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MACROBIUS AND SERVIUS: VERECUNDIA AND THE GRAMMARIAN'S FUNCTION

ROBERT KASTER

I

THE *grammaticus*, Seneca says (with more than a touch of sarcasm), is the *custos Latini sermonis* (*Epist.* 95,65), "the guardian of the Latin language." At the end of antiquity, the metaphor of the *custos* reappears in the writings of St. Augustine, in a different application: the grammarian's craft as the *custodia historiae* (*De musica* 2.1,1, *P.L.* 32.1099), the grammarian as the "guardian" of the traditional culture in all the many aspects of learning covered by the word *historia*. In each case, the particular turn of phrase suggests a concern characteristic of the individual. For Seneca, the grammarian's performance as *custos Latini sermonis* means, in effect, that "he busies himself with the language and, if he wishes to wander farther afield, with 'histories,' and finally, to extend the boundaries as far as possible, with poetry" (*Epist.* 88.3). That description, with its gradation of priorities placing language foremost and poetry on the periphery, is at once good Stoic orthodoxy and unique among Latin writers:¹ it is, in fact, not so much a description of current educational practice as a prescription, seeking to limit the grammarian's sphere and thereby his antiquarian baggage, the sort of thing which shares, with tessellated baths and the habits of the gourmand, Seneca's multifaceted contempt for the impedimenta that slow one's journey to *virtus*.² Augustine's emphasis, on the other hand, falls on *historia*, the great weight of tradition. It is the binding and limiting

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¹ Cf. Gudeman in *RE* 7 (1912) s.v. Grammatik col. 1810 f; cf. also Sex. Empiricus *Adv. gramm.* 91 ff.

² See all of *Epist.* 88, especially the treatment of Didymus Chalkenteros at 88.37; also his lengthy comparison of the philosopher, the *philologus* and the *grammaticus* at 108.30 ff; or 58.1 ff, and "wasting one's time with a grammarian."

force of the past's authority that animates the grammarian's *custodia historiae*,³ and it is Augustine's understanding of the power and inclusiveness of *historia* that informs his attitude toward the inherited culture:⁴ while in the *De musica* the *custodia historiae* involves a simple matter of prosody, it is implicitly as *custodes historiae*, perpetuators of the "wretched error" of the old religion, that the *grammatici* are drawn into the initial polemics of the *De civitate Dei* (1.3).

The metaphors of the *custos Latini sermonis* and the *custos historiae* are noteworthy for four interrelated reasons. The two aspects of the *custodia* correspond, first of all, to the two halves of the grammarian's task, *recte loquendi scientia* and *poetarum enarratio*, the terms used by Quintilian⁵ and found with slight variation in the grammarians' own handbooks down to the end of antiquity. As Quintilian pointed out, both halves must be understood to cover more ground than appears at a glance, especially the second, which demands that the grammarian "straighten out standing questions, explain matters involving knowledge of the past (*historias*), and interpret the poems" (*Inst.* 1.2, 14). In turn, there was implied in the grammarian's combined functions, and the wide-ranging expectations to which he was subject, a second point concerning his *custodia*: the grammarian performed as a *custos* in another sense, occupying a cardinal position in the social and intellectual life of the empire, as he presided over the critical passage from bare literacy, gained in the *ludus litterarius*, to initiation in the literary culture and the promise of its status and perquisites.⁶ This second point

³ See H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris 1938; hereafter referred to as *Augustin*) 15.

⁴ See esp. Marrou, *Augustin*, with O. Gigon, *Die antike Kultur und das Christentum* (Gutersloh 1966), and a recent attempt to mediate between the two by F. Weissengruber, "Augustins Wertung von Grammatik und Rhetorik im Traktat Contra Cresconium," *Hermes* 105 (1977) 101-124.

⁵ *Inst.* 1.4,2 *haec . . . professio, cum brevissime in duas partis dividatur, recte loquendi scientiam et poetarum enarrationem, plus habet in recessu quam fronte promittit.*

⁶ That the passage from the first to the second level of education (even more than the passage from the school of the grammarian to that of the rhetor) was the turning point, presenting the most critical social and economic obstacles, is implied by the fact that this first transition was often part of another critical passage, from country to town: the elementary schools tended to be less confined to substantial centers of population, the grammar and rhetorical schools more confined. See H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*⁶ (Paris 1965) 427 ff (with the interesting comparison of the educational careers of Virgil and St. Augustine); also M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*² (Oxford 1957) 424 f, A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Norman, Okla. 1964) 997 f.

passes naturally to a third: the grammarian's function was too important to be left to the grammarian. One finds in the literature generally, as in Seneca and Augustine, that the grammarian tends to become a mere cipher in the attempts of others to define his role for him. There is no lack of distinct sketches which suggest what the grammarian should and should not do: although often slighted in histories of ancient education in favor of an emphasis on methods, and never treated in precise, historical terms, the variety of opinion on this heading is itself a rich area for investigation. But while the nature and significance of the grammarian's task are expressed by others in a variety of ways, the grammarian's own point of view, his own definition of his status and function, remains curiously submerged. This is the fourth point: if the grammarian is used as a cipher by other writers, it is in part the grammarian's own fault; for among the significant participants in the literary culture, the grammarian is the most reticent when it comes to staking out his own position. Apart from the observations of ex-grammarians whose circumstances had variously changed (for example, Ausonius and Augustine), there exists, on the Latin side at least, no work in which the *grammaticus* stands apart from his labors to reflect and comment on them freely and personally. We are left with the not entirely happy task of drawing what inferences we can from the abstractions of the handbooks, the particularities of the commentary, and the place of the grammarian in the social system.⁷

The present study of Macrobius' *Saturnalia* is based upon the four points sketched above, and especially the third, the tendency of our sources to see the grammarian according to their own understanding of his function, making of him what suits their special purpose. Briefly, a reading of the *Saturnalia* will be proposed which takes as its starting point the qualities of the grammarian Servius, as he is presented in the dialogue. By using the figure of the grammarian as a way of approaching a work which is itself so profoundly "grammatical" in spirit and interest, I hope not only to provide specific elaboration of the points raised above but also to make plain, with greater precision and clarity than has been done previously, the attitudes which lie behind the *Saturnalia*. By way of conclusion, I will indicate certain problems concerning the historical and social context of Macrobius' work and that of the "real" Servius,

⁷ The contribution of K. Hopkins, "Social Mobility in the Later Roman Empire: The Evidence of Ausonius," *CQ* 11 (1961) 239 ff, is particularly valuable in his last regard. It is clear that a first need for a coherent treatment of this matter is a prosopographical survey of the grammatici in the Imperial period, a work currently in progress.

questions which are raised by but go beyond the boundaries of the present discussion.

II

The *Saturnalia* has long occupied a special place in the history of letters of late antiquity. Purportedly written for the edification of Macrobius' son (1. *Praef.* 1 ff), the work draws together a distinguished collection of "nobles and other learned men" (1.1,1 *Romanae nobilitatis proceres doctique alii*) for the three-day holiday symposium. As the roll call of the "invited" suggests, the gathering captures, in microcosm, all that is excellent in both the society and the literary culture at large: the cream of the aristocracy represented by Praetextatus, Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus, the two Albini, Rufius and Caecina, together with their learned retinue — the philosopher Eustathius, the rhetor Eusebius, the grammarian Servius — and the young man Avienus; and to this nucleus there are added three uninvited guests — the cross-grained nobleman Evangelus and the two lesser figures who join the gathering in his company, the physician Dysarius and the boxer-turned-Cynic Horus.⁸ This mixture of characters produces a dialogue which, in its pursuit of the *arcana* of the ancient culture and above all in its communal study of Virgil, has exercised a peculiar fascination on modern readers. Yet, regarded as typifying an "interest in learning for its own sake . . . at a time when pedantry was unusually pervasive,"⁹ the *Saturnalia* has tended to arouse disappointment in the wake of fascination, and distaste following upon disappointment: it has been the lot of the *Saturnalia* to be described most often in terms of what it is not, as the reader stresses how far short the work falls of his own expectation and his own understanding of the proper literary or political aims of

⁸ For an appreciation of Macrobius' use and variation of the genre, see J. Flamant, "La technique du banquet dans les Saturnales de Macrobe," *REL* 46 (1968) 303 ff, and the same author's book, *Macrobe et le néo-platonisme latin à la fin du IV^e siècle. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain*, vol. 58 (Leiden 1977) 177 ff. On the principle according to which Macrobius selected his participants, see A. Cameron, "The Date and Identity of Macrobius," *JRS* 56 (1966; hereafter referred to as "Date") 33 f. On the figure of the ἀκλήτος, see J. Martin, *Symposion: Die Geschichte einer literarischen Form. Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums* 17.1-2 (Paderborn 1931) 64 ff, esp. 69 ff (on Evangelus and Horus); Evangelus, of course, is a man of substance (cf. 7.16,15, his estate at Tibur) who plainly regards himself as the social equal of the other *nobiles*: on his behavior, see further below.

⁹ R. D. Williams, "Servius, Commentator and Guide," *PVS* 6 (1966-67) 50.

exegesis.¹⁰ Less frequent, but more important, have been the attempts to read the *Saturnalia* positively, for its depiction of late antique cultural life; but here too, attention tended in the past to be directed away from the dialogue itself and toward the "circle of Symmachus" and the relations between paganism and Christianity in the last decades of the fourth century.¹¹ In a sense, the cart has often been put before the horse: attempts to discuss the *Saturnalia*'s very real significance as a document located in a specific cultural context have proceeded from certain assumptions, unexplored or only partly explored, concerning the mood and intent of the dialogue itself. The results have not always been happy, and what follows is, in part, an attempt to redress the balance. The attempt draws its primary impulse from Alan Cameron's redating of Macrobius' career to the early fifth century and the *Saturnalia* to the period around or not long after A.D. 431.¹² The effect of Cameron's adjustment has essentially been one of liberation: since it has become possible to place the *Saturnalia* beyond the religious crisis which dominated earlier approaches to the work, it has also become easier to direct our attention back to the work itself to gain a more whole and balanced view. If we have learned to see in *Saturnalia* not a literal or even first-hand account of the *saeculum Praetextati*, but a reconstruction and idealization of that age, we have also learned something about the process of cultural continuity from one era to the next.¹³ That

¹⁰ Literary: see the influential chapter of T. R. Glover, *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge 1901) 171 ff. Political: cf. F. Paschoud, *Roma Aeterna* (1967) 107, and S. Döpp, "Zur Datierung von Macrobius' 'Saturnalia'," *Hermes* 106 (1978) 619 ff, esp. 623, 625.

¹¹ Most thoroughly and sympathetically, H. Bloch, "A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West," *HTR* 38 (1945) 206 ff, 237, 240, and "The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century," in A. Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 207 ff; less subtly, E. Türk, "Les Saturnales de Macrobo: Source de Servius Danielis," *REL* 41 (1963) 327 ff, esp. 336 ff.

¹² For our Macrobius = Theodosius, PPO Ital. in 430, Cameron "Date" 25 ff; cf. N. Marinone, *I Saturnali* (Turin 1967) 14 ff. Since Cameron's discussion, the identification of Macrobius with a proconsul of Africa in 410 has been revived by Flamant (*Macrobo* . . . [above, n.8] 102 ff); his arguments are a good deal less compelling than those of Cameron, and the identification leaves more questions unanswered than Flamant seems to realize. The most recent discussion, that of S. Döpp (above, n. 10), provides a useful survey of the question, but is unfortunate in its assumptions and argument.

¹³ In this regard, the consequences of Cameron's redating have been best explored by J. Matthews, "Continuity in a Roman Family: The Rufii Festi of Volsinii," *Historia* 16 (1967) 498 ff, and *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford 1975; hereafter referred to as *Arist.*) 369 ff; see

process, carrying along much that was the same into a world that looked back from a drastically altered prospect to the *locupletior res publica* of forty years before,¹⁴ is central to the ideal which Macrobius wished to transmit. When we make our way into the dialogue, we should be prepared to see, not only in the fact but in the form and manner of the idealization, something basic to Macrobius' purpose. It is here that Servius can serve as an effective guide.

We might look first at the description of Servius' entrance: "Following after these (viz. Symmachus and Caecina Albinus), his eyes upon the ground and looking as though he were trying to hide, came Servius, who had recently established himself as a teacher among the *grammatici*, at once admirable in his learning and attractive, delightful in his modesty — *iuxta doctrina mirabilis et amabilis verecundia*" (1.2,15). Servius' extreme self-effacement, here and elsewhere in the dialogue, has often been attributed to his age: a factor, no doubt, although modern scholars, in the interest of establishing Servius' chronology, have tended to lay considerably more stress on his youth than does Macrobius.¹⁵ A more immediately apparent reason for his *verecundia* is a social one, his relation to the other members of the gathering.

First, the phrase *iuxta doctrina mirabilis et amabilis verecundia*, with its nicely turned union of *doctrina* and *mores*, is redolent of the language of *amicitia*, what Symmachus terms the *lenocinia commendationis*.¹⁶ As part of the retinue of the nobility, Servius is suitably presented as a man

also P. Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," *JTS* 19 (1968) 113 n.2, and R. A. Markus, "Paganism, Christianity and the Latin Classics in the Fourth Century," in J. W. Binns, ed., *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century* (London 1974) 1 ff (where, however, there is discernible a certain reluctance to abandon the *Saturnalia* as direct evidence for the "circle of Symmachus").

¹⁴ *CIL* VI.1783: *locupletioris adhuc reipublicae bona vel adservata vel etiam aucta* . . . ; on the significance for Macrobius of the inscription, celebrating the rehabilitation of the elder Nicomachus Flavianus in 431, see Cameron, "Date" 35 f.

¹⁵ Servius' youth is attested only by the passing allusion of the phrase *inter grammaticos doctorem recens professus* at 1.2,15, and by *adulescens*, applied to him near the end of the dialogue, at 7.11,2; contrast the case of Avienus, whose youth is constantly emphasized. It is generally agreed that Servius and Avienus are the (only) two characters too young to have participated in the dialogue at the time of its dramatic date (cf. Macrobius' defense of the anachronism at 1.1,5): on Servius' chronology, the basic discussion is that of H. Georgii, "Zur Bestimmung der Zeit des Servius," *Philol.* 71 (1912) 518 ff, with the elaborations of Cameron, "Date" 29 ff.

¹⁶ When it suits his purpose to turn the convention against itself: *Epist.* 2.38.

capable of steering a middle course between the dangers of professional life described by Symmachus (*Epist.* 1.43, recommending an *advocatus* to Ausonius):

scis nempe, in illo forensi pulvere quam rara cognatio sit facundi oris et boni pectoris, dum aut modestum ingenium verecundia contrahit aut successu eloquens inolescit.¹⁷

The terms of approbation applied to Servius in the dialogue recapitulate the qualities desired by patrons in their dependents: no doubt Macrobius, in maintaining his own network of *amicitia*, often had occasion to use comparable phrases in commendatory letters of his own, and no doubt the real Servius, in making his way in his profession, was often the subject of such praise.¹⁸ Since the aristocratic ideal of "gentleman and scholar," each quality more or less presuming the other, governed the formal and (more importantly) informal "requirements" for positions in the liberal professions,¹⁹ the language of that ideal quite naturally finds its way into the ideal world of the *Saturnalia*.

¹⁷ For other examples of the *vita et doctrina* type, see esp. *Epist.* 1.15, 1.79, 2.2, 2.16, 2.29, 2.39, 3.22, 7.58, 7.91, 9.2, 9.54.

¹⁸ It should be remembered that the little information we have from contemporary sources suggests that Servius did quite well for himself; in fact, his general prominence may be the only reason he was chosen by Macrobius as a participant, although his evident connection with the Albinii may count for something as well. So in the preface to his *De metris Horatii* he explains to the dedicatee, a certain Fortunatianus, that he turned to Horace "while enjoying my leisure in Campania" (*GL* 4.468,6: *Horatium, cum in Campania otiarer, excepi*), quite in the manner of one of his aristocratic patrons; the dedication of the *De centum metris*, addressed to "*praetextatorum decus Albine*" (*GL* 4.454,4), suggests a connection sought or, perhaps more likely, gained with that distinguished family (if the young Albinus were a *praetextatus* at the time, his age would be that of one of Servius' pupils; among the known Albinii of this general period, Caecina Decius Aginatius Albinus — PVR in 414, probably the son of the Decius Albinus and grandson of the Caecina Albinus of the *Saturnalia* — seems most likely to fit the chronological requirements: on this Albinus, see Cameron, "Date" 30, 37, and the stemma in *PLRE* I, 1138). There is also the letter of Symmachus (*Epist.* 8.60) addressed to a Servius, although it tells us very little in itself, even if it is our Servius who is named. The meaning and value of the reference to Servius as *Servius magister urbis*, found in one branch (the later) of the tradition of the ps.-Acro scholia to Horace at *Serm.* 1.9,76, are similarly uncertain.

¹⁹ See most recently the long discussion of F. S. Pedersen, "On Professional Qualifications for Public Posts in Late Antiquity," *C&M* 31 (1976) 161 ff (= *Late Roman Public Professionalism*. Odense University Classical Studies vol. 9 [Odense 1976]), and Hopkins (above, n.7). The third attribute ordinarily joined with *vita* (*mores*) and *doctrina* would be *genus*; where *genus* is lacking as positive ground for commendation, the other two naturally tend to be stressed all the more heavily.

Further, as one of the components of *honestas*²⁰ and a mark of *gravitas*,²¹ *verecundia* both guarantees one's *bonum pectus* and guides one's behavior in a way appropriate to one's social station. Servius is not, strictly speaking, overawed by the company but expresses in his own form of self-effacement the regard necessary to maintain the proper distinction between himself and the *nobiles*. There is not a little about Servius that is reminiscent of Horace's description of his relations with Maecenas;²² and it is significant that Servius is alone (apart from Macrobius)²³ in remarking on both the learning and the nobility of the gathering, and in advancing both as the cause of his reverential behavior.²⁴ As the aristocratic ideal presumes that one who is a gentleman by birth has his *nobilitas* as his passport into the world of learning, so one who is not a gentleman by birth needs his learning to enter the world of the *nobiles*. The positive aspect of this complementary relationship has been well noted by John Matthews;²⁵ but the negative aspect, the precarious position of the learned man with no claim of birth, is also discernible, in an incident which places Servius at the mercy of the man who most consistently refuses to play by the rules, whose role it is to attempt to strip away the protective fabric of the ideal: Evangelus. In the second book, it comes Servius' turn to tell a joke. Consistent with his behavior throughout, he hesitates momentarily *per verecundiam* (2.2,12); and as a result of his *verecundia*, he is subjected to the harshest of Evangelus' personal attacks:

"omnes nos" inquit Evangelus "impudentes, grammaticae, pronuntias,

²⁰ Cf. Cic. *De off.* 1.93 *sequitur ut de una reliqua parte honestatis dicendum sit, in qua verecundia et quasi quidam ornatus vitae, temperantia et modestia omnisque sedatio perturbationum animi et rerum modus cernitur*; see also esp. *De off.* 1.148 *Cynicorum vero ratio tota est eicienda: est enim inimica verecundiae, sine qua nihil rectum esse potest, nihil honestum.*

²¹ Cf. Gellius 1.24,4, on the epitaph of Pacuvius, *epigramma Pacuvii verecundissimum et purissimum dignumque eius elegantissima gravitate.*


²² Hor. *Epist.* 1.7,37 f *saepe verecundum laudasti, rexque paterque / audisti coram . . .* with *Serm.* 1.6,56 ff, on Horace's introduction.

²³ In his introduction, 1.1,1 *nobilitatis proceres doctique alii.*

²⁴ 1.4,4 (the preamble to his first entry into the dialogue) *licet . . . in hoc coetu non minus doctrina quam nobilitate reverendo magis mihi descendum sit quam docendum, famulabor tamen arbitrio iubentis (viz. Symmachi).* Cameron correctly observes ("Date" 34 n.65) that "it is natural to bracket Macrobius with Servius, but it must be remembered that Macrobius is not a mere grammaticus, but a high imperial official." The social distinction is also noted, but the social situation quite thoroughly misunderstood, by Türk (above, n.11) 334 ff.

²⁵ *Arist.* 372, observing that Macrobius' phrase (above, n.23) is meant to imply "not so much that the nobles were not necessarily learned . . . but that learned men were not necessarily aristocrats."

si tacere talia vis videri tuitione pudoris, unde neque tuum nec Dysarii aut Hori supercilium liberum erit a superbiae nota, ni Praetextatum et nos velitis imitari.”

The outburst is an extraordinary breach of etiquette, made particularly ugly by Evangelus' choice of Servius as his target, the man least likely to defend himself. With its several distortions, it is  effective piece of characterization, conveying the mean and sardonic turn of Evangelus' mind: he willfully misinterprets Servius' *verecundia* as *superbia*, gratuitously includes in his broadside the innocent Dysarius and Horus, who are simply waiting to follow Servius in the *ordo* (see further below), and demands that Servius imitate his betters, although his own consistent refusal to imitate the attitudes and behavior of the group is the most distinctive characteristic of Evangelus. But the specific point of interest here is the use of *grammaticae*, its tone controlled by the same threatening sarcasm that warps the passage as a whole: what would be a straightforward recognition of the grammarian's *splendida ars* when put in another man's mouth is twisted by Evangelus into a sneer at something he regards as a *sordida professio*.²⁶ The bare vocative, a distillation of Evangelus' contempt for Servius' profession ("schoolteacher"), becomes the taunt of a bully, an insult comparable in its force to another of Evangelus' favorite terms of abuse, *Graeculus*. It tells Servius that here at least is a man who will pay no heed to any claim of social position derived from his skill.

The real social distinctions that underlie the bullying of Evangelus must be compared with the *instinctive* nature of Servius' own behavior, for the latter is a point of fundamental importance for the full elaboration of Macrobius' ideal. The modest place occupied by Servius in the social scheme of the dialogue is not depicted as imposed from without, but is assumed spontaneously and "naturally."²⁷ The same is true, moreover, of the rest of the company, as can best be seen at two places where the proceedings shift from random conversation or the continuous exposition of an individual to a different form: 2.2,1-15, where

²⁶ For the distinction, see Donatus at Ter. *Ad.* 2.10 (3 Wess.) *fere qui in sordidis professionibus agunt, honorifice proprio nomine appellas, at [in] splendidis artibus constituti gaudent artis nomine nuncupari, ut "imperator" "orator" "philosophus."* Evangelus would regard the phrase *sordida professio* as virtually a tautology, *splendida ars* as an oxymoron: presumably he and Donatus (in whose presentation the *leno* and the *miles* are types of the *sordida professio*) would have disagreed over the proper categorization of *grammaticus*: cf. Donatus at *Ad.* 2.88 (4 Wess.), for the examples *magister*, *medicus*, *orator*, similar to the honorific *imperator*, *orator*, *philosophus* above.

²⁷ Cf. 7.11,1 of Servius: *naturali pressus ille verecundia*.

each of the company takes his turn in telling a joke handed down from antiquity, and 7.4,1 ff, where each member has the opportunity of consulting the physician Dysarius. In each place, the existence of a fixed *ordo* is noted specifically;²⁸ in each place, the gathering falls into the *ordo* spontaneously; and in each place, the *ordo* is essentially the same (with two interesting variations) and clearly hierarchical, determined by a combination of social status and the dignity of one's learning:²⁹

	2.2,1-15		7.4,1 ff
2.2,1	Praetextatus	7.4,1	Praetextatus
2.2,4	Flavianus	7.6,1	Flavianus
2.2,5	Symmachus	7.7,1	Symmachus
2.2,6	Caecina Albinus	7.8,1	Rufius Albinus
2.2,7	Rufius Albinus	7.8,7	Caecina Albinus
2.2,8	Eustathius		[- - ->Eustathius - - -]
2.2,9	Avienus		[- - - -Evangelus < - -]
2.2,10	Evangelus	7.10,1	Eusebius
2.2,11	Eusebius	7.11,1	Servius
2.2,12	Servius	7.12,1	Avienus
2.2,14	Dysarius	7.13,1	Horus
2.2,15	Horus		(Dysarius serves as <i>consultus</i>)

In the first series the *ordo* proceeds from Praetextatus through the remainder of the *nobiles* to the philosopher Eustathius; the young man Avienus and the uninvited noble Evangelus follow, succeeded by the two remaining representatives of the literary culture, the rhetor and the grammarian (Servius thus standing last among the invited guests), and finally, the two other uninvited guests, the physician and the Cynic. The second series mirrors the first, with two significant changes:³⁰ Avienus places himself farther down in the *ordo*, as the last of the invited, an act consistent with the alteration of his behavior in the

²⁸ Both times when Servius' hesitation interrupts the flow of the proceedings: 2.2,12 *inter haec cum Servius ordine se vocante per verecundiam sileret . . .*, and 7.11,1 *his dictis cum ad interrogandum ordo Servium iam vocaret . . .*; and cf. 7.9,27, n.32 below.

²⁹ Marinone (above, n. 12), 35, notes the existence of the *ordo*, taking it to be evidence of a "gerarchia" — not strictly true in itself, and certainly not the whole truth: for the criteria according to which the *ordo* is determined, we might compare Tac. *Germ.* 11, on the *auctoritas* of the German chiefs: *max rex vel princeps, prout aetas cuique, prout nobilitas, prout decus bellorum, prout facundia est, audiuntur*. If *decus doctrinae* is substituted for *decus bellorum*, the list is directly applicable to the standing of each of the members of the *ordo* here.

³⁰ Apart, that is, from the reversal of the two Albini, who in any event are treated as interchangeable, in their role as interpreters of *antiquitas*, throughout the work. Since Dysarius is the center of attention, he is not part of the *ordo* here.

dialogue, which is more "forward" in the earlier books and more docile in the later;³¹ and Evangelus characteristically and self-consciously thrusts himself ahead of the philosopher, Eustathius, to follow the other *nobiles*.³² The ability (or in Evangelus' case, inability) of each member instinctively and automatically to define and assume his proper place in the group is the essence of *verecundia*. And it is that quality, traced through its various ramifications, which dominates the dialogue.

For as a virtue, *verecundia* is not and cannot be limited to Servius. Almost immediately after Servius enters, exhibiting his own appropriate brand of *verecundia* (1.2,15), there is the example of Caecina Albinus, and his behavior on being asked by Praetextatus a question of antiquarian concern (the precise starting point of the holiday). Praetextatus anticipates and forestalls Caecina's urge to beg off *per verecundiam*;³³ and Caecina prefaces his answer with a typical scruple (1.3.1):

cum vobis . . . nihil ex omnibus quae veteribus elaborata sunt aut ignoratio neget aut oblivio subtrahat, superfluum video inter scientes nota proferre. sed ne quis me aestimet dignationem consultationis gravari, quidquid de hoc mihi tenuis memoria suggesserit, paucis revolvam.

In his modest *recusatio*, which praises the acumen of the group while dissimulating his own, Caecina speaks quite in the manner of one of the participants in a dialogue of Cicero, Crassus, perhaps, speaking in the presence of Antonius (*De or.* 1.171):

verecundius hac de re iam dudum loquor, quod adest vir in dicendo summus, quem ego unum oratorem maxime admiror . . .³⁴

In general terms, Caecina's tone is part of the gentility, the *urbanitas* often noted as an element in the dialogue.³⁵ But more precisely, in

³¹ On Avienus' place in the work, see pp. 243 ff.

³² For the self-conscious element, cf. 7.9,27, the conclusion of Evangelus' interruption: *sed Eustathio iam cedo, cui praeripui consulendi locum* (Eustathius, having regained his place, yields to Eusebius, for reasons which become apparent later on; see pp. 240 ff); Evangelus had previously attempted to disrupt the proceedings entirely at 7.5,1, after Praetextatus' initial question, but was deflected.

³³ 1.2,20 *quia te quidquid in libris latet investigare notius est quam ut per verecundiam negare possis* . . .

³⁴ Note, however, that the clause which follows (*sed tamen idem hoc semper ius civile contempsit*), with its passing hit at Antonius, is notably alien to the tone of the *Saturnalia*; see further p. 238 f.

³⁵ See, for example, the remarks of F. Klingner, "Vom Geistesleben im Rom des ausgehenden Altertums" in *Römische Geisteswelt*⁴ (Munich 1961) 528, and H. Bloch in Momigliano (above, n.11) 208, both comparing the tone of Cicero's dialogues.

terms of the *communal* effort of the symposium, the hesitancy of self-assertion derives from a modest selflessness, which is inspired in turn by one's confidence in the group as a whole. Like *verecundia* and the *ordo* which it shapes, this chain of responses is a natural growth, free from ulterior motives or pressures. There is implicit throughout the dialogue a distinction comparable to the one which Ammianus Marcellinus draws between *adulatio* and *verecundia* in his mordant description of Petronius Probus (30.5.4 *non ut prosapiae suae claritudo monebat, plus adulationi quam verecundiae dedit*)³⁶: the distinction between a servility that is artificial and hypocritical, because self-interested and ostentatious, and a self-restraint that is unpretentious and unselfish. Each of the participants claims that he does not need to instruct the gathering, being merely *doctus inter doctos*, while each proceeds nonetheless with his instruction, with an assurance derived from his own sense of place within the *ordo* and within his own area of expertise.³⁷ This modest but ultimately secure selflessness of the guests, quite as much as the concern with Virgil, is the unifying element of the dialogue. This unity is obviously facilitated, although not made inevitable, by the choice of the dialogue form; and the self-consciousness with which Macrobius insists upon his choice of form suggests that more is at stake than a gesture of homage to heroes of the past generation or the creation of a mnemonic device.³⁸ As we shall see in greater detail, the values and behavior elaborated in the dialogue become the well-spring of the dialogue's substance. Macrobius chose to make a virtue out of a fact of life: the fragmentation of knowledge, the *atomisme psychologique* described by H.-I. Marrou as endemic to the world of late antiquity³⁹ is redeemed here, not because knowledge is coordinated and redirected toward some new synthesis, but because it is endowed with the unity of the social order. The behavior of the participants goes beyond the polished good manners of *urbanitas*, to become inseparable from, and as important as, the information conveyed.

³⁶ Cf. the caution of Symmachus, *Epist.* 9.88,1 *olim te mihi fecit optabilem cultu fama litterarum tuarum, sed diu officium scribendi per verecundiam distuli, ne in aula positum viderer ambire; cuius morbi ita crebra est adfectatio, ut diligentis existimationis viri pro alienis vitiis erubescant.*

³⁷ For the apportionment of the discussion of Virgil (*velut ex symbola*) among the participants, according to their individual expertise, see 1.24,14–20.

³⁸ Homage: see esp. 1.1,4; dialogue form as an aid to memory: 1 *Praef.* 3.

³⁹ The burden of the first section of *Augustin*, 1–157; see also the remarks of J. Vogt, *Der Niedergang Roms: Metamorphose der Antiken Kultur* (Zürich 1965) 403 f.

To begin to appreciate this last point, we must look for a moment beyond the behavior of the guests and their attitudes toward each other. The purely social side of *verecundia* is somewhat static and two-dimensional; but an added dimension of depth is gained, and the intellectual aspect of *verecundia* begins to become more evident, when Macrobius projects the values and restraints of his ideal social order further into the past, using those elements as a means to understand the workings of *historia*, the cultural tradition. Thus, it is significant that we find almost precisely the same terms as those applied to Servius at his entrance (*iuxta doctrina mirabilis et amabilis verecundia*) used to describe Virgil early on in the dialogue, even before his poetry has been made the central subject of the occasion (1.16,44, Eustathius' addition to Praetextatus' discourse on the calendar):

item poeta *doctrina ac verecundia nobilis*, sciens Romanos veteres ad lunae cursum et sequentes ad solis anni tempora digessisse, *utriusque saeculi opinioni reverentiam servans*, "vos quoque" inquit (G.1.6 f) "labentem caelo qui ducitis annum / Liber et alma Ceres," tam lunam quam solem duces anni hac invocatione designans.

The *verecundia* here attributed to Virgil clearly consists of the willingness to preserve his past, and bring it with his present, expressing due *reverentia* for *both*. That both past and present are involved should be emphasized especially: the feelings of *verecundia*, when turned to history, are not presented as demanding servile prostration before the past to the exclusion of the present, just as the same feelings, in the area of the social order, are distinct from the servile behavior of *adulatio*. Virgil's role in the process of cultural continuity corresponds to the role of the individual guest in the process of the symposium: the place of the individual should not be underestimated in either case, whether that place is viewed in historical terms (relative to past *saecula*) or in social terms (relative to the hierarchical *ordo*). The behavior of Virgil, as one both *verecundus* and *doctus*, is paradigmatic and embodies a constant concern of the dialogue. Consider, for example, the single most frequently cited sentence of the work: *vetustas quidem nobis semper, si sapiamus, adoranda est*. That opinion of Rufius Albinus (3.14,2) is usually quoted as a simple distillation of the work as a whole. But in its context it is only the first half of a single thought, a necessary expression of good will before the *equally necessary* criticism which follows: the thought is completed in the assertion that the present age has rid itself of some of the moral flaws (a catalogue follows) which accompanied the

“abundance of virtues” of the old.⁴⁰ “Respect,” in other words, includes self-respect, and *verecundia* does not exclude self-confidence — *provided* (the crucial point) one has precisely and knowledgeably defined one’s relationship to the whole, either one’s own relationship to the social order, or the collective relationship of one’s times to history: it is not coincidental that the criticism of *vetustas* in Book 3 is produced by the Albini, the experts in *antiquitates*. The fine line between *reverentia* and *adulatio* consists of the quiet knowledge of one’s virtues and limitations and the lack of self-interest that derives from a satisfaction with both. Criticism can be offered, where warranted, but as a simple matter of fact, not as a cause for self-aggrandizement (cf. Caecina Albinus at 3.13,16). Competition becomes inappropriate, in fact pointless: the dominant attitude of the work in this regard might be expressed in the words of Horace, his correction of the would-be social climber, *nil mi officit, inquam, / ditior hic aut est quia doctior: est locus uni / cuique suus* (*Serm.* 1.9,50 ff). Thus, in introducing the topic of Virgil’s literary borrowings, Rufius Albinus adduces the anecdote of Afranius (6.1,4):

Afranius enim togatarum scriptor in ea togata quae “Compitalia” inscribitur *non invereconde respondens* arguentibus quod plura sumpsisset a Menandro, “fateor” inquit

sumpsi non ab illo modo
sed ut quisque habuit conveniret quod mihi,
quod me non posse melius facere credidi,
etiam a Latino.

quod si haec *societas et rerum communio* poetis scriptoribusque omnibus inter se exercenda concessa est, quis fraudi Vergilio vertat, si ad excolendum se quaedam ab antiquioribus mutuatus sit?

This defense of “borrowing” evidently looks as much to Macrobius’ own time — and beyond literature, to the context of the *Saturnalia* — as it does to Virgil’s literary practice: it is noteworthy that in the entire treatment of literary imitation not only is the competitive element entirely absent, the *ἀγων* emphasized by both ancient and modern readers,⁴¹ but the *verecundia* of Afranius is set at the head of Rufius’

⁴⁰ The section on the correction of *vitia* follows from a section of Book 3 now lost (between 3.12 and 3.13), in which the Cynic Horus had delivered an *obiurgatio* on the vices of the present age (cf. 3.13,16); the exposition of the Albini is a defense against that attack, cf. n.64 below.

⁴¹ See M. Wigodsky, *Vergil and Early Latin Poetry*, Hermes Einzelschriften 24 (Wiesbaden 1972) 2 and n.3 with p. 7 f. (although in the latter place *Sat.* 6.1,6 is included, incorrectly, to illustrate the idea of *certatio*; on that passage, where something rather different is involved, see p. 250 with n.93).

discussion, as one example to typify the whole.⁴² A sense of literary imitation as a form of cultural piety is by no means unique to Macrobius and has not gone unremarked in modern treatments of the subject; but there is more which deserves notice. It has been observed, for example, that the awareness of imitation as a form of “structural” or “thematic” allusion is virtually absent from ancient discussions of Virgil’s borrowings (in Macrobius and elsewhere),⁴³ an absence due, at least in part, to the concentration of education and criticism on verbal effects. This is quite true. But one might also suggest that if the idea of such imitation were explained to Macrobius, he would not have been much impressed. The modern interest in “theme” and “structure” is essentially an interest in the idiosyncratic workings of the particular poet’s mind, while Macrobius’ interest in imitation is broader and less personal: literary borrowing conceived of as the preservation of and expression of respect for the *societas et rerum communio*, the “unified community” of the shared culture extending into the past, just as the intellectual “borrowing” among the participants in the symposium is a means of recognizing and affirming the order, the “unified community,” of the present. Although based on rhetoric, the idea of literary imitation found in the *Saturnalia* goes beyond rhetoric to become a moral imperative, and so forms one of the links between the dialogue’s substance and its form: the harmony and continuity that result when a Virgil or an Afranius turns his *verecundia* to the past mirror the harmonious workings of the symposium. “Thus in every aspect of life,” says the philosopher Eustathius (7.1,13), “and especially in the happy surroundings of a gathering such as this, all that seems discordant must — provided decency is preserved — be reduced to a single harmony.” The metaphor of harmony proceeds from the metaphor which opens Book 7 (the whole is borrowed from Plutarch): Symmachus, responding to the suggestion of Praetextatus that the group consider philosophical questions, doubts that the *verecundia* of philosophy could tolerate the possible dissonance (*strepitus*) of such a discussion (7.1,2):

verumne ita sentis, Vetti, ut philosophia conviviis intersit et non tamquam censoria quaedam et plus nimio reverenda materfamilias penetralibus suis contineatur, nec misceat se Libero, cui etiam tumultus familiares sunt, cum ipsa huius sit *verecundiae* ut *strepitum non modo verborum sed ne cogitationum quidem in sacrarium suae quietis admittat?*

⁴² 6.1,3, introducing the anecdote: *unum nunc exemplum proferam, quod ad probanda quae adsero paene sufficet.*

⁴³ See Wigodsky (above, n.41) 8, with Additional Note A, p. 140 f.

He is assured by Eustathius that, like the *societas* of a chorus, the *societas* of their group will provide the harmony demanded by philosophy's *verecundia*, so long as the *periti* outnumber the *imperiti*.⁴⁴ The metaphor of the chorus, with the key and melody set by the whole (which either drowns out the discordant voices or influences them for the better) and with individuals now and again picking up the solo that responds to the harmony of the whole, is evidently suited not only to the gathering but to the relationship between past and present.⁴⁵ The *societas* of the symposium enjoys a reciprocal relationship with *verecundia*, on the one hand encouraging and rewarding it, on the other governed and preserved by it. Just so, the *societas et rerum communio* of the past culture, against which the poet, for example, defines himself, both sets limits which are freely acknowledged and finds preservation in his work. Both the *societas* and the individual are well served.⁴⁶

It is, however, not completely accurate to say that the *una concordia* of the present order, and the relationship of past to present, is preserved by *verecundia*. *Verecundia* is the impulse, *doctrina* (or *prudencia*, *scientia*, *peritia*) the result: what mediates between the two, and so between the past and present, is *diligentia*, the care and maintenance required for keeping in touch with one's culture. The relationship among these qualities is triangular: proceeding from one's sense of *verecundia*, the quality of *diligentia*, when applied, produces *doctrina*, which in turn is properly channeled by *verecundia*, to avoid the unrestrained arrogance of learning.

Diligentia involves a willingness to extend oneself, to behave with energetic scrupulousness in performing one's duty. So, for example, confidence in Virgil's *diligentia* stands behind the judgment which finds him *doctrina ac verecundia nobilis* (1.16,44): the poet's *verecundia* inspires feelings of *reverentia*, but those feelings would be still-born if the poet did not exert himself to translate "respect" into "learning."

⁴⁴ 7.1,9 *primum hoc eam scio servaturam, ut secum aestimet praesentium ingenia convivarum, et si plures peritos vel saltem amatores sui in convivii societate reppererit, sermonem de se patietur agitari, quia velut paucae litterae mutae dispersae inter multas vocales in societatem vocis facile mansuescunt, ita rariores imperiti gaudentes consortio peritorum aut consonant signa possunt, aut rerum talium capiuntur auditu.* The metaphor of the chorus is a commonplace: see esp. Aelius Aristides in *Romam* 29 (the Roman state as chorus, the emperor its leader), cf. 31,32,87.

⁴⁵ With the qualification, *salva innocentia* ("provided that decency is preserved"), cf. the assertion of moral improvement at 3.14,2 noted above.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tacitus on *Agricola* (*Agr.* 8.3) *ita virtute in obsequendo, verecundia in praedicando extra invidiam nec extra gloriam erat.*

It is precisely this same confidence in Virgil's monumental exertions that stands behind the initial defense of the poet against the sneers of Evangelus, the point of departure for the main theme of the dialogue (1.24,1 ff). Implicitly and explicitly, the company is called upon throughout "to marvel at the deeply hidden workings of the poet's *diligentia*," through which bits of the past are preserved in his work.⁴⁷ But the *diligentia* of the poet is not sufficient by itself. It must strike a responsive chord in the reader: as the poet "reveals his own *diligentia*" in his work, so the reader is called upon to be *diligens* in his turn⁴⁸ — in essence, to prove himself worthy of the poet. This is the relationship to the text that underlay the *enarratio* of the grammarians in their schools, the method that produced a habit of mind, an attention to detail, which calls forth metaphors of the jeweler's loup or the art historian's magnifying glass in modern descriptions;⁴⁹ and it is a technique responsible in part for the fragmentation of knowledge referred to earlier. But it should be evident that *diligentia*, in the context of the *Saturnalia*, can not simply, or even primarily, be an intellectual quality: like its inspiration, *verecundia*, it is a moral quality, part of one's duty to the culture. That duty is particularly of the sort felt to exist among *friends*: it is recapitulated in the area of late antique social relations, where *diligentia* serves as the adhesive of *amicitia*. The *diligens* poet stands in relation to the past, and the *diligens* reader stands in relation to the text, much as one *amicus* stands in relation to another, bound by obligations which are met through *diligentia*, or the related quality of "reverent scruple," *religio*.⁵⁰ But the moral aspect of *diligentia* is made apparent negatively as well, in the language of coercion that accompanies the criticism of its absence. When, for example, Eustathius (5.21,1 ff) comes to treat the various names for cups used by Virgil, he notes that some are familiar enough, but (5.21,2)

⁴⁷ 5.18, 15 *in qua quidem re mirari est poetae huius occultissimam diligentiam*, cf. 5.18, 18 *animadvertitis diligentissime verba Euripidis a Marone servata*.

⁴⁸ Cf., framing one section of Praetextatus' discourse: the poet *diligentiam suam pandit* (3.5,1), and the *diligens lector* must do his share (3.5,10).

⁴⁹ Text as a string of pearls, studied one by one: Marrou *Augustin* 25; text as canvas studied under the glass: P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London 1967) 36. Compare the sarcasm of Seneca, *Epist.* 58.5 *non id ago nunc hac diligentia ut ostendam quantum tempus apud grammaticum perdiderim . . .*

⁵⁰ Cf. Symmachus, *Epist.* 9.15,2 *tandem igitur partes religionis exequere, ut exemplo diligentiae tuae in officiorum vicissitudinem provocemur*. On *religio* in the letters of Symmachus, see esp. E. Wistrand, "Textkritisches und Interpretatorisches zu Symmachus" in *Symbolae Philologicae Gotoburgenses*, Acta Universitatis Gotoburgensis 56 nr. 3 (1950) 87 ff. Cf. also n.61 below.

de carchesiis cymbiisque, quae apud Latinos haud scio an umquam reperias, apud Graecos autem sunt rarissima, *non video cur non cogantur inquirere* quid sibi nova et peregrina nomina velint.

"I do not see why they are not *compelled* to inquire," *compelled* to do their duty: "they" are the *grammatici*, who come in for particular criticism for their failure of *diligentia*.⁵¹

As a moral quality conducive to harmony and order, *diligentia* can and in fact must be distinguished from *ingenium*, the idiosyncratic "genius," with its rough edges. So, for example, one finds the negative criticism of Virgil at 5.17. There Eustathius marks off as defective certain sections of the *Aeneid* which Virgil, barred by his subject matter from following Homer, fashioned out of his own imagination; he observes; *maluisssem Maronem et in hac parte apud auctorem suum (viz. Homerum) vel apud quemlibet Graecorum alium quod sequeretur habuisse*. This remark is capable of being misunderstood, if read out of context. It is not a straightforward and objective criticism of Virgil's *ingenium*,⁵² but is conditioned by the predispositions of the dialogue: based on the distinction between *fama* (= *historia*) and *facta* drawn, for example, by Horace,⁵³ and involving a profound preference for the former, the criticism follows, in the context of the dialogue, from the a priori judgment that any exercise of *ingenium* is bound to be viewed as less successful and rewarding than an application of *diligentia* which finds a way of translating the past, in the form of *auctoritas*, into the present. The moral bias that accompanies the critical bias is plain in a related passage, another attack on the *grammatici* (5.22, 11 ff):

in tertio libro cursim legitur, neque unde translatum sit quaeritur (A.3.251 f), "quae Phoebus pater omnipotens, mihi Phoebus Apollo / praedixit," et cetera. *in talibus locis grammatici excusantes imperitiam suam inventiones has ingenio magis quam doctrinae Maronis adsignant, nec dicunt eum ab aliis mutuatum, ne nominare cogantur auctores*.

The attribution to *ingenium* rather than *doctrina* (Eustathius goes on to claim Aeschylus as the source) is presented as a way for the grammarian to shirk his own responsibility: note again the language of coercion, in *cogantur*. In the terms of the dialogue, such a recourse to *ingenium* is simply a shoddy schoolteacher's trick. It is the equivalent of aspersing

⁵¹ See all of 5.18–22, and below on 5.22, 12.

⁵² As it is taken to be by Wigodsky (above, n.41) 6, who remarks that the criticism appears to be "uncharacteristic . . . of ancient ways of thought."

⁵³ *A.P.* 119 ff, with Brink's comments, esp. p. 196 (on Horace's own preferences) and p. 197 (on the relation between Horace's opposition of *fama* and "fiction" and the usual, tripartite division, *historia* / *verisimile* / *fictum*).

the poet's *verecundia*, of asserting that he has failed to perform the duty owed to the *societas et rerum communio*, in order that the grammarians' own lack of *diligentia* — and so their *imperitia* — may be concealed.

The exercise and celebration of *diligentia* extends over all the areas covered in the guests' treatment of Virgil. Fragmentary and unhistorical (by our lights), the form of exegesis found here is common enough, and its effect is certainly evident. The text readily becomes a pool of Narcissus: in admiring the poet's *occultissima diligentia* one is admiring one's own.⁵⁴ But it should be pointed out that, however common the basic method may be, seldom if ever in antiquity is the dissimulated arrogance of this form of interpretation so clearly and self-consciously integrated in a social and ethical scheme. With proper *verecundia*, one can hardly believe that the poet would be ignorant of what one knows oneself,⁵⁵ and so one gladly submits to the poet's awesome knowledge and skill, and cooperates in making plain his virtues; and with the awareness of one's own virtues that is also part of *verecundia*, the implicit self-assurance, derived from one's sense of place, that allows one to instruct the learned, one shapes the poet's meaning according to one's own particular *diligentia* and *doctrina*. There is in this approach to the text something reminiscent of Gibbon's description of the governmental practices of Augustus and his lieutenants, who "humbly professed themselves the accountable ministers of the senate, whose supreme decrees they dictated and obeyed";⁵⁶ although the duplicity that animated Gibbon's irony is not in the least apparent in the *Saturnalia*, the resemblance is probably not fortuitous. For what is interesting is not that Virgil is assumed to possess exquisitely comprehensive knowledge and extraordinary skill: although not infrequently treated as peculiar to late antiquity, this assumption — the foundation of the method of *ζήτημα* (*quaestio*) and *λύσις* (*solutio*) and of the encyclopedic function of the text in the grammarian's school — was an interpretive principle already ancient by the fourth and fifth centuries, and its application to Virgil in an extreme form is traceable to within a generation or two of his death.⁵⁷ Nor is it the case that Virgil, or *vetustas* in general, can do no

⁵⁴ With 5.18,15 (quoted above, n.47) cf. 3.10,1 *hic cum omnes concordii testimonio doctrinam et poetae et enarrantis* (sc. *Praetextati*) *aequant* . . .

⁵⁵ Cf. 5.18,21 . . . *nam ut haec ignoraverit vir tam anxie doctus minime crediderim*.

⁵⁶ E. Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (London 1909) ch. 3, p. 75.

⁵⁷ A case in point is the scholium of Servius, ultimately derived from Julius Hyginus, on the phrase *velati lino* at *A.* 12.120: Hyginus contended that Virgil did not write (i.e., could not have written) *lino*, which (i.e., because it) would have involved an error in ritual practice, but wrote *velati limo* instead. On the

wrong: they both certainly can, and each has its own defects and limitations. The point is rather that Virgil — like the participant in the symposium — is a part of *ordo*, a *societas* that can do no wrong: the perfection lies in the whole, and in the cooperation and coordination of its parts, whatever the limitations of any one part may be. The obligations and goals of the individual — of Virgil as of the guest — are the same in each case: the resonance of past and present achieved by Virgil when he is at his best in the concerted application of *verecundia*, *diligentia*, and *doctrina* cannot help echoing, in the historical dimension, the harmony produced when those same virtues are at work in the ideal society of the dialogue. The historical process, represented by the cultural continuity realized in Virgil's poetry, is at one with the social process represented in the symposium. The values of the one are precisely the values of the other; and it is assumed that Virgil, quite as much as a member of the symposium's *ordo*, would appreciate the hierarchical and noncompetitive nature of those values. So in his relation to Homer, the area in which he most clearly does "do wrong" (5.13 ff), the gathering is assured that Virgil could, with undamaged *verecundia*, admit his inferiority to his *auctor*.⁵⁸

Woven together from the commonplace and the tralatitious, the dialogue is the product of the same values as those it conveys: it is a study in convention profoundly appreciated and made internal. The indivisibility of social, moral, and intellectual qualities that make the *Saturnalia* a kind of cultural *de officiis* of late antiquity offers an ideal that is far from despicable in its unity and coherence. It is this vision that inspires a recurring motif in the behavior of the group: the gracious confidence of the smile that turns away distressing controversy.⁵⁹ That smile is a small detail, barely more than a reflex where it appears;

practice of Hyginus, with its strong suggestion of attempted textual tampering based on a piece of *recherché* knowledge attributed to Vergil, see most recently J. E. G. Zetzel, "Emendavi ad Tironem: Some Notes on Scholarship in the Second Century A.D.," *HSCP* 77 (1973) 237 f. For a variation on this approach, again involving Hyginus, cf. Gellius 10.16.

⁵⁸ Equally significant is the fact that a *synkrisis* of Homer and Virgil, whose relative positions of overall superiority and inferiority are fixed, can be undertaken without qualms and without the suggestion of competition, while the invitation to Eusebius (5.1.3 ff) to perform a *synkrisis* of Cicero and Virgil, who are essentially equals, is refused as unsuitable.

⁵⁹ For a participant responding to an ignorant objection or criticism with a smile (*renidens*), see 1.4.4 (Caecina to Avienus), 1.11.2 (Praetextatus to Evangelus), 3.10.5 (Praetextatus to Evangelus), 7.7,8 (Symmachus to Horus), 7.9,10 (Dysarius to Evangelus), 7.14.5 (Eustathius to Dysarius).


but perhaps precisely because it is a reflex, it provides, in its nature and object, one of the more direct clues to Macrobius' imagination. It is, for example, quite unlike the smiles found in the dialogues of Cicero. While men beam urbanely from those pages too, they do so in a context of give-and-take, where the smile is an instrument of amused debate and rejoinder⁶⁰ or accompanies ironic banter.⁶¹ The smile of Macrobius' characters, however, is a signal that debate is being shut off and is the opposite of bantering: it is Olympian, the smile of a Jupiter speaking from a position of certain knowledge to calm the unwarranted fears and complaints of a Venus (*A.1.254 f.*).⁶² The only man who beams in the *Saturnalia* is the expert; and not just the expert, a type whose smile recurs elsewhere in the literature of the period,⁶³ but the expert *who has been challenged* precisely in his area of expertise. A smile invariably follows some lapse in *verecundia* — some ignorant criticism or other faux pas — and invariably precedes a pronouncement which admits no contradiction. Moreover, apart from the smile *adulescens* Avienus, the only figures who receive the smile are the three uninvited guests: by implication, these are the only figures who are subject to such lapses and who therefore need the smile to remind them where they stand. There is something chill in these gestures of magnificent condescension, which simultaneously put the offending party in his place and affirm the status of the speaker. The smiles are not easy and open, like those in Cicero, but are part of the massive effort of (self-)control that is another side of Macrobius' ideal: beneath their serenity and graciousness, the smiles, like the ideal, are a bit brittle. They conceal an inflexibility comparable to that found in the criticism of Virgil's *ingenium*. When the men of the dialogue see in Virgil a man "so anxiously learned" (5.18,21 *tam anxie doctus*), they necessarily see much of themselves: for if the *Saturnalia* offers a vision of an ideal unity, it is a vision which exacts, as the price of that unity, an anxious defensiveness which underlies, and ultimately belies, the self-confident surface. An attack upon one part is an attack

⁶⁰ Cf. *De or.* 1.74, 1.134, *n.d.* 3.1, *De fin.* 1.26; see also Tac. *Dial.* 11, *remissus et subridens*, of Maternus in his reply to Aper.

⁶¹ Cf. esp. *Brutus* 42: an amused Atticus allows Cicero some leeway in a matter of historical detail, a point of "scruple" (*religio*, cf. *Brutus* 44); see also *De or.* 1.265, *Acad.* 2.63, 2.148, *De fin.* 2.119, 5.86.

⁶² Note that the lone passage in Cicero's dialogues which approximates to the tone of Macrobius occurs in *De rep.* 6.12, the serene smile of Scipio, calming the distress felt by his companions at the presage of his death.

⁶³ For the smile of the wise man, resolving an apparent discrepancy and revealing the truth, see for example the philosopher Eustathius in Eunap. *Vit. soph.* 466 (= p. 27,19 ff Giangrande).

on the whole and on the underlying social fabric. A vulnerability of this kind is virtually admitted at the outset, when the morose comments of an outsider (Evangelus) are in effect ed to govern the rest of the proceedings, as the “invited” close ranks around Virgil. But Evangelus, who exults in his status as an “outlaw,” is treated thereafter simply as an irritant; he never seriously disturbs the surface calm of the gathering. More revealing is an incident which occurs at the end of the (extant) dialogue, involving another of the guests who, although not originally among the invited, has nonetheless functioned throughout as one of the group, the physician Dysarius.⁶⁴

Dysarius has been entertaining questions from the group when the philosopher Eustathius, who had postponed his turn,⁶⁵ begins by taking issue with an explanation just given by Dysarius (7.13,21): *ne decipias, quaeso, credulum qui se quaestionemque suam commisit fidei tuae*. The point is that the doctor, in laying down an opinion on a matter of “physics” (*physica ratio*), had flown in the face of *verecundia*: he had overstepped the boundaries of his expertise, made an error, and so violated the trust of his position. Eustathius sets the matter straight and, to drive his point home, draws Dysarius even farther out of his depth by asking why images appear larger when reflected in water than they are in actuality (7.14): when Dysarius produces the opinion of Epicurus in response, Eustathius counters with a smile (*renidens*) and a correction (7.14,5 ff). Eustathius clearly is wearing the white hat in this encounter: his refutation of Dysarius is presented as carrying such conviction that for the first and only time in the dialogue even Evangelus is moved to join the rest in admiration.⁶⁶ But Dysarius is otherwise moved. He first responds, with some ill-temper, that philosophy (that is, Eustathius) has often been lured by applause into fields alien to its expertise and so fallen into error, and then goes on to mention an error of Plato to illustrate his point (7.15,1 *ut Plato vester dum nec anatomica quae medicinae propria est abstinere, risum de se posteris tradidit*, concluding 7.15,13 *vides satius fuisse philosophorum omnium principi alienis abstinere quam minus nota proferre*). *Plato vester*, meaning “the Plato of

⁶⁴ As in the matter of the smile, dissent on fundamental issues is expressed only by Avienus and the three uninvited guests: Evangelus, obviously; Dysarius, in the incident about to be considered; and the Cynic Horus, who scolded the gathering on the licence of the age, thus eliciting the rebuttal of the Albinus (see above n.40; and cf. n.20, for the opposition of the *Cynicorum ratio* to *verecundia* at *de off.* 1.148).

⁶⁵ Cf. above n.32.

⁶⁶ 7.15,1 *his dictis favor ab omnibus exortus est admirantibus dictorum soliditatem, adeo ut attestari vel ipsum Evangelum non pigeret*.

you philosophers,” gives the game away and betrays Dysarius’ basic misunderstanding of the situation:⁶⁷ believing the areas of knowledge to be separate but equal, and open to mutual criticism (a belief encouraged by the claim of each participant to be merely *doctus inter doctos*, and allowed to serve as the reality so long as it is innocuous), he is unaware that philosophy, as “parent” of medicine, can criticize it, although the option of criticism is not open to medicine. Eustathius, naturally, is appalled, equally by the attack on philosophy and by the ignorant singularity of Dysarius’ opinion, flying as it does in the face of the consensus of humankind (7.15,14):

ad haec Eustathius paulo commotior “non minus te” inquit “Dysari, philosophis quam medicis inserebam, *sed modo videris mihi rem consensu generis humani decantatam et creditam oblivioni dare, philosophiam artem esse artium et disciplinam disciplinarum: et nunc in ipsam invehitur parricidali ausu medicina . . .*”

The language, obviously, is very strong, and continues in that vein, with medicine termed the *physicae partis extrema faex* (7.15,15). Eustathius, after denouncing medicine for its empiricism and defending the *Platonica maiestas*, concludes (7.15,24): *cum igitur et ratio corporeae fabricae et testium nobilis auctoritas adstipuletur Platoni, nonne quisquis contra sentit insanit?*

The lines in the incident are drawn unambiguously: the defense is produced, and Dysarius’ criticism is turned back, in tones of brute certainty wholly foreign to the episode in Plutarch on which Macrobius relied.⁶⁸ No rebuttal is made, or can be made, to Eustathius’ reproof.

⁶⁷ Expressions similar to *Plato vester* found elsewhere either indicate the native language of the speaker (e.g., in *Cicerone vestro*, spoken by the Greek Eusebius at 5.1,4) or express a kind of cultural alienation (so Evangelus speaks of Virgil as *hic vester* at 3.11,3): in the mouth of the Greek Dysarius *Plato vester* approaches the second meaning. The person who raises the objection against Plato in the passage of Plutarch on which Macrobius drew (*Quaest. conviv.* 698A ff) is also a physician, Nicias; but the form which Dysarius’ words take, a slap at philosophers as a group, is *purely* Macrobius’ own.

⁶⁸ The initial denunciation of Dysarius by Eustathius (7.15,14–17) has no parallel in Plutarch and must be counted a free invention by Macrobius; with Eustathius’ forceful and unequivocal conclusion (7.15,24), contrast the much gentler and more flexible conclusion in Plutarch (*Quaest. conviv.* 700B), where the criticism of Plato is deprecated, but — or rather, *because* — the matter is treated as *an open question*, incapable of certain solution: *εικότα γὰρ μακρῶ ταῦτα μᾶλλον ἐκείνων τὸ δ’ ἀληθές ἴσως ἀληπτον ἐν γε τούτοις, καὶ οὐκ ἔδει πρὸς φιλόσοφον δόξῃ τε καὶ δυνάμει πρῶτον οὕτως ἀπαυθαδίασασθαι περὶ πράγματος ἀδήλου καὶ τοσαύτην ἀντιλογία ἐχόντος.*

When immediately thereafter Evangelus tries to bring the discussion down to the absurd by asking "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" (7.16,1), the earnest answer which his question receives from Dysarius only serves to emphasize the rapidity with which the surface calm is restored, the controversy put away as though it never happened; and when Evangelus, true to his disruptive tendencies and sensing an opportunity to continue the quarrel, maliciously asks Eustathius to comment on Dysarius' reply,⁶⁹ Eustathius simply praises Dysarius' answer as brilliantly and truly spoken and adds some detail. It is in the midst of the appendix that the text breaks off.

The manner in which Dysarius is put in his place is the most brutal example in the dialogue of its hierarchical values and their connection with the maintenance of the *societas*, the *una concordia*, the reinforcing harmonies of past and present. The alternative to *verecundia*, and the consequences of an outright refusal to define oneself in terms of the *ordo* of society and history, is made plain: it is a charge of madness.

It would no doubt be incorrect to take *insanit* absolutely literally; but there is no mistaking its force, or the harsh contours of the situation in which it is set. In the metaphor of the chorus,⁷⁰ Dysarius' is the dissonant voice that is drowned out. As such, his experience may usefully be compared with a similar confrontation which occurs at the start of the symposium and which leads us back to where we began, with the grammarian Servius.

The central figure in the incident is the *adulescens* Avienus, the one participant whose character undergoes a development in the course of the dialogue. The change, and its motivations, are both distinct and important. Were Macrobius given to allegory, Avienus would be designated "Youth guided in the Ways of Maturity"; for his youthfulness serves a purpose in the dialogue beyond that of mitigating any anachronism caused by his inclusion.⁷¹ Avienus is a young man on the threshold of culture: he has already read his Virgil (the minimum expected of an *adulescens*, achieved while still a *puer* in the grammarian's school and forming the basis of the questions put to Servius at 6.7,1 ff)

⁶⁹ 7.16,19 *his dictis Evangelus Eustathium intuens, "si rationi dictae adsentiris" ait "annuas oportet: aut si est quod moveat, proferre non pigeat, quia vis vestri sermonis obtinuit ne invita aure vos audiam."*

⁷⁰ Cf. 7.1,9 and p. 233 f above.

⁷¹ On the anachronism, cf. Cameron "Date" 29 f; for his identification with the fabulist and friend of Macrobius, Avianus, see Cameron's arguments, "Macrobius, Avienus, and Avianus," *CQ* 17 (1967) 386 ff (with the small adjustment offered by C. E. Murgia, "Avienus's Supposed Iambic Version of Livy," *CSCA* 3 [1970] 186).

but is imagined as still pondering the course of proper rhetorical training (5.1,2). Although he is really a decent sort, endowed with *verecundia* and so essentially knowing his place and his limits,⁷² he nonetheless demonstrates a certain youthful exuberance in the earlier books, interrupting the conversations or, with excessive enthusiasm, equating Praetextatus with Socrates.⁷³ Yet this exuberance melts away — or, perhaps, is more properly channeled — in the later books, where, with perfect docility, he successively places himself at the feet of the rhetor Eusebius (5.1,2 ff), Servius (6.7,1 ff), the philosopher Eustathius (7.2,1 ff) and the physician Dysarius (7.12,1 ff).⁷⁴ In the last instance his eagerness to learn is made the subject of an apology, as he puts to Dysarius as many separate questions (fourteen) as all of the seven preceding guests combined.⁷⁵ In this exercise of *verecundia* and *diligentia* his submission to the values of the gathering is complete. The change in his behavior is epitomized in his adoption of a new and lower place in the *ordo*; ⁷⁶ and the last words we hear him speak in the work are the simple and affecting, *quia ignoro scire cupio* (7.12,28).

Avienus is molded in the course of the dialogue: the transformation he undergoes is especially significant, for if recent arguments concerning his identity are correct, Avienus may be taken to symbolize an actual, living link between the age of Praetextatus and Macrobius' own.⁷⁷ To refer once more to the metaphor of the chorus, Avienus represents one of the *imperiti* who is influenced for the better by the harmony of the whole. His *imperitia* is a function of his youth and will not, his behavior implies, remain long, unlike that of Evangelus, whose ignorance has

⁷² See 1.7,17, where he refers Horus, who has asked him a question on a point of ritual, to Praetextatus, with the remark that "although all of these men are equally potent in learning (*pari doctrina polleant*)" (note his use of the third person plural, by implication excluding himself), Praetextatus can serve Horus best; and 1.24,20, where he avoids arrogating to himself a particular expertise in their discussion of Virgil, and reminds the company to include Servius in the division of labor.

⁷³ See 1.6,3 (*tum Avienus — ut ei interpellandi mos erat . . .*) and 2.3,14 ff, where he interrupts Symmachus and is told by Horus to wait until Symmachus has finished; and 2.1,2 ff, for the comparison of Praetextatus with Socrates, which is deprecated by the older man.

⁷⁴ Note the comment of Eustathius at 7.3,23: *mi Aviene, instituenda est enim adulescentia tua, quae ita docilis est ut discenda praecipiat . . .*

⁷⁵ Cf. 7.12,22 *mi molestus tibi sum, Dysari, patere plus nimio ex discendi cupidine garrientem, et dicas quaeso cur . . .*, and the self-effacement with which he begins his questions, 7.12,1 *quia me ordo . . . ad similitudinem consultationis adplicat . . .*

⁷⁶ See above, p. 228.

⁷⁷ See above, n.71, and below, p. 260.

become inveterate and warped him entirely; and both Avienus' age and his ignorance are at issue in the noteworthy episode which first introduces Avienus to the reader, and first brings Servius to speak. At 1.4,1, the conclusion of Caecina Albinus' discourse on the actual starting point of the Saturnalia, Avienus is discovered whispering to Rufius Albinus. Prompted to speak, Avienus expresses puzzlement at certain expressions used by Caecina:

moveor quidem auctoritate Caecinae, nec ignoro errorem in tantam non cadere doctrinam; aures tamen meas ista verborum novitas perculit . . .

The actual usages involved are *noctu futura* for *nocta futura*, *die crastini* for *die crastino*, and *Saturnaliorum* for *Saturnalium*. With fine politeness, in other words, couching his thought in euphemism (*novitas*) and in expressions of regard for the older man's *auctoritas* and *doctrina*, Avienus asks why Caecina has committed two solecisms and a barbarism.⁷⁸ Caecina replies with a smile and silence (1.4,4 *cum Caecina renidens taceret*), and Servius is asked by Symmachus to provide the required defense: after remarking on the nobility and the learning of the gathering, he replies that Caecina's expressions involved not *novitas* but *vetustas*. With an obliqueness corresponding to Avienus' politeness, Servius thus informs the young man that the fault was not Caecina's but his own: in effect, Avienus' own ignorance has led him to mistake the ancient and respectable for the untoward and flawed.⁷⁹ Servius goes on to give a detailed account of all these expressions, with Symmachus and Praetextatus adding a few observations at the end as tokens of their own expertise (1.4,5-27). Avienus immediately responds (1.5,1 ff) with a blast at Servius worthy of Evangelus, denouncing the foolishness of speaking a bygone language (note that at the outset Macrobius specifies, *Avienus aspiciens Servium*, lest it be thought that the subsequent comments, quite rough by the standards of the dialogue, are directed at the last speaker, Praetextatus). The remarks are drawn largely from Gellius (1.10) and are worth quoting in their entirety (in the following I have not indicated Macrobius' minor alterations of his source; in the two major deviations or expansions, Macrobius' words are

⁷⁸ The solecisms would be the phrases *die crastini* and *noctu futura* and the barbarism the form *Saturnaliorum*, according to the traditional distinction between a fault in the juncture of words and a fault in an individual word, respectively; cf. Avienus at 1.4,3.

⁷⁹ With Servius at 1.4,4, *insinuabo primum de Saturnalibus, post de ceteris, unde sit sic eloquendi non novitas sed vetustas*, cf. the words of Caecina at 6.4,1, on *verba quae nobis nova videri facit incuria vetustatis*; and see further below, pp. 248 ff and n.94.

set on the right-hand side of the page, Gellius' on the left)⁸⁰ (1.5, 1-3):

"Curius" inquit "et Fabricius et Coruncanus antiquissimi viri, vel etiam his antiquiores Horatii illi trigemini plane et dilucide cum suis fabulati sunt: neque Auruncorum aut Sicanorum aut Pelasgorum, qui primi coluisse in Italia dicuntur, sed aetatis suae verbis loquebantur: tu autem proinde quasi cum matre Evandri nunc loquare,

sermone abhinc multis annis iam desito uteris, quod scire atque intellegere neminem vis, quae dicas. nonne, homo inepte, ut quod vis abunde consequaris, taces?

vis nobis verba multis iam saeculis oblitterata revocare, ad quorum congeriem praestantes quoque viros, quorum memoriam continuus legendi usus instruit, incitasti.

sed antiquitatem vobis placere iactatis quod honesta et sobria et modesta sit: vivamus ergo moribus praeteritis, praesentibus verbis loquamur. ego enim id quod a C. Caesare, excellentis ingenii ac prudentiae viro, in primo Analogiae libro scriptum est habeo semper in memoria atque pectore, ut 'tamquam scopulum sic fugiam infrequens atque insolens verbum.'

mille denique verborum talium est quae cum in ore priscae auctoritatis crebro fuerint, exauctorata tamen a sequenti aetate repudiataque sunt. horum copiam proferre nunc possem, ni tempus noctis iam propinquantis necessariae discessionis nos admoneret."

Avienus' final words (the addition of Macrobius) provide the point of departure for the reproof delivered by Praetextatus.⁸¹ The protocol involved is significant: whereas Caecina first replied to Avienus with his silent smile, the details of the defense being left to the grammarian (with the token embellishments of Symmachus and Praetextatus), this

⁸⁰ One minor change by Macrobius is worth noting: where Gellius writes (1.10,3) *antiquitatem tibi placere ais*, Macrobius has *antiquitatem vobis placere iactatis*, making the verb stronger and ruder.

⁸¹ 1.5,4 "*bona verba quaeso*," *Praetextatus morali ut adsolet gravitate subiecit*, "*nec insolenter parentis artium antiquitatis reverentiam verberemus, cuius amorem tu quoque dum dissimulas magis prodis. cum enim dicis, 'mille verborum est,' quid aliud sermo tuus nisi ipsam redolet vetustatem?*" In Praetextatus' last sentence there is hidden a return charge of solecism: since Avienus plainly did not intend to follow *vetustas* in saying *mille verborum est*, he used the abnormal construction without being *sciens*, without *peritia* — the decisive factor in such matters (cf. Pompeius *GL* 5.292,13 ff); Praetextatus' correction is expressed with a politeness suitable to his general theme, that one can not help but be imbued with antiquity, and is the equivalent of saying, "Of course you realize . . ." when one really means, "Obviously you don't realize . . ."

second defense, explicitly raising a fundamental issue, the relationship between modernity and antiquity, is not entrusted to Servius (although he has been the object of attack) but calls forth the most revered member of the group. Moreover, Praetextatus' own position in the *ordo* (in effect, that of *rexque paterque*) is consonant with the metaphors through which he expresses his reproach: again weaving his own words with those of Gellius, Macrobius causes Praetextatus to begin with a warning against cultural matricide (*nec insolenter parentis artium antiquitatis reverentiam verberemus*) and to conclude by urging against cultural parricide,⁸² placing his own words at beginning and end, with the substance of his statement, a chapter (substantially rearranged) of Gellius, set in between (1.5,5-9 ~ Gell. 1.16). The intended effect is one of *gravitas* (1.5,4 *Praetextatus morali ut adsolet gravitate subiecit . . .*), paternal and hence different from the more emotional and unrestrained tone of Eustathius' reproof of Dysarius: but in both instances the metaphors chosen run in the same direction and reveal the same turn of mind that is involved.⁸³ A failure of *verecundia* stands behind the behavior of both Dysarius and Avienus, each of whose reach is found to exceed his grasp of his social, intellectual, and historical position: as the doctor failed in his responsibility by venturing beyond his area of expertise and then responded to correction with a misconceived and ill-tempered assault on the hierarchical position of philosophy relative to medicine, so Avienus went beyond the limits established by his age and *imperitia*, first venturing to correct (albeit politely) his elder and better, Caecina, then responding to correction with a rude assault on the relationship (also hierarchical) of antiquity and modernity.

This first appearance of Avienus can be viewed as the bench mark against which his measure is to be taken in the rest of the dialogue. Presenting the unformed and, at first, self-assertive young man as the spokesman for contemporary usage was both an obvious and a useful thing for Macrobius to do; and Macrobius consciously exploited the potential of the situation in his adaptation of Gellius. Whereas Gellius' chapter purports to be a rebuke aimed by the sophist Favorinus at the affectations of an *adulescens casce nimis et prisce loquens* (1.10 *praef.*), Macrobius has turned the situation around. The pupil here rebukes the teacher: it is precisely Servius' expertise and professional (that is,

⁸² 1.5,10 *tamquam sexagenarios maiores de ponte deicias?* (incorporating the proverb).

⁸³ With the metaphors of parricide, and antiquity as the *parens artium*, at 1.5,4 and 1.5,10, cf. Eustathius at 7.15,14, on philosophy as the *ars artium* and the *parricidalis ausus* of Dysarius.

didactic) function that are attacked in the first passage in which Macrobius deviates from his source. "You have goaded even (these) men of great stature, whose storehouse of memory [*memoria*, here virtually = *doctrina*] has been built by constant reading, to heap up" words which have been "rubbed out" and "cashiered" and "spurned" by the advance of time. According to Avienus' charge, the grammarian is a purveyor of the obsolete, an opponent of a commonsense distinction between current language, *praesentia verba*, and old-fashioned (that is, gentlemanly and sober and moderate) behavior.

The discontinuity between language and *mores* urged by Avienus obviously cannot be tolerated in a setting whose system of values so consistently blurs the distinction between social behavior and broader cultural attitudes. The point that should be emphasized, however, is that Avienus' fault lies not so much in his regard for the modern as in his one-sided regard, which would exclude the past; conversely, what Praetextatus urges is not a simple clinging to the archaic, but the coexistence of past and present, with the limits of the latter's freedom determined by a proper respect for the former. The importance of this linguistic controversy, the coda to the dialogue's beginning, for Macrobius' ideal of cultural continuity and social harmony should not be underestimated. One point especially should be stressed. Although the defense of archaic usage attains in Macrobius a pitch of moral fervor rarely, if ever, matched by, say, Gellius, there does not exist the complementary judgment that the language has somehow been corrupted and become impure: nowhere in Macrobius is there the suggestion found so often in Gellius that what is "commonly used" or "nowadays used" (*vulgo dicitur, modo dicitur*) represents a debasement of the language, an ignorant deviation from the more refined standard of the past. In language as in *mores* (cf. 3.14,2), a sense of decline is entirely absent, nor should such a judgment even be anticipated, for two related reasons. First, an approach such as that found in Gellius would be inconsistent with the noncompetitive ethic that dominates the dialogue. The perception of decline, especially in linguistic matters, is often a thinly veiled form of contentiousness, a question of "us" (the few) against "them" (the many). Charges of debasement and deviation usually function quite explicitly as manoeuvres in a contest for prestige: thus the claim of a Gellius, that a given debased usage is characteristic of the "run of the mill" (*vulgus*), is invariably complemented by the claim that Gellius himself knows the more ancient, hence pure and superior, usage. Such explicit attempts to assume a place among an elite have little in common with the dominant tone of the dialogue: as we shall see

presently, when the participants in the dialogue most clearly deprecate contemporary practices and attitudes, they do so without drawing a distinction between themselves and some generalized *vulgus*. Second, a judgment of decline would represent a violation, as serious in its own way as that of Avienus, of that aspect of *verecundia* which demands a commitment to the present. The values implicit in the confrontation begun by Avienus find their clearest expression in the praise of Virgil's *verecundia* at 1.16,44, his *reverentia* for both his past and present and his careful blending of the two; and it is precisely those values which Avienus comes fully to share in the course of the dialogue. Yet, while Avienus grows, the opinions which he first represents do not simply go away. Rather, the ideas associated with the immature Avienus at the dialogue's beginning recur later on and are generalized, to stand as typical of the age.

In the course of explaining one of Caecina's expressions (*noctu futura*), Servius has occasion to appeal to the *auctoritas* of Ennius (1.4,17): *Ennius enim — nisi cui videtur inter nostrae aetatis politiores munditias respuendus — “noctu concubia” dixit . . .* In the immediate context of the dialogue, Servius' oblique and parenthetical defense of Ennius must be understood to be directed at the recipient of his teaching, Avienus;⁸⁴ the defense thus anticipates the rude rejection (cf. *respuendus*) placed in Avienus' mouth on the following page. It has been observed, moreover, that Servius' remark is the first of a series of references to the diminished status of the older Republican authors.⁸⁵ Yet the treatment of these passages has tended to direct attention away from their role in context to a debate over their utility as clues to Macrobius' sources: does the contempt registered in these passages suggest the use of sources traceable to the first century, when disdain for the older poets ran high?⁸⁶ Or are these passages authentic witnesses to the tastes of Macrobius' own time, whatever the provenance of his

⁸⁴ Note the parallel constructions in the two sentences which open 1.4,17 *verba quae Avieno nostro nova visa sunt . . .*, and: *nisi cui videtur inter nostrae aetatis politiores munditias respuendus*; in this connection it might be noted that Servius is capable of a kind of modest irony in the performance of his duty: at 1.4,8 just preceding, he remarks that he will proceed with his explanation of *Saturnaliorum*: *quatenus alienum non est committi grammaticum cum sua analogia*.

⁸⁵ See esp. Rufius Albinus at 6.1,5, on the older poets *quos, sicut praesens sensus ostendit, non solum neglectui verum etiam risui habere iam coepimus*, and at 6.3,9.

⁸⁶ G. Regel, *De Vergilio poetarum imitatore testimonia* (diss., Göttingen 1907) 36; E. Norden, *Ennius und Vergilus: Kriegsbilder aus Roms grosser Zeit* (Leipzig 1915) 4.

sources?⁸⁷ This debate has tended to misplace the emphasis found in the passages. The expressions of contempt and the assertions of an increased refinement can clearly be shown to reflect the tastes of the late fourth and fifth centuries; but equally clearly, these passages do not serve as just another document of the age,⁸⁸ noteworthy and unexpected in so staunch a "friend of the past" as Macrobius.⁸⁹ The sentiments are introduced so that their force might be mitigated and their consequences regretted.

Those twin effects are very plainly the intent of Servius' remarks to Avienus at the outset of the dialogue (1.4,17); and the intent remains when the attitudes first associated with "callow youth" are extended in the dialogue to include the attitudes of the age as a whole. In the preamble to his discussion of *versus* and *loci* adopted by Virgil from the older poets (6.1-3), Rufius Albinus has occasion to remark (6.1,5):

[Vergilio] etiam gratia hoc nomine habenda est quod non nulla ab illis in opus suum, quod aeterno mansurum est, transferendo fecit ne omnino memoria veterum deleteretur, quos sicut praesens sensus ostendit, non solum neglectui verum etiam risui habere iam coepimus.

"As current taste indicates, we have begun not only to neglect but even to mock" the older poets. The remarks immediately follow the anecdote of Afranius and his sense of *verecundia* before the *societas et rerum communio*;⁹⁰ and it is at once apparent that these words (whether read in their immediate context, or with reference to Praetextatus' reproof of Avienus, or with an ear to the values of the dialogue as a whole) are not simply descriptive, much less complacent. Rufius speaks not of the literal and limited "we" of this gathering, but of the universal "we" of this age, who submit to the dictates of modernity, the "current taste" (*praesens sensus*). There was an opportunity here to project the regrettable tendencies onto a straw man, the *vulgus*, and thus to exculpate the members of the symposium. The opportunity was not taken. The first person plural is inclusive and acquires, in its inclusiveness, a penitential

⁸⁷ H. D. Jocelyn, "Ancient Scholarship and Virgil's Use of Republican Latin Poetry. I," *CQ* 14 (1964) 283 f, with Wigodsky (above, n.41) 7 n.24.

⁸⁸ For the lack of distinction, see esp. Wigodsky (above, n.41) 6 f, where the remarks of Rufius at 6.1,5 (above, n.85) are quoted, as simply "another witness" to the late antique bias.

⁸⁹ Cf. Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte röm. Lit.* (Munich 1920) IV.2, p. 312 n.11, with Rufius at 6.1,5 quoted once again and the remark: "Im Munde des Freundes der Vergangenheit ist die Bemerkung doppelt bemerkenswert."

⁹⁰ See above, p. 232.

edge. The behavior of *nos* is contrasted with that of Virgil, whose virtue in giving a place to the older poets in his work is consonant with the *verecundia* of Afranius and with the behavior attributed to Virgil throughout: the attitude described by Rufius is at once acknowledged as a thing shared with his contemporaries, and deprecated. This nuance, and the thought behind it, becomes dominant in the similar remarks with which Rufius closes his exposition (6.3,9):⁹¹

nemo ex hoc viles putet veteres poetas, quod versus eorum scabri nobis videntur. ille enim stilus Enniani saeculi auribus solus placebat, et diu laboravit aetas secuta ut magis huic molliori filo adquiesceretur.

Rufius' warning is put in the form of two pairs of distinctions: the distinction, first, between the quality of the poetry and the status of the poet; and the distinction between the aesthetic standards of a given era and the historical process that bridges the gap between different eras. The warning contained in the passage is at one with the moral aspect of cultural duty that informs the work: it is a warning against the complacency inspired by a sense of progress, the arrogance of the modern untempered by feelings of humility before the dignity of personal achievement (*nemo . . . viles putet veteres poetas*) and the labor of generations (*diu laboravit aetas secuta*). Underlying the warning is the conviction that the supremacy of aesthetic preference, of taste and appearance (*sensus, videntur*),⁹² with its connotations of the subjective, the arbitrary and the idiosyncratic, fuels the kind of behavior opposed to social and intellectual *verecundia*: self-assertion rather than selflessness, competition rather than cooperation, ambitious scorn rather than confident contentment with one's own place, superficial criticism rather than diligent inquiry and service. It is not that aesthetic preference has no room to operate (judgments will be made willy-nilly).⁹³ Rather,

⁹¹ Note that in the case of Rufius' exposition (6.1–3), as in Praetextatus' rebuke of Avienus (1.5,4–10), the borrowed substance — here, the compilation of *versus* and *loci* — is framed by moralizing passages typical of Macrobius: there is no reason to think that Rufius' opening and closing remarks are any less the invention of Macrobius than were those of Praetextatus.

⁹² Cf. Eustathius' denunciation of the empiricism of medicine at 7.15,15, with p. 241 above.

⁹³ So Macrobius (in the person of Rufius), comparing the results of Virgil's imitation with the poetry of the older authors, 6.1,6: *denique et iudicio transferendi et modo imitandi consecutus est ut, quod apud illum legerimus alienum, aut illius esse malimus aut melius hic quam ubi natum est sonare miremur*; although the improvement is noted, there is not the least suggestion of a "competition"; cf. n.41 above.

aesthetic preference, when allowed to dominate, demands too high a price: it subordinates the overall unity of the culture and its history to mere impressions that are transient by nature and fragmenting in their effect. The awareness of the cost is expressed in the often-quoted words of Servius (6.9,9, responding to a question put by Avienus): "Because our age has fallen away from Ennius and the whole store of ancient authors, *we are ignorant* of many things which would be clear if we were used to reading the ancients."⁹⁴

There is nothing in the judgments on the older poets that is extraordinary or inconsistent with Macrobius' service as "friend of the past." Rather, there is something askew in the perception of Macrobius' friendship extending solely to what is past. It would be more accurate, because more inclusive, to call him the "friend of unity and continuity," or even (by the lights of his own literary culture) the "friend of history." As we have seen above,⁹⁵ Macrobius' vision and concern, expressed in the metaphors provided by the literary culture, include both past and present; and if his emphasis falls so heavily on the past, that emphasis may be in part intended to redress a perceived imbalance.⁹⁶ Macrobius' bias is profoundly conservative but not reactionary. His intention is not to negate the present and its (precariously maintained) culture through a blind embrace of the past (a negation which would itself involve a loss of *verecundia*), but to demonstrate how men of the present might fulfil their moral duty by making room for, cooperating with, and, when proper, deferring to the past, as the right-thinking men of the symposium cooperate with and defer to each other. It was both the historical and the social process that interested Macrobius as much as the substance or the product; and it was the single-minded emphasis on the product, with little regard for both the persistence and fragility of the process, that Macrobius found disturbing in his age (it is a minor irony that Macrobius' work has so often suffered from a similar critical bias). As is evident from Avienus' outburst, such an emphasis was perceived as having the effect of throwing up barriers between the past and present, and of thus threatening the continuity of *historia*, as surely as the process of the symposium imagined by Macrobius would

⁹⁴ 6.9,9 *quia saeculum nostrum ab Ennio et omni bibliotheca vetere descivit, multa ignoramus, quae non laterent si veterum lectio nobis esset familiaris*; with the *incuria veteris lectionis* diagnosed by Servius at 6.9,9 (*bene . . . haec tibi quaestio nata est ex incuria veteris lectionis*) compare Caecina at 6.4,1, on *verba quae nobis nova videri facit incuria vetustatis*, and see n.79, on the terms of Servius' correction of Avienus.

⁹⁵ See above, pp. 231 ff.

⁹⁶ See the conclusion, pp. 256 ff.

be threatened if the actual social barriers between the aristocracy and the other participants were observed. It was Macrobius' chosen fiction that in Roma Aeterna both temporal and social distinctions, while quite real, did not need to be made explicit and ought not be regarded as barriers: out of the combined modesty, confidence, and contentment of *verecundia* individuals would *naturally* maintain the proper perspective and position of trust in both spheres.⁹⁷

The fiction created by Macrobius suggests not so much a "culture running hard to stand still," but a culture which chooses not to outrun its past; the difference is significant. It is possible to judge the attempt futile *post eventum*, and to see in the fiction a desire to escape into a "mirage of permanence";⁹⁸ but one suspects that such judgments come a bit too easily with the remove of fifteen hundred years. There is, moreover, one area in the dialogue where Macrobius' ideal unquestionably comes into contact with contemporary reality: the dangerous divorce between language and culture that underlies the outburst of Avienus, his correction by the firm and paternal Praetextatus, and the approach to the older poets in the passages just considered. This divorce results from modernity's arrogance of exclusion and its concern only with the surface; and Macrobius was certain of where the blame lay for the separation of language from its broader cultural base. The fault was that of the educational system and, more exactly and explicitly in the terms of the dialogue, of the first stage in liberal studies, the school of the grammarian. It is precisely the sort of disjunction elsewhere condemned by Macrobius that animates the most extended criticism of the *grammatici*, set in the mouth of Symmachus, just at the moment when the company, goaded by Evangelus, choose Virgil as the object of their communal effort. After citing Virgil's letter to Augustus as documentary evidence of the *studia potiora* which the poet felt compelled to impart to his work (1.24, 11), Symmachus goes on (1.24, 12–13):

nec his Vergilii verbis copia rerum dissonat, quam plerique omnes litteratores pedibus inlotis praetereunt tamquam nihil ultra verborum explanationem liceat nosse grammatico. ita sibi belli isti homines certos scientiae fines et velut quaedam pomeria et effata posuerunt, ultra quae si quis egredi audeat, introspexisse in aedem deae a qua mares absterrentur existimandus sit. sed nos, quos crassa Minerva dedecet, non patiamur abstrusa esse adyta sacri poematis, sed arcanorum sensuum investigato aditu doctorum cultu celebranda praebeamus reclusa penetralia.

⁹⁷ For the crack in the fiction's facade, when perspective is lost and trust violated, cf. above on Eustathius and Dysarius, pp. 240 ff, and below, p. 262.

⁹⁸ "Mirage of permanence": so Markus (above, n.13) 11, writing under the influence of (and somewhat misapplying) Brown's metaphorical description of the *Saturnalia* ([above, n.49] 301).

This passage on the *grammatici* (= *litteratores*) carries the sting of any of Seneca's snipings, if for precisely opposite reasons. The orientation and activity of "those fine fellows" is expressed in terms of their fixing boundaries which isolate them on the periphery (*certos scientiae fines et velut quaedam pomeria et effata posuerunt*, which, when blended with the metaphor of the *aedes deae*, produces the image of the grammarians' standing on the outside looking, or rather, refusing to look in). The grammarians' treatment of the text as though it were a shrine is presented as a means of self-protection: behind the impulse to "enshrinement" lies the grammarians' awareness of their own inadequacy. The grammarians are morally and, as a result, intellectually deficient. To apply the values of the dialogue, they lack *diligentia*: they have "unwashed feet."⁹⁹ This dallying on the margins of language and the refusal to go to the core of the *copiā rerum*, the "history" in the broadest cultural sense, makes the grammarians' teaching insufficiently nourishing for the young entrusted to them and (an equally important point, given Macrobius' moralizing emphasis) makes their own behavior an unsuitable example. The grammarians described by Macrobius have violated the trust placed in them as mediators standing at the critical point in the cultural process.¹⁰⁰ They have established the boundaries, the "enshrinement" of the text is their own, created as an excuse for not approaching its substance. Two very important points are involved here. First, the metaphor of the text as "shrine" (of the Bona Dea!), complete with *pomeria*, *adyta* and *penetralia*, the metaphor often plucked from its context to exemplify the worshipful attitude of Macrobius,¹⁰¹ is developed as part of the caustic comment on the *grammatici*, to describe *their* approach to the text and is thus used to describe precisely the way in which the text should *not* be treated: it is the purpose of the company

⁹⁹ Cf. Gellius 1.9,8, where the proverb is used to stigmatize the arrogance of those who "nowadays" (the contrast is with the *familia* of Pythagoras) seek to study philosophy without the necessary preparation: *nunc autem . . . isti, qui repente pedibus inlotis ad philosophos devertunt, non est hoc satis, quod sunt omnino ἀθεώρητοι, ἔμμοσοι, ἀγεωμέτρητοι, sed legem etiam dant, qua philosophari discant*; and cf. 17.5,14, concerning a misconceived criticism of Cicero, where *inlotis, quod aiunt, pedibus* indicates the proverbial flavor of the phrase. With the lack of *diligentia* attributed to the grammarians here, cf. the other attacks on the grammarians, for the same reasons, noted above, p. 235 f.

¹⁰⁰ See above, p. 220 f.

¹⁰¹ E.g., Klingner (above, n.35) 529, quoting only the second part of Symmachus' statement (*sed nos . . . non patiamur . . .*), and observing, inconsequently: "Man sieht, es handelt sich um eine Art Mysterium: die Auslegekunst wird, wie damals oft die Wissenschaften überhaupt, 'Mystagogie' . . ., Führung der Seele zu einer heiligen verborgenen Schau." Cf. Döpp (above, n.10) 632.

to lay bare the “shrine” and “*de-mystify*” the text.¹⁰² For (and this is the second point) the grammarians’ violation of their trust consists in the construction of barriers, unnecessarily and self-servingly. The poet’s achievement may indeed be a *sacrum poema*; but if so, it is *sacrum* in exactly the same way as the culture of the distant past, which the poet incorporated in his work, and the society of the present, whose values the poet is presumed to have shared. The “sacred” is available directly and naturally through the exercise of the appropriate, simple virtues: it does not need to be, and ought not be made mysterious and absurdly remote, endowed with an artificial awesomeness which makes it inaccessible. As such, the grammarians’ violation of their trust is similar to, yet different from, that of the physician Dysarius in Book 7: whereas the latter *stepped beyond* his area of expertise (with the consequences noted above), the *grammatici* willfully *stop short* of what their position demands of them. This is Macrobius’ perception of a literary education posing a threat to the literary culture it was meant to serve. This understanding of a threat from within, so to speak, does not appear on the surface as the controlling idea of the work, rather the opposite: Macrobius is concerned to have the bold face of unity dominate. But it provides an important motif in its appearances in the dialogue and may, in fact, be understood to have contributed significantly to the inspiration of the work as a whole.¹⁰³ It certainly inspired the idealized portrait of Servius, who is explicitly excepted from the *plebeia grammaticorum cohors* (Symmachus’ phrase at 1.24,8), to stand as the type of “good” grammarian. To use the metaphors of the grammarian’s function with which we began this study: Macrobius insists that the combined service as both *custos sermonis* and *custos historiae* is not only desirable but absolutely necessary. The functions cannot be divided without damage to both. Hence Servius, in the latter guise (at 6.9,9), is made to remark on the growth of ignorance resulting from the neglect of antiquity; and as *custos sermonis*, the conservator of the language and agent of its continuity, he instructs Avienus in the antiquity of the language (1.4,5–25) in order that (as Avienus’ contempt impels Praetextatus to point out) the present might extend itself to maintain living contact with the past. Servius’ performance in the two roles is conducted with impeccable harmony and virtue: *iuxta doctrina mirabilis et amabilis verecundia*.

¹⁰² For the idea of “mystery” specifically raised and dismissed, cf. Praetextatus to Evangelus at 1.7,5 ff. In the irony directed against the grammarians from which the metaphor proceeds — as in all of his response to Evangelus in 1.24 — Symmachus’ tone is coolly superior, not prostrate.

¹⁰³ See below, 258 ff.

III

Such, at least, was Macrobius' fiction. When one reads the commentary of Servius after turning from the *Saturnalia*, two related facts come to be appreciated in quick succession: first, the degree to which Macrobius' portrait of Servius is in fact an idealization bearing little relation to the real Servius; second, that Macrobius' criticism of the education provided in the grammarian's school is scarcely the tendentious exaggeration of a sentimentalist.¹⁰⁴ It has long been recognized that the details of what Servius is made to say in the dialogue bear no direct relation to — and in some cases plainly contradict — what he says in the commentary;¹⁰⁵ and it is generally agreed that Macrobius did not use Servius as a source but probably had recourse to the variorum commentary of Donatus.¹⁰⁶ Given the traditional freedom of the dialogue form exploited by Macrobius to attribute to other participants attitudes and opinions they are unlikely — or are known not — to have shared, it is not surprising that Servius is accorded the same treatment.¹⁰⁷ But the differences between the ideal and the actual go far beyond differences in detail. Not only did Macrobius not use Servius as a source, but there is really very little in Servius that Macrobius would have found especially useful. Indeed, in describing the barriers created between language and culture by the grammarians, and the disproportionate attention given the former at the expense of the latter, Macrobius could easily have been writing with Servius' commentary in

¹⁰⁴ If Servius' birth is placed somewhere between A.D. 365 and 370, his professional career can be conjectured to have begun any time from five to ten years after the dramatic date of the dialogue (i.e., 389 to 394) and could have continued into the 420's (so Cameron, "Date" 31; I assume with him that Servius was dead by the time of the *Saturnalia's* composition). He taught, that is to say, during the time that Macrobius would have received his own education (although we do not know when or even where that took place) and is a representative of the type of training Macrobius would have known first hand.

¹⁰⁵ Still valuable are the discussions of Thilo, in the preface to the first volume of his edition of Servius, pp. *xxi* ff, and H. Nettleship in Conington-Nettleship, *The Works of Virgil*⁴ (London 1881) I, *xxx* f. See also the following note.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to Thilo and Nettleship, see H. Georgii, *Die Antike Aneiskritik aus den Scholien und anderen Quellen Hergestellt* (Stuttgart 1891) 18 ff; A. Santoro, "Il Servio Danielino e Donato," *SIFC* 20 (1946) 79 ff and *Esegeti virgiliani antichi* (Bari 1946); N. Marinone, *Elio Donato, Macrobio e Servio* (Vercelli 1946); R. B. Lloyd, "Republican Authors in Servius and the Scholia Danielis" *HSCP* 65 (1961) 305 f, with G. P. Goold, "Servius and the Helen Episode," *HSCP* 74 (1969) 113 ff (both ultimately going back to Santoro).

¹⁰⁷ On the implications of the dialogue form in this regard, see Cameron, "Date" 32; for the contradiction of known views, see Cameron's remarks, *ibid.* 38, on Symmachus and slavery.

mind (although I am not suggesting that he literally did so). There is no lack of reasons to believe that Macrobius would have been more profoundly and immediately unsympathetic to the commentary than even Servius' modern readership has tended to be.¹⁰⁸ To take a fairly familiar matter, consider the general emphasis of the commentary as a whole: the mass of notes which provide purely linguistic instruction and assistance is swollen out of all proportion to other categories, involving two notes out of every three; on the other hand, only one note out of seven is concerned with cultural matters of the kind insisted upon by Macrobius, and of this small minority only another very small proportion amount to anything more than perfunctory references or allusions.¹⁰⁹ This disproportion is not to be explained by the assumption that Servius' commentary reflects an "elementary" level of instruction, while the more extensive treatment (especially of *Realien*) found, for example, in Donatus' commentary would have been destined for "advanced classes."¹¹⁰ The idea of elementary and advanced classes is itself an anachronism; and more to the point, if learning of the sort compiled by Donatus had regularly seen the inside of a classroom in even vaguely unabridged form, Macrobius' scorn for the grammarians would not have been so vivid. The imbalance of the commentary must be taken as an authentic witness to the ordinary instruction received by the sons of the upper classes who read Virgil in Servius' school.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ I mention here only a few evident examples of the differences between the two works, since the points raised in this paragraph are dealt with more fully in an article designed as a companion to the present discussion, "The Grammarian's Authority," *CP* 75 (1980) 216 ff.

¹⁰⁹ These figures, necessarily approximate, are based on a survey of the comment on all twelve books of the *Aeneid* and are in general agreement with the figures given for a similar analysis of Book 2 by R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge 1963) 41, with the note on p. 396. The major deviations from the proportions noted occur in Book 1, where the bulk of linguistic instruction is (not surprisingly) still greater; and in Book 6, which has (especially at the two apocalyptic speeches of Anchises) a greater density than any other of annotation dealing with myth, history (in the narrower modern sense), philosophy, religion, and literary history (Servius, in his own fashion, signals the special place of Book 6 in his preface to that part of the commentary: *totus quidem Vergilius scientia plenus est, in qua hic liber possidet principatum*).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Goold (above, n.106) 135; more cautiously Lloyd (above, n.106) 299 326, who speaks of Donatus' commentary as intended for the use of "more advanced scholars": see also n.1111.

¹¹¹ Although Servius' work must be regarded as a simplification compared with that of Donatus, Donatus' work must in turn be regarded as (1) a *multiplication* of ordinary instruction, intended as (2) a sourcebook or reference work

Equally telling, moreover, are two features of the commentary which have been observed separately but which should be understood to be complementary: on the one hand, the large-scale suppression of references to the older Republican authors,¹¹² and on the other, perhaps Servius' largest personal contribution to his commentary, the inclusion of extensive references to the authors of the first century (Lucan, Juvenal, Statius).¹¹³ In the economy of the commentary, the two measures are part of a single process: we have here an instance of "out with the old to make room for the new." In both actions, Servius unquestionably reflects the current taste; and in the case of the former, he can be seen to further by his own teaching the very trend which the Servius of the *Saturnalia* is made to deplore (6.9,9: "Because our age has fallen away from Ennius and the whole store of ancient authors, we are ignorant . . .").¹¹⁴ It is evident, moreover, that in both cases

for the *grammaticus* (not, directly, for the classroom). Both of the points clearly emerge from the surviving prefatory epistle to Donatus' commentary, which describes both the method — the *munus collaticium*, drawing together the work of almost all who had previously written on Virgil (and so necessarily implying that the comment of any individual would be of much less scope than the whole produced by Donatus) — and the product, a means to "show the way and lend a hand to a *grammaticus* still wet behind the ears (*grammatico . . . rudi ac nuper exorto*): Servius used the work in precisely the way intended by Donatus. See the remarks of Lloyd (above, n.106) 325 (although Lloyd, with a scruple that is admirable in the context of his argument but perhaps unnecessary, suggests that there were other commentaries as extensive as Donatus': I see no reason, either logical or factual, for that suggestion).

¹¹² See Lloyd (above, n.106).

¹¹³ See P. Wessner, "Lucan, Statius, und Juvenal bei den römischen Grammatikern" *PhW* 49 (1929) 296–303, 328–335, A. Cameron, "Literary Allusions in the *Historia Augusta*," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 363 ff (on Juvenal), R. Syme, *Amnianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1968) 84 ff (on Juvenal), and my own discussion, "Servius and *idonei auctores*," *AJP* 99 (1978) 181 ff. It is worth noting that among the poets whose influence was discerned by Kroll in the works of Symmachus (*De Q. Aurelii Symmachi Studiis Graecis et Latinis* [Breslau 1891] 58 ff), Statius stands third, after Virgil and (*longo intervallo*) Horace (although not all the twenty-two echoes found are compelling). Both Lucan and Juvenal are quoted by Macrobius (*Comm. somn. Scip.* 2.7,16 and 1.9,2, respectively; cf. *Comm.* 1.8,9, 1.10,12, *Sat.* 3.10,2).

¹¹⁴ Cameron, "Date" 30 n.43, recognized that Servius' use of the Silver Age authors was a reflection rather than a cause (as often supposed) of the "renaissance" which they enjoyed in the latter part of the fourth century. His reasons are chronological; I myself would be inclined to question whether any grammarian (in this period and for some time before) could be described, without considerable qualification, as initiating rather than reflecting a given fashion — a problem of the relationship between social structure and "canon" which goes beyond the scope of this article.

Servius' own learning is circumscribed by the trend it reflects: whereas the manner, the extent, and the accuracy of Servius' quotations of, for example, Plautus are such as to raise serious doubts about his familiarity with that author,¹¹⁵ the longest single quotation of any author in the commentary (nearly six lines) comes not from Virgil, or from any other of the classical *quadrige*, but from Lucan (1.412 ff at G.2.479). Throughout all this, and in much else in the commentary, there is evidence of the institutional imperative of Roman education understood by Macrobius: knowledge follows taste; or (to include the grammarian in the equation), knowledge follows the grammarian (as *custos historiae*), and the grammarian follows taste.

As the repeated criticisms of the grammarians testify, Macrobius consciously set his face against these tendencies in writing the *Saturnalia*. It is for this reason, among others, that I am inclined to accept as something more than mere convention Macrobius' dedication of the *Saturnalia* to his son: in fact, if a recent conjecture is correct, the boy would have been nearing the age for his own instruction in the grammarian's school at the very time that his father was composing the dialogue.¹¹⁶ If Servius' commentary is characteristic of the instruction received in the schools of Macrobius' day, and if that instruction accurately reflects contemporary tastes and interests, then the difference between the work of Servius and the work of Macrobius may fairly measure the difference between Macrobius' cultural aspirations and those of the typical man of his time and his class. There is nothing particularly odd in this suggestion by itself. It has been observed, for example, that there is an important layer of truth beneath Ammianus' polemical description of the Roman aristocracy as a group of men who read nothing but Juvenal and Marius Maximus, who hated learning like poison and kept their libraries locked tight as crypts: that truth was no doubt as valid in Macrobius' time as in Ammianus'. Not all the aristo-

¹¹⁵ See the discussion of Lloyd (above, n.106) 313 ff.

¹¹⁶ Cameron, "Date" 37, conjecturing that the son was Plotinus Eustathius, PVR in 462 (cf. Marinone [above, n.12] 20, and Flamant, *Macrobe* . . . [above, n.8] 131 f): the conjecture produces a stemma which would extend neatly down to Macrobius' grandson, the Macrobius Plotinus Eudoxius whose name appears in the subscription to the *Comm. somn. Scip.* Cameron suggests that Eustathius may have been forty at the time of his prefecture, i.e., eight or nine years old at the time of the composition of the *Sat.*, if the latter event is put around 431; he could easily have been 11 to 14 years old at the time, the age at which a boy would ordinarily read his Virgil in the *grammaticus'* school, which would make Eustathius a bit older at the time of his prefecture (so Marinone), or place the time of composition a year or two after 431, or (equally possible) some combination of the two.

cracy were men of letters and patrons of the arts, and not all exerted themselves to pass beyond the anonymity and mediocrity of current fashion: "We should not be misled by the impressions created by the letters of Symmachus or by the inscriptions that show the *cursus honorum* of leading senators. Many more senatorial residents of Rome have escaped our knowledge, simply by having escaped distinction."¹¹⁷ It is from the anonymous majority, like the all but anonymous Nicaeus who read Juvenal in Servius' school,¹¹⁸ that the bulk of the grammarian's pupils would have come, the "quiet grey men" who carried with them, for better or worse, the Virgil they learned as boys.¹¹⁹ Such men Gellius would have characterized, in his own day and in his own style, as part of the *vulgus semidoctum*,¹²⁰ and it is from such men among his peers and contemporaries that Macrobius chose to set himself apart — but in terms far different from Gellius'. For the striking point is this: while choosing to set himself apart, Macrobius carefully avoids the appearance of doing so. As I have remarked above, the avoidance of competition stands at the center of the dialogue and is an integral part of the social and intellectual values that shape the work; yet at the same time, when one seeks even tentatively to place the work in its historical context, one immediately becomes aware that it is a clear and conscious attempt to rise above the general level of educated men of its day. We are confronted with a curious phenomenon, a kind of covert striving for prestige. There is an arrogance in the work, but it is clothed in a smile and directed at targets different from Gellius'. In the microcosm Macrobius constructs, the consistent objects of scorn are not the "run of the mill," the anonymous majority of the educated upper classes, but figures either of little social importance or of a singular depravity: that is, respectively, the grammarians, the *plebeia gram-*

¹¹⁷ Brown (above n.13) 95 = *Religion and Society*, p. 186; among recent discussions, see also A. Cameron, "The Roman Friends of Ammianus" *JRS* 54 (1964) 25 ff, Syme (above, n.113) 149 ff, and Markus (above, n.13) 9 f. Although Macrobius must be understood to belong to the governmental aristocracy rather than the aristocracy of Rome strictly called — he was, as he tells us, born *sub alio caelo* — the basis for comparison remains nonetheless valid.

¹¹⁸ The subscription in the Leidensis (bibl. publ. 82, s.X): LEGI EGO NICEVS ROME APVD SERVIVM MAGISTRVM ET EMENDAVI (in slightly different form in the later Laurentianus, 34.42, s.XI: LEGI EGO NICEVS APVD M. SERVIVM ROMAE ET EMENDAVI).

¹¹⁹ See Symmachus' response to the scepticism of Evangelus, 1.24,5: *videris enim mihi ita adhuc Vergilianos habere versus qualiter eos pueri magistris praelegentibus canebamus*.

¹²⁰ For the phrase, see, e.g., Gellius 1.7,16 ff; the *vulgus semidoctum* is naturally linked with the *grammaticus semidoctus* (for example, Gellius 15.9,3 ff).

maticorum cohors who bear the brunt of Macrobius' blame, or Evangelus, whose moral and intellectual failings are so profound that he seems to be *sui generis*, an extraordinary and easily isolated case unrepresentative of men at large. The claim of cultural superiority implicit in the dialogue's composition has been subordinated almost completely to the urge for unity. In this connection, it is possible to think of Peter Brown's analysis of the "centrifugal" and "centripetal" trends in Roman society before and after the sack of Rome in 410:¹²¹ one may view the social ideal of the *Saturnalia* as characteristic of the latter movement, the urge to "pull together," while the creation of the *Saturnalia*, an unspoken attempt to stake out a position as part of an elite within an elite, may be regarded as a continuation of the former. The two impulses are not combined without some strain. The point at which they overlap is perhaps visible in the combination of equality and hierarchy that forms one of the dialogue's basic tenets: all the participants are equal, but some are more equal than others. *Omnes . . . qui adsunt pari doctrina polleant*, says Avienus, while deferring to Praetextatus, *unice conscius* (1.7,17).

These conflicting impulses, in themselves, raise interesting and difficult questions for any attempt to locate the dialogue securely in its historical context. Those impulses, furthermore, are related to another, fundamental question: how, finally, is one to define the points of similarity and difference, continuity and discontinuity, between Macrobius' own circumstances and the age he chose to memorialize? The desire for continuity is certainly present: it is easy but, I think, mistaken to emphasize the purely elegiac aspect of the dialogue, as if Praetextatus and the rest were chosen as the "last of the Romans," whose like would not come again.¹²² Macrobius' fiction is of a somewhat different kind: *not long ago* there were great men *just as* in the time long past. Macrobius' moralizing recreation of the *saeculum Praetextati* is meant to provide a metaphor and model for his own day. As the figure of Avienus suggests, the distances between the ages can be bridged: there is not a complete separation of the present from the recent past, and the recent past from the distant past. This aspect of the work, the eye turned to the present, is important in itself: thus the *Saturnalia* has been exploited by John Matthews in his important demonstration of the continuity of the cultural life of the Roman aristocracy and the latter's resilience in the passage from the fourth to the fifth century.¹²³ But continuity does not

¹²¹ (Above, n.13) 95 ff = *Religion and Society*, 186 ff.

¹²² It is here that Cameron's emphasis falls, "Date" 35 ff; cf. Marinone (above, n.12) 24.

¹²³ See above, n.13.

tell the whole tale, especially in certain features which affect the basic tone of the dialogue. Consider, for example, the following passage from one of Symmachus' letters (3.44):

concedo in leges tuas et ἀρχαῖσμον̄ scribendi non invitus adfecto. tu tamen fac memineris, illud potius simplex nonnullis videri, quod sequentis aetatis usus recepit . . . si tibi vetustatis tantus est amor, pari studio in prisca verba redeamus, quibus salii canunt et augures avem consulunt et decemviri tabulas condiderunt. iam dudum his renuntiatum est, ut successio temporum placita priora mutavit.

Symmachus' lecture here actually concerns a minor point of etiquette, and the rhetoric applied is hardly characteristic of his general attitude toward *vetustas*;¹²⁴ but the very fact that these sentiments can be so casually deployed suggests some of the distances that separate Macrobius from his subjects. There is nothing in the *Saturnalia* that is quite so relaxed and mercurial. While able to accept Symmachus' premise (*successio temporum placita priora mutavit*; cf. *Sat.* 6.3,9), Macrobius would regret the note of combativeness and sarcasm: in fact, Symmachus' *reductio ad absurdum* is strikingly similar to the unfortunate notions voiced in the dialogue by the immature Avienus.¹²⁵ The differences present here are symptomatic: one finds in a Symmachus — for all his unquestionable conservatism — a flexibility (even wiliness), an irony, an acceptance of controversy¹²⁶ that are absent from Macrobius' work. The *urbanitas* of Symmachus' correspondence, like that of Cicero's dialogues, rests upon an easy and individual self-confidence; the urbane façade of Macrobius' dialogue conceals a more anxious and brittle turn of mind. It is appropriate that, although the company of the symposium undertake to speak *de Maronis ingenio* (1.24,14), much the greater part of their attention lies elsewhere, with, in effect, his *mores*:¹²⁷ for the ideal that shapes the *Saturnalia* places most of its emphasis on

¹²⁴ With *Epist.* 3.44, compare the quick shift in rhetorical coloring found in two letters to Naucellius, 3.11 and 12.

¹²⁵ With the salii and augurs and decemviri who figure in Symmachus' letter, compare the Horatii and the other men who, together with Evander's mother, play a similar role in the outburst of Avienus at *Sat.* 1.5,1-3; with Symmachus' *renuntiatum est*, cf. Avienus' *oblitterata . . . exauctorata . . . repudiata*.

¹²⁶ As sketched so well by Matthews in his study of the correspondence, "The Letters of Symmachus" in J. W. Binns (above, n.13) 58 ff; see also *Arist.* 5 ff.

¹²⁷ Compare and contrast the union of qualities in, e.g., Symmachus *Epist.* 1.14,2 (reproaching Ausonius for his failure to send a copy of the *Mosella*): *cur me istius libelli, quaeso, exsortem esse voluisti? aut ἀμωσότερος tibi videbar, qui iudicare non possem, aut certe malignus, qui laudare nescirem. itaque vel ingenio meo plurimum vel moribus derogasti.*

moral qualities (*verecundia*, *diligentia*) conducive to mutual support, praise, reassurance — and obedience. This last element is most apparent when, for a moment, the façade cracks, in the clash between the philosopher Eustathius and the doctor Dysarius. It may be possible to hear in that passage the idiom of the fifth century: the language of Macrobius in the heat of controversy is most closely paralleled by the language used to denounce a contemporary Christian heresy, as the unrestrained assertion of an idiosyncratic *prudencia* which seeks to undo the solidarity of the whole.¹²⁸

These last few paragraphs were intended to suggest several lines of approach by which we may reach a more complete understanding of the *Saturnalia*. But we are perhaps not yet in a position to evaluate with precision the various phenomena sketched above. One particular need may be mentioned: a more satisfying assessment than now exists of the *Saturnalia*'s relation to the conventions of its genre. Only when we have considered the relationship between the elements embedded in the literary tradition and aspects of contemporary influence will we be able to answer with assurance such questions as the following: does the *Saturnalia* represent a typical projection of the "more rigid and more oligarchic" social structure and intellectual life of the period following the sack of Rome onto the "still prolific and turbulent age of Symmachus and Praetextatus?"¹²⁹ Or does it represent a projection of Macrobius' notion of the social structure and intellectual life of classical antiquity, compounded from his readings in Gellius, Cicero, and Plutarch?¹³⁰ Are the answers to the foregoing necessarily mutually exclusive? In seeking to answer these questions we would learn something new about the interplay of social forms and literary conventions; we would then be able to answer in turn many of the other questions raised by the *Saturnalia* and so draw on its full potential as a unique social and historical document.

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¹²⁸ With Eustathius' denunciation at 7.15,14 (Macrobius' own addition to the substance borrowed from Plutarch, cf. above n.68), esp. the charge that Dysarius has attempted *rem consensu generis humani decantatam et creditam oblivioni dare*, cf. the language of the imperial rescript of 418 denouncing Pelagianism (*PL* 48. 381): *insignem notam plebeiae aestimat vilitatis sentire cum cunctis, ac prudentiae singularis palmam communiter approbata destruere*, and see Brown (above, n.13) 98 = *Religion and Society*, p. 189.

¹²⁹ So P. Brown, in his review of M. A. Wes, *Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des römischen Reichs*, *RSI* 80 (1968) 1021, reprinted and translated in *Religion and Society*, p. 231 f.

¹³⁰ As C. E. Murgia has suggested to me.