

The Active Reader and the Ancient Novel

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In a series of imaginative studies, Guglielmo Cavallo has argued that reading in the past was different from the way we moderns typically read: ‘The most usual way of reading in Byzantium was intensive reading.... Intensive reading was practiced as much by intellectuals, who often, and again and again, were bent over learned texts as they performed at the intersection of reading and writing, as by ordinary readers.’¹ Cavallo notes (18) that already in antiquity, grammarians and rhetoricians such as Dionysius Thrax (1,1,5-6) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*On Imitation* 31,5,7) used the expressions *anagnôsis entribês* or *epimelês* to designate an ‘attentive reading,’ as opposed to a superficial one. And he concludes (70) that ‘the learned man read his texts pen in hand [plume à la main],’ with a view to emending them, providing commentaries, scholia, and notes, and to registering alternative readings in other manuscripts – and, I would add, to arranging such items as epigrams or excerpts from drama or oratory according to his (or her) own taste.²

Cavallo’s account might suggest that the scene of reading was the scholar’s study, with a manuscript or manuscripts spread out upon the desk and a dusty silence pervading the room. But this is to misconceive how people actually read. Reading was principally a public and oral practice. This is so not only for courtroom speeches or orations in the assembly or senate, or in a later period for the declamations that became so popular in the early Roman empire, but also for what we might take to be more private occasions, for example the reading of philosophical works or even personal letters. To be sure, silent reading existed in antiquity, and on the basis of this evidence, Alexander Gavrilov concluded that ‘the phenomenon of reading itself is fundamentally the same in modern and in ancient culture. Cultural diversity

¹ Cavallo 2006, 7.

² Cf. Johnson 2005, 70-80; Höschele 2007.

does not exclude an underlying unity.³ But William Johnson, who quotes the preceding comment, enters an important caveat: ‘If we accept that the ancients did read silently, yet know also (what no one disputes) that they commonly read aloud, does it follow that ancient reading was really so like our own?’⁴

There is abundant evidence that the ancient Greeks and Romans read – or were read to – in groups, under conditions that promoted commentary and conversation. They were trained to this practice from an early age. To take a single example, Plutarch, in his early pedagogical treatise, *How a Youth should Listen to Poems*, recommends that youngsters openly respond to statements by classical poets which they regard as inappropriate, as though they were speaking directly to the author. For example, when a character in a play by Sophocles affirms that ‘profit is pleasant, even if it comes from falsehoods’ (fr. 749 Radt), Plutarch blurts out (21A): ‘but in fact we heard you say that ‘false statements never bear fruit’ [fr. 750 Radt]’. The latter is not necessarily Sophocles’ true opinion, according to Plutarch; he is seeking rather to encourage young readers to adopt a critical attitude toward all literature. Plutarch offers as a model of how to read an anecdote in which Timotheus (fr. 3), in a theatrical performance, called Artemis ‘mad, possessed, inspired, raging,’ and a certain Cinesias shouted out from the audience, ‘may your daughter turn out like that!’ (22A). Plutarch evidently thinks of the schoolroom as a lively place, marked by argument and exchange; as he puts it, ‘one must not tremble and bow down before everything like a coward, or superstitiously as in a temple, but rather be habituated to shouting out boldly, ‘wrong!’ and ‘badly done!’ just as much as ‘right!’ and ‘well done!’” (26B).⁵

No doubt, not every classroom was like the one recommended by Plutarch, but students from an early age were educated to argue about literature, not altogether differently from the way the sophists (including Socrates) discussed Simonides’ poem in Plato’s *Protagoras* (338E-342A), albeit on a less sophisticated level.⁶ And they would bring these same reading habits to

³ Gavrilov 1997, 69; quoted in Johnson 2000, 599.

⁴ Johnson 2000, 600.

⁵ For fuller discussion of Plutarch’s conception of reading, see Konstan 2004.

⁶ Jacob (2004, 33) remarks in connection with Plato’s *Phaedrus*: ‘Un texte peut ne formuler que des questions. Leur résolution est alors confiée aux lecteurs.’ Nieddu (2004, 42-43) criticizes the view of Eric Havelock and his followers that writing and reading in fifth-century Athens were merely ‘ancillary’ to memorization, insisting instead (rightly, in my view) that ‘non può in ogni caso nascondere la realtà che i personaggi ritratti (maschili e femminili) nelle scene di recitazione o di canto [sc., on vase paintings] son pienamente alfabetizzati’ (p. 43). But the point is, I would add, precisely that they were

their later studies. Raffaella Criatore remarks that ‘*Erôtêmata* (‘questions’), which often occur in grammatical texts of late antiquity and the Middle Ages ... derived from pedagogical methods that were always employed in ancient classrooms.’⁷ René Nünlist (2008) notes that one critic, in connection with scene changes in Homeric epic, writes rather ‘in the style of a teacher’ when he ‘urges the reader to search where the storyline had been dropped’ (schol. T *Il.* 1,430c). Nünlist quotes another scholium (bT *Il.* 24,605b) on Achilles’ use of the Niobe paradigm in *Iliad* 24, which runs: ‘In a rhetorical manner [Achilles] inverted the order of his narrative. ‘Eat! For Niobe too <ate>.’ ‘Who is she?’ ‘The one whose twelve children were killed.’ ‘By whom?’ ‘By Apollo and Artemis.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because of her arrogance.’ Nünlist remarks of this passage: ‘The vivid analysis of 24,602-8 in the form of questions (Priam) and answers (Achilles) reminds one of ancient school exercises and again suggests that concept and terminology are rooted in catechism literature and rhetoric.’ Again, in the scholia to Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* (ad 1,224-6a Wendel) we find the note:

If Pelias sent them [the Argonauts] into danger, why did his son [Acastus] go along? He [i.e., Apollonius] says that he did so despite the fact that his father was unwilling. Demagetus, however, says that Pelias ordered the Argo to be constructed with weak bolts, so that it would quickly destroy them; but Argus did the opposite, and Acastus boarded because he regarded the builder as trustworthy.

represented as reciting, and mostly (though not always) in groups. As Nieddu remarks later on: ‘Non vi è dubbio, infatti, che la lettura davanti ad un uditorio (che tende ad essere sempre più qualificato) continui ad essere (in definitiva per tutta l’antichità, anche in età più letterate) la forma primaria di pubblicazione dell’opera (filosofica, storiografica, tecnico-scientifica, etc.). Essa ne costituiva la ‘presentazione’ negli ambienti ritenuti più idonei, nei quali potesse avere un’immediata risonanza’ (p. 108). Nieddu cites Diogenes Laertius 9,39-40 (on Democritus), Diogenes Laertius 9,50 and Xenophon *Memorabilia* 2,1,21 (on Prodicus), Diogenes Laertius 9,54 (on Protagoras), and Plato *Hippias Major* 286A-C and *Hippias Minor* 363C-D, 368C-D (on Hippias), and concludes: ‘Lecture pubbliche dunque, ma sulla base di testi precentemente elaborati’ (p. 109).

⁷ Criatore 2001, 209. Jacob (2004, 47) sees in the Aristotelian *Problemata* a precursor to this kind of literature, and remarks: ‘Les *Problèmes* sont donc un dispositif qui nourrit la conversation et la réflexion’; cf. p. 30: ‘Dans les écoles philosophiques de l’Empire romain, la leçon magistrale était habituellement suivie des questions des auditeurs.’ Papadoyannakis (2006, 94) observes of the *erotapokriseis* or ‘question and answer’ literature that was popular among Christian writers: ‘As a literary form it sprang from and was used in the schoolroom of the philosophers.’ Cf. A.E. Johnson 1985.

If these commentators were reading ‘pen in hand,’ they were nevertheless thinking out loud, and very possibly speaking aloud as well.

This kind of give and take was very likely characteristic of oral performances of epic. Dwight Reynolds reports of modern Egyptian epic recitation: ‘A transcribed performance of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* does not resemble the orderly, neat lines we are accustomed to seeing on the pages of the *Iliad* or *Beowulf*. Instead, audience members voice approval or disapproval, take advantage of brief pauses between lines to shout compliments and exclamations, at times even compete with the poet for attention with jokes and witty remarks.’⁸ Reynolds notes that ‘In midperformance poets may test the audience with quick questions: ‘Who’s saying this?’..., ‘And who does he meet?’’ Thus, the ‘poets directly question the audience..., which again forces direct vocal participation’ (p. 184). The interrogations are not so different from those we have encountered in the scholia to ancient epics. The transition to writing did not abolish this style of responding to a work; on the contrary, reading remained a public act, most often carried on in company.⁹

The situation was not dissimilar even in the formal performances we call declamations. Ruth Webb explains: ‘The declaimers’ audiences were not like the modern audience in a proscenium arch theatre.... By contrast, the audience of a declamation were deeply implicated in creating, not just accepting, the fictions that were played out before them. They were the ‘you’ plural of the speech, they played the role of the jury or assembly whom the persona adopted by the declaimer sought to persuade and the speaker’s present was therefore their present.’¹⁰

⁸ Reynolds 1995, 179.

⁹ See Johnson 2000, 615-624.

¹⁰ Webb 2006, 33. Manguel (1996, 247) quotes Pliny *Ep.* 6,17: ‘I have just left in indignation a reading at a friend of mine’s, and I feel I have to write to you at once, as I can’t tell you about it personally. The text that was read was highly polished in every possible way, but two or three witty people – or so they seemed to themselves and a few others – listened to it like deaf-mutes. They never opened their lips or moved a hand, or even stretched their legs to change from their seated postures’ (6,17,2-3: *Indignatiunculam, quam in cuiusdam amici auditorio cepi, non possum mihi temperare quo minus apud te, quia non contigit coram, per epistulam effundam. Recitabatur liber absolutissimus. Hunc duo aut tres, ut sibi et paucis uidentur, disertis surdis mutisque similes audiebant. Non labra diduxerunt, non mouerunt manum, non denique adsurrexerunt saltem lassitudine sedendi*). Manguel remarks (pp. 247-248): ‘The listeners were expected to provide critical response, based on which the author would improve the text – which is why the motionless audience had so outraged Pliny.’

Among the most illuminating passages on the communal and interactive way a reader might address a text in classical antiquity is a comment by fourth-century Christian bishop Synesius (*Dio* 18,1-5):

Often, I prefer not to wait for the outcome of a book to derive some good from it, but I lift my eyes and wrestle with the writer, letting not a moment go by but giving myself over to the occasion, and, as if reading on, I string together from my own mind what I think follows, and then I test what is said against what is written. And I am frequently aware of having chanced upon the same thought and the same wording. It has also sometimes happened that I have hit the argument, and what may stray from the wording nevertheless very much approximates the harmoniousness of the composition. And even if the thought was different, it was still something suitable, at all events, to the man who created the book, and one of which he would not have disapproved if he had argued it. And sometimes I know I've encountered noble and worthy people, when I had some composition in my hands, and when they asked me to read to them to hear it in common, I did so. When it was suitable, now and then, I would devise something and recite it – not having prepared it, by the God of Discourse, but rather whatever occurred to me I entrusted to my mind and tongue. Then indeed there arose a great uproar, and applause broke out among those who praised that man whose composition it was, and not least for the very additions I had made. Thus the god made my soul a soft wax tablet for what was imprinted in the words or characters.

It is remarkable how easily Synesius passes from his dialogue with a text to a recital in the circle of his friends.

All very well – but did the ancients read novels in this way? We are accustomed to a very different relationship with fiction. Here, for example, is Proust's description of Marcel, curled up with a book: 'I had stretched out on my bed, with a book, in my room which sheltered, tremblingly, its transparent and fragile coolness from the afternoon sun, behind the almost closed blinds.... It was hardly light enough to read.... The dark coolness of my room related to the full sunlight of the street as the shadow relates to the ray of light.'¹¹ How familiar it seems. And with good reason. Ian Watt, in his seminal study of the conditions under which the English realistic novel came into being, notes that a 'characteristic feature of the Georgian house is the closet, or small private apartment usually adjoining the bedroom. Typically,

¹¹ Proust 1954, 83.

it stores not china and preserves but books, a writing desk and a standish.¹² Samuel Richardson was the prophet of this new way of writing and reading: ‘his readers found in his novels the same complete engrossment of their inner feelings, and the same welcome withdrawal into an imaginary world vibrant with more intimately satisfying personal relationships than ordinary life provided, that they had afforded Richardson in the writing’ (pp. 195-96). The result is that, ‘ceasing to be conscious of the printed page before our eyes we surrender ourselves entirely to the world of illusion which the printed novel describes. This effect is heightened by the fact that we are usually alone when we read, and that the book, for the time being, becomes a kind of extension of our personal life’ (p. 198).¹³

Cavallo himself has suggested that in the second and third centuries A.D. there arose, in response to a sharp increase in popular literacy, a new kind of text, which he has dubbed ‘letteratura di consumo.’¹⁴ This new literature was addressed to middle levels of society, as opposed to the elite that formed the readership for earlier texts; it was preserved not so much in libraries as in archaeological sites, reflecting its mass and also local character (p. 132). It included such items as hunting and cooking manuals, horoscopes, magical formulas, riddles, narratives of pagan martyrs such as the *Acta Alexandrina*, and much Christian material; and typical too of this kind of production is the adventure or romantic novel, such as Lollianus’ *Phoinikika* and Chariton’s *Callirhoe*. From Chariton’s self-presentation as ‘secretary to the rhetor Athenagoras,’ Cavallo draws the conclusion that the new practices and texts that emerged in this period ‘also produced a new author-function,’ and that ‘the very figure of the author came to be ‘democratized’’ (p. 134), although it is rare that the identity of such writers is preserved. The expansion of literacy thus gave rise to two reading publics with distinct levels of cultural competence, and the texts they read differed accordingly in content, style, and organization (p. 135).¹⁵

¹² Watt 1957, 188.

¹³ Manguel (1996, 150) records of Colette: ‘Challenged by her father, lovingly watched over by her mother, the girl finds her only refuge in her room, in her bed, at night. Throughout her adult life, Colette would seek out this solitary reading space.’

¹⁴ Cavallo 2001, 131.

¹⁵ Cavallo puts the distinction between the recipients of novels and an elite readership in antiquity more sharply in Cavallo 1999. Thus, he writes: ‘One consequence of a broader range of readers was the rise, under the Empire, of a ‘consumer’ literature of works of entertainment that had not been among the traditional genres...., above all, fictional narratives spun out of typical situations, stereotyped descriptions and schematic psychological situations...’ (pp. 78-79), that is, the novel. He affirms that the works of Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus entertained not only elite readers but also those, ‘male and fe-

Was the novel, then, read differently from a text such as Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* or Virgil's *Aeneid*? I do not imagine that we are likely to discover scholia to Chariton or Xenophon of Ephesus; the novels did not become classics in this sense. Yet I do think it probable that readers approached them in the same active or dialogical spirit that they did elite literature. What I mean (and my point is perhaps somewhat different from Cavallo's) is that readers did not surrender themselves entirely to the novels' 'world of illusion,' in Watt's phrase, but maintained that interrogative relationship to the text for which we have found evidence in Plutarch, Synesius, and other sources. One example of such an active reading of an ancient novel is an allegorical interpretation of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* said to derive from a lecture or discourse (*phônê*) by 'Philip the Philosopher,' to be dated perhaps as early as the fifth century though majority opinion assigns it to the Byzantine period, and preserved in a single manuscript (Venetus Marcianus gr. 410) of Heliodorus' novel.¹⁶ The text begins with a *mise-en-scène*, in which a certain Nicolaus is described as calling urgently upon Philip to defend 'the book of Chariclea' against the wanton disparagements of critics (*philologoi*), who are reading it (*anagnôskousin*, v. 11 Colonna) – evidently out loud and in a group – at the gates of a temple. Just what these scorners might have objected to be is unclear; Richard Hunter plausibly suggests (2005, 127-128) that they may not have been expressing puritanical or high-minded contempt for the low genre of romantic fiction so much as having some ribald fun at expense of the heroine's virtue or chastity. Nicolaus wants Philip to demonstrate that, on the contrary, the novel is 'beyond all reproach' (v. 15 Colonna).

male, who were fully literate but might not have enjoyed (or understood?) the great authors of ancient literature.... The educated women among this reading public must have been particularly given to this sort of sentimental, fantastic literature whose plots featured stories about women (perhaps precisely to attract female readers)' (p. 80). Cavallo imagines an educated woman who 'could create her own private space as a reader of works (probably escapist texts) that reflected her' (*ibid.*, citing Egger 1988). The picture is, in my view, wholly fanciful.

¹⁶ Text in Colonna 1938, 365-370; translation (based on text by Herscher) in Lamberton 1986, 306-311, discussion on pp. 148-157. For the date of 'Philip,' see Lamberton pp. 148-149; Hunter 2005, 126; Tarán 1992 defends a fifth-century date. Lamberton remarks (p. 152): 'since it is the technique of the novel itself to play with the possibility of further levels of meaning, the interpretive essay ... is exceptionally well suited to it.' Lamberton notes that the argument 'is dependent primarily upon the Neoplatonic tradition and specifically on Plotinus,' but that 'there are words, phrases, and ideas that unavoidably belong to the Christian tradition' (p. 156).

Philip's initial response is that he is too old for such 'childish toys,' having long since abandoned them for philosophy: erotic narratives are suitable to youth. But they are so not necessarily because boys are licentious, but rather because they are not yet ready for the higher demands of philosophy. If they are nevertheless exposed to such works, it is because they provide, when properly interpreted, a kind of propaedeutic to higher things. Thus Plutarch, in his essay, *How a Youth should Listen to Poems*, explains: 'for what is discussed in philosophy, it is obvious to us that the very young enjoy more and are more attentive and manageable in regard to things that do not seem to be said philosophically or in earnest' (14D). And he adds: 'For in poetry there is much that is pleasurable and nourishing to the soul of a youth, but no less that which is perturbing and misleading, unless listening finds correct instruction' (15B). Plutarch insists, accordingly, that poetry is not simply harmful, but contains much that is useful (*khresimon*); one has simply to trim away the mythological and dramatic element in it (*to muthôdes kai theatrikon*, 15E), mixing into the residue a suitable dose of philosophical content. Plutarch concludes: 'Thus those who are going to engage in philosophy must not avoid poems but must rather pre-philosophize in poetry, having been trained to seek and welcome what is useful within the pleasurable' (15F). Philip, who alludes to Socrates' conversation about literature in Plato's *Phaedrus*, just as Plutarch writes in dialogue with Plato's critique of poetry in the *Republic*, appears to be adopting just the strategy that Plutarch recommends.

When he has joined the crowd of mockers, Philip initially defends the poem for the virtuous way in which the protagonists are characterized. Theagenes and Chariclea are models of *sôphrosunê*, he says: 'let them stand for us as a noble paradigm (*agathon hupodeigma*) of justice' (v. 57 Colonna). In turn, 'the story cries out' (v. 64 Colonna) that those who commit vicious acts will be punished in the end. The technique of reading tales as illustrative of proper (and improper) behavior is again endorsed by Plutarch, who defends it against the more recherché form of astrological allegorizing that was evidently in vogue in his time. As Hunter puts it (2005, 133), 'Heliodorus' novel becomes an educational introduction to ethical philosophy and a protreptic to virtue.' Plutarch alleges that his method offers a useful approach to the most maligned myths, which some people force and twist with what used to be called connotations (*huponoiai*) but are now called allegories. These people say that Helios reveals the adultery of Aphrodite with Ares [in the *Odyssey*], because when Ares' star joins that of Aphrodite it predicts adulterous births, but they do not remain concealed when the Sun is

ascendant and descendant. In turn, Hera's beautification for Zeus and her trick with [Aphrodite's] girdle signify, they say, the purification of the air as it nears the fiery element – as though the poet himself did not provide the solutions (*luseis*). For in the verses concerning Aphrodite he teaches those who pay attention that cheap music, sordid songs, and stories with adulterous plots produce licentious characters, unmanly lifestyles, and people receptive to wantonness, effeminacy, a womanish temperament, 'changes of clothes, hot baths, and soft beds' [*Od.* 8,249]. That is why Homer made Odysseus bid the singer,

'come now, switch over and sing about the fashioning of the [Trojan] horse' (*Od.* 8,492),

nicely indicating that one should adopt one's musical and poetic plots from people who are discerning and have good sense. In the verses concerning Hera, Homer excellently demonstrated that sex and gratification deriving from potions and magic and accompanied by deception are not only transient, quick to surfeit, and precarious, but also mutate into enmity and anger when the pleasurable part abates. For Zeus himself threatens this and says to Hera,

'so you may see whether sex and the bed help you, which you enjoyed when you came to me apart from the gods and deceived me' (*Il.* 14,32-33).

For if writing about and representing ignoble deeds also delivers in the end shame and harm resulting to those who execute them, then they benefit rather than harm the audience (19E-20B).

So too, Heraclitus, very possibly a contemporary of Plutarch, observes in his *Homeric Problems* (78): 'In Homer, everything is full of noble virtue: Odysseus is wise, Ajax brave, Penelope chaste, Nestor invariably just, Telemachus dutiful to his father, Achilles totally loyal to his friendships' (transl. Russell and Konstan 2005). The brunt of Heraclitus' defense of Homer, however, takes the form of a more strictly allegorical interpretation, although he, like Plutarch, rejects the astrological style (53). Philip, for his part, shifts registers as well, explaining in good allegorical manner that 'Chariclea is a symbol of the soul and of the mind that orders it' (vv. 79-80 Colonna), and discovering evidence for this in her very name, a compound of 'fame' and 'grace': the etymological method was a staple of the allegorizing tradition

(cf., e.g., Heraclitus 31 on the name Ares, and the bulk of Cornutus' *Compendium of Theology*). Philip adds some numerological interpretation, which, as Hunter points out (p. 134), has a basis in Heliodorus' own text (9,22,6), and proceeds to offer an exegesis of Chariclea's desire for Theagenes as a riddle (*ainigma*, v. 101 Colonna) of the soul's 'passion for the knowledge on high' (*ton erôta tês hupsêlês epignôseôs*, v. 105 Colonna). There are hints of this kind of Platonic imagery in Heraclitus (cf. 76: 'can Homer, the great hierophant of heaven and of the gods, who opened up for human souls the untrodden and closed paths to heaven, deserve to be condemned as impious?' [trans. Russell and Konstan]), but the closest parallel is the manifestly allegorical narrative of Psyche's ascent to heaven under the attraction of Cupid (= Erôs) in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, already subjected to a Platonizing interpretation by Fulgentius, who was perhaps writing around the time of Philip himself.

Philip is represented in the text as an astute exegete of the novel: but can he be taken as representative of its intended readership? After all, he is called upon to defend the deeper significance of the *Aethiopica* against the apparently more superficial, or at least less respectful, reading of the men conversing in front of the temple. Nevertheless, the assumption seems to be that his way is the right way to read it: the others are still, perhaps, at the level of schoolboys, failing to grasp the more profound sense and adopting an adolescent pose of derision. They may not be the most sophisticated of students, but they are nevertheless reading the novel together, and discussing it among themselves. They have certainly not lost themselves in it, in the manner of Proust or Colette. And that is the distinction I wish to draw between ancient and modern styles of reading.

The date of Philip is insecure, as we have seen. In the absence of other testimonies, is it possible to infer the nature of reading practices from the texts themselves? What kind of style would testify to, or at least suggest, the kind of active reading I have outlined? I propose to consider two examples, drawn from works that would seem to represent opposite extremes of the spectrum in respect to level of readership. The first is Virgil's *Aeneid*, which has enjoyed a penumbra of school commentaries from antiquity to today (Cornutus himself – the Stoic teacher of Persius – prepared a commentary on it). The poem begins, of course, with a summary of the hardships that Aeneas has endured since the destruction of Troy, because of the 'ever-remembering resentment of cruel Juno' (*saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram*, 1,4); the first paragraph concludes (v. 11) with the rhetorical question: 'can divine minds harbor such resentments?' (*tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*).

I have no desire to trivialize the poignancy of this abrupt apostrophe to the reader, but I nevertheless imagine a teacher in a Roman school pointing his stick at one pupil after another and asking: ‘Well, can they?’ The stick would find immediate use in the case of an inadequate reply. More advanced students might be asked to compose *controversiae*, defending one side or the other.¹⁷ My point is that readers are invited at the very beginning of the epic to judge the motives of characters, mortal and divine alike. Virgil does not provide a definitive answer, but poses a dilemma: the answer is to be filled in or pondered by the reader, who expects just such a challenge. As Francis Cairns puts it: ‘Often the logic of a classical poem or speech appears to be intentionally incomplete or inconsistent.’¹⁸ In the finale of the epic, the reader is again left to decide whether Aeneas is right or wrong to have slain Turnus in a fit of rage. The modern debate over whether Virgil meant to criticize or approve his hero, and indirectly Augustus, is misguided to the extent that it does not recognize the space that the poet has deliberately left open for the active role of his readers.¹⁹

My second text is the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*, which we possess in several fifth-century redactions but probably goes back to an original composed in the third century A.D. (I leave aside the question of whether there was a Greek model). This anonymous romance, with its exceptionally simple syntax and popular narrative motifs, would seem precisely the kind of work that falls under Cavallo’s category of ‘consumer literature.’ But it too invites the reader to complete or question the text. This is evident not only in the anonymous author’s quotations from Virgil, which imply a reader capable of recognizing and evaluating allusions which sometimes run against the grain of the surface sense – a reader, that is, with the competence to read Virgil himself – but also in the frequent use of riddles and puzzles that test readers’ ingenuity and provoke their competitive intervention. By way of illustration, we may take the very beginning of the narrative, in which we learn that Antiochus has raped his daughter. Her nurse inquires (2): ‘What is the meaning of that troubled expression of yours?’ To which the girl replies: ‘In this bedroom two noble names have perished.’ I imagine young readers asking, ‘which names?’, and one or another shouting out the answer (they will know

¹⁷ As Hunter (2005, 128) points out, Seneca’s *Controversia* 1,2 presents a case that resembles the situation of Tarsia in the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*.

¹⁸ Cairns 1972, 5.

¹⁹ See Konstan 2004, 25-27 for discussion and references. One might adduce here as a textbook example Aeneas’ emergence from the underworld, at the end of *Aeneid* 6 (exactly halfway through the poem), through the gate of false dreams, which has puzzled students surely since antiquity – and, I would argue, was meant to do so.

it if they have been paying attention), whereas the nurse fails to catch on and asks: ‘Mistress, why do you say this?’ The girl explains that she has been violated, but the nurse, still confused, inquires: ‘who would be bold enough to stain the bed of a royal maiden?’ Her mistress continues to speak indirectly: ‘Irreverence (*impietas*) committed the crime.’ ‘So why don’t you tell your father?’, asks the nurse; to which the girl replies: ‘And where is my father?’²⁰

Juvenile? Perhaps. It is possible that the work was used as a school text, in which case it might have attained something of the status of a classic.²¹ But my point is that it does not presuppose readers who expect a ‘complete engrossment of their inner feelings’ and a ‘welcome withdrawal into an imaginary world,’ in the words of Ian Watt, or who lie curled up in bed, ‘behind almost closed blinds,’ like Proust’s Marcel. These readers, as I imagine them, talk to each other and to the text, and if they do not in this instance exclaim, with Plutarch’s Cinesias, ‘may your daughter turn out like that!’, they may very well cry out, ‘wrong!’ and ‘badly done!’ For they would have been reading aloud, and in company. The many riddles that pepper the novel have a similar function. Indeed, we are told that, when the incestuous king Antiochus refused to accept Apollonius’ correct answer to the puzzle he posed, Apollonius returned home, ‘opened his shelf of books, and examined all the problem texts by his authors and the disputations of practically all the philosophers and even those of the Chaldaean oracle specialists’ (ch. 6 of the A recension), to check whether there might be a different solution.²² Consultation of such texts may well have been in the minds of readers of the novel as they puzzled over one or another conundrum.²³

²⁰ ‘*Quid sibi vult iste turbatus animus?*’ *Puella ait: ‘Cara nutrix, modo in hoc cubiculo duo nobilia perierunt nomina.’ Nutrix ignorans ait: ‘Domina, quare hoc dicis?’ Puella ait: ‘Ante legitimam mearum nuptiarum diem saevo scelere violatam vides’. Nutrix ut haec audivit atque vidit, exhorruit atque ait: ‘Quis tanta fretus audacia virginis reginae maculavit thorum?’ Puella ait: ‘Impietas fecit scelus.’ Nutrix ait: ‘Cur ergo non indicas patri?’ Puella ait: ‘Et ubi est pater?’*

²¹ See Holzberg 1989; for the popularity of riddles in schools, see Guichard 2007.

²² Laird 2005, 229 remarks in connection with the opening puzzles in the novel: ‘in the passage here the mentions of Apollonius’ bookcase and especially of the Chaldaeans serve to elevate the status of riddles. The *quaestiones Chaldaeorum* must refer to the Chaldaean oracles: these oracles, which were cited by Iamblichus and later neo-Platonists, offered a guide to oracular doctrine, cosmology and theurgy.’ Laird affirms further: ‘Representation itself is a riddle’ (p. 231), and he sees in the pervasiveness of riddles in the *Historia Apollonii* a key to interpreting the romance (p. 230).

²³ Cf. Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 1,17: ‘He [Apollonius] was not given to logic-chopping or long discourses, and he was never heard being ironic or argumentative with his listeners; rather, in discussions, he used to say, as if from the tripod, ‘I know,’ ‘I be-

An expectation of active participation on the part of the public – coming up with answers to puzzles, fill in missing details, accounting for apparent inconsistencies in a text – conditioned the way authors and orators composed their works.²⁴ Theophrastus, for example, affirmed that a speech is more

lieve,’ ‘where are you rushing to?,’ and ‘you ought to know’ (tr. Jones 2005, slightly modified). Apollonius was unusual in delivering ex cathedra pronouncements, but even he engaged in give-and-take dialogue with his audiences. Also, Sidonius *Epist.* 9,13,3: *certe si saluberrimis avocamentis, ut qui adhuc iuuenis, tepidius inflecteris, a Platónico Madaurensi saltem formulas mutare convivialium quaestionum, quoque redderis instructor, has solve propositas, has propone soluendas, hisque te studiis et dum otiaris, exerce* (‘since you are still a youth, if you should be inclined more warmly to edifying diversions, by all means acquire the examples of dinner-party problems by the Platonist from Madaura [i.e., Apuleius], by which you will be better educated: solve these puzzles or offer them to others to solve, and train yourself by means of these pursuits even in your leisure time’; on question-and-answer pastimes at dinner-parties, cf. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae*; Plutarch *Quaestiones Convivales*, etc.); Aulus Gellius 16,8,16-17 and 10,22,24 on the seductive pleasure of logical puzzles, even for adults; 7,13,7-10: *‘Nolite,’ inquit Taurus, ‘haec quasi nugarum aliquem ludum aspernari; gravissimi philosophorum super hac re serio quaesiuerunt*’ (‘do not look down on such exercises as though they were about trifles; the most serious philosophers have argued seriously over this matter’); also Galen *Synopsis of his own Treatise on Pulses* 1 on the need to read deeply, and not merely by way of epitomes and outlines, in order to solve the problems and conundrums posed by ‘captious men’ (*antilogikois anthrôpois*) when one happens upon them: Galen clearly views this as a common occurrence. On the philosophical genre of *problêmata* or ‘problems’ (e.g. the *Problems* attributed to Aristotle), which may reflect such debaters’ exchanges, see n. 7 above; also, on the Renaissance tradition of *problêmata*, Blair 1999. Blair (p. 175) cites Aspasius (10,30-34 Heylbut) for his explanation of the phrase, *problêmata enkuklia*: ‘Among them [i.e., the Peripatetics], ‘round-about’ problems are miscellaneous ones. They were also called ‘round-about,’ because they sat in a circle and tried their hand at the proposed problem, or else because they listened to the lectures standing in a circle’ (trans. Konstan 2006). Konstan comments ad loc. (n. 22): ‘The explanation is fatuous; in addition to ‘circular,’ *enkuklion* means ‘popular,’ and Aristotle uses it to refer to his exoteric works (cf. *De caelo* 279a30)’; but this is to miss the significance of Aspasius’ remark for teaching practices in his own time (mid-second century A.D.), which may well have been indebted to Aristotle’s own methods. As Blair notes (p. 178), the Renaissance humanist Juan Luis Vives, in the preface to his edition of Aristotle’s *Problems* (1554), affirmed that the expression ‘designated the questions that pupils posed successively to their masters; he thus unwittingly reversed the interaction that Aspasius described.’ Blair (pp. 175-176) compares Aristotle’s own endorsement of problems in dialectical training in *Topics* 1,11, 104b2ff. Cf. also the *Problêmata* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose methodological preface had a considerable influence in the Renaissance (Blair 1999, 176).

²⁴ In the prologue to his *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius directly invites the participation of the reader. Sometimes the novelists deliberately leave an event open to interpretation, as Petronius does in the story about the widow of Ephesus, indicating alternative responses. So too, Chariton indicates multiple reactions to events on the part of witnesses within the

persuasive if it omits some things, and leaves it to the listener to supply what is missing: ‘for by catching on to what has been omitted by you, he becomes not just part of your audience (*akroatês*) but also a witness (*martus*) on your side’ (cited in Demetrius *On Interpretation* 222 = Theophrastus fragment 696 Fortenbaugh). Agatharchides, a 2nd-century BC geographer-historian and tutor, it seems, to one of the Ptolemaic princes, begins the fifth book of his *On the Red Sea* (preserved in Codex 250 of Photius’ *Bibliotheca*) with a disquisition on the proper way to write history.²⁵ He illustrates the wrong style by way of the orator Hegesias (fourth or third century), whom he labels ‘cheap’ (*eutelês*). The problem with Hegesias, according to Agatharchides, is that he displays verbal cleverness even when dealing with terrible events such as the destruction of cities, thereby diminishing emotional effect (*pathos*) for the sake of rhetorical flourishes. Thus he indulges in elegant anti-theses such as ‘We gained a name, we lost a city’ (*onoma katelabomen, polin katalipontes*). ‘Look, now,’ says Agatharchides: ‘this does not produce emotion at all, but rather tends to innuendo (*emphasis*) and makes one search for what he means (*zêtein ti legei*).’ If what is said lacks clarity (*to saphes*), it also misses out on immediacy (*enargeia*), the technique of making the reader or listener see the events as though present at them; ‘when a statement slips into this kind of implication or suggestion (*emphasis*), it distracts our minds from the subject.’ Agatharchides is objecting not to Hegesias’ ostentation alone, but also to the literary device of engaging the attention of readers by having them fill in the blanks, as it were. In a more positive vein, Porphyry, quoted in the scholium to mss. bT on *Iliad* 449a, explains that poets do not tell everything but leave some matters to be understood, for example that a character has picked up a spear which he laid aside earlier, or washes his hands after a meal as well as before it, even though only the latter is mentioned. Writers could count on a readership or audience that was almost obsessively attentive, whether in regard to narrative detail or the evaluation of an argument, and was prepared to respond to and fill in the text.

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes describes ‘two systems of reading.’²⁶ One, he says, races along, whereas the other ‘skips nothing; it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport.’ Barthes takes the second kind of reading to be ‘suited to the modern text, the limit-text,’ as opposed to the classical nineteenth-century novel; as

story, e.g. the contrary judgments of men and women; there is a precedent for this in Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonautica* 1,238-259.

²⁵ For what is known of Agatharchides, see Burstein 1989; my translation differs from his.

²⁶ Barthes 1975, 12.

he says: ‘read *all* of a novel by Zola, and the book will drop from your hands; read fast, in snatches, some modern text, and it becomes opaque.’ Modern novels, that is, require attentive reading, as Dionysius Thrax and Dionysius of Halicarnassus put it. Now, I certainly do not mean to identify *Apollonius King of Tyre* as a modern, not to say post-modern text; in any case, Barthes is referring to two types of private reading, not the group recitation that I believe was characteristic of antiquity. But works intended for reading aloud also demand concentration and alertness. Barthes concluded his famous essay, ‘The Death of the Author,’ with a ringing proclamation of ‘the birth of the reader.’²⁷ I should prefer to call it the rebirth of the reader, who was very much alive and kicking in the ancient and mediaeval world.

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²⁷ Barthes 1977, 148.

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