Bad Readers in Ancient Rome

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Abstract

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This dissertation traces the literary and cultural phenomenon of “bad readers” across a range of Greek and Latin texts from the late first to late second centuries CE. By jointly engaging the framework of book history with the insights of feminist, queer, critical theory, it offers a methodology for understanding why certain readerly embodiments and modes are stigmatized for deviating from the hegemonic norm, and how the contested space of reading intersects with negotiations of power, embodiment, and identity. I argue that “bad readers” are not “bad” in any inherent or universal sense, but rather that “bad readers” intersect with particular literary, cultural, and ideological agendas. I also show how “bad readers” help illuminate the broader material, social networks that are adumbrated by books as objects in antiquity, thus contributing to recent work that has emphasized the importance of situating “reading” within its ancient, sociocultural context. At the same time, this study lays bare how such work has also tended to leave the question of modern readerly poses and politics to the side. Ultimately, this study shows how literary representations of “bad readers” offer a powerful locus for telling a different story about books and reading in the ancient Mediterranean, as well as a lens for theorizing how certain hermeneutic modes in the discipline today participate in and reproduce hierarchies of power.
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Figure 1: Banquet scene, House of the Triclinium (V.2.4), Pompeii. Now in Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 120029. Photograph courtesy of Evan Jewell.
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Dedication

For my friends and family
Introduction

The history of reading is a history of worrying.

— Leah Price (2019: 13)

A certain story has long been told about the history of reading, and it goes something like this. In classical antiquity, people read aloud. Poor Greeks and Romans, loudly trudging through texts written in *scriptio continua* on unwieldy bookrolls: with no word spaces, no punctuation to guide them, they suffered “ocular regressions,” which led to “very slow reading,” which in turn prevented them from engaging in “types of complex thinking.”1 Once the codex superseded the scroll, silent reading became the norm. By the time Augustine spotted his teacher Ambrose reading a book silently to himself, the good reader was born, and the bad reader was history.2

And yet, one is not born a bad reader, but becomes one. And the ancients became bad readers on or about the year 1898, when philologist Eduard Norden used the example of Ambrose’s silent reading to contend that ancient readers by default read aloud. His thesis was propelled in the 1920s by Josef Balogh, who argued that *scriptio continua* presented a technological reason that made silent reading too difficult for ancients. Soon, medievalists and

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1 Saenger 1997: 1-17; 32-40. In fact, there is ample evidence for forms of punctuation in ancient texts, and this evidence is highly context dependent. For example, while Greek literary texts were consistently written in *scriptio continua*, the papyrological record shows evidence of spaces, dots, and oblique strokes being used to help students learn to read syllable-by-syllable (McCutcheon 2015: 7; Cribiore 2009: 323).

2 The much-discussed scene occurs at *Confessions* 6.3.3.
book historians would link the notion of technological developments (e.g., spaces between words in medieval manuscripts; the “invention” of the printing press in Europe) to the development in human cognition: the evolution from ancient scroll to medieval manuscript to printed codex gave rise to a deeper, more sophisticated reader who could handle “inherently more difficult texts.”

Some Classicists, however, have told a different story that stymies this tidy narrative of readerly progress. Building on the work of Bernard Knox (1968) and A. K. Gavrilov (1997), who gather evidence for both silent and oral reading in classical antiquity, William Johnson argued in an important essay that reading ought not to be understood as an isolated, cognitive act (whether silent or aloud), but rather as a more dynamic, social event, “the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural context.” This framing helps us rethink a narrow definition of ‘literacy’ and instead imagine societies as populated by a multitude of ‘literacies’ that are thoroughly embedded in their social, material contexts. By attending to sociocultural context, we can better understand the form of the elite bookroll, with its *scriptio continua*, beyond the paradigm of silent vs. oral reading. In fact, Latin texts, initially written in *scriptio continua*, adopted interpuncts from the second century BC onwards (cf. Seneca *Ep. 40.11*), but by the second century CE, they used *scriptio continua* again. These oscillatory moves do not mean that Romans first read aloud, then silently, then aloud again: rather, the move

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3 Saenger 1997: 8. For a cognate argument involving the Gutenberg printing press and the “progress” of “Western civilization,” see Eisenstein 1979. It is worth noting that woodblock and moveable type printing exist in China, Japan, and Korea in the 9th century, about 600 years prior to Gutenberg’s “invention” of the printing press.


5 Johnson 2000; 2010: 12.

6 As suggested by the volume of essays in (eds.) Johnson and Parker 2009.

7 Wingo 1972.
back to *scriptio continua* in the second century CE might be indicative of a desire to mimic the aesthetics of Greek books, and thus to validate the Latin book as an exclusive, elite, “difficult to read” object.⁸

I rehash the trajectory of this debate because it foregrounds one of this dissertation’s central claims: the story people tell about reading and the book intersects with the story they wish to tell about themselves as readers. Staking a claim to an ideal, readerly embodiment over another also stakes a culturally specific claim to power. The coordinates of the silent vs. oral reading debate, as R. W. McCutcheon has instructively shown, are also plot points in the teleological story people have desired to tell that links the “progress” of technology to the “progress” of human intellect: as the ancient scroll is superseded by the medieval manuscript codex and Gutenberg printing press, intellectual culture in Western Europe becomes increasingly sophisticated. McCutcheon’s essay reframes this entwined history of reading and the book as a history of scholarly investment and Eurocentric bias.⁹

Additionally, the premise gleaned from this debate applies not only to the historical framing of scholarship on reading in antiquity: it equally applies to ancient accounts of reading themselves. These accounts come to us embedded within elite literary discourse and are thus subject to all the usual anxieties we might expect with this discursive mode. Put simply, the ancients show themselves reading the way they want to be seen.¹⁰ It has been a mistake to take ideal literary representations of books and readers as objective, neutral evidence. Alessandro Barchiesi (2005) describes a version of this mistake as “the search for the perfect book,” pointing

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⁹ Moreover, the publication of his essay in *Book History* speaks to the importance of cross-disciplinary conversation about these interconnected histories.

¹⁰ So Howley 2020 on Augustine; Frampton 2016 on Cato as devouring reader in *De Finibus 5*.
out how scholars have taken poetic, authorial representations of the ideal *libellus* at face value and as sufficient for understanding the material reality of books and reading. Rather, as recent book historical approaches to the classical material have illuminated, the social and material landscape of books and readers (and the evidence upon which our idea of ancient ‘book culture’ rests) is far more slippery, messy, and untidy than we have imagined.11

In this study, I search for the bad reader. By searching for the bad reader, I show how we might also orient ourselves towards a different understanding of reading and the book in the imperial Roman Mediterranean world. Here, it is important to note that the history of reading is not the same as the history of the book. Reading is just one among a number of practices to which material texts may be put and through which they generate meaning.12 As the lens of book history teaches us, the book as object adumbrates a capacious network of readers, producers, writers, handlers, and materials.13 Book historian Leah Price observes that “once books are placed in the hands of owners who recognize neither their language nor even their alphabet, illegibility throws material attributes into relief.”14 When books fall into the hands of the “wrong” kind of reader, or when readers don’t behave the way our sources want them to, we often come to see a new perspective on the materiality of books, as well as their literary, cultural, and social significance. In this way, “bad readers” form one way of bridging the study of reading and the study of the book.

By letting “bad readers” reorient us to reading, we come to see both reading and the book as object anew. Given that we are interested here in what happens when readers somehow

deviate from the hegemonic norm, we might understand this re-orientation as a queer orientation. Following Sara Ahmed, we can theorize orientation as a direction taken through space, towards some objects and not others.\textsuperscript{15} When one falls “out of line,” when one “fails” at directing oneself along the well-trodden path, a “queer effect” is produced. For example, describing her experience of sitting at the family dinner table as a lesbian, surrounded by family portraits on the wall, Ahmed supposes that this “background” is not simply “there” but is rather “an effect of the repetition of a certain direction,” an orientation along the linear, reproductive path of the heteronormative family.\textsuperscript{16} By attending to queer bodies, bodies that are aslant or out of line in relation to other bodies, desires, etc., we defamiliarize such familiar and familial objects and signs, disrupting their tendency to fade into a neutral background and exposing the work they do as “straightening devices.”

Integrating the methodology of book history with the insights of queer and critical theory, this study shows how the “wrong” or even “queer” orientation of a book user exposes the discursive, figurative apparatus that links a certain kind of readerly embodiment with the fulfillment or failure to embody and reproduce hegemonic norms. By reorienting ourselves through “bad” or “failed” readerly inhabitations, we render legible readerly bodies, affects, and epistemologies that these straightening devices restrict, degrade, or even occlude from view. In centering readers who “fail,” I am situating my approach—a mode of queer book history (where “queer” might be taken as both an adjective and an imperative verb)—within a rich nexus of work that explores failure’s queer resonances and potentiality. Much of this work is indebted to José Esteban Muñoz’s theorization of queerness and failure as a “brilliant offness” that is “not so

\textsuperscript{15} Ahmed 2006: 85.

\textsuperscript{16} Ahmed 2006: 88.
much a failure to succeed as it is a failure to participate in a system of valuation that is predicated on exploitation and conformity.”17 In her recent book To Make Negro Literature, a study of African American literary culture in the decade following the 1896 legalization of segregation, Elizabeth McHenry productively engages this notion of “failure” as she calls for “reevaluating those texts, genres, institutions, forms of authorship we have dismissed as unsuccessful, unproductive, unconventional, anomalous, or irrelevant; they are an important archive of the queer literary practices through which African Americans rejected a system of racial categorization that deemed them socially intolerable, intellectually inferior, and politically unqualified.”18 In this study, I center “failure,” in McHenry’s words, an “aspect of literary culture that is all too rarely the subject of study,”19 because failure and its attendant queer resonances help us reorient our understanding and perceptions of ancient literary culture. When readers fail, they lay bare the figurative apparatus that marks some readers as normative and others as deviant. This method of “queer book history” opens up a new mode of reading the history of books and reading: through this lens, we can track how this history intersects with elite, normative projects of constructing and policing embodiment, power, and identity. This method also challenges us to reevaluate, to queer, our own orientations as readers and to reconsider who merits study as a reader in the first place.

Through “failed” orientations of reading, we gain a new perspective on reading and the book. “Bad readers” form a conceptual bridge between the history of reading and the history of the book. Taken cumulatively, the structure of this study’s chapters—while also moving in rough

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19 McHenry 2021: 5.
chronological order from the 60s CE to the late second century—mirrors this bridge: we begin by learning what it means to stray from the path of the ideal reader, and we end by opening up a different perspective onto books. But this study is more than an attempt to deepen our understanding of ancient reading culture. And this is how my study builds upon, but significantly departs from, William Johnson’s (2010) *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*. Johnson’s central goal in this book is to understand ancient reading as rooted in the fabric of its sociocultural context. Working with case studies across Latin and Greek authors from the “high empire” (70 CE—192 CE), Johnson explains that he has concentrated on this period “for the pragmatic reason that this is where much of the best evidence lies.”

While meticulous at situating how reading events construct elite community, Johnson’s focus on the ancient sociocultural context of elite literary circles tends to leave the crucial question of modern readers’ situated poses, politics, and investments to the side. For this reason, I have chosen to put into dialogue texts that each present a particular hermeneutic challenge associated with how *we* read (reading and books within) them. This arrangement of texts demands of my analysis a particular kind of self-reflexivity: in addition to showing how ancient literary representations of “bad readers” are embedded within a discourse that opens out onto broader cultural anxieties about power, embodiment, and identity, I also put under a microscope *our own* modes of reading and lay bare the ways in which ancient and modern hermeneutics of reading and the book intersect.

The first two chapters examine reading in the context of two philosophical and (largely) prescriptive works: Seneca the Younger’s *Moral Epistles* (henceforth, *Epistles*) and Plutarch’s *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* (henceforth, *Poetry*). Seneca’s *Epistles* have generated

20 Johnson 2010: 15n 22.
longstanding but separate discussion around two topics: reading (e.g., Graver 2014, Eden 2012) and enslavement (e.g., Bradley 1986, Edwards 2009). In Chapter 1, I argue that we must put these two discussions into dialogue if we are to understand Seneca’s discursive construction of reading. Seneca sets his ideal, philosophical reader off against an array of figures who are marked by the intersecting language of enslavement and gender. To “err” in reading is not simply to make a mistake, but to wander astray from the path towards achieving elite, male embodiment: to wander astray is to embody the erro, or vagrant slave. Seneca’s ideal reader, on the other hand, reproduces the masterly, masculine orientation of the auctor, a double for the paterfamilias. Part of the difficulty in bridging these hermeneutic approaches to the Epistles is that Seneca’s Epistles seem quiet by contrast to the epistolary collections of Cicero and Pliny the Younger, who are quite upfront about enslaved or formerly enslaved readers like Tiro and Zosimus. It is easy to fall under the illusion created by the Epistles of reading as an intimate, dialogic conversation between Seneca and “Lucilius.” By engaging Sara Ahmed’s concept of “paperless philosophy,” however, I consider the apparent absence of enslaved readers as calculated erasures that are central to Seneca’s conditioning of his ideal, manly philosophical reader.

Ahmed’s “paperless philosophy,” which teaches us “how philosophy might be oriented toward a certain kind of body, one for whom materiality would be an unnecessary distraction, one who has time freed for contemplation by how others do the paperwork, the domestic work, the care work,”21 helps us reorient ourselves to reading as a practice grounded in bodies and materials: reading is a social practice that implicates gender, class, and other hierarchies of embodiment and epistemologies. Orienting the reader on a paperless path to elite, male

philosophical embodiment becomes crucial to Plutarch’s project of training his young male subject in *Poetry*. *Poetry* has long been heralded as providing an ancient prototype to the modern, “critical” and “active” reader, and as offering a hermeneutic framework for reading other works by Plutarch. This scholarly attachment, however, has obscured the historically and culturally specific hierarchies reproduced through Plutarch’s ideal, readerly inhabitation. Writing at a time where social outsiders from the eastern Mediterranean could become upwardly mobile, even “Greek,” through paideia, Plutarch is especially concerned with developing a readerly program that shores up an ideology of authentic masculine, elite, Greek embodiment. The “bad reader,” according to the Plutarchan binary articulated in *Poetry*, is marked as servile, effeminate, and ethnically foreign.

In addition to drawing on critical feminist work to problematize the modern scholarly assessment of the Plutarchan reader as “active” reader, Chapter 2 also approaches Plutarch differently by reading the *Moralia* together with the *Lives*. While Plutarch advocates a highly normative perspective on reading and paideia in the *Moralia*, his syncretic *Lives* both illuminate the stakes of erring from the normative readerly program in *Poetry* and generate space to think more capaciously about how readers (and non-readers) can generate meaning from material texts. Here, I examine Plutarch’s representation of Alexander the Great, who sleeps with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow. Scholars have taken this scene as an example of how Plutarch makes Alexander one of his own: the *Iliad* symbolizes that Alexander is “a literate scholar perfectly at home in the bookish world of the Second Sophistic.” I argue, however, that this scene represents Alexander as a failed reader according to *Poetry*’s scheme. But I do not draw on

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22 As demonstrated by König 2007.

this scene simply to reinforce a Plutarchan binary between “good/active” and “bad/passive” reader: instead, I mobilize book history and queer studies to consider how Alexander as a non-reading book user opens up a space for imagining other embodied and affective relations to books. By “reading into” the book rather than reading “through” the book, I show how Alexander uses the book as an object to reflect his emotions and desires, treating it as a carrier of intimate, social relationships. In this regard, I also problematize the modern hermeneutic approach of using Plutarch to read Plutarch.

This ambivalent vignette of a non-reading book user serves as a hinge between the first and second halves of this study in two ways: first, the affective, material coordinates I uncover between a book and its user set the stage for Martial and Lucian’s ludic and satiric modes, which draw up close to books and bodies and emphasize the range of ways that books adumbrate broader social, material, bodily networks. Second, I show how we come to this new understanding of Alexander and his Iliad by playing the “bad reader” ourselves, by lingering over the materiality of texts and sensing their affective potential.

By playing the “bad reader,” we stray from well-trodden hermeneutic paths, paths which tend to unsee the book as object and the messy social networks of its production, consumption, circulation, and use. No other Latin poet emphasizes the book as object more relentlessly than Martial, the subject of Chapter 3. The untidiness and chaos of bookish objects within Martial has prompted scholars to think hard about “literary” ways of reading Martial’s epigrammatic books. The orthodox way of reading Martial now is to read Martial’s books of Epigrams as cohesive, literary wholes, intended to be read front to back, and, increasingly, to read the dodecology as a unified whole.24 This dominant hermeneutic mode, however, treats “the book” as a hermetically

sealed, stable, and disembodied vehicle for serial reading. In Chapter 3, I track the disruptive readerly relations to books as objects that get left to the side by our desire to read Martial like a good reader. By tracing the “sticky signs” (Ahmed 2014: 91) that Martial attaches to readers who threaten to meddle physically with his books and authorial integrity (through pen-in-hand exegesis, forgery, and plagiarism), we come to see an awareness of the epigrammatic book not (only) as a sublimated, literary product (and property) of a single author, but rather as a polyphonic, permeable object that brokers connections and contact between a spectrum of bodies, bodies that are figuratively marked as low-status or servile, foreign, and gender deviant.

The importance of not reproducing the very hierarchies our elite sources are invested in upholding looms large in Chapter 4, which traces how similar signs are attached to the abject, “polluting” body of Lucian’s so-called “ignorant book collector.” In the Adversus Indoctum, a self-proclaimed Syrian pepaideumenos criticizes another Syrian man who purchases fine books while failing to embody any real claim to paideia. The Adversus Indoctum has long been of interest to scholars of book history, precisely because it pulls up close to books as objects. Less accounted for, however, is the relationship between the book collector’s “bad” use of books and his non-normative embodiment. Two thirds of the way through the satire, the speaker outs the collector as a kinaidos, a figure typically glossed as a gender-deviant man or “passive homosexual.” Building on recent work done on the kinaidos, I choose to center the collector’s embodiment as a kinaidos in order to illuminate a “queer” orientation towards books as objects.²⁵ By situating this text within the broader cultural and literary discourse of the kinaidos, I understand the collector not as hapless and vain, but rather as possessing an intimate, affective, knowledgeable relationship to texts as objects. The lens of book history tells us that this

²⁵ Recent work includes Sapsford 2017, now out as a monograph from OUP.
epistemology would have been recognizable to ancient readers, especially those outside of the *pepaideumenoi* elite. This queer reading provides another perspective on how Lucian’s seriocomic satire twists and subverts the dominant, hegemonic perspectives of his time.

Taken together, these chapters present a case for the value of engaging the phenomenon of “bad readers” as a site for literary, cultural analysis, as well as a kaleidoscopic lens through which to tell a different story about what to do with reading and books in each of these texts. It would be hazardous, however, to claim that “bad readers” operate in a discretely distinct manner between Seneca’s composition of the *Moral Epistles* in the 60s CE to Lucian’s late second century satires. I have no desire to argue here for such a paradigm shift. As Tim Whitmarsh writes, “literary works are shaped by multiple influences, which may include, alongside social, political and cultural shifts, the conservatizing effects of canons and traditions as well as the idiosyncratic creative aspirations of individual authors.”

Nonetheless, when we put these texts in dialogue, we can trace important threads of “interaction” between them and locate these strands as part of the broader texture of intellectual culture in the period. By “interaction,” I am mobilizing a hermeneutic employed by the co-editors to the recent volume *Literature and culture in the Roman Empire, 96-235: cross-cultural interactions*, who focus on ‘interaction’ rather than ‘influence’, and its implicated companion ‘intertextuality.’ For them, ‘interaction’ describes (2020: 1-2):

a kind of connection between writers and speakers in our period who, on a strictly biographical level, may have had little or no contact. Writers in different communities articulated their own ideas through the manipulation of shared myths and tropes, participating competitively in broader, contemporary discourses of knowledge about art, science, philosophy, law and literature which crossed cultural, linguistic and religious boundaries...We aim to illuminate a deeper connectedness between texts and writing communities across the vast space of the Roman empire; to explore how the meaning and significance of texts shift through greater awareness of their myriad relationships

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26 Whitmarsh 2011: 10, writing about the ancient Greek novel and romance narratives.
with each other; and to expose the impact which literary interactivity itself had on identity and community formation (or distancing), at macro and micro levels.

One central node of interaction between the texts I have gathered is their response to the material reality that ancient Roman literary culture depended on the work and contributions of enslaved and formerly enslaved literary workers: from Rome’s mass enslavement of the eastern Mediterranean in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BC, elite literary culture and enslavement are intertwined.\textsuperscript{27} Enslaved people and freedmen “were secretaries who took dictation, maintained correspondence, and kept account books. Copyists produced fair versions or duplicates of books, speeches, documents, and legal texts. Readers read aloud in a variety of settings, to larger or smaller audiences. Tutors taught children, whether free or enslaved.”\textsuperscript{28} Freed literary workers authored works in their own right: we often learn of their publishing activities only after their manumission, leaving open the question of how much ghostwriting they did for their owners while enslaved.\textsuperscript{29} Further, enslaved people played crucial roles in book and library maintenance in elite households, and beyond the elite household, booksellers were often freedmen.\textsuperscript{30} In Joseph Howley’s words, “a Roman version of Robert Darnton’s classic “communication circuit,” in which each stage of a book’s physical creation and circulation is diagrammed, would be dense with enslaved labor.”\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{28} Flower 2022: 115.

\textsuperscript{29} On Daphnis, see Flower 2022; on Gellius’ disparaging attitude towards Tiro as writer and reader, see Howley 2018: 174-190.

\textsuperscript{30} Houston 2014.

Enslavement (whether enslaved workers or enslavement as metaphorical schema) shapes how each of the authors examined here conceptualizes what it means to be a “bad” reader, or to count as a reader at all. It can be difficult, however, to flesh out fully the presence of the enslaved in these elite literary representations. For one, enslaved readers often “appear” through their erasure. In his account of his uncle’s daily routine, Pliny the Younger tells us that “while he was sunbathing, a book was read, he would take notes and excerpt passages” (*iacebat in sole, liber legebatur, adnotabat excerptabatque*, 3.5.10). On the surface, the language here paints a picture of Elder Pliny as a reader at leisure, communing with a book. But the passive voice verb *legebatur* indicates the absent presence of an enslaved reader. Who is *really* reading here? And are we to imagine that Pliny is taking notes himself on wax tablets, while prone in the sun? We might rather take *adnotabat* and *excerpbat* as causative verbs: Pliny had notes taken down and passages excerpted (by an enslaved secretary, perhaps). To understand how reading becomes a contested space, we must probe around these representations for the readerly agents our elite authors may not want us to see.

Other times, however, we exclude who counts as a reader through our own biases about intellectual work and social status. For example, scholars have commonly taken enslaved readers as mere extensions, “prostheses” of their masters. Following this logic, a sharp-sighted, enslaved reader may have read to his enslaver, or taken down dictation, but we ought to understand the enslaver as the one who really reads, the one who really writes: according to the “prosthesis” model, the enslaved *lector* is no more than a pair of eyeglasses, the enslaved *notarius* no more than a *stilus*. Analyzing Pliny the Younger’s idealized account of his literary activities at his Tuscan villa (9.36), William Johnson notes that “Pliny’s sketch includes the now

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familiar elements of a daily regimen varied by controlled rotation among literary, physical, and social activities: he spends the morning writing, followed by a drive and a walk (1-3)...next comes a dinner, which, if only with his wife and a few friends, includes a book read to the group, followed by comedy or music (4).”

If we turn to Pliny’s letter itself, we find that Johnson has given us only a partial description of these scenes: Pliny in fact spends his morning writing by dictating to an enslaved notarius or secretary, while he himself remains prone in bed (notarium voco et die admisso quae formaveram dicto, 9.36.2); as for the entertainment of reading over dinner (liber legitur), Johnson reproduces Pliny’s own elision of the presence of the trained, enslaved lector who would have read this book aloud for Pliny and his elite company.

It is one thing for elite authors to fuel their sense of intellectual superiority and social domination through this exclusionary epistemology, whether by marking readers as “bad” through the language of servility or by eclipsing their contributions and agency through the despotic fantasy of “masterly extensibility.” It is quite another matter for us to reinscribe this discourse in our own framing of reading in antiquity: when we do this, we are staking a claim to whose reading and what individuals are worthy of our study. This dissertation enacts one model of reading this discourse on reading—a discourse underpinned by violence, forced labor, and exclusion—against the grain, thus adumbrating the kinds of readers who are often rousted from the narratives we tell about reading in classical antiquity, and emphasizing how the discursive negotiation of reading is fundamentally implicated in power relations.

Alongside (and sometimes intersecting with) this pervasive anxiety about the proximity of the enslaved to the elite reader, we can also sense in each author an anxiety about social “interlopers” into the idealized realm of the elite, readerly community, such as low-status

33 Johnson 2010: 42.
grammarians, Greek-speaking sophists from the eastern Mediterranean, and wealthy freedmen. Many of these cultural concerns will be familiar to readers of Juvenal’s *Satires*, which warn us not to put any faith in appearances (*nulla frontis fides*, 2.7). Each of this study’s authors negotiates these concerns through various thematizations of style vs. substance, performance vs. essence, and surface vs. depth. Seneca’s Calvisius Sabinus exhibits stereotypical freedman behavior by purchasing enslaved readers who have memorized all of Homer, Hesiod, and the nine lyric poets for the sake of “appearing” learned in front of dinner guests; Plutarch compares people who read for style over ethical substance to women who gather eye-catching, ephemeral flowers; Martial uncloaks readers who threaten to usurp his authorial status by marking them with language of servility, gender deviance, and foreignness; Lucian’s satirical speaker lampoons a man of low social origins who uses fine book rolls like cosmetics so as to appear *pepaideumenos* (and as is typical of Lucian, the *pepaideumenos* speaker’s mask is also up for critique).

We might be tempted to diagnose some of these patterns as germane to the so-called “Second Sophistic.” As used today, this term is intended to describe a period of imperial Greek literature from the late first to early third centuries CE, marked by a laundry list of phenomena that include sophistic performance and rhetoric, *paideia* and learnedness, archaizing and Atticizing language, and novel, fictive discourse. The term itself is coined by Philostratus between 242 and 244 CE to designate a style of epideictic performance in the persona of historical or mythical figures (*VS* 481, 507). Its journey from Philostratus to scholarly use,

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34 On the ‘invisibility’ of the Juvenalian speaker, and how this shifting persona epitomizes performance culture during a period “newly aware of the absence of any central, unified notion of what Rome is,” see Uden 2015: 7.

35 Jones 2002. For a laundry list of characteristics scholars have come to associate with the “Second Sophistic”, see Johnson and Richter 2017: 4-6.
However, should give us pause: the phrase “Second Sophistic” was revived in the early 20th century by Erwin Rohde, who imagined the zweite Sophistik as a reassertion of “national Hellenic” (national-hellenisch) element against Roman oppression and (supposed) eastern infiltration. The anti-Semitic underpinnings of Rohde’s model have largely been downplayed by recent critics who emphasize instead the anti-Roman vein of the movement. But as Tim Whitmarsh remarks on this sedimented notion of the ‘second sophistic,’ it “was not a unified, manifesto-led organization.” As such, continued use of the periodization tends to emphasize a static picture of “Greek literary insularity” at the expense of illuminating Greco-Roman interactivity, and is only useful insofar as it allows us to illuminate literary, cultural tendencies across this vast terrain with specific granularity. Given these political and hermeneutic stakes, I follow William Johnson’s (2010) and others’ (e.g. Richter 2011; Uden 2015) decisions not to employ the periodization of “Second Sophistic,” while at the same time remaining attuned to patterns and interactions that cut across both Greek and Latin texts that in some respect fall under its purported purview.

Rather than offering a claim about the historical “period” from Seneca the Younger to Lucian as such, this dissertation offers a methodology that helps us better understand ancient reading culture in relation to elite normative projects. Jointly engaging the framework of book history with the insights of feminist, queer, and critical theory, this study lays bare the discursive roles the “bad reader” is made to play in shoring up hegemonic dynamics of power, embodiment, and identity. The ultimate effect of this study is to show how “bad readers” offer a powerful

36 Whitmarsh 2011: 8-10; Rohde 1914: 319.
locus for telling a new story about books and reading in the ancient Mediterranean, as well as a lens for theorizing how certain hermeneutic modes in the discipline today participate in and reproduce hierarchies of power. Across this study, I draw attention to the different ways in which scholars affiliate themselves with certain kinds of “ideal” readers, and how these attachments can both obscure and reproduce the same exclusionary discourse and hierarchies of power our ancient sources are invested in upholding. “Bad readers” help intervene in this chain of readerly replication. By taking “bad readers” seriously as subjects worthy of our study, we might become better readers ourselves, readers who are attuned to the political and ethical stakes of what underpins our ancient sources’ attachments—as well as our own—to a certain idea of the “successful” as opposed to “failed” reader. If, as Merve Emre argues in her book *Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America,* “valorizing one practice of reading over another is both historically contingent and a limitation for literary criticism,” then we might need to become bad readers ourselves.39

Bad readers may not be so bad after all.

Enter, bad reader.

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Chapter 1: Enslavement, Gender, and the Reader(s) in Seneca’s

Moral Epistles

After withdrawing in 62 CE from a tumultuous career in Nero’s court, Seneca the Younger composed his Moral Epistles (henceforth, Epistles), a collection of letters that orients the reader towards living the virtuous, philosophical life of the wise man (sapiens). It is hardly surprising that, as he attempted to disentangle himself from an increasingly erratic Nero (the emperor would sentence him to death for conspiracy in 65), Seneca composes a work that advocates for daily practice towards achieving philosophical self-sufficiency and self-mastery. As part of this quest for achieving ideal, philosophical embodiment, the Epistles launch the reader on a parallel journey, constructing a training course in a certain kind of reading. Seneca’s theorization of reading in the Epistles has attracted significant critical attention. In general, scholars have taken reading in the Epistles as a central component of the text’s enactment of therapeutic, philosophical praxis. To open the Epistles, to read as “Lucilius,” is to enter into “a dialogic development between teacher and pupil, or better, fellow travelers, on the same therapeutic journey of self-improvement.”

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40 For a historicizing reading of Seneca’s emphasis on self-command as the ultimate goal of philosophy and his use of military language to re-evaluate ideals of military and political success in favor of philosophical self-command and control, see Roller 2001: 66 and Star 2012: 23-61.

41 For a reading of the Epistles in the context of Seneca and Nero’s tutor-pupil relationship, see Wilson 2014: 191-205.


43 Williams 2015: 135-36. At 75.1, for example, Seneca tells the reader that the letter’s text should resemble a conversation (sermo), “as if we were sitting and walking together, spontaneous and easy-going.” On therapeutic reading in Seneca, see Graver 1996, 2014.
What these treatments of reading in the Epistles often fail to account for is the role of the enslaved, whose labor underpinned operations of reading and literary production in Roman antiquity. Importantly, our ability to envision reading as an intimate, solitary stroll with Seneca—and so our tendency to eclipse the presence of the enslaved—is partly a phenomenon conditioned by the rhetoric of the Epistles themselves: we see “reading” as Seneca wants us to see it. And compared to reading as represented in other epistolary collections like Cicero’s and Pliny the Younger’s (which feature named enslaved and freedmen literary workers like Tiro, Zosimus, Encolpius, etc.), Seneca’s Epistles seem quiet. I argue, in fact, that they are not. By engaging critical theorist Sara Ahmed’s concept of “paperless philosophy,” I consider these apparent absences as calculated erasures that are central to Seneca’s conditioning of his ideal, manly philosophical reader.

In attending to Seneca’s erasure of enslaved literary labor, this chapter examines the work that enslavement is made to do (and not made to do) in Seneca’s discursive construction of his ideal reader. By inquiring into this particular nexus, I engage with and contribute to a rich body of work on Seneca and slavery, one that emphasizes the centrality of enslavement to his works whilst leaving questions of enslaved literary labor to the side.\textsuperscript{44} I argue that Seneca’s construction of good and bad readers is unthinkable without the material and metaphorical paradigm of slavery: a reader becomes “bad” if he transgresses the boundary between free and enslaved.\textsuperscript{45} Seneca sets his ideal reader off against figures marked by the language of servility

\textsuperscript{44} e.g Bradley 1986, Edwards 1997, 2009.

\textsuperscript{45} I use the pronoun “he” for Seneca’s reader throughout this chapter deliberately. To enter the Epistles is to enter a heavily male homosocial space, and not once do we see non-males reading (though we do encounter a spectrum of men).
and effeminacy, discourses that intersect according to a Roman sexual and social protocol that
defined “real” men (viri) as free and corporeally inviolable, unlike the enslaved.46

Additionally, I show how in scripting what person counts as a good reader, Seneca
assimilates the process of reading to a proprietary, generative, and emphatically masculine model
of authorship. If the good reader, like the bee, should “hide away everything by which he has
been aided and show only what he has produced” (84.7), so too does Seneca assimilate and
eclipse the intellectual and physical contributions of enslaved literary labor, enacting a version of
Ahmed’s “paperless philosophy,” a fantasy that, in Ahmed’s words, “can be understood as
crucial not only to the gendered nature of the occupation of philosophy but also to the
disappearance of political economy, of the “materials” of philosophy as well as its dependence
on forms of labor, both domestic and otherwise.”47 While the rhetorical device of “Lucilius” may
work as a placeholder for any reader to insert himself into the “you” of the letters, I propose that
the Epistles construct a readerly curriculum that conditions and domesticates this “general
reader” into a particular kind of (good) reader, one who reproduces normative ideals of
masculinity and mastery.

Let’s take a preliminary illustration of how the rhetoric of enslavement underpins
Seneca’s orientation of his ideal, philosophical reader. At the opening of Ep. 45, Seneca writes:48

librorum istic inopiam esse quereris. non refert quam multos sed quam bonos habeas:
lectio certa prodest, varia delectat. qui quo destinavit pervenire vult unam sequatur viam,
non per multas vagetur: non ire istuc sed errare est.

46 On the Roman construction of “gender” as embedded within a wider pattern of social status, see Walters 1997.
48 All text from Seneca’s Moral Epistles is taken from Gummere’s Loeb edition.
You complain that there is a lack of books where you are. It doesn’t matter how many books you have, but how good they are: purposed reading is beneficial, varied reading serves to delight. The man who wants to arrive at the destined end ought to follow one road, not wander through many; that’s not progressing, that’s wandering.

Seneca supposes that you, dear reader, are eager to get your hands on a bunch of books, regardless of the merit of their inner contents. The desire for an indiscriminate multitude of books, however, will distract us from the task at hand, our journey towards living a philosophically sound and morally upright life. lectio certa is the ticket to the vi(t)a recta. For Seneca, “one path leads to [wisdom], and it is straight (recta); you will not go astray (aberrabis). Proceed with unerring steps (certo gradu, 37.4).” 49 The bonus vir must also be a bonus lector. If “straightness” (certa and its anagram recta) indicates the trajectory of the good, philosophical reader, “wandering” (vagetur/errare) marks the orientation of the bad reader. In the eyes of Roman jurists, “wandering” is a bad thing that slaves do with their bodies and their minds (cf. errare as ‘make a mistake’). The erro, according to Ulpian, is a slave “who does not, indeed, run away, but frequently indulges in aimless roaming (vagatur) and, after wasting time on trivialities, returns home at a late hour” (Dig. 21.1.17.14). 50 “Wandering” or non-linear movement is particularly associated with one of the most grueling tasks imposed on the enslaved, often as punishment: working the mill. 51 In Apuleius’ Metamorphoses, Lucius, whose animalization into a donkey marks him as an enslaved figure, is forced to work a mill with chained and tattooed (possibly runaway) slaves, “going back over my own steps, wandering with unwavering

49 Quintilian is also a proponent of the straight path: Inst. 10.7.16, 5.14.31.

50 For more on the erro, see Joshel 2013: 99; Bradley 1990 (on idling as one way in which the enslaved resisted servitude); Fitzgerald 2000: 44.

51 Working the mills is designated by the Theodosian Code (9.40.3) as a punishment for bad slaves.
wandering” (*mea recalcans vestigia vagarer errore certo*, 9.11-12). These cultural associations between wandering and servility mark out the vagrant reader as a reader who reads like a (bad) slave.

In the pages that follow, I trace how discourses of enslavement and gender permeate Seneca’s representations of reading. By shunning the orientations of bad readers at every twist and turn, the reader will also “liberate” himself from a (metaphorical) state of enslavement and embody philosophical (self)mastery. Crucially, part of this training demands that the reader be ever mindful and aware of the risk of falling into and inhabiting a metaphorical state of enslavement. In this regard, Seneca participates in a long philosophical tradition of using the enslaved to figure the free man who, in not ‘mastering’ his emotions, passions, etc., falls into a state of ‘ethical’ enslavement.  

In *Ep.* 47, for example, Seneca writes, “Show me a man who is not enslaved; one man is enslaved to lust, another to greed, another to ambition, and all men to fear. I will show you a consul who is enslaved to an old woman, a rich man who is enslaved to an enslaved girl, and youths of noblest birth enslaved by pantomime actors! Self-imposed enslavement is the most shameful of all” (*ostende, quis non sit; alius libidini servit, alius avaritiae, alius ambitioni, omnes timori. dabo consularem aniculae servientem, dabo ancellulae divitem, ostendam nobilissimos iuvenes mancipia pantomimorum! nulla servitus turpior est*

52 On the animalization of the slave in Roman thought, see Bradley 2000.

53 See *Ep.* 8.7: “The man who submits and surrenders himself to (philosophy) is not kept waiting: he is emancipated right away. For freedom (*libertas*) is, in fact, being a slave to philosophy (*philosophiae servire*).”

54 This goes back at least to Aristotle, who describes anger as “listening to reason, but listening carelessly (*παρακούειν*), just like overhasty slaves who rush out before hearing all of what you are saying, and so mess up your order, or like dogs, who bark whenever there is a knock at the door before waiting to see if it’s a friend.” (*NA* 1449a26-30). On anger as mark of the slave, see further Sen. *Ep.* 18.14: “Immodest anger begets madness.” You must know how true this is, since you have possessed both slaves and enemies.” On being a slave to the body, see *Ep.* 14.1-2 (“I say that we must not be slaves to our bodies: for he who is a slave to his body will have many masters...”). For the slaveowner who is enslaved by lust, gluttony, etc. cf. Seneca *De Ben.* 3.28.1; 4-5.
quam voluntaria, 47.17). It is the shameful yoke of “self-imposed” enslavement
(servitus...voluntaria) that (free, elite, male) readers are tasked with casting off.

Slaves were not just “good” for the elite, slaveowning class to think with: they were necessary for elite Romans to think with in order to formulate a politics of freedom and control. As Myles Lavan has noted, the metaphor of owner and enslaved afforded the central metaphorical paradigm for imperial Roman control of its provincial subjects from Cicero to the 4th century CE. In order to maintain their own sense of “freedom,” the elite had to maintain the real-life practice of enslavement. While Seneca may at times appear to encourage sympathetic identification between the reader and the enslaved, it is important to remember that Seneca’s “prime concern was with the master not with the slave.” As Keith Bradley writes, “Seneca’s writings on slavery must be judged a plea for the creation of social harmony between slave and free, and not as a disinterested statement on the common humanity of all men...[his] views on slavery were in fact essentially manipulative, deeply rooted in the elite conservatism of the Roman ruling class.” In the Epistles, Seneca pushes his readers not only to be good slaveowners in “real life,” (e.g. Ep. 47) but also to play the part of the enslaver in their encounters with books (an encounter often mediated by slaves) and control their readerly passions and appetites. This is a concern that becomes all the more acute when we consider how

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55 Lavan 2013: 16-17. After the 4th century CE, Lavan argues that there is a significant change in the language of empire, with a proliferation of maternal metaphors.

56 Seneca was a slaveowner (Ep. 83.4; 123.1-2, 4) who believed that slaves were a burden to feed and maintain (17.3), equated slaves with animals (77.6; 80.9) and expressed no issues with burning a slave criminal alive (86.10) nor with an owner who would beat his slaves for making errors in his account books (122.15).


enslaved and freed literary workers were involved in every aspect of ancient literary production and consumption.

Toni Morrison writes of American slavery that “the slave population, it was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness.” Likewise in the context of the enslaving society of ancient Rome, the elite used the enslaved as (among other things) figures to think with, to fuel their sense of themselves. Unlike in the racist system of American slavery, however, any member of the Roman enslaving class might conceivably become enslaved. As this chapter traces the figurative apparatus that underpins readerly deviance throughout the Epistles, it emphasizes that the servile embodiment of “bad readers” is not limited to “outsider figures” like Calvisius Sabinus, an effeminate man with the ingenium of a freedman (27) or grammarians, who were often foreign and of enslaved or low social origins (88, 108). Lucilius, the “internal” reader, is repeatedly teased and admonished for swerving towards the servility and non-normative masculinity embodied by Seneca’s cast of bad readers. If we take “Lucilius” as a proxy for (little Lucius) Seneca himself, the Epistles’ theme of philosophical introspection is thrown into further relief: the elite, slaveowning reader must vigilantly interrogate himself for the specter of the enslaved, the bad reader, lurking within.

1.1 The Reader’s Road to Mastery Begins (Epistles 1-29)


60 Fifteen of twenty-one grammatici in Suetonius’ De grammaticis et rhetoribus were ex-slaves. On the social status of grammarians, see Kaster 1988.
The first three books (Ep. 1-29) of the collection constitute a distinctive group as they launch the reader’s journey on the right course in life and in reading: at the end of nearly all of these letters, Seneca inserts a sententia that is figured in various terms of economic exchange, rewarding the reader for reading all the way through to the end of the letter and enticing him to progress towards the next.\(^{61}\) The first letter of the collection kicks this journey off with an imperative bang and is shot through with the language of slavery (Ep. 1.1-2):

> fac ita, mi Lucili; vindica te tibi, et tempus, quod adhuc aut auferebatur aut subripiebatur aut excidebat, collige et serva. Persuade tibi hoc sic esse, ut scribo…fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere. sic fiet, ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris.

Act like this, my Lucilius: set yourself free for your own sake, and as for your time, which up to this point has either been taken away or snatched from you or slipped by, gather and preserve it. Persuade yourself that what I write to you is true…Therefore, my Lucilius, do what you write that you are doing: take hold of every hour. Then it will come about that you’ll depend less on tomorrow, if you will have taken ownership of today.

As Catharine Edwards has noted, the verb vindicare takes its departure from the language of Roman law and is used to assert one’s claim to one’s own property (OLD 1) or an enslaved person (OLD 3); vindicare may also assert the freedom of one wrongly held in slavery (OLD 3) and is later used symbolically of manumission.\(^{62}\) From the get-go, the reader is addressed as a slaveowner would address his slaves, with a cascade of imperatives.\(^{63}\) After “freeing himself,” the reader is directed to do things that resemble the duties of a slaveowner. The imperatives

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\(^{61}\) See Borgo 2013 on the role of financial and commercial language in Lucilius’s ethical instruction.

\(^{62}\) Edwards 2009: 139. Edwards (157) also notes that, although Augustus claims in the first sentence of his Res gestae that he “liberated” (vindicavi) the republic from the tyranny of faction, in Seneca’s time, many of the Roman political elite characterized themselves as “enslaved” to the emperor.

\(^{63}\) One of the first school exercises for boys was learning imperatives to have on hand for ordering around enslaved members of their household. Dionisotti 1982: 93, Fitzgerald 2000: 6.
collige and servi are two of the primary actions taken by an enslaver to deal with property: for Aristotle, two qualities which the head of a household must possess in dealing with property are acquisition (τὸ κτᾶσθαι) and preservation (φυλάττειν). Furthermore, the reader must “take ownership” (complectere) of time by “casting his hand” (manum inieceris) on each day as it comes. As a legal idiom, manum inicere refers to how an owner would seize and take possession of a fugitive slave. The reader is urged to liberate himself but not to abolish the metaphorical condition of slavery altogether: rather, he must transfer it to another entity, playing the master and reproducing the dynamics between oppressor and oppressed. While Seneca certainly does, in Catharine Edwards’ words, “draw the reader into identification with the slave,” he ultimately tasks the reader with taking up a readerly pose that mirrors and maintains hierarchical power relations between owner and enslaved.

In the next letter, we see how these power dynamics translate to a room full of books. “Lucilius” in dangerous territory, surrounded by a crowd of books (librorum multitudo, 2.3): he confesses that he wants to “dip first into one book, then into another” (sed modo...hunc librum evolvere volo, modo illum, 2.4), recalling the image of the vagrant slave (erro) who resists by

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64 Oeconomica, 1344b23-28. The second two are improving the property (κοσμητικόν) and making use of it (χρηστικόν). We will see the importance of this latter two masterly qualities in the construction of the good reader later on, esp. in Ep. 84.

65 The verb complectere (“take hold”) ranges in signification from a loving, tender embrace to the occupation of land by the military, and, by extension, to ‘comprehend’ something mentally. This is the first of numerous instances where Seneca figures intellectual activity through the vocabulary of military and domination, and such imagery is immediately picked up in the following letter (Ep. 2).

66 On the manus iniectio, see the Digest of Justinian 18.7.9; Livy 3.44 tells of how Appius Claudius commissioned Marcus Claudius to claim the daughter of Lucius Verginius as his slave (manum iniecit), after she refused his advances.

67 As Nicole Giannella points out to me, this is “good freedman behavior.” We will encounter an example of “bad freedman behavior” with Calvisius Sabinus in Ep. 27 (although whether or not he is actually a libertus is up for discussion).

68 Edwards 2009: 156.
delaying and wandering about. “Watch out,” Seneca warns, “lest your reading of many authors and every kind of book contain something unsettled and unstable” (*vide, ne ista lectio auctorum multorum et omnis generis voluminum habeat aliquid vagum et instabile*, 2.2). This promiscuous reading is a bad habit Seneca must correct, urging Lucilius to possess only as many books as he can (fully and fruitfully) read. Seneca materializes the negative consequences of this distracted, superfluous reading practice through several metaphors. First, Lucilius is likened to a person who travels all the time, gaining many acquaintances but no real friends (2.2). He is also likened to a bad eater who samples (*degustare*) many dishes but does not assimilate food to his body for nourishment. Indeed, Lucilius’ promiscuous and voracious readerly appetites carry a sexualized charge: his desire to dip here and there into a medley of books makes him dangerously close to Catullus’ Aurelius, who is cast as both indiscriminate lover and reader, his “penis gunning for boys good and bad” (*c*. 15.9-10).

By crowding so many colorful metaphors into such a brief space, Seneca cleverly exemplifies the very mental restlessness that Lucilius as vagrant-reader embodies. After this flurry of metaphors, Seneca’s concluding advice may come as a relief to the reader overwhelmed by such verbal flourishes (2.4-5):

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\text{aliquid cotidie adversus paupertatem, aliquid adversus mortem auxilii compara, nec minus adversus ceteras pestes: et cum multa percurreris, unum excerce, quod illo die concoquas. Hoc ipse quoque facio; ex pluribus, quae legi, aliquid apprehendo.}
\]

\[
\text{hodiernum hoc est, quod apud Epicurum nactus sum; soleo enim et in aliena castra transire, non tamquam transfuga, sed tamquam explorator. “Honesta,” inquit, “res est laeta paupertas.”}
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Each day acquire something helpful against poverty, something against death, indeed against other pestilences: and after you have thoroughly run over many things, select

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69 On the dynamics of Catullus’ poem and similar examples of sexual politics between poet, reader, and text, see Fitzgerald 1995: 46-55.
one which you can completely digest on that day. I myself do this too; out of the many things which I’ve read, I claim something for myself.

Today’s is this, which I stumbled upon in Epicurus; for I am accustomed to cross over even into another’s camp, not as a deserter, but rather as a scout. “Contented poverty is an honorable thing.”

Reading—even reading alone—entails social mixing and negotiation, whereby material texts “broker (or buffer) relationships among the bodies of successive and simultaneous readers.”\textsuperscript{70} In contrast to Lucilius, who exhibits a lack of self-control and is unable to gain intimate ‘presence’ through his reading, distracted by a crowd of books and authors, Seneca plays the soldier-scout, achieving presence with an author (\textit{apud Epicurum}, a prepositional phrase which plays on the literal sense of being ‘in the writings of’ but also ‘in the presence of’). As if anticipating the objection that he himself strays from the path, distracted and won over by the “enemy” (\textit{alienus}) Epicurus, Seneca casts his reading in acquisitional terms, only briefly venturing into enemy/foreign territory so as to select one thing and accommodate it to his own purposes. For Seneca, the good reader ought to “apply himself intimately to the inborn mind of an author” (\textit{qui nullius se ingenio familiariter applicat}, 2.2). The adverb \textit{familiariter} signals an aesthetic that is central to Seneca’s delineation between the good and bad reader: as Kathy Eden writes, “\textit{familiaritas} captures more than an essential quality of effective writing, according to Seneca; it is also the mark of sound reading—and not just letter reading but all reading.”\textsuperscript{71} I have translated \textit{familiariter} as “intimately,” but the word has a more specific, cultural connotation. \textit{familiariter}

\textsuperscript{70} Price 2012: 12. Lucilius appears to be ‘alone’ here, amongst a crowd of books, but it is possible that he is also amongst a “crowd” of enslaved readers.

\textsuperscript{71} Eden 2012: 39. We can also read Seneca’s desire for finding ‘intimacy’ in reading/books in the broader context of his life: Seneca had recently withdrawn from life in the imperial court. According to Tacitus (\textit{Annals} 14.53), Nero “more and more shunned his intimacy” (\textit{familiaritatem eius magis aspernante Caesare}). And so, it is not surprising that the emperor’s ex-tutor sought intimacy by constructing two lengthy, paideutic works (\textit{NQ} and \textit{EM}) both addressed to the same “pupil” (either his younger self or Lucilius).
takes its departure from the *familia*, that is, the enslaved household staff (and other property) that belongs to the *paterfamilias*. A reader who reads *familiariter* has the power to make what he reads his own (*sua*), just like the *paterfamilias* who acquires, puts to use, and extracts benefit from his own *familia*/property, including enslaved readers.

In this letter, then, Seneca demonstrates how the Stoic reader can become a masterful reader even among the most “foreign” or “hostile” (*aliena*) of texts, actively mastering Epicurus for his own purposes through excerpting, acquisition, and application in his own life.

Additionally, this letter introduces the strategy that Seneca will employ through the end of Book 3 to keep Lucilius on track. Like clockwork, Seneca closes nearly all of these letters (through *Ep.* 29) by offering *sententiae* from his daily reading. This repeated strategy—a paratextual device—trains the reader not only in linear reading (motivating him to read straight through to the end) but also in daily reading, digesting something each day to so as to make steady progress towards the goal of self-mastery. In addition to luring the reader to the end of the letter, Seneca uses these *sententiae* to model how the reader should appropriate material—even material that is *alienum*, like that of Epicurus—into something that belongs to him, as property does to an enslaver, or spoils to the conquering general. In one letter (12.10), Seneca strikingly refers to this payment as

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72 In *Ep.* 47, Seneca praises Lucilius for living *familiariter* with his slaves (a further example of the collocation between master/slaves and reader/reading material, books, etc.).

73 In *Ep.* 64.7, Seneca says that the reader ought to “play the part of the good *pater familiae* and make more ample what we’ve received.”

74 On practices of excerpting, Johnson 2010: 201: “The ancient habit of excerpting…was not undertaken simply to digest information (as note taking is, normally, for us). Rather, the sometimes extensive excerpting of thoughtfully chosen texts served as a means of gaining control over these texts, often in conjunction with close study and memorizing, as a means of inculcating into the reader certain essential masteries.” On Seneca’s practice of disconnecting Epicurean *sententiae* from their larger argumentative framework and thus limitation of doctrinal contamination, Schiesaro 2015: 240.
peculium, the funds or property an enslaver would give to an enslaved person.\textsuperscript{75} The metaphorical use of peculium is indicative of the central framework in which Seneca positions his readers: they progress from a state of “enslavement” to freedom and, eventually, play the masterful part of the enslaver.\textsuperscript{76}

This conditioning works: soon, the reader is made to perform an eagerness and hunger for these daily compensations for directed reading. For example, at the conclusion of Ep. 16, Seneca writes (16.7):

\begin{quote}
iam ab initio, si te bene novi, circumspicies, quid haec epistula munusculi attulerit.
excute illam, et invenies.
\end{quote}

Right from the beginning (if I know you well), you’ll be looking around for what little contribution this here letter has brought. Shake it out, and you’ll find it.

Likewise, near the end of Ep. 24.22:

\begin{quote}
video quo spectes; quaeris, quid huic epistulae infulserim, quod dictum alicuius animosum, quod praecptum utile.
\end{quote}

I see what you are looking for; you are asking what I have infused into this here letter, what soulful saying of someone, what useful precept.

Occasionally, however, Lucilius seems at risk of falling back into the habits of errant reading he embodied in Ep. 2. In Ep. 6, Seneca says that he will send him some books (libros) from which he has recently gained some sapientia. He adds that he will mark certain passages (imponam notas, 6.5) so that Lucilius doesn’t waste time searching “here and there” (passim), embodying the enslaved erro, but rather can head at once to the passages that Seneca approves and admires

\textsuperscript{75} Enslaved people could not own property under Roman law, so peculium in fact belonged to the enslaver and could be reclaimed by him. Bradley 1987: 108-11.

\textsuperscript{76} Or, en route to serving as a slave to philosophy (rather than to his body, desires, etc.). See Ep. 8.7: “The man who submits and surrenders himself to (philosophy) is not kept waiting; he is emancipated right away. For freedom (libertas) is, in fact, being a slave to philosophy (philosophiae servire).” See also 88.2: only the study of wisdom (sapientiae) will make a person free (liberum facit).
(ad ipsa protinus, quae probo et miror, accedas). Seneca will eventually stop this practice and even admit that it can have negative consequences (Ep. 33). Before the training wheels come off in Ep. 29, however, there is a crucial lesson “Lucilius” must learn about how to be a good reader. Ep. 27 presents us with one of the baddest of the bad readers in the entire collection. In this next section, I focus on the crucial role played by the paradigm of slavery in establishing the boundary between good and bad readers, showing how the representation of Calvisius Sabinus and his enslaved readers opens out onto broader, cultural concerns at the intersection of social status and gendered embodiment.

1.2 Reading like Calvisius Sabinus (Ep. 27)

In this letter, Seneca draws a distinction between the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of learnedness. The discovery of virtus, Seneca explains, requires no intermediary but the soul itself. Seneca contrasts this philosophical labor of inner, moral improvement—a task that requires constant vigilance and self-critique—with inferior intellectual pursuits: “this task of yours does cannot be delegated to someone else. That other kind of literary study allows a helper (adiutorium, 27.4-5).” In order to ridicule the pursuit of learnedness through a “helper,” Seneca includes a lively anecdote about one Calvisius Sabinus (27.5-8):


In our time, there was a rich man, Calvisius Sabinus. He had both the patrimony and natural ability of a freedman: never have I beheld a man more unfittingly fortunate. This fellow’s memory was so bad that he would sometimes forget the name of Ulysses, then Achilles, then Priam, names we know as well as we know our enslaved attendants. Nor would a little old enslaved nomenclator, who doesn’t provide his owner the names but makes them up, call off the names of his owner’s tribesmen so wrongly as that man did the names of the Trojans and Greeks. Nonetheless, he wanted to appear learned. So, this is the short-cut he thought up: he bought slaves for a massive sum, one who could contain Homer, the other Hesiod; he also assigned individual slaves to the nine lyric poets. That he paid a large amount is not something you should marvel at; if he didn’t find slaves, he had them made to order. After he had acquired this group of enslaved people, he began to disturb his dining guests. He would keep these slaves at his feet; from time to time he would ask them for verses which he could repeat, and often he would break down in the middle of a word. Satellius Quadratus—a nibbler and, consequently, a flatterer of stupid rich men, and (which goes with the other two) a mocker—urged him to use grammarians as slaves to gather up the “bits.” When Sabinus remarked that each slave cost him one hundred thousand sesterces, Satellius said, “You could have purchased as many book-cases for less.” Still Sabinus held to the following opinion: he thought he himself knew whatever anyone in his household knew. His same Satellius began to encourage him—a weak, pale, gaunt man—to take up wrestling. When Sabinus answered: “How can I? I’m scarcely alive,” he said, “Please, don’t say that; don’t you see how many incredibly healthy slaves you have?” A good mind is neither borrowed nor bought. And I think, if it were for sale, it would not find a buyer. Yet bad minds are purchased every day.

A number of scholars have gone in search of the “historical” Calvisius Sabinus. Was he a freedman? A consul under Tiberius? I leave such questions to the side, for I am interested here in how Seneca entwines the language of enslavement and gender to skewer Sabinus as a “bad reader.” Note, first of all, that Sabinus is not explicitly identified as a freedman. Rather, he is

77 See Vassileiou 1974 for discussion and bibliography.
someone who has the *patrimonium* and *ingenium* of one. Seneca is clearly playing on the association in imperial Roman society between ostentatious freedmen and massive fortunes. Sabinus is also the most “unfittingly blessed” (*beatum indecentius*) man Seneca claims he has ever seen. This phrase is striking: the *vita beata* is what Seneca and his readers are striving for, a life where one’s *sermo* concords with one’s *vita*, everything neatly stitched together in harmonious balance. The juxtaposition of these two words encapsulates the perverse hybridity and discord within Sabinus’s own character, “blessed” in material fortune yet ethically and intellectually deficient. Sabinus serves as a cautionary example to the free elite male reader lest he also embody the “inborn disposition” (*ingenium*) of someone who has belonged to a lowly, servile class.

Sabinus’ shallow recall of basic literary knowledge doubles as a jab at his lack of “masterly” qualities. Not only is he superficially learned in literature: he is also unlearned in the arts of being an enslaver, unable to remember “the name of Ulysses, then Achilles, then Priam, names we know as well as we know our enslaved attendants.” Even the senile, enslaved *nomenclator* is better at calling off names than Sabinus is at mastering those of the Trojans and Greeks. Seneca pits himself and his reader (*novimus*) against Sabinus: he and the reader are good slave-owning individuals who actually know the names of their slaves, and perhaps even named them themselves as a demonstration of power. The slide between the names of literary Greeks and enslaved people links Roman mastery over reading material (e.g., Homer) with mastery over contemporary (Greek) bodies, including those who facilitated elite Roman practices of reading.

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78 Vassileiou 1974: c’est que, pour lui, l’idée d’affranchi est bien correlative de celle de richesse. Cf. *De Ben.* 3.27; *NQ* 1.17.9. Also cf. Trimalchio in the *Satyricon*, Zoilus in Martial’s *Epigrams* (discussed in Chapter 3).

79 On the enslaver’s practice of taking slave names from Greek mythology to partake in the ‘civilized world of which Greek culture was most precious fruit,’ see Fitzgerald 2000: 5. On naming *vernae*, see Bruun 2013.
Seneca implies that mastery as a philosophical reader goes hand in hand with mastery over enslaved people.

Literary shortcomings and servile embodiment continue to be entangled throughout the anecdote. Seneca has Sabinus fulfill a number of elite stereotypes of freedmen: deficient in his “natural ability” (*ingenium libertini*) and desiring to appear learned (*eruditus*), he relies on his deep pockets. This retinue of enslaved people (*familia*) are made to function like audio-recordings of the Greek literary classics: they “contain” (*tenet*) all of Homer, Hesiod, and the nine lyric poets, embodying the elite ideology of the slave as *instrumentum vocale* (“talking tool,” Varro, *R.R.* 1.17). Now, an enslaver’s practice of using the enslaved as readers was routine in Roman book culture and does not in and of itself mark Sabinus as a ‘bad’ reader. Seneca does draw attention to the exorbitant price that Sabinus expends on acquiring such specifically trained slaves, but as Harriet Flower has shown, some Roman elites were willing to pay an enormous expense for such slaves trained in literary skills.80

To understand where Sabinus goes wrong in his use of enslaved readers, we might compare the advice Seneca gives Lucilius in *Ep.* 15. Here, Seneca gives Lucilius some tips on how to exercise his mind: he writes, “I am not ordering you to bend incessantly over your book and tablets...riding in a litter both shakes up the body and does not hinder study; you can read, you can dictate, you can talk, you can listen, nor does taking a stroll prevent any of these things” (*neque ego te iubeo semper imminere libro aut pugillaribus...gestatio et corpus concutit et studio non officit; possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire, quorum nihil ne ambulatio quidem vetat fieri*, 15.6). Enslaved scribes and readers are clearly involved here in the process of reading and dictation on-the-go: consider Cicero’s apology to Atticus for sending him a letter

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80 Flower 2022.
that he has dictated while walking because he had no free time and wished to exercise his voice
(nam cum vacui temporis nihil haberem, et cum recreandae voculae causa nesses esset mihi
ambulare, haec dictavi ambulans, Cic. Att. 2.23.1). Seneca’s language occludes the presence of
enslaved readers and secretaries, depriving them of any intellectual agency. The catalogue of
intellectual actions (possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire), while enabled
through the labor of the enslaved, is envisioned as a better alternative to the banausic image of
“bending over” one’s books and tablets. Rather than comport his body as an enslaved or low-
status literary worker might, Lucilius is directed to use the bodies (and minds) of his slaves as
animated, yet invisible, tools.

Turning back to Sabinus, we can see now that one problem with Sabinus’ reliance on the
enslaved readers lies specifically in his failure to minimize their presence as “helpers,” to
incorporate them as seamless prostheses, enacting the despotic fantasy of “masterly
extensibility.” Recall that Seneca’s chief goal in this letter is to distinguish philosophy as a
special, intellectual enterprise that admits no delegatio or adiutorium. Sabinus fails because he
takes a short-cut, compendiaria, by attempting to acquire knowledge through the purchase of
enslaved readers who “contain” (tenēret) Homer, Hesiod, etc. The choice of this verb tenēre
transforms these enslaved readers into bookish objects, into mere containers of words. And yet, it
is Sabinus who proves to be the leaky container, as he regurgitates what his slaves feed him in
piecemeal form.

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81 On the connection between bent bodies and low-status, servile, banausic epistemologies (degraded by Seneca), see
Ep. 90. This latter “bookish” practice of static reading, as we’ll see throughout this study, is negatively associated with
grammarians such as the book bound Palaemon in Juvenal Sat. 7.222-37. In Ep. 27, the joke about employing
grammatici to “gather up the bits” of Sabinus’ botched reading also creates an abject image of their lowly work.

82 Reay 2005.
In linking reading with eating, Seneca taps into a metaphor we have already seen activated in the Epistles (Ep. 2). It is significant that the drama of this passage transpires in a convivial setting, where Sabinus “disturbs (inquietare) his fellow guests through his broken, butchered verses. The verb inquietare embodies the opposite of what the ideal, philosophical reader of the Epistles should be striving for. In the first sentence of Ep. 2, Seneca is pleased that Lucilius is not disturbing himself (inquietaris, 2.1) through a frequent change of abode. As discussed earlier, however, he is acting like the vagrant slave (erro) in his frequent waffling within a crowd of books: hence, Seneca advises him to select one thing from his reading that he can cook down and digest per day, precisely the kind of thorough, digestive work of introspective and purposeful reading that Sabinus fails to embody. Sabinus’ metaphorical failure to digest fully and incorporate into his body what he reads is materialized through his failure to incorporate and lay claim to the work of his enslaved readers.

The intersection between Sabinus’ lack of mastery as a reader and an enslaver is also focalized through close attention to his embodiment vis-à-vis his slaves. Sabinus appears to position his slaves in a visually subordinate place, having them sit “at his feet” (ad pedes). This placement of slaves at the feet ought to figure the (proper) power dynamic between owner and enslaved. Consider, for example, this wall painting of a banquet scene from the so-called House of the Triclinium in Pompeii:

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83 On this painting (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 120029), see Joshel 2013 and Clarke 2003: 242-43.
In this painting, the power of the elite over the enslaved is reinforced by the small stature of all four slaves, as well as the functions they offer to the elites: one slave takes off a man’s shoe, another offers him a cup of wine; one young, male slave sits beside the master whose banquet this is, likely to be used as sexual gratification by him; and the final slave props up a vomiting man. Sabinus perverts the proper order of things: his slaves are at his feet, yet it is he who becomes a laughable spectacle, disturbing his guests, vomiting up chunks of poetry. Despite
Sabinus’ attempt to use his purchased slaves as “books” from which to read, his slaves upstage him in their reading: Sabinus can put his slaves in their rightful, lowly place, and yet he cannot embody real ownership over his “reading material.”

While the bodies of the elites in the painting from Pompeii are clearly represented as physically larger and more powerful than those of the slaves, Sabinus’ slaves are the stronger ones. His own body is weak and pale (pallidus), an adjective that often marks the cinaedus, a man whose submission to sexual pleasures was believed to make him both ill and pale.84 Sabinus’ association here with the effeminate Roman man (whether a cinaedus, molles, etc.) also offers insight into his propensity to “read” verses in broken bits, since a “broken voice” was associated with cinaedic and/or effeminate modes of speech.85 His failure as a reader is also marked as a failure to embody a real Roman vir. If we push the association between Sabinus and the cinaedus further, we can understand Sabinus as permeable to the wrong sorts of pleasures and thus illegible as a free Roman vir: for Seneca, voluptas is marked as servile (servile) and can be found “more often hiding and taking advantage of darkness...and pale” (latitantem saepe ac tenebras captantem...pallidam, Vit. Beat. 7.3). Sabinus thus embodies a profound contradiction: he owns slaves, whilst embodying (elite stereotypes of) servile behavior himself.

The character of Sabinus opens out onto broader concerns about the proper, masterful handling of one’s reading, particularly given the historical, material reality that literary culture, reading, and book production depended on the intellectual and material labor of the enslaved. He is a negative foil to Seneca’s ideal, philosophical reader in two intersecting ways: he is unable to school his own body according to elite Roman norms of masculinity, and he is schooled by his

84 This was thought to make men not only ill but also “pale.” loci for this include Persius 1.26, Seneca De Ira 3.26.4, Vit. Beat. 7.3, Juvenal 2.49–50; see also Richlin 1993: 549.

85 See Phaedrus, App. 10 (fracte loquendo), Quintilian, Inst. 9.4.6-7, and my discussion of the kinaidos in Chapter 4.
enslaved readers. Protesting his intellectual shortcomings, Sabinus claims that he “knows whatever anyone else in his enslaved household staff knew” (*in ea opinione erat, ut putaret se scire, quod quisquam in domo sua sciret*). The issue with this belief, however, is that it endows the enslaved “book containers” with intellectual agency, and thus is a principle that is fundamentally at odds with Seneca’s statement that a “good mind can neither be borrowed nor purchased” (*bona mens nec commodatur nec emitur*). In the economy of philosophy, the enslaver-philosopher must seamlessly appropriate the labor of his enslaved literary workers and suppress any intellectual agency that belongs to them, enacting a version of Ahmed’s “paperless philosophy.”

1.3 Reading like an *Auctor* (*Ep. 33*)

The gendered and classed dynamics of the Sabinus episode ripple out into *Epistles* 33 and 84, where Seneca theorizes more fully how to deal with the inevitable proximity between the slaveowning, philosophical reader, his enslaved literary workers, and books. Taken together, these letters sketch a trajectory whereby Seneca trains the reader to assimilate himself to the masterful, generative *auctor* and play out the gendered and classed fantasy of “paperless philosophy.” At stake in *Epistle* 33 is the virile integrity of Stoic writings. Lucilius expresses desire for Seneca to continue closing his letters with maxims, or *sententiae*, as he did in the first three books of *Epistles*: “you desire that I attach to these letters, like I did the earlier ones, certain utterances from the leading men of our school” (*desideras his quoque epistulis sicut prioribus adscribi aliquas voces nostrorum procerum*, 33.1). While Seneca had used this technique of “attaching” *sententiae* to train the reader in directed, digestible reading, now that the reader has progressed (cf. “I recognize my Lucilius: he is beginning to reveal the man he promised,” 31.1),
Seneca links such zeal for *sententiae* with lack of normative manliness and mastery. First, Seneca objects to the reader’s desire to pursue choice extracts on the grounds that the “entire texture” (*totus contextus*) of Stoic writings is “full of strength/manly” (*virilis*, 33.1). In fact, the reader need not ask him for excerpts because “whatever is excerpted among other writers runs continuously among ours” (*continuum est apud nostros quicquid apud alios excerpitur*, 33.3). The smooth style of Stoic textual aesthetics (e.g., *levis, simplex*) enables the reader to read similarly, in continuous fashion without interruptions or distractions from exciting *sententiae*. Stoic writings (and by implication, Stoic readers) are more “masculine” (*virilis*) than those of, say, Epicurus (a man who practiced effeminacy, *ab homine mollitiam professo*, 33.2), where such sayings are more conspicuous, random, unexpected.\(^86\)

While in the first three books these Epicurean morsels lured the reader towards the end of the letter, Seneca now contrasts such eye candy to the manly, consistent texture of Stoic writings which have no “eye-catching bits” (*ocliferia*, 33.3) to deceive the consumer.\(^87\) The word *ocliferia* suggests that Epicurean writings in particular are easily commodified and trafficked. Further evidence indicates a certain level of anxiety amongst elite Romans about *sententiae* and their ability to circulate between elite and popular culture, particularly in the context of Roman theater. Cicero (*Pro Sestio* 102) complains that bad people quote from Accius’ *Atreus*, and, in similar vein, Seneca (*Ep. 108.8*) describes how theatergoers applaud upon hearing *sententiae* about greed in the mimes of Publilius Syrus. Quintilian (*Inst. 1.8.9*) suggests that his contemporaries were especially

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\(^86\) Compare Seneca’s praise of the style of Papirius Fabianus in 100.8: the orator’s vigor is missing, and the spurs and sudden strokes of *sententiae* you are looking for, but the body as a whole is honorable (*deest illis oratorius vigor stimulique quos quaeris et subiti ictus sententiarium; sed totum corpus...honestum est*). This letter is also another example of Seneca’s direction of Lucilius’s reading, for it is Lucilius who complains that Fabianus’s prose is dull and not at all uplifted (*humilia et parum erecta*). Looking for catchy *sententia* that punctuate the work is not good reading: Lucilius is being bad by not appreciating the writing as a whole.

\(^87\) On *ocliferia*, see Milnor 2014: 79. See also Martial 1.117.10-12, who advises someone seeking his poetry to look for a *taberna / scriptis postibus hinc et inde totis, / omnis ut cito perlegas poetas*. 
keen to go after these catchy bits, stating that most modern writers “think that *sententiae* are the only virtue in any work” (*omnium operum solam virtutem sententias putaverunt*).

Against the backdrop of these cultural concerns, Seneca demands that Lucilius (33.5):

> depone istam spem, posse te summatim degustare ingenia maximorum virorum; tota tibi inspicienda sunt, tota tractanda. res geritur et per lineamenta sua ingenii opus nectitur, ex quo nihil subduci sine ruina potest. nec recuso, quo minus singula membra, dummodo in ipso homine, consideres. non est formonsa, cuius crus laudatur aut bracchium, sed illa, cuius universa facies admirationem partibus singulis abstulit.

banish that hope of yours, that you can taste bit by bit the inborn talent of the greatest men; the whole must be inspected by you, the whole must be handled. The material is worked out and the product of their minds is fastened together line by line, from which nothing can be taken away without collapse. I’m not refusing to let you examine the individual parts, provided that you examine them as parts of the man himself. A beautiful woman is not the one whose leg or arm is praised, but rather that woman whose entire appearance removes the need to admire her individual parts.

The image of “readerly sampling” harks back to *Ep. 2* where Lucilius suffers from readerly indigestion and signals an unmasterful relationship between reader and the body of text. I would argue that Seneca’s exhortation to the good reader to inspect and handle the text as a complete, bodily whole also calls to mind similar imagery from another exhortation in *Ep. 80*. In this letter, Seneca recommends that buyers at a slave market “pull off the garments from slaves, lest any bodily flaws escape your notice” (*detrahis vestimenta venalibus, ne qua vitia corporis lateant, 80.9*). If slave-dealers wrap up an arm or leg of a slave, the buyer must demand that they “be stripped” (*nudari*) and that “the body be shown” (*tibi corpus ostendi, 80.10*). For how, Seneca asks, “can you judge a person who is all wrapped up” (*hominem involutum aestimas*)? In the realm of textual materiality, the participle *involutum* can describe a bookroll that is closed and hence left

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88 Like Quintilian, Seneca agrees that *sententiae* are useful for aiding the memory of young boys. Hence (perhaps) why Quintilian laments (*Inst. 10.1*) that Seneca attracted the attention of boys rather than learned men, since he broke up the weightiness of his thought with so many *sententiae*. For further discussion of these passages and the role of *sententiae* in graffiti, see Milnor 2014: 175–89.
unread and unexamined. This overlap in language suggests that the good reader ought to play the part of the good enslaver, to ensure that the body of the text, like the body of the enslaved at the market, not remain “rolled up” (involutus): it must be opened, inspected, handled in full (tota tractanda).

Seneca continues (33.7-8):

certi profectus viro captare flosculos turpe est et fulcire se notissimis ac paucissimis vocibus et memoria stare; sibi iam innitatur. dicat ista, non teneat. Turpe est enim seni aut prospicienti senectutem ex commentario sapere. “Hoc Zenon dixit”; tu quid? “Hoc Cleanthes”; tu quid?...Omnes itaque istos, numquam auctores, semper interpretes sub aliena umbra latentes, nihil existit habere generosi, numquam ausos aliquando facere, quod diu didicerant...Aliud autem est meminisse, aliud scire. Meminisse est rem commissam memoriae custodire. At contra scire est et sua facere quaeque nec ad exemplar pendere et totiens respicere ad magistrum. “Hoc dixit Zenon, hoc Cleanthes!” Aliud inter te intersit et librum.

It is shameful for a man of determined progress to chase after little flowers and prop himself up with the most well-known and briefest sayings and to depend on his memory; he should be leaning on himself by now. He should make maxims, not memorize/contain them. For it is shameful for an old man or one approaching old age to rely on knowledge from a notebook. “Zenon said this.” What have you said? “This Cleanthes.” What about you? ...I think that those men—never auctores, always interpretes lurking in the shadow of someone else—possess nothing noble, never daring at any time to put into practice what they have learned for so long...it is one thing to remember, and another to know. Remembering is guarding something entrusted to the memory; knowing, however, means making everything your own; it means not depending upon the copy and not looking back so often at the teacher. “Zenon said this, Cleanthes that!” Let there be some difference between you and your book.

Seneca’s representation of this “shameful” (turpe) mode of reading is peppered with echoes of Calvisius Sabinus. A reader fails at being a real vir if he props himself up on others and is simply a container of words (teneat). Like Sabinus, who demanded his enslaved readers feed him little bits of poetry to showcase at dinner, this shameful reader pursues “little flowers” (flosculos) in his

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89 The phrase “lean on himself” (sibi...innitatur) also calls to mind the Elder Pliny, who, moments before his death on the beach near Vesuvius, “props himself up on two slaves” (innitens servolis duobus, 6.16) in order to walk, only to collapse again. Recall that we also saw a man using a slave as a walking stick in the painting from Pompeii.
reading, thus straying from the straight path, the metaphor for the philosopher-in-training’s “determined progress” (certi profectus). Seneca also recalls the Sabinus episode by employing a book-word, commentarius, to figure this kind of deficient reader: he is no better than a notebook that regurgitates what others have written.

Let us take a closer look at how this shameful, passive reader (reader as “bookish container”) is pitted against the generative reader as auctor. Seneca writes, “I think that those men—never auctores, always interpretes lurking in the shadow of someone else—possess nothing noble” (Omnes itaque istos, numquam auctores, semper interpretes sub alienas umbra latentes, nihil existimo habere generosi). The use of auctores and interpretes as representative terms for each class of readers encodes a social relationship between these categories that is analogous to that of master and enslaved. The word interpretes designates a range of occupations, including an astronomer, soothsayer, translator, legal interpreter, or grammarian. Several details here suggest that we ought to understand interpretes as linked with the profession and cultural stereotypes of grammarians, who, as Robert Kaster and James Uden have shown, were generally socially-low, marginal figures, often of enslaved origins. First, their “shadowy” presence calls to mind the popular image of the grammarian burning the midnight oil in pursuit of obscure,

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90 Cicero, Div. 2.44.

91 Cicero, Div. 2.28, 2.62.

92 interpretes as translator: Quintilian Inst. 10.1.87, Varro is a translator (interpretes) of others’ work, his writing is not contemptible (spernendus), yet he does not offer much towards “increasing one’s faculty of speaking” (augendam facultatem dicendi parum locuples). The interpretes is defined in contrast to the one who can augere, that is, a “real” author.

93 Juvenal, Sat. 4.79; 6.544; Quintilian Inst. 12.8.4.

94 Cicero, Div. 1.18.

recondite trivia.\textsuperscript{96} Juvenal, for example, represents the grammarian Q. Remmius Palaemon poring over his Horace and Vergil at night for answers to trivial questions, causing the books to be darkened by the soot of his lamps (7.222-227). Second, the \textit{interpres} is described as shamefully having “commentary-knowledge” (\textit{turpe...ex commentario sapere}). A \textit{commentarius} would have been most useful to grammarians as a set of exegetical notes that stored and regurgitated citations from other authors.\textsuperscript{97} In \textit{Ep.} 108.30-32, for example, Seneca describes how a \textit{grammaticus} would have his \textit{commentarius} to hand while reading Cicero and making note of peculiar grammatical forms. We might also recall here a remark made by Sabinus’ companion Satellius, who jokes that Sabinus “ought to use grammarians to gather up the crumbs” (\textit{ut grammaticos haberet analectas}, 27.7). \textit{analecta} is technically a term for a slave or parasite who picks up the leftovers of a meal. Martial, for example, uses \textit{analecta} to describe a parasite who pilfers the leftover food and wine from someone else’s banquet and resells it as his own (\textit{Ep.} 7.20.17). The image of \textit{grammatici} bending over and trying to make sense of Sabinus’ crumby verses is resonant with the \textit{interpres} as a reader who lurks under someone else’s shadow, eager to sample their verbal morsels (\textit{summatim degustare}), and as a result has only “piecemeal” knowledge. In each case, the imagery marks this shameful reader as someone who embodies a socially low, abject position.

\textsuperscript{96} On the grammarian as metaphorical bookworm, an insect that consumes books at random and in the dark, see Lambert 2020. The shadowy figure of the \textit{grammaticus}, and the incompatibility of their reading practices with Seneca’s project, will be discussed further below. For the shadiness of the figure, cf. Petronius, \textit{Sat.} 2: the \textit{umbraticus doctor}, cloistered pedant, whose instruction of boys has enervated speech with “flatulent and formless flow of words” and “destroyed the minds of young men” (\textit{deleverat ingenia}).

\textsuperscript{97} On the semantic range of “commentary,” see Howley 2018: 164-174. Quintilian (\textit{Inst.} 1.8.19), in a discussion of the grammarian’s \textit{enarratio historiarum} (explanation of historical/mythological allusions), refers to the \textit{commentarii} of grammarians, which are a “superfluous labor…chock full of everything ever said by even the most despised writer” and end up “smothering (boys’) talents” (\textit{obruit ingenia}). At \textit{Inst.} 3.6.59, \textit{commentarii} simply refer to “school notes / lecture notes from school.” At \textit{De Oratore} 1.5, Cicero describes his \textit{De Inventione} as “slipping out of the notebooks of my boyhood or youth” (\textit{pueris aut adolescentulis nobis ex commentariolis nostris...exciderunt}); \textit{De Inventione} is a work that largely regurgitates others’ ideas, and for Cicero as an elite man, is associated with youth rather than maturity.
Third, this reader-as-interpres is obsessed with knowing the authorship of each and every verbal quip, prefiguring Juvenal’s caricature of the grammarian Palaemon, who is expected to “know all authors like his own fingers and nails” (auctores noverit omnes / tamquam ungues digitosque suos, Sat. 7.231-32). This bad reader qua grammarian is characterized as a walking, talking book, only able to say what other authors have said, and in this way embodies the commentarius. Given the tight association between the body of the book (in particular, a puerile book) and the enslaved in Roman thought, Seneca is anxious to restrict the boundary between certain books and grown (free) men, bidding his philosophical reader-in-training to “let there be some difference between you and your book” (aliquid inter se intersit et librum). Real knowledge (sapere), the epistemology proper to the free Roman vir, cannot be extracted (or be shown to be extracted) from a book. Bookish or schoolroom knowledge, by extension, belongs to the unfree and is turpe for the Roman vir.

By invoking the grammaticus and his puerile textual apparatus, Seneca conveys the shame a fully grown man should feel to embody the readerly practices of such a socially marginal figure. This bad reader embodies a negative paradox: he has progressed so far in his life, yet in his reading practices (and implicitly in his inner character) he’s heading backwards, in the wrong direction, looking back (respicere) to another authority (quite literally a “copy”, exemplar, as if he were a scribe or grammarian), rather than transforming what he’s read into “his own” (sua). Good reading, on the other hand, results in real knowledge (scire), not mere “storage” of information. After all, “storing” or “preserving” (custodire/φυλάττειν) is just one part of being a successful enslaver: for

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98 In Ep. 14, Lucilius is scolded for asking about the authorship of a sententia (ede...auctorem).

99 One might also consider the connection between the notebook, servile profession of the grammarian, and schoolboy learning (the puer as both (free) boy and enslaved, the frequent figuring in Latin poetry of the book-as-slave as specifically a puer (e.g., Catullus 1, 15; Horace, Ep. 1.20; Sat. 1.10.92).
Aristotle (Oec. 1344b23-28), the enslaver must also improve his property (κοσμητικόν) and put it to good use (χρηστικόν). Following this model, the best readers are readers who are also generative “authors” (auctores). The Latin word auctor can mean “author” (i.e., writer, whence English ‘author’) but, as its root augēre suggests, more broadly designates the person who originates, generates, or enhances something. This model of reading as “authorship” is emphatically masterful as well as manly: auctor can also signify “father” or “male progenitor.” On the other hand, the reader-as-interpres is not generosus, an adjective that means noble, of good lineage, but also “generous” in the sense of having the power to amplify or increase the gens. This connotation of productivity and enhancement relates directly to Seneca’s masterly conception of the good reader as auctor, that is, one who can “increase” and “grow” (augere) the material he consumes or acquires. The ideal reader-as-auctor is thus a double for the paterfamilias, whose task, Seneca claims elsewhere, is to “make more ample what we have received (agamus bonum patrem familiae, faciamus ampliora quae accepimus, 64.7).”

1.4 Reading like Bees (Ep. 84)

Seneca’s masculine and masterly notion of the reader as author/auctor finds its fullest expression in Epistle 84. At the start of this letter, we find Seneca in a state of readerly indigestion and taking his studies on the road (84.1):

*itineria ista, quae segni*iat mihi excutiunt, et valitudini meae prodesse iudico et studiis. quare valitudinem adiuvent, vides: cum pigrum me et neglegentem corporis litterarum amor faciat, aliena opera exerceor; studio quare prosint, indicabo: a lectionibus nihil recessi.*

I hold those journeys—which shake the sloth out of me—to be beneficial both to my health and my studies. Here’s how they benefit my health: since my love of literature makes me lazy and neglectful of my body, I exercise myself through someone else’s labor; here’s how they benefit my studies: I have not at all regressed in my reading.
The ablative of instrument, *aliena opera*, tells us that Seneca is not reading alone: rather, he is in at least the presence of slaves who carry him about, exercising him in his litter. Seneca continues:

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\text{nec tantum legere debemus; altera res contristabit vires et exauriet, de stilo dico, altera solvet ac diluet. invicem hoc et illo commeandum est et alterum altero temperandum, ut quicquid lectione collectum est, stilus redigat in corpus.}
\]

We mustn’t solely write, nor should we just read; continual writing will cast a gloom over our strength and sap it dry, while constant reading will render it flabby and watery. One must alternately mingle one with the other and blend them together, so that the writing-stilus may direct into a body whatever has been collected in reading.

It is likely that Seneca is able to keep up his studies on the road—mingling together both reading and writing—through the use of enslaved readers and secretaries, recalling Pliny the Younger’s description of his uncle taking his enslaved *notarius* with him wherever he traveled, even in winter, lest he squander any time for his studies (*Ep. 3.5*). The passive phrasing of “whatever has been collected in reading” (*quicquid lectione collectum est*) is certainly suggestive of the labor of an occluded, enslaved *notarius*. And who, moreover, is manipulating the *stilus*? There is no personal subject in this final sentence. Its animation and direction to write is also suggestive of an enslaved *notarius*. The *stilus*, then, likely operated by an enslaved *notarius*, directs what has been collected in reading (by an enslaved reader) into a “body” (*corpus*). What or whose body is this? Is it the first *corpus* we meet in the letter, Seneca’s own body, which he has ‘neglected’ (*neglegentem*) through binge-reading? Or is this *corpus* the textual ‘body,’ which the writing-*stilus* brings into shape on (invisible) wax tablets? In his 1983 essay “L’Écriture de soi,” Michel Foucault understands this “body” to be the new self that is created through “assimilative writing” (l’écriture assimilatrice, 1983: 13):

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100 “Passive” exercise, such as riding in a litter, is recognized by ancient medical writers. See Johnson 2010: 37.
It is one’s own soul that must be composed in one’s writings. But as a man bears on his visage a natural resemblance to his ancestors, so likewise is it well that we should be able to recognize in his writings the ancestry of those thoughts which have been engraved on his soul. Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form for oneself an identity, upon which can be read an entire spiritual genealogy.

For Foucault, writing and writer are inseparable from one another: writing bears not only the stamp of its creator, but also the genealogy of his thoughts. But the genealogy of Seneca’s textual corpus becomes much more complicated and fraught when we pose the question of who is actually reading and writing here. Seneca’s “identity” as expressed in his writing is predicated upon extracting multiple forms of enslaved labor: those exercising him in his litter, those reading aloud to him, and those taking down his thoughts on wax tablets. Seneca’s language in this passage enables him to maintain a sense of control over both the bodies of the enslaved literary workers as well as the corpus of work that he generates through their labor. By using the bodies of enslaved workers to “temper” reading with writing, Seneca is also concerned with tempering his own performance of masculinity: continual writing—or continual dictation to an enslaved scribe—will sap Seneca’s manly strength (vires) while constant reading, or being read to, will render his manly constitution flabby.

Once again, we can understand what Seneca is doing here through Sara Ahmed’s theorization of “paperless philosophy.” For Ahmed, “paperless philosophy” explains “how philosophy might be oriented toward a certain kind of body, one for whom materiality would be an unnecessary distraction, one who has time freed for contemplation by how others do the paperwork, the domestic work, the care work...” Ahmed’s “paperless philosophy” helps us lay

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101 On Foucault’s essay and this letter more generally, see Graver 2014.

bare how this scene functions as part of Seneca’s highly gendered and classed readerly program. In his “paperless reading,” Seneca papers over the labor of his slaves to fuel his sense of himself as an elite, masculine reader and writer.

This ideology is further reinforced when Seneca urges his reader to imitate bees. The figure of the bee as poet/writer has a long literary history. The bee-poet is a familiar convention in archaic lyric poetry (e.g. Pi. P. 4.60-61, HHer. 553-66, Bach. 10.10) and is sustained in later poets like Callimachus (H.Ap. 110-12) and Horace (Od. 4.2.27-32).103 Yet it is also one of the most common metaphorical schemes that materializes the ideal, affective qualities of the elite, male reader, who is ‘masterful,’ industrious, and generative. Plutarch, for example, upholds bees as ideal reader-gatherers, setting them against women who gather flower garlands (On Listening 41E-F):

διὸ δεῖ τὸ πολὺ καὶ κενὸν ἀφαιροῦντα τῆς λέξεως αὐτὸν διόκειν τὸν καρπὸν καὶ μιμεῖσθαι μὴ τὰς στεφανηπλόκους ἄλλα τὰς μελίττας. αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐπιοῦσαι τὰ ἀνθηρά καὶ εὐώδη τὸν φύλλων συνείρουσι καὶ διαπλέκουσιν ἡδὺ μὲν ἐφήμερον δὲ καὶ ἀκαρπον ἔργον. αἱ δὲ πολλάκις Ἰω καὶ ρόδων καὶ ὑακίνθων διαπέτομαι λειμωνάς ἐπὶ τὸν τραχύτατον καὶ δριμύτατον θύμων καταίρουσι καὶ τοῦτο προσκάθηναι, “ζανθὸν μέλι μηδόμεναι,” καὶ λαβοῦσαι τὸν χρησίμων ἀποτελοῦσαι πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἔργον.

One ought therefore to strip off the superfluity and inanity from the style, and to seek after the fruit itself, imitating not women that make garlands, but the bees. For those women, culling flower-clusters and sweet-scented leaves, intertwine and plait them, and produce something which is pleasant enough, but short-lived and fruitless; whereas the bees in their flight frequently pass through meadows of violets, roses, and hyacinths, and come to rest upon the exceedingly rough and pungent thyme, and on this they settle, “making the yellow honey their care,” and when they have got something of it, they fly away home to their own special work.104

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103 Yet see Worman 2015: 55 for how literary theorists police the potentially emasculating “floral feminine mode,” and 151-153 for a discussion of how Aristophanes (Birds 748-50; Frogs 1003) and Plato (Ion 534a7-b3) appropriate this “bee-poet” trope in order to make fun of poets and produce caricatures of poetic inspiration. For bees more generally see Davies and Kathirithamby 1986: 70-72; Waszink 1974.

104 Translation and text from Babbitt 1927. Plutarch also invokes the figure of the bee and the same line of Simonides at Progress in Virtue 79C-D.
Women are drawn by superficial attractions, culling colorful, sweet-scented flowers to weave garlands that are pretty but ephemeral. The good (male) reader, on the other hand, should treat his raw material like the bee. He must resist the temptations of the colors and smells that (apparently) distract women and instead collect something more substantial and useful (χρησίμων) for generating his own product. For Plutarch, the male reader draws on his reading material to produce and enhance something that uniquely belongs to him (οἰκεῖον ἔργον), while the female “gatherer” makes a product that is ultimately unfertile and “fruitless” (ἄκαρπον ἔργον). The adjective οἰκεῖον brings home (so to speak) the appropriative and productive aspects of ‘good’ reading, taking as its point of departure the οἶκος and all the property that belongs to its owner.

Like Plutarch, Seneca draws on the figure of the bee to materialize a similar set of readerly affects (84.3):

apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quicquid attulere, disponunt ac per favos digerunt et, ut Vergilius noster ait, “liquentia mella / stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas.”

We ought to imitate, as they say, the bees, which wander and pluck flowers fit for making honey; then they arrange whatever they have gathered and closely pack it into cells and, as our Vergil says, “they pack close the flowing honey and swell their cells with sweet nectar.”

He goes on to claim that honey is not in fact produced directly from the process of gathering “juice” (sucum) from a number of flowers (which would align bees with the non-ideal reader as regurgitative interpres), but rather that bees transform this mixture into honey through a “certain property of their breath” (proprietate spiritus sui mutent, 84.5). The bee’s proprietas symbolizes each reader’s individual ability to transform his reading material into something that uniquely belongs to him, that is, something proprium. Recall that back at Ep. 2, Seneca advocates for
reading *familiariter* (“intimately”) in order to make what he reads “his own” (*sua*) rather than remain “someone else’s” (*aliena*). *familiariter*, like Plutarch’s *oikeion*, derives from the household property (*familia*) and emphasizes the proprietary relation between the reader/owner and his books/property, including enslaved people.

Like Plutarch, Seneca is also concerned about the gendered implications of different reading practices. Recall that Seneca warned at the start of this letter that continual reading will “render one’s strength flabby and watery” (*vires…solvet ac diluet*, 84.2). The figure of the bee works perfectly to embody the two-fold process of consumption and (useful) production expected of Seneca’s ideal, male reader. Seneca has carefully culled verses from Vergil’s *Aeneid* (*liquentia mella / stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas, Aen.* 1.432-433) so as to link the bee-as-reader to masculinity, since these bees are used by the poet to figure the men who build Carthage.105 For Seneca, as for Plutarch, the bee embodies a properly masculine style of reading, impervious to the excessive pleasure and ultimate fruitlessness involved in superficial, feminine consumption.106 As Nancy Worman has observed, poets commonly invoke the trope of the flower-culling bee to indicate their mastery over certain poetic styles and genres.107 In turn, the reader as flower-culling-bee maps (good) reading onto masculinist mastery over materials (like flowers, or *sententiae*) that have feminine associations.

But the example of bees also raises the possibility that Seneca is negotiating more complex power dynamics of reading and writing. Remember that part of Seneca’s project here is to center the elite male readerly subject over and against the contributions of enslaved people

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106 cf. Gellius *NA* 3.1 on how extreme acquisitiveness in reading translates to effeminacy in the mind and body.

107 Worman 2015, especially Ch. 2.
who enable his mingling of reading, writing, and travel/exercise. It is important, I think, that Seneca urges the imitation not just of a single bee but of multiple: this conveys the image of the ideal, elite reader as an enslaver managing a collective group of enslaved literary workers. Seneca’s citation of Vergil’s bees calls to mind the bees from Book 4 of Vergil’s *Georgics*, a poem that is notorious for its effacement of the enslaved. William Fitzgerald, however, has argued that these bees of *Georgics* 4 may represent a “slave gang.” On this reading, the elite reader is closely linked with the *dominus* who, rather than clipping the daisies himself, manages a collective of enslaved workers.

An interesting linkage between enslavement, the management of bees, and the cultivation of Roman, elite male identity appears in the *Res Rustica* of Seneca’s contemporary, Columella. Columella’s twelve-volume work begins by ascribing the declining state of Roman agricultural yield to the absence of and poor management by enslavers, “who have handed over agriculture—which the greatest of our ancestors managed themselves in the best way—to the worst of our slaves, as if to the executioner for punishment” (*qui rem rusticam pessimo cuique servorum velut carnifici noxae dedimus, quam maiorum nostrorum optimus quisque et optime tractaverat*, 1.pr.3). For Columella, it is key that the *dominus* himself effectively manage the enslaved *villa* workers, and most importantly, the enslaved *vilicus* or overseer. In this context, an interesting detail emerges in Columella’s discussion of beekeeping: he claims that beekeeping is a special task that cannot be entrusted to the enslaved *vilicus* or workers. Ideally, it will be “under the supervision of the master” (*sub oculis domini, 9.5*), since it is an affair that requires “the greatest amount of fidelity, which, because it is very rare, is more safely secured through the intervention of the master” (*maximam fidem desiderat; quae quoniam rarissima est, interventu domini tutius*

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108 Fitzgerald 2021: 244.
The *dominus* must ensure that beekeeping not be entrusted to a “fraudulent” (*fradulentum*) or “lazy” (*segnitiae*) *vilicus*. Here, we might recall that Seneca’s exhortation to imitate bees in one’s reading occurs within the context of a “journey” which “shakes the sloth” out of him (*segnitiam mihi excutiunt*). Like Columella’s *dominus*, Seneca’s ideal reader “handles” the bees himself, thoroughly overseeing their work, appropriating their labor as his own, and shirking any charge of “laziness” (*segnitia*) and its servile connotations.

Further, in light of Columella’s statement that beekeeping requires *maximam fidelitatem*, we can more clearly see how Seneca’s choice of the bee-metaphor for a kind of reading that is mingled with writing is underpinned by an elite anxiety about the “fidelity” of texts that are (in reality) “authored” collaboratively through enslaved labor. *Fides* is the quality of both the trustworthy slave and a reliable text. Martial, for example, praises his enslaved *amanuensis* Demetrius, calling him the “faithful hand of my studies” (*fida manus studiorum*) and manumitting him upon his death so that he may descend to the Underworld as both *liber* (free) and a book (*liber*). Aulus Gellius, moreover, designates reliable manuscripts of Cicero by invoking the care and “fidelity” of Tiro, Cicero’s freedman secretary (e.g., *NA* 1.7.1, *in libro spectatae fidei Tironiana cura* and 13.21.16, *antiquissimae fidei libro Tironiano*). As the reliable slave is *fidelis* to his owner, a text is marked by its fidelity to its author’s intent (and thus by the enslaved or freedman secretary’s ability to faithfully mediate what his owner dictates). When a text bears an error, however, the blame lies not with the enslaver/author but rather with the servile mediator and his failure to attend faithfully to what his owner meant to say (as Tiro does at *NA* 15.6.1-2).\(^{109}\) As Seneca rode in his litter and dictated to an enslaved secretary, he must have been all too aware that the material production of his ideas depended on mediation by

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\(^{109}\) For discussion of these passages from Gellius and Tiro as servile mediator, see Howley 2018: 176-79.
another person. The bee-metaphor, on the other hand, feeds the fantasy that Seneca is seamlessly orchestrating this work himself: whatever these worker bees produce shall faithfully bear the mark of their *dominus/auctor*.

Seneca concludes this letter with an injunction to mimic the bodily process of digestion, “which we see nature doing in our bodies without any labor on our part...let our mind hide away everything by which it has been aided, let it show only what it has produced” (*quod in corpore nostro videmus sine ulla opera nostra facere naturam...animus noster omnia, quibus est adiutus, abscondat, ipsum tantum ostendat, quod effecit*, 84.6-7). Seneca’s citation of “the natural” rhetorically works to conceal the labor that goes into reading, writing, and the production of his own elite, male selfhood: “bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force,” Sara Ahmed writes. “The work of repetition involves the concealment of labour under the sign of nature.”

Throughout the *Epistles*, the reader is directed to repeat the script of “paperless philosophy” as part of his elite, self-conditioning. “Bad readers” like Sabinus and the *interpres*—who overly rely on enslaved readers and a *commentarius*—help us surface the “work” that underpins “paperless philosophy.” In *Ep.* 84, Seneca provides a further script for ensuring that the elite enslaver develops an epistemology of reading that lays claim to the *corpus* of ideas that he and his enslaved literary workers collaboratively generate.

### 1.5 Reading Like a Grammarian (*Ep.* 88, 108)

We have already seen how Seneca admonishes his ideal reader-in-training against embodying the grammarian through the figure of the *interpres* in *Ep.* 33. This section further examines how Seneca represents the grammarian as a socially abject double to the masterful,
philosophical reader. In skewering the grammarian, Seneca exhibits attitudes and prejudices held by many contemporary elites. Despite, or perhaps because, these men were “guardians” of the language of the elite, a line had to be drawn between grammatici as intellectuals and the elite. “It was always easy,” Uden writes, “to insult a grammaticus by focusing on the fact that he taught for pay. Their trivialization as “mere” teachers reflects the anxieties they generated about the professionalization of intellectual labor and the influence of low-status individuals on the cultural formation of the elite.” As we turn to Seneca’s representations of grammatici in Epistles 108 and 88, it will be important to keep in mind that these men were more than “mere teachers,” even if Seneca boxes them and their intellectual production into that narrow category.

**Ep. 108**

Ep. 108 imagines how the philosophical reader and grammarian would in theory deal differently with the same reading material. Seneca laments that “what was philosophy has become the study of words” (itaque quae philosophia fuit, facta philologia est, 108.23). To shore up the difference these two enterprises, Seneca gives a little demo on how a grammaticus and a philosophus would read the same line of Vergil (108.24):

> Multum autem ad rem pertinet, quo proposito ad quamquam rem accedas. Qui grammaticus futurus Vergilium scrutatur, non hoc animo legit illud egregium: fugit inreparabile tempus; vigilandum est; nisi properamus, relinquemur; agit nos agiturque velox dies; inscii rapimur; omnia in futurum disponimus et inter praecipitia lenti sumus. sed ut observet, quotiens Vergilius de celeritate temporum dicit, hoc uti verbo illum “fugit”

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111 Uden 2020: 578.

112 As Uden (2020: 578) notes, “Some of Suetonius’ grammatici (Servius Clodius, Verrius Flaccus, Palaemon) were inarguably scholars of lasting repute as well as working teachers, even though Suetonius gives very little details about their scholarly activities or ideas. Other figures in the DGR perform different sorts of intellectual labor as poets, speech-writers, or political aides, and may indeed have made little contribution to traditions of philological research.”
Moreover, it is very pertinent with what mindset you approach a given subject. A man who is to be a grammarian and examines Vergil does not read this noble verse “unrestorable time flees” in the following way: “We must wake up; if we don’t hurry, we’ll be left behind; the swift day rolls ahead and drives us; we are swept along, unknowingly; we arrange all plans for the future and we are at ease at a precipice.”

Rather (the grammarian reads this verse) to observe how many times Vergil, in speaking about the quickness of time, uses the word “flees.”

The grammaticus is absorbed with pedantic, philological inquiry, tracing the uses of fugit in Vergil’s works, a readerly mode that necessitates that he quite literally will wander about through various texts. The philosophus, by contrast, has immediately applied the phrase of Vergil to his own life, urging himself to hasten, which Seneca emphasizes through a rapid sequence of pithy phrases (vigilandum est; nisi properamus, relinquemur, etc.). He has fulfilled Seneca’s injunction from Ep. 33 to make maxims himself, rather than memorize or reproduce in a book those of others. It is fitting, of course, that the line of Vergil chosen by Seneca to stage this read-off is about the swift passage of time, a theme that is germane to the Epistles from the very beginning. In Ep. 1, as we saw, Seneca urges the reader to “free himself” and transfer the metaphorical condition of enslavement onto time. Seneca calls on his readers to appropriate time (“let every day…be made our own possession,” quisque…dies…redigatur in nostrum, 108.27), recalling his earlier claim that the “writing stylus” ought to “redirect” whatever one has read into the/a body (redigat in corpus, 84.2). What’s more, the good, philosophical reader must engage in this readerly appropriation with a dominating sense of urgency: “what flees must be taken into possession” (quod fugit, occupandum est, 108.28). Time, like a fugitivus servus, flees (fugit).

This pithy phrase reinforces the recurring figuration of the good reader as enslaver, who lays claim to his reading material. The grammaticus, on the other hand, squanders his time in reading: far from gaining the upper hand over “time,” the grammarian remains bogged down in books, a

113 On this passage from the perspective of Stoic hermeneutics, see Batinsky 1993.
“bent” bodily (and implicitly lower intellectual) disposition that Seneca associates with banausic and servile labor (cf. Ep. 90, discussed momentarily).

Seneca also suggests that different kinds of readers are “naturally” disposed to read the same text in different ways by importing a metaphor from the realm of nature: “There is no reason to marvel that each man collects from the same material whatever is fit for his own studies; in the same meadow the cow seeks grass, the dog the hare, the stork the lizard” (non est quod mireris ex eadem materia suis quemque studiis apta colligere; in eodem prato bos herbam quaerit, canis leporem, ciconia lacertam, 108.29).114 The animal metaphor might indicate that there is no hierarchy between different readers: to each their own. The picture becomes more complicated, however, when Seneca describes the ‘natural’ readerly impulses of three men—the philologus, grammaticus, and “man dedicated to philosophy” (philosophiae deditus)—when they read Cicero’s De Re Publica (108.30-32):

Philosophus admiratur contra iustitiam dici tam multa potuisse. Cum ad hanc eandem lectionem philologus accessit, hoc subnotat: Duos Romanos reges esse, quorum alter patrem non habet, alter matrem. Nam de Servi matre dubitatur; Anci pater nullus, Numae nepotis, dicitur. Praeterea notat eum, quem nos dictorem dicimus et in historiis ita nominari legimus, apud antiquos magistrum populi vocatum. Hodieque id extat in auguralibus libris…Aequo notat Romulum perisse solis defectione; provocacionem ad populum etiam a regibus fuisse; id ita in pontificialibus libris esse…Eosdem libros cum grammaticus explicuit, primum verba expressa, reapse dici a Cicerone, id est re ipsa, in commentarium refert, nec minus sepse, id est se ipse. Deinde transit ad ea quae consuetudo saeculi mutavit…

The philosopher marvels that so much could have been said against justice. When the philologist has approached the same reading, he makes the following note: there were two Roman kings, one of whom did not have a father, the other a mother. For there is confusion about the mother of Servius, and no father is spoken of for Ancus, the grandson of Numa. Additionally he also notes that the man whom we call a dictator and whom we read is called this way in our histories was called in ancient times the magister populi; such is the name that exists today in the augural books…he also notes that Romulus died.

114 Plutarch (On How the Young Man Should Study Poetry 30D) uses a very similar comparison to differentiate between different readers of poetry: the φιλόμυθος, φιλόλογος, and the φιλότιμος/φιλόκαλος, who takes up poetry not as a παιγνίον but rather “for the sake of παιδεία,” rooting around for examples of manliness, self-control, and moral uprightness.
during a solar eclipse; that there was an appeal to the people even from the kings; this is so according to the pontifical books...When the grammarian has unrolled the same books, he puts down in his notebook first the forms of words, that *reapse* (that is, *re ipsa*) is used by Cicero, no less *sepse*, that is, *se ipse*. Then he shifts to the words which current usage has changed...

In this passage, Seneca elevates the philosopher-reader over the *philologus* and *grammaticus*. Although the philosopher receives the least attention, with his reading summed up in one short sentence, brevity is itself a virtue for Seneca. Each verb speaks volumes: the philosopher “marvels” (*admiratur*) that so much could have been “said” (*dici*) against justice. The philosopher reads and responds to Cicero through his mind. The verb *admiratur* suggests an elevated response, while *dici* indicates that the reader has enabled the text’s author to speak, engaging with Cicero as if he were a dialogic, philosophical interlocutor. Meanwhile, when the *philologus* and *grammaticus* start reading, the image of unmediated, intellectual communion with Cicero is brought down to earth. The *grammaticus* roots around for pedantic trivia on the historical forms of words and the *philologus* for details relating to the historical genealogy of the kings. What’s more, material texts—nowhere present in the philosopher’s reading—land with a thud: the *philologus* takes notes (*subnotat*; *notat*) and consults other books (*auguralibus libris*; *pontificalibus libris*). The *grammaticus* is seen even unrolling the book (*explicuit*) and taking notes in his “notebook” (*commentarium*), the very same book that Seneca used to figure the inferior knowledge of the *interpres* in *Ep. 33*. Any ‘material’ that these two readers are gleaning from Cicero’s *DRP* is transferred straight into another book rather than processed in their minds and translated into their life, à la “paperless philosophy.”

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115 A similar outcome of reading is showcased by the bad miscellany Gellius receives from a friend of his at *NA* 14.6, discussed further below.
The hierarchy between the philosopher as reader and philologist / grammarian as readers is made explicit in the next section of the letter (108.35):

Sed ne et ipse, dum aliud ago, in philologum aut grammaticum delabar, illud admoveo, auditionem philosophorum lectionemque ad propositum beatae vitae trahendam, non ut verba prisca aut ficta captemus et translationes inprobas figurasque dicendi, sed ut profutura praecepta et magnificas voces et animosas, quae mox in rem transferantur. Sic ista ediscamus, ut quae fuerint verba, sint opera.

But lest I too, while I am doing something else, slip down towards the philologist or grammarian, I advise this, that the study and reading of philosophers should be applied to the outset goal of the blessed life, and we should not hunt out ancient or far-fetched words and eccentric metaphors and figures of speech, but rather beneficial precepts and magnificent and spiritful sayings, which soon can be translated into action. Let us thoroughly learn them like this: so that words may become deeds.

The philologist’s and grammarian’s respective use of notes and a notebook represent puerile (and, recalling Ep. 33, “servile”) stages of learning: where the bad reader of Ep. 33 was shamed for “hunting out little flowers” (flosculos captare), so the bad readers here are drawn to hunting down outdated and fanciful phrases (verba prisca...captemus). Seneca’s fear that his reader “slip down” (delabar) the readerly hierarchy has a social dimension in addition to a literary one. Quintilian criticizes grammatici in a similar vein to Seneca, remarking on their practice of tediously commenting on every detail of every page of an author’s work: such a reader ought to “turn his attention to old wives’ tales” and by implication, keep his hands off “real,” manly literature (anilibus quoque fabulis accommodare operam potest, 1.8.18-19). fabulae aniles, as William Owens has noted, are associated with the kinds of stories enslaved women would have told, potentially to other slaves and/or to children they nursed. In the elite literary imagination, the grammaticus and his real-life, servile associations ought to caution the (free, elite) reader against slipping down the social and intellectual ladder.

In negotiating this epistemological hierarchy between the *philosophus* and *grammaticus*, Seneca has the *philosophus* “read” and respond with his mind, and the *grammaticus* with his hands, thus associating the *grammaticus* more broadly with banausic and servile embodiment. We can track how this association plays out more broadly in Seneca’s philosophical project in *Ep.* 90. Musing on the relationship between human progress and philosophy, Seneca objects to Posidonius’ claim that “mechanical tools were the invention of wise men” (*ferramenta fabrilia excogitate a sapientibus viris iudicat*, 90.11). Seneca is railing against inventions (like roofs, hammers, farming, milling, etc.) which foster luxury, but he is equally concerned with degrading the low-status workers who produce them: they are not invented by a man whose mind was “great and exalted” (*non magni nec elati*) but rather by “a bent body and a mind that looks upon the ground” (*corporere incurvato et animo humum spectante*, 90.13). Interesting for my purposes is Seneca’s description of the invention of shorthand: “what of the signs for words, through which a speech, however rapidly uttered, is taken down, and the hand follows the speed of the tongue? That is the invention of the lowest type of enslaved chattel: wisdom lives higher, and she is the teacher of the mind, not the hand” (*quid verborum notas, quibus quamvis citata excipitur oratio et celeritatem linguæ manus sequitur? vilissimorum mancipiorum ista commenta sunt; sapientia altius sedet nec manus edocet, animorum magistra est*, 90.25-26).\(^{117}\) Seneca likely benefitted from enslaved stenographers who used shorthand themselves—and no doubt from grammarians in his early education—but he imposes a strict bifurcation between elite and banausic, low-status knowledge to shore up his sense of elite, male embodiment.

\(^{117}\) The details of Latin shorthand are murky: it is generally associated with the enslaved, and there is a (fantastical) tradition that claims that Tiro invented it. Seneca’s language here is reminiscent of Martial’s epigram about the enslaved stenographer who finishes the line before the “tongue” is done speaking (14.208). We also have papyrological evidence for Greek shorthand: see P. 6755 for an example of Greek tachygraphy and P.Oxy.4.724 for an enslaved person apprenticed to learn shorthand.
In *Ep. 88*, we gain further insight into how Seneca projects anxieties of class and social status onto the *grammaticus* as inferior reader. Here, the *grammaticus* emerges as a ‘servile’ reader in contrast to the man who pursues ‘liberal’ studies, which are so-called because (88.2):

> homine libero digna sunt. ceterum unum studium vere liberale est, quod liberum facit. hoc est sapientiae, sublime, forte, magnanimum. cetera pusilla et puertilia sunt; an tu quicquam in istis esse credis boni, quorum professores turpissimos omnium ac flagitiosissimos cernis? non discere debemus ista, sed didicisse.

they are worthy of a free man. But there is really one liberal pursuit, which gives a man his liberty. This is the pursuit of wisdom, which is lofty, brave, great-souled. The rest are trifling and puerile; yet do you believe that there is anything good in those other pursuits, whose teachers you observe to be the most shameful and disgraceful of all? We ought to have learned such things, not still be learning them.

Rather than pursuing wisdom, the *grammaticus* (88.3-4):

> circa curam sermonis versatur et, si latius evagari vult, circa historias, iam ut longissimi fines suos proferat, circa carmina. quid horum ad virtutem viam sternit? syllabarum enarratio et verborum diligentia et fabularum memoria et versuum lex ac modificatio? quid ex his metum demit, cupiditatem eximit, libidinem frenat?

busies himself with investigations of speech and, if he wishes to wander further ahead, he works on history, or if he would extend his range to the farthest limits, on poetry. But which of these paves the path to virtue? Pronouncing syllables, investigating words, memorizing plays, or making rules for the scansion of poetry—what is there in all this that rids one of fear, roots out desire, orbridles the passion?

Seneca’s objections to the grammarian’s superficial processing of texts echo those we just saw in 108. Furthermore, his progress in reading—figured in the language of travel (*circa... versatur; evagari*)—embodies the wrong kind movement, circuitous and vagrant, which we know by now is associated with the errant slave. This readerly orientation, with its implicit servile associations,
does not “pave the path to virtue” (*ad virtutem viam sternit*): Seneca’s ideal reader must remain impervious to such distractions, and in doing so, embody a bodily integrity that is associated with *virtus*, the elite masculinity associated with the free *vir*. None of the grammarian’s exegetical activities Seneca catalogues will help his ideal reader control the feminizing and servile affects of fear, desire, or lust (*metum*...*cupiditatem*...*libidinem*).

The meandering pursuits of the *grammaticus* also call to mind the threat posed by the encircling crowd (*turba circumeat*), which in *Ep.* 32 threatens to “twist” (*detorqueri*, 32.2) Lucilius away from the goal of the philosophical life. If we are unsteady (*inconstantia*) and let our mind be “stirred by wandering thoughts” (*vagis cogitationibus agitata mens*), we end up “reducing life to particles and frittering it away” (*diducimus illam in partículas ac lancinamus*, 32.2). The phrase *diducimus*...*partículas* even invokes the reading practices of the grammarian. *partícula*, the diminutive of *pars*, can rhetorically signify a clause of a sentence or a grammatical particle, and *diducere* can refer to the grammatical division of parts of speech. If in 88 and 108 we see how the grammarian’s reading produces bits and pieces of linguistic and historical trivia, in 32 we see the imagined consequences of such reading practice come to life: this trivia might be the very stuff that a dazzling, distracting sophistic speaker would showcase to a public crowd, a practice that in Seneca’s Rome would increasingly be associated with Greek sophists from the eastern Mediterranean.

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118 Grammarians and their ilk are often represented as squandering their life away too, thus becoming pale and sickly. More on this in discussion of *Ep.* 108. We might also compare Calvisius Sabinus from *Ep.* 27, who pours all his energy into the superficial appearance of learnedness to the neglect of his body, which is “sickly, pale, thin” (*aegrum*, *pallidum*, *gracilem*, 27.8).

119 Quintilian *Inst.* 4.5.25, 9.4.69.

120 Gellius *NA* 2.17.6, 2.19.3, 7.7.6.

121 Quintilian *Inst.* 1.4.20, 1.5.40.
The ill-directedness and superficiality of the grammarian’s readerly pose comes into clearer focus later on in the letter. Here, Seneca uses the example of Odysseus—a ‘wanderer’ if there ever was one—to clarify the differences between the deportment of good and bad readers (88.6-8):

Hoc quidem me quaerere, uter maior aetate fuerit, Homerus an Hesiodus, non magis ad rem pertinet quam scire, cum minor Hecuba fuerit quam Helena, quare tam male tulerit aetatem. Quid? Inquam, annos Patrocli et Achillis inquirere ad rem existimas pertinere? Quaeris, Vlixes ubi erraverit, potius quam efficias, ne nos semper erremus? […] Hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus navigem.

It does not matter more to me to investigate this—who was greater in age, Homer or Hesiod—than to know why Hecuba, although younger than Helen, bore her age so badly. What, I say, do you think matters in determining the age of Patroclus and Achilles? Are you asking, where did Ulysses wander, instead of trying to prevent us from always going astray? […] Teach me [by example of Ulysses] this: how I should love my country, my wife, my father, how I should sail to these honorable ends, even if I am shipwrecked.

Seneca reads (what we would call) literature as a manual for navigating his own life, in order to learn how to control his feelings of love, how to avoid ‘wandering’ like the erro (ne nos semper erremus) from the best, moral path.122 He skewers the reader who endlessly wanders about in pedantic inquiry and asks of the text the kinds of questions grammarians were wont to ask.123 Similar sorts of questions—the product of “wide and scattered and far-flung readings”—land with a thud in book-form in a passage from Gellius’ Attic Nights, illustrating just how persistent this negative attitude towards grammarians is: here, a man presents Gellius with a “book of great

122 There is an echo of Plato’s Phaedrus here (229D-230A), where Socrates sets aside questions of mythological pedantry (what form were the Hippocentaurs and the Chimera and other monsters?) and instead looks into himself (σκοπῶ ὁ ταῦτα ἄλλα ἔμαθόν), asking himself whether he is a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon or a tamer, simpler animal…

123 Other examples in Lambert 2020.
bulk, overflowing with learning” (*librum grandi volume doctrinae omnigenus...praescatentem*, 14.6.1). When Gellius reads it, he finds it contains “what the names of the companions of Ulysses were who were seized and ripped to shreds by Scylla; whether Ulysses wandered in the inner sea, following Aristarchus, or in the outer sea, following Krates” (*atque illud etiam scriptum fuit, quae nomina fuerint sociorum Ulixis, qui a Scylla rapti laceratique sunt; utrum ἐν τῇ ἔσω θαλάσσῃ Ulixes erraverit κατ᾽Αρίσταρχον an ἐν τῇ ἔξω κατὰ Κράτητα, 14.6.3-4*). Gellius rejects this book and mode of reading as not at all useful for improving one’s own life and character, keeping with his generally negative attitude towards grammarians as inferior intellectuals.¹²⁴ For Seneca, this bad reading also produces bulky material, embodied by the four thousand books compiled by the Greek *grammaticus* Didymus.¹²⁵ In such books, Didymus investigates more of the same questions: where Homer was born, who was the mother of Aeneas, etc. Apparently books of this sort were circulating with some popularity in Rome: Seneca claims that, even among the Romans, there are many books like Didymus’ that “ought to be cut down with an axe” (*ostendam multa securibus recidenda*, 88.38).

This reading practice that produces a dense, dark forest of superficial material constitutes a metaphorical and literal roadblock to the man on the straight path to *virtus* and philosophical *lumen* (88.38-39):

> Magno impendio temporum, magna alienarum aurium molestia laudatio haec constat: 'o hominem litteratum!' Simus hoc titulo rusticiore contenti: 'o virum bonum!' Itane est? annales evolvam omnium gentium et quis primus carmina scripserit quaeam? quantum temporis inter Orphea interst et Homerum, cum fastos non habeam, computabo? et Aristarchi ineptias, quibus aliena carmina compunxit recognoscam, et aetatem in syllabis conteram?

> “What a learned person!” This sort of praise comes as a result of a huge outlay of time and a great annoyance to the ears of others. Let’s be content with this (more rustic) title:

¹²⁴ On which see Vardi 2001.

¹²⁵ Quintilian also discourages this kind of reading, using Didymus to make an example (*Inst. 1.8.19*).
“What a good man!” Does this mean I should unroll the annals of all races and find out who was the first man to write poetry? Or, if I don’t have written records, should I calculate how much time lies between Orpheus and Homer? Or should I look over the trifles of Aristarchus, in which he branded the verses of other men, and wear away my life upon syllables?

For Seneca, good reading is not necessarily a straightforward question of ‘literacy.’ A “literate” reader might be able to pore over roll after roll of history, but he will forever wander a sea of *litterae*, unable to better his own (inner) life through a reading that transfers *verba* into *(mo)res.*

Aristarchus is an example of a bad, yet *litteratus*, reader, “branding” others’ poetry and (by implication) wearing away his opportunity for moral improvement through literature. This “branding” indicates the process of marking spurious lines of poetry with the obelus, which would have quite literally darkened the page.\(^{126}\) Such marks on the page could have the effect of puncturing the reader’s smooth, even course in reading, luring him into pedantic quibbles and philological wormholes.\(^{127}\) Seneca takes care to distinguish between a “literate person” (*hominem litteratum*) and a “good man” (*virum bonum*): the word *hominem* encompasses enslaved people across the social spectrum, including enslaved literary workers or socially marginal grammarians; but only “real men,” that is, *bonum virum*, count as good readers.

The important association of darkness with this bad kind of reading (and the obscured material text it produces) re-emerges at the conclusion of the letter. Seneca claims that even the philosophers themselves have entertained much superfluous matter: they have “descended” (*descenderunt*) to going after the pronunciation of syllables and true meanings of conjunctions and prepositions, taking a page from the books of grammarians. Not only are these philosophers regressing in their progress (going back to the basics of grammar, things we ought to have

\(^{126}\) On these readers’ marks, see Schironi 2018.

\(^{127}\) On the relationship between this passage and an epigram from the *Garland of Philip* that skewers pedantic grammarians as “thorn-gathering bookworms from Aristarchus’ brood” (ἀπ’ Ἀριστάρχου σήτες ἄκανθολόγοι, *AP* 11.347), see Lambert 2020.
“already learned”). They are also undertaking a metaphorical katabasis, “descending” from a place of (philosophical) light to the realm of darkness: “some (philosophers) do not offer light by which I may direct my gaze toward the truth; others dig out my eyes” (Illi non praeferunt lumen, per quod acies derigatur ad verum; hi oculos mihi effodiunt, 88.45). That the representatives of this bad class of readers—grammarians—were often enslaved or former slaves clarifies the stakes of this metaphorical katabasis: the good reader, ordered to “free himself” in the first letter, is reading himself towards a state of elite, free, masculine embodiment. If he reads like the grammarian, he risks slipping backwards and downwards to a degraded, metaphorical state of enslavement, stooping over his books in the dark.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced us to three threads that run throughout this dissertation. The first is that hierarchies between various kinds of reading are historically and culturally contingent. For example, the readerly practices ascribed to the philologus and grammaticus (i.e., ‘bad reading’) resonate today with a “historicizing” and critically detached approach to ancient texts, modes that form part of the bread and butter of literary studies in Classics today. The grammaticus is engaged in what we might recognize as source criticism, one means of identifying instances of “intertextuality”: he “considers himself happy because he has found the source behind Vergil’s words” (felicem deinde se putat, quod invenerit, unde visum sit Vergilio dicere). Where a historicizing approach creates distance between the reader and the material, often leaving the question of the reader’s politics to the side, Seneca’s ideal reader might be characterized as reading literature anachronistically (traditionally a big, bad word for Classicists!):128 he does not view...

128 While Lucien Febvre considered anachronism “the worst of all sins, the sin that cannot be forgiven,” Sebastian Matzner (2016) shows how anachronism is crucial for understanding classical reception, and how present scholarly desires permeate much (straight/historicist) classical scholarship already. Shane Butler (2019) brilliantly traces connections between the “rigid” poses of the historicist and ancient pederast, claiming that both deny agency to their...
literature as a window onto a past culture and happily reads texts like Homer’s *Odyssey* for ethical codes of action to apply to his own life.

The second is that literary representations of reading are about more than “just reading”: they serve particular literary, cultural, and ideological agendas. It is easy to be seduced by the *Epistles*’ rhetorical veil of philosophical, introspective quietude, to imagine that we have seamlessly entered a “therapeutic” journey of learning how to embody the ideal, Stoic condition, following Margaret Graver’s thesis. But Seneca is playing a trick on our minds. To read the *Moral Epistles* is to read both a guide for living a certain kind of philosophical life, and a guide for making philosophy “paperless.” To understand what underpins Seneca’s construction of his ideal, philosophical reader, we need to read the *Epistles* with a hermeneutic that attends to the absent presence of enslaved literary workers and the broader, cultural anxieties that bear witness to their presence in Roman book culture. An ablative of instrument, a passive voice verb, bookish metaphors, an allusion to bees, all show that the seemingly serene space of philosophical reading is in fact carefully manicured and manufactured, a privileged space that depends ideologically and materially on the paradigm of enslavement. Seneca’s construction of this space and his degradation of other sorts of readers—Calvisius Sabinus, grammarians—reinforce Roman norms of masculinity (where the “real” *vir* is elite and free) and restrict who counts as an intellectual agent in Roman literary culture.

And third, this chapter has emphasized the importance of developing hermeneutic modes ourselves that resist reinscribing the epistemological and social hierarchies our sources are invested

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“object” to love them back out of fear of placing their own critical faculties and subject positions at risk. For queer unhistoricism and queer temporality more generally, see Traub 2013 and Freccero and Menon 2013. On the “untimeliness” of antiquity in the present, see Billings 2010. de Grazia 2010 situates the drive against anachronism in the sixteenth century, as empiricists like Bacon urge the scholarly subject to hold himself apart from the object of study. On Bacon and his ilk, see Eisendrath 2018.
in upholding. In this chapter, I have drawn on Ahmed’s concept of “paperless philosophy” in order to help reorient us to reading as a practice grounded in bodies and materials, and as such, as a social practice that implicates gender, class, and other hierarchies of embodiment. This chapter has also engaged a book historical lens so as to remain sensitive to the conditions under which textual materiality and the presence of textual agents besides the elite “author” surface. What emerges is an elite ideology of reading that intersects with the fulfillment of other elite, normative projects. As my next chapter shows, a similar project preoccupies Plutarch’s philosophical treatise *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*. And here, too, the intrusion of the “bad reader” helps us situate Plutarch’s “ideal reader” within the historically and culturally specific coordinates of elite power and domination, thus encouraging us to consider critically our own attachments as scholars to Plutarch’s ideal reader.
Chapter 2: Plutarch and the (mis)use of poetry: from philosophical propaideia to pillow

Like Seneca’s Moral Epistles, Plutarch’s How the Young Man Should Study Poetry (henceforth, Poetry), dated to the early 80s CE, is generally concerned with inculcating a readerly orientation that befits the philosophical man.\(^{129}\) Poetry participates in a long tradition, starting with Aristotle’s Poetics, of taking up Plato’s challenge to poetry-lovers in Book 10 of the Republic to show that poetry is “not only pleasurable (ἡ δεῖα) but also beneficial (ὠφελήμη) towards the life of the state and of man” (Rep. 607d7-e2).\(^{130}\) Plutarch pushes back against the expulsion of mimetic art from the ideal city by charting a course in poetry reading that will serve as a young man’s propaideia for the ultimate goal of philosophy (Poetry 37b). Poetry’s readerly course offers not only a response to Plato, but also a hermeneutic key for reading other works of Plutarch. For example, Jason König has shown how we might fruitfully find order in Plutarch’s miscellanistic Sympotic questions through the methodology of “active reading” outlined in Poetry and On Listening to Lectures. For König, Poetry’s program of “active reading” primes us for encountering the disparate questions and topics in the Sympotic questions.\(^{131}\)

In addition to offering a hermeneutic framework for reading other works by Plutarch, Poetry’s readerly scheme has also been heralded as offering an ancient prototype to a certain kind of modern reader. In his 2004 essay “The Birth of the Reader: Plutarch as a Literary Critic,”

\(^{129}\) The transmitted Greek title of the treatise is Πῶς δεῖ τὸν νέον ποιημάτων ἀκούειν and is also known as De Audiendis Poetis. Plutarch has in mind the “reception” (δέχεσθαι) of poetry, “in listening and in reading” (cf. ἐν ταῖς ἀκροάσεσιν καὶ ἀναγνώσεσιν, 14f). On the dating, see Hunter and Russell 2011. Text is from Babbitt’s Loeb edition.


\(^{131}\) König 2007: 44-45.
David Konstan locates in Plutarch’s *Poetry* an ancestor to the postmodern critical reader. He argues that Plutarch constructs “a certain kind of reader who by achieving a critical distance from the text is immune to the seductions of narrative. This strategy of locating the responsibility for the text in the recipient is...a new one—in fact, Plutarch is the earliest classical commentator, I believe, to present it fully and cogently.” In Konstan’s view, Plutarch’s overarching goal is “to liberate the young from the tyranny of tradition that they may interrogate poetry frankly and fearlessly. The crucial thing is always to demand a reason for what is said, Plutarch avers, “opposing and resisting” (ἀπαντῶν καὶ ἀντερείδων, 28d) the text.” Konstan thus frames Plutarchan reading as a radically novel hermeneutic of readerly resistance that frees the text from the narrow confines of authorial intent.

Konstan’s desire, however, to unearth an ancient prototype to the modern, critically distanced reader obscures how deeply Plutarch’s construction of his “ideal” reader is invested in reproducing historically and culturally specific hierarchies. In this chapter, I argue that Plutarch constructs a historically specific readerly inhabitation whose purpose is to shore up hierarchies of gender, class, and Hellenocentrism afforded by *paideia*. I begin by outlining how various layers of context illuminate the cultural and literary embeddedness of *Poetry*’s readerly investments. Situating *Poetry* in relation to its historical context of Roman Greece, the literary

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132 Konstan 2009 makes a similar move, pitting the active, critical ancient novel reader against the (apparently passive and uncritical) modern novel reader. For him, contrary to the modern novel reader who curls up with and slips into the world of the book (and is thus a passive and uncritical reader?), readers of the ancient novels were ‘active,’ ‘critical,’ and ready to judge characters as if they were in court.


135 My central focus here is *Poetry*, other relevant treatises that intersect with *Poetry*’s themes and rhetoric include *On the Right Way of Listening, On Curiosity,* and *Progress in Virtue*. For a reading of *Poetry* and *On the Right Way of Listening* as companion pieces, see a brief discussion in König 2007: 47-49 and, more thoroughly, Xenophontos 2016: 79-91.
tradition in which it participates, and its textual place within the *Moralia* provides a richer understanding of what’s at stake for Plutarch in constructing a binary between good and bad readers. Crucial for Plutarch’s recuperation of poetic *mimēsis* is the rhetoric of usefulness or benefit (*χρήσιμον, ὠφέλιμον*) that the (good) reader can extract from the process of (good) reading. Against this contextual backdrop, I draw on Sara Ahmed’s work on the cultural politics of “use” (2019) to show how the seemingly benign and happy discourse of usefulness in *Poetry* depends on and reinforces hierarchical structures and ideologies of power. The good reader—always active, never passive—must make poetry “useful” (*chrēsimon*) precisely for shoring up and maintaining these hierarchies.

While contextualizing *Poetry* elucidates Plutarch’s motivations for linking a certain hermeneutic pose to the patriarchal, elite embodiment of the paideutic, philosophical reader, the reader of *Poetry* routinely encounters poetry in decontextualized form. Crucially, it is in Plutarch’s representations of failed readers where textual materiality lands with a thud, a pattern we have already observed in the case of Seneca’s *Epistles*. The second section of this chapter asks what Plutarch achieves through this game of showing and hiding the book. Scholars have noted tensions in Plutarch between physical books and *paideia*: he is curiously silent on contemporary libraries and is often keen to divorce paideutic capital from its material supports, which are subject to deterioration and destruction, and, in the particular case of Greek books, subject to looting by conquering Romans.\(^\text{136}\) I argue that we might understand such obfuscation of the materiality of texts as more than simply the concern of a Greek writer under Roman rule. As I showed in Chapter 1 with my discussion of Ahmed’s “paperless philosophy,” this erasure can also be understood as a readerly epistemology that implicates gender and class: Plutarch’s

selectivity in where and when to divorce paideutic capital from material supports reveals classed, masculinist understandings of who can handle books and how.

Finally, I illuminate the stakes of erring from Plutarch’s normative readerly program in *Poetry* by turning to the *Lives*. Here, I focus on a famous scene from Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander*: Alexander, we are told, would sleep with a copy of the *Iliad* tucked under his pillow. Scholars have taken this scene as an example of how Plutarch makes Alexander one of his own, “a literate scholar perfectly at home in the bookish world of the Second Sophistic.”\textsuperscript{137} I argue, however, that this scene represents Alexander as a failed reader according to *Poetry*’s scheme. On the one hand, my own readerly move here (reading Plutarch through Plutarch) replicates the approach taken by Jason König, discussed above. On the other, I also show how using Plutarch to read Plutarch provides only a limited way of understanding Alexander’s failure, since it ultimately reproduces the Plutarchan binary of good/bad reader. By mobilizing queer theory and reception studies, I probe Alexander’s “failure” as a non-reading book user to show how this scene might create space for imagining other embodied, affective relations to books, relations that—as the lens of book history tells us—would have been recognizable to contemporary readers. By reading “badly,” by straying from Plutarch’s prescriptive readerly program as well as dominant modern modes, I thus reorient our understanding of Alexander as someone who uses the book as an object to reflect his emotions and desires, treating it as a carrier of intimate, social relationships.

\textsuperscript{137} Brunelle 2017: 265.
2.1 Contextualizing Poetry

While Plutarch’s writing may affect an aura of timelessness (a timelessness which perhaps facilitates modern scholars’ abilities to see themselves in his ideal reader), *Poetry* is a document of its historical, cultural, and intellectual milieu.\(^{138}\) It participates in Roman Greek negotiations of Hellenism, which Tim Whitmarsh describes not as a “reflex reaction to the oppression of an indigenous group by a foreign oppressor, but...a shifting terrain over which identities were created, contested, denied, impugned, crushed, reaffirmed.”\(^{139}\) Amidst Roman stereotypes of Greek intellectual effeminacy and servile pedantry,\(^{140}\) Plutarch scripts poetry reading as training ground for the young man to embody traditional markers of elite, masculine, Hellenic identity and ethical character. This project of constructing and restricting boundaries between good and bad readers, who in *Poetry* are marked as effeminate, servile, and/or non-Greek, becomes all the more urgent for Plutarch at this historical juncture where social outsiders and interlopers could also acquire social mobility and Greekness through *paideia*. This social phenomenon intensified after the death of Domitian in 97 CE, as emperors Trajan and Hadrian (and the Antonines after them) publicly embraced Greek culture and intellectuals and funded building projects—including libraries—in Athens and elsewhere in Greece, including Delphi, where Plutarch lived as a priest. At the same time, Plutarch may also have felt that Greece’s

\(^{138}\) Pelling 2002: 222–23 argues that Plutarch favors contemporary “resonances” and no more: he is writing a *ktēma es aiei* that will be “relevant” to any historical time. On timelessness in Plutarch’s approach to Roman history, see Pelling 2002: 237–51; on timelessness in Greek history, Pelling 2000: 58–60. See also Schmidt 2002 on the “timelessness” of Plutarch’s barbarians.

\(^{139}\) Whitmarsh 2001: 23.

\(^{140}\) Cicero (*QFr*. 1.16), Juvenal (3.109–12), Martial (10.65); for Roman stereotypes of effeminate Greeks, see Edwards 1993: 93, and for negotiating *andreia* and *paideia*, see Connolly 2003. On Plutarch’s definition of masculinity as the ability to wield intellectual authority over ethical, political, and military spheres, see Asirvatham 2019.
cultural centrality was highly contested as but one among other centers of learning and prestige in the Roman empire, including Egypt, India, and Judaism.¹⁴¹

_Poetry_’s main concern—how to deal with the dangers of poetic mimesis—marks it as a text that positions itself within an area of contestation central to Roman Greek literature. As Whitmarsh has argued, the aesthetic system of Roman Greek literature was largely concerned with the imitation of canonical models and exploring literary mimesis as an empowering means of cultivating identity and negotiating the relationship between the classical Greek past and present.¹⁴² Plutarch’s _Poetry_ thus embodies a powerful response to Plato’s expulsion of mimetic art from the ideal city: poetry may be useful as a training ground for deeper, philosophical study. Cleverly modifying Plato’s famous image of the cave (Rep. 7.514a-18b), Plutarch claims that reading poetry (the right way) allows young men to familiarize themselves with a “borrowed (lit. “bastard”, νόθῳ) light” before confronting the full gleam of philosophy: should they hear the philosophers before this, they will reject their ideas out of “astonishment and confusion and amazement” (ἐκπλήξις…καὶ ταραχὴ καὶ θάμβος, 36e). For Plutarch, mimesis can play a useful role in society, so long as readers have developed the hermeneutic strategies outlined in _Poetry_. Plutarch implies that such an idealized community of readers exists in Roman Greece:¹⁴³ here the _pepaideumenoi_ are empowered to master poetry’s dangerous allures and, through judgment and logical reasoning, select examples from poetry that can be made useful towards self-empowerment as elite, masculine, Greek subjects.

¹⁴¹ On this, Richter 2011 (esp. 177–206).

¹⁴² Cf. Van Groningen’s claim that the literature of the period is ‘secondary’ and thus a ‘sham.’ In general, Whitmarsh 2001, Ch. 1.

Finally, it is important to situate this text in relation to its own inner framing—an address to fellow father Marcus Sedatus on educating his son, Cleander—as well as its paratextual framing in the *Moralia* by two other prescriptive and paideutic essays, *On the Education of Children* (also addressed to fathers) and *On Listening to Lectures*, addressed to a young man who has just taken on the cloak (*himation*) of manhood. While the authorship of *On the Education of Children* is no longer granted to Plutarch, readers have encountered it as a prelude to *Poetry* at least since the 1509 Aldine edition of the *Moralia*. To many readers, then, it has made sense to encounter these three texts sequentially: the first two are addressed to fathers and all three, taken together, concern progressive stages of the male youth’s educational and moral formation, where philosophy is the ultimate goal.

Understanding *On the Education of Children* and *Poetry* as progressive, teleological chapters that culminate in *Listening* pricks our ears to the relationship between readerly training and patriarchal power. Bloomer has observed how *On the Education of Children* elevates the role of the father above all other agents and warns fathers that “nurse, mother, slave, pedagogue, teacher, base men, and rhetorical training itself threaten the child in line after line of attack.” This text is less about hashing out the particulars of a curriculum, and rather is concerned with fostering ideal relationships among men: “a display of boys and their relations against the

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144 For bibliography on issues of authenticity, see Berry 1958.

145 As Too 2016: 322 notes, championing philosophy as the final goal of elite education goes in striking contrast to Roman practice in the Flavian period, since Quintilian relegates philosophy to a secondary status. For a reading of *Poetry* and *Listening* as companion texts, see König 2007: 47-50 and Xenophontos 2016: 79-91.

146 Bloomer 2006: 76. On the privileging of fathers, Bloomer notes tensions in literary representations of roles of fathers: for example, while the reading of the *Aeneid* in schools clearly provides students with an ideal father-son relationship, comedy persistently dramatizes paternal loss of control. He also considers Augustan political ideology, too, which emphasized family values and depicted the emperor as a father figure.
menacing background of inappropriate bodies, especially the female and the servile.” The fear that the free boy will embody servility runs persistently throughout this essay. If fathers have badly educated their sons, the author warns, their sons will “throw themselves into disorderly and slavish pleasures” (ἐπὶ δὲ τὰς ἀτάκτους καὶ ἀνδραποδώδεις ἥδονὰς ἑαυτοὺς κρημνίσωσι, 5a).

Fathers should only appoint Greek slaves to care for their children lest they be “contaminated by barbarians” (ίνα μὴ συναναχρωνύμενοι βαρβάροις, 6). The author attributes servility to all those who interfere with the boy’s education: flatterers, for example, may happen to be freeborn but are “slaves by choice” (τῇ τύχῃ μὲν ἐλεύθεροι, τῇ προαιρέσει δὲ δοῦλοι, 13c). Thus, if freeborn sons associate with flatterers and their ilk, they will enter a state of voluntary enslavement.

This rhetoric serves to heighten the stakes for the father to ensure that his son develops into the right kind of man. Such an anxiety may stem from the material circumstances of education in the ancient world, where boys very closely resembled the enslaved and could be beaten in schools, where they were subject to enslaved or freedmen pedagogues and teachers. Despite (or indeed, motivated by) the historical reality that in this period “ranks of slaves and ex-slaves were the true treasury of literate teachers and experts,” Plutarch invests the father with the authority to educate his son in encountering poetry like a freeborn man: at the start of Poetry, Plutarch even has fathers appropriate the role of the enslaved paidagōgos, claiming that boys need “more oversight in their reading than in the streets” (ἐν ταῖς ἀναγνώσεσι μᾶλλον ἢ ταῖς ὀδοῖς παιδαγωγίας, 15a). Like Seneca, Plutarch here theorizes reading as a kind of embodied journey, a process of orientating oneself away from effeminate, servile affects and towards ideal,

147 Bloomer 2006: 73.
149 Bloomer 2006: 83.
masculine embodiment. Perhaps reading may require more paternal guidance than wandering the streets because reading often leaves few, if any, traces, and is thus harder to surveil. And yet, as we will see with *Poetry*, the way a person reads becomes an index of that person’s embodiment and identity. Where “real life” feminine and servile bodies threaten the boy in *On the Education of Children*, *Poetry* is concerned with helping the freeborn boy school his body properly when he encounters these “bodies” in his reading.

### 2.2 Making *Poetry* “Useful” in Roman Greece

It is against this contextual background that Plutarch strives to make poetry “useful” to the philosopher-in-training.\(^\text{150}\) *Poetry* is shot through with the vocabulary of “usefulness”: boys must be accustomed to seek what’s useful (τὸ χρήσιμον) within poetry’s pleasures (14f, 15c-d, 15f-16a); one should pit a poet’s contradictory statements against themselves so that boys direct themselves towards the “more useful” one (χρησιμότερα, 21d); it is “useful” (χρήσιμον, 28b) to interrogate the reason for why a poet writes the thing he does; a boy must search amongst the vines and branches of poetic diction to find what is “helpful and profitable” (ὠφέλιμα καὶ χρήσιμα, 28e); avoid linguistic triviality and go after what’s useful (τὸ χρήσιμον, 31f); extract something useful (χρήσιμον, 32f) even from the most base and worthless passages. No efforts are to be spared in rendering poetry useful: one should even emend (ἐπανόρθωσις) or interpolate lines to make passages more “useful” (33c-d)!

What’s useful, however, is by no means an essence that resides inherently in things, but rather is contingent and negotiable according to shifting paradigms of culture and power. Use is, as Sara Ahmed understands it, “a relation as well as an activity that often points beyond

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\(^{150}\) The “useful” (χρήσιμον) and “pleasurable” (ἡδόν) is “the central dichotomy around which all Hellenistic poetic criticism turned” (Russell and Wilson 2011: 74). See, for example, Horace, *Ars Poetica* 333-4 (*aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae*) and 343-4 (*omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*).
something even when use is about something: to use something points to what something is ‘for.’”\textsuperscript{151} The rhetorical scheme of “usefulness” works by directing and orientating bodies in “useful” ways, whatever “useful” means according to normative, cultural protocol. The useful, in other words, is not a universal, stable category but a political and negotiable one. This explains how, for example, the Christian bishop St. Basil (330-379) of Caesarea was perfectly able to take over Plutarch’s scheme of reading for an entirely different—yet still “useful”—purpose in \textit{How Young Men May Benefit from Greek Literature}, where he urges Christian readers not to reject altogether pagan Greek literature but rather to accept from it whatever is useful (χρήσιμον, 1.25).\textsuperscript{152}

What hegemonic paradigms might the discourse of “usefulness” reproduce in the context of \textit{Poetry}? Amy Lather has argued that, for Plutarch, the “useful and beneficial elements are precisely those parts of poetry that correspond to philosophical thought in their representations of virtuous characters and actions.”\textsuperscript{153} I propose, however, that the seemingly benign rhetoricity of “usefulness” encodes culturally situated, political investments: it not only trains the reader to attune himself to “virtuous,” philosophical principles but also compels him to reproduce hierarchical ideologies of elite, patriarchal power and Hellenocentrism.

First, let’s turn to a passage quoted by Konstan as evidence of the premodern “active reader.” Plutarch writes: “it is useful to ask the reason for why something is said” (τὸ τίν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου τῶν λεγομένων ἐπιζητεῖν χρήσιμόν ἐστιν, 28b). In order to convince us that this is indeed a “useful” readerly response, Plutarch cites the example of Cato the Younger: “when Cato

\textsuperscript{151} Ahmed 2019: 23.

\textsuperscript{152} Wilson 1975.

\textsuperscript{153} Lather 2017: 327.
was still a boy, he would do whatever his enslaved attendant would order, but he would also demand the reason and grounds for the order” (ὁ μὲν γὰρ Κάτων ἐτι παιδάριον ὄν ἐπραττε μὲν ὁ προστάξειν ὁ παιδαγωγός, αἰτίαν δὲ καὶ λόγον ἀπήτει τοῦ προστάγματος, 28b). While Cato’s paidagogos was an enslaved Greek, Plutarch’s citation of the story in Poetry encourages young Greek men to play the part of Roman enslavers in their reading. In Konstan’s view, demanding a reason for why something is said or written is a trademark of the critical reader who interrogates an author’s motives. When read in the fuller context of Plutarch’s precocious Cato, however, we see that Plutarch is framing this critical interrogation of the text as a means of mastering the text. The citation of a Roman enslaver, moreover, might also remind Greek readers of contemporary power dynamics under imperial Rome and suggest to them the implicit consequences of not positioning themselves as masters of the text. By orienting oneself thus towards the text, the young male reader differentiates himself from the enslaved attendant, who would be present as he learned how to read.

Plutarch’s “critical reader” must develop a hermeneutic mode that reproduces certain social and bodily hierarchies. Noting that poetry represents characters who are flawed and imperfect, Plutarch observes that the good reader will accustom himself to praise things said and done well, while scorning the opposite (26a-b). On the other hand (26b):

ο δὲ πάντα θαυμάζων καὶ πάσιν ἐξοικειούμενος καὶ καταδεδουλωμένος τῇ δόξῃ τὴν κρίσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἱρωικῶν ὄνομάτων, ἔσπερ οἱ τὴν Πλάτωνος ἀπομιμούμενοι κυρτότητα καὶ τὴν Ἀριστοτέλους τραυλότητα, λήστει πρὸς πολλὰ τῶν φαύλων εὔχερής γενόμενος, δεὶ δὲ μὴ δειλῶς μηδ᾽ ὡσπερ ὑπὸ δεσποινίδων ἅπαντα καὶ προσκυνεῖν, ἀλλὰ θαρραλέως ἐθιζόμενον ἐπιφυνεῖν μηδὲν ἴττον τοῦ “ὀρθός” καὶ “πρεπόντως” τὸ “οὐκ ὀρθῶς” καὶ “οὐ προσηκόντως.”

he who marvels at everything and assimilates everything to himself and is enslaved in his judgment by the reputation of heroic names, will, like those who copy Plato’s

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154 The same story occurs at Cato minor 1.5, where we learn that the paidagogos’ name was Sarpedon.
humped shoulders and Aristotle’s lisp, without noticing become indifferent to much that is base. One must not cowardly nor as though under the superstitious spell of religious dread in a temple shiver with awe at everything and fall prostrate, but rather should acquire the habit of courageously exclaiming “not right” and “not fitting” no less than “right” and “proper.”

This passage is another instance where Konstan appropriates and seamlessly recycles Plutarch’s metaphorical use of enslavement as evidence for the parallelism between ancient and modern critical/good readers. He writes, “Plutarch...recommends that the young be disabused of their high regard for heroes like Achilles and Agamemnon...so long as the young maintain a critical distance toward these figures, praising what is good and blaming what is base and not letting their judgment be enslaved by great names, they can hear poetry without damage to themselves.” At stake for Plutarch is more than just the risk that the bad reader will diminish his critical, hermeneutic faculties: the real risk is becoming a bad reader who embodies (Hellenocentric stereotypes of) the servile, the effeminate, the barbarian, the disabled.

For starters, “marveling at everything” is a readerly response most unsuitable for the Greek philosopher, as Plutarch’s discussion of Pythagoras’ “τὸ μηδὲν θαυμάζειν” in the context of how to listen to lectures makes clear (Listening 44b-d). Indiscriminate marvel is instead the response of the flatterer (κόλαξ) and marks off ‘ordinary’ (idiōtaí) men from the pepaideumenoi elite. While “judgment” (krisis) ought to be the guiding force of ideal, readerly practice, the bad reader’s judgment is “enslaved” (καταδεδουλωμένος) by flashy, famous names. Plutarch’s comments on Aristotle’s lisp and Plato’s hunched shoulders again make clear that a course in proper reading is also a course in schooling the body according to hegemonic norms. We might recall here Seneca’s admonition to his reader-in-training not to embody the vagrant reader,

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156 On krisis in ancient literary criticism, see Too 1998: 9-10, 131, 206.
waffling like the enslaved erro amongst a crowd of books, or the grammarian, bending over his books in pursuit of trivia. As we have seen, a bent or twisted readerly posture is linked to a servile, low-status, and effeminate inhabitation. Plutarch also participates in this rhetorical association here by adapting a passage from Plato’s Protagoras (325c5-326a3), where Protagoras urges mothers, nurses, and paedagōgoi to point out to children ‘this is just, that unjust’ and ‘this is honorable, that disgraceful.’ If boys do not obey willingly, they should “straighten him” (εὐθὸνουσιν) with threats and blows as though he were a piece of bent and twisted wood.

The verb προσκυνεῖν adds another layer to Plutarch’s skewering of the undiscerning and obsequious reader. It marks the bad reader with the language of effeminacy, servility, and ethnic otherness. In Euripides’ Orestes, for example, the enslaved Phrygian—bedecked in effeminate, eastern garb—beseeches Orestes with such a gesture (προσκυνῶ σ’, ἀναξ, νόμοισι βαρβάροισι προσπίτνων, Or. 1507). While a Greek may respectably “fall at the knees” in worship of a deity, to do so in any other context would be marked as eastern or barbaric. Homer, of course, is an ideal training ground for reading as the formation of Greek as opposed to barbarian identity, and it doesn’t hurt that the Greeks came out of the Trojan War on top. Plutarch urges readers of Homer to take careful note of the differences between Greeks and Trojans. For example, he draws the readers’ attention to how the Greeks die bravely in battle, while the Trojans “fall to their knees” (ὑποπεπτόκασιν, 30c) to beg for their lives: “it is a trait of barbarians to make supplication and fall at the enemy’s feet (ὡς βαρβαρικῶ τοῦ ἱκετεύειν καὶ ὑποπίπτειν), but of Greeks to conquer or die while fighting” (30c). The Trojans’ “barbaric” gestures recall the bad reader’s impulse to “fall prostrate” at everything and everyone in his reading. Plutarch’s ideal reader, on the other hand, ought to follow the path of the Greek hero Odysseus, bound to the
upright mast of his ship as he resisted the charms of Sirenic song: “shall we set [boys] against
some upright standard of reason and there bind them fast, guiding and guarding their judgment,
that it may not be carried away from the course by pleasure towards that which will harm them?”
(ἀρθῷ τινι λογισμῷ παριστάντες καὶ καταδέοντες, τὴν κρίσιν, ὡπώς μὴ παραφέρηται τῷ τέρποντι
πρὸς τὸ βλάπτον, ἀπευθύνομεν καὶ παραφυλάττομεν; 15d). Plutarch’s ideal reader, like
Seneca’s, must orientate himself on the “upright” and “straight” path towards ideal,
philosophical embodiment: to stray, to wander, to become bent is to embody the culturally
inferior, the gender deviant, the socially low.

There is also a temporal dimension to the reader’s metaphorical enslavement: the
imperial Greek reader must avoid letting his judgment be “enslaved” specifically to the canonical
literature and literary figures of the classical Greek past. We might understand this in light of
Plutarch’s contemporary Dio Chrysostom’s recommendation that orators in training read not
only the classical hits from Demosthenes and Lysias but also more recent orators as well: reading
more contemporary oratory is useful because “when we encounter [these authors], we are not
enslaved in regards to our judgment, as we are when we encounter the ancients” (οὐκ ἂν
ἐντυγχάνοιμεν αὐτοῖς δεδουλωμένοι τὴν γνώμην, ὡσπερ τοῖς παλαιοῖς, 18.12). Plutarch sets
readers on a strictly “ancient” diet in poetry reading, but in light of contemporary discussion
about Greek readers who are too “bound” to the glorious, classical past (as the passage from Dio
implies), he emphasizes both the cultural primacy of Homer and the tragedians at the same time
as he advertises techniques for imperial Greek readers to position themselves as “masters” or
“owners” of it.

Plutarch’s critique of the reader who marvels at everything implicates his contemporaries’ relations not only to the canonical Greek past but also to Roman power. After all, the Trojans are the mythical ancestors of the Romans. The world of contemporary Greek readers would have been saturated with wondrous symbols of Roman imperial power. For the Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 CE), it was impossible to capture fully in words the spectacle of Vespasian and Titus’ joint triumph after the Roman victory over the Jews of Judaea in 70 CE: the collective exhibition of “wonderful (θαυμαστὰ) and precious productions of various nations...displayed the size of Roman power” (Jewish War, 7.5.5). For the poet Martial, all the other “wonders” (miracula) of the wider world yielded to the Colosseum, where representatives from every gens flocked to witness the wondrous spectacles of Roman power (De Spect. 3). In training the elite Greek reader to resist uncritical praise and marvel at flashy names and reputations of past heroes, Plutarch might be subtly encouraging the reader to reflect upon his own present positionality and perspective towards these “wonders” of Rome.

Plutarch is thus interested in constructing a particular kind of “active” reader, one who is charged with the project of ensuring that binary distinctions between Greek and barbarian, manly and effeminate, free and enslaved remain intact. While the onus is on the reader to discern between good and bad, these aesthetic hierarchies themselves are predetermined, rigid, and normative: “by its nature,” Plutarch tells us, “what is shameful cannot become good” (οὐσίᾳ μὲν γὰρ οὐ δύναται καλὸν γενέσθαι τὸ αἰσχρόν, 18a). This essentializing rhetoric frames aesthetic and moral hierarchies as natural rather than culturally contingent phenomena that work to shore up normative, Hellenocentric, masculinist, ableist logic. Readers must never praise an ugly or shameful thing in itself but rather the artistic, mimetic skill that goes into representing something (that dominant culture has already designated as) ugly or shameful as “ugly” or “shameful.” We
might, Plutarch says, admire a fitting representation of Philoctetes on stage at the same time as we flee the sight of a diseased, disabled man (18c). The reader’s ability to uncover poetry’s “usefulness” (this set of pre-encoded, normative values and aesthetic hierarchies) is thus an index of the reader’s ability to embody and reproduce hegemonic values and characteristics.

Plutarch’s “critical” reader should not be so critical as to subvert aesthetic hierarchies and question the status quo. After all, Plutarch is invested in cultivating a particular kind of readerly embodiment that will enable his reader to live the philosophical, virtuous life of the elite man. In a passage strikingly parallel to Seneca (Ep. 108.29, discussed in Chapter 1), he outlines how different readers pursue differing tastes and proclivities in their reading (30d):

ἔπει δ’ ὡσπερ ἐν ταῖς νομαῖς ἢ μὲν μέλιττα διώκει τὸ ἄνθος, ἢ δ’ αἰὲς τὸν θαλλόν, ἢ δ’ ὦς τὴν ρίζαν, ἄλλα δὲ ζῶα τὸ σπέρμα καὶ τὸν καρπὸν, οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἀναγνώσεσι τῶν ποιημάτων ὃ μὲν ἀπανθίζεται τὴν ἱστορίαν, ὃ δ’ ἐμφυεῖται τῷ κάλλει καὶ τῇ κατασκευῇ τῶν ὀνομάτων…τὸν μὲν φιλόμυθον μὴ λανθάνειν τὰ καῖνος ἱστορούμενα καὶ περιττῶς, μηδὲ τὸν φιλόλογον ἐκφεύγειν τὰ καθαρῶς πεφρασμένα καὶ ῥητορικῶς, τὸν δὲ φιλότιμον καὶ φιλόκαλον καὶ μὴ παιγνίας ἄλλα παιδείας ἕνεκα ποιημάτων ἀπτόμενον.

Just as in pasturage the bee goes after the flower, the goat the grass, the pig the root, and other animals the seed and the fruit, so in the reading of poems one person culls the flowers of the story, another clings fast to the beauty and arrangement of words…the novel and unusual aspects of stories do not escape the myth-lover, nor do faultless and rhetorical expressions escape the word-lover, whereas he who loves what is honorable and good takes up poetry not for the sake of childlish games but for paideia.

As with Seneca, the comparison to the animal world at first masks any obvious hierarchy between these different ‘kinds’ of readers. And yet we know that “flower culling” can be gendered: the philomuthos, who “culls the flowers” of the “novel” and “unusual” twists and turns in a story calls to mind the flower-culling women in Plutarch’s Listening (41e-f) discussed in Chapter 1. These women are attracted by eye-catching flowers to weave a garland that, while beautiful, is ephemeral. The φιλόλογος is keen on hunting down elegant, rhetorical expressions,
recalling Seneca’s dismissive attitudes towards the reading practices of the socially low 
grammaticus. The best kind of reader, the philosophical reader, reads poetry for actionable, 
ethical examples of manliness (ἄνδρεία), self-control (σωφροσύνη), and justice (δικαιοσύνη): 
while the philomuthos and philologos are hooked on “childish games” (παιγνίας), the 
philosophos reads poetry for the sake of paideia, or elite, masculine, cultured embodiment.

The subordination of these readers to the philosophical reader comes fuller into view 
when we consider the association Plutarch makes elsewhere in his oeuvre between childishness 
and triviality and inferior, “barbarian” epistemologies. Daniel Richter notes in Plutarch’s writing 
about Egypt a tendency to paint Egyptian wisdom in an inferior light: “what passes for wisdom 
in Egypt is revealed as intellectually inferior when seen in the bright light of Hellenic 
paideia.”158 For example, in Dinner of the Seven Sages, Neilo xenus (“guest from the Nile”), in a 
reversal of the traditional knowledge-quest of the Greek sage to Egyptian priests, travels to 
Corinth to see if the Greeks can solve a riddle given to him by the Ethiopian pharaoh. At the 
party, he meets the girl Cleobulina, whose cleverness in riddles (αἰνίγματα), Neilo xenus reveals, 
has travelled all the way to Egypt. Thales then counters that these riddles are only an “occasional 
source of amusement” for her, and she actually has wonderful sense, a statesman’s mind, and 
amiable character (148d). Neilo xenus is urged to forget silly riddles and games and look toward 
more serious (Greek) intellectual pursuits. As Richter writes, “Plutarch allows for the wisdom of 
the Egyptians, but always reminds his readers that real wisdom, real philosophy, is the gift of the 
Greeks.”159 In the context of “childish” reading and hunts for trivia, it is useful to recall Seneca’s 
characteristically Roman stereotypes of the pedantic Greek grammarian or word-twisting, style-

159 Richter 2011: 198.
obsessed sophist. Plutarch, on the other hand, redirects the Roman stereotype of the trifling, pedantic Greek onto the Egyptians, and ensures that his reader-in-training moves beyond the childish activity of “games” (paidia, 31e) towards the privileged realm of paideia and philosophy.

2.3 Decontextualizing Poetry: How the Young Man Should (Not) Study Poetry (Books)

τὸν μὲν δὴ ποιητῶν συμβουλεύσαις εἰς τὸν κομικὸν μὴ παρέργος ἐνυπηρέτησι καὶ Εὐριπίδη τῶν τραγικῶν, καὶ τούτως μὴ οὕτως, αὐτὸν ἀναγνώσκοντα, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἐτέρων ἑπισταμένων μάλιστα μὲν καὶ ἡδέως, εἰ δ’ οὗν, ἀλύσως ὑποκρίνασθαι. πλείων γάρ ἡ αἰσθήσις ἀπαλλαγέντι τῆς περὶ τὸ ἀναγνώσκειν ἀσχολίας.

As for the poets, I would counsel you to “read” Menander of the comic poets in no trifling way, as well as Euripides from the tragic ones, and to do so not by reading yourself, but through others, preferably those who know how to render it pleasurably, or at any rate, without causing grief. For sensory perception is enhanced when one is unburdened from the task of reading.

–Dio Chrysostom, Oration 18.6

Poetry may be a text about how to read and interpret “poetry,” but it is also a text about how not to read books. In the passage quoted above, Dio is quite transparent about how transferring the labor of reading poetic text onto a trained enslaved reader can enhance the elite reader’s aesthetic experience of poetry. Unlike Dio, Plutarch is entirely silent on the practicalities of reading poetry as material text. As readers of Poetry, what we encounter of poetry is essentially the aftermath of Plutarch’s own reading process, bits and pieces upended from their material contexts. Furthermore, this may have been how Plutarch himself encountered at least some of these verses. As scholars have shown, Plutarch’s own citational practice in Poetry and elsewhere indicates that he himself relied heavily on anthologies of poetic citations and
anecdotes, and the overlap with other anthologies, including Stobaeus’, reveals that he was indebted to the same kinds of anthologies used both in school education and higher philosophical levels of study. His exhortation to readers to exclaim “right” or “fitting” mirrors a textual practice found in ancient scholia. Nonetheless, any such anthologies, scholia, or material apparatuses have vanished into the background.

What are the consequences of these maneuvers? What does Plutarch achieve by making books disappear, and what might the implications be for the work the good reader has to do to avoid being a bad one? At a time in the Roman empire when books and libraries took on increased circulation and presence (and given the fact that a contemporary Greek writer like Dio could and did comment on the materiality technicalities of reading poetry), Plutarch’s move to divorce text from material substrate and labor appears to be a calculated choice. I argue that this choice shores up the gendered, classed, and cultural superiorities his good readers embody, and also serves as a model for how the good reader should “use” poetry by eclipsing its material underpinnings.

One way to understand Plutarch’s negotiation of literary materiality in Poetry is in the larger context of his reticence on contemporary libraries in the Greek east. As Alexei Zadorojnyi has shown, Plutarch misses many opportunities to engage with imperial libraries: the medium-size library sponsored by Titus Flavius Pantaenus and dedicated between 98 and 102 CE in Athens; the library constructed between 99 and 102 CE in Delphi, where Plutarch lived; and the Celsus library in Ephesus, erected in honor of the Greek Tiberius Iulius Celsus Polemaeanus,

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160 Hunter and Russell 2011: 15.
161 Hunter and Russell 2011: 147.
162 See the essays in König, Oikonomopoulou, and Woolf 2013.
whose family Plutarch likely knew of. For other Greek writers, these libraries embodied alliances between Roman power and Greek paideia and were a point of cultural pride. Aelius Aristides, for example, says in his Panathenaicus that the libraries of Athens are a unique cultural asset: “warehouses of books such as are not seen anywhere else in the world and very much the beautiful specialty of Athens” (Pan. 354). Plutarch, however, is wary about “making the paideutic capital contingent upon its medium and location.” After all, books could become liabilities, especially for Greeks under imperial rule: collections of books were prone to destruction by fire or confiscation as war plunder.

In an illuminating passage from the start of the Life of Demosthenes, Plutarch concedes that living in a bustling, book-filled city would be helpful for a man compiling a history, only to then imply that a man seeking to write a work that fosters ethical virtue can make do in a smaller, less bookish town. He declares that he prefers to work in his little native town, since virtue, the key project of his Lives, “is like a strong and hardy plant, takes root in any place, so long as it occupies a generous nature and a labor-loving soul” (τὴν δ’ ἁρετήν, ὀσπὲρ ἱσχυρὸν καὶ διαρκές φυτὸν, ἐν ἀπαντὶ ρίζοιςθαι τόπῳ, φύσεως τε χρηστῆς καὶ φιλοπόνου ψυχῆς ἐπιλαμβανομένην, Dem. 1.3). The ponos in the compound philoponos operates here in distinction to the manual labor of transmitting, circulating, acquiring, and leafing through heaps of books, and stands for the intellectual labor of the philosopher.

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163 Zadorojnii 2013: 384–86.


165 Plunder: Plutarch, Aem. 28.6, Sulla 26; Strabo 13.1.54; Pliny NH 25.3.6; fire: Galen, Peri Alupias, Howley 2017 on Roman book-burning. On the formation of libraries as part of the Roman project of epistemicide, see Padilla Peralta 2020.
In addition to these cultural concerns, we can also illuminate Plutarch’s desire to unhinge the work of the mind from the work of bodies through Ahmed’s framing of “paperless philosophy.” This feminist epistemology—already encountered in Chapter 1—tells us that Plutarch may be motivated not only by his position as a Greek under Roman rule, but also by elite, patriarchal concerns. For Ahmed, philosophy becomes a gendered enterprise through the masculinist eclipsing of the materials and labor it depends on. Paperless philosophy not only conceals the materials (like paper) upon which it is written, it also conceals the labor of those who work so that the philosopher has time, space, and conditions to think; thus, philosophy becomes “orientated toward a certain kind of body, one for whom materiality would be an unnecessary distraction, one who has time freed for contemplation by how others do the paperwork, the domestic work, the care work, diversity work.”

In Chapter 1, we saw how it was “bad readers” (Calvisius Sabinus, the interpres) who tended to disturb the masculinist, elite fantasy of “paperless philosophy”: in these representations, the material substrates and labor of reading tended to surface. We can observe a similar pattern in Plutarch’s essays on reading, where the fulfillment or failure to render philosophy “paperless” reinforces the gendered and classed hierarchies that underpin Plutarch’s ideal reader. On the rare occasion where we do come into contact with paper in Plutarch’s contemporary space and time, it lands with a deafening thud and its materiality distracts from the philosophical task at hand. For example, in On Listening to Lectures, Plutarch scorns foolish people who attend philosophical lectures as if they were hearing tragedies in the theater. These fools may be pardoned, however, in the case of sophists (τοῦς σοφιστάς): “for when they stand up from the speaker’s chair and put away their books and lecture notes (ἀποθέμενοι τὰ βιβλία καὶ

τὰς εἰσαγωγάς), it becomes clear that in the real parts of life they are small men and worse than *hoi polloi,*” (43f). Here, books are deceptive props that men depend on to perform a learned, superficial façade. The true philosophical speaker—and the real man—whips out not *biblia* but *logos,* which, elsewhere in Plutarch, is equated with the phallus.167

The consequences of not following Plutarch’s program of reading outlined in *Poetry* are materialized in the figure of the busybody, whose readerly failings are distilled in the form of a book (*On Curiosity,* 520A-B):

> φέρε γάρ, εἰ τίς ἔπιον τὰ συγγράματα τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκλαμβάνοι τὰ κάκιστα τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ βιβλίον ἔχοι συντεταγμένον οίον Ὄμερικῶν στίχοιν ἀκεφάλοις καὶ τραγικῶν σολοκισμῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπ’ Ἀρχιλόχου πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας ἀκρεπώς καὶ ἀκολάστως εἰρημένων, ἑαυτὸν παραδειγμάτιζοντος, ἂρ’ οὐκ ἐστὶ τῆς τραγικῆς κατάρας ἄχος “ὁλοιο θνητῶν ἐκλέγον τὰς συμφοράς;” καὶ ἄνευ δὲ τῆς κατάρας ἀπρεπῆς καὶ ἀνωφελῆς ὁ θησαυρισμός αὐτοῦ τῶν ἄλλωτρων ἀμαρτημάτων.

Look here, if some fellow going over the writings of the ancients were to extract from them the worst parts, and if he were to have a book assembled from such things, like headless Homeric lines and tragic solecisms and things unfittingly and licentiously said towards women by Archilochus, who makes a spectacle of himself, wouldn’t this man be worthy of the tragic curse “damn you, collector of mortals’ miseries”? Even without the curse, that man’s treasure trove of others’ mistakes is indecorous and useless.

This poor fellow is ridiculed for being unable to control his readerly appetites and for orientating himself towards the wrong pursuits. “Mistakes” are figured in both philological and moral terms, a double dimension afforded by the Greek adjective κακός (and its opposite κάλος). For Plutarch, pedantic inquiry for “headless lines” and Archilochus’ saucy comments about women are matters best left to the socially low grammarian (cf. *Poetry* 31f). Reading is a process of gathering materials (and of course Plutarch’s *Poetry* itself is a manifestation of compilatory reading), but the mind should process these materials and direct their useful parts towards ethical living and

167 In *An seni respublica gerenda sit,* Plutarch explains that statues of Hermes portraying him as an old man with an erect phallus show that old men compensate for physical strength with “fertile and productive reason” (τῶν λόγον ἐνεργόν...καὶ γόνιμον, 797f).
normative, elite masculine embodiment. Good reading is a process of internalizing one’s reading through authentic, paideutic embodiment, rather than externalizing it through a book full of “mistakes.”

Superficial, bookish practices that linger on the materiality of things do not at all align with Plutarch’s overarching agenda in orientating readerly reception (Listening 48d):

\[\text{ἀσκεῖν ἅμα τῇ μαθήσει τὴν εὐρέσιν, ἵνα μὴ σοφιστικὴν ἐξιν μηδ’ ἱστορικὴν ἀλλ᾽ ἐνδιάθετον καὶ φιλόσοφον λαμβάνομεν, ἀρχὴν τοῦ καλὸς βιώναι τὸ καλὸς ἀκούσαι νομίζοντες.}\]

to exercise independent thinking along with learning, so that we may acquire a *habitus* that is neither sophistic nor bent on seeking out information, but rather deep-seated and philosophical, since we believe that listening well is the beginning of living well.

The ideal listener (or reader) may seek things out in poetry or lectures, but only as a start to living well, applying what’s useful to his philosophical life in a self-reflexive and self-aware manner. In stark contrast are people with *σοφιστική* and *ἱστορική* bodily deportment (*hexis*): these adjectives recall the sophistic speakers who use books as props, the grammarian-type readers who mine ancient poetry to compile “useless” information, as well as the compiler of *historia* at the start of Dem.-Cic. who needs to be in a large city surrounded by books. While their heads are bogged down in the stuff of books, their souls grow moldy and dark (*τὸν δ’ ἐντὸς εὕρωτα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ζόφον*), an inner disease that only the “light of philosophy” (*διὰ φιλοσοφίας*, On Listening 48d) can banish. Here we might again recall Juvenal’s representation of the grammarian Palaemon, whose burning of the midnight oil in pursuit of trivia caused his copies of Vergil and Horace to become dank with soot (7.222-227).

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168 Compare this monstrous miscellany to Gellius’ encounter with a bad miscellany (*NA* 14.6), also a “useless” collection of trivial things. On this passage see Howley 2018: 98–100, who points out that such a *thesaurus* of knowledge is, for Pliny the Elder, worthy of the imperial reader.

169 On reading for reflective self-improvement, see also *De prof. virt.* 79B-C.
Poetry invents a peculiar world: a freeborn father appropriates the labor of the enslaved paidagogos in steering their son’s navigation through poetry. This “pedagogy” ensures that, as readers, we need not get our hands dirty in the mechanical handling of texts, which is best left to enslaved instructors or grammarians. Another papering over of physical texts occurs in the discussion of “emendation” (ἐπανορθώσις, 34b). Plutarch commends the use of “emendation” to fix lines so that they “sway young men towards the better course” (τοὺς νέους παρακαλεῖν πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον, 33d). He draws on the examples of Cleanthes, Antisthenes, and Zeno as peculiar textual critics. Antisthenes, for example, does not work amongst books but rather does his work in the theater. “After he saw that the Athenians raised a huge uproar (θορυβήσαντας) in the theater at the line: ‘what’s shameful if the deed’s doers don’t think so?’ he immediately interpolated (παραβάλλων) the line ‘what’s shameful is shameful, whether one thinks so or not’” (33c). Plutarch’s own examples of “correction” do not involve the nitty gritty work of manuscript collocation. He does not direct us to the books. The sense is that, if your soul is orthos and you are guided by reason and judgment, you’ll be able to “straighten out” a text (ἐπανορθώσις) without ever handling one.

In this regard, Plutarch’s paperless philosophy becomes paperless philology, and echoes that of A. E. Housman, who believed that textual criticism need not rely on paleographical methods but was “purely a matter of reason and of common sense...A man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises or lectures on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself...[W]hatever

170 As an example of textual emendation that does, see Strabo’s account of the ‘bad’ editing of Aristotle’s corpus by people who are too lazy to collate manuscripts (13.1.54).

171 For further comments on the dual textual/ethical sense of the word epanorthōsis, see Xenophontos 2016: 38–40.
he reads about textual criticism in books, or hears at lectures, he should test by reason and common sense, and reject everything which conflicts with either as mere hocus-pocus.”

While Housman and Plutarch have wildly different ends in mind (Housman the authorial ur-text, Plutarch an ethically, philosophically “useful” text with little regard for what the author intended), for both men the gritty, hands-on work of textual criticism is sublimated as “an aristocratic affair” best performed by the innate capabilities of a sensible intellectual (or at the very least a man who has a head, not a pumpkin, on his shoulders).

For Housman, the textual critic applies his mental faculties of logical reasoning to correct “the frailties and aberrations of the human mind and of its insubordinate servants, the human fingers.” For Plutarch, the (manual, material) work of reading is powered by logos. For Konstan, the rational hermeneutics of the modern critical reader and his ancient predecessor are taken to be epistemologically superior. And yet, this rational and critical pose by no means represents a neutral or universal pose towards poetry. As Black feminist thought has long shown, the subordination of nonrational, erotic, embodied knowledge to rationality is a tool of patriarchal oppression. For Plutarch, what is “useful” about using logos to master poetry’s affective, Sirenic charms is how it doubles as a training course in reproducing dominant, elite norms of manhood. The straightening rod of logical reasoning obscures other possible ways of knowing and relating to texts as embodied, haptic objects and material carriers of social, even intimate relations. While readerly epistemologies are highly circumscribed in the *Moralia*, Plutarch’s

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173 Ibid.

*Lives*—set at a safe distance in the temporal past—stage examples of what’s at stake in erring from the readerly program in *Poetry* and open up other possible modes of relating to texts in the flesh.

**2.4 Poetry in Life: was Alexander the Great a great reader?**

In contrast to the protreptic *Poetry* where the path to optimal readerly behavior is clearly paved out, the *Lives* and their distinctive, paired structure invite readers to compare and re-evaluate their judgments of historical figures’ characters and deeds. Moreover, we find the *Lives* full of vignettes of readers who behave in unexpected and sometimes unruly ways. The most extreme example is Cato, who, despite having Plato’s *Phaedo* to hand and reading it through at least thrice, is unable to achieve a serene suicide à la Socrates: as the previous section has instructed, readers go astray if they philosophize by the book, rather than internalizing its moral lessons. While the Cato scene may be fairly cut and dry, Alexei Zadorojnyi has argued that scenes of literary materiality in the *Lives* often play an ambivalent role as indices of a figure’s character. He has noted a “lack of systemization” in Plutarch’s largely sporadic and context-dependent problematizations and rehabilitations of literary paraphernalia. While critics have noted the spectrum of readers and book users within the *Lives*, they have imagined the readers of (objective genitive) the *Lives* as a rather circumscribed, narrow group: they are “not passive readers expecting instruction but active, engaged and critical readers—just the kind of reader

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175 On the workings of moralism and lack of direct injunction to readers of the *Lives*, see Pelling 1995.


177 Zadorojnyi 2004.
Plutarch imagines for some of the texts in the *Moralia.*" For Duff, who follows Konstan’s 2004 line of argument discussed at the start of the chapter, Plutarch is not writing for “casual readers, who read merely for pleasure” but rather for “serious readers who self-consciously choose material that will benefit them and are able to distinguish what behavior to avoid and what to imitate.” In this way, the readerly scheme outlined in *Poetry* and elsewhere in the *Moralia* has served as a hermeneutic for reading the *Lives.*

In this final section of the chapter, I examine a famous scene from the *Lives* to assess the limitations of using Plutarch to read Plutarch. Early in the *Life of Alexander*, we learn that Alexander would sleep with a copy of Homer’s *Iliad* under his pillow. Some scholars have taken this scene as an example of how Plutarch makes Alexander one of his own, “a literate scholar perfectly at home in the bookish world of the Second Sophistic.” I argue, however, that this scene represents Alexander as a failed reader according to *Poetry*’s readerly scheme. First and foremost, we do not in fact see Alexander reading this book: rather, he uses the book as an object to reflect his emotions and desires and does not make use of its moral lessons. But rather than citing Alexander’s “failure” to reproduce a Plutarchan binary between “good/active” and “bad/passive” reader, I also mobilize a queer lens to register the affective possibilities that accumulate around Alexander’s nocturnal tableau, creating an epistemological sphere where other meanings of books as objects can come into view.

Let us begin by entering Alexander’s bedchamber. At *Alex.* 8.2, we learn that Alexander:

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178 Duff 2008: 59.
179 Duff 2008: 76.
180 Brunelle 2017: 265.
regarded and called the *Iliad* a resource of military virtue, and he took the one revised by Aristotle that they call “from the casket,” and he would always have it, along with a dagger, lying under his pillow, as Onesicritus has written.

The notion of fitting the *Iliad* in scroll form (either eight papyrus scrolls, each the volume of a can of beer, or three massive scrolls, each the volume of a two-liter Coke\(^\text{181}\)) under a standard, ancient pillow has puzzled scholars for over a century.\(^\text{182}\) Christopher Brunelle writes, “no matter how romantic our views of Alexander, the love of literature cannot overcome the laws of nature: enough scrolls to contain the *Iliad* are simply too large to fit under any ancient pillow.” Brunelle follows Anton Hilhorst in tracing Plutarch’s pillow (προσκεφάλαιον) back to a Persian idiom for a store-room at the head of the king’s bed (Ath. 12.514e-f).\(^\text{183}\) In reality, Brunelle claims, Alexander did not keep his *Iliad* not under his pillow, but instead adopted the custom of Persian kings and stored it in this opulent, adjacent chamber. Brunelle argues that Plutarch innovates on this tradition by having Alexander tuck his *Iliad* under his pillow because Plutarch wants to construct Alexander as “the sort of cultural connoisseur that his own *pepaideumenoi* contemporaries could recognize and appreciate.” The importance of the scene “now rests almost entirely with Homer (as a sign of *paideia*) rather than with the now simple pillow.”\(^\text{184}\)

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\(^\text{181}\) Johnson 2004: 150.

\(^\text{182}\) Birt (1913: 296) questions how Alexander would then cram this many bookrolls into a casket (cf. *Alex.* 26.1-2) and speculates about an abridged version (cf. Birt 1907: 159, 216).

\(^\text{183}\) Hilhorst 1982.

\(^\text{184}\) Brunelle 2017: 265. For a similar argument, see Djurslev 2018: 543.
Contrary to modern scholars’ befuddlement, however, ancient readers did not seem to question or care about the apparent implausibility of tucking the *Iliad* under one’s pillow. In Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum*, the collector is imagined to be tucking books under his pillow to sleep on them. The only thing an ancient scholiast has to say on the line is a rather neutral observation: “they say that Alexander slept like this upon the poems of Homer.” This scene is no mere citation of Alexander as *pepaideumenos*: rather, we ought to understand this scene as part of Alexander’s image as a complicated figure who elsewhere displays a theatrical and emotional attachment to texts—especially letters—as palimpsest like objects that encode social, intimate relationships and blur temporalities.

We can start to probe the affectivity of this nocturnal tableau of not-reading by situating the scene within the framing narrative, which concerns Alexander’s fraught relationship with his teacher, Aristotle. The genitive absolute (Ἀριστότελους διορθώσαντος) tells us that it is not only “Homer” who is in bed with Alexander, but also Aristotle. If Plutarch had truly wanted to frame Alexander as a scholarly reader of Homer, he might have followed Strabo’s version (13.1.27) in which Alexander himself annotates and corrects the *Iliad*. Rather, our snapshot of Alexander curled up with his *Iliad* falls smack dab in the middle of Plutarch’s account of his education as a youth by Aristotle (7) and his eventual estrangement from his teacher (8.4). Alexander’s particular copy of the *Iliad*, with Aristotle’s emendations, fuses temporalities together: this blurring of past and present is mirrored by Plutarch’s narrative structure, which envelops this (future) bedtime scene within the linear narrative of Alexander’s youth.

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185 Rabe 1906: 151.
Several further details of this framing are particularly salient: the first is that we learn
Alexander becomes upset when, upon crossing into Asia, he learns that Aristotle is circulating
some of his more secret and profound (ἀπορρήτων καὶ βαθυτέρων) teachings in book form:

> ἠδη γὰρ εἰς Ἀσίαν διαβεβηκώς, καὶ πυθόμενοι λόγους τινὰς ἐν βιβλίοις περὶ τούτων ύπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους ἐκδιδόσθαι, γράφει πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ φιλοσοφίας παρρησιαζόμενος ἐπιστολήν, ἣς ἀντίγραφόν ἔστιν. “Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀριστοτέλει εὐ πράττειν. οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἐποίησας ἡκόδους τοὺς ἀκροαματικοὺς τῶν λόγων. τίνι γὰρ δὴ διοίσωμεν ἡμεῖς τῶν ἄλλων, εἰ καθ’ οὓς ἐπαιδεύθημεν λόγους, οὗτοι πάντων ἔσονται κοινοὶ; ἐγὼ δὲ βουλοίμην ἂν ταῖς περὶ τὰ ἄριστα ἐμπειρίας ἢ ταῖς δυνάμεις διαφέρειν. ἔρρωσο.”

For, after he had already crossed over into Asia and had learned that certain treatises on
these topics had been published by Aristotle in books, he wrote a letter to him in
unrestrained language on behalf of philosophy. This is a copy of it: “Alexander greets
Aristotle. You have not behaved correctly in publishing these acroamatic doctrines. For,
in what area will I surpass other men if these doctrines in which I’ve been educated will
be the common property of all? For my part, I would rather excel in my acquaintance
with the best things than in my power. Farewell.”

The published and circulating books carrying Aristotle’s teachings operate in stark contrast to
Alexander’s cloistered education in these same matters. While these profound and secret
doctrines had been transmitted from teacher to student viva voce, now, as books, they can reach
not only anyone’s minds, but anyone’s hands. What bothers Alexander is not so much the notion
that more people will ruminate on abstract philosophical doctrines, but rather the reality that
Aristotle now circulates qua physical book and becomes common property. Even the
accumulation of power (δυνάμεσι) on his military campaign pales in comparison to his unique
experience of intimate learning with Aristotle: Alexander stands apart from the many in his
acquaintance or experience (ἐμπειρίαις) not just with “the best things” (τὰ ἄριστα) but also with Ἀριστοτέλης.

186 For another telling of this episode, see Gellius ΝΑ 20.5.
Aristotle writes back to Alexander to defend his actions, claiming that the doctrines were “both published and not published. For in truth the treatises on metaphysics are not useful for teaching and learning but rather were written as a reminder for those who have been trained from the start” (καὶ ἐκδεδομένων καὶ μὴ ἐκδεδομένων. ἄληθῶς γὰρ ἡ μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ πραγματεία πρὸς διδασκαλίαν καὶ μάθησιν οὐδὲν ἔχουσα χρήσιμον ὑπόδειγμα τοῖς πεπαιδευμένοις ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς γέγραπται, 7.5). Plutarch ultimately leaves this exchange unresolved, leaving it to the reader to determine whether or not Alexander would have been persuaded by the assurance that only the pepaideumenoi could truly “access” these most intimate lessons. With Alexander’s concerns about other people handling “Aristotle” in book form still lingering, we are almost immediately confronted with the image of Alexander keeping “Aristotle” (in the form of his textual emendations of the Iliad) as close at hand as can be: under his pillow as he sleeps, accompanied by a dagger. While a reader attuned to the themes of the Iliad might take that dagger as symbolic of the poem’s martial themes, another reader, sensitive to Alexander’s anxiety about the circulation of Aristotle’s books, might understand the dagger as a line of defense for this particular copy of the Iliad, lest this book with its Aristotelian traces be removed from the intimate space of the bed and circulated like Aristotle’s philosophical treatises.

After Plutarch tells us of the wound Alexander experiences from hearing about Aristotle’s publication of his books, he then informs us that it was Aristotle who inculcated in his pupil a love for the art of healing: “for [Alexander] not only loved the theory of medicine, but he even came to the aid of his friends when they were sick and prescribed certain therapies and diets to them, as one can gather from his letters” (ἐκ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν, 8.1). It is highly unlikely that Alexander physically came to the bedsides of all of his sick friends; rather, he “comes” to their aid and prescribes remedies through letters. It is no coincidence, then, that Plutarch
showcases the ability of material texts to serve as proxy for an absent person, right after Alexander’s objection to Aristotle’s circulating books and right before we see Alexander in bed with his *Iliad*.

These details add another layer to the meaning of the participle διορθώσαντος. As Alexander “heals” his friends, so Aristotle as textual editor plays the *Iliad’s* doctor, straightening out its *melē*. All the more reason that this particular copy of the *Iliad*, “healed” by Aristotle, has special meaning for Alexander, whose love of healing was first sparked by Aristotle. The therapeutic potential of the *Iliad* as physical text comes into clearer view if we consider other documented instances in antiquity where people sleep with objects—including material texts—under their pillows or in their beds to heal their diseases. Jeremiah Coogan, for example, has illustrated how early Christians in North Africa slept with the gospels when sick.187 The 4th century CE treatise of Sextus Placitus even recommends sleeping with a wolf’s head under the pillow to heal ailments (8.2). More to the point of Homer, medical and magical handbooks from the late antique period often urge the wearing of amulets, inscribed with Homeric verses, to ward off misfortunes and heal various illnesses.188 The late 3rd century CE Roman medical poet Serenus Sammonicus even advises putting “the fourth book of Homer’s *Iliad* under the frightened patient” (*Maeoniae Iliados quartum suppone timenti* 907) suffering from quartan fever,189 an image that in particular calls to mind Alexander with his *Iliad* under his pillow.

The therapeutic potential of this book for Alexander becomes even more significant when we compare another instance where Alexander sleeps with a physical text under his pillow (19.3-}

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187 Coogan 2018.

188 For examples, see Faraone 1996: 83-85.

189 The *quartus liber* of the *Iliad* matches “quartan fever,” and the doctor Machaon appears in this book as well. I am grateful to James Uden for pointing this poem out to me.
4). Alexander has fallen dangerously ill after taking a bath in the icy cold river Cydnus. His friend Philip the Acarnian boldly decides to prepare a medicine for Alexander to regain his strength. Parmenio, however, sends a letter to Alexander warning him to be on guard against Philip on the grounds that he intends to kill him rather than heal him. The scene unfolds in a dramatic way (19.4):

Alexander read the letter and placed it under his pillow without showing it to any one of his friends. When the time appointed was at hand, and Philip came in with the king’s companions, carrying the medicine cup, Alexander handed him the letter, while he himself took the medicine from him with readiness and no sign of suspicion. It was an amazing sight, then, one worthy of the stage—the one reading the letter, the other drinking the medicine...

The intense, emotional drama between friends in this scene—facilitated by Alexander whipping a letter out from under his pillow—and its therapeutic outcome (Alexander’s body is healed and his friendship with Philip is healed) encourages us to reconsider what Alexander might be doing, or feeling, in putting the *Iliad* under his pillow.

The therapeutic quality of books as objects also increases the further away from Greece Alexander goes. Plutarch calls him a “lover of words and a lover of reading” but not once does he show us Alexander actually reading any of these books. Instead, books act as companions to be kept close at hand or under one’s pillow. Consider, for example, Alexander’s request for books from Harpalus, having found no books in the interior of Asia (8.2-3):
δὲ θαυμάζων ἐν ἀρχῇ καὶ ἀγαπῶν οὖχ ἦττον, ὡς αὐτός ἔλεγε, τοῦ πατρὸς, ὡς δ᾽ ἐκεῖνον μὲν ἵπτον, διὰ τοῦτον δὲ καλὰς ἵπτον, ὑστερον ὑποπτότερον ἔσχεν, οὖχ ὅστε ποιήσαι τι κακόν, ἀλλ᾽ αἱ φιλοφροσύναι τὸ σφοδρόν ἐκεῖνο καὶ στερτικὸν οὖχ ἔχουσαι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀλλοτριώτητος ἐγένοντο τεκμήριον.

And so, he sent him the books of Philistus and many of the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles and Aeschylus, and the dithyrambs of Teltestes and Philoxenus. Aristotle he admired at first and loved him, as he himself used to say, no less than he did his father, for the latter had given him life, but the former had taught him to live well; but later, he held him in suspicion, not with the result that he did him any harm, but rather his friendliness lacked their former zealousness and affection towards him and this was proof of their estrangement.

Note how after this catalogue of authors and their books, the name of Aristotle seamlessly intervenes, almost as if he too is sent to Alexander in book form. The catalogue of authors who are now “present” with Alexander as he travels further away from Greece heightens the estrangement that unfolds between Alexander and his teacher, whom, in earlier times, he had loved “no less than his own father.” At the start of the story, we saw Alexander fretting about Aristotle qua book falling into the hands of other, unknown readers and considered how this anxiety about the social lives of texts could explain why he keeps this Iliad, with its Aristotelian traces, under wraps with a dagger. As this episode comes to a close, however, a large entourage of canonical authors gain presence qua books with Alexander and overshadow the lonely Aristotle, who quickly fades from the narrative of the Life.

When contextual surround is taken into view, we start to see how the pillow-scene is less about Homer as symbol of paideia and Alexander as pepaideumenos than it is about Alexander’s negotiation of his fraught relationship with his teacher and the intimate power of material texts for those distanced from the ones they love. In fact, “Homer” the “author” is not even explicitly mentioned in this bedtime scene. When the Iliad crops up a second time in the Life (26), Homer then becomes the star of the show and Aristotle’s textual presence has completely disappeared.
from view. At this point, Alexander’s army has just laid siege to Gaza, and those in charge of the Persian king Darius’s possessions have brought to Alexander the “most precious item,” an ornate chest (κιβωτίου). Alexander decides to place his *Iliad* in there for safekeeping (φρουρήσειν) rather than in the intimate space under the pillow. Aristotle is nowhere to be seen, and now it is Homer who “seemed to accompany him on his expedition” (αὐτῷ συστρατεύειν ἔοικεν, 26.2). Homer even appears to him in a dream and instructs him, through reciting two lines from the *Odyssey*, to model the city of Alexandria on Pharos (26.3-4), causing Alexander to claim that Homer was “marvelous in respect to other things and a very wise architect” (τά τε ἄλλα θαυμαστὸς καὶ σοφώτατος ἀρχιτέκτων, 26.4).

Alexander embodies an attachment to this book that does not align with the pose of the *pepaideumenos*. In fact, a number of details suggest that Alexander fails as a reader according to Plutarch’s *Poetry*. One example is Alexander’s attachment to the character Achilles. As Mossman has charted, Alexander understood himself as both a descendant of and real-life counterpart to Achilles, even filtering his own relationship with Hephaestion through that of Achilles and Patroclus.¹⁹⁰ When Alexander visits Troy, for example, he anoints Achilles’ gravestone with oil, runs a race by it with his companions, crowns it with garlands, and “pronounces the hero happy in having, while alive, a faithful friend, and after death, a great herald of his fame” (15.4). And yet, in so deeply attaching himself to Achilles, Alexander does precisely what Plutarch warns against in *Poetry*. According to *Poetry*, good readers ought to use

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¹⁹⁰ Mossman 1988, who notes this is commonplace in the sources on Alexander’s life: Diodorus 17.1.4; Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.11-12; Plutarch *Mor.* 327f-328a, *Alexander* 15.4-5.
Achilles as an example of how to curb one’s anger. Plutarch cites the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles in Book 1 of the *Iliad* (26d-e):

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\text{μάλλον παροξυνθεῖς ἐπὶ τὸ ἔξοφος φέρεται σφάτειν διανοούμενος, οὔτε πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ὀρθὸς οὔτε πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον. ἐπὶ αὐθεὶς μετανοῆσας,}
\]

\[
	ext{ἂψ ἐς κουλεῶν ὃσε μέγα ἔξοφος, οὐδ’ ἀπίθησε μύθῳ Αθηναίης,}
\]

\[
	ext{ὁρθῶς πάλιν καὶ καλῶς, ὅτι τὸν θυμὸν ἐκκόψαι παντάπασι μὴ δυνηθεῖσιν, ὃμως πρὶν ἀνήκεστόν τι ἀβάςα μετέτσησαι καὶ κατέσχεν εὔπειθῇ τῷ λογίσμῳ γενόμενον.}
\]

Having become more irritated, he draws himself towards his sword, intending to slay [Agamemnon], wrongly in respect to both honor and expediency. Later, again, having changed his mind/repented, he thrust his large sword back into its scabbard and he did not ignore Athena’s words,” this time rightly and honorably, because, although he was unable to entirely eradicate his anger, still, before doing anything irreparable, he put it aside and held it in check, (his anger) made obedient to reason.

Achilles, though angry, causes his anger to be subdued to rational thought (*logismos*) and puts away his sword. The same cannot be said for Alexander in the scene where he murders Cleitus (*Life* 50-52). At a symposium, a drunk Cleitus, “by nature harsh in his anger and overbold” (φύσει τραχὺς…πρὸς ὀργὴν καὶ αὐθάδης, 50.9), delivers a *makarismos* in which he envies the dead: they are more fortunate than those Greeks who are currently dealing with Alexander’s degeneration into Eastern customs and luxury (51.1). Alexander becomes incensed (παροξυνθεῖς, 51.1, just like Achilles in *Poetry* 26d), and after Cleitus delivers another insult—that Alexander might be better off “living with barbarians and slaves, who would fall at the knees of his Persian girdle and white tunic” (51.3)—Alexander is no longer able to control his anger (οὐκέτι φέρων

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191 In a lost work *On Freedom from Anger* (quoted at Gellius, *NA* 1.26.5-7), Plutarch indicates that an enslaver should not flog his slaves while angry: anger is unbefitting to the philosopher and the free man. In *On the Education of Children* (10b-d), the writer urges fathers to raise their sons to conquer their anger, using the example of Plato who, when he was upset at a slave, would order his sister’s son in law to beat him, instead of beating him himself.

192 On how this scene and the murder of Callisthenes transgress sympotic ethics in Plutarch, see Whitmarsh 2002: 181-84.
τὴν ὀργὴν, 51.3) and launches an apple at Cleitus. One of Alexander’s bodyguards wisely steals away his sword, and many men beg him to calm down, but to no avail: Alexander breaks into Macedonian and orders a trumpeter to sound an alarm. When the trumpeter bravely refuses, Alexander punches him in the face (51.4). Alexander finally seizes a spear from one of his guards and drives it through Cleitus. As soon as Cleitus falls dead, Alexander’s “angry spirit immediately departed” (εὐθὺς ἀφῆκεν ὁ θυμὸς αὐτόν, 51.6). Alexander so regrets the deed that he pulls the spear from Cleitus’s body with intent to kill himself, but his bodyguards whisk him away to his chamber, where he spends all night and the next day an emotional wreck, “lamenting bitterly” and heaving deep groans.

Alexander—if he were a good reader according to Poetry’s scheme—might have followed the example of Achilles laid out at Poetry 31b and bid Cleitus to be quiet and not irritate him. As Plutarch writes, those who are predisposed to anger and fits of passion must use precaution and forethought to control their anger (κρατεῖν ὀργῆς) and not be “made captive by it” (μηδ’ ἁλῶναι). “We must carefully show readers matters like this, that Achilles, though not tolerant or mild in temper, bids Priam to be quiet and not irritate him” (31c). The militaristic language figures this conflict between logos/logismos (as ever the stamp of the elite, free, masculine according to dominant norms) and the passions as a battle: though Alexander is one of the most dominating generals in the history of the ancient Mediterranean (Plutarch tells us that Caesar wept when he read of Alexander’s great deeds and realized how short he fell in

193 This action recalls Plutarch’s Cato, who, on the eve of his suicide, demands his sword (also taken from him) from an enslaved person and angrily punches him in the face. Despite the fact that Cato has the Phaedo in hand and reads it through three times, Cato’s actions and botched suicide indicate that Platonic doctrine (especially for a Stoic) is not to be gained from just reading books. On this scene, Zadorojnyi 2007, who sees here Plutarch’s following of the Platonic distrust in textual materiality.

194 Whitmarsh (2002: 183n. 53) observes that this scene evokes Odysseus’ slaughter of the suitors in Od. 22.
comparison), this is a battle he could not win, implicitly because he hasn’t read *Poetry* like a good reader.

Alexander thus embodies several aspects of *Poetry*’s failed reader: in his violent, drunken outburst, he does not at all embody Greek ethics of philosophical self-control. He also blurs the Greek-barbarian binary, here vividly figured by the image of barbarians “kneeling” to him in his Greek tunic and Persian girdle. Plutarch is ambivalent about Alexander’s gradual adoption of Persian clothing and customs: either he put on “barbaric dress” (ἐνεδύσατο τὴν βαρβαρικὴν στολὴν) to “assimilate himself” (συνοικεῖον) to the barbarians so as to “tame” them (ἔξημερωσεν) and secure his domination, or he did so as a technique for introducing Macedonians to the Persian custom of *proskynēsis* (45.1). Following the example of mismanaged anger, we might also understand Alexander’s blending of Hellenic and Persian ideals and customs partly as a consequence of bad reading. Plutarch claims that poetry, in particular the *Iliad*, is useful for boys to take note of the superiority of Greeks over barbarians (e.g. 29d-30a).\(^{195}\) Just as “prudence” (*pronoia*) is the mark of a man who has mastered his anger, it is also “characteristic of a Greek and man of refinement, while over-boldness is barbaric and low-class” (Ἕλληνικὸν οὖν καὶ ἀστεῖον ἢ πρόνοια, βαρβαρικὸν δὲ καὶ φαῦλον ἢ θρασύτης, 29f).

Alexander’s contentious introduction of the Persian custom of *proskunēsis* echoes the characterization of bad readers in *Poetry* who become “enslaved” (καταδεδουλωμένοι) to the famed reputation of heroes such that they “fall prostrate” (προσκυνοῦσιν, 26b) to and are in awe of everything that is said, unable to use rational thought to discern between right and wrong. Alexander has failed at using his *Iliad* as a resource according to the rubric of *Poetry* and rather

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\(^{195}\) At 19f, we learn that Paris is a shameful character because he is the only person in Homer to have sex during the daytime.
is “enslaved” to the famed reputation of his hero, Achilles, ultimately unable to use logismos to guide his actions when it counts.

2.5 Re-Orienting Alexander’s readerly failure

Alexander fails at using his Iliad according to the framework of *Poetry*. But there is something dissatisfying about relying on Plutarch to read Plutarch: inevitably, we will reproduce Plutarch’s own hierarchies between “good” and “bad” readers. In this final section, I propose a methodology through which to reframe Alexander, his Iliad, and his pillow. We might begin to understand this scene beyond the epistemological sphere of Plutarch by reorienting this book user and book as object within a queer epistemological sphere. Since Alexander fails at using poetry (books) the “right” way—as a gateway to philosophy—we might understand this vignette as encoding a “fleeting moment” of queer possibility. Here, I am drawing on queer theorists’ and archivists’ attention to ephemera.196 José Esteban Muñoz writes that (2006: 65):

> Queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term. The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as the trace, the remains, the things that are left hanging in the air like a rumor.

Returning to Plutarch’s framing of the scene within the *Life*, this nocturnal tableau swiftly enters and exits the broader, chronological narrative like a reported rumor: Alexander slept with the Iliad under his pillow, we learn, “as Onesicritus has recounted.” After the brief span of a sentence, we are jolted back into the primary narrative of Alexander’s life, our impression of this scene slowly fading like the impression on a pillow. Importantly, Muñoz notes, these ephemeral moments and performances “are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological

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196 e.g., Cvetkovich 2003: 110; Freeman 2007: 62.
sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.”\textsuperscript{197} I have already shown how scholars have attempted to read this scene as “impossible”: there is simply no way Alexander could have gotten a good night’s sleep with the \textit{Iliad} tucked under his pillow, and given this impossibility, the scene must metaphorically symbolize \textit{paideia} and learnedness. As the lens of book history shows, however, people in antiquity kept books under their pillows often because they were attached to an affective aspect of the object’s materiality, less as a ‘text’ to be read. And as I have shown, this particular copy of the \textit{Iliad} has significance for Alexander not only because it transmits the story of Achilles and Patroclus (after whom Alexander styled his own relationship with Hephaestion, who, like Patroclus, would tragically die before his time) but also because it transmits the traces of his teacher, Aristotle. Both the materiality of the book and the framing of the book within the narrative of Alexander’s \textit{Life} blur time and bodily traces.

The 1918 poem “Kaisarion” by C. P. Cavafy helps us read this scene as a vignette that encodes a “fleeting moment” of queer possibility and temporality.

In part to ascertain a certain date
and in part to while away the time,
last night I took down a collection
of Ptolemaic inscriptions to read.
The unstinting laudations and flatteries
are the same for all. All of them brilliant,
glorious, mighty, beneficent;
every undertaking utterly wise.
As for the women of the line, they too,
all the Berenices and the Cleopatras, are wonderful too.

When I successfully ascertained the date
I’d have finished with the book, if a tiny,
insignificant reference to King Caesarion
hadn’t attracted my attention suddenly . . . . . .

Ah, there: you came with your indefinite

\textsuperscript{197} Muñoz 1996: 6-7.
charm. In history there are only a few
lines that can be found concerning you;
and so I could fashion you more freely in my mind.
I fashioned you this way: beautiful and feeling.
My artistry gives to your face
a beauty that has a dreamy winsomeness.
And so fully did I imagine you
that yesterday, late at night, when the lamp
went out—I deliberately let it go out—
I dared to think that you came into my room,
it seemed to me you stood before me: as you must have been
in Alexandria after it had been conquered,
pale and wearied, perfect in your sorrow,
still hoping they’d have mercy on you,
those vile men—who whispered” Surfeit of Caesars.”

This poem, about the ill-fated child of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar, has historically elicited a
similar response to the Alexander scene: scholars have identified in its poet-persona a fellow
scholar, who whiled away the evening by perusing a tome of Ptolemaic inscriptions. Margaret
Alexiou is among the many critics who have noted the stilted, academic language the poet uses
to open with the prosaic, adverbial phrase ‘in part, in part, en merei...en merei.’ Takis Kayalis
has recently emphasized that this channeling of an academic, narrative persona is a calculated
pose: “Cavafy’s appropriation of the ancient world in the modern Greek text probably serves to
invest the poem with an aura of subliminal authenticity and also to enhance his own pose as a
scholar-poet who is conversing directly with ancient sources to unearth lost treasures from
historical oblivion. But, despite its almost unanimous critical validation, this was indeed a pose.
Cavafy was a brilliant artist and surely a modernist...but he was certainly not a historian or a
scholar.”

198 Translated into English by Daniel Mendelsohn (2012).
199 Alexiou 1985: 183.
200 Kayalis 2019: 45.
Nonetheless, as Kayalis shows, this desire to see Cavafy as a true expert has led critics to go (vainly) in search of the scholarly tome of inscriptions that Cavafy must have been in the habit of perusing like an idle antiquarian. This move elbows out of view the queer aesthetics and dynamics of this bookish encounter. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s concept of queer phenomenology and Muñoz’s work queerness and futurity, Joe Watson argues that Cavafy rearticulates and orients himself towards objects (especially sculptures) from the Greek past in order to locate himself “on a queer continuum from the ancient world to his own days.” It takes little to queer Kaisarion, however, since Cavafy was surely aware of a long tradition of employing Kaisarion to encode and articulate homoerotic desire. What is queered in this poem is not so much the reader’s object of desire but rather the readerly persona itself, at first an old curmudgeon leafing through a tome in a historicizing manner, to ascertain dates and facts about a period in the past, who then casts “rigor” to the wind, bending and blurring time to resurrect a ghost. In making entities past and present touch, or partially touch, Cavafy’s poetic persona embodies what Carolyn Dinshaw identifies as a queer historical impulse, “for partial, affective connection, for community, for even a touch across time.”

Kayalis is right: Cavafy is not a historian or a scholar, any more than Plutarch’s Alexander is a “scholar at home in the second sophistic.” We might rather understand Cavafy’s poetic persona (and Plutarch’s Alexander) as enacting a mode of “queer unhistoricism.”

201 As Kayalis persuasively shows, Cavafy is likely engaging with J. P. Mahaffy’s (1895) The Empire of the Ptolemies.
203 For examples, Kayalis 2019: 53-61.
bending time, productive mobilisations of anachronism, and momentary or sustained transitions from temporal normativities into osmotic temporalities.” Read together with Cavafy, Alexander’s book-pillow tableau looks less like a scholarly performance of paideia and more of a cognate, queer impulse to bend time and space. For both, the book as object—Homer’s Iliad and a volume of inscriptions—turns out to work differently than we might expect. Instead of being a token of scholarly learnedness, or an aid to the historicizing scholar who seeks to “ascertain a date,” the book becomes animated as a locus for queer affectivity and the bending of time. Following Mario Telò and Sarah Olsen, we might “conceive of the interpretive act not as the impossible inhabiting of irreproducible, historically determined cultural codes but as a creative experience, in which the interpreting subject’s and the interpreted artwork’s temporalities deterritorialize each other.”

To return to one of the puzzles with which I started, Brunelle states: “no matter how romantic our views of Alexander, the love of literature cannot overcome the laws of nature.” Perhaps where scholars have gone wrong is precisely in trying to read this scene, to say nothing of love, “according to the laws of nature.” Naturally, there’s no way Alexander would have gotten a good night’s sleep on top of a standard ancient pillow and the entire Iliad in scroll form. But what happens if we resist the urge to make this scene conform to what’s “natural”? Perhaps the physical burden of the entire Iliad in scroll form is the point: Alexander doesn’t read the book, but he certainly would have felt it. Perhaps if Alexander couldn’t get a good night’s sleep

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205 Matzner 2016: 192.
206 Olsen and Telò 2022: 7.
207 Brunelle 2017: 258.
with the *Iliad* under his pillow, he tossed and turned in all sorts of positions, the same way we see Achilles do, after he has lost Patroclus, in *Iliad* 24.4-11:

ουδὲ μιν ὑπνὸς
��εὶ πανδαμάτωρ, ἄλλ᾽ ἐστρέφετ’ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα
Πατρόκλου ποθέων ἀνδροτήτα τε καὶ μένος ἤν,
ηδ᾽ ὅπόσα τολύεισσε σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ πάθεν ἄλγεα
ἀνδρῶν τε πτολέμους ἄλγεινά τε κύματα πείρων:
τὸν μυκηνακόμενος θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυον εἶβεν,
ἀλλὸτ᾽ ἐπὶ πλευρὰς κατακείμενος, ἀλλὸτε δ᾽ αὐτὲ
ὑπτιος, ἀλλὸτε δὲ πρηνής

All-subduing sleep could not take him, but he turned and twisted, from side to side, longing for the manhood of Patroclus and his noble might, all that they’d done together, and hardships they’d suffered, all that they’d gone through both on the field of battle and pounding waves of the sea: remembering these things he let fall streams of tears, and he would lay down on his side, but then on his back, but now facedown again.

Perhaps Alexander initially put the *Iliad* under his pillow because he wanted to look like a scholar. But that’s what Cavafy’s poetic persona claims to be doing at the start of “Kaisarion” too, and we know how that turns out for him, once the lights go out. This is the kind of queer potential I think we can open up by focusing a little less on reading what’s at the center of our texts, and a little more on feeling them, handling them, making them touch, dimming the lights, to not read, just to feel, if only for a fleeting moment.

### 2.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter by deconstructing a modern, hermeneutic approach to Plutarch that identifies in *Poetry* (and related essays in the *Moralia*) a certain model for reading: on the one hand, Jason König has illuminated how we might productively use Plutarch’s model of “active reading” to read other works of Plutarch, particularly those of miscellanistic variety. On the
other, David Konstan has taken Plutarch’s reader of *Poetry* as a model for us, a premodern blueprint of today’s ideal, active, critical reader. Part of what I take Konstan’s motivations to be is to prove that “good” critical readers of today were alive and kicking in imperial Rome. The implication of this genealogical thread is that Classicists are the inheritors of this hermeneutic tradition: the objects of our study thus merit our study because their authors envisioned ancient readers as sophisticated and critical as “us.” There is, however, a danger in championing *Poetry*’s normative vision of reading as masculine mastery (and all the baggage that entails) as our own. By contextualizing Plutarch’s prescriptive readerly program, and by thinking through the cultural politics of “use,” I have shown how *Poetry* creates a binary scheme of reading that categorically excludes certain readerly inhabitations, stigmatizing them as effeminate, servile, and foreign.

If *Poetry* sets in place a rigid, hegemonic binary for readerly practices, Plutarch’s *Alexander* allows us to probe around these categorical, readerly essences. Its charged scenes of embodied reading and not-reading let us see what kinds of readerly attachments and modes get swept to the side when the binary of ‘good/active’ and ‘bad/passive’ reading is ushered in. What we gain from reading *Poetry* alongside the example of Alexander as “bad reader” is a more nuanced understanding of how the ancients imagined relations between books and their readers: sometimes readers generated meaning from books by reading them (or having them read to them by an enslaved reader). But Alexander as a non-reader shows us how books were understood to generate meaning as objects that may or may not be read. Importantly, I have offered a different “reading” of the Alexander scene by reading “badly” myself, at least according to the readerly program in *Poetry*: I have embraced rather than papered over the desires readers bring to their
texts as objects and imagined what could have happened between Alexander and his book(s) behind closed doors.

These respective chapters on Seneca and Plutarch have taught us how philosophical courses in reading intersect with elite, normative projects: learning how to read becomes training ground for how to embody an idealized, elite masculine subject. More importantly, however, we have also learned how “not” to read, in two senses: first, we have learned about the dangers of not reading according to normative programs. For the elite readerly subject, this entails being marked with the intersecting language of servility and effeminacy. Second, we have learned through Alexander how not reading at all can generate meaning from a book: Alexander fails according to the readerly scheme of *Poetry*, but as a non-reader he also opens up a way of “reading” books as objects that do more than carry the verbal scrim of an author. By reading Alexander not reading, through the lenses of queer ephemera and the poetics of C. P. Cavafy, we can speculate about what books could mean to their users at nighttime, in the dark, when the lights go out, when the reader cannot be surveilled.

After presenting a version of this argument at a conference, a colleague said to me: “couldn’t the book just be a metaphor?” Indeed, as I have shown, the dominant way of reading this scene is to assume the implausibility of this book as an object (Plutarch, or Alexander, has failed to account for the *Iliad*’s true girth) and thus read the book as a metaphor, as a symbol of Alexander the *pepaideumenos*. This response to my queer reorientation of this scene seems to suggest that I am reading too much into things, a familiar charge against queer readings: as David Getsy remarks, “underlying these anxieties about “reading into” is a defensive and pernicious desire to uphold the normative. Immediately suspect are any interpretations that make use of artworks or ideas to carve out semantic space for differently identified individuals to adopt
those artworks. To prompt us to see a material or an object in a different way—against or to the side of its intended use—is a queer tactic. “Reading” a book may be different from “reading into” a book. Often, “reading” a book means reading “through” a book, prioritizing its authorial, verbal scrim over and against its textual materiality. To “read into” the book may mean to linger on the materials we are supposed to pass over. To “read into” the book may mean to read for traces other than those of the “author,” the traces of other users, producers, and handlers. This mode of reading (into) books lays the ground for the next chapters, which examine two different perspectives on the paradoxical power of the book to shore up and destabilize certain embodiments and epistemologies (Martial’s authorial persona, Lucian’s pepadeumenos speaker).

\[208\] Doyle and Getsy 2013: 63.
Chapter 3: Playing the Bad Reader in Martial’s *Epigrams*

The previous two chapters have tracked how Seneca and Plutarch frame reading as a training course in elite, masculine, philosophical embodiment. The “bad reader” deviates from this prescriptive path, and through his failure, comes to be figured in feminizing, servile, and othering language. But “bad readers” do more than service this elite, normative, and exclusionary discourse: they also illuminate other epistemologies of the book, epistemologies that Seneca and Plutarch (according to their specific literary, generic, ideological projects and cultural contexts) are motivated to paper over. As the case of Alexander demonstrated, we come into contact with these alternative epistemologies and embodied relations to books by straying from well-trodden hermeneutic paths ourselves, paths that are paved both by Plutarch’s *Poetry* and modern scholars. The search for the bad reader becomes all the more important when modern and ancient hermeneutic paths intersect and reinforce one another—when we read the way an ancient author wants us to—as they have in the case of the poet Martial.

“How does one *read* an epigrammatist?” 209 This is the question posed by William Fitzgerald at the outset of his 2007 monograph, the first book length treatment of Martial in English since J. P. Sullivan’s 1991 *Martial: The Unexpected Classic*. One recurring response to Fitzgerald’s question goes like this: if one wants to read and appreciate a book of epigrams as “literature,” one ought to read each book straight through, as a carefully designed and ordered whole. 210 This now-fashionable hermeneutic approach counters the “libellus theory” put forth by Peter White (1974), who maintained that Martial’s books of epigrams comprised arbitrary

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collections of occasional poems that were originally composed and published elsewhere for
private addressees. White’s popular theory was delivered a decisive blow by Don Fowler’s
(1995) essay “Martial and the Book”: for Fowler, these supposedly private epigrams in fact
acquire new meaning when read within the context of their epigrammatic liber. What we see in
Martial is not an awkward conglomeration of occasional poetry but rather “a sophisticated play
on the notions of serial reading.”

In addition to reading individual books as cohesive yet varied wholes, critics have increasingly drawn attention to how the twelve Epigrammaton Libri reward
the “attentive reader who approaches the numbered books as planned installments in a grand and
complex serial narrative.”

Sure, the reader can be selective and may choose to skip over
certain epigrams (as Martial suggests at Xenia 3.7-8 and Apophoreta 2.3-4). But, in Gideon
Nisbet’s words, “selective consumption must never be allowed to shade into reproduction or
material alteration; no plagiarist or interpolator may compromise the textual and physical
wholeness of the libellus.” While Nisbet is here talking about the ancient reader, his analysis
also implicates the modern critic: “good” readers of Martial—both then and now—appreciate the
authorial architecture and literary cohesion of Martial’s dodecology.

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211 Fowler 1995: 214. Another of Fowler’s interventions in this important essay is to show why ‘the book’ in Martial
should be of interest to literary critics in addition to scholars of ancient book production: “the constant reference to
the book in Martial should be an invitation to treat his poems as more than a source for social history, and to allow
the interplay of possible readers to produce its myriad and complex effects” (1995: 204).

212 Nisbet 2020: 78. Crucial to this mode of reading Martial is the poetic cycle. Martial’s ‘cycles and other structuring
devices were noted as early as Barwick 1958. For a summary of studies on book composition in Martial, see Scherf
2001. As Lorenz (2004: 256) notes, however, these scholars “do not generally treat the libri as organic wholes. Instead,
individual components are extracted from their context and considered in isolation.”

213 Nisbet 2020: 60. Obvious examples of such tampering appear in Book 1 (e.g., Fidentinus in 1.53 and Cornelius in
1.35, warned against ‘castrating’ Martial’s books by purging its risqué content) and reemerge in Book 10, put forth in
a second, revised edition after the assassination of Domitian.

214 Further on this form of “macro” reading of Martial’s twelve books of Epigrams, see Lorenz 2019.
What these responses tell us is that the question of how to read Martial the epigrammatist is also a question of how to read Martial’s “books” of epigrams the way he wants them to be read. One issue with this now-orthodox way of reading Martial is that it treats “the book” as an authorial, disembodied vehicle—hermetically sealed and stable—for serial, literary reading by a lector studiosus. But the lens of book history teaches us to understand “books” as variably embodied objects that adumbrate a range of writers, producers, readers, and users beyond the author, the “ideal book,” and the intended or ideal reader. When we essentialize the book, when we treat the book simply as a disembodied funnel for an author’s words, we leave to the side a whole range of readerly (and non-readerly) subjects, practices, and possibilities. This hermeneutic approach casts aside readerly subjects and practices that disturb this idealized mode of literary communion with Martial the epigrammatist. In this chapter, I linger over the readers and book users who threaten the authorial integrity of Martial and his epigrammatic books (and who thus also threaten our own desire to read his “books” as such). Because Martial is forging an authorial identity as an author of books of epigrams—a fluid medium, scrawled anonymously on pots, walls, and other surfaces—he is particularly anxious about readers who tamper physically with his books, who reauthorize them by inserting their own poetry into them, who threaten to turn his books into schooltexts or graffiti.

In constructing a discursive boundary between these meddling readers and the integrity of his authorial book, Martial figuratively marks these readers as gender deviant, low status, foreign, and filthy: they threaten the authorial integrity of his books just as they threaten to pollute the social order. As I trace Martial’s representations of these meddling readers and filthy handlers, I expose how these bodies become treated as “inherently” disgusting and capable of

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debasing and contaminating Martial’s textual, authorial project, often through touch. As Sara Ahmed’s theorization of disgust teaches us, bodies and signs are not inherently “disgusting,” but become so because of a history of contact between bodies and signs already “designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place.” I trace the historicity of disgust by following certain metaphors around, tracking how they accumulate affective value as they circulate and “stick” (to use Ahmed’s phrasing) to some bodies and their readerly practices as opposed to others. This helps us understand how and why Martial puts energy into marking some readers’ hands as “inherently” filthy, contaminating, and threatening, and helps us resist reproducing this essentializing discourse about “bad readers” ourselves.

One particularly “sticky” figure that emerges here is the grammarian, who serves more broadly in our imperial sources as a locus for elite Roman anxieties about gender, social status, and ethnic otherness. What might Martial have to gain from directing so much energy towards framing the readerly practices of grammarians—for them, a normal practice of annotating the text—as perverse and filthy? James Uden has recently illuminated how grammarians were not just low-status individuals who expounded the poets to children of the elite, but also composers of satiric verse in their own right, “marginal voices in the lineage of the genre of satire.” I argue that Martial mobilizes a satirical poetics that contains and domesticates the threat posed by these social, textual interlopers and rival authors. Martial may stigmatize the readerly practices and products of the interloping reader, but he does so through formal and aesthetic moves that cause him to hedge close to embodying this kind of nefarious reader himself. This performance


is most clearly on display at 1.53, a poem in the so-called “Fidentinus” cycle, where Martial lampoons a certain kind of nefarious reading practice at the same time as he appropriates and (re)performs it to ludic ends, safely ensconced within his own theater of epigram. In this way, Martial’s “bad readers” form a locus for experimenting with and enacting an ideological practice characteristic of the genre of Roman satire. Martial engages in what Thomas Habinek has called “ludic substitution,” a kind of mimetic play central both to the literary genre of satire and to Roman culture itself and its need to incorporate and assimilate the alien, threatening other. Ultimately, Martial must play the “bad reader” in order for the “bad reader” to get played.

3.1 Hands-on Reading: the malignus interpres and the dominus

Our expectations for Martial’s meddling reader are first conditioned by the appearance, and quick dismissal, of the malignus interpres in the Preface to Book 1. Martial uses this preface to set forth several programmatic claims about the poetry that follows: he will not joke about real people by name, and the lasciviousness of his verse merely follows the tradition of Catullus and co. Associating his dirty, obscene verse with the spectacle of Flora’s games (Florales, 15), he bids “Cato” adieu (non intret Cato theatrum meum). We might reasonably suppose that the morally prudish reader is the wrong kind of reader for Martial, but Martial is being cheeky: a reader as morally stern as Cato is in fact welcome to read what follows, provided he doesn’t

\[^{219}\text{Habinek 2005a: 181-82. Martial is not traditionally included in the genealogy of Roman saturae, but his influence on Juvenal is pervasive, and his poems clearly play with well-established trademarks of the genre. Freudenberg (2005: 16) notes: “Martial’s Epigrams are “fully ‘satiric’ in our modern sense without being ‘satire’ per se...the importance of [Martial’s] influence to the larger history of the genre cannot be overstated. For it is precisely Martial’s epigrammatic complains against Greetlings, snobs, misers, freed slaves, whining poets, women, etc., that Juvenal makes into his signature performance.”}\]
make a show of storming off (*aut si intraverit, spectet*).\textsuperscript{220} The wrong sort of reader for Martial’s *Epigrams* is not the staunch Cato but rather the *malignus interpres*. Martial writes (Pref. 6-9):

\begin{quote}
absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea scribat: improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est.
\end{quote}

I hope the spiteful *interpres* keeps away from the openness of my jokes and doesn’t (re?)write (upon?) my epigrams: ‘tis shameless to be clever in another man’s book.

There is delicious irony in the fact that textual critics have rewritten, or written upon, the very sentence that begs readers to resist physically tampering with the text. The manuscript reading of *scribat* has roused unease in textual critics and commentators. Peter Howell writes “the somewhat unsatisfactory balance and rhythm suggest that something may have dropped out before *scribat*. If the text is right, *scribat* must here have the sense ‘rewrite.’”\textsuperscript{221} In his 1990 Teubner edition, Shackleton Bailey prints Heinsius’ conjecture of *inscribat* instead of *scribat*. In his discussion of the passage, Nisbet also accepts *inscribat* and takes the verb to mean “interpolating explanatory paratext in the form of poem-headings (such headings were a common feature of ancient epigram-books, including Martial’s own recent *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*).”\textsuperscript{222} The verb *scribere* may also suggest that Martial fears that this *interpres* will treat his epigrams as if they were graffiti, and will scrawl something on top of them: in Catullus 37.10, the poet

\textsuperscript{220} All text is from Shackleton Bailey’s Loeb edition. Martial treats his elite female readers the same way in Book 3: he playfully shooes them away, cautioning them that the rest of the book will contain much lewdness, only to catch them reading again about 20 poems later. For discussion of this, see Larash 2004.

\textsuperscript{221} Howell 1980: 97.

\textsuperscript{222} Nisbet 2020: 60.
threatens to “scribble obscenities/dicks on the front of the pub” \( (\textit{frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam}) \).\textsuperscript{223}

On top of this kerfuffle, critics are also divided over the precise sense of \textit{interpres}. As discussed in Chapter 1, this term casts a wide semantic net. In the context of Martial’s Preface, Nisbet parses \textit{malignus interpres} as either a “meddlesome copyist” or “jumped-up amateur littérature,” while Sam Hayes argues that the \textit{malignus interpres} “attributes to the poet a \textit{nigra fama} and seeks to write their own authority into the text to subvert its meaning.”\textsuperscript{224} Peter Anderson suggestively points out that Martial’s use of the word \textit{interpres} instead of \textit{lector} suggests that he has in mind the textual practices of grammarians: he is “not warning off the malicious reader, but the malicious exegete, who intends to damage Martial’s project.”\textsuperscript{225} As a grammarian, the \textit{interpres} presents a serious threat to Martial’s identity as an élite Roman author: as Kaster writes, “for literary men who would stand apart from the common run, the \textit{grammatici} became figures with whom they must reckon and from whom they might distinguish themselves.”\textsuperscript{226}

Whether we accept the manuscript reading of \textit{scribat} or opt for Heinsius’ \textit{inscribat}, one salient feature of the \textit{malignus interpres’} otherwise shadowy identity (copyist? grammarian? dick scribbler?) is his practice of reading pen-in-hand. Martial’s objection to the \textit{malignus interpres’} practice of leaving traces in “another man’s book” \( (\textit{alieno libro}) \) becomes clearer once we hit 1.3. Here, we meet Martial himself, engaging with his own work pen-in-hand. In this poem,

\textsuperscript{223} As Milnor (2014: 20n 46) notes, \textit{sopio} may have nothing to do with writing per se but may rather be another one of the numerous Latin euphemisms for penis (which is how the \textit{OLD} has it).”

\textsuperscript{224} Hayes 2016: 69.

\textsuperscript{225} Anderson 2008: 210.

\textsuperscript{226} Kaster 1988: 53.
Martial plays on Horace’s *Ep.* 1.20, in which Horace figures his now-finished book as a manumitted slave eager to prostitute/sell itself in the city. Martial also personifies his book as an enslaved person, eager to leave his owner’s/author’s *scrinia* and make for the bookshops of the Argiletum, the main thoroughfare of the Subura known for both bookshops and brothels.\(^{227}\) Although Martial warns his “book” that he’ll endure harsh criticism and ridicule from the Roman public, the personified book will take his chances. For, we are told (ll. 9-11):

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sed tu, ne totiens domini patiare lituras
neve notet lusus tristis harundo tuos,
aetherias, lascive, cupis volitare per auras:
i, fuge; sed poteras tutior esse domi.
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you desire, lascivious fellow, to flit through the airs of heaven, lest you keep on suffering the erasures/smudges of your master, lest his stern reed pen mark up your jests. Go on, get: but you could have been safer at home.

In these lines, Martial explicitly links himself as “author” to the enslaver: the book *qua* enslaved person suffers (*patiare*) at the editorial hands of his enslaver (*domini*). Unlike the *interpres* of the Preface, who inscribes another man’s book (*in alieno libro*), the stern pen of the *dominus* has the authority to shape, mold, and inscribe (or indeed, “cane,” if we take that sense of *harundo*, cf. Petronius 134.3-4) his own book at his will. Most translators take *lituras* to mean “erasures,” but more precisely they refer to the “smearings” or “smudges” (cf. the verb *lino*) of ink that may result from the act of erasure (either by rubbing ink that is still wet, or wetting a sponge to smear dry ink, cf. Martial 4.10; or in the case of parchment, creating a smudge by scraping ink with a knife). We can see how “smudgings” is a more appropriate sense by observing how in elegiac (or generally depressing) poetry *liturae* are frequently accompanied by the poet’s tears (*lacrimi*). For example, Ovid’s *liber* at *Tristia* III.1.1-20, personified as a slave sent to Rome, tells his reader:

\(^{227}\) Williams 2002: 157 notes the sexualized representation of the book/enslaved youth and author.
“as for the fact that my messy letters are stained with smudges, the poet himself has harmed his own work with tears” (littera suffusas quod habet maculosa lituras / laesit opus lacrimis ipse poeta suum, 15-16). To remove liturae altogether, Pliny the Elder recommends using urine (NH 28.66.4: hac et atramenti liturae abluuntur). Finally, describing the notorious emendation of the name “Verres” to “Verrucius,” Cicero asks the jury: “do you see that the final part of the name, that there tail-bit, has sunk in the erasure like a pig’s tail in mud?” (videtis extremam partem nominis, codam illam Verrinam tamquam in luto demersam esse in litura, Verr. 2.2.191). This suggests that an erasure on a wax tablet—created by the flat end of the stylus—would have left a noticeable impression. Liturae would have looked different on wax as opposed to papyrus or parchment (on wax, the wax is smeared, but on an ink-bearing surface, the ink is smeared), but the salient point here is that “erasure” leaves a visible trace: for Martial, these “smearings” impress the traces of the author/enslaver upon the book, figured as the permeable, enslaved body.

These smudges—and the close connection between ink and makeup—suggest an authorial editing/grooming at play, but of a rather different vein from the Catullan paradigm. Catullus figured the dedicatory copy of his book as a depilated, enslaved boy, “smooth” (levis) and “polished with dry pumice stone” (arida pumice expolitum). Where Catullus’ libellus was rubbed with pumice, thus smoothing out its surface (and figuring the aesthetic qualities of its verbal contents), Martial’s “smearing” of his book suggests that his grooming has left periodic traces. Further, the verb notet also heightens the sense that Martial is here concerned with impressing his own marks upon the book, at the same time as it invokes the intertwined dynamics of authorial “editing” and enslavement: its cognate noun nota can mean critical marks, such as the notae that Seneca the Younger claims to insert in his books so that his reader can

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228 On Catullus c. 1 and its connection to slavery, see Fitzgerald 1995: 40-41.
quickly find the passages he approves (*Ep.* 6.4), or stenographic signs, a shorthand writing system in which the enslaved secretary’s “hand follows the speed of the tongue” (*CELERITATEM LINGUA MANUS SEQUITUR*, Sen. *Ep.* 90.25). The book’s imagined sense of panic and pain at the editorial hands of his owner also invites readers to associate this verb with *nota* as a “tattoo,” such that an enslaver would inflict on the body of his slaves who had attempted to escape.

Of course, it is impossible to say definitively whether Martial’s description of his editorial activities is to be taken literally (Martial the author is smearing and marking/making up his physical book) or metaphorically (Martial invokes the materiality of editing to make a claim about the aesthetics of his poetry: as the juxtaposition of *lusus* (“jokes”) and *tristis* (“stern, serious”) suggests, it will contain witty paradoxes and ironic barbs), or both. Luke Roman (2001) helps us see that this is precisely the kind of tension characteristic of Martial’s poetics of literary materiality. He writes, “the relentlessness of Martial’s materialist fiction thus creates the basis for a striking polarization of hermeneutic options: the reader must either accept the problematic fiction afforded by the text’s literal account of itself, or assume a literariness the text persistently disavows.” Whether we take Martial to be describing a “fictional” encounter between himself and his book or not, the aesthetic dynamics of this encounter are grounded in the material reality and conditions of enslaved literary labor, where Martial styles himself as an author who marks his epigrammatic book as his own proprietary, poetic project. Elsewhere in the *Epigrams*, Martial claims that these “authorial traces” increase the value of the books for readers: in 7.17,

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229 Seneca (*Ep.* 90.25) goes on to claim that shorthand is “the invention of the most worthless kinds of slaves; wisdom sits higher up, and she is not the teacher of the hand, but of the mind” (*VILISSIMORUM MANCIPIORUM ISTA COMMENTA SUNT; SAPIENTIA ALTUS SEDET NEC MANUS EDOCET, ANIMORUM MAGISTRA EST*). At *Aphophoreta* 14.208, Martial praises a stenographer (*notarius*) whose hand runs faster than the dictated words.

230 Compare the description of the slaves who work the mill in Apuleius’ *Met.* 9.12.3-4: their “foreheads are tattooed” (*FRONTES LITTERATI*).

231 Roman 2001: 129.
Martial imagines that his seven, published books of *Epigrams* are worthy of finding a humble niche in the library of a villa, for “they are marked by the pen of their own author: this smudging increases their value” (*auctoris calamo sui notatos / haec illis pretium facit litura*, 7.17.7-8). The implication to the reader here is twofold: first, to assume that any smudges or markings on their own copy of Martial’s books are from the author (rather than a copyist, former reader, etc.), and second, to resist smudging or inscribing the book themselves, since that would dilute or threaten their presumed value as “authorial” books.

*Ep.* 1.3, occupied with impressing traces of Martial the author onto his books, reinforces the contrast drawn in the Preface to Book 1 between the author and the rival *malignus interpres* who inscribes “another man’s book” (*alieno libro*). At the same time, it implicates them both in shared, rival activities of marking up the book. Turning to another poem set early in a book (3.2), we are able to crystallize further the threat posed by the *malignus interpres* type of reader. Here, two kinds of bad readers are curiously juxtaposed: a cook and Probus the grammarian, who reads pen in hand (3.2):

\[
\begin{align*}
cuius vis fieri, libelle, munus? \\
festina tibi vindicem parare, \\
ne nigram cito raptus in culinam \\
cordylas madida tegas papyro \\
vel turis piperisve sis cucullus. \\
5 \\
Faustini fugis in sinum? sapisti. \\
cedro nunc licet ambules perunctus \\
et frontis gemino decens honore \\
pictis luxurieris umbilicis, \\
et te purpura delicata velet \\
et coco rubeat superbus index. \\
10 \\
illo vindice nec Probum timeto.
\end{align*}
\]

Whose present do you want to be, little book? Hurry, find yourself a protector, lest you are swiftly carried off to a sooty kitchen and wrap tuna with your soaked papyrus, or become a case for incense or pepper. Are you fleeing into Faustinus’ lap? You’ve got good taste. Now you are allowed to walk about anointed with cedar oil and handsomely shaped with the twin ornament of your brow you’ll luxuriate in your painted bosses, and dapper purple
will cloak you, and your proud title will blush with scarlet color. With him as your protector, have no fear of Probus.

This poem begins by calling to mind Catullus c. 1 (cui dono lepidum novum libellum), and, like 1.3, channels the themes of Horace Ep. 1.20 by figuring the book as a manumitted slave in need of a “protector” once he has been released from the “safety” of his owner. The word for “protector” tightens this linkage between publication and manumission, since the judicial figure of the vindex is the person who would have engaged in the manus iniectio, the process of affirming a manumitted slave’s freedom. If the personified book falls into the wrong hands—the hands of enslaved cooks—the book will not be valued for its high literary contents (signaled by the aestheticizing vocabulary of pictis...umbilicis, purpura delicata, superbus index, etc.) and instead will be forced to become fish-wrapping paper. As clothing for a lifeless fish, the book in the kitchen enters a metaphorical state of death, emphasized by the phrase cito raptus (“taken swiftly”), which is recurrent in funerary epigrams. We can also compare Catullus’ distinction between Cinna’s Smyrna, which will naturally age as the years roll by, and Volusius’ Annales, which “will die by the river Padua and often furnish a loose tunic for tuna” (Paduam morientur ad ipsam et laxas scombris saepe dabunt tunicas, 95.7-8). On this reading, the darkness of the kitchen (nigram...culinam) evokes the dank house of Hades (cf. 5.34.3: parvola ne nigras horrescat Erotion umbras). The book’s katabasis to the dark inferno of the kitchen thus stands in pointed contrast to the colorful (pictis...purpura...cocco rubeat) materiality, cosmetic make-up,

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232 Compare 1.52, in which Martial invokes Quintianus to be the adsertor libertatis of his newly manumitted books, under threat from being plagiarized.

233 e.g. CLE 489, 4 sed cito rapta silet; 502, 4 fato cito raptus iniquo. In Martial, see 1.116.3 (hoc tegitur cito rapta suis Antulla sepulchro). See Fusi 2006: 117.
mobility/circulation (ambules), and long life (oiled with protective cedar, cedro...perunctus) of the book under the wealthy patron Faustinus’ protection and care.234

At the climax of the epigram, however, where Martial is prone to introduce a witty, paradoxical twist, we learn that the book needs protection not only from the cooks in the kitchen, but also from Probus, one of the most famous grammarians of the 1st century CE. According to Suetonius, Marcus Valerius Probus of Berytus (modern Beirut) “took care to emend and punctuate and furnish with critical notes the large number of copies he gathered, devoting himself to this branch of grammar alone and no other” (multaque exemplaria contracta emendare ac distinguere et annotare curavit, soli huic nec ulli praeterea grammatices parti deditus, DGR 24).235 These “exemplars” (exemplaria) were copies of works “no longer studied in Roman schools in Probus’ time.”236 It is possible, then, that Martial invokes Probus to communicate the fear that when his books grow old and decrepit, they will be in need of a grammarian like Probus to bring them back from oblivion. But Probus was best known for his exegesis on classic school texts: we know from the Anecdoton Parisinum (according to James Zetzel, probably derived from a work of Suetonius) that Probus used critical signs (notae) to annotate manuscripts of Vergil, Horace, and Lucretius.237 In his commentary on Vergil, Servius cites Probus the most out of any ancient authority.238 To fear Probus meant to fear becoming a

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234 Faustinus is one of Martial’s most mentioned patrons (19 times). On Faustinus in Martial, see Fusi 2006: 114-15.

235 Suetonius is our best ancient source on Probus, in addition to the Anecdoton Parisinum, but he is mentioned a number of times by Aulus Gellius (e.g. NA 1.15.18, 4.7.1, 13.2.1).

236 Jocelyn 1984: 467-68.


schooltext, to be handled by a socially marginal figure who taught for pay (cf. a similar fear at Horace *Ep.* 1.20.17-18).

What other threat might Probus’ probing hand present to Martial’s book of epigrams? Recall that in 1.3 the practice of “correcting” and “marking up” the book signaled a proprietary relation between author/*dominus* and book/enslaved and was framed as a painful, yet benevolent, gesture. One straightforward explanation would be that Probus symbolizes the proverbially harsh critic, which would be in keeping with other instances where Martial warns his book *qua* manumitted slave about the sharp judgment of Roman readers (e.g., *nimium Martia turbit sapit. maiores nusquam rhonchi: iuvenesque senesque et puero nasum rhinocerotis habent*, 1.3.3-6). But we ought to consider how the juxtaposition of the cook and Probus in this poem characterizes the affectivity and materiality of Probus’ threat beyond the trope of the judgmental reader. At first glance, they seem to occupy opposite poles of the spectrum: cooks are unideal readers for Martial’s book because they don’t (implicitly) read the contents of the book, valuing it only for its material affordances as a wrapper or container. By contrast, Probus the grammarian is perhaps too sharp and pointed a reader of the book’s verbal contents. But numerous examples from Latin and Greek poetry of the period attest to the elite’s desire to portray grammarians and their reading practices as having a degrading effect on the materiality of literary texts. A passage from Juvenal’s seventh *Satire* gives us some sense of how the grammarian’s reading practices might sully the page. Juvenal describes the grammarian Q. Remmius Palaemon, a man who,

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239 So Fusi 2006: 126-27, citing the antonomastic uses of Aristarchus in Cic. *Pis.* 73, Hor. *ars* 450. Valmaggi 1914-15 supposes that Martial uses Probus to allude to the archaizing hostility to new poetry, a view that is later revised by Pascucci 1976.

240 See also 4.86 (*si te pectore si tenebit ore, nec rhonchos metues malignorum*, 6).

according to Suetonius (*DGR* 23) was born into enslavement under a female owner and then acquired extreme wealth and celebrity status, teaching at Rome from the reigns of Tiberius to Nero pupils including Persius and Quintilian. Juvenal portra...recondite trivia, in case he is asked a random question on the way to the baths, such as who Anchises’ nurse was or how long Acestes lived or how many jars of Sicilian wine he gave to the Trojans (7.229-36). The injunction that the grammarian “know all the authors like his fingers and nails” (auctores noverit omnes / tamquam ungu...suo...uestos) has dark consequences for his books (7.222-27):

dummodo non pereat mediae quod noctis ab hora sedisti, qua nemo faber, qua nemo sederet qui solet obliquo lanam deducere ferro,
dummodo non pereat totidem olfecisse lucernas quot stabant pueri, cum totus decolor esset Flaccus et haereret nigro fuligo Maroni.

Just make sure that you get something from sitting from midnight onwards in a place where no blacksmith would sit and no one used to carding wool with their slanting steel comb. Just make sure that you get something for breathing the stink of as many lamps as there are boys, while your Horace gets totally discolored and the soot sticks to your blackened Vergil.243

Palaemon’s reading practice—burning the midnight oil to hunt down answers to obscure, thorny questions—manifests itself quite literally in the sooty disfigurement of his books (decolor...Flaccus...haereret nigro fuligo Maroni). Additionally, several Greek epigrams from the *Garland of Philip* suggest that grammarians darkened the page through their readerly


243 Translation from Braund 2004.
annotations as well. Take, for example, the following epigram of Philip, which dates no earlier than 40 CE (AP 11.347):

χαίροι σοί περὶ κόσμου ἐνι πεπλανητές ὅμμα, 
οἱ τὰ ἀπὸ Ἀριστάρχου τίτας ἁκανθολόγοι. 
ποῖ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ξητεῖν, τίνας ἔδραμεν ἧλιος ὄἴμως 
καὶ τίνος ἦν Προτεύς, καὶ τίς ὁ Πυγμαλίων; 
γιγνώσκωι ὅσα λευκόν ἐχει στίχον. ἢ δὲ μέλαινα 
ἰστορίη τήκοι τοὺς Περικαλλιμάχους.

A fond farewell to you whose eyes are ever roving round the universe, and you others, thorn-gathering bookworms of Aristarchus’ brood. What good is it to me to inquire what paths the sun ran, and who was Proteus’ father, and who was Pygmalion? I would know works whose lines are crystal-clear; let the darker learning sap the strength of our super-Callimachuses.244

This epigram draws a contrast between light and dark, disparaging “thorn-gathering bookworms of Aristarchus’ brood” (i.e., grammarians) for their pursuit of “dark learning / inquiry” (μέλαινα ἱστορίη).245 The adjective μέλαινα may suggest the literary work done at night or in the dark, or metaphorically refer to the obscurity of the questions whose answers grammarians were expected to know, or the physical darkness inflicted on poetry’s verses from sooty lamps or dark ink from the insertion of critical signs, such as those that Probus affixed to his texts.246 We might recall here that one of Martial’s fears about the malignus interpres is that he will attribute nigra fama to his books (cf. 10.3). Thus, in 3.2, the colorful book will be marred with darkness whether it falls into the hands of the cook in the sooty kitchen (nigram...culinam) or into the hands of the grammarian. In each case, the degradation of the aesthetically attractive book comes at the hands of socially marginal figures in Roman society. Probus may not immediately signal a degrading,

244 Text and translation from Gow and Page 1968.

245 Elsewhere in the Garland grammarians are associated with darkness: in Antiphanes 11.322.5, they are referred to as “darkness to little beginners” (παισὶ σκότος ἄρχομένουσιν) and mocked as “bed-bugs that secretly feed off good authors” (εὐφώνων λαθροδάκναι κόριες, 6).

246 For Aristarchus see Seneca Ep. 88.39. On the gendered implications of this discourse, see Lambert 2020.
dirty fate for the book as object, but by putting the cook and Probus together in this poem, Martial figuratively designates Probus as capable of soiling his book through his hands-on textual practices as a socially marginal figure. The cook is already marked as “dirty” by virtue of being a socially low figure in the “sooty kitchen.” The “darkness” of the kitchen (“disgusting” to Martial because associated with the bodily activities of the socially low) is made to “stick” to Probus, marking him as a polluting handler who sullies Martial’s book and its beautiful trappings.

In 10.21, we can further trace the connection between the material and aesthetic dynamics of “darkness” and the threat posed by the socially low grammarian. Here, Martial once again conjures the grammarian as a non-ideal reader in order to negotiate the aesthetics of his epigrammatic corpus vis-à-vis other poetic modes:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{scribere te quae vix intellegat ipse Modestus} \\
&\text{et vix Claranus, quid, rogo, Sexte, iuvat?} \\
&\text{non lectore tuis opus est, sed Apolline libris:} \quad 3 \\
&\text{iudice te maior Cinna Marone fuit.} \\
&\text{sic tua laudentur sane: mea carmina, Sexte,} \\
&\text{grammaticis placeant ut sine grammaticis.} \quad 6
\end{align*}
\]

Why, I ask, does it please you, Sextus, to write stuff that Modestus himself or Claranus would barely understand? Your books don’t need a reader, but an Apollo: by your reckoning, Cinna was greater than Vergil. On that basis, go ahead, let your poems be praised: as for my poems, Sextus, let them please grammarians so that they may be free from grammarians. 247

Martial defines his own poetry against that of a certain Sextus, whose verse is so obscure that it stumps the grammarians Modestus and Claranus 248 and requires an interpreter of oracles like

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248 Little else is known about these figures if their names do indeed refer to real people. We have evidence of a Claranus and Modestus in the exegetical tradition of Horace in the first century CE: Porphyrio cites (on Serm. 2.3.83) Claranus
Apollo to decipher their meaning. Martial asserts that his poems, however, will be so clear that they will not need grammarians to interpret them. Quintilian’s discussion of *perspicuitas* and *obscuritas* gives us reason to believe that *obscuritas* was a hot aesthetic of the day. On one aspect of *obscuritas*, that is, *adianoeta* (expressions that have hidden meaning, but lit. “unintelligibles”), Quintilian says the following (8.2.21):

*ingeniosa* haec et fortia et ex ancipiti diserta creduntur, pervasitque iam multos ista persuasio, ut id demum eleganter atque exquisite dictum putent *quod interpretandum sit*. sed auditoribus etiam nonnullis grata sunt haec, quae cum intellexerunt acumine suo delectantur, et gaudent non quasi audierint sed quasi invenerint.

These things are believed to be clever and powerful and perplexingly eloquent, and the following conviction is now pervasive among many: they think that no expression is eloquent or refined unless it needs interpreting. Indeed, these things are even pleasing to some audiences, for when they’ve understood them, they take delight in their own cleverness, and they rejoice, not as if they had heard them but as if they’d devised them.

Quintilian objects to audiences playing the *interpres* (*quod interpretandum sit*): these audiences position themselves not as recipients of literature but as writers of a sort through their clever interpretations. We might here compare Martial’s order to the *malignus interpres* to remain far away from his jokes, on the grounds that they are “straightforward” (*simplicitas*) and contain no hidden meaning: the *interpres* need not take up his pen and “get clever” (*ingeniosus*) in Martial’s book, threatening his authorial claim to the epigrams within. In 10.21, Martial acknowledges that grammarians would have been well positioned to interpret thorny, obscure passages, but Sextus’ poetry is so obscure and riddling that even the grammarians are stumped.

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on the connection between the island Anticyra and the plant hellebore, and Ps.-Acro names a Modestus who commented on Horace. For discussion see Zetzel 2018: 150.

249 Damschen und Heil (2004: 107) takes the reference to Apollo to align with Martial’s broader claim that his page “schmecken nach Mensch” (10.4.10), and thus is meant to be read by humans, not gods, like Sextus’ poetry.
This epigram at first reads as a plain contrast between the unintelligible, obscure poetry of Sextus and Martial’s clear, simple verse. In his commentary on the poem, Andreas Heil takes Martial’s views in this poem to align straightforwardly with Quintilian’s discourse on the vices of *obscuritas*. But two details suggest that Martial might be playing a little game of *obscuritas* at the same time as he disassociates himself from that aesthetic mode, and the grammarians who follow close on its heels. First, he claims that Sextus would reckon Cinna to be a greater poet than Vergil. The implication here is that, because Sextus values *obscuritas*, Cinna, the author of a short, recondite poem called *Smyrna* (cf. Catullus 95), writes in a more convoluted and hence better style than Vergil. No doubt the *Smyrna* would have been a highly allusive, recondite Alexandrian composition, precisely the sort that would require grammarians for explication (cf. the anti-Callimachean posture of *AP* 11.347 discussed above). On the other hand, Martial’s implicit praise of Vergil’s clarity is surprising given the rich exegetical tradition surrounding Rome’s most famous poet, whose (often peculiar) Latin required thorough grammatical and rhetorical explication. Quintilian even cites Vergil as a perpetrator of *obscuritas*: he informs us that one of the worst sorts of *obscuritas* is “a tangle of words” (*mixtura verborum*), as observed in a line from Vergil’s *Aeneid*: “rocks the Italians call in the midst of waves altars” (*saxa vocant Itali mediis quae in fluctibus aras*, *Inst.* 8.2.14; cf. *Aen.* 1.109). The oddity of Vergil’s Latin also provoked parodies, including one by a certain Numitorius, author of the *Antibucolica*, whose opening has been preserved in Donatus’ life of Vergil (*Vita* 43). Parodying the start of Vergil’s third Eclogue (*dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? an Meliboei?*), Numitorius writes: “tell me, Damoetas, ‘whose flock/cuium pecus,’ is that Latin?” (*dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus anne Latinum*?).

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Perhaps Martial brings up Vergil not to align himself with the poet’s greatness (after all, Martial tells us in 1.2 that “book boxes are for the big boys; one hand grasps me”), but rather to cheekily one-up him: indeed, Cinna may be more immediately linked to obscuritas than Vergil, but surely readers would have been aware that grammarians, including Probus of 3.2 and Palaemon (looking forward to his cameo at Juvenal 7), got their hands dirty in the magnificent Maro. The point is not that Vergil is free from grammarians but that Martial is, or at least hopes to be: “may my songs, Sextus, please grammarians so that they may be without grammarians.” This suggests that the grammarian who reads “like a grammarian” is doing something spiteful and shady, like the malignus interpres of the Preface to Book 1. What Martial hopes for here is that grammarians read him on the condition that they do not play the role of the malignus interpres, and rather, that they simply read for pleasure (placeant), not for work.

3.2 The malignus interpres as rival author

So far, we have encountered one version of the malignus interpres as the grammarian, who represents a hands-on threat to Martial’s text. I have suggested that their hands-on practices come dangerously close to Martial’s representation of his own authorial activities, and I have begun to illuminate how Martial draws on the accumulative affectivity of disgust to mark grammarians as polluting handlers of his epigrammatic books, for example, linking them to the dirty space of the kitchen. When explicitly mentioned in the Epigrams, grammarians are largely positioned as readers and receivers of poems rather than as producers of their own. The broader discourse on grammarians, however, tells a different story, one in which grammatici channeled their positions as social outsiders and produced biting, witty satura themselves.251 Martial is

251 Uden 2020.
relatively quiet on this front, but an important exception occurs in 2.86. Here, Martial defines not just his readership but also his authorial persona as a poet against the grammarian Palaemon, amongst a host of other gender deviants:

quod nec carmine gloriō supino
nec retro lego Sotaden cinaedum,
nusquam Graecula quod recantat echo
nec dicit mihi luculentus Attis
mollem debilitate galliambon,
non sum, Classice, tam malus poeta.
quid se per gracilis vias petauri
invitum iubeas subire Ladan?
turpe est difficiles habere nugas
et stultus labor est ineptiarum.
scribat carmina circulis Palaemon,
me raris iuvat auribus placere.

Since I neither pride myself on reversible poems nor read Sotades the cinaedus backwards, since nowhere does a Greekling echo resound nor does splendid Attis dictate to me a broken and soft galliambic verse, I am not, Classicus, such a bad poet. What if you ordered Ladas to mount against his will the slender path of the balance beam? It’s shameful to make difficulties out of trifles, and laboring over frivolities is foolish. Let Palaemon write poems for rings of crowds, I like to please select ears.

Martial begins by reassuring his addressee “Classicus” (whose name suggests a reader who is not only “elite” but who also conforms with “high, classical standards,” cf. Gell. NA 19.8.15) that he avoids flashy metrical techniques and does not imitate the low forms of poetry produced by effeminate, sexual deviants such as Sotades the cinaedus. Martial then stakes a claim for the readership generated through his style of poetry: the grammarian Palaemon may please a large crowd, but he will please a more refined audience. Although Palaemon was likely dead before Martial wrote his Epigrams, his reputation and celebrity superceded him. Active as a teacher from the reign of Tiberius to Nero, and whose pupils included Persius and Quintilian, Palaemon

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252 On this poem, see Williams 2004 ad loc. A Sotadean verse is created by taking a line of hexameter verse and reversing its word order. On Martial’s use of the cinaedus, see Sapsford 2017: 207-15.
is packaged by Suetonius as a morally deplorable upstart: he was “the homeborn slave of a woman, first learned the weaver’s trade, as they say, then learned his letters while accompanying his owner’s son to school (mulieris verna, primo, ut ferunt, textrinum, deinde herilem filium dum comitatur in scholam, litteras didicit, DGR 23). After his manumission, Palaemon gained a reputation not only for his teaching but also for “every vice” (infamis omnibus vitiis). He “captivated men both with his memory of things and his readiness in speech: for he even extemporaneously composed poetry. He also wrote in various meters, and uncommon ones at that” (sed capiebat homines cum memoria rerum, tum facilitate sermonis; nec non etiam poemata faciebat ex tempore. scripsit vero variis, nec vulgaribus metris, 23). Kaster notes that capiebat here may have the sense of “charmed,” “won over,” almost “seduced,” which is in keeping with Palaemon’s reputation for sexual promiscuity and impropriety.254

Palaemon thus represents to Martial a socially, morally dubious rival, able to dash off saucy, crowd-pleasing poetry like epigram on the fly. How similar in style and tone would Palaemon’s extemporaneous compositions have been to Martial’s epigrams? It is hard to say, but his status as a verna may associate him with contumelious, satiric, witty speech. Take, for example, 1.41, where Martial deflates one Caecilius, who claims to be sophisticated (urbanus), by cataloguing an inventory of people he really resembles, including a verna, a mediocre street-poet (non optimus urbicus poeta), a shameless teacher from Cadiz (de Gadibus improbus magister), and the satirical cheek of a little old cinaedus (bucca est vetuli dicax cinaedi). The verna, street poet, improbus magister, and dicax cinaedus all invoke the tradition surrounding Palaemon, suggesting that Martial uses Palaemon as a stand-in figure for a socially abject type...

253 Zetzel (2018: 74) notes that Suetonius does not tell us much about Palaemon’s grammatical writings, which included the Ars grammatica, “probably the single most influential work of its kind ever written in Rome.”

254 Kaster 1988: 56n 96.
who has acquired popularity for his biting, satiric, licentious wit. Martial thus distances himself from Palaemon’s crowd-pleasing poetry and delegitimizes him as poetic rival by lumping him together with a series of infamous, gender deviant figures.

As a _verna_-turned-sexually scandalous celebrity grammarian / poet, Palaemon presents Martial with fodder for a quick but loaded jab. For Martial, the figure of the _verna_ allows him to negotiate anxieties about unlicensed speech, and more specifically, the ability of socially marginal figures to tamper (whether through speech or textual practices) with his authorial identity as a poet of epigram, a characteristically anonymous form. One of the stereotypical fears of the free Roman was that his _servi_ knew all his secrets, and thus could spread them around (cf. Juvenal 9.102-123, “the tongue is the worst part of a bad slave,” _lingua mali pars pessima servi_). Martial activates the fear that slaves will circulate the secrets (_arcanum_) of their owners at 10.3, complaining that a certain “secret/anonymous poet” (_clancularius poeta_, 5) has passed off “quips of homeborn slaves, filthy abuse” (_vernaculorum dicta, sordidum dentem_, 1) as being authored by Martial. Martial reassures the reader of the aesthetic superiority of his authorial compositions. He writes (ll. 7-10):

> voce ut loquatur psittacus coturnicis  
> et concupiscat esse Canus ascaules?  
> procul a libellis nigra sit meis fama,  
> quos rumor alba gemmeus vehit pinna.  

Shall a parrot speak with the voice of a quail, and shall Canus crave to be a bagpiper? May dark fame be far away from my little books, which jewelled report carries on white wings.

Martial marshalls avian and musical imagery here to associate his poetry with urbanity: the quail is an aggressive bird compared to the parrot, and the bagpipe an instrument of the lower

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255 Martial identifies his poems as “home-born slaves” (_libellos vernulae_) in 5.18.4.
classes. Poetry as song (a song from foul mouths that has been misattributed to Martial) then morphs into poetry as mediated through the bookroll. Martial’s wish, “may dark reputation be far away from my books” (procul a libellis nigra sit meis fama), recalls the Preface to Book 1: absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea inscribat: improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est. The darkness of fama (nigra fama) at one level conveys an anxiety about the porous boundaries between the genre of Martial’s epigrams and that of popular forms of jest, mockery, and satire. The adjective nigra suggests that this anonymous, popular poet (clancularius poeta) associates Martial with the quips of homeborn slaves out of malignitas or livor. In this, Martial channels his satiric predecessor Horace: as Rosario Cortés Tovar has outlined, Horace connects adjectives niger and ater to malignitas and livor so as to differentiate his own satirical production with that of the unlicensed, mocking speech of socially low groups.

What’s notable in the case of Martial’s Preface to Book 1 and 10.3 is that Martial’s concern about the potential of social inferiors to tarnish his authorial reputation converges on the materiality of his books: nec epigrammata mea inscribat: improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est and procul a libellis nigra sit meis fama. Martial’s point is that he is special not because he composes epigrams: so too do vernae and grammatici like Palaemon. Rather, Martial is special because he funnels epigrams—a fluid poetic form that, as this poem tells us, coexisted with socially-low, often anonymous, modes of jest—into the elite bookroll, and he does so (or wants to be seen to do so) as a proprietary author. Writing on the literary culture of Pompeian graffiti, Kristina Milnor remarks that, while Martial’s oeuvre overlaps in themes and style with

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256 Damschen und Heil 47.

poetic graffiti scrawled on the walls of Pompeii, “Martial’s self-conception as a writer of books is pronounced, and his almost paranoid defense of his authorial ownership of his works is at odds with the anonymity of most epigrams found on walls.” Marking up or scribbling in Martial’s epigrammatic books is a practice that threatens to turn the liber into a graffitoed wall. Anyone can scribble on the wall: “it’s easy,” Martial tells his addressee Sabellus, who has composed some witty tetrastichs, “to write epigrams prettily, but writing a book, that’s hard” (*facile est epigrammata belle / scribere, sed librum scribere difficile est*, 7.85.3-4).  

We might understand Martial’s elevation of his status as epigram book author and debasement of low verse as analogous to what I. A. Ruffell (2003) has argued is happening in Horace’s *Sermones*: Horace erects a “cordon sanitaire” between his own, comically self-abasing satire and sub-literary modes of mockery, like graffiti, mime, and the *versus populares*. Further, James Uden raises awareness of another strain excluded from hexametric *satura*: the satiric output of the socially abject *grammaticus*. While not writing in the long form hexametric *satura* like Horace, Persius, Juvenal, etc., Martial is an important chapter in the story of Roman *satura*. Moreover, as this chapter has so far demonstrated, he is engaged in a strategic kind of boundary work characteristic of satire as a genre: Martial portrays grammarians as a certain kind of nefarious reader, implicating them in the practices of the *malignus interpres* as a rival, authorial figure, and associating both their readerly practices and satiric output with other socially abject figures.

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258 Milnor 2019: 491.

259 According to Suetonius (*DGR* 21), the grammarian Gaius Melissus, manumitted by Maecenas, compiled 150 volumes of “Trifles,” (*libelllos Ineptiarum*) which were later called “Jests” (*Iocorum*). James Uden suggests to me *per litteras* that Juvenal may riff on this line when he writes *difficile est saturam non scribere*.

But there is a latent tension here, as we might expect from the genre: when Martial contrasts himself to Probus, Palaemon, and co, he inevitably invites comparison between his own literary, ludic, bookish activities and that of grammarians. The only difference (it appears) between Palaemon and Martial is that Martial composes for “more rarefied ears” (raris…auribus) by using the aesthetically high bookroll to organize and mediate his epigrams. Probus and Martial both read pen-in-hand, but one of them is the book’s dominus and another a grammarian from the geographical fringe of the empire. Martial may claim his poems sound nothing like the barbs composed by vernae, but elsewhere Martial figures his books themselves as “homeborn slaves.”

In other words, Marital is not only holding up grammarians (and other socially low, authorial rivals like the clancularius poeta and vernae of 10.3) as straightforward, inferior foils: he is also playing a clever game of “ludic substitution,” where, according to Habinck, the satirist “mimes his opponents even as he ridicules them. He lets them speak and act through his text and his performance thereof. He thus re-creates what he professes to despise.”

We see the clearest traces of this practice where the seams in Martial’s liber are most vulnerable: the plagiarism poems in Book 1, a series of poems where Martial attacks a reader named Fidentinus for nefarious, readerly activities, including stealing his poems, reciting them as his own, interpolating one of his own inferior poetic creations into Martial’s epigrammatic book. Particularly in 1.53, Fidentinus as malignus interpres forms a locus for Martial to experiment and

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261 Martial identifies his poems as “home-born slaves” (libellos vernulae) in 5.18.4.

262 Habinck 2005a: 182.

263 These are poems 1.29, 1.38, 1.52, 1.53, 1.66, and 1.72. Fidentinus is not named in 1.52 and 1.66, but critics generally assume he is the implied target here.
enact this practice of “ludic substitution,” coming close to embodying this kind of nefarious reader himself and thus domesticating and neutralizing the threat he poses.

3.3 The bad reader gets played

The so-called “Fidentinus cycle” in Book 1 has played an outsized role both in rehabilitating Martial as a literary master, and in discussions of Martial’s poetics of literary materiality and the book. At stake for Martial in Book 1 is securing his authorial persona as an epigrammatist, and he develops this poetic cycle as part of this project. For Victoria Rimell, this cycle keys us in to broader, metaliterary themes of Book 1, including contamination and mixing, borders between poems, etc. For Fitzgerald, this cycle is one way in which Martial explores the uneasy boundary between the book and the world. Building on the work of Luke Roman, J. Mira Seo shows how this cycle relates to the materiality and commodification of Martial’s poetry. Most recently, Gideon Nisbet has taken this cycle as key to understanding Martial’s broader poetic enterprise, showing how it ripples out intratextually from Book 1 into key moments of Books 6 and 10 and thus functions as a “framing device for Martial’s poetic output at Rome.”

I contribute to this recent work by making two hermeneutic moves that shed new light on Martial’s anxieties about Fidentinus as a meddling, hands-on reader, as well as the poetic, satirical maneuvers Martial orchestrates around them. First, by framing the figurative language of Fidentinus’ theft and interpolation within the broader discourse on two kinds of hands-on

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264 e.g., McGill 2012, Nisbet 2020.
266 Seo 2009: 567-93.
267 Nisbet 2020: 63.
readers (the copyist and the untrustworthy grammarian) I argue that we can read this cycle as part of Martial’s broader negotiation of the *malignus interpres* as meddling, socially abject authorial rival. Second, while critics tend to read the Fidentinus cycle alongside Martial’s other representations of plagiarism and literary misattribution (which return most prominently in Book 10), I illuminate the perceived threat of Fidentinus’ poem through the lens of the immediately subsequent Zoilus cycle in Book 2. These figures, a literary thief and Trimalchio-esque freedman parvenu, might seem unlikely companions. In both cases, however, I will show how Martial mobilizes a satirical poetics that plays these socially abject interlopers at their own game, thus absorbing and neutralizing the destabilizing threat they pose.

Martial describes Fidentinus as engaging in two modes of literary theft: first, misattribution of Martial’s poems to himself through public recitation, and second, circulating Martial’s poems in book form as his own (e.g., 1.66). In 1.53, Martial dramatizes this second mode of stealing. Fidentinus has claimed authorship of Martial’s poems, but has interpolated one of his own literary creations into Martial’s book:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{una est in nostris tua, Fidentine, libellis pagina, sed certa domini signata figura, quae tua traduci manifesto carmina furto.} \\
\text{sic interpositus villo contaminat uncto urbica Lingonicus Tyrianthina bardocullus,} & \\
\text{sic Arretinae violant crystallina testae,} & \\
\text{sic, niger in ripis errat cum forte Caystri,} & \\
\text{inter Ledaeos ridetur corvus olores,} & \\
\text{sic, ubi multisona fervet sacer Atthide lucus,} & \\
\text{improba Cecropias offendit pica querelas.} & \\
\text{indice non opus est nostris nec iudice libris:} & \\
\text{stat contra dicitque tibi tua pagina ‘fur es.’} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

There is one page of yours in my little book, Fidentinus, but it is stamped with the sure likeness of its owner, which shows your poems up to ridicule as an obvious theft. So a Lingonian overcoat put among city tyrianthines contaminates them with its greasy wool, so crocks from Arretium dishonor crystal glasses, so a black crow becomes a laughing stock amongst Leda’s swans when it wanders by chance on Cayster’s banks, so when a sacred
grove swarms with many-toned nightingales a shameless magpie offends their Cecropian
laments. My books need neither an informer nor a judge: your page confronts you and says
“you are a thief.”

It is difficult to know precisely what material mechanism of theft Martial envisions here. Has
Fidentinus inserted one of his own poems into Martial’s book and passed that liber off as
belonging to Martial? Or has he interpolated one of his own poems into Martial’s book and
passed the entire thing off as his own? Or perhaps Martial is gesturing to the anthologizing
tradition of “(re)authorizing” Hellenistic epigram. As Kathryn Gutzwiller has shown,
anthologizing poets like Meleager claim a style of authorship that emphasizes not original
composition but rather the artful (re)arrangement of others’ and one’s own poems.268

Whatever the case may be, the crucial point is that this poem draws on emphatically
material language to figure what happens when the malignus interpres does in fact get clever
(ingeniosus) in another man’s book (alieno libro). Martial dedicates most of this poem to a series
of similes that emphasize both the gulf between his authentic poetry and Fidentinus’ phony
poem, as well as the aesthetic effect produced through their juxtaposition in the bookroll.
Fidentinus here plays the role of malignus interpres by “acting shamelessly” (improbe facit), his
interpolated poem sticking out like a “shameless magpie” (improba pica) in Martial’s authentic
poetic flock. By combining economic and literary discourses of poetic value, as Seo has noted,
Martial positions the reader as a consumer tasked with discerning between quality goods and
cheap trash.269 Martial claims that his authentic poems will be so recognizably his that they
“need neither an informer nor a judge,” (indice opus non est nec iudice libris, 11). Typically
translated as “informer,” index also forms a clever double entendre, as it also suggests the “label”

that would be attached to papyrus rolls to identify them (cf. the bookroll’s *superbus index* in 3.2, discussed above): Martial’s readers will recognize what’s really his under a spurious title, or even with no title at all (cf. 12.2).

Fidentinus’ name ironically serves to emphasize the lack of *fides* we ought to ascribe to his poetic creations. As discussed in Chapter 1, *fides* was also a quality that the enslaved were expected to display to their enslavers, as well as a quality that texts were expected to show vis-à-vis their authorial witnesses. A text of high *fides* is a text that bears as close a resemblance as possible to the version the author intended. The connection between the *fidelis* text and *fidelis* slave becomes more pointed when we consider that elite authors often relied on enslaved secretaries to take down their dictated word. Martial consciously plays with this nexus in another poem in Book 1, one which sheds some light on the dynamics at play in 1.53. Here, Martial announces the death of his enslaved amanuensis, Demetrius (1.101):

illa manus quondam studiorum fida meorum et felix domino notaque Caesaribus, 
estituit primos viridis Demetrius annos: quarta tribus lustris addita messis erat.
ne tamen ad Stygias famulus descenderet umbras, ueret implicatum cum scelerata lues,
cavimus et domini ius omne remisimus aegro: munere dignus erat convaluisse meo.
sensit deficiens sua praemia meque patronum dixit ad infernas liber iturus aquas.

Once the faithful hand of my studies and productive for his owner and known to the Caesars, Demetrius deserted his opening years fresh in his youth: to three lusters a fourth harvest was added. I took care that he not descend to the Stygian shades as a slave, when the sinister plague burned him in its grip, and I gave up all my rights as an owner to the sick fellow: he was worthy of recovering through my gift. As his strength failed, he perceived his reward and called me patron, destined to go a free man to the infernal waters.

Demetrius is a “faithful hand” (*manus fida*) of Martial’s studies because he faithfully acts as a manual extension of his owner as he inscribes his words to a tee onto the papyrus. Upon his
death, Martial deems Demetrius worthy of manumission, given his faithful record. But the manumission also provides Martial with a ripe opportunity for a punning conclusion: Demetrius will not only go to the Underworld a free man (liber) but also as a book (liber). Of course, this pun only works through the elite, ideological fantasy of “mastery extensibility,” whereby, according to the logic of the enslaver, the enslaved is a seamless prosthesis of the enslaver’s mind and body. In reality, however, the amanuensis is not simply a hand but an alive and embodied interpres, a mediating agent between author and book.

As much as Martial portrays Demetrius as his faithful hand in this epigram, he was also fully aware that copyists might not be such “faithful” go-betweens: in another epigram, Martial supposes that anything “too obscure or not quite Latin” (sive obscura nimis sive Latina parum, 2.8.2) in his book is the result of a careless librarius (non meus est error: nocuit librarius illis, 2.8.3). If Demetrius is a fida manus, allowing nothing other than the author’s words to impress upon the page, then Fidentinus embodies the traitorous inverse. In a way, Fidentinus’ interpolation is not all that different from the error of the librarius that “harms” (nocuit) Martial’s books. Martial claims that a non-authorial, scribal intervention into his book will stand out as obscura nimis sive Latina parum, “too obscure or not quite Latin.” Likewise, Fidentinus’ creation is figured as a foreign, low-status intrusion: it is like a “black crow” (niger...corvus) wandering amongst “Ledaean swans” (errat...inter Ledaeos olores). As should be clear by now, the vocabulary of niger persistently marks unlicensed speech and textual activities of socially-low individuals. Further, by comparing Fidentinus’ poem to a “Gallic overcoat”

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270 We might compare one Staberius Eros, a rare example of a grammarian who embodied honestas and was “manumitted because of his devotion to literature” (propter litterarum studium manumissus, Suet. DGR 13).

271 For discussion of “masterly extensibility,” see Reay 2005.

272 There is also a tradition of the interpres as “traitor” (Mairs 2011).
(Lingonicus...bardocullus) that “contaminates urbane Tyrianthine cloaks with its greasy wool” (villo contaminat uncto / urbeca Lingonicus Tyrianthina bardocullus), Martial figures the poem as a foreign invasion, an attempt by the colonized periphery to supplant those at the center (and indeed, this poem falls approximately midway through Book 1). The threat posed to normative, aesthetic hierarchies by an infiltration of the socially low and non-Roman resonates with an anecdote that Quintilian reports about a certain schoolteacher in his discussion of obscuritas (8.2.18):

cum iam apud Titum Livium inveniam fuisse praeceptorem aliquem qui discipulos obscurare quae dicerent iuberet, Graeco verbo utens σκότισον. Unde illa scilicet egregia laudatio: “tanto melior: ne ego quidem intellexi.”

for I find already in Livy that there was a certain teacher who ordered his students to obscure what they were saying, using the Greek word skotison (“darken it!”). No doubt that’s where that extraordinary compliment comes: “Much better: I didn’t even understand it.”

We aren’t given the precise identity of this praeceptor, but the emphasis on his use of a Greek word (Graeco verbo utens σκότισον) suggests that a Greek teacher, as many grammatici were, is to blame for this scrambling of Roman aesthetic hierarchies. This aligns with what we have seen in Martial: the materiality and aesthetics of “darkness/obscurity” find common expression in representations of grammarians as perverse textual handlers, who themselves were often foreign and low-status or former slaves. The discourse around grammarians also helps illuminate the dynamics of literary theft. In the first century CE, grammarians had a reputation both for pointing out literary theft and for engaging in it themselves. In Suetonius’ De Grammaticis, there are four instances in which grammatici are associated with literary theft of various forms. Lenaeus, a freedman of Pompey the Great, “ripped Sallust apart in a most biting satire”

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273 Bardocullus appears one other time in extant Latin, at Martial 14.128, where the poet jokes that the bardocullus used to be a cercopithecorum paenula (a coat for long-tailed monkeys).
(Sallustium...acerbissima satura laceraverit, 15) out of devotion to Pompey’s memory. Lenaeus called him “a gourmandizer and a spendthrift and a tippler and a man who was monstrous both in life and in his writings, and additionally was a stupendously ignorant thief of the words of the ancients and Cato (lastaurum et lurconem et nebulum popinonemque appellans, et vita scriptisque monstrorum, praeterea priscorum Catonisque verborum inerudissimum furem, 15).

While grammarians like Lenaeus were in a position to ascertain the authorial propriety of words, they are more often portrayed as trying their hands at the business themselves. We learn that a freedman Sevius Nicanor, who was “the first to attain to fame and recognition through his teaching” (primus ad famam dignationemque docendo pervenit, 5), wrote a satire (saturam) as well as commentaries, “most of which are said to be stolen” (commentarios, quorum tamen pars maxima intercepta dicitur, 5). Suetonius quickly tarnishes Nicanor’s claim to fama and dignatio by citing the rumor (dicitur) that he has copied his commentaries from unattributed sources. Nicanor then departs for Sardinia and dies there “on account of some disgrace” (ob infamiam quondam).

In addition to accusations of plagiarism, grammarians also provide a model for pilfering and forging physical texts. Pilfering stains the very beginnings of grammar’s genealogy (beyond its emergence from the sewer): Servius Clodius, the son-in-law of Lucius Aelius, who “laid and extended the foundations of grammar” (instruxerunt auxeruntque...grammaticam, 3), “stole one of his father-in-law’s books before it was published, and because of this he was disowned and left the city in shame and remorse, fell ill of gout” (Servius, cum librum soceri nondum editum fraude interceptisset, et ob hoc repudiatus pudore ac taedio secessisset ab urbe, in podagras morbum incidit, 3) and eventually died after applying a poisonous drug to his feet. Clodius’ behavior strikes a chord with Martial’s playful advice to the “greedy thief of my books”
(meorum fur avare librorum, 1.66.1) to steal unpublished, “virgin books” (virginis pater chartae, 1.66.7) rather than a well-known book like his, which “cannot change its owner” (mutare dominum non potest liber notus, 1.66.9). Should the prospective thief decide to take Martial up on his advice to steal an unpublished work, he awaits a life of shame (pudore) like the disgraced Servius Clodius.274

At the end of 1.53, Martial borrows legal language to assert that this case of thievery is so obvious that it will require neither “judge” nor “informer” (indice non opus est nostris nec iudice libris, 1.53.11) According to Suetonius, Cicero plays a “judge” (iudicem) between two grammarians, Nicias and Vidius: Nicias has presented Vidius with a note that demands payment, while Vidius plays Aristarchus and obelizes them (alter Aristarchus hos obelitei), marking them as spurious. Cicero is faced with playing ye critic of old: “I, like the critic of yore, am to play the judge of whether they are the poet’s or a forgery” (ego tamquam criticus antiquus iudicaturus sum, utrum sint τοῦ ποιητοῦ an παρεμβεβλημένοι, 14). This example illustrates how grammarians—precisely because they had skills to judge textual authenticity—were also themselves experts at duping.

These are several ways in which the language of 1.53 may implicate the practices of the traitorous scribe/book seller or nefarious grammarian, a figure who both judged between authentic and inauthentic texts and also was caught red-handed and put to shame as thieves themselves. For Martial, however, there is no need to summon a grammarian to play the iudex here: the theft is so obvious that Fidentinus’ interpolated page reveals itself as a foreign, socially and aesthetically low interloper. Martial does not muster the tools of grammar and philology to out Fidentinus’ inferior page; instead, he attaches to Fidentinus and his poem certain metaphors

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274 Shame is also associated with the plagiarist’s behavior in 1.52 (hoc si terque quaterque clamitaris, impones plagiario pudorem).
that elsewhere “stick” to other socially abject book handlers, including the cook, the grammarian, and the unfaithful copyist. On the one hand, we can read this poem as Martial’s attempt to erect a “cordon sanitaire” between his authentic book and the malignus interpres who would seek to soil it. In practice, however, this poem would do little to prevent meddling readers from tampering with individual copies of Martial’s books. But this is no matter for Martial: this poem mobilizes a satirical poetics that plays Fidentinus at his own game. In this final section of the chapter, I unpack Martial’s satirical poetics by reading this poem alongside Zoilus, one of Martial’s most notorious miscreants, one who has nothing to do with books or poetry (it would seem) at all. The nexus of imagery and themes between the consecutive Fidentinus and Zoilus cycles helps us see how Martial uses satirical epigram to play both social and textual interlopers at their own dirty game, advertising but also neutralizing their threat.

3.4 Playing the bad reader: Fidentinus and Zoilus

Zoilus, a runaway (fugitivus) turned wealthy freedman, is introduced to Martial’s readers through a cycle of poems in Book 2 (2.16, 2.19, 2.42, 2.58, 2.81), crops up occasionally in the interceding 8 books, and re-emerges in another cycle in Book 11 (11.12, 11.30, 11.37, 11.54, 11.85, 11.92). When we meet him in 2.16, Zoilus is lampooned as a fraud: he is faking a fever so that he can wrap himself up in fancy blankets and conspicuously display his wealth. Zoilus’ blankets, “dyed in strong-smelling Sidonian purple” (Sidone tinctus olenti, 2.16.3), recall one of the metaphors used to describe the effect of Fidentinus’ inferior interpolation in Martial’s book: “in the same way a Lingonian overcoat placed among urbane Tyrian purple clothes contaminates them with its greasy wool” (sic interpositus villo contaminat uncto / urbica Lingonicus
In each case, Fidentinus’ (metaphorical) and Zoilus’ (literal) aspirations to cloak themselves in prototypically high garments are shown up as fraudulent and associated with a disease (contaminat, 1.53.4; febrem, 2.16.1).

The nexus between the two tightens in 2.58, where we learn that Zoilus’ precious garment is something he has stolen:

\[
pexatus pulchre rides mea, Zoile, trita.
sunt haec trita quidem, sed mea sunt.
\]

You in your very new toga laugh at my worn-out one, Zoilus. They may be worn out, but they are mine.

Here, Martial engages in self-abasement in order to turn the joke around on Zoilus: Zoilus may have obtained a fresh toga (pexatus), but it doesn’t truly belong to him. Martial insinuates that Zoilus has pilfered this toga and is thus a fur like Fidentinus, who has attempted to cloak himself within Martial’s book. Martial may also suggest that Zoilus’ toga, the mark of Roman citizenship, does not “really” belong to him because he is a libertus and thus belongs to a socially ambivalent class. Like Fidentinus, who puts the wrong contents (his own inferior poetry) into a “high” container (Martial’s libellus), Zoilus is here made the butt of a joke for the incongruity between his toga and the socially abject body it contains. Martial later makes explicit the connection between Zoilus’ thievery and social status in Book 11 (11.54):

\[
\text{unguenta et casias et olentem funera murram}
\text{turaque de medio semicremata rogo}
\text{et quae de Stygio rapuisti cinnama lecto,}
\text{improbe, de turpi, Zoile, redde sinu.}
\text{a pedibus didicere manus peccare protervae.}
\text{non miror furem, qui fugitivus eras.}
\]

Fidentinus’ page also evokes the page of the kitchen: at 10.66, Martial describes one Theopompus, an attractive enslaved youth who is forced to become a cook; his face is “defiled with a sooty kitchen” (faciem nigra violare culina, 10.66.3) and his “hair is polluted with greasy flame” (uncto polluit igne comas, 10.66.4).
As for the perfumes and cassia and myrrh that smells of funerals and the half-cremated frankincense you snatched from the middle of the pyre and the cinnamon you snatched from the Stygian couch, shameless Zoilus, give these things back from your filthy pocket. Your bold hands learned how to be wicked from your feet. I’m not surprised you are a thief, you who were a runaway slave.

Zoilus, attempting to cloak his low social origins through stealing fancy, cosmetic items, is outed by Martial as a social imposter in language that evokes the revelation of Fidentinus as a textual thief and imposter. They are both shameless thieves (improbe...furem, 11.54; improba...fur, 1.53). Strikingly, Martial implies that Zoilus does bad things with his hands because he was a “bad slave” (fugitivus) who did bad things with his feet. We might here recall Martial’s praise of the enslaved amanuensis Demetrius, who is rewarded with manumission because of his “faithful hand” (fida manus). While the poems that Demetrius himself wrote with his hands in Martial’s libellus could and did pass as authentically “Martial,” what Fidentinus writes with his hands is “stamped with the sure sign of its owner,” (certa domini signata figura, 1.53.2) and is revealed through metaphors that figure it as the product of a socially marginal, abject figure.

Not only are Fidentinus and Zoilus alike in their thieving habits and botched, superficial attempts to achieve authentic, elite embodiment: Martial also imputes to each of them a dirty mouth and undertones of sexual pollution. Zoilus’ os impurum suggests that he dirties normative ideals of Roman masculinity as a fellator. In 2.42, for example, we learn that Zoilus could make a bathtub even dirtier by washing his head instead of his ass in it. For Fidentinus, his interpolated page has a polluting effect on the authentic poems that surround it: it “contaminates” (contaminat) and “causes dishonor” (violant) to Martial’s authentic collection. In another poem in the cycle, close attention is paid to the effect Fidentinus’ mouth has on Martial’s poems (1.38):

quem recitas meus est, o Fidentine, libellus:
sed male cum recitas, incipit esse tuus.

276 On Zoilus’ os impurum, see Williams 2004 ad loc.
The little book you are reading, Fidentinus, is mine: but when you read it badly, it begins to be yours.

Perhaps Martial means that Fidentinus is so bad of a reader that when he reads Martial’s poems they become unrecognizable, so sullied to the point that they might as well be Fidentinus’ own creations. Yet in 1.53, Martial is not happy to let Fidentinus get away with his literary theft. As we have seen in this poem Martial pulls out all the stops to hold Fidentinus’ page up as an inferior, inauthentic, duplicitous creation. Comparison with Zoilus brings into view the broader, social anxieties that underpin how and why Martial undercuts this satirical double and textual interloper.

But things are not so clear cut. Returning to 1.53, the poem both calls out and puts to shame a *malignus interpres* at the same time as it calls attention to itself as a conspicuous interloper. Taken as a whole, the poem itself stands out like a black crow amongst white swans as the only hexameter epigram in Book 1 (and one of two in the entirety of Martial). Victoria Rimell has observed how the “bumbling gracelessness of line 5” (*urbica Lingonicus Tyrianthina bardocucullus*) suggests Martial is “plagiarizing one of [Fidentinus’] awful poems, or (at least in part) mimic and ridiculing the ‘Fidentinian style’ in an unmistakable fashion.” If, as Rimell suggests, we read this poem not just as “about” a bad poem but also “as” a bad poem, then the lines between Fidentinus and Martial are blurred. What would Martial have to gain by implicating himself in Fidentinus’ nefarious(ly bad) practices as a reader and rival poet? Perhaps Martial means to make good on an earlier statement he has made about what goes in to making a book (1.16):

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sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura
quae legis hic: aliter non fit, Avite, liber.
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277 Rimell 2008: 46.
There are good things, there are some trivial things, there are more bad things which you read here: ain’t no other way, Avitus, that a book is made.

For Rimell, 1.16 relates to the continual threat of plagiarism posed after Martial’s book leaves his authorial hands: “Martial fosters an image of the epigram book as an unstable, fluid and fragmented whole, in contrast to rival imagery promoting epigram as solid tomb-marker, as long-lasting inscription.”278 I agree with Rimell that Martial promotes an awareness of the epigram book as “unstable, fluid and fragmented whole,” but compared to an epigram on a gravestone (where it is often the stone that addresses the passerby, rather than an author), Martial relentlessly asserts his own authorship over his poems. At 7.84, he claims that his face will be “more certain” (certior) in his poetry than in a painting. At 12.2, Martial claims he doesn’t even need to put a titulus on his book: “let two verses or three be read, and all men, book, will exclaim that you are mine” (versus duo tresve legantur, clamabunt omnes te, liber, esse meum, 12.2.17-18). At 12.61, Martial advises one Ligurra—who desires to be written about by Martial—to “seek out a drunk poet of the dark archway, who scribbles songs with rough charcoal or crumbling chalk which people read while they poo. This brow of yours must not be marked with my brand” (quaeras censeo...nigri fornicis ebrium poetam, / qui carbone rudi putrique creta / scribit carmina quae legunt cacantes. / frons haec stigmate non meo notanda est, 12.61.7-11).

While part of the point of 12.61 is to shore up the integrity of Martial’s authorial brand as an author of epigrammatic books (the word stigma denotes the mark of ownership an enslaver would inscribe/tattoo upon slaves), the poem’s recusatio conceit (Martial has in fact composed a barb against Ligurra) invites a connection between Martial’s poetry and anonymous graffito: by

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278 Rimell 2008: 33.
writing of Ligurra, Martial himself is implicitly writing a poem that ought to be read by people as they shit.

Martial may appear to erect a “cordon sanitaire” between his version of epigrammatic books and cheap, inferior rivals, but 1.53 in particular suggests that this boundary is porous. According to Rimell’s interpretation, 1.53 is one of the “bad” poems that any liber, as described in 1.16, will have. Scott McGill, however, objects to this interpretation, remarking that “recent scholarship has emphasized how the content of particular poems can spill over into other texts within a volume of Martial’s epigrams in ways that the author might not have foreseen and could not control. But this does not give interpreters free rein to connect poems wantonly by pushing forward with certain parallels even when other considerations cogently argue for keeping the texts separate.” And so we meet one modern reincarnation of Martial’s malignus interpres. But it is precisely this wanton reading that provokes deeper understandings of what Martial is up to in implicating his own satirical persona in the activities of the very readers he appears to deride. I (reading wantonly) will draw a connection not between poems “within a volume of Martial’s epigrams” but across volumes of epigrams, tracing how Martial restages the satirical maneuver of 1.53 at 3.29, with 2.86 (discussed earlier) serving as a bridge that emphasizes the satirical effect of 3.29.

After Martial’s tango with Fidentinus at 1.53, 2.86 might come as a relief to readers: Martial’s poetry is in fact distinct from the socially low forms of jest associated with effeminate and sexually dubious characters. While Palaemon the grammarian churns out verse to seduce the crowd, Martial composes for “choice ears” (raris auribus). For, his poetry isn’t influenced at all by the stuff that Palaemon is into: Martial steers clear of the effeminate galliambic meter, nor

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does he “read Sotades the *cinaedus* backwards” (*nec retro lego Sotaden cinaedum*, 2.86.2). What a surprise, then, to come across a poem shortly thereafter in Book 3, composed in the very meter Martial claims not to read, the Sotadean meter (3.29):

> has cum gemina compede dedicat catenas,  
> Saturne, tibi Zoilus, anulos priores.

These chains with their twin fetter Zoilus dedicates to you, Saturnus, his rings of days past.

Crucially, this poem is not presented in Martial’s own voice, but rather impersonates the voice of none other than Zoilus. Zoilus is made to play the bad reader, and Martial has played him at his own game. By interspersing a votive-style epigram in an effeminate meter (the only example of Sotadeans in Martial), Martial makes this poem perform Zoilus’ embodiment as a socially low, gender deviant interloper within the Roman elite. The epigram’s meter and content draw attention to this scrambling of social categories: Zoilus, now in possession of his equestrian rings as a *libertus*, dedicates to Saturn the shackles of his formerly enslaved status. The dedication to Saturn, moreover, recalls the Saturnalia, the festival where distinctions between free people and the enslaved were temporarily reversed. In 3.29, then, Martial follows a similar playbook to 1.53: both poems are composed in an anomalous meter, and they come to embody and flaunt the very thing Martial mocks and derides. While Martial may claim not to read poems in the *cinaedus*’ meter, he cannot resist playing the bad reader for his reader’s pleasure, safely reading the *cinaedus* by appropriating the voice and body of Zoilus, just as he plays Fidentinus at his own game in 1.53.
3.5 Conclusion

Martial “plays” the bad reader in more than one way: on one level, different kinds of bad readers “get played” by Martial’s witty lampoons. I have drawn attention to a pattern that runs throughout Martial’s debasement of certain meddling readers: these readers tend to be associated with socially low, satirically rivalrous figures like the grammarian and present a material threat to Martial’s authorial persona as well as his epigrammatic books. On another level, however, Martial “plays” the bad reader himself, or more specifically, plays the bad reader through a socially abject figure like Fidentinus or Zoilus. Martial’s warning in the Preface to Book 1 only applies to a *malignus interpres* who acts like a socially abject grammarian, a Fidentinus, a Zoilus. It does not, however, preclude Martial from playing the *malignus interpres* himself: after all, this book belongs to him, and to play the bad reader in one’s own book may be the ultimate show of authorship/ownership.

One way of making sense of Martial’s twofold play would be, following Nisbet, to claim that he is exercising a “fallible and self-contradictory persona that aligns epigram with Roman satire,” 280 a persona that will be familiar to readers of Martial’s literary heir, Juvenal. But this explanation falls short of accounting for the ideological impetus behind this generic move. We might rather understand Martial’s paradoxical play as a mode of “ludic substitution.” According to Habinek, the satirist “mimes his opponents even as he ridicules them. He lets them speak and act through his text and his performance thereof. He thus re-creates what he professes to despise.” 281 Martial’s satiric moves exclude and assimilate various kinds of bad readers (above all those who threaten the integrity of the élite Roman male) through mimetic play, and in so

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280 Nisbet 2020: 55.
281 Habinek 2005a: 182.
doing, participate in a practice that, as Habinek has noted, is central not only to the genre of Roman satire but also to Roman culture, on display most prominently in the realm of theatrical games or *ludi*, where the other is parasitically or parodically incorporated. “[T]here is no Rome,” Habinek writes, “without an incorporated other.”

282 We ought to read Martial’s play of and on the bad reader as a textual trace of this broader, Roman cultural practice. This mode of play would have been readily familiar to Martial’s readers from theatrical spectacles, and it is no coincidence that the spectator and theater happen to be one of Martial’s favorite metaphors for the reader and book.283 Through his satirical epigram, Martial provides a ludic script for “good” Roman readers who want to play bad. Martial plays “bad readers” at their own game in his book because the epigrammatic book paradoxically both enables and threatens the integrity of his authorial persona.

This chapter has reinforced two core themes of this study: first, literary representations of “bad readers” are interconnected with other elite, normative projects which may have little or nothing to do with “just reading.” Second, a book historical lens helps us see more clearly into the literary, metapoetic representations of these “bad readers.” The traces of the “bad readers” I have analyzed in this chapter are contained within Martial’s own diegetic frame: these “bad readers” do not speak or act for themselves. But by attending to the materiality behind the figurative apparatus that underpins these “bad readers” (from the dark kitchen to the darkening pen of the grammarian to the “darkening” mistake of the *librarius* to the greasy, contaminating poem of Fidentinus), we open critical ground for speculating about how Martial’s epigrammatic book would have adumbrated these “bad readers” at every stage of its life, accumulating traces


283 On the connection between Martial, reading, and spectacles, see Larash 2004: 92-121.
as it passes through the hands of a range of social agents beyond the author who in turn give the book new meaning. The book as object mediates not just text but social, embodied relations. This destabilizing potential of the book takes center stage in the next chapter, where Lucian’s supposedly incompetent book user challenges the claim staked by an elite _pepaideumenos_ to a superior epistemological mode. This “bad reader,” like Martial’s cast of bad readers, brings into view the different hermeneutic possibilities that accumulate around books as objects, possibilities that our elite sources—and sometimes our own hermeneutic modes—foreclose, demean, or are simply oblivious to by virtue of their own situated perspectives.
Chapter 4: Lucian’s queer book user in the *Adversus Indoctum*

Two things can be acquired from the ancients, the ability to speak and to act as one ought, by emulating the best models and shunning the worst; and when a man clearly fails to benefit from them either in one way or the other, what else is he doing but buying haunts for mice and lodgings for bookworms?

–Lucian, *Adversus Indoctum* (17)

Paper matters. Paper can also be queer; paper can be used queerly...to queer use can be to linger on the material qualities of that which you are supposed to pass over; it is to recover a potential from materials that have been left behind, all the things you can do with paper if you do not follow the instructions.

–Sara Ahmed (2019: 206-7)

In Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum*, an anonymous speaker mercilessly scolds a figure who is passionate about purchasing fine books while possessing no real claim to *paideia*.\(^{284}\) As the speaker enumerates the book collector’s shortcomings, he is quick to cordon off this fellow from his own well-born circle of *pepaideumenoi* (3-4): he portrays the collector’s desire for books as materialistic and vain, a deceptive means of infiltrating the privileged population of *pepaideumenoi*. In order to cast shame upon the collector’s failed and inauthentic embodiment of *paideia*, the speaker musters a number of comparisons that exploit incongruity between objects and their users: he is like Thersites, who becomes a laughing-stock in the arms of Achilles (7); or Neanthus, a musically untrained youth who expected to sound just like Orpheus when he played

\(^{284}\) The received Greek title of the satire is Πρὸς τὸν ἄπαθενταν καὶ πολλὰ βιβλία ὁμοιόμενον (“Against the man who is ignorant and buys a bunch of books”). All text is from Harmon’s Loeb edition.
his lyre (11); or Dionysus of Syracuse, who procured Aeschylus’ wax-tablets in the hopes of writing tragedies just like his (15). When the speaker concludes that the collector couldn’t possibly be acquiring books to get any proper “use” (χρεία, 19) out of them, “any more than a bald man would a comb,” (οὐ μᾶλλον ἡ φαλακρός ἢ τις πρίαιτο κτένας, 19), he supposes he purchases books in order to curry the favor of the paideia-fond emperor, Marcus Aurelius (22).

In the final sections of the satire, the speaker begs the collector either to keep his books under lock and key so as not to befoul them with his hands and tongue (28) or otherwise to lend his books to someone else (like him) who will make use of them like a real pepaideumenos (30).

This text has long been of interest to scholars of book history, but one detail’s full potential within this framework remains unaccounted for. Two thirds of the way through the satire, the speaker makes a curious, invective move: he outs the collector as a kinaidos (23), a figure typically glossed as a man who deviates from masculine norms and enjoys being sexually penetrated by other men.285 Why should Lucian’s speaker insinuate that his target is a “passive homosexual”? More specifically, what has a kinaidos got to do with books?

In the most extensive account of Lucian’s Adversus Indoctum by a book historian, William Johnson explains that Lucian uses the figure of the kinaidos to set the collector “at one side of a bipolar opposition” seen elsewhere in Lucian.286 If we are hungry for more, we turn to his footnotes, which reveal that his interlocutor on the book collector as kinaidos is Maud Gleason’s 1995 monograph Making Men. Following this trail, we are taken to Gleason’s discussion of how physiognomists parsed bodily deportment as a kind of language, an index of

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286 Johnson 2010: 162.
one’s moral character and inner disposition: here, Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum* earns a tantalizing but brief mention in the footnotes.\(^{287}\) True to form, Lucian’s *kinaidos* has largely remained a matter for the footnotes, bottoming the page rather than topping it. This discursive marginalization, however, is itself a scholarly choice.

In this chapter, I jointly engage book history and queer studies to tell a different story about the so-called “ignorant book collector.” While explicit mention of the *kinaidos* does not occur until well into the satire, I suggest that treating the figure of the *kinaidos* as a feature of the whole satire unlocks a new perspective onto the collector: rather than being hapless and vain, this book user exhibits an intimate, affective, knowledgeable relationship to texts as objects. The lens of book history tells us that this is an epistemology that would have been recognizable to ancient readers, especially those outside of the *pepaideumenoi* elite, including enslaved and low-status book workers. I first trace how this text participates in the discourse of the *kinaidos*, drawing attention to how the speaker’s framing of the collector as *kinaidos* negotiates intersecting dynamics of power, embodiment, and identity. Then, I show how situating this nexus of cinaedic embodiment and textual materiality within the matrices of book history and queer studies provides a fruitful way of reframing the book collector outside of the pejorative, normative rhetoric in which he is encased. Ultimately, I offer a hermeneutic model for handling a text indelibly marked by the suppression and degradation of queer embodiment and alternative epistemologies of the book.

\(^{287}\) Gleason 1995: 77n 100.
4.1 The *kinaidos* in the *Adversus Indoctum*

In order to understand what Lucian’s speaker is doing in associating the collector with the *kinaidos*, we first need to understand that the *kinaidos* is a body that is used to do things. To take a preliminary example, at section 23 of the *Adversus Indoctum*, the speaker draws an explicit link between the body of the *kinaidos* and the book collector. He tells us that the collector follows the bodily regulations in the handbook of Hemitheon the *kinaidos*, and then supposes that, even if such a man should don the lionskin of Heracles, his cinaedic embodiment would not escape detection (23):

μυρία γάρ ἐστι τὰ ἀντιμαρτυροῦντα τῷ σχήματι, βάδισμα καὶ βλέμμα καὶ φωνῆ καὶ τράχηλος ἐπικεκλασμένος καὶ ψιμοθὴν καὶ μαστίχη καὶ φύκος, οἷς ὑμεῖς κοσμεῖσθε, καὶ ὅλως κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, θάττον ἂν πέντε ἑλέφαντας ὑπὸ μᾶλλος κρύψειας ἢ ἕνα κίναιδον. εἶτα ἢ λεοντῆ μὲν τὸν τοιοῦτον οὐκ ἂν ἔκρυψεν, σὺ δ’ ὤεις λήσεις σκεπόμενος βιβλίῳ; ἀλλ’ οὐ δυνατόν. προδώσει γάρ σε καὶ ἀποκαλύψει τὰ ἄλλα ὑμῶν γνωρίσματα.

For, there’s a million things that would bear witness against the *kinaidos’* appearance: the walk and the glance and the voice and the weak neck and the white lead and mastic and rouge that you use to adorn yourself. In short, to quote the proverb: you could more easily conceal five elephants under your arm than a single cinaedus. Well, if the lionskin would not have concealed a man like that, do you think that you’ll escape notice under the cover of a book? Impossible: the other recognition-marks of your sort will betray and reveal you.

This passage, which I discuss in greater detail below, illustrates a persistent phenomenon in the *Adversus Indoctum*: the speaker uses the *kinaidos* as a body to fuel and secure his own sense of power and normative embodiment. The body of the *kinaidos* comes to us not through his own subjectivity but as embedded within this hostile, elite discourse, and thus demands a methodological intervention that will allow us to analyze this discourse without reinscribing the
hierarchies embedded within it. In the case of Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum*, we need both book history and queer studies to tell a new story about Lucian’s cinaedic book collector.

The *kinaidos* would seem to be an ideal body to use to cordon off the ignorant book collector from the speaker’s well-born circle of authentically masculine and Greek *pepaideumenoi*, or in Johnson’s words, to “set the collector at one end of a bipolar spectrum.” Indeed, Amy Richlin has suggestively argued that *cinaedi* may have comprised a “passive homosexual subculture” in Rome, thus truly embodying the bottom, passive end of the ancient sex/gender system. But in order to resist reproducing the speaker’s logic that renders the collector a passive book user devoid of knowledge, we first need to tell a different story about the *kinaidos*. The past two decades of scholarship on the *kinaidos* have problematized the binary framework of active/penetrator and passive/penetrated, instead situating the *kinaidos* as a figure who exposes the instability and constructedness of a range of social hierarchies. On the Greek side of things, in his 1997 *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, James Davidson dubs the *kinaidos* “the paradigm of insatiability, of desire never-to-be-fulfilled.” The Gorgian life of the *kinaidos* is not the life of the “catamite” but rather the life of bottomless pleasure. Drawing on the work of Thomas Habinek and Craig Williams, Elizabeth Young reminds us that the term *cinaedus* originally referred to a performer of lascivious song and dance: “whether swaying his hips,

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288 The material and documentary record of the *kinaidos* paints a different picture from the literary discourse. On these sources, see Sapsford 2015. Particularly noteworthy is an inscription from Philae, where two individuals appear to self-identify as *kinaidoi*.

289 Johnson 2010: 162.

290 Richlin 1993.


292 cf. Plato *Gorg.* 494e; Socrates claims that the most shameful life with respect to pleasures is that of the *kinaidos*, translated by Donald Zeyl (in Cooper’s 1997 edition) as “catamite.”
exposing tender patches of skin through depilation, or enjoying the feel of a silken sleeve brushing against his wrists, the *cinaedus* regularly opened his body to a thrilling range of all-over pleasures. Rather than simply being a pathic, the *cinaedus* was something of a sensualist.”

Most recently, Thomas Sapsford invites us to understand the *kinados* as a queer body, and is, to my knowledge, one of the first classicists to engage this framing. For Sapsford, the *kinados* embodies queerness through his “ability to morph, blend, adapt...to flip across boundaries.”

A source contemporary with Lucian encapsulates the queerness of the *kinados* well: in his dream manual the *Oneirocritica*, Artemidorus explains the significance of dreaming about clay (3.29.5):

> πηλὸς νόσον σημαίνει καὶ ὑβριν. νόσον μὲν διὰ τὸ μῆτε καθαρὸν εἶναι ὑδωρ μήτε γῆν ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἁμφιτέρου μεμίχθαι καὶ μηδὲ ἔτερον εἶναι. πονηρὸν οὖν σύγκριμα τοῦ σώματος τοῦτο ἐστὶ νόσον προσαγορεύει εἰκότως. ὑβριν δὲ, ὅτι μολύνει. ἐτὶ δὲ κιναίδον διὰ τὸ ὑγρὸν καὶ ἐκλυτον.

clay means disease and hubris; disease on account of not being purely water nor earth, but rather a mix of both and not one or the other: so, as a base compound, it rightly predicts disease of the body; it signifies hubris because it stains. It can even mean a *kinados* because it is fluid and unbridled.

The anxieties we see here about the *kinados’* slipperiness and fluidity—his ability, like clay, to muddy the boundaries between discreet categories—become particularly pronounced during the time of Lucian’s writing. Gleason and Habilnek have charted how, under the empire, the

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294 Sapsford 2017: 261.

295 Lucian himself frequently draws on the image of clay to figure his playful, innovative, and subversive reworkings of a supposedly rigid, marmoreal classical tradition. See Romm (1990: 90-91) on *Prometheus Es In Verbis*: “…this metaphor defines the role of the innovating artist by aligning him with Prometheus against the Olympians, by enabling him to hybridize objects from the world around him, and by connecting him with an audience more closely attuned to novelty than to subtlety.”
charge of cinaedism is preoccupied with revealing or exposing “the true cinaedus within.”

This strikes a chord with a persistent anxiety in imperial literature about social interlopers of various kind. The obsession with the disguise and shocking revelation of these Protean characters is perhaps best demonstrated by Juvenal’s second Satire, an important companion text for Lucian’s Adversus Indoctum. “There’s no trusting in appearances” (frontis nulla fides, 2.8), Juvenal’s satirical persona claims: cinaedi are everywhere, and nowhere. As Habinek has argued, Juvenal’s text is less about any passive, sexual behavior of these figures than it is about their incongruity, their pliancy, their ability to play both sides, to slip in and out of and scramble Roman hierarchies of masculinity, class, and ethnicity. He identifies in this Satire a “growing recognition of the destabilizing potential of homosexual relations” wherein the “vacillation between active and passive” confounds traditional models of penetrator/penetrated or dominant/submissive: “the ‘great concord’ to be found among homosexuals, especially if transported from the cosmopolitan capital to the frontier provinces, threatens to undo the patterns of oppression and domination on which the entire empire is and has been built.” To frame the kinaidos as “queer” is to account for the relational threat posed by the figure vis-à-vis dominant society: as Judith Peraino writes, “as a term of relation, queer describes neither a simple binary

297 Nor is there any trusting in the satiric persona! On Satire 2 and its thematization of disguise and concealment, see Uden 2015: 52-74.
298 Habinek 1997: 32.
299 Habinek 1997: 38. Habinek (2005: 197) situates this preoccupation with outing and belittling “real” cinaedi within broader changes in imperial constructions of sexuality: “an emphasis on privacy as the context for sexual behavior, a concern with sexual technique, and a belief that sexual preference is determinative of personal identity: now, to be a cinaedus is to be radically and unalterably different from being a ‘real,’ heterosexual, penetrative man.”
opposition to normative heterosexuality nor a position outside in dialectic with the status quo, but a threat—the sexual ignition of cultural phobias.”

I propose that we see a cognate phenomenon in the *Adversus Indoctum*: here, the Lucianic speaker’s anxieties about what the collector does with books are refracted through current, “cultural phobias” about the *kinaidos*, in particular, anxieties about dissimilitude and disguise, contamination and disease, and inauthenticity and fraudulence, all of which threaten to disrupt and disturb the hegemonic category of the *pepaideumenos*. Let us return now to section 23, where the collector is most explicitly linked to the *kinaidos*. The speaker has alleged that the collector purchases books because he wants to ingratiate himself with the *paideia*-fond emperor. Fat chance of this, the speaker claims: his cinaedic deviancy is obvious “even if [he] just speaks,” (εἰ γὰρ καὶ φθέγξατο μόνον). In this claim, the speaker resembles the famous physiognomist Cleanthes, who, according to an anecdote recorded by Dio Chrysostom, never made any mistake in identifying whether a person was “a manly man, a coward, an imposter, a wanton, or a *kinaidos*, or an adulterer” (osauros ekeinos touz antherwpos ouz hipistato orn và legetin hdunato oti ouros men andreios, ouros de deulos, ouros de ulacos, ouros de ubristi hé kinaidos hé moichos, 33.53). As Dio tells us, some men tested Cleanthes’ remarkable abilities by presenting him with “a rugged man with knitted brow, in a wretched and filthy state, with calloused hands, wrapped in a rough, gray cloak, shaggy down to his ankles, hair close-shaved” (prosagousin autn skleron tina to soma kai sownorfon antherwpon, aymandon kai faulwos diakeimenon kai en taiz xerst túlous exonta, faión ti kai trachy peribeblymenon i mátion, dasoun éos tôn sfurôn kai faulwos kekarymenon). Cleanthes looked him up and down for some time but was stumped and dismissed the fellow: “yet as he was leaving, he sneezed. Immediately, Cleanthes cried out that

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300 Peraino 2003: 434. Cf. Lee Edelman’s (2004: 17) proposition that queerness “cannot define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.”
he was a *kinaidos*” (ἡδὴ δὲ ἀποχωρῶν πτάρνυται. κάκεϊνος εὖθυς ἀνεβόησεν ὡς εἴη κίναιδος, 33.54))

As Gleason has shown, the perception that these *kinaidoi* practiced their vice in secret and could be anywhere “kindled the vigilance of physiognomists, expert and amateur.” Lucian has his speaker tap into this agonistic element of physiognomic performance: throughout the satire, the speaker prides himself on his ability to identify and out misfits and imposters in agonistic contexts of performance. The dissimulating *kinaidos*, as Dio’s anecdote about Cleanthes illustrates, presents a particularly heightened challenge to the speaker, who leaves no doubt that he’s done his homework (23):

εἰπὲ γοῦν μοι καὶ τόδε, εἰ Βάσσος ὁ ὑμέτερος ἐκείνος σωφριστὴς ἢ Βάταλος ὁ αὐλητής ἢ ὁ κίναιδος Ἡμιθέων ὁ Συβαρίτης, ὡς τοὺς θεωμαστοὺς υἱὸν νόμους συνέγραψεν, ὡς χρή λειαίνεσθαι καὶ παρατύλλεσθαι καὶ πάσχειν καὶ ποιεῖν ἑκεῖνα, — εἰ τούτον τις νυν λεοντὴν περιβαλόμενος καὶ ῥόπαλον ἔχον βαδίζει, τί οἶεν φανεῖσθαι τοῖς ὅροισιν; Ἡρακλέα εἶναι αὐτόν; οὖκ, εἰ γε μὴ χῦτρας λημώντες τυγχάνοιεν. μυρία γὰρ ἔστι τὰ ἀντιμαρτυροῦντα τὸ σχῆμα, βάδισμα καὶ βλέμμα καὶ φωνή καὶ τράχηλος ἐπικεκλασμένος καὶ ψιμύθιον καὶ μαστίχη καὶ φύκος, οῖς ὑμεῖς κοσμεῖσθε, καὶ ὀλως κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, θάττον ἄν πέντε ἐλέφαντας ὑπὸ μάλης κρύψεως ἢ ἕνα κίναιδον. εἶτα ἢ λεοντὴ μὲν τὸν τοιοῦτον οὐκ ἢ ἐκρυφθείς, σὺ δ᾽ οἱεί λήσει σκεπόμενος βιβλίῳ; ἀλλ᾽ οὐ δυνατόν. προδώσει γὰρ σε καὶ ἀποκαλύψει τὰ ἄλλα ύμοι γνωρίσματα.

and tell me this: if Bassus, that sophist of yours, or Batalos the aulete or the cinaedus Hemitheon of Sybaris, who wrote those marvelous regulations for you—how you’ve got to smooth yourself down and pluck out your hair and experience and do those things—if one of these men should walk around wrapped in a lionskin and carry a club, what do you think onlookers would think? That he’s Heracles? No, unless they happened to be nearly blind! You see, there’s a million things that would bear witness against their appearance: the walk and the glance and the voice and the weak neck and the white lead and mastic and rouge that you use to adorn yourself with. In short, to quote the proverb: you could more easily conceal five elephants under your arm than a single cinaedus.

Well, if the lionskin would not have concealed a man like that, do you think that you’ll

301 On the resonances between Dio’s use of the *kinaidos* and Lucian’s speaker’s desire to locate the collector (also a Syrian) at a cultural remove, see below. On Dio 33 and imperial Greek representations of eastern/Syrian otherness (esp. sexually deprived androgyny), see Andrade 2013: 253-60.

escape notice under the cover of a book? Impossible: the other recognition-marks of your sort will betray and reveal you.

Like the physiognomists and moralists of his time, the speaker assumes that the figure has something to conceal. As a kinaidos would deceptively attempt to conceal the stereotypical tokens of his cinaedism by wearing Heracles’ lionskin, so too, the speaker claims, does the collector use his books to conceal these “marks of recognition” (γνωρίσματα). These marks, “recognizable” (γνώριμα) to virtually anyone, allow him to be “read” (ἀναγιγνώσκω) like a book. This metonymy between books and bodies resonates with a passage from Lucian’s De Mercede Conductis where the speaker draws on the image of the book to figure Greeks who deceptively ingratiating themselves with wealthy Romans: “they are like the finest books, whose knobs are golden and slip-covers purple, but inside there’s either Thyestes feasting on his children or Oedipus sleeping with his mum...so too are these men stars and admired by everyone, but inside, underneath their purple, they hide a deal of tragedy; in fact if you unroll any one of them, you will find no small drama by a Euripides or a Sophocles” (ὁμοίοι εἰσιν τοῖς καλλίστοις τούτοις βιβλίοις, ὅν χρυσοὶ μὲν οἱ ὀμφαλοί, πορφυρὰ δὲ ἔκτοσθεν ἡ δυθέρα, τὰ δὲ ἐνδὸν ἡ Θυέστης ἐστὶν τῶν τέκνων ἐστιώμενος ἢ Οἰδίπους τῇ μητρὶ συνόν...τοιοῦτοι καὶ αὐτοὶ εἰσι, λαμπροὶ καὶ περίβλεπτοι, ἐνδὸν δὲ ὑπὸ τῇ πορφύρᾳ πολλὴν τὴν τραγῳδίαν σκέποντες. ἔκαστον γοῦν αὐτῶν ἢν ἐξειλήσης, δράμα οὐ μικρὸν εὐρήσεις Εὐριπίδου τινὸς ἢ Σοφοκλέους, 41). While these men who “hide” (σκέποντες) their perversions are compared to a deluxe bookroll whose outer materiality conceals its appalling content, the collector is perceived as quite literally attempting to conceal his cinaedic embodiment beneath a book (σκέπομενος βιβλίῳ).

303 Interesting, though, that in De Mercede Conductis the speaker chooses to reveal these men’s real essences as dramatic texts: even when the outer cosmetic layer is stripped away, the inner essence is still a performance.
This practice of parsing the deviant body, of outing the *kinaidos*, is framed as a practice of reading the body like a book, stripping away its superficial materiality and gleaning its inner contents. The speaker positions himself as an authority on the figure of the *kinaidos*: he’s read his Aeschines since he cites Batalos, a nickname for Demosthenes due to his associations with *kinaidia.* He’s read his Hemitheon, whose *Sybaritica* had quite the reputation for licentiousness by the time of Ovid’s exile (cf. *Trist.* 2.147) and is lumped together by Martial with the “ultra-pathic little books of Mussetius” (12.95.1-2). Although the speaker makes a point of saying that Hemitheon the *kinaidos* wrote this *kinaidos*-handbook for the collector and his cinaedic crew, he ironically reveals through his knowledge of its contents that he’s had his hands on it, too.

In his frantic catalogue of all the signs that enable an observer to out a *kinaidos*, the speaker recycles much vocabulary that appears in the physiognomist writings of the time (e.g., Polemo, *Phys.* 61, 1.276F), drawing on stereotypes that appear as early as the Hellenistic physiognomy attributed to Aristotle (Aris. *Phys.* 808a). In particular, the speaker follows the physiognomists in employing the lion and his mane to set up a counter-paradigm to the figure of the *kinaidos*. The ideal man moves harmoniously, with careful control, and bravely, “for his is the walk of the lion” (Anon. Lat. 76, 2.99-100F). Hairiness, moreover, was understood as a symbol of innate manliness: for Aristotle, a man’s hair stemmed from the “abundance of inner heat that concocted his sperm” (*Gen. An.* 765b; 783b). The image of the lionskin certainly

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304 Later in the satire the speaker asks the collector if he blushed when he read Aeschines’ speech *Against Timarchus*.


alludes to the opening of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where the androgynous Dionysus disguises himself with a lionskin and club but is easily recognized by Heracles himself.\(^{307}\)

Hairiness and masculinity are also a concern at the start of Juvenal’s rant about *cinaedi* at the start of his second *Satire* (2.5-10):

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frontis nulla fides; quis enim non vicus abundat
tristibus obscenis? castigas turpia, cum sis
inter Socraticos notissima fossa cinaedos?
hispida membra quidem et durae per bracchia saetae
promittunt atrocem animum, sed podice levi
caeduntur tumidae medico ridente marsicæ.
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There’s no trusting in appearances: look, what street isn’t packed with grim looking perverts? Do you criticize shameful behavior, when you are the most infamous ditch amongst Socratic *cinaedi*? Shaggy limbs and stiff bristles all over your arms promise a fierce spirit, but from your smooth asshole the swollen figs are trimmed off while the doctor laughs.

Here, we are presented with paranoia about figures whose “hairy limbs and stiff bristles on their arms promise a fierce spirit” (*hispida membra quidem et durae per bracchia saetae / promittunt atrocem animum*) but in fact have a smooth ass marked by the signs of voracious, sexual submission. Like Lucian’s *kinaidos* in a lionskin, these perverts subvert normative expectations for the masculine body: their incongruous soft and hard, hairy and smooth qualities expose the instability of normative sex and gender categories, suggesting, in Michael Broder’s words, that “manly gender presentation is literally only skin deep.”\(^{308}\) When read in the company of Juvenal’s queers, Lucian’s collector as *kinaidos* undercuts the speaker’s essentializing

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\(^{307}\) This image of the cinaedic book collector as a Heracles thus also has a destabilizing potential: in the mythic tradition, Heracles was no straightforward emblem of normative masculinity; during his enslavement to the Lydian queen Omphale, Heracles wore women’s dress and performed women’s tasks. Moreover, his bottomless appetite also implicates him with the figure of the *kinaidos*. See further discussion in Eppinger 2017.

\(^{308}\) Broder 2015: 291.
formulation of normative, masculine embodiment. By wearing a lionskin and embodying both feminine and masculine qualities, the *kinai̇dos* exposes how all gendered embodiment is performative rather than a naturalized essence. In this regard, the destabilizing potential of the collector as *kinai̇dos* is akin to the subversive potential of drag performance. Drawing on the work of Esther Newton, Judith Butler, and others, Izzy Levy writes that drag performers, by “heightening and hybridizing binary oppositions through...mimetic performance...reveal that, although such oppositions or their terms might be premised as natural, they are only 'real' inasmuch as they are performed or performative.”309 Like a drag performer, the collector and his cinaedic associations challenge the naturalized hegemony of the elite, masculine *pepaideumenos* speaker, uncovering and laying bare the performativity and contingency of all readerly poses.

I have suggested that the speaker associates the collector with the *kinai̇dos* not only because he embodies stereotypical signs of the *kinai̇dos*, but also because the collector’s embodied relations to books invoke cinaedic incongruity and dissimulation. Much like other historical and literary personae of the period who are anxious to spot and reveal a “real” *kinai̇dos*, the speaker is obsessed with uncloaking the collector and revealing his “true essence”, these “tokens of recognition” (γνωρίσματα) that the collector (in the speaker’s view) desires to cover with his fancy books. So far, we have seen how the speaker’s representation of the collector as a deviant body opens out onto gendered concerns, but the speaker also uses the body of the *kinai̇dos* to articulate intersecting anxieties about gender, social status, and ethnic identity. One central way in which the speaker achieves this is by framing the collector’s use of books as a “disease” (νόσος, 28):

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\text{τούτο γοῦν καὶ μάλιστα θαυμάσεις ἃν τις, τίνα ποτὲ ψυχὴν ἔχων ἀπτῇ τῶν βιβλίων, ὁποίαις αὐτὰ χερσὶν ἀνελίττεις, πότε δὲ ἀναγιγνώσκεις; μεθ᾽ ἡμέραν; ἄλλ᾽ οὔδεις ἐώρακε τούτῳ ποιοῦντα. ἄλλα νόκτωρ; πότερον ἐπιτεταγμένος ἢδη ἔκεινοις ἢ πρὸ τῶν λόγων;}\]

Indeed, someone would especially wonder above all about this: what state of soul do you possess when you touch your books, and what about your hands when you unroll them. When do you do your reading? By day? No one has ever seen you doing this. At night? When you have already given instructions to those guys, or before? Come now, in the name of Cotys, never again dare such a thing, but leave the books alone and attend to your own affairs. Yet you shouldn’t do that either; rather, you should feel shame when reading about Euripides’ Phaedra when she is vexed at women and says: “Don’t they fear that night, their accomplice, and the chambers of the house will break into speech?” But, if you’ve decided to cleave to the same disease no matter what, go on, buy books and keep them at home, locked up, and reap the fame of your possessions. This is enough for you. But never ever lay hands on or read or sully with your tongue the prose and poetry of ancient men that has done you no harm.

Drawing up close to the collector’s mouth and hands as capable of polluting and sullying the contents of esteemed, canonical Greek texts, the speaker taps into a long tradition of pathologizing kinaidia as a spreading contagion or disease. By invoking Phaedra (who is also a transgressive text maker!) as an exemplum of transgressive, feminine desire, the speaker reveals his anxiety about the collector’s transgressive embodiment and what he does with his body and books behind closed doors. The figure of the contaminating kinaidos also allows the speaker to attach to the collector additional anxieties about the kinaidos’ ability to scramble of traditional signifiers of gender and class status. This reinforces a theme introduced earlier in the

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310 Richlin 1993: 537-549. Important loci are Persius 1.26, Seneca de Ira 3.26.4, Vit. Beat. 7.3, Juvenal 2.49-50. Many imperial literary sources envisioned the kinaidos’ bodily deviance to be catchable like a disease, including Juvenal 2 (Juvenal, in Satire 2, portrays cinaedism as an example of how Greekness infiltrates and corrupts Rome as a disease (morbum, 17; a spreading contagio, 78-81).
satire, where the speaker imagines that the Muses, rather than granting the collector a laurel branch like they did Hesiod, would have “whipped” (μαστιγοῦσα, 3) him away, like a pharmakos or outcast, lest he “pollute either Olmeios or Hippocrene, whose waters only thirsty flocks or the clean lips of shepherds may drink” (ὡς μὴ μιᾶναι μήτε τὸν Ὀλμεῖον μήτε τὴν τοῦ Ἱπποβου κρήνην ἀπερ ἡ ποιμνίως διψώσιν ἡ ποιμένων στόμασι καθαροῖς πότιμα, 3). The image of polluted water in particular recalls Artemidorus’ cinaedic clay, which (being neither water nor earth) signifies “disease of the body because it is a dirty/base compound” (πόνηρον σύγκριμα). Moreover, the suggestion that the Muses would “whip” the collector—a treatment that distinguishes the bodily integrity of the free from enslaved—imbues his polluting threat with clear connotations of slavery. The muddying kinaidos is thus a screen onto which the speaker projects his anxieties about the collector’s mingling of books (as elite, paideutic capital) with his own low social origins.

A servile status is further imputed to the collector when the speaker compares him to a donkey: “Although you hold a book in your hand and are constantly reading, you just don’t get what you’ve read: you are like a donkey (ὄνος), listening to the lyre and wagging your ears” (καὶ σὺ τοῖνυν βιβλίον μὲν ἔχεις ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκεις ἄει, τῶν δὲ ἀναγιγνωσκομένων οὐσθά οὐδέν, ἀλλ’ ὄνος λύρας ἀκούεις κινοῦν τὰ ὀτα, 4). This image of the donkey, a proverbially unmusical and hypersexual animal, calls to mind the myth of Midas, who was punished with donkey’s ears after choosing the satyr Marsyas over Apollo in a music contest.311 We might also think of Lucius-turned-donkey in Apuleius’ The Golden Ass: as Keith Bradley has argued, the animalization of Lucius figures his state of enslavement, given that the donkey was particularly

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311 Hopkinson 2008 ad loc.
associated with “the ideal servant, adaptable, hard-working and compliant.” On the other hand, following William Fitzgerald, we can also read the stubborn donkey as an image of the slave’s resistance, opening up the possibility that the collector’s deportment as a book user might also communicate a sense of resistance and subversion of power.

The incongruity between the collector’s low social origins and current amassing of wealth (which, in turn, he has expended, cf. 25) add fuel to the speaker’s desire to pin him neatly into an outsider group: “do you really claim,” the speaker asks, “that you know the same things as us, although you haven’t learned them?...Your haunts in boyhood were not the same as ours” (φής καὶ ταύτα μή μαθὼν ήμιν εἰδέναι;...οὖδὲ τὰς αὐτὰς διατριβὰς ήμιν ἐν παῖσιν ἔποιοῦ, 3). The speaker and collector may differ in the class-status of their origins, but they share an “outsider” status in their Syrian ethnicity (19). For Richter, Lucian draws attention to the shared Syrian ethnicity of speaker and target to “evaluate the importance of ethnicity in the construction of Greek identity.” Just as the *pepaideumenos* speaker claims to use “discernment” (διάγνωσις) to judge “genuine cultural value from counterfeit,” the reader is invited to “distinguish true barbarianness from counterfeit: both men are Syrians with respect to their birth (genos), but this non-Greek origin does not debar the text’s author from claiming to be Greek in cultural terms” via *paideia*. The speaker’s anxiety about his shared Syrian *ethnos* comes into clearer focus when considered against the broader discourse of imperial Greek sophists, who stereotyped eastern provincials as sexually, socially deviant. As Nathanael Andrade has shown, this

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312 Bradley 2000: 118. Simultaneously, the “ass was almost proverbial in antiquity for the physical abuse to which it was subjected” (Bradley 2000: 120). Bradley’s case study is Lucius’ transformation into a donkey in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*.

313 So, Fitzgerald (2000: 41) reads *Amores* 2.7.15-16, where “the beaten ass becomes less, not more, tractable.”

314 Richter 2011: 150.

315 Richter 2011: 150. For Richter, the *Adversus Indoctum* critiques cultural mimesis as a “flawed project.”
discourse perpetuated a belief that eastern, provincial societies had “certain innate, essential characteristics” such that even a provincial like Lucian’s Syrian speaker, who has assimilated and internalized Greek paideia, could be exposed as “counterfeit, as disguising their truly deviant natures.”

We see this play out if we return to our friend Cleanthes from Dio’s 33rd oration. Here the legitimate Greek pepaideumenos draws on physiognomic theory to deauthenticate the Tarsians’ claim to Greek ethnic lineage: all it takes is a rather queer sneeze to reveal the androgynous depravity, the kinaidos, that hides beneath a superficial screen of Greekness.

Our speaker thus finds in the discourse of the kinaidos another means of injecting difference between himself and his Syrian target, employing a technique used by Greek sophists like Dio and drawing on the associations between the kinaidos and “disease.” In Dio’s 33rd oration, the “sneeze” is not merely a “sign” (semeion) or symbol of a sexually deviant ethnos. In Andrade’s words, the sneeze “constituted a “disease” (nosēma) that generated it.”

Thus, the speaker taps into a long tradition of associating someone with the kinaidos so as to locate them at a cultural remove. Even the word kinaidos, as Joseph Azize and Ian Craigie propose, is a near Eastern loanword indirectly borrowed from Akkadian by the Greeks, and then borrowed once more by Latin speakers.

To return to the notion of the kinaidos as queer, as Sapsford has argued, “it is the openness of this figure that allows the kinaidos to be a locus for several forms of social anxiety, including effeminacy, licentiousness, ethnic otherness, and non-free status.”

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316 Andrade 2013: 246.


318 Craigie and Azize derive kinaidos from Akkadian quinnatu, meaning ‘anus’ or ‘rear,’ but that it enters Greek through an intermediary language, by which time it has come to mean a word for a dancer (2002: 60).

319 Sapsford 2017: 87.
One further concept the collector threatens to pollute or disrupt through his cinaedic embodiment is authenticity. Our sources indicate that a key expectation for the *pepaideumenos* was his ability to judge the “authentic value” of a text, that is, its philological fidelity (*fides, pistis*) vis-à-vis its authorial version. The *kinaidos*, meanwhile, is routinely represented as someone who is not to be trusted, to whom no *fides* can be ascribed. The stereotypical linkage between the *cinaedus* and lack of *fides* sparks the speaker’s rant in Juvenal’s second *Satire* and echoes much of the rhetoric about the collector in the *Adversus Indoctum*. The speaker announces his intention to ditch Rome because the city is swarming with hypocrites, “men who forfeit their claim to masculinity.”


321 In the O recension of Juvenal’s sixth *Satire*, for example, the satirical persona warns that “men who are like *cinaedi* should pretty much never be trusted” (similesque *cinaedis haud tamen illi / semper habenda fides*, 6.017-24). Note that the speaker hedges in his description of these untrustworthy men: so slippery are they that he can only warn the audience about people who are “like” *cinaedi* rather than *cinaedi* themselves (a reminder that our elite literary sources are giving us their idea of the *cinaedus* as rhetorical scare-figure).

objects they own (e.g., busts of moral philosophers; fancy, old books) and their moral and intellectual shortcomings. In particular, the curious detail in Juvenal 2 that the “most complete” of these cinaedic hypocrites seeks out not just any copy of Cleanthes and his ilk but “originals” (archetypus, 7) intersects with the fraught dynamics of textual authenticity in the Adversus Indoctum. The word archetypus, when used in the context of texts, seems to refer to an artifact transmitted by the author’s own hand. Cicero, for example, uses the word to mean a manuscript written by his own hand (ad Att. 16.3.1). Martial uses the word archetypus the most out of any Latin writer (six times), often to refer to luxury tableware and once with respect to his poetry (Ep. 7.11).

At stake for Juvenal’s speaker is the tension between “realness” (fides) and mere appearance (frontis). And so, he enhances the shock-value of the scene by having his cinaedus—who does not in any way live up to Stoic virtue—go after the “originals” of Cleanthes. In the Adversus Indoctum, the speaker activates a similar stereotype when he mockingly suggests that the collector should “collect and keep those manuscripts of Demosthenes, as many as the orator wrote with his own hand, and those of Thucydides that were found to have been copied eight times by Demosthenes, and even all the books that Sulla sent From Athens to Italy” (ἐκεῖνα ἔχει συλλαβῶν τὰ τοῦ Δημοσθένους καὶ αὐτὰ ὀκτάκις μεταγεγραμμένα εὑρέθη, καὶ ὅλως ἀπαντά ἐκεῖνα ὅσα ὁ Σύλλας Ἀθήνης ἐις Ἰταλίαν ἔξεπεμψε, 4). Not even through this effort, the speaker claims, would the collector “acquire anything towards paideia” (ἐκ τούτου παιδείαν κτήσαι, 4). According to William Johnson, “the joke is that many such books would have been

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323 Is it a coincidence that Dio’s famed physiognomist, expert at outing a cinaedus by a mere sneeze, has the same name as the philosopher Cleanthes?

324 On autograph manuscripts in ancient Rome, see McDonnell 1996.
forgeries aimed at the gullible.”\footnote{Johnson 2010: 167.} Indeed, the collector’s statement bears witness to two documented modes of bibliographical forgery in the ancient Mediterranean: the forgery of age and provenance. But, to my mind, there is nothing in the Greek to suggest that the speaker \textit{himself} is aware that such texts would likely be forgeries. Rather, his goal here seems to be to foreclose entirely the collector’s ability to associate with the \textit{pepaideumenoi}: he’ll never be authentically \textit{pepaideumenos}, even if he should acquire books that are the “real deal,” that bear the most “faithful” relationship to the authorial original.

Bibliographical knowledge of forgeries, however, belonged to booksellers—often enslaved or formerly enslaved—who knew how books could be tampered with to look old or to mimic a famous or archaic hand. For example, in his twenty-first oration \textit{On Beauty}, Dio Chrysostom tells his interlocutor about the practice of contemporary booksellers (\textit{βιβλιοπωλῶν}): “because they know that old books are highly sought after, since they are better written and on stronger papyrus, they dunk the worst/cheapest books of our day into grain so that their very color resembles that of ancient books, and after sullying them they sell them as if they were old” (ὅτι εἰδότες τὰ ἀρχαία τῶν βιβλίων σπουδαζόμενα, ὡς ἁμείνον γεγραμέναι καὶ ἐν κρείττοσι βιβλίοις, οἱ δὲ τὰ φαυλότατα τῶν νῦν καταθέντες εἰς σῖτον, ὡς τὸ γε χρώμα ὡμοία γένηται τοῖς παλαιοῖς, καὶ προσδιαφθείραντες ἀποδίδονται ὡς παλαιά, 21.12).\footnote{See discussion of this passage in Howley (forthcoming).}

Dio’s comment about the booksellers suggests that these practitioners possessed and exercised knowledge about the material aesthetics of books and how to manipulate them to suit the taste of elite buyers. This bibliographical knowledge, however, is not valued by Lucian’s speaker, who is pejorative towards these sub-elite practitioners throughout the satire and lumps
the collector together with them. According to the speaker, the “book dealers” (ἐμπόροις) and “booksellers” (βιβλιοκαπήλοις), although they possess many books, “are no better in paideia than you, but rather are barbarous in their speech like you, and obtuse in their judgment, just like you’d expect from men who do not know the difference between good and shameful” (μηδ’ ἐκείνους πολὺ σου τὰ εἰς παιδείαν ἁμείνους, ἄλλα βαρβάρους μὲν τὴν φωνὴν ὤσπερ σὺ, ἀξινέτους δὲ τῇ γνώσει, οἴους εἰκὸς εἶναι τοὺς μηδὲν τὸν καλὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν καθεωρακότας, 4).

The speaker discounts (or is oblivious to) bibliographical knowledge, prioritizing instead the ability to discern between the inner, moral qualities of texts, what is “good” and “shameful,” to tell which books are “worth a lot” (πολλοῦ ἀξία), that is, which books’ texts bear the stamp of textual pístis and thus are worth purchasing.

This nexus between cultural politics of bodily and textual authenticity emerges most clearly in an early passage that is replete with cinaedic associations. The speaker claims that no matter how many old books the collector acquires, he won’t be able to “make use of/enjoy their beauty/goodness any more than a blind man would enjoy/make use of the beauty of his favorites” (οὔτε εἰδότι τὸ κάλλος αὐτῶν οὔτε χρησομένῳ ποτὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἢ τυφλὸς ἀν τις ἀπολαύσει κάλλους παιδικῶν; 2). The speaker allows that the collector can “read” (ἀναγιγνώσκεις, 2) his books (τὰ βιβλία) fluently, but:

οὐδὲπο δὲ τοιτὸ μοι ἰκανὸν, ἣν μὴ εἰδῆς τὴν ἄρτην καὶ κακίαν ἐκάστου τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων καὶ συνής ὅστις μὲν ὁ νοῦς σύμπασιν, τῖς δὲ ἡ τάξις τῶν ὄνομάτων, ὅσα τε πρὸς τὸν ὅρθον κανόνα τὸ συγγραφεῖ ἀπηκρίβωται καὶ ὅσα κίβδηλα καὶ νόθα καὶ παρακεκομμένα.

this is not enough for me, unless you see the virtue and defects of each of the inscribed contents and understand the sense of the whole, and the arrangement of the words, which have been perfected by the writer according to the correct standard (lit. measuring rod) of use, and which are adulterated and illegitimate and counterfeit.
Proper use of books comes down to philological abilities. Johnson notes that the coin metaphor is a familiar one in ancient scholia as well as second-century lexicography, where words would be marked out as “authentic” or “counterfeit” based on whether they appear in properly classical texts. The metaphor is also interesting, however, from the perspective of a speaker who is very concerned about a cinaedic figure getting his (dirty) hands (and eyes and tongue) on precious books. The adjective κίβδηλος (counterfeit) appears in one of the earliest descriptions of a cinaedic figure. In a fragment of Anacreon (Gentili 82), we read of Artemon, an effeminate man who forged his way into aristocratic membership, exchanging rags for riches by “finding his living through deceit” (κίβδηλον εὑρίσκων βίον). On Artemon’s fraudulence, Sapsford writes that “it is neither Artemon’s effeminate apparel nor his sexual behavior that primarily mark him out as a threat, but rather his dissimilitude.” The speaker’s desire to weed out “counterfeit” or untrustworthy parts of texts intersects with his concern about the collector as an interloper into the pepaideumenoi elite.

Later in the text, the speaker paints the collector as a failure at pístis in other contexts. The collector believes (πιστεύεις, 20) everything flatterers tell him: “you once were persuaded that you resembled some royal person in your looks, like the false Alexander, the false Philip the fuller, the false Nero in our grandfathers’ time, and whoever else has been put labeled as false” (ποτε κάκεινο ἐπείσθης, ὡς βασιλεῖ τινι ὤμοιόθης τὴν ὄψιν, καθάπερ ὁ ψευδαλέξανδρος καὶ ὁ ψευδοφίλιππος ἔκεινος κναφεῦς καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοὺς προπάτορας ἣμῶν ψευδονέρων καὶ εἰ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ὑπὸ τὸ ψεύδο τεταγμένων, 20). In addition to these phonies, the collector is compared to a...
certain Pyrrhus of Epirus, who believed (πιστεύειν, 21) that he resembled Alexander the Great, until an old woman in Larissa told him that he resembled Batrachion the cook (Βατραχίωνι...τῷ μαγείρῳ). What these comparisons emphasize is the gulf in social status between the imitators and those they imitate: cooks were often of enslaved status; the false Philip, Andricus of Adramyttium, was a fuller before claiming the Macedonian throne. Alongside these comparisons, the speaker’s joke about the collector’s delusion of resembling “some royal person” (βασιλεῖ τινι) emphasizes the likelihood that the collector is of low-status and/or banausic origins.

Moreover, the speaker’s concern about falseness and inauthenticity in connection with low-status, banausic workers who might transgress boundaries is echoed in several inscriptions about people identified as kinaidoi. One inscription, for example, on a tomb tile from Rhegium describes an individual named Soterichos as both a kinaidos and a pseudo-potter (Σωτήριχε κίναιδε ψευδοκαμινάρι, SEG 39 1062). In a piece of correspondence from the Zenon archive dated to 258/7 BC, Amyntas warns Zenon of one “Kallianax, a carpenter, a kinaidos,” who “behaved drunkenly.” “Make clear to Apollonios,” Amyntas says, “not to trust him in anything” (Ἀπολλονίῳ ἐμφανίζειν μηθὲν ἀυτῷ π[ι]στεύειν, PSI V 483). For Sapsford, Soterichos’ and Kallianax’s professions as potter and carpenter seem “strikingly contrary to the more typical image of the effeminate kinaidos” and this “incongruity between the handler of hard wood or fired clay and the dissimulating performer of soft dance and music” carries the pejorative force of the insult. At the same time, perhaps the linkage of the potter and kinaidos is not so

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329 Hopkinson 2008 ad loc.

330 Sapsford 2015: 119-120.
incongruous: surely the potter would be familiar with manipulating the lubricity of clay to resemble anything.

Another aspect of paideutic reading that the speaker is concerned with is the “proper arrangement of words” (τίς δὲ ἢ τάξις τῶν ὄνομάτων, 2). This also betrays an anxiety rooted in the discourse of the *kinaidos*. In addition to scrambling the traditional markers of gender, social status, ethnicity, etc., the *kinaidos* was also notorious for scrambling words. From the author of *On Style*, we learn that, when Sotades the *kinaidos* rearranged the word order of *Iliad* 22.133, he did so in bad taste (*Eloc.* 189):

σύνθεσις δὲ <κακόζηλος ἢ> ἀναπαυσική καὶ μάλιστα ἐοικυία τοῖς κεκλασµένοις καὶ ἀσέµνοις μέτροις, οία μάλιστα τὰ Σωτάδεια διὰ τὸ μαλακότερον... “σείων μελίνην Πηλιάδα δεξίον κατ’ ὤμον” ἄντι τοῦ “σείων Πηλιάδα μελίνην κατὰ δεξίον ὤμον”... ὑπὸ τί τὸ μεταμεµροφωµόµενῳ ἐοικεν ὁ στίχος, ὡσπερ οἱ μυθευόµενοι ἐξ ἀρρένων µεταβάλλειν εἰς ἂνθελίας.

The composition is (described as affected when) anapaestic and when similar to those weak and undignified meters, such as especially the Sotadean due to it being rather soft, for example... “shaking the Pelian ‘weapon’ right across his shoulder” instead of “shaking the Pelian ‘weapon’ across his right shoulder”; such that the line seems like one having undergone a metamorphosis, just like those men fabled to change from males into females.

A mere change in word order results in a gender-bending metamorphosis and cinaedic subversion of dignified Homeric epic. The Sotadean line, like its namesake, bears the stamp of the *kinaidos*: κεκλασµένοις is a recurrent buzzword in descriptions of cinaedic embodiment (including in *Adversus Indoctum*, 23). According to Quintilian, one could reverse the order of an entire line to put it in the Sotadean meter (9.4.90), whence Martial’s claim (discussed in the previous chapter) that he “does not read Sotades the *cinaedus* backwards” (*nec retro lego*).

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331 Strabo 14.1.41 says that “Sotades was the first to *kinaidologein* (ἤρξε δὲ Σωτάδης µέν πρῶτος τοῦ κιναιδολογείν).”
Quintilian echoes *On Style’s* concerns about the Sotadean, writing that the Sotadean meter has a “lax” character because of its preponderance of short syllables: it is like a stream, when its waters are broken and struggling amidst opposing rocks (*fragosa atque interrupta, 9.4.6-7*).

Broken, jarring, unharmonious deportment pops up as a frequent target of critique in the satire: Thersites’ limping movement and embodiment causes Achilles’ armor to buckle and bend; (7), Evangelus’ “discordant and jarring” (*ἀνάρμοστόν τι καὶ ἀσύντακτον*) lyre playing and “unmusical, thin voice” (*ἀπόμουσόν τι καὶ λεπτόν*, with the cinaedus’ voice often described as a *λεπτή φωνή*) (9); Neanthus’ spastically strums Orpheus’ lyre and is subsequently torn to pieces by dogs (12). The speaker’s concern about the “arrangement of words” may at first appear just to be purely philological concern, but it is one that also opens out onto broader cultural anxieties about the perversion that objects undergo—including books—when they fall into the wrong hands. In one lively anecdote, the speaker tells us that Demetrius the Cynic came upon “an ignorant fellow” (*ἀπαίδευτόν τινα*) reading a “very beautiful” (*κάλλιστον*, 19) copy of Euripides’ *Bacchae*. When he gets to the messenger speech, Demetrius “snatched it away and dismembered it, saying “it is better for Pentheus to be torn to tatters by me once and for all than by you repeatedly” (*ἁρπάσας διέσπασεν αὐτὸ εἰπῶν, ἀμεινόν ἐστι τῷ Πενθεῖ ἄμεινὸν ἑμῶν ὑπ᾽ ἑμοῦ ὑπὸ σοῦ πολλάκις*, 19). What does it mean that this fellow is “butchering” his reading? We might recall here Seneca’s Calvisius Sabinus, who regurgitated the poetry fed to him by his enslaved readers in piecemeal form such that one of his companions suggested he “employ grammarians as slaves to gather up the bits” (*ut grammaticos haberet analectas, 27.5-8*). We aren’t given any specifics about this “ignorant” fellow’s embodiment aside from his failing as a

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332 Martial does, however, compose one poem in the Sotadean meter: 3.29. For discussion of this, see Chapter 3.
reader, but if the speaker means to associate his “broken” mode of speech with the book collector, chances are he resembles an unmanly man, like Sabinus, the collector, the *kinaidos*.

These are some of the salient ways in which our speaker uses the body of the *kinaidos* to negotiate intersecting dynamics of power, embodiment, and identity. And while he tries to use this body to fuel his sense of himself, this body—when read queerly—in fact exposes the instability and constructedness of the speaker’s own performance as *pepaideumenos*. This twist runs true to the slippery, seriocomic nature of Lucianic form and humor, which reveals the partiality of traditional perspectives like that of the *pepaideumenos*. It is characteristic of Lucian’s satiric persona, in Tim Whitmarsh’s words, “to offer no securely authoritative moral position.”333 Living in a society where the spectacular and theatrical reaches “unparalleled heights,” Whitmarsh writes, Lucian “ironizes any attempt to assume a high-mindedly Hellenic position of exteriority.”334 These Lucianic moves emphasize, in R. Bracht Branham’s words, the “incongruity of any single way of seeing a subject.”335

4.2 Towards a New Understanding of the “Ignorant Book Collector”

How might we understand the book collector another way, not as a shameful object of critique, but rather as a subject who embodies a different orientation towards books? By situating key representations of book handling within the matrices of queer studies and book history, I will reframe the collector beyond the speaker’s pejorative rhetoric, suggesting that the book collector

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335 Branham 1989: 56-57; 104.
possesses an alternate epistemology of the book that would have resonated with low-status book workers and other, ancient book users. Here, I am taking my cue from queer studies, in particular, the work of José Esteban Muñoz and Sara Ahmed. In his 1996 essay “Ephemera as Evidence,” Muñoz seeks to interrupt the institutionalized “regime of rigor” that deprives “evidentiary authority” to the often makeshift and randomized archives of queerness.

“Queerness,” he writes, “is often transmitted covertly...Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.” With this framework in mind, I turn to key scenes where I argue that queer relations between books and their users ignite a threat to the straightening, rigorous, paideutic regime of the speaker’s logic. I will draw attention to how these scenes, framed by the speaker as superficial and failed performances of learnedness, might instead be read as ephemeral traces of queer performance, or “queer use” (drawing on Sara Ahmed’s framing), that could have signaled something meaningful to other onlookers or readers.

Near the beginning of the satire, the speaker jokes that the collector cannot tell the difference between “books that are old and worth a lot, and what are worthless and simply in wretched condition, unless you judge them by how much they are eaten into and cut up, calling the bookworms into counsel to settle the question” (ὥς πόθεν γάρ σοι διαγνώναι δυνατόν, τίνα μὲν παλαιὰ καὶ πολλὸν ἁξία, τίνα δὲ φαῦλα καὶ ἄλλως σαπρά, εἰ μὴ τῷ διαβεβρῶσθαι καὶ κατακεκόφθαι αὐτὰ τεκμαίροι καὶ συμβούλους τοῦς σέας ἐπὶ τὴν ἔξετασιν παραλαμβάνοις;).
A *pepaideumenos* like the speaker would obviously use philological reasoning to discern between an old book that’s rubbish and an old book that has value because its inner, verbal contents are ‘faithful’ to its authorial version. The collector relies on worms instead of words.

I want to suggest that a very Lucianic move is at play here. The joke, at first, seems patently obvious: bookworms cannot read and they ingest content indiscriminately, so a bookworm hole (to say nothing of an actual bookworm) won’t tell a user anything about textual ‘value,’ ‘quality’ or ‘fidelity.’ On the other hand, wormholes are an excellent way to tell if a book is in wretched repair: worms crop up in descriptions of books that have been sitting around for some time, unhandled, festering with humidity and rot.337 One might even find wormholes in the “cheap/worthless” (φαυλότατα) books that Dio describes as being aged artificially in grain (21.12). Perhaps we should not be so quick to discount this philology of the worm: when viewed from a book historical lens, calling the bookworms into counsel might be a perfectly valid *bibliographical* test of whether a book is “old and valuable,” that is, valuable enough to have been protected by cedar oil. In a Lucianic twist, the speaker’s lack of bibliographical knowledge is up for laughs.

The speaker’s initial confusion about wormholes as bibliographical features opens out onto a broader misunderstanding of and pejorative attitude towards the bibliographical knowledge that the collector appears to possess. Here, the speaker puzzles over the collector’s book handling, asking him (16):

> τίνα γὰρ ἐλπίδα καὶ αὐτὸς ἔχων εἰς τὰ βιβλία καὶ ἀνατυλίτεις ἀεὶ καὶ διακολλᾶς καὶ περικόπτεις καὶ ἀλείφεις τῷ κρόκῳ καὶ τῇ κέδρῳ καὶ διφθέρας περιβάλλεις καὶ ὀμφαλοῦς ἐντίθης, ώς δή τι ἀπολαύσων αὐτῶν; [...] δυοὶ δὲ ὄντοι ἀττ’ ἀν παρά τῶν παλαιῶν τις κτήσαιτο, λέγειν τε δύνασθαι καὶ πράττειν τὰ δέοντα ζῆλῳ τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ φυγῇ τῶν χειρόνων, ὅταν μὴν ἔκεινα μὴν ταῦτα φαίνηται τις παρ’ αὐτῶν ὡφελούμενος, τί ἄλλο ἢ τοῖς μυσὶ διατριβὰς ὄνειται καὶ ταῖς τίλφαις οἰκήσεις καὶ πληγὰς ὡς ἀμελοῦσι τοῖς οἰκέταις;

337 Lambert 2020.
what expectation do you have for your books, as you are constantly unrolling them and rolling them up, and gluing them and trimming them and smearing them with saffron and cedar oil and dressing them in slip-covers and sticking a rod in them, in order to derive some benefit from them? [...] There are two things one can acquire from the ancients: the ability to speak and act as one ought to, by emulating the noblest models and shunning the worst; and when a man clearly fails to benefit from them in that way or the other, what else is he doing other than buying haunts for mice and lodgings for worms and beatings for his slaves on account of their negligence?

The speaker portrays the collector as vain and materialistic: he is occupied with the cosmetic appearance of books and oblivious to the moral benefits of the writings they contain. The speaker clearly means to associate the collector’s book handling with his cinaedic reputation, framing his book handling in terms that suggest physical, sexual gratification. The verb ἀπολαύσων harks back to the beginning of the satire, where the speaker asserts that the collector will “enjoy” the beauty of his books no more than a blind man would the beauty of his favorite young boys (τυφλὸς ἄν τις ἀπολαύσει κάλλους παιδίκων, 2). Smearing the books with saffron and cedar oil prefigures the speaker’s outing of the collector as a kinaidos who ornaments himself not only with cosmetics but also with books (23). Sticking a rod in books (ὀμφαλοὺς ἐντίθης) surely communicates sexual innuendo, but interestingly, this penetrative action suggests that the collector is not playing according to normative expectations of the kinaidos as passive partner. I think this gesture creates an opening to imagine the collector’s embodied relation to books outside of the speaker’s narrow-minded rhetoric. We might begin to rethink the collector’s book handling through Sara Ahmed’s framework of “queer use,” which draws attention to how things (like the word “queer” itself) “can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended.”

“Queer use,” Ahmed proposes (2019: 206):

can be about lingering over things, attending to their qualities. To use things properly often means to paper over them...In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), I called into

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question the fantasy of a “paperless philosophy” as part of a critique of how philosophy might be oriented toward a certain kind of body, one for whom materiality would be an unnecessary distraction, one who has time freed for contemplation by how others do the paperwork, the domestic work, care work, diversity work.

Indeed, there is a tension between attending to paper and papering over in the Lucian passage quoted above. The speaker suggests that the good reader, the “paperless” reader, does not busy himself with the stuff of books (τὰ βιβλία): he is concerned with their contents, “the ancients” (τῶν παλαιῶν). From the start to the end of this passage, the speaker causes bookish materiality to undergo a vanishing act. Yet for the queer user, as Ahmed remarks, “paper matters. Paper can also be queer; paper can be used queerly...to queer use can be to linger on the material qualities of that which you are supposed to pass over; it is to recover a potential from materials that have been left behind, all the things you can do with paper if you do not follow the instructions.”339

The lens of book history, moreover, tells us that the people in antiquity who would have been most attuned to the material possibilities and potentialities of paper are enslaved and low-status individuals. The speaker’s suggestion that a book owner should beat his slaves in response to finding them overtaken by worms indicates that enslaved workers would have been tasked with rousting the bookworms and caring for books. Oddly, though, all of the book handling that the collector himself appears to be doing earlier in the passage (the unrolling, gluing, oiling, etc.) were practices that were intended to give books routine care. They are all banausic tasks that would have been intimately familiar to enslaved and low-status book workers. Unrolling and rerolling books (ἀνατυλίττεις) would give books exercise, prevent the papyrus from going brittle, and ensure that they did not fall prey to hungry bookworms. For example, in a 3rd-century CE

papyrus fragment (*P. Ross. Georg.* 3.1), an army doctor, away from home for an extended period of time, asks his wife to shake out (ἐκτίναξον) his medical treatises from time to time, “presumably to rid them of dust and larvae.” Gluing and trimming (διακολλάς καὶ περικόπτες) was part of maintaining the roll, particularly if a section of the papyrus was damaged and needed to be replaced. We have record of an enslaved person, known as a *glutinator*, who would have been responsible for this task. Smearing the papyrus with cedar oil was a common defense against bookworms. As for throwing slipcovers around books and inserting a rod into them, we might interpret this as a rebinding of an old book. Once again, in his misreading of the collector’s book handling as “neglect,” the speaker is up for laughs.

Ironically, it is the low-status individuals–such as the collector, booksellers, etc. whom the speaker degrades who would have laughed back at the speaker’s inability (or refusal) to acknowledge the material contingencies of “the ancients” and inseparability of text and book. I suggest that Lucian means to heighten the irony of this passage that describes the collector’s handling (16) by placing it immediately after a certain anecdote about Dionysius of Syracuse. The story goes that Dionysius procured Aeschylus’ wax tablets, thinking he’d be able to write some serious tragedies. And yet, he only wrote verses “more ridiculous” (γελοιότερα, 15) than before. One of his lines in particular—“fools make sport of themselves alone”—the speaker believes could have been addressed directly to the collector. This quip cuts both ways if we read it from another epistemology of the book, one that recognizes that the collector may know

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340 Houston 2014: 184 n. 14 and 230 n. 54.
342 E.g. Horace, *Ars Poetica* 332. For papyrus that has been treated with cedar oil, see Houston 2014: 230: *MP* 3 1237 (Ibycus) and *MP* 3 1495 (Theocritus).
precisely what he is doing when he handles books, and that the very “ancients” whom the
speaker reveres for their noble examples depended quite materially on the kind of care given to
them by the collector. The speaker is made a fool by his own elite ignorance.

The speaker’s rhetoric largely aligns with Seneca and Plutarch’s prescriptive discourse on
reading: proper reading is a course in schooling the body according to hegemonic norms, and in
reinforcing dominant epistemologies. The collector, despite, or perhaps because of his failure to
conform his body to that of the proper, elite male reader, is deeply attuned to the matter, the
potential, of papyrus. In his “queer use”, the collector animates the material possibilities of the
book: he displays an embodied knowledge of why paper, or papyrus, matters. At another point in
the satire, the speaker asks the collector what he could possibly gain in paideia even if he put
books under his pillow and slept on them or glued them together and walked about dressed in
them (τί ἂν πλέον ἐκ τοῦτοῦ εἰς παιδείαν κτῆσαι, κἂν ὑποβαλόμενος αὐτὰ ἐπικαθεύδης ἢ
συγκολλήσας καὶ περιβαλόμενος περινοστῆς; 4). Johnson calls this a “strikingly ludicrous (if
hypothetical) image”343 on the part of the speaker, but to ancient readers attuned to the
materiality of texts, neither of these suggestions would necessarily have been all that bizarre. On
the suggestion that the collector sleeps with books under his pillow, an ancient scholiast has
commented: “they say that Alexander the Great slept like this upon the poems of Homer” (οὔτω
γάρ φασι τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ἑπικοιμᾶσθαι τοῖς Ὀμήρου ποιήμαιν).344 A further detail
that might prompt readers to consider the speaker’s, rather than the collector’s, lack of
knowledge about the therapeutic and haptic uses books occurs towards the end of the diatribe.
According to the speaker, pepaideumeno benefit not from the “beauty of books” (ἐκ τοῦ

343 Johnson 2010: 163.
κάλλους τῶν βιβλίων) but rather from the “language and thought of their writers” (ἐκ τῆς φωνῆς καὶ τῆς γνώμης τῶν γεγραφῶν, 28). Rather than benefitting like a pepaideumenos through the inner contents of books, the collector expects to “heal his lack of paideia” (θεραπεύσειν τὴν ἀπαιδευσίαν) through books as objects. The verb choice here, θεραπεύσειν, ironically conjures up documented uses of books as objects for therapeutic purposes. The late 3rd century CE Roman medical poet Serenus Sammonicus even advises putting “the fourth book of Homer’s Iliad under the pillow of the patient suffering from quartan fever (Maeoniae Iliados quartum suppone timenti, 907).345 Jeremiah Coogan has detailed how early Christians in North Africa would sleep with copies of the gospels in bed when sick.346

As for the collector in a papyrus-dress, the image might have resonated with people who wore amulets inscribed with Homeric verses to ward off misfortunes and heal various illnesses, as Christopher Faraone has documented. The image might also have resonated with people in antiquity who had embodied knowledge of the broader ecosystem afforded by the papyrus plant. According to Theophrastus’ Enquiry on Plants (4.8.4), we are wrong to imagine that the most well-known use of the papyrus was as a substrate for text: he writes that the papyrus is useful for many purposes, including making clothing (ἐσθητά τινα).

To some ancient readers like our collector—who understand the non-paideutic potency of books as objects precisely because they don’t follow the instructions—neither of these suggestions would necessarily have been all that bizarre. The collector, like the low-status booksellers he is associated with in the satire, is attuned to the material vitality of books as objects that were once plants, that have the potential to nourish the mind and protect the body.345

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345 The quartus liber of the Iliad matches “quartan fever,” and the doctor Machaon appears in this book as well.

346 Coogan 2018.
These various vignettes of the collector handling books, dressing up in them or sleeping on them, only strike us as ludicrous if we seek to smooth over the messy materiality of ancient book culture and fail to take into account the people who possessed intimate, expansive, and banausic knowledge of books’ material properties and care.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made “queer use” of Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum* by taking a page from the collector himself, lingering over the materiality of the *kinaidos* and drawing up close to the bibliographical materiality that the speaker tries so hard to paper over. The collector as *kinaidos* intersects with a readerly embodiment that the sources examined in this study persistently demean. One consequence of this pejorative attitude towards non-elite, non-paideutic, non-(normative)-masculine, non-masterly readerly inhabitations is that other epistemologies of the book disappear from view, an erasure that happens perhaps out of elite ignorance, perhaps out of active suppression. The *kinaidos* helps us disturb this normative picture of book culture in the imperial Roman Mediterranean. Far from being a recycled trope, the *kinaidos* is also a window onto what is particularly Lucianic about this text in the first place: at the same time as the speaker draws on the discourse of the *kinaidos* to degrade the collector as a person who supposedly uses books to conceal his deviant, inner essence, the collector as *kinaidos* pokes holes in the speaker’s reliance on a rigid, binary epistemology that elevates the inner, abstracted text over and against the materiality of the book. And, even as the speaker scorns the collector’s embodied handling of books, he betrays a prurient curiosity and desire to know what goes on with the collector and his books behind closed doors. These ironic, paradoxical maneuvers are as characteristic of the *kinaidos* as they are of Lucian: in both cases,
as the speaker remarks at the start, “things go bottoms up” (περὶ τὰ κάτω χωρεῖ, 1).\textsuperscript{347} We may thus read the \textit{Adversus Indoctum} as embodying a praxis that is fundamental to Lucian’s work, namely “the establishment of excluded, neglected, or alien perspectives.”\textsuperscript{348}

To be clear, the lenses of queer studies and book history do not enable us to recover the “ignorant book collector” as a historical, queer subject from a hostile source, nor has that been this chapter’s objective. Rather, I have sought to mobilize a hermeneutic approach that illuminates how partial and situated the speaker’s own perspective is, which equips us to read his degradation of queer, banausic, abject bodies against the grain. This twinned methodology forms an “epistemological sphere” where other relations between people and books come into view and help us tell a different story about the collector. The political upshot of my approach is that other modes of knowing, feeling, and embodiment in relation to books surface, modes that are often occluded in the study of ancient literary culture, sometimes because of the elite sources we are at the mercy of, and sometimes by virtue of our own readerly choices.

\textsuperscript{347} \textit{LSJ} E4: cf. Aelian, \textit{NA} 9.34 on a certain kind of mollusk (ναυτίλος πολύπους) who “rises to the surface by turning its shell bottoms up” (ἀναπλεῖ μὲν ὁὖν τὴν κόγχην στρέψας περὶ τὰ κάτω). On the \textit{cinacetus} and his association as a performer whose dance includes bum-wiggling, see Williams 2010: 193-4. Apparently the Greeks referred to a certain bird as \textit{kinaidion} or \textit{seisopugis} (butt-shaker).

\textsuperscript{348} Branham 1989: 90. Kate Gilhuly, for example, claims that Lucian was the first author to center the experience of the \textit{hetaira} in \textit{Dialogues of the Courtesans} 5 (Gilhuly 2007: 61).
Conclusion

This study has shown how some readers and readerly modes come to be valorized over others, and how the contested space of reading intersects with negotiations of power, embodiment, and identity. By gathering texts that stem from diverse generic and intellectual traditions, I have argued that “bad readers” are not bad in any inherent or universal sense, but rather that “bad readers” are made to serve particular literary, cultural, and ideological agendas. Seneca and Plutarch offer two perspectives on how erring from an ideal readerly mode intersects with a failure to embody the elite, masculine, philosophical subject: both mark their bad readers with the language of effeminacy, enslavement, and cultural otherness. As they construct a tight connection between masterly reading and the cultivation of masterly embodiment, they both script ideal reading as a kind of “paperless philosophy”: the ideal, reading subject may use enslaved readers, secretaries, and textual supports, but his externalization of his reading (i.e., his writing, his speech, his bodily deportment) must occlude or de-emphasize the socially inferior agents and materials adumbrated by the economy of philosophical labor.

As Plutarch’s Alexander teaches us, however, one can do other things with books besides read them like the ideal philosopher or pepaideumenos. As a book user, Alexander draws our attention to how a failure to reproduce this normative, philosophical readerly program might illuminate alternative bibliographical epistemologies; by “reading into” the book as object, we see how the book mediates intimate, social relations in addition to an author’s verbal scrim. The book’s ability to adumbrate a range of uses and users takes center stage in Martial’s Epigrams. Martial is highly anxious about negotiating the embodied aspects of reading and book use,
particularly those that threaten his status as an author of epigram books. For Martial, the book is both the enabler and destabilizer of his authorial identity: a *malignus interpres* might unravel Martial’s authorial work by writing upon his books of epigrams, thus reauthoring them as graffiti, as schooltext, as his own. While Martial ultimately reinforces an epistemic hierarchy between socially marginal and elite book users, Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum* flips the tables. The so-called “ignorant book collector” brings into view the different hermeneutic possibilities that accumulate around books as objects, possibilities that expose the situatedness of the normative, elite epistemologies of reading and the book encountered in this dissertation, possibilities that would have been legible to other book users, particularly those outside the *pepaideumenoi* elite.

One of the challenges I have faced in reading “bad readers” across Seneca, Plutarch, Martial, and Lucian is that these figures do not speak for themselves. In order to deconstruct how these literary representations and their figurative apparatuses work to negotiate aspects of power, embodiment, and identity, I have developed a methodology that blends book history with the insights of queer, feminist, and critical theory. Book history and queer studies in particular may seem an odd couple, but as the previous four chapters have shown, both critical modes are good at telling stories from traces that can be hard to read or even detect. Both modes are excellent at defamiliarizing normative assumptions about embodiment and materiality and opening up different ways of looking at objects, bodies, and their relations. Both modes (at their best) take up the project of understanding how certain subjects and epistemes become papered over or marginalized in our archives and devalued as objects of our study. I see their combination as a mode of curation, a way of caring for the representations of “bad” readerly subjects who “speak” through a hostile discourse, from the margins, through ephemeral gestures, or through their erasure.
The ultimate effect of this methodology is to center “bad readers” as a powerful site for literary analysis and for recalibrating the way we think about books and readers. First, we see that hierarchies between readerly modes—both our own and those of the objects of our study—are culturally and historically contingent. This conclusion complements recent work in disciplines beyond Classics, such as Nicholas Dames’ (2007) *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*, Leah Price’s (2012) *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, Michael Allan’s (2016) *In the shadow of world literature: sites of reading in colonial Egypt*, and Merve Emre’s (2017) *Paraliterary: the making of bad readers in postwar America*. In addition to situating “reading” within particular contexts, these studies also counter modern assumptions about the ontological status of literature and the naturalized, ideal reading subject. For example, Allan shows how a text becomes consecrated as literature not by virtue of any inherent textual qualities but rather as a result of certain reading practices: in the context of colonial concerns about the methods of Qur’anic education and “illiteracy” in the colonized population, “world literature” becomes a regime that dictates who can read and how, securing a hierarchy between free-thinking “literary readers” and hidebound “fanatic readers,” ultimately leveling differences between how texts are lived, embodied, and experienced in the world of their readers in colonial Egypt. As Classicists, we might consider how the championing of any ancient text as “literary” or “literature” may be co-extensive with our own attachment to a certain idealized “literary” reading subject, whose construction—as this study has argued—is already bound up in social hierarchies and exclusivist epistemologies.

Another insight afforded by this methodology is that our own attachments to certain ideal readerly modes impoverish our understanding of ancient reading and the book, and at worse
reproduce our elite sources’ investments in a set of power dynamics. “Bad readers” interrupt this hermeneutic feedback loop through their failure. In attending to the productive potential of failure, in straying from well-trodden hermeneutic paths and playing the “failed” reader myself, I have taken my cue from recent work on failure in queer studies.349 “Bad readers” fail, not because they don’t simply succeed, but rather because they fail to conform to, and thus problematize, hegemonic measures of success. By failing to reproduce a certain mode of reading, they also fail to reproduce the normative embodiment of the hegemonic reader, thus creating possibilities for other ways of making meaning from texts and creating community through other bibliographical literacies. One might also think of the structure of this study’s four chapters as a progressive course in the art of readerly failure (to riff on Halberstam), beginning with the directives of Seneca and Plutarch and culminating with Lucian’s “ignorant book collector,” who, in failing at every metric of the pepaideumenos, embodies both a bodily and bookish unruliness that generates a host of other ways of knowing, feeling, and being in relation to books.

“Within failure,” Muñoz writes, “we can locate a kernel of potentiality.”350 With the ink that remains, I want to consider how this study may contribute “a kernel of potentiality” to ongoing discussions about the discipline of Classics and power. If, as I have argued, staking a claim to an ideal mode of reading and ideal vision of the book negotiates and reproduces a set of culturally, historically specific power dynamics, then what kind of readerly subject and practices are reinforced through the ways that Classics as a discipline promotes certain hermeneutic modes and readerly embodiments? How does the way that we talk about reading—and more concretely, the way we develop and reproduce curricula that incentivize students to embody certain readerly


modes over others—reinforce hierarchical and exclusivist epistemes about who can handle classical texts and how? In a recent issue of TAPA, Mathura Umachandran calls our attention to the discipline’s attachment to “mastery.” She writes, “for a long time, the cohesion of the discipline has been constituted by proficiency and mastery of the ancient languages...this has come at the expense and systematic exclusion of other things we might craft as core to disciplinary knowledge.”\(^{351}\) At the graduate level, one way this “mastery” is often conditioned is through high-stakes rituals like Latin and Greek translation exams, which entail a kind of “paperless” reading, with no use of dictionaries or other such material supports. While the “mastery” of a canon of Latin and Greek authors legitimizes entry into this academic community of readers, this same construct of “mastery” has also served as a gatekeeping mechanism that not only excludes “failed” readers but also has historically served to perpetuate exclusivist and oppressive epistemes: as Umachandran writes, “the pervasive logic of white supremacy is precisely the seduction of mastery.”\(^{352}\) Emblematic of this “logic” is the racist statement of then-South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun, who in the 1830s claimed that he would recognize the humanity of African Americans if they could demonstrate mastery over ancient Greek syntax.\(^{353}\)

One of the themes of this study has been the persistence of “mastery” as a hallmark of the ideal reader, while the inferior reader is marked as servile, effeminate, and culturally other. I have claimed that we ought to understand this investment in “mastery” in the material context of literary production in imperial Rome, which depended on enslaved and low-status labor, as well as the potential of books as objects to adumbrate a capacious range of uses and users.

\(^{351}\) Umachandran 2022: 27.

\(^{352}\) Umachandran 2022: 27.

\(^{353}\) As reported by Alexander Crummell, founder of the American Negro Academy in 1897. See Gates 1987.
whom (like Lucian’s book collector) the author may never have intended. I wonder if it is a coincidence that “mastery” underpins both a core episteme of this ancient discourse and an ideology central to the discipline that studies this discourse. If this dissertation has shown anything, it is that other models of reading are possible and available, then and now. Reading—and how we talk about the ancients and ourselves as readers—is fundamentally a choice. It is a choice to continue to endorse a certain “paperless,” elitist, “masterly” mode of reading as a metric of success. If learning to read Greek and Latin means learning how to master, we need to choose other ways of learning how to read. “Bad readers” might help us make different choices: ultimately, they teach us that we do not need to choose to be “good” readers over “bad” readers, but that we do need to reckon with the power our choices have.
Bibliography


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