Chapter 1

Situating the Beginnings of Latin Prose

In this study I take as a point of departure the fundamental claim of cultural studies that the production and consumption of culture are human practices characterized by relations of dominance and subjection. Far from aiming to disavow or sublate philological and literary analyses, I take this claim as a driving force for expanding current notions of text, form, literature, and genre. By regarding texts as integral to practice, I envision them as the result of a series of judgments and perceptions of the ordering of the world and their authors as social agents constrained by practical schemes strictly associated with their perception of reality. In this instance reality is not simply a context to which texts are to be linked; rather, it consists of a web of restrictions and possibilities experienced by each agent in relation to other agents. Accordingly, I understand generic inclinations, formal choices, thematic preferences, and modes of textual construction as practical manifestations of a shared sense of reality and as clear indicators of the authors’ different experiences of limitations and options.

My first basic argument is that in early second century B.C.E. Rome, the author’s positioning in the larger scheme of social relations was connected with his choice to produce either poetry or prose in Latin. It is significant that Latin poetry was a practice initiated by professional immigrants, whereas the beginnings of Latin prose were interlaced with the career of Cato the Censor, a man from Tusculum who lacked a history of family
achievements and yet managed to enter Rome’s political scene and remain at its center for about half a century. To elaborate this proposition, I will be employing the useful notion of subjectivity.

The centrality of this notion in a variety of disciplines has produced a wide range of definitions.¹ In philosophy subjectivity is generally defined as the opposite of objectivity understood as an ontological realm that is independent of any arbitrary influence of a thinking being. Nonoppositional definitions of subjectivity in other fields share a concern with how agents are constituted by cultural and social determinations and how, more or less consciously, these determinations shape the cognitive and affective frameworks through which agents perceive themselves in relation to others and decide about a course of action. I cannot claim, of course, that my description of a plurality of late-third- and early-second-centuries B.C.E. subjectivities is neutral. In fact, I see no escape from the fact that as soon as we set out to describe we immediately participate and cease to be observers on the sidelines. If this were not enough, our access to the subjectivities in question is mediated by texts that are also, for the most part, fragmentary. By declaring the death of the author, deconstruction has been teaching us that texts have no fixed meaning and that words act as unstable signifiers and purveyors of multiple significations whose meaning is supplied or completed by the reader. In this book I take in the claim of deconstruction but resist the preeminence that it grants to the reader in order to map a number of complex historical dynamics, cultural representations, and individual positionings.

My second argument is that the specific forms and themes that distinguish early Latin poetry from Cato’s prose bear the imprint of the distinct subjectivities of their producers. Everyone recognizes that Latin poetry owes its existence to acts of translation from literary texts produced in the Greek-speaking world. In chapters 2 and 3 I take as a cue the narratives of migration of its early practitioners to Rome and expand on exclusively text-bound approaches by considering the effects that migration may have had on their self-perception, their translations, and others’ perception of both. In the remaining chapters I work out the strategies that Cato adopted in order to overcome the limitations that derived from his status as homo novus. In chapter 4 I look at how he disavowed poetic agency and yet redeployed poetic forms by anchoring them to schemes of speech and action associated with an ancestral past and including pre-poetic forms generally bracketed under the rubric of the carmen. In chapter 5 I scrutinize how

¹. For a useful survey of definitions of subjectivity, see Hall 2004.
Cato differentiated his writing activities by relying on the ritual practices that sustained his attainment and exercise of social and political authority. My attempt to bring authorial subjectivity into play from a variety of viewpoints ushers in the body as an additional factor to consider and is warranted by what we find in the texts. Let me offer here two examples.

In a fragment attributed to Ennius and preserved by Aulus Gellius we learn that the poet claimed to have “three hearts,” *tria corda*, because he knew how to speak Greek, Latin, and Oscan (or Messapian).² This image reveals a subjectivity that is empowered by an emotional identification with multiple cultural and linguistic sites. At the same time, it reflects the variegated environment of second-century B.C.E. Italy.³ But if we turn our attention to another Ennian fragment, the emotional equality that this image bestows on those different sites breaks down before the relative sociopolitical prestige that each enjoys. In keeping with the plurality of Ennius’ heart, the fragment reads: *nos sumus Romani qui fuimus ante Rudini,* “we are Romans who once were Rudians.”⁴ This fragment not only alludes to Ennius’ geographical relocation to Rome, but also proclaims his midlife promotion to Roman citizenship. This new identification supersedes his association with the civic community of Rudiae and ‘nests’ his Greek heart into the newly acquired identity.⁵ Rather than disappearing, this heart informs his self-fashioning as a poet, his choice of Greek-derived formal and thematic frameworks, and the multiple processes of Romanization that figure in his poetry. In the *Annales* the dynamic relationship between Ennius’ “three hearts” produces a bifurcated trajectory: as the poem endorses the expansionistic and political successes of the Roman leaders in Italy and beyond, it also opens up alternative perspectives on his and others’ perception of being in the world.⁶

Cato too experienced migration; however, his subjectivity was distinctively different from that of the poets. Born in 234 B.C.E. in Tusculum, fifteen miles south of Rome, Cato belonged to an elite family that is thought to have acquired Roman citizenship in 268 B.C.E. with the rest of the Sabines. This means that he enjoyed from birth the right to embark on a polit-

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³ For a recent assessment of the centrality of *cor* in Ennius’ fragmentary corpus, see Gowers 2007.


⁵ I am borrowing the concept of ‘nesting’ from hierarchy theory whereby each level of the hierarchy contains different elements and subsumes them within. For a reflection on ‘nested identities,’ especially in their relation to space, see Herb and Kaplan 1999.

⁶ For recent discussions of the latter trajectory, see Elliott 2007 and Keith 2007.
cal career in Rome and could look to the inclusive policy that had long regulated the cooption of new bodies into the urban aristocracy. And yet an obstacle remained: the advantages traditionally enjoyed by men whose ancestors had held the highest offices and who were identified as nobiles.

The most recognized way by which Cato negotiated his successful career as an ‘insider outsider’ was to draw on his Sabine origins.\(^7\) By projecting on them the old-time virtue that had made Rome great and by purporting to incarnate it, he was able to counter what he saw as the corrupting influence of Greek culture and to displace the monopoly that the nobiles held on pristine morality and hardy customs. Cato’s perception of himself and his agency was mediated through a twofold identification with Sabine and Roman sites and drew force from a polemical displacement of ‘Greekkness.’\(^8\) The latter move could not be clearer than in a fragment of the so-called Ad Filium:

Dicam de istis Graecis suo loco, Marce fili, quid Athenis exquisitum habeam, et quod bonum sit illorum litteras inspicere, non perdiscere. Vincam nequissimum et indocile esse genus illorum. Et hoc puta vatem dixisse: quandoque ista gens suas litteras habet, omnia conrumpet, tum etiam magis, si medicos suos huc mittet. Iurarunt inter se barbaros necare omnis medicina, sed hoc ipsum mercede faciunt ut fides iis sit et facile perdant. Nos quoque dictitant barbaros et spurcius nos quam aliis Opicon appellatone foedant. Interdixi de medicis.\(^9\)

I shall speak about those Greeks in the proper place, Marcus my son, as to what I found out in Athens and what benefit there is in looking into their writings, not in learning them thoroughly. I will demonstrate that their race is most despicable and intractable. And reckon what follows as pronounced by a vates: whenever this race will give its literature, it will corrupt everything; all the more so, if they will send their doctors here. They have taken an oath among themselves to kill all the barbarians by their medicine, but they do this very thing for a fee, so that they may be trusted and destroy easily. They also speak of us all the time as barbarians, and they insult us more filthily than others by calling us Opici. I have forbidden you to deal with doctors.


\(^8\) In Laws 2.5 Cicero speaks about municipal men as having two homelands (patriae): one by place (locus) and one by right (ius). For further considerations about this duality, see Farney 2007:1–38.

\(^9\) Pliny, NH 29.14 = Cato, Ad Filium 1 C&Sbl.
This fragment opens by featuring Cato’s ‘speaking I’ addressing his son and promising him to deal with the Greeks on another occasion. Through this deferral, Cato situates the Greeks in an Athens construed as a peripheral site that he has self-confidently examined and represents their writings as objects that are both alien and alienable.\(^\text{10}\) The alienable features that Cato attaches to Greek literature are here made prominent in his choice of dare (to give). Produced by a despicable and fickle race, these writings—he warns his son—are good to be inspected (inspicere) but should not be learned thoroughly (perdiscere). Paratactically adding to it, Cato ominously predicts that Greek literature holds the potential to undo (conrumpere) everything and equates his pronouncement to that of a vates. As a figure of pre-poetic Roman song shunned by Ennius in a famous fragment of the Annales, the vates becomes in this context a prop for empowering Cato’s own self-positioning.\(^\text{11}\) In what follows, Cato abruptly shifts his focus from literature to medicine and characterizes Greek doctors as conspirators and assassins operating under the disguise of paid professionals. The language of destruction (necare, disperdere) that he uses at this point recalls the ruinous power (conrumpere) previously attributed to Greek literature. The echo ushers in the unfamiliar idea of reading as affecting the body through the mind and suggests that Cato’s distinction between inspicere and perdiscere does not rest on a different degree of attention paid to texts, but on the extent to which what is read comes to be incorporated. When viewed vis-à-vis Cato’s positioning, Ennius’ self-reference in bodily terms sheds some of its metaphorical dimension and brings to the forefront from a different direction the shared perception of the body as the vehicle through which an individual constructed and expressed his place in the world. Consequently, an approach that takes account of forms and themes as practical templates that affect and are affected by authorial subjectivity allows us to grasp the impact of embodied experience on the choice of forms, themes, and textualities in ways that a strictly textual interpretation cannot.

\(^{10}\) See Dench 2005: 324–26; Dupont 2005. The question of ownership in relation to Greek literature comes vividly into play in Horace, Ars 128–35 where Greek literary texts are defined as communis (128) and publica materies (131) that through poetic manipulation and translation become an area of ius privatus (131).

\(^{11}\) Ennius, Ann. 7.206–7 Sk. Cato’s adoption of vates as an authoritative prop counters the negative overtones that are made manifest in Livy’s narrative of the Bacchanalian affair of 186 B.C.E. (39.8–18), suggesting changes in their social location and a tightening of control over religious practices. See Gildenhard 2007b: 87–92; Wiseman 2006; Habinek 2005a: 227–28; Gruen 1990: 34–78. The rejection of the vates is central to Ennius’ poetic self-fashioning and is treated in that relation in chapter 3.
My third argument is that in early-second-century B.C.E. Rome, writing helped to differentiate poetry and prose from everyday, unmarked activities; however, in their reciprocal differentiation and the social value accorded to each, a decisive role was played by modalities of writing and reading. This argument builds upon my claim that thematic and formal choices are expressions of diverse subjectivities and calls attention to the relationship between texts and acting agents. By focusing on this relationship, I consider texts as aesthetic artefacts and deal with them as material objects whose production and consumption are practical exercises that acquire significance when viewed in relation to the production and consumption of other texts. As such, I concentrate on diverse writing and reading practices and how they are strategically played off against one another to generate the perception that the writing activities of the agent and the reception of his texts are privileged in their import and consequences.

One of the distinctive features of early poetic writings is that they were produced primarily with a view to their being performed by the author himself or by professional performers during occasions that were temporally and spatially marked off from the everyday. In the case of poetic drama, we can safely say that these occasions were integrated in civic festivals organized and regulated by individuals who exercised sociopolitical authority. As for other early poetic texts, we are unable to proceed with the same confidence. Nothing prevents us from thinking that these may have been objects of reading acts similar to ours; however, a fragment attributed to the *carmen de moribus* in which Cato looks down upon poetic encroachments on convivial gatherings offers some ground for speculating that some poetic compositions were consumed in those contexts or, at least, in exclusive situations which Cato represents as bearing convivial features.\(^\text{12}\) I expand on this more fully in chapter 3. The point that I would like to convey here is that the alien and alienable features that Cato attributes to Greek writings illuminate something significant about the relationship between authority and authorship in the Roman context. If we take the case of Ennius, we may say that he gained authorial success by translating from Greek literature and by situating himself in a longstanding series of reading events. But if we look at Ennius’ authorship through Cato’s lens, we can see that his poetic success granted him a limited agency. For one thing, Ennius constructed his authorship by relying on the kind of intake of Greekness and Greek literature that Cato

\(^{12}\) I am referring here to Gellius 11.2.5 = Cato, *carmen de moribus* 2 C&SB. Modern constructions of ancient reading are discussed in Parker 2009 (but the evidence he discusses dates to the late first century B.C.E. onwards).
rejects. Although we may choose to ignore Cato, it is important to keep in mind that Ennius enjoyed a lesser social standing and had to confront the perception that Cato promoted. Second, Ennius’ positioning in the world was largely dependent on his poetic crafts and their favorable reception.\textsuperscript{13} I call this quality of poetic writing ‘scriptic.’ The texts attributed to Cato, on the other hand, consist of what I call ‘transcriptions.’

The term transcription has been used by Florence Dupont to define the relationship between orality and textuality whereby a text purports to encode “an utterance whose written reality \textit{pretends} to be a transcription.”\textsuperscript{14} In Dupont’s view, when written texts present themselves as fixing ritually or socially codified oral performances, the fiction bestows form on a text that otherwise would not have any. Expanding on Dupont’s focus on fictionality and speech, I suggest that Cato conceived of the texts that he produced as transcriptions of speech acts and social events that were conducive to his accrual of sociopolitical authority. In turn, the sociopolitical authority that he accumulated over the course of his career opened up for him the possibility of redeploying paradigms of speech and actions that were recognized as having the power of ordering the universe, the community, and the household. Through the interplay of these factors Cato avoided the predicaments attached to poetic writing; at the same time, he extended his control over the reception of his transcriptions by leading readers to acknowledge his self-assertions as authoritative.

In the remaining pages of this introductory chapter I present the genealogy of my approach in relation to what I see as the most significant methodological debates that have taken place in the Anglo-(North) American scene of Latin studies in the last decade or so. The first relates to the rift between formalisms and historicisms in the study of Latin poetry and the second to the so-called ‘invention of Latin literature.’

\section*{Form and History}

One of the most enduring binaries structuring the study of Latin literature is the opposition between poetry and prose, where poetry constitutes the positive term primarily by virtue of its dependence on metrical laws and

\textsuperscript{13} Dupont 2009 and Farrell 2009 explore this element in different ways. But see also Pierre (2005: 241): “Le poète romain, quant à lui, n’est, d’un point de vue social, qu’un scripteur. Pour autoriser socialement son poème, il doit donner du poids: le poème sera reconnu comme publiquement valide, uniquement s’il est autorisé par un \textit{auctor} qui le diffuse et le garantit.”

\textsuperscript{14} Dupont 2009: 147; the emphasis is mine. Cf. also Dupont 1999: 61–63 and \textit{passim}. 
formal sophistications. In the nineteen-eighties and nineties the study of intertextuality developed around this hierarchical model, becoming the primary tool for interpreting Roman poetry. Born as a reaction to the monopoly of New Criticism in the Anglo-(North) American world and as a redress to the crisis of traditional historicism in Italy, intertextual studies called into question the unity of a text and located meaning in the relationship of a text with prior texts and in the codes to which it belongs. One consequence of this new trend was a positive re-evaluation of Latin poetry’s “belatedness” with respect to Greece; another was an increasing interest in Augustan and Imperial poetry; yet another was a greater awareness of the constructed nature of literary interpretation and, consequently, of the critic’s own ideological framework as a determinant in the process of reading.

In the late nineties a number of concerns about interpretations focused on intertextuality began to arise from within the ranks. Exemplary, in this respect, is Stephen Hinds’ *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (1998). In this book, Hinds reflected on how to distinguish between allusion and accidental confluence of words or commonplaces. He also raised the issue of how to treat authorial intention, stressing that from the point of view of interpreters, however conjectural, the alluding author is still instrumental, still “good to think with.” By turning next to the role of reading, Hinds used as a case study the archaic Roman poets and demonstrated the extent to which readings of them in antiquity keep informing our literary histories. Finally, he focused on the status of a text under examination in relation to the texts alluded to, asking what hierarchies structure their relationship—in other words, which of them constitutes the master-text.

In 2001 Lowell Edmunds published *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry* as a response to Hinds’ methodological reflections. Discussing the nature of allusions, Edmunds claims that they should be regarded as “pleasing or intriguing, often unordinary, uses of language that convey or portend some meaning valuable to the reader.” Following this trajectory, Edmunds dismisses the possibility that a poem may actually perform something in the world and proposes that it is “the

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15. I should like to point out that the formation of Greek prose has received much more attention; see, e.g., Wardy 1996; Goldhill 2002; Kurke 2006 and 2010.
16. The best treatment of the “New Latin movement” is to be found in Fowler 1995. See also Fowler 2000.
poet’s adoption of a persona, his speaking in a fictional voice, that gives a poem its special status outside the ordinary uses of language.” As for the issue of authorial intention, Edmunds maintains that the very difficulty of introducing information about ancient authors from outside the poems downgrades intentionality to nothing more than “the scholar’s rhetorical add-on at the conclusion of an interpretation.” To Hinds’ reconstruction of how the earlier Roman poets were reduced to the status of “archaic” by ancient readers and to his wondering about what vantage point we should be taking, Edmunds reacts by characterizing this sort of exercise as purposeless since Hinds himself is located in “a new era of reception.” Ultimately, Edmunds articulates the interpretation of Roman poetry as an aesthetically-based reading practice that finds validity in what he calls the “Latin sub-community” and the “conventions of its discourse.”

While drawing attention to some genuine pitfalls of Roman studies, Edmunds’ conceptualization of intertextuality is not as impermeable to historicism as it may seem. In fact, his strong resistance to looking outside texts and his equally strong penchant for the aesthetic are undermined by the way he locates the founding moment of a “reading culture.” Although he acknowledges the recitatio and the reading of texts at elite dinners as ancient contexts of literary reception, he claims that the late first century B.C.E. witnessed the development of a new type of reading, one centered on a cognitive and/or aesthetic experience. In doing so, Edmunds reinforces the high value traditionally granted to poetry, raising Augustan poetic texts to the status of master-texts and excluding by default any other texts chronologically or generically located elsewhere. Moreover, he constructs a locus of origins for the type of reading that he promotes by implying that intertextual analyses of Augustan poetry are the very discourses and conventions that structure the Latin ‘sub-community.’ Accordingly, Edmunds is pulled towards historicism after all, demonstrating that, even when aesthetically conceived, reading practices do structure social subjectivities and communities.

Somewhat fortunately, as Edmunds points out, Latinists have always been open to productive self-reflections and to entering into dialectical relationship with contemporary trends in the humanities. In 2003

Edmunds organized at Rutgers the conference *Critical Divergences: New Directions in the Study and Teaching of Roman Literature*. The papers delivered on that occasion and now published in *TAPA* 2005 are a signal indication of this fruitful, twofold engagement. One useful fact that emerges from these papers is that the rift between formalism and historicism that preoccupies all Latinists alike is not at all monomorphic. Indeed, as Alessandro Barchiesi alerts us, the ways in which it is articulated are still contingent upon generational positionings, local traditions, and professional demands inherent to the scholarly landscape in which individual Latinists seek (or are forced) to abide. Consequently, it is important not only to interface the two approaches, as Barchiesi has it, but also to move beyond the politics of theoretical binaries altogether in a manner that valorizes classical studies in spite of global economies, local hierarchies, and whatever crises of critical thinking arise inside and outside academia.

If the study of allusions applied to Augustan poetry has been teaching us that texts are relational in nature and that reading is, no matter what, a practice able to structure subjectivities as well as communities, the transnational dimension of the postmodern and globalized world should make us wary of any individual or communal attempt to either homologize or hierarchize ancient practices in ways that elide the specific antagonisms and accommodations that informed them.

To articulate the relationship between text and context, inside and outside, form and history, is a multifaceted task; as such, it calls for a constructive and concerted effort. As the contributions to the Rutgers conference suggest, the careful study of words and phrases can and should be supplemented by a number of lateral approaches; these include the reading of texts falling outside the genre of the text under observation, a comparably close analysis of artefacts, and the reconstruction of how texts have been read/interpreted across time. The point is that there is so much that we do not understand about the ancient world and the way we relate to it that it is absurd to think that any given critical engagement with any given ancient material will provide an answer to all the questions. Critical approaches are not critical because they contain answers, but because they help us to constructively identify a phenomenon by the very act of moving close to it.

In his contribution to the Rutgers conference Thomas Habinek observes that, just as today, “to read” in the Roman world is “a practice,
entailing a specific, historically constituted set of relationships of body to voice, speaker to listener, male to female, master to slave, owner to object, and so on.”\textsuperscript{28} Habinek’s shift of focus to the body complicates current binaries by adding a further variant. In his book \textit{The World of Roman Song: From Ritualized Speech to Social Order} (2005), he invites us to move from text to language and from literature to song. By relying on the fruitful analytical work done on archaic Greek poetry, Habinek identifies a classificatory system based on the opposition between \textit{cano} and \textit{loquor} within the Latin language.\textsuperscript{29} As opposed to the unmarked \textit{loquor}, Habinek argues that \textit{cano} and its derivatives relate to the establishing of a relation between the singer, the constituted social world, and the cosmic whole through ritualized speech. In this sense, ritualized means “made special through the use of specialized diction, regular meter, musical accompaniment, figures of sound, mythical or religious subject matter, and socially authoritative context.”\textsuperscript{30} Included under the same rubric as \textit{cano} is \textit{dico}, in the sense of “to express with authority” or “to insist upon the validity of.”\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Cano} and \textit{dico} are song in that they both constitute a marked form of \textit{loquor} and relate to the voice of a person with special access to sources of authority. The difference between them turns upon what is stressed: \textit{dico} “emphasizes the validity or authoritativeness of the utterance,” implying an asymmetrical relationship between speaker and addressee, while \textit{cano} points to its aesthetic characteristics and performance context.\textsuperscript{32}

In contrast to both \textit{cano} and \textit{dico}, \textit{canto} stands a notch lower, qualifying a musical performance to someone else’s tune or the singing of a song authorized by another singer.\textsuperscript{33} As for poetry, \textit{poema} describes a poetically devised output in Ennius’ \textit{Annales}, appears once again in Lucilius to define a small portion of a larger poem called \textit{poesis}, and reemerges in Horace in relation to the “fashioning that goes into its production rather than the authority that sustains it.”\textsuperscript{34} And prose? This form of speech would come into the song system through \textit{dico} in two ways. Starting from the political, social, and cosmic authority assigned to song, Habinek argues that oratory, philosophy, and dance are “aspects of song that struggle to be differentiated from and within the realm of special speech. By promoting the power of \textit{dicta}, oratory and philosophy in particular derive

\textsuperscript{28} Habinek 2005b: 84.  
\textsuperscript{29} Habinek 2005a: 2.  
\textsuperscript{30} Habinek 2005a: 61–62.  
\textsuperscript{31} Habinek 2005a: 63.  
\textsuperscript{32} Habinek 2005a: 69–70, 72. See also Habinek 1998b.  
\textsuperscript{33} Habinek 2005a: 67.  
\textsuperscript{34} Habinek 2005a: 80.
their authority from the impact of ritualized language beyond the bounds of ritual, yet their practitioners use that authority to reshape the condition of its production.”

Elsewhere, Habinek describes prose as secondary to song, owing its derivative status from “a loosening of the bonds, a progressive limitation of the marked elements that characterize song.”

In Habinek’s account, the Roman evaluation of speech is closely tied to the relationship of the performer’s voice to the body. The relationship between embodied performance (mimesis) and textual symbolization (semiosis) is central to Latin literature, while the break in the relationship, privileging the latter, is articulated as the liberation of voice from body. Habinek’s most persuasive examples center on the ludus poeticus, or “poetic play,” as it is conjured up in a number of texts historically ranging from Catullus to Horace. Poetic play is constructed as an exercise in submission to bodily discipline, including social patronage, metrical laws, and the labor of writing. In this the poet, struggling to establish his own autonomous and, therefore, authoritative voice, enters upon a process of self-empowerment. Transcendence from bodily constraints, however, is not so easily achieved. In this sense, Horace hints that his own ludus may turn into a more permanent state akin to enslavement. As Paul Allen Miller aptly summarizes in his review of Roman Song, Horace helps us see that the “the ultimate dream of aristocratic Roman manhood is for carmen—the ritualized speech that constitutes the community as a living unity—to assume the status of dictum, authoritative speech freed from the scripting and embodiment of play (ludus).” To my mind, Habinek points to an alternative vantage point from which to observe how Rome’s cultural history was affected by the correlation between different strategies of ritualization and specific sectors of society. One aspect of poetry that Habinek mentions very briefly is that the origins of Roman poetry were historically bound up with nonelite and/or alien cultural agents. This fact deserves more focused consideration.

Although scholars working across different fields are increasingly convinced that individual and collective identities are socially constructed

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38. Farrell (2009: 164–85) has recently added to the discussion by focusing on a number of anxieties that emerge in Catullus and other near contemporary poets in relation to poetry’s dependency on the papyrus roll, a writing material perceived as a corruptible object meant to be given as a gift to others. Cf. also Pierre 2005: 241–42.
41. Habinek 2005a: 80, 82.
(and I take this as a given), less attention has been paid to how cultural expressions are shaped by these identities and how they are perceived accordingly. My work illustrates that Latin poetry’s historical association with socially secondary individuals is, to a large extent, responsible for the perception of aesthetic discipline and poetic writing as exercises in bodily submission. Centuries later, Horace manifests the inescapability of this perception in his *Epistles*. While Habinek emphasizes that Horace presents his delivery of philosophical precepts as speech unconstrained by the rules of poetic engagement, I find it important to stress that the poet continues to constrain his speech within the bonds of the hexameter and constructs a written artefact of poetic design, expressing formally and materially the inescapable predicaments of Latin poetry’s origins.\(^{42}\) To recognize these predicaments has several advantages. One of these is the possibility to observe that the markedness of Roman poetry does not derive from its fictionality alone. Another is the opportunity to reflect on the limitations that we impose on ourselves by thinking about literature solely in terms of the poetic. Still another is the chance to approach anew the formal and written features of Latin prose and to develop alternative perspectives on Roman aestheticism.

In her review of *Roman Song*, Michèle Lowrie contests Habinek’s methodological move of including writing under song as a vehicle for performance because it rules out the fact that “the Romans understood writing to provide certain advantages over song.”\(^{43}\) By underscoring that writing is a mechanism for the creation of an aesthetic artefact, Lowrie points out that, as opposed to song, which needs recontextualization, writing along with the category of literature allows for temporal longevity and ritual decontextualization. For Lowrie, in other words, writing helped construct objects aesthetically conceived (i.e., literary texts) that exceeded the moment of the utterance and allowed for the transcending of the speech act beyond its performance occasion and for its splitting off from the sacred at the same time. As a result, literature would have provided “a space in which to think about what song does, its powers, its limits, without always needing to actually engage in it.”\(^{44}\)

Lowrie’s criticism, although inherently sound and insightful, betrays a widespread methodological flaw: the tendency to conflate writing, literature, and poetry. This conflation valorizes Roman poetic texts by imbuing them with an autonomous potency that they did not otherwise possess.

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\(^{43}\) Lowrie 2006.

\(^{44}\) Lowrie 2006. A fuller articulation of this statement can now be found in Lowrie 2009.
regardless of any resistance to or reflection on the limits of song that these texts bear. Accordingly, to focus on the relationship between cultural practices and social hierarchies as I do can appear provocative, even heretical. Yet, I suggest that the study of this relationship reveals that the temporal longevity and the ritual decontextualization attached to poetic writing—as well as the space for reflection that it created—was intellectually powerful but performatively limited.

One of the most telling and well-known reflections on the limits of poetic writing can be found in Horace *Epistles* 1.20. In this poem Horace dramatizes his separation from his book of poetry as if speaking as a master to his manumitted slave. While reproaching the book’s eagerness to cross the threshold into the public eye, he comes to liken the circulation of his poetry to prostitution. In this way, Horace reveals that the publication of a poetically manufactured text is bound up with acts of appropriation performed by a readership that the author cannot fully control. Horace’s abbreviated biography attached at the end of the poem reinforces the message. By claiming that he has been able to win the favor of eminent men despite being the son of a freedman, Horace asserts his social superiority over other non-eminent individuals; at the same time, however, he admits the failure of his poems to promote him to the same social level of his favorite readers and addressees. Accordingly, he makes conspicuous the social constraints that loom large over poetry as a cultural practice and stresses that poetic authorship went hand in hand with a process of dispossession. Underlying this relationship is what I call the ‘scriptic’ nature of poetic texts.

In her article “Reading as a Man: Performance and Gender in Roman Elegy” Mary-Kay Gamel observes that when scripts are performed control is dislocated from the author to the reader/performer, producing a contradiction: “the words spoken by performers both do not belong to them (because written by someone else) and yet do (because they come from their bodies).” By taking stock of Gamel’s observations, we can better comprehend Horace’s quandary. To write poetry opens up the possibility of acquiring authorship; authorship, however, is not always a synonym for authority. In the case of poetry, this is strictly linked to a movable text that is alienated from its producer at the moment of reception. Although Gamel is thinking of public performance, Cato’s representation of Greek literature in his address to his son suggests that the same alienating pro-

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cess could well apply to private readings of texts.\textsuperscript{47} The most conspicuous strategies adopted by poets to secure the most successful reception for their poems and the highest degree of authorial success for themselves were aesthetic artfulness and metrical sophistication. By the same token, the more authorial success the poet achieved, the more his texts were subject to appropriative acts carried out by their readers/performers. As such, when critics disqualify intentionality altogether and construct intertextuality as a matter that lies exclusively in the hands of readers, they evoke the limits of poetic agency and the power of Roman poetry to empower those who appropriated it.\textsuperscript{48}

The case of the \textit{Res Gestae} by Augustus can serve here as a nice contrast. In the paper that she presented at Rutgers, Lowrie confronts the occurrence of \textit{auctoritas} in Augustus’ text and calls attention to the relationship between social agency and cultural representation. Taking as a starting point Benveniste’s definition of \textit{auctoritas} as “a power that brings things into being by its exercise,” Lowrie notes that this power emanates from the individual but is also granted to that individual by his followers. What this means is that “people only confer this sort of power on people with certain qualities (charisma) and the qualities can only find a field of operation once they are recognized.”\textsuperscript{49} Accordingly, she proposes to view \textit{auctoritas} as a performative kind of political power that operates beyond the sphere of law; at the same time, she points out that, because \textit{auctoritas} thrives on being actualized, cultural representation constitutes an active sphere of engagement of \textit{auctoritas} itself.\textsuperscript{50} To drive home her proposition, Lowrie suggests that with the \textit{Res Gestae} we are dealing with a text that had the power of keeping \textit{auctoritas} performatively in play because it was an account of how Augustus had actualized his own. What Lowrie does not fully elaborate in that context is that the \textit{Res Gestae} is a text that could do so because its author was a social agent that enjoyed \textit{auctoritas} in the first place.\textsuperscript{51} This means that the strategies that Augustus adopted to make his \textit{Res Gestae} a direct and enduring manifestation of his \textit{auctoritas} depended on possibilities and limitations that were not at all the same as those experienced by poets.

In keeping with recent trends in the interpretation of Augustus’ inscrip-

\textsuperscript{47} For the modern preoccupation over public performance vs. private reading, see Parker 2009.

\textsuperscript{48} See already Martindale 1993: 3–4.

\textsuperscript{49} Lowrie 2005: 42–43. For a discussion of \textit{auctoritas} with a focus on Augustus, see Galinsky 1996: 15–42.

\textsuperscript{50} Lowrie 2005: 43.

\textsuperscript{51} For further explorations, see Lowrie 2007 and 2009.
tion, one may begin by suggesting that the *Res Gestae* drew its performative power from the architectural contexts in which it was located. In this sense, Augustus would have capitalized on the well-established role granted to monuments in publicizing and preserving the reputation and accomplishments of the commemorated beyond their deaths. Following the existing monumental tradition, he used writing to communicate things that could not be portrayed through visual devices by producing a list of offices held, military and political achievements, the names of temples and buildings sponsored, people conquered, and the like. As Greg Woolf points out, in monumental writing lists serve the purpose of situating the person commemorated by the monument as a whole in a nexus of relationships, human and divine. Interestingly, to set the stage for such conclusions, Woolf turns to Horace *Odes* 3.30: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* (“I have built a monument more lasting than bronze”) and comments:

monuments, the *Ode* implies, if they lasted long enough and were prominent enough, would preserve the fame of the commemorated, acting like mnemonics to trigger memories and perhaps speech. Once evoked, the deeds and qualities of the monumentalized, would be rehearsed, whether orally or in silence, and admired, and he or she would not “perish utterly.”

While Woolf uses Horace’s poem to illustrate the mnemonic qualities attached to monuments, I would like to emphasize what the poem suggests about the power of poetic writing vis-à-vis monumental writing. In light of Horace’s reflections on poetic authorship in *Epistles* 1.20, *Odes* 3.30 reveals that a poetic text can be said to be monumental only to the extent that it triggers the memory of its author’s poetic skills and his success in having eminent men authorize his poetic creations. But Horace’s perspective sheds light also on another, hardly acknowledged, aspect of monuments.

On the one hand, by forcefully trumpeting that his poetry is a *monumentum* Horace is seeking a long-lasting public visibility; on the other, he

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53. For anxieties about the corruptibility of monuments, see Fowler 2000: 193–217.
55. Woolf 1996: 25
56. Hardie (2007) has recently discussed Horace’s use of Ennius as a mirror for trumpeting his poetic innovations and reflecting on his dependency on social superiors. Not surprisingly, Hardie finds *Epistles* 1.20 and *Odes* 3.30 teeming with Ennian allusions.
implicitly longs to avoid what he fears in *Epistles* 1.20, namely, that his poems may end up in the wrong hands. In this respect, what monuments allow that poetry does not is to obtain the highest degree of publication and the least degree of indiscriminate appropriations. This is because the insertion of writing into an architectural structure renders the text not only conspicuous but also unmovable. Moreover, even though monumental writing presupposes a wide readership, only individuals enjoying a certain degree of *auctoritas* themselves were in the position of reenacting the exploits listed in the text. That is, they would have used the accomplishments reported on the inscription as standards against which they could construct, measure, and expand their own *auctoritas*.

Augustus’ *Res Gestae* can be described as a signal example of monumental writing which manifests its distance from poetry by pointing to writing practices performed by socially authoritative individuals and texts that had the power to sublate deeds and actions from the author’s quotidian existence in such a way as to produce the perception that those actions were privileged in their scope and repercussions. Moreover, the *Res Gestae* helps us conceive how a text accrued social value when it excluded indiscriminate appropriations and allowed its socially authoritative author to enter the competitive arena of the Roman upper-class. And, if the study of Roman poetry has taught us something about the importance of form, the style of Augustus’ *Res Gestae* exemplifies that Latin prose was not artless or natural; on the contrary, it deployed formalities that were perceived as a practical manifestation of *auctoritas*. For this reason, any serious work on Latin prose requires us to readjust the current notions of literature and song, and to consider the formation of Latin prose vis-à-vis its poetic counterpart.

If we understand literature solely as aesthetic writing, and if by aesthetic we mean only poetic, then the exclusion of Latin prose from the category of literature is inevitable. Likewise, if writing constitutes one of the ways in which speech is ritualized and turned into song, but only when it is used to produce a script for a performance to come, then a great number of prosaic texts will find no place in Habinek’s classificatory system either. Such exclusionary conceptions of literature and song fail to account for the formal features of Latin prose and the social interpretation of the activities (including writing) that went into the construction of prose texts. I contend that prose texts, like poems, were written objects that required a great deal of formal elaboration on the part of their authors. The same can be said about the nature of prose as song. Prose was marked speech by virtue of its association with socially authoritative individuals.
engaged in actions construed as extraordinary and, therefore, ritualized. Its textualization should thus be viewed as an equally extraordinary event and, once again, ritualized. What is difficult about Latin prose is that its formalities cannot be reduced to univocal and measurable schemes as these are based on the replication and invocation of speech patterns and behavioral templates associated with most diverse song types. Moreover, these replications and invocations were not affected by the same rules of social engagement and textual embodiment that loomed over poetry. In this sense, my study illustrates that the beginnings of Latin prose are interlaced with Cato’s mastery and subordination of a wide range of cultural and social traditions in ways that did not limit but rather empowered a subjectivity that was, from the start, relatively more empowered than that of the poets. With this in mind, let me return briefly to Habinek’s treatment of prose.

As I mentioned above, Habinek describes prose as emerging from the loosening of the bonds of song and the progressive limitation of the marked elements that characterize song. Habinek qualifies this description by way of pinpointing the entangled relation between the production of song and the order of the universe that Manilius unfolds in his work. Commenting on *Astronomica* 1.22–24, Habinek calls attention to use of *verba soluta* to mean words of prose. In relation to the order of the universe, Manilius understands them as “loosened from their own proper patterns”; in turn, he represents these patterns as those that connect words to the order of the cosmos, elaborating an interrelation that is as old as Roman song itself.\(^{57}\) I would note, however, that Manilius’ definition of prose rests upon two parallel ploys: the downgrading of prose to quotidian speech and the rounding up, if not equation, of poetry to song. In other words, Manilius disconnects metrical patterns from bodily constraints and augments their lesser social value by investing them with cosmological performativity. Yet, as Habinek notes, Manilius operated by “the dispensation of Caesar.”\(^{58}\) Consequently, measured against an “un-dispensed” notion of poetry, the phrase *verba soluta* stands for words that are unconstrained by the social and formal bonds of poetry and yet are tied to socially and formally ritualized practices. Paradoxically, one of Manilius’ strongest claims, that the universe itself “desires to disclose the heavenly census through (his) songs” (*cupit aetherios per carmina pandere census*, 1.12), brings into view the instrumentality of poetry vis-à-vis the ritualized

\(^{57}\) Habinek 2005a: 92.

\(^{58}\) Habinek 2005a: 93.
terrain from which Latin prose sprouted and grew: his songs expose but do not affect the pecking order of the cosmos. As Manilius knew well, censorial practices were grounded in speech and writing practices, which, carried out by authoritative individuals (like Augustus), fell outside the poetic sphere. By observing prose from outside the narrow confines of the poetic, my study contributes to the reciprocal expansion and integration of literature and song as hermeneutical tools in at least two ways.

First, Habinek’s distancing from the long-standing correlation of the term *carmen* with a primitive and unitary system of verbal ritualization calls attention to the urgency of rethinking Roman pre-poetic and non-poetic practices. Already in the late nineteen-sixties Bruno Luiselli noted that the surviving corpus of non-poetic and pre-poetic *carmina* is characterized by diverse types of linguistic formalization. Indeed, he distinguished between two registers of formalized speech according to their sphere of use. For Luiselli, the legal *carmina* appear to be less formalized and can be defined as “humble”; the religious *carmina*, on the other hand, are more formalized and, therefore, express a more “elevated” register. In the same study, Luiselli also pinpointed a stylistic evolution within each register and argued for the secondary relation of legal *carmina* to those falling within the area of the sacred, finding external corroboration in the Tabulae Iguvinae.

Although one can contest that Luiselli’s analysis suffers from a hierarchical and evolutionistic pattern typical of the Italian tradition, his study indicates that when looking onwards from an earlier period the term *carmen* relates to specific, albeit varied, strategies of speech formalization. Juxtaposing longer and shorter compositional segments, manipulating figures of sound, and stringing together two or three words are strategies that find no match in the Hellenistic tradition. Moreover, they characterize speech acts performed alongside and together with embodied activities that had the power of affecting reality in ways that poetry did not achieve on its own and that Habinek leaves unexplored. To be sure, the ‘aura’ that these strategies retained and accumulated over time and in spite of sociopolitical changes confirms that what is generically called ‘carmen-style’ was perceived as a vital way of connecting the polity and its people to the cosmic whole that sustained them as well as an empowering ploy for objectifying reality for cognitive endorsement by all. In this sense,

the fact that *carmen*-style was used outside the sphere of legitimate power (that is, magic largely speaking) and that this outside sphere was tightly policed constitute a signal expression of the performative potency that it was believed to possess.\footnote{On this specific point, see most recently Meyer 2004: 103–7. In his recent thesis, Maxime Pierre (2008) argues that *carmen* is an utterance that carries its authority within itself, i.e., it has an authority that is not derived from the social authority of its author. I owe this reference to one of the readers for The Ohio State University Press; however, I have not been able to consult it myself. The first sign of policing the *carmen* is to be found in the so-called Twelve Tables (7.3).} Accordingly, the traces of *carmen*-style that we read in Cato’s prose texts are better interpreted as the most visible (for us) signs of his achievement of *auctoritas* and his ability to uphold it. The practitioners of poetry would indeed mimic or parody this way of speaking and acting; however, the sociocultural value accorded to their mimetic acts was undercut by their lesser standing and by their exclusions from the most significant contexts of social performance. These included, among others, the speakers’ platform in the forum, the Senate house, and the law courts.

Second, my analysis of early Latin prose in this book reveals that prose emerged out of a multiform process of expansion that stretched and extended the confines not simply of ritualized speech, but ritualized practices as well. By building on Lowrie, I suggest that thanks to its scriptic nature poetry offered new sociocultural possibilities by divorcing the speech act from its author and its original occasion. At the same time, however, I propose that the redeployment of the *carmen*-style outside the sphere of ritual by individuals enjoying *auctoritas* indicates an expansion and redeployment of social prerogatives and corresponding activities. As Elizabeth Meyer has recently demonstrated, one of these activities involved the production of *tabulae*. Embedded in actions undertaken on behalf of the legitimate and desired sociocosmological order, *tabulae* presented compositions bearing *carmen*-like features and constituted the final embodiments of the new reality that they helped create.\footnote{Meyer 2004.} To retain their performative power, the uses of the *carmen*-style and the modes of textual production attached to them were guarded at all times. Nevertheless, the continuous creation of in-group hierarchies within the upper crust of Roman society required agents to invent ever new ways to make their speech acts special and their activities extraordinary. Prose, I argue, was both a consequence and an expression of these dynamics; but to compre-
In factual terms, it means that the closer a piece of prose resembles daily speech, the more one should be on the lookout for the alternative ploys of differentiation that are at work; the more prose formally reproduces socially lesser types of song, the more one needs to consider the hierarchies expressed by such mimetic appropriations; the more the modalities of prose text production are assimilated to poetic writing, the more we need to be wary of intra-elite relations and the stakes that such a ploy encodes.

Through a close analysis of the texts attributed to Cato the Censor, I tackle their link to preexisting authority-loaded practices and the then emerging tradition of poetry; at the same time, I investigate the sociohistorical contingencies that triggered the emergence of prose and shaped its impact. For a start, I delineate how Cato expanded linguistic and practical schemes associated with performances that took place in contexts permitting the sole participation of social agents engaged in the ruling, organization, and management of the community. Therefore, I pinpoint how he both displayed and augmented his achievement of *auctoritas* by using his ritual mastery and by stretching the spatial and temporal boundaries of the ritualized activities that sustained the construction of his own *auctoritas*. Second, I describe how Cato disavowed the encroaching presence of poets and other alien cultural agents in the life of the Roman ruling class and yet took hold of cultural forms introduced by them in such a way as to propose cultural mastery over alien and socially lesser cultural traditions as an added expression of *auctoritas*. A corollary to this twofold ploy was Cato’s redeployment of writing from censorial, legislative, and pontifical activities. Although everyone acknowledges that the Romans had long engaged in these writing practices, their impact on our understanding of the Roman literary phenomenon and the generic distinction between poetry and prose is often overlooked by those who, in the last two decades, have engaged in the debate over the so-called “invention of Latin literature.”

**“The Invention of Latin Literature”**

*Orthodoxies, Debates, and Models*

To a certain extent, the discussion about the emergence of a literature in Latin that is going on in the Anglo-(North) American scene of classics finds its starting point in Nevio Zorzetti’s publication of two articles in the early nineteen-nineties. In these articles, Zorzetti discussed the
scholarly debate of the previous one hundred years and encouraged a renewed look at the *carmina convivalia* evoked by Cato the Censor and a few later authors. On the basis of these evocations, Zorzetti argued that B. G. Niebuhr was wrong to think that they had anything to do with epic lays or ballads belonging to a popular tradition; rather, they were linked to a musical culture supported by clusters of aristocrats joined together in *sodalitates*. By comparing them to the Greek *hetaireiai* (aristocratic drinking clubs), he suggested that the *sodalitates* elaborated an exclusive lore of exemplary memories and a didactic system expressed in musical forms and enacted during their convivial gatherings. In this sense, the scraps of *sententiae* and *praebecta* that are often associated with the figure of the *vates* and that come to us either anonymously or attached to specific names or proverbialized in popular tradition are a manifestation of the system of *sapientia* articulated in those exclusive contexts. Moreover, Zorzetti pointed to a cultural evolution coinciding with the formation of the *nobilitas*, the new political class that emerged after the so-called Struggle of the Orders in the fourth century B.C.E. The valorization of individual achievements in the service of the *res publica* and the increasing importance of public recognition reshaped the cultural practices previously linked to the *sodalitates* and their *convivia*. The cultural forms that until then had exclusively been produced, circulated, and transmitted within convivial settings by *sodalitates*, were now diverted to the public space of the *urbs*.

Zorzetti described this shift in this way:

> public life absorbed a remarkable number of elements which had previously existed within the closed traditions of *sodalitates*, and were not displayed in the public sphere. The heroes, cults, and values of the *gentes* became the property of the State and of the people. . . . Roman oral traditions then experienced their homeostatic adjustment, in the selection and superimposition of earlier memories . . . and also in their enrichment through the competition between the *nobiles* to contribute each from his own traditions to the image of the city.

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65. For a discussion of this term and a view on the historical and ideological formation of the so-called *nobilitas*, see Hölkeskamp 2004: 11–48.
Zorzetti named this phenomenon “theatralization” and argued that the invention of the curule aedileship, the organization of the *Ludi Romani* in 366 B.C.E., and the *ludi scaenici* in 364 B.C.E. are indicative of the civic appropriation of cultural resources belonging to the *gentes* and their *sodalitates*. Moreover, he proposed that at that time the members of the ruling group or possibly their *iuvenes* became involved in the rituals themselves. In other words, Zorzetti maintained that even in the new political configuration, the *sodalitates* upheld their social distinction through rights of cultural production, performance, and preservation. Social distinction was guaranteed because the ruling class organized these public festivals and co-opted the performers from its ranks; in turn, the festivals conspicuously alluded to the exclusive possession of resources that made individual contributions and the performance of rituals possible in the first place. In other words, the “spectacles” demonstrated that each performer belonged to the privileged class by making visible to the whole *urbs* that he had access to the exclusive lore, the *sapientia*, that sustained the community. In a way, the *nobilitas* generated and enacted a collective representation, an “imagined community” (the *res publica populi romani*) that they shared with the *populus* as viewer. The *populus*, on the other hand, watched its rulers performing the lore of the city and, by virtue of their watching, legitimated its rulers’ assertions of authority and power. Finally, Zorzetti concluded that after “theatralization,” the more sophisticated Hellenistic music, represented by the early Latin poets, replaced traditional music so that the decline of the previous aristocratic lyric culture intersected with the beginning of “the age of the Hellenistic professionals.”

In his 1998 *The Politics of Latin Literature* Habinek built upon Zorzetti by proposing that the emergence of Latin literature in the second half of the third and first half of the second centuries B.C.E. should be conceived as a cultural revolution aimed at redressing the “identity crisis” that troubled the ruling aristocracy at the time. Confronted by the numerous challenges to its authority generated by Rome’s transformation from a city-state to an imperial capital, the ruling aristocracy supported a cultural shift, which

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67. For the *Ludi Romani*, see Dion. Hal. 7.70–73, and for the description of the *pompa circensis*, see Fabius Pictor, fr.16 P2. For the *origines scaenicae* as presented by Livy 7.2.8–13 and Livy 6.42, see Zorzetti [1984] 1990: 295–98.

68. For the participation of young aristocrats, besides Livy 7.2, see also Dion. Hal. 7.71 at least for the performance of the *Sali* and Valerius Maximus 1.1.9.

69. For the concept of ‘imagined communities,’ see the classic treatment of Anderson 1991.


Habinek calls “a revolution in the sociology of literary production” and defines it in the following way:

Three developments define this revolution: reliance on writing, professionalization of performance, and importation of performers. Whereas archaic literary culture seems to have been characterized by performances that were not necessarily transmitted in writing, the new culture was intimately connected with the preservation, importation, and circulation of texts.\(^{72}\)

This new culture benefited the ruling aristocracy in two complementary ways: by codifying an exclusively aristocratic tradition and by valorizing this tradition against other sources of authority. But although literature eventually helped resolve the aristocracy’s malady, at least initially it clashed against and competed with pre-existing forms of acculturation. These were oral in nature and hinged on the aristocratic and musical tradition envisioned by Zorzetti.\(^ {73}\)

In his 2005 review article of the *Handbuch der Lateinischen Literatur der Antike. Erster Band: Die Archaische Literatur* published in 2002 and edited by Werner Saurbaum, Denis Feeney identifies Zorzetti and Habinek as the promoters of a paradigm change and the founders of a ‘new orthodoxy.’\(^ {74}\) For Feeney, the German handbook participates in it by drawing on the same alluring but faulty analogy between archaic Greece and Rome, and prospers from a model of development from oral to literate imported from Greek studies. Feeney interprets this paradigm shift as a return to a nineteenth-century style of scholarship that, by deferentially mimicking Hellenism, has as its goal the recovery of “the same spontaneity and authenticity wistfully imagined in Greek culture.”\(^ {75}\) Consequently, he sweeps the issue of the *carmina convivalia* aside and capitalizes on the works of Hellfried Dahlmann and Nicholas Horsfall in order to offer the following methodological prospect: later authors, being in a position of ignorance similar to ours, constructed what was ‘before literature’ either by analogizing or by calquing Greek accounts.\(^ {76}\) Thus, Feeney observes that even if the search for an original Roman culture may not be its driving principle, the ‘new orthodoxy’ does not do anything more or less than embrace an interpretative model that was in place already in antiquity.

\(^ {72}\) Habinek 1998a: 36–37.
\(^ {73}\) Habinek 1998a: 34–68.
\(^ {74}\) See also Gildenhard 2003b.
\(^ {75}\) Feeney 2005: 233–35.
Moving towards the *pars construens* of his review, Feeney calls attention to and elaborates on the pitfalls that derive from stressing the continuity between the pre-literary and the literary periods and from disregarding Rome’s Italian connections. To claim historical continuity obscures the fact that “no society in the ancient world other than the Romans took over the prototypical forms of the institution of Greek literature as the basis for a corresponding institution in their own vernacular.” Lack of historical contextualization, on the other hand, suppresses the fact that Rome had been running an empire for at least a generation ‘before literature’ and that in mid-Italy Greek culture had long enjoyed a high prestige. Accordingly, he proposes an alternative definition of originality and points to a number of phenomena, which—he correctly warns—can be easily simplified or homogenized. To drive his point home, Feeney underscores the Romans’ oscillating relationship with Greek culture as representative of ‘otherness’ and invokes Emma Dench’s work to comment upon the way in which they could take up or put down the Greek role to distinguish themselves from the other Italians or to culturally promote themselves in relation to the Greeks. For Feeney, the initial lack of participation in the new literature by the Roman governing class is a signal expression of mirroring/distancing dynamics similar to those deployed by Taussig in his work on the Cuna Indians. Moreover, Feeney looks back to his 1998 book *Literature and Religion at Rome* and spends a few words on the poets themselves; they were the multilingual *semigreci* who, by coming from Greek, Oscan, Messapian, and Umbrian towns, in fact created Latin literature. Borrowing Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of ‘contact zone,’ Feeney remarks that these poets explored the interstices between the competing cultures of central and southern Italy. He concludes by describing the poets as ‘cultural brokers’ who, by moving outwards from Greek culture, acted at its margins as mediating agents at a time of heightened cultural exchange.

The overall tone of Feeney’s criticism is symptomatic of how, in this debate, rifts and splits come to be created: each new contribution grows stronger by targeting others and by deconstructing their methodological weaknesses. To a certain extent, the pattern is very much in line with an existing trend that, as Barchiesi points out, responds to the pressures put

78. Feeney 2005: 231, 238.
79. Feeney 2005: 239.
82. Feeney 2005: 239, deriving the phrase “cultural brokers” from Woolf 1998.
on professional academics since the late nineteen-seventies to discover something new. Because in the field of classics, the chances of finding fresh material are undoubtedly slim, the solution has been a compromise: to oppose and innovate upon the approaches and ideas of the previous generation. In the field of Roman studies, where we witness even among younger classicists a strong interest in finding new ways to interconnect historicisms and formalisms, those who dare to participate in the debate over the beginnings of Latin literature need to deal with some added complications. In this respect, Feeney’s intervention makes clear that the formation of intra-debate ‘orthodoxies’ has much to do with establishing the value of two sets of evidence, that is, what does not find an explicit expression in the literary archive and what falls outside the poetic. As for the first set of evidence, Feeney is at his best when, in unravelling the fallacies that go along with using Greek *comparanda*, he reconsiders the literary and linguistic work achieved by the earlier poets in the backdrop of Rome’s Italian connections. As for the second, his renewed allegiance to ‘literature’ as a fully suitable hermeneutical tool and his narrow focus on poetry displaces the pathbreaking work of Erich Gruen and Sander Goldberg in the early nineteen-nineties and the areas of investigation that Habinek’s *The Politics of Latin Literature* has opened up in the last ten years or so.

Differing somewhat in their approach to the sources (sociohistorical and literary, respectively), Gruen and Goldberg used the works of the early poets to make a case for the uncontested emergence of Roman culture in the Hellenistic world as an offshoot of military successes. Rather than being careless of Greek cultural achievements, Gruen maintained that the Romans exploited Greek culture as a means of enriching their own cultural heritage and as a foil for articulating a specifically Roman “national identity.” In doing so, Gruen was able to counter the notion that the early poets served the needs of individual households or political factions and to argue that there were never philhellenic and antihellenic parties or movements in the first place. By expanding on Gruen’s contribution, Goldberg focused on epic and qualified the partnership between poets and the elite as one resting on the same communal intents and intellectual endeavors: “Roman aristocrats provided the subject and much of the audience of early poetry. The poets’ claim to strength lay not just in recounting their achievements

83. A. Barchiesi 2005: 137.
84. For a sign of this interest, see “Historicisms and Formalisms,” a Graduate Student Conference held on April 25, 2008 and organized by the Princeton Graduate Students. Website: http://www.princeton.edu/~classics/conferences/2008/histform.
but in creating a context that declared and confirmed their significance.\textsuperscript{86}

The greatest merit of Gruen’s work was to reevaluate Cato the Censor’s ambivalence towards the Greeks and their culture. Goldberg added to it by calling attention to the aesthetic qualities of early Roman epic in a field that at the time was dominated by the study of Augustan poetry. What seems to have been forgotten in the last decade or so is that the picture drawn by Gruen and Goldberg levels out the fraught accounts that we have about the activities of individual poets (Naevius, in particular) and the expressions of resistance voiced by Cato the Censor through the invocation of ancestral convivial practices. For Gruen, Cato invoked these practices to oppose Hellenistic poses which, adopted by some members of the elite, did not match the Roman character and were opposed to the construction of a specifically Roman identity.\textsuperscript{87} Goldberg, on the other hand, rejected their historicity together with Niebhur’s hypothesis and Macaulay’s elaboration of ‘bardic ballads’ and moved his attention to the Ciceronian context in which Cato’s evocation is couched.\textsuperscript{88}

Although sharing with Gruen and Goldberg the notion that language and literature are concerned with constituting national identity, Habinek gave further attention to the intimate relationship of literature with the Roman elite by emphasizing their acculturating work.\textsuperscript{89} His attention to semantic details in specific textual contexts helped him show that the professionalization of culture, the creation of a literary dialect, the invention of a moral and cultural tradition, and the expropriation of Greek symbolic capital were not uncontested after all.\textsuperscript{90} Moreover, he located the primal scene of Latin literature outside the poetic and argued that the process of evaluation that it claimed as its main feature is instantiated in the Preface to Cato’s \textit{De Agricultura}. For Habinek, Cato lifted the etymological association of \textit{existimo} “I appraise” from the semantic area of economic calculation and constructed for it the metaphorical meaning of “I judge, determine” in the new area of literature in such a way as to replace \textit{laudo} “I praise,” a verb squarely connected with pre-literary convivial practices. In so doing, Cato manifested the tensions produced by a deep cultural anxiety over the ambiguity of value. At the same time, he established a disparity between aristocratic evaluation and mercantile practices attached to other social groups.\textsuperscript{91}

\begin{itemize}
\item 88. Goldberg 1995: 46.
\item 89. For Habinek’s understanding of language, literature, and national identity see, Habinek 1998a: 44–45.
\item 91. Habinek 1998a: 46–50.
\end{itemize}
The greatest and least remarked merit of Habinek’s argument was to point to prose as a neglected area of inquiry. Indeed, by repositioning a largely misapprehended text like the *De Agricultura*, he called attention to the emergence of prose as something more than an epiphenomenon of poetry or, worse, as a somewhat infelicitous literary experiment. In turn, he raised the value of early Latin prose as a cultural form worthy of study in its own right and revealed that when its earliest attestations come into the picture the literary phenomenon assumes very different contours; as a result, the ability to interpret this phenomenon becomes tantamount to the willingness to push further the terms of the discussion and step outside familiar ground.

Looking at Early Latin Poetry through Cato’s Prose

As I mentioned above, the unsuitability of Greek precedents as methodological *comparanda* has been remarked upon in various ways in relation to both the question of the *carmina convivalia* and the shift from oral to literate to which it has been applied. What has not been said is that the same holds true for many aspects of the Roman cultural tradition and for reasons that have less to do with its constant engagement with Hellenism than with the methodological predicaments that this engagement produces. Put in extreme terms, any Greek pattern or motif that we find in the Latin literary materials is the product of a cultural and linguistic reprocessing that makes better sense if we take into account the sociocultural hierarchies of legitimation that loomed over the choices available to their authors at the time of their production. This is not to say that Greek literary practices had no capacity to offer alternative or even contrasting spaces for reflecting on the world at any given time or that they have no explanatory value for understanding these materials. To be more precise, it means looking beyond and around the poetic in an attempt to identify and assess more accurately the complicated dynamics of mirroring and distancing that, as Feeney points out, structure both the early formation and the history of Latin literature.

Enlarging our purview on late-third- and early-second centuries B.C.E. Rome need not involve forging an originary Latin matrix or proposing a de-Hellenized account of Rome’s cultural history. Rather, it helps address the perplexity that arises when we encounter textual materials bearing fea-

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92. See Astin 1978: 198 and more recently Dalby (1998: 22), who defines Cato’s *De Agricultura* as an “irritating handbook.”
tures that do not easily fit Greek precedents and that encompass a polemi-
cal resistance to the near contemporary emergence of Hellenized cultural
forms in Latin. Methodologically, to approach these materials without
the support of Greek models is rather uncomfortable, mostly because
the textual tradition of (say) the *Odyssey* or the Greek lyrics, however
discontinuous, legitimates an untroubled conceptualization of their poetic
counterparts in Rome.\(^93\) Granted that, it is clear that when the varied nature
of Roman cultural forms is interrogated from outside the comfort zone
of the Hellenistic frameworks, to define the specificity of Latin literature
becomes a thorny business and to locate its beginnings an elusive task.

As a longstanding participant in the discussion, Goldberg takes up the
latter challenge in his *Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic:
Poetry and Its Reception*. By focusing on poetry alone, Goldberg proposes
that ‘literature’ did not exist at Rome before a sufficiently large and criti-
cally sophisticated reading public emerged, and until the available texts
had been collected, commented upon, and canonized. For Goldberg, this
process culminated with figures like Cicero and Varro, but was initiated
and carried forth by rhetoricians and teachers who showed aristocratic
readers how to appreciate and use them for their own purposes. Thus, he
argues throughout that “when Cicero refers to *litterae*, he often means ‘lit-
erature’ in something very much like the modern sense of texts marked by
a certain social status, where literary denotes not simply an inherent aes-
thetic value but a value accorded them and the work they do by the society
that receives them.”\(^94\) Contributing to a renewed discussion about the per-
formance dimension of Roman comedy, Goldberg pays special attention
to the transformation of dramatic texts from mere scripts for performance
to literary (i.e., organized and canonized) materials meant to be consumed
by a reading public.\(^95\) In the process, he adds to the discussion concerning
the *carmina convivalia* and Roman epic.

First of all, Goldberg contends that the archaeological remains can-
not help us come to terms with the historicity of the *carmina convivalia*
evoked (but never heard) by Cato, nor do they allow us to prove that the
erly Romans had anything like a ‘symptotic culture’ from which liter-
ary epic developed. Second, by sifting through the argumentative layers
that make up Cicero’s testimony, he emphasizes that Cicero is the one
responsible for making the *carmina convivalia* invoked by Cato in the

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93. In this respect, the response to Habinek’s *Roman Song* written by Feeney and Katz


95. For a thorough reassessment of the textual nature of comic scripts, see Marshall 2006.
Origines the progenitors of epic. Finally, Goldberg reads a fragment from the *carmen de moribus* (preserved in Gellius 11.2.5) where Cato conjures up ancestral judgments to form an attack on poetic encroachments on banquets alongside Polybius’ moralizing passage about the extravagance that the young Scipio Aemilianus avoided (Polyb. 31.25.5). Through their juxtaposition, he proposes that the *convivia* that both Cato and Polybius so strongly criticized could not have been the sites for the performance of epic, either before or after the late third century B.C.E., as Jörg Rüpke has it.\(^96\) Accordingly, he concludes that in the early second century B.C.E. poetry was receiving respect and that Livius Andronicus, Naevius, and Ennius provided a model for the later construction of Latin literature thanks to “their inherent merits and the consciousness of their achievement.”\(^97\)

Goldberg’s intervention complicates the applicability of the category ‘literature’ to late-third- and early-second-century B.C.E. cultural practices.\(^98\) At the same time, it denies validity to the archaeological record for gauging the historicity of Cato’s *carmina convivalia* and their relationship with literary epic. Methodologically, Goldberg’s interpretative project carries some important assumptions. Foremost among them is the idea that ‘literature’ comes to exist and becomes socially relevant only when texts undergo a certain type of reading and are accorded a certain type of value. Such an assumption remains a viable and worthy point of departure for a historicizing inquiry into an attitude towards texts that is relevant to us classicists; however, it is unsatisfactory when references to other cultural forms are rejected because they are not germane to our historicizing projects. While it is true that we will never be in the position to construct exact narratives about the content and form of early Roman convivial songs, it is nevertheless hard to deny the testimonial value that the archaeological remains hold. Although nowhere proving the historicity of Cato’s evocations (in fact, this is their least important aspect), they do bear witness to a long existing, even if varied, relationship between aristocratic status and exclusive banqueting.\(^99\) In this respect, the archaeological data help us see that archaic Rome was part of a cultural *koinè* that, by including Etruria and Latium, was founded on the gentilician organization of society. In this society the *convivium* was constituted as something distinguished

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99. See Zaccaria-Ruggiu (2003) for a thorough discussion of the material evidence also in relation to the spaces allocated to the *convivium* within the house. For a more general discussion, see Habinek 2005a: 40–43.
from everyday eating and drinking through the strategic and ever changing combination of actions, songs, and objects. By these same means, the *convivium* concretized the prerogatives and responsibilities of a peer group composed of heads of *gentes* by entitling it to a disproportionate share of the community’s resources.\(^\text{100}\) The visual representations of *convivia* found in the so-called Second Regia at Murlo (590–580 B.C.E.) and the terracottas known as the type Roma-Veio-Velletri (530–525 B.C.E.) give substance to the centrality of convivial practices by featuring not only food and drinking but also performances of songs and players of musical instruments. Moreover, these scenes are part of complex cycles and occupy a position as relevant as depictions of races, weddings, assemblies of seated individuals, and arrayed armed men. As such, these materials testify both to the enduring centrality that the *convivium* enjoyed in central Italy for the definition of the aristocracy and the paradigmatic role that the practices of this aristocracy played in the structuring of social relations.\(^\text{101}\) In light of these precedents, the fact that poetry figures in the early second century B.C.E. debate over conspicuous consumption and in connection with convivial practices is not at all surprising. Indeed, it suggests that in some elite quarters poetry was perceived as a practice that upset intra-elite relations and created in-group disproportions that affected the rest of society. This perception prompts a more nuanced understanding of Cato’s invocation of ancestral banqueting and makes evident that the tendency to polarize the discussion in terms of oral versus literary does not do justice to ancient preoccupations. The notion of ‘scenario’ developed by Diana Taylor offers in this respect a practical way out for returning to the ancient materials with a less restrictive attitude.

For Taylor a ‘scenario’ is an embodied repertoire of cultural imaginings or schemes that are associated with physical locations. Formulaic and portable in nature, the schemes that make up a scenario have the power of structuring environments, behaviors, and practices; as such, they can also engender most diverse cultural expressions (poems, narratives, performances, films, and so on). These schemes remain powerful at each reactivation and remain so irrespective of whether or not they are ‘mediatized’ through objects, bodies, or texts. Furthermore, each reactivation of a

\(^{100}\) Habinek 2005a: 43. For a most recent reassessment of the *gentes*, see Smith 2006; for the role played by the *gentes* in the formation of city-states and their endurance throughout Rome’s history, see Terrenato 1998; 2000; 2001; 2006; 2007.

scenario presents different combinations of formulaic elements while the manipulations that occur from one reactivation to another make visible or invisible societal anxieties as well as individual accommodations. Thus, Taylor explains:

The discoverer, conqueror, ‘savage,’ and native princess, for example, might be staple characters in many Western scenarios. Sometimes they are written down as scripts, but the scenario predates the script and allows for many possible “endings.” Sometimes, people may actually undertake adventures to live the glorious fantasy of possession. Others may tune in regularly to television shows along the lines of Survivor or Fantasy Island. The scenario structures our understanding . . . [the] framework allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others. In the Fantasy Island scenario, for example, we might be encouraged to overlook the displacement and disappearance of native peoples, gender exploitation, environmental impact, and so on.102

Borrowing from Taylor, I understand Cato’s invocation of ancestral convivial practices as the activation of a commanding scenario. Featuring a peer group composed of elite males, this scenario envisions them reclining at a banquet and performing in turn, without the mediation of texts and with outsiders excluded. By using this scenario as a benchmark, I follow the trajectory followed by poets and poetry from the volatile spaces of drama to more exclusive sites of social interaction. Viewed through the lenses of the convivial scenario, the linguistic and metrical recodification pursued by the poets, their intertextual allusions, and their strategies of self-presentation emerge as embodied ploys mediated by texts and deeply implicated in histories of geographical displacement and social affirmation. While it has been argued that, because of its fictional nature, poetry eschews any identification of the persona with the author, I propose that fictionality constituted one of the ways in which the poets could stretch the boundaries that limited their social agency.103 In this sense, the convivial scenario invoked by Cato helps us analyze individual positionings in relation and in contrast to one another and in such a way as to remain sensitive

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102. Taylor 2003: 28. Because Taylor does not state it explicitly, I find it important to stress that the last twenty years have witnessed an increasing interest in precisely the nature and workings of ‘embodied schemes.’ See especially Bourdieu 1990; M. Johnson 1990; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Lakoff 2008.
to the authoritarian nature of Roman social hierarchies at a specific time. This is because the use of scenario as a methodological tool allows us to keep an eye on the critical distance that stands between the social actor and the cultural representations that he produces or the social actor and the patterns of behaviors attached to his standing in relation and in contrast to the ways other social agents handled the same distances. Clearly, every reconstruction of an overall picture joining together heterogeneous handlings of formalized languages and embodied schemes, and the parallel mapping of how these handlings intersected with the fluidity of Roman social relations remains just that, a reconstruction. Even so, through this reconstruction we will have identified a network of positions that relate to one another and capture the varied correlation between social subjectivity and cultural agency.

In chapter 2 I reconsider the formation of the Roman poetic tradition. By stressing that poetry was a practice linked to individuals relocated just like the texts that they translated, I suggest that the rhythmical, generic, and linguistic recodification that the poets performed bears the signs of their ‘migratory subjectivity.’ In the mid-nineteen-nineties Carol Boyce Davies coined this notion to describe black women’s writings and to emphasize how moving across geographical and cultural boundaries can be itself an empowering and liberatory process. By using this phrase, I aim to move away from discourses of cultural inferiority and superiority, center and periphery, to focus on the construction of poetic agency in relation to geographical and linguistic displacements as well as local negotiations and relocations across social divides. To sustain my argument, I concentrate on Plautine metatheatricality and the fictional character of the clever slave. Ultimately, I suggest that they both constituted mimetic spaces for reflecting on diverse social subjectivities and cultural agencies vis-à-vis the hegemonic and expansionistic drive of the Roman ruling class. A close look into the virtuoso and scriptic dimensions of Livius Andronicus’ translation of Homer’s Odyssey concludes the chapter and serves to lay the foundations for a renewed approach to epic.

In chapter 3 I turn to the epics of Naevius and Ennius. The concern with authorship that these poems communicate calls for a more detailed

104. As McCarthy (2000: 18–19) nicely puts it, “Roman society is fractured by division within divisions within divisions, each one marking out difference as well as marking out a hierarchical relation. These mutually complicating divisions include gender, juridical status, census, rank, geographical provenance, wealth, and cultural/intellectual achievement. Furthermore, each of these bases of assigning value . . . establishes a finely calibrated scale on which each person is placed above some and below others.”

inquiry into the relationship between authorship and authority. One of my arguments is that, from the poets’ perspective, epic was appealing not only because it boasted an enduring tradition in the Greek world but also because it envisioned solo performances and scenarios in which the figure of the poet is endowed with the faculty of deploying elite memories. Accordingly, I propose that the reprocessing of Greek epic allowed the poets who operated in Rome to negotiate their entrance into more exclusive spheres of social exchange and to manipulate elite desires of self-representation to their own advantage. In this sense, the idea that the early epic poems were born as scripts performed by their authors in social settings envisioning a chosen public takes nothing away from the likelihood that they were also objects of more public or private readings, nor does it jeopardize the value of our own reading practices in any way. After all, Goldberg’s argument about the later construction of Latin literature as a practice centered on the reading and explication of these texts carried out by both authors and rhetoricians confirms that early poetry envisioned performances based on scripts across the board.\textsuperscript{106}

Cato’s ethnicized understanding of \textit{litterae} deserves, in my view, as much attention as Cicero’s for what it reveals about second century B.C.E. More broadly, Cato’s distrust of the Greeks and his citations from Greek literature, his likely sponsorship of Ennius and his opposition to the progressive encroachment of poets on elite life emerge as some of the most visible signs of a larger and complex love affair between rulers and their ‘others’. This love affair involved reciprocal mirroring, making the rulers’ subjection of their ‘others’ problematic and the definition of authority both profound and disturbing. This is because, when mimicry comes into play, authority becomes increasingly dependent on strategic limitations expressed within the authoritative realm that are successful only in the measure that they enable the transformation of mimicked subjects into objects to be possessed.\textsuperscript{107}

The formal analysis of Cato’s prose that I pursue in chapter 4 reveals that as a \textit{homo novus}, Cato compensated for his lack of an aristocratic past by exploiting the \textit{carmen} tradition and by aligning his self-advancement with a series of relationships and oppositions that, by transcending the ordinary, invoked the coherence of the socio-cosmological order and vacated its aristocratic ascendency of familial specificity.\textsuperscript{108} But Cato had also a vested interest in mimetic appropriations of alien and lesser traditions as ploys for

\textsuperscript{106} Based on Suetonius, \textit{gramm.} 1.1.
\textsuperscript{107} See Bhabha 1994: 121–44.
\textsuperscript{108} On this aspect, see Blösel 2000.
constantly expanding his exercise of *auctoritas*. His expertise in handling different strategies of formalization helped Cato construct the self-assertions of his peers as divorced from the past and to represent their increasing reliance on nonelite cultural agents as an indication of failed mastery and, therefore, inability to rule. Viewed in this way, Cato’s prose bears the signs of competing subjectivities even while signaling his practical ability to integrate and hierarchize very diverse cultural materials, practices, and frameworks through complex oppositions and homologies.

To acknowledge the embodied dimension of these dynamics as I do does not mean to give up our philological analyses; rather, it entails approaching written materials without stumbling on the slippery implications of extended analogies based on hyperliterary conceptualizations of textuality and the aesthetic. My analysis of how the formalities that characterize Cato’s prose fold the body into the text illustrates that the ‘aesthetic’ or the ‘literary’ are not intrinsic or superior qualities; rather, they are two strategies among many whose relevance needs to be articulated in culturally and chronologically specific terms. For this reason, any inquiry into early-second-century B.C.E. Roman cultural practices cannot be deemed satisfactory unless the textuality of Cato’s prose is taken fully into account vis-à-vis other types of textuality.

As I mentioned above, in his *Politics of Latin Literature* Habinek locates the primal scene of Latin literature in the Preface to the *De Agricul- tura* where the process of *existimatio* both evokes and replaces ancestral evaluative practices attached to *laudare* and the aristocratic *convivium*. Thus, he explains:

> While *existimare* at an earlier stage of linguistic and cultural development means “to set a price on,” in the concrete sense of assigning a monetary value, it now comes to signify assessment by the vaguer and more easily manipulable standards of goodness (*bonus*), reputability (*honestus*), and largesse (*amplissime*). Cato assigns to the inevitably controversial and ambiguous determination of a man’s worth the simplicity of an economic evaluation. Yet in so doing he seeks also to establish a disparity between aristocratic *existimatio* and the tawdry processes of exchange and evaluation characteristic of other groups in society.

While pointing in the right direction, Habinek’s narrow focus on the economic meaning of *existimare* obscures its relationship with the specific

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textuality of Cato’s prose. Though highly fragmentary, the Preface to the *Origines*, the other foundational work attributed to Cato, amplifies the concept of *existimatio*.\(^{111}\) On the one hand, Cato builds upon his invocation of convivial songs and the exclusivity of the convivial scenario; on the other hand, he likens texts produced by *viri clari* and *magni* to the financial accounts (*rationes*) that male Roman citizens wrote on *tabulae* and presented to the censor. Through this twofold strategy, Cato acted on his attainment of *auctoritas* and extended his privileged experience with the census beyond the confines of the ritualized actions and words that gave substance to its markedeness. During the taking of the census, the *rationes* embodied the ability of male Roman citizens to manage their households and constituted the means by which these men were accorded responsibilities and privileges.\(^{112}\) In the *Origines*, Cato conceives of *rationes* as texts meant to embody the words and actions of eminent men and to offer, like ancestral convivial songs, practical standards against which new generations of elite men could construct, measure, and expand their *auctoritas*. Ultimately, with the *Origines* we are projected into a world where writing did not stand in opposition to song, but it was the means whereby patterned words and actions, once textualized, were cast beyond the ordinary. In this respect, Cato’s prose writing illustrates that textualization is not a linear process of evolution and that literature is neither a natural outcome nor, finally, a monomorphic phenomenon.

Chapter 5 builds upon what we read in the Preface to the *Origines* and explores how Cato’s prose writings ultimately dovetail with what I call ‘transcriptions.’ As opposed to scripting, I show that transcription has to do with a type of *post*-performance textualization that allows the author to keep his *auctoritas* as a social agent performatively in play. My account of how Cato constructed his transcribing practices demonstrates also that these were not only an expression of his resistance to the encroachment of alien and nonelite professionals on the life of the elite. They were also purveyed as a resolution to the anxieties that derived from extending one’s *auctoritas* through texts liable to be appropriated by an undifferentiated public and as a counterplay to those who, like Scipio Africanus, left no self-authorized memorials of their outstanding existence.


I have organized the subject matter of this book into chapters that can be read in isolation so that the reader can exercise a certain degree of freedom; however, it is together that they make sense as a larger effort to map diverse positionings towards formalities and textualities in relation to social hierarchies and subjectivities. What follows in no way pretends to be an exhaustive account of early poetic and prosaic forms. My choice to focus on comedy and epic at the near exclusion of other poetic forms derives from the fact that in the former case we are lucky enough to have entire scripts and in the latter case the poets’ engrossment with authorship merges with the special interest that epic enjoys in Latin studies. In reality, a more rounded account of early Roman poetry should include *fabulae praetextae* and *cothurnatae*, satire, the fable, and other even more obscure and highly fragmentary works (like, for example, Ennius’ rendering of Archestratos’ *Hedypatheia* or the *Euhemerus*). Likewise, my account of Cato’s prose does not deal in detail with the content of his orations, the variegated compositions that make up the *De Agricultura* and the *Origines*, or, finally, with a number of writings generally bracketed under the rubric of *commentarii*. As I say at the beginning, my main goal with this book is to solicit new reflections on the complexity of the Roman literary tradition and to set the scene for a collective effort towards overcoming rifts and orthodoxies.