastises auditors like Priscus who fall short of that ideal.[47] Yet precisely via this presentation of self and others in his letters, Pliny is ranking some members of the community, including himself, higher than others. Hence he too is playing a competitive ranking game, judging who are better members of the community and who are worse, and furthermore he submits his own and others' behaviour (as he represents it) to the judgment of the readership of his letters – all in the very act of articulating the ideal of a non-competitive, cooperative community that keeps its dirty laundry out of the public eye. It has long been recognised that Pliny uses his letters as a vehicle for advantageous self-fashioning, and for presenting himself as an ideal senator, advocate, governor, administrator and so on. The letters in general are well adapted to this purpose, and the recitation letters are no exception.[48] It is also clear that recitations could generate 'buzz' in the social circles that cared about them, so it is unsurprising that scuttlebutt about so-and-so's latest is passed around in letters.[49] Yet Pliny's recitation letters involve two distinctive paradoxes. Pliny undercuts the recitation community's ideals of secrecy and candour in the very act of articulating those ideals to the readership of the letters; and he seeks competitive advantage for himself in the eyes of that same readership by

[46] An epistle, with a single 'official' addressee, may appear 'private' or 'secret' insofar as confidential information is theoretically being transmitted to just one person. But in selecting particular letters for inclusion in a collection to be published for a broader readership, Pliny obliterates that notional confidentiality. I thank Alice König for her thoughts about the simultaneously private and public faces of the published epistle.

[47] Binder 1995: 300–3; also Beck 2013: 297, 303–4 on Pliny as 'censor' of others' comportment.

[48] Marchesi 2008: 2–4 offers a brief overview of this topic, with bibliography.

[49] E.g. in *Ep.* 1.5 and 6.17 Pliny passes along gossip he has heard from others about the goings-on in particular recitations at which he was not present himself; in *Ep.* 5.3, 7.17 and 9.34 he describes what he has heard through the grapevine about his own recitations. At Tac. *Dial.* 2.1, the city is abuzz about Maternus' recitation; and Martial (*Epig.* 1.29) learns via rumour (*fama refert* . . .) that Fidentinus is plagiarising his poetry.

decrying the efforts of others to seek competitive advantage within the recitation event.

To conclude this chapter, let us examine perhaps the most audacious instance of hostile exchange within the recitation community in all of Nervan, Trajanic and Hadrianic literature. The text in question is the beginning of Juvenal's first Satire – the gambit that opens his entire satiric oeuvre. The text is as follows (*Sat.* 1.1–6):

> Semper ego auditor tantum? Numquamne reponam
> uexatus totiens rauci Theseide Cordi?
> Impune ergo mihi recitauerit ille togatas,
> hic elegos? Impune diem consumpserit ingens
> Telephus aut summi plena iam margine libri
> scriptus et in tergo necdum finitus Orestes?
>
> Am I only ever an auditor? Am I never to retaliate,
> having been annoyed so often by the *Theseid* of hoarse Cordus?
> Will this man recite his comedies to me unpunished,
> and that one his elegies? Will a vast *Telephus* consume the day unpunished,
> or an *Orestes* written at the top of the roll (the margins already being full)
> and also on the back, and still not completed?

The satirist introduces himself as one who has sat in the audience for many a trying recitation – listening repeatedly to an epic poem read out in a hoarse voice, and over-long tragedies that waste a whole day. Rhetorically he asks whether his fate is only ever to be an auditor. The answer, of course, is no: for now he has written some poetry himself – satire, as he subsequently indicates (1.19–21, 30) – and it is finally his turn to 'retaliate' (*reponam*) by reciting, and thereby take revenge on others for what they have inflicted on him (*impune . . . impune?*). The conceptual framework of reciprocity is clear here, and is familiar from Pliny: members of the community are obligated both to give recitations of their own work, and to attend the recitations of others. The twist, however, is that here this exchange is presented as hostile from the outset. The satirist, now at long last giving a recitation of his own work, promises to subject his auditors to an experience every bit as awful, if not worse, than those to which they subjected him. In this satirical inversion of the obligations of reciprocity, the competition is framed as a race to the bottom, with the satirist striving to outdo his auditors/rivals in creating the worst possible recitation experience. But there is more. This poem itself, of course, is one of the satires that our poet has written and is here declaring his intention to recite. We who read the text of this poem are directly addressed at various points;

yet the satirist is addressing us not so much as readers of the finished, published text (though we are that), but – in the fiction of the satirist's own self-positioning – as *auditors* attending the satirist's recitation of this poem as a work-in-progress: for so he sets himself up at the poem's beginning.[50] And since we are being addressed as auditors, it follows that *we ourselves* are precisely those bad and annoying poets who have previously recited with Juvenal in our audience, and upon whom he is now taking his revenge. As we begin to read this poem, then, we find ourselves rather uncomfortably under attack from the reciter/author/satirist for our prior transgressions against him. The textual interaction between poet and 'us' as readers is thus set up to mimic precisely the social interaction at the recitation between the reciter and 'us' as auditors. This kind of move is typical of satire, which has a way of seizing its readers by the collar, insisting that it is addressing them, and refusing to allow them to stand back or detach themselves from the polemic. I wish to stress, however, that this vertiginous opening gambit only works by presupposing that the culture of recitation involves both cooperation and competition. The 'cooperative' norm of reciprocal reciting and attendance at recitations is patently on display, albeit in a hostile mode (as befits satire); but so is the reciter's competitive desire to equal or surpass the efforts of prior reciters (now sitting in his audience) – namely, to take the crown for inflicting misery. Thus Juvenal's opening neatly displays, even as it travesties, the combination of cooperation and competition, articulated via exchange language, that we have seen to characterise the culture of recitation more generally.

Conclusions

I end with a few general points about the kinds of 'literary interaction' the culture of recitation enables and promotes in the era of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian. First, literary works in progress are always already 'intertextual' in at least a Bakhtinian way, since any author's text necessarily, from its inception, participates in the dialogic texture of all literature: repetition, appropriation, alteration, response and so on.[51] No text, at any stage of its development, is ever free of such relations to the earlier and contemporary texts, produced at many different times and places, that constitute the

[50] Addresses to readers: *expectes*, 1.14 (if this verse is retained); *admittitis*, 1.21; *dices*, 1.150. On Juvenal as a reciter (as well as critic of recitations) at *Sat.* 1.1–18, and for other cultural dimensions of this passage, see Uden 2015: 25–9, 98–104.

[51] See e.g. Whitton and Langlands in this volume, whose essays adumbrate the wide range and varied intensity that intertextual engagement in this period can exhibit.

literary universe the new text enters. Nevertheless, such intertextuality is 'interactive' in a somewhat limited way. An author can 'interact' with a fixed, published text (whether its author is dead or alive) only via appropriation and response. The resultant new text may, in its turn, shape future readers' reception and understanding of the earlier texts with which it interacts, but would not normally change the actual words of those texts. Recitation, however – this is my second general point – is a form of literary interaction that is social as well as textual, involving living members of a local community. Because author and audience are both alive, present and responsive to one another, audience feedback at a recitation and at any subsequent stage of editing can trigger changes in the text under development. Thus the finished work is sure to be imprinted with the values and preferences of this community as constituted at that time and place. This imprint may take a variety of forms, which we may or may not be able to spot and distinguish from other formative forces.[52] I speculate, however, that the habits of interactivity cultivated and confirmed in the recitation and elsewhere in the editing process 'spill over' into finished works that respond to and interact with the finished texts of other contemporary authors. That is, the specifically textual forms of interactivity discussed in other chapters of this volume may themselves echo the exchange dynamic among authors and auditors promoted and sustained by the culture of recitation. Third, because the collocal, synchronic recitation community in which Pliny, Martial and other authors participate includes members of the Roman imperial ruling class (i.e. the senatorial–equestrian aristocracy centred in or focused on Rome), and because the exchange that is constitutive of recitation may, in its competitive and sometimes hostile dimension, produce social rankings and hierarchies, it seems inevitable that recitation should sometimes have political and civic consequences resembling those of the more formal *negotia* discharged by members of this ruling class – notwithstanding that this activity is (for aristocrats, at least) typically declared to take place *out* of the civic sphere in the realm of *otium.* In this respect recitation may share the social stakes of any public performance.

[52] At Tac. *Dial.* 3.2, Maternus' visitors expect to find him revising the text he recited the previous day to make it less offensive to the powerful, in light of the response it received in the recitation. Though fictional (or fictionalised), this exchange hints at one form such an imprint might take. Meanwhile Pliny claims, in general and in particular cases, that he and other reciters revise their work in light of feedback received at recitations or later in the editing process (*Ep.* 5.12.1–2; 7.17.7, 11; 8.21.6). But he never describes any specific revision(s) made as a result of this process.

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