Cato the Censor and the Beginnings of Latin Prose

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Sciarrino, Enrica.
Cato the Censor and the Beginnings of Latin Prose: From Poetic Translation to Elite Transcription.
The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
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Chapter 4

Inventing Latin Prose

*Cato the Censor and the Formation of a New Aristocracy*

While the macro-system of economic and migratory circulation underwent changes as a consequence of military expansion, Rome earned the stature of a capital in part through the massive concentration of cultural commodities in the hands of its most affluent and powerful citizens. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this phenomenon took several shapes at the same time. First, the city witnessed the development of a performance tradition based on Greek dramatic scripts translated by professional immigrants called *poetae*. This tradition sustained the conspicuous display of the ruling elite and mediated new encounters among different social groups in the ever-shifting human landscape of the city. Second, the intensified circulation of poets and other nonelite and alien cultural agents in the highest spheres led to the structuring of a closed system of cultural circulation along with the formation of new social subjectivities. Whereas these cultural agents turned into objects of desire trafficked among the powerful few, being at the top of the social ladder meant being involved in this traffic in one way or the other. The ultimate consequence of this multifaceted phenomenon is that the Roman elite acquired the skills necessary to take hold of the cultural resources of their ‘others’ and began to flaunt a new type of cultural mastery. My aim in this chapter is to investigate in detail the nature and the dynamics that characterized this further outcome and how, in turn, this outcome expressed itself in the establishment of a prose tradition in Latin.
Although our focus is once again on texts, the cultural mastery that the early second century B.C.E. Roman elite sought to acquire and exhibit had little to do with the construction of texts per se. As a signal expression of social authority, expertise in new cultural expressions or practices was attained and displayed in embodied form. Once again, we need to search for the body in the text. Once again, the textual material available for investigation is scanty. Despite these limitations, the obsessive concern with social behaviors and cultural activities that characterizes our material reveals an underlying anxiety over the redefinition of aristocracy. Attention to the formalities and modalities in which such an anxiety is expressed and redressed grants us the possibility to account for the formation of Latin prose and its impact on the Roman aristocracy at the same time.

**Ancestorship and Aristocratic Status**

For the members of any given society the attribution of qualities and values to things and people determines the identity and the position of these things and people in the ordering and functioning of that society. While the perpetuation of a societal structure requires for such qualities and values to be continuously defined and legitimated, competition and manipulation most often express the maneuvering of power and authority played out by individuals operating in the highest echelons. Like everything and everybody these individuals undergo a process of quality and value attribution; as opposed to the rest of the community, however, they are accorded ‘aristocratic’ status and, therefore, distinguish themselves from the rest of the community by being identified as qualitatively distinct beings.

The most widely recognized quality attributed to aristocrats is their adherence to archetypes situated in a not readily accessible location associated with the past. This quality is evinced by the insistence on ancestors and ancestorship that typifies discourses about aristocrats and aristocratic practices. Located in the ‘back then,’ the ancestors are invariably characterized as entities responsible for the creation and maintenance of the social order. As Mary Helms points out, it is precisely by virtue of their link with these outer entities that aristocrats are believed to be “imbued with ancestral qualities and to be distinguished as a social collectivity by a living ancestorship that places them in a qualitatively different state or condition of being relative to commoners.”1 In other words, aristocrats are generally considered living embodiments of the ancestors and their qualities.

From our standpoint, the relationship between aristocrats and ancestors in the context of early second century B.C.E. Rome emerges most clearly from Polybius’ description of the funeral ceremony:2

For whenever one of the distinguished men among them dies, when the funeral has been arranged, the body is carried with the rest of the adornment to the place called the ship’s prows (rostra) in the forum. There, it is usually propped up for all to see, it is laid out only rarely. (2) If a grown-up son is left behind and happens to be present, he steps onto the rostra with all the people standing around. If not, another member of the family that is available speaks about the virtues of the dead man and what he has accomplished during his lifetime. . . . (4) After that, they bury the body and perform the customary rites. Then they place an image of the dead person in the most public part of the house, keeping it in a small wooden shrine. . . . (6) They reveal these masks during public sacrifices and compete in decorating them. And whenever a leading member of the family dies, they introduce them into the funeral procession, putting them on men who most resemble the deceased in height and in general appearance. . . . (8) These men now ride on wagons, and the rods and axes and the other customary equipment of those in power accompany them according to the dignity of the rank and station achieved by each man in politics during his life. (9) When they reach the rostra, they all sit in order on ivory stools. It is not easy for an ambitious and high-minded man to see a finer spectacle than this. (10) For who would not be won over at the sight of all the masks together of those men who had been extolled for virtue as if they were alive and breathing? (54.1) None except the man who is speaking over the one who is about to be buried; who, when he has finished his eulogy, starts praising the others who are present beginning with the oldest, and recounts the successes and the achievements of each. . . . (3) But the greatest result is that young men are encouraged to undergo anything for the sake of the commonwealth in the hope of gaining the renown that attends the great deeds of men.3

(trans. Paton)

As evidenced by this passage, the funeral ceremony impressed the Greek Polybius for the way it helped establish a connection between aristocrats and ancestors. This connection was achieved and exhibited in several

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2. For the Roman funerary ritual at large, see Scheid 1984; for useful remarks, see Feldherr 2000.
3. Polybius 6.53.1–4
ways. First, the clan’s ancestors (*maiores*) were paraded through the city when living individuals wore the wax masks of dead members of the clan and accompanied the newly dead to the rostra in the forum. In this context, the wax masks played a fundamental role. They materialized the extraordinary achievements of the ancestors whose features the masks reproduced beyond the decay of the physical body; at the same time, they made conspicuous before the community the link between the living members of the clan and an energizing past.\(^4\) In turn, the attending community assisted the transformation of the newly dead into an ancestor and legitimated the attribution of ancestral qualities to the living members of the clan by virtue of its spectatorship. Second, when delivering his eulogy from the rostra, the chosen young male unfolded in speech the achievements of his predecessors up to the newly dead and made explicit the qualities attached to these achievements. Moreover, he pledged before the ancestors made ‘alive’ through the wearing of the wax masks and the attending community to replicate or outshine his predecessors and, therefore, to become a living ancestor himself. Finally, Polybius lingers on the effects of the ceremony on the audience. In particular, he focuses on the young men and suggests that, by watching the spectacle, they were fired with the desire to risk everything for the community and to win the immortality and the renown epitomized by the ceremony in its entirety.

By and large, Polybius’ description of the Roman aristocratic funeral suggests that the notion of aristocracy held a centripetal as well as a centrifugal social force. The identification of aristocrats as living ancestors elicited by the wax masks and their association with outstanding deeds put a limit on the expansion of the aristocracy as a group. Produced only when an individual had reached the curule rank, the wax masks were jealously guarded by a small number of office-holding households.\(^5\) Similarly, the funeral oration fashioned a new ancestor out of the newly dead and expressed the promise that the excellence unfolded throughout the ceremony would be embodied once again within a particular clan. This emphasis on the exclusive continuity of ancestral qualities through familial lines can be detected elsewhere. For example, in exemplary discourses models of imitation and patterns of behavior (either to espouse or to reject) are often said or felt to be staple features of a single clan. Accordingly, three generations of Decii Mures are said to have died in

\(^4\) On the social weight of ancestral masks in Roman society and for a convenient survey of sources, see the appendix in Flower 1996.

\(^5\) For the so-called *ius imaginum*, see Cicero, *Verr.* 5.14.36; for the terms of the discussion relating to it, see Flower 1996: 53–59.
battles as consuls and two sacrifice themselves in similar acts of devotio; M. Iunius Brutus, the assassin of Caesar, seems to have felt the pressure to act against tyranny by virtue of his ancestor’s example, L. Iunius Brutus, founder of the Republic.⁶

This centripetal social force was clearly countered by a centrifugal one. Because aristocratic status was linked to socially significant actions like achievement of office and victory in battle, any free male citizen performing these actions had, at least virtually, the possibility of being counted among the aristocrats independent of the clan to which he belonged. This is what underlies Polybius’ reference to the generic group of young male spectators inspired by the ceremony; the enthusiasm that, according to Polybius, they expressed takes for granted that any male citizen could, at least in theory, measure himself against the achievements remembered and, therefore, be granted ancestral qualities. Intriguingly, this option stemmed from the very display of the exclusive connections with the past that permeated the ceremony in general and the oration in particular. The paraphernalia paraded throughout made conspicuous familial deeds and ancestral qualities, but the words pronounced during the laudation typified social standards and unfolded them to those outside the gentilician group. Thus, those who belonged to households with an established record of achievements and approved patterns of behavior were more easily granted entrance into the closer circle of legitimate leaders (nobiles); however, the focus on achievements in the largest sense and their continuous standardization made it possible for new men (homines novi) to enter that circle as well.⁷

The testimony of Pliny the Elder about the laudation of Q. Caecilius Metellus (cos. 206 B.C.E.) delivered for his father Lucius (cos. 251 and 247 B.C.E.) in 221 B.C.E. can serve as an illustration of how these two-directional social forces worked:

Q. Metellus in ea oratione quam habuit supremis laudibus patris sui L. Metelli pontificis, bis consulis, dictatoris, magistri equitum, XVuiri agris dandis, qui primus elephantos ex primo Punico bello duxit in triumphum scriptum reliquit decem maximas res optimasque in quibus quaerendis

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⁶ For the Decii Mures, see Cicero, TD 1.89, De Fin. 2.61; Dio Cass. Apud Zonar. 8.5; for M. Iunius Brutus, see Cicero, Phil 2.26; Dio Cass. 44.12; Appian 2.112. I owe these references to Roller 2004: 24–25 and note 57; on this issue, see also Blösel 2000: 46–53 and Treggiari 2003.

sapientes aetatem exigerent, consumasse eum. voluisse enim primarium bellatorem esse, optimum oratorem, fortissimum imperatorem, auspicio suo maximas res geri, maximo honore uti, summa sapientia esse, summum senatorem haberi, pecuniam magnam bono modo invenire, multos liberos relinquere et clarissimum in civitate esse. haec contingisse ei nec ulli alii post Romam conditam. 8

Q. Metellus in that oration which he delivered with the highest praises of his father Lucius Metellus, pontifex, twice consul, dictator, master of the horse, one of the fifteen men who looked over the distribution of land, who was the first to lead elephants in triumph in the first Punic war, left written that he devoted himself to achieving the ten greatest and best things in which wise men spend their life: to be a leading warrior, the best orator, the bravest commander, to achieve the greatest deeds under his auspices, to hold the highest office, to be of the highest shrewdness, to be held the highest senator, to acquire great fortune in an honorable way, to leave many children behind, and to be the most distinguished man of the city. He achieved all of this as no other man since the foundation of Rome.

Pliny here appears to be citing from the final portion of Metellus’ eulogy, the part dedicated to the dead father. The first section encompasses a list of offices and feats performed by the eulogized; the second comprises a standardized catalogue of qualities. 9 Although repetitious and unexciting, the catalogue shape and the use of superlatives can be seen to construct the supernormal status of the newly dead. To be sure, it is precisely by means of these formalities that the life of the eulogized is reduced to discrete actions and the eulogized projected into a competition for prestige and recognition that extended beyond the ‘here and now’ and into the past. In this sense, the speaker’s work was to measure the dead man’s achievements against absolute and timeless norms of excellence and augment his distance from the lived world of the attending audience to its maximum. The final sentence elucidates precisely that: “he achieved all of this as no other man since the foundation of Rome.”

Distanciation, however, was beset by the necessity to transform the supernormal qualities associated with the eulogized into positive energy

9. To give a number to the different standardized qualities is typical. See, for example, Gellius 1.13.10 about P. Licinius Crassus Mucianus (cos. 113 b.c.e.) and Pliny, NH 7.100 about Cato the Censor (cos. 195 b.c.e.).
for the living society at large. In our example the eulogizer can be seen to bridge that expanse when, in laying out the standards of excellence, he refers to what we may term ‘a judging community.’ The ten criteria articulated by Q. Caecilius Metellus noticeably include “to be held the highest senator” (sumnum senatorem haber) and “to be considered the most distinguished man in the city” (clarissimum in civitate esse). These criteria presuppose that ancestral qualities and, therefore, aristocratic standing could only be attained through a direct involvement in communal affairs and only after undergoing an evaluation performed by a group external to the clan. This process of evaluation was so pervasively important for the notion of aristocracy that it is a staple feature even in compositions textually preserved in less public contexts (family tombs) such as the Scipionic elogia and the elogium of Atilius Calatinus. Accordingly, those who belonged to the inner elite circle by familial affiliation had to actively regain and reaffirm the ancestral qualities that they inherited before their peers and the Roman people.10 By same token, those who did not come from a clan sustained by an ancestry of accomplishments had the chance to compete for legitimate leadership and authority by emulating the achievements and qualities laid out by aristocrats. Even so, their success was equally contingent upon their ability to incarnate ancestral qualities and to establish a connection with ancestral archetypes that would meet, if not the consensus, at least the acknowledgment of a judging community. The successful case of Cato the Censor is in this sense exemplary.

In the Roman historical memory Cato is famous for having built an outstanding political career by challenging the notion that aristocratic authority was the exclusive possession of a few clans even while affirming the aristocratic commitment to the replication or reperformance of ancestral practices and behaviors.11 Contradictory to all appearances, Cato’s twofold attitude pertains both to his entrance into the close aristocratic circle as a homo novus and the socially sanctioned weight granted to the maiores. By aspiring to move (and indeed moving) into the center of power where legitimate leadership was located, Cato had no choice but to establish a socially approved link with the ancestral realm. Because he lacked the support of a familial past, Cato exploited the centrality of

10. Reaffirming inherited ancestral qualities could be a source of great anxiety. See, for example, the case of young Scipio Aemilianus as described in Polybius 31.24, discussed in chapter 3.

11. For his contrasts with the traditional aristocracy, see especially Livy 37.57–58; 39.40.9. With special reference to his censorship, see Livy 39.40–41 passim; 39.42.5 and 7; Nepos, Cato 2.3; Plutarch, Cato Mai. 16. For a recent assessment of Cato’s relationship with aristocratic ideology, see Blösel 2000: 53–59.
action implicit in the notion of nobilitas. Thus, he strove to measure single actions (his own and those of others) against behavioral models that he locates in an ancestrally constructed past; at the same time, he emptied this ancestral past of any familial specificity. In the process, Cato articulated an aristocratic code of speaking and behaving that allowed the Roman elite to culturally subjugate their ‘others’ and to redefine themselves as an aristocracy ruling over an ever expanding world.

**Oratory and the Socio-cosmological Order**

Current works on the oratorical texts attributed to Cato the Censor tend to emphasize his extensive use of paratactical constructions, lexical parallelisms, and phonetic repetitions. These features are generally viewed as the mark of an underdeveloped phase of literary development and are unanimously connected with the Italic carmen. Under this rubric have been grouped cultural expressions as diverse as prayers, magic formulas, laws, treaties, accounts, dedications, vows, elogia, and sententious speech. Their common denominator is not to be found in the use of a strictly defined rhythmical pattern, even though compositions in Saturnians—as we have seen—were bracketed under the category of carmen; nor can these forms be classified within a neat system of literary genres, even though they are preserved in inscriptive and literary materials. From a purely formal point of view, the carmen was loosely marked in three ways: by juxtaposing a long compositional segment before a shorter one, by deploying a range of figures of sound, and by aligning two or three words and/or phrases. From a socially-oriented perspective, a carmen can also be described as a speech act that seeks to establish or confirm socio-cosmological hierarchies. Although anyone could produce speech bearing carmen-like features, its ultimate effect on both the social positioning of the performer and the socio-cosmological order depended upon a number of other variables. These included the context of performance, the performer’s positioning in the larger scheme of social relations, and the acknowledgment of a judging audience.

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13. For a recent discussion on the relationship between carmen and tabulae, see Meyer 2004: 44–72.
As we have seen in the previous chapter, the relationship between formally marked speech and the socio-cosmological universe inherent in the notion of *carmen* underlies the contested establishment of an epic tradition in Rome. Livius Andronicus and Naevius turned to the *carmen* as a model of song for the construction of their epic artifacts. To these imitative attempts, the ruling elite responded in two ways. Whereas some looked to expand their individual authority through representations crafted by the poets, the narratives that we read around Naevius suggest that others viewed this type of mediation as a disturbing encroachment on the socially demarcating practices of the ruling elite. Cato articulated the latter position and on a number of occasions spelled out a convivial scenario that excluded nonelite interferences. In the face of this resistance, Ennius turned away from the *carmen* and established for himself a model of scripted song redeployed from the Greek tradition.

Cato’s involvement in the elite controversies sparked by the popularity of poetry invites us to investigate the triangular relationship of his oratorical style with the *carmen*, on the one hand, and poetry, on the other. Indeed, attention to the strategies of formalization adopted by Cato in his oratory allows us to do two things at once: to gauge how he maximized his invocations of authoritative precedents located in the ancestral past to sustain his positioning within the ruling aristocracy; and to explore the paradigm of cultural domination over nonelite cultural forms that he proposed to his peers through his oratorical performances.

The earliest oratorical fragments attributed to Cato belong to a speech delivered in Spain during his 195 B.C.E. consulship. Perhaps a *suasio* addressed to the knights in their military function, the speech aimed to stimulate their valor.\(^{16}\) The first fragment consists of a very elaborate *sententia* about the long-lasting benefits that derive from hard work and honorable deeds:

> Cogitate cum animis vestris; si quid vos per laborem recte feceritis, labor ille a vobis cito recedet, bene factum a vobis dum vivitis non abscedet; sed si qua per voluptatem nequiter feceritis, voluptas cito abibit, nequiter factum illud apud vos semper manebit.\(^{17}\)

> Reflect very carefully in your own mind; if by working hard you do right, the fatigue will withdraw fast and the good deed will not leave you as long

\(^{16}\) Sbendorio Cugusi 1982: 131–32.

\(^{17}\) Cato, *orat.* 1.1 Sbl.
as you live; but if by obeying pleasure you do wrong, pleasure will soon leave and the evil deed will always remain with you.

Formally this *sententia* is organized around syntactical parallelisms (si quid . . . feceritis picked up by si qua . . . feceritis, labor . . . cito recedet duplicated by voluptas cito abibit, bene factum . . . non abscedet corresponding to nequiter factum . . . manebit) and figures of sound (adnominatio in recedet . . . discedet and homoioteleuton in the triads feceritis- recedet- abscedet and feceritis- abibit- manebit).\(^{18}\) Parallel phrases and exploitation of the phonetic layer of the language are typical of the *carmen*. Rather than stressing their primitivism and uncouthness, it is best to conceptualize these formal devices as integral components of an actual performance. In so doing, we can observe that Cato used these formalities to establish a secure connection between his oratorical performance and the socio-cosmological order that these formalities invoked. Moreover, in order to strengthen his authoritative position as consul in relation to the attending knights, he gives ancestral substance to his overall intervention by explicitly calling on the ancestors and enumerating the material tokens of honors established by them:

maiores seorsum atque divorsum pretium paravere bonis atque strenuis, decurionatus, optionatus, hastas donaticas aliosque honores.\(^{19}\)

The ancestors established separate and differentiated prizes to the good and the courageous, the office of decurion, that of helpmate, honorific javelins and other honors.

Significantly, the ancestors that Cato invokes here are not identified as his direct progenitors; they constitute a generic group of beings located in the past and responsible for the existing and widely recognized system of rewards. Such a generic invocation allows Cato to transform the aristocratic notion of ancestorship into an asset to be shared by the elite in its entirety and helps him validate his sententious proposition whereby action is what defines the social quality of an individual. Not surprisingly, he achieves all of this by organizing his speech in *carmen*-like parallelisms and by exploiting the phonetic layer of the language once again.

The formal aspect of Cato’s oratory in these instances suggests that

\(^{18}\) These features are noted in Sblendorio Cugusi 1982: 133–36.
\(^{19}\) Cato, *orat.* 1.2 Sbl.
authority could be expressed through the deft use of formalized speech and the appropriation of behavioral patterns that looked back to the ancestral past as the fountainhead of auctoritas itself. But Cato’s formal allegiance to the carmen-style allowed him to achieve more than just projecting his performance beyond the ordinary everyday and into an ancestral past. It also helped him naturalize alien cultural forms into his assertions of authority and, therefore, to expand the socio-cosmological dimensions of his interventions. Cato achieved this expansion by enmeshing into the carmen-like organization of his speeches quantitative devices foreign to the Roman song tradition. In relation to this early speech, Antonio Traglia has pointed out that Cato’s sententia in the first fragment presents a double trochee at the end of the period (semper manebit) that looks back to self-conscious trochaic variations located at the end of colon and comma. It could be (and it has been) argued that Cato’s adoption of metrical clausulae is to be linked to his exposure to Greek rhetorical teaching. It may be so; however, with its pervasive reliance on quantitative structures and its performance appeal, poetry must have stood out as a much more alluring resource than Greek rhetoric to draw upon.

Ancestral invocations, attention to social behavior, and exploitation of diverse cultural traditions come to play a pervasive role in what remains of a speech delivered by Cato in 190 B.C.E. against Q. Minucius Thermus known as De Falsis Pugnis. After obtaining the right of a triumph in 196 B.C.E. for his campaign against the Iberians, Q. Minucius Thermus had asked for a second one in recognition of his military engagements against the Ligurians, but was denied the triumph perhaps because of Cato’s very involvement. What remains suggests that the overall speech pivoted

20. Traglia 1985: 354. These would have been located at the end of colon (non abscedet [spondee + trochee]) and at the end of comma (recte feceritis [spondee + cretic] and cito recedet [tribrach + trochee] in the first half of the sententia and nequiter feceritis [spondee + cretic] as well as voluptas cito abibit [dactyl + trochee] in the second half).

21. Much has been said on the influence of Greek rhetoric on Cato’s oratory, but no definite answers have been reached. Most important contributions to the debate are Clarke 1966: 38–42; Kennedy 1994: 110–11; Leeman 1963: 43–49; Astin 1978: 147–56; von Albrecht 1989: 11–20; Cavarzere 2000: 47–56; Calboli 2003: 11–35. For a review of this debate, see Sciarrino 2007: 57–58. Interestingly, Traglia (1985: 350–51) turns to the rhetorical tradition of southern Italy and hypothesizes that this had an impact on Ennius, but does not develop his argument all the way. For the influence of rhetoric on poetry, see Barsby 2007. The edict of 161 B.C.E. testifies to the encroaching presence of Greek rhetoricians, but their influence on the oratory of the time is much less detectable. For a recent discussion of this edict, see Stroup 2007.


around a parallelism between Thermus’ feigned military successes and his administrative shortcomings. If so, the surviving fragment would have referred to the latter argument and would have focused on the public beating of local magistrates that Thermus had orchestrated in the provinces:

Dixit a decemviris parum bene sibi cibaria curata esse. iussit vestimenta detrahi atque flagro caedi. decemviros Bruttiani verberavere, videre multos mortales. quis hanc contumeliam, quis hoc imperium, quis hanc servitutem ferre potest? nemo hoc rex ausus est facere: eane fieri bonis, bono genere gnatos, boni consultis! ubi societas? ubi fides maiorum? insignitas iniurias, plagas, verbera, vibices, eos dolores atque carvificinas per dedecus atque maximam contumeliam, inspectantibus popularibus suis atque multis mortalibus, te facere ausum esse! set quantum luctum, quantum gemitum, quid lacrimarum, quantum flctum factum audivit! servi iniurias nimis aegre ferunt: quid illos, bonos genere gnatos, magna virtute praeditos, opinamini animi habuisse atque habituros, dum vivent?

He asserted that the local decemviri had neglected to arrange well the food provisions allocated to him. He ordered them to be stripped and whipped severely. The Bruttiani scourged the decemviri and many men stood there to watch. Who could tolerate such an offense, this abuse of power, this imposition of servitude? No king ever dared commit such a crime: now these crimes are inflicted on honorable men, men born from honorable stock, men held to be honorable! What happened to the respect of the allies? What happened to the allegiance to the ancestors? How did you dare to inflict atrocious offences, beatings, thrashings, wounds, those torments and tortures in addition to dishonor and most despicable insults, before the eyes of fellow citizens and many other mortals! And yet, how much affliction, how much groaning, how many tears I heard that were provoked! Most painfully slaves endure offenses: what do you think that they, born from honorable stock and equipped by great virtue, felt and will feel as long as they live?

As testified by a great variety of sources, beating had a peculiarly performative force in making distinctions of status. The fasces that accompanied the magistrates with imperium and the association of libertas with immunity from bodily violations made the divide between citizens and noncitizens, enfranchised and disenfranchised, ideologically clear. In practice, the

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25. Cato, orat. 6.42 Sbl.
26. For a useful discussion of all these points, see Saller 1994: 133–42.
divide was much more blurred, especially when beating and being beaten involved citizens living outside Rome. As the fragment suggests, when a magistrate decided to exercise his authority in physical terms, a citizen’s immunity from beating was breached. Within the city, the offended citizen could resort to the *lex Valeria de provocatio*ne which was traditionally dated back to the foundation of the Republic and granted male citizens the right of appeal (*provocatio*). Outside of Rome, however, he was not equally protected so that, around the time of this speech, the law was being updated with the promulgation of the so-called *leges Porciae*. The details of these new laws are not clear, but they must have had something to do with the prohibition of public scourging of citizens living in the provinces.\(^\text{27}\) To what degree Cato was involved in the promulgation of one or more of these laws is debated.\(^\text{28}\) Whatever the case, in 184 B.C.E., in a speech known as the *Si se M. Caelius tribunus plebis appellasset* (22.87 Sblendorio), Cato mentions his contribution to the protection of “the shoulders of citizens” and in the fragment above he can be seen to take advantage of the contemporary legal debate to sustain his attack on Thermus.\(^\text{29}\)

Rather than offer a detailed account of Thermus’ offense, Cato conjures up a scene focused on the effects of beating on all involved: the consul, the executioners, the *decemviri*, and the spectators. In this scene, the action moves quickly from the consul’s commands to their performance by the executioners. Whereas the consul’s assertion of authority is associated with kingly practices and is, therefore, figured as uprooting the standing social order, the executioners become both an extension and a mirror of the consul. Their ethnic identification would have recalled disloyalty since during the Punic war the Bruttians had defected to Hannibal. In turn, their performance of beating would have underscored the disgrace that Thermus had allowed by having slaves whipping Roman magistrates whom, as a punishment for their disloyalty, the Bruttians were supposed to serve.\(^\text{30}\) When the focus moves to the victims, Cato invokes the ancestral rules that regulated the interaction with the allies. Through this invocation, he heightens the ignominy of the entire episode and the shame suffered by the local *decemviri*. Finally, Cato uses the same ploy that we find in funeral orations and other textualized aristocratic compositions when he calls attention to the attending spectators. Here, however, the spectators

\[^{27}\text{Astin 1978: 21 note 23. For a general discussion, see Lintott 1999: 97–99.}\]
\[^{28}\text{On the debate over Cato’s involvement in the promulgation of the *leges Porciae* and his position vis-à-vis the popular cause, see Astin 1978: 22–23; 326–28.}\]
\[^{29}\text{On the wording *pro scapulis* used in the *Si se M. Caelius tribunus plebis appellasset* to refer to the law, see Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001: 309; Sblendorio Cugusi 1982: 270–71.}\]
\[^{30}\text{About the Bruttiani, see Gellius 10.3.18–19; Festus 28.19L.}\]
are drawn into the frame to become actors in the scene. In the economy of the speech, their bodily responses (tears, groaning, and mourning) have the effect of giving material facticity to Thermus’ inadequacies as a member of Rome’s body politic and reconstitute his actions as a socio-cosmologically disruptive event.

If being alert to the narrative details preserved in this fragment can help us grasp Cato’s representational maneuvers, even more can be gained from paying attention to his strategies of formalization. From a purely stylistic viewpoint, the speech act preserved in writing presents a thick array of features typical of the *carmen*. Indeed, it tends to pivot around two or three lexical elements strung together in such a way as to achieve a climactic effect. Embedded in two or three parallel syntactical units, these lexical elements are underscored by the *anaphora* of interrogatives (as in *quis hanc contumeliam / quis hoc imperium / quis hanc servitutem* and *ubi societas / ubi fides*) or intensified by alliterative polyptoton (as in *boni / bono genere gnatis / boni consultis*). Similarly, the triad *luctum-gemitum-fletum* is introduced by the repetition of *quantum*, while the reiteration of the final phoneme–*um* creates a rhyme that virtually extends to *fact(um)*, a lexical unit tightly linked to *fletum* by the duplication of the initial consonant. Furthermore, Cato’s juxtaposition of the socially antithetical terms, *decemviros Bruttiani* and his decision to embed the last term in a construction characterized by a *chiasmus*, *Bruttiani (A) verberavere (B), videre (B) multi (A)* is outstanding since the two internal terms, tied together by homoioteleuton, emphasize the focal actions: beating and seeing.31 The *adnominatio* in *opinamini animi* and the strategy of accumulating synonyms are also striking. The latter are either hurried by *asynedeton* as in *iniurias, plagas, verbera, vibices* or delayed by the conjunction *atque* as in *dolores atque carnificinas* and *per dedecus atque maximam contumeliam*. Finally, the colometric analysis of the final period (*servi iniurias nimis aegre ferunt / quid illos, bonos genere gnatos / magna virtute praeditos / opinamini animi habuisse atque habituros / dum vivent?*) would point to Cato’s predilection for ending a syntactical structure with a short and unemphatic colon. Mapped on the long-short sequence of cola that characterizes the Saturnian and other textualized samples of *carmen*, this device is generally identified as “appositional style.”32

So pervasively linked to the *carmen* tradition through form, this

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31. It has been argued that, far from being stylistically refined, the *chiasmus* is the natural untutored way of combining two pairs, more natural than *abab*. See Leeman 1963: 22; Courtney 1999: 6–7; Barsby 2007: 43.
speech was particularly loved by the later archaizing author Aulus Gellius, who cites this passage to illustrate highly emotional oratory.\textsuperscript{33} But in the senatorial context in which the speech was originally performed, Cato’s pervasive exploitation of the \textit{carmen}-style had an effect that went beyond the mere arousal of indignation from his peers.\textsuperscript{34} It constituted the very means whereby he was able to construct his oratorical performance and the reenacted social drama as happenings of extraordinary caliber. Indeed, syntactical parallelisms and phonetic reiterations would have helped Cato recreate the public beating suffered by the local magistrates in such a way as to characterize himself as the ultimate custodian of the socio-cosmological order and Thermus as its ultimate violator. What is more, the \textit{carmen}-like repetitions that pervade the syntactical and phonetic layer of this fragment are reinforced by metrical patterns.

Double spondees can be detected in at least two places: in the closing phrase \textit{multi mortales} where the metrical structure is interlaced with an alliterative nexus already used as a second colon of a Saturnian by Naevius in his \textit{Bellum Poenicum}, and in the sequence \textit{boni consultis, fac(tum) audivi, habituros dum vivent.}\textsuperscript{35} A hypodochmiac (−\textit{ᴗ}−\textit{ᴗ} x) frames once an initial colon (\textit{quis hanc contumeliam}) and twice a mid colon (\textit{atque maximam contumeliam} and \textit{magna virtute praeditos}). Furthermore, trochees veering towards the spondaic rhythm stress the phonetic, lexical, and syntactical \textit{carmen}-like repetitions that mark the reaction of those watching the appalling spectacle: \textit{quantum luctum / quantum gemitum / quid lacrimarum / quantum fletum fact(um) audivi.} As pointed out by Thomas Habinek, these metrical patterns are among those used in Plautus’ comedies to draw to a close a \textit{canticum} characterized by diverse but similar meters.\textsuperscript{36}

In this particular context Cato’s choice to turn to comedy could be explained by the fact that this poetic form expressed a special interest in beating through persistent references to the signs of the whip left on the slave’s back and exuberant elaborations on the vocabulary and the sound of whipping.\textsuperscript{37} Although Cato does not linger at all on the beaten body

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Gellius (10.3.15–16) compared this fragment with Gaius Gracchus, \textit{De Legibus promulgatis} (48 Malcovati\textsuperscript{3}) and Cicero, \textit{Verr.} 2.5.161–3. Cf. also 13.25 (24). 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} For the senatorial context of the speech, see Slendorio Cugusi 1982: 194.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} M. Barchiesi 1962: 360–61: \textit{eorum sectam sequuntur multi mortales / multi alii e Troia strenui viri / u<r>bi foras cum auro illic exibant.}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Habinek 1985: 191–92. For the importance of his contribution for the interpretation of pre-ciceronian oratory more generally, see Sciarrino 2007: 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} References to beating in comedy have long been central to the interpretation of comedy’s social effects. See especially Segal 1987; Parker 1989; Fitzgerald 2000: 32–41. For the exploration of beating at the phonetic level of the language, especially in the form of onomatopoeia, see Traina 1977: 164.
\end{itemize}
of the magistrates, his metrical gestures to comedy would have certainly sustained its evocation. In an oratorical performance, however, such an evocation would not have produced laughter; rather, it would have conjured up a rather horrifying mental picture. Then again, Cato persevered in rhythmically echoing drama in other circumstances as well. A most outstanding case is the opening of the Pro Rhodiensis.

Cato delivered this speech in 167 B.C.E. Later on its written version was inserted into the Origines.\textsuperscript{38} The speech consisted of a senatorial intervention in the debate over the fate of the Rhodians after the end of the third Macedonic war. During the hostilities they had shown sympathy to Perseus and had tried to mediate between the two sides. After the end of the war, the arrival in Rome of a Rhodian embassy meant to clarify the position of Rhodes in the new East sparked a heated discussion over the procedures to follow. With his intervention, Cato argued in favor of the Rhodians and sustained their forgiveness.\textsuperscript{39} In a letter to Quintus Axius, Tiro, the faithful freedman and secretary of Cicero, used the text of the Pro Rhodiensis to draw a comparison between the oratorical styles of Cato and Cicero. In that context, he criticized the former for not following the proper rhetorical procedure in structuring his discourse. In the second century C.E. Aulus Gellius cites the letter and refutes Tiro’s criticism by quoting and commenting on seven long passages.\textsuperscript{40}

Gellius’ interest in measuring this speech against a Greek rhetorical framework is very much linked to the centrality that Greek rhetoric was soon to acquire among the Roman elite. Rather than giving credit to Gellius’ frame of reference, I propose giving attention to the formal components of this speech within their own milieu. By so doing, we can see that Cato went so far as to organize the opening of his intervention into a string of syntactic cola structured like Plautus’ cretic cola:\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{quote}
Scio solere pleribusque hominibus 
rebus secundis – \(\circ\) – \(x\)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} The speech is preserved in large part by Gellius 6.3 = Cato, Orig. 5.100–106 C&Sbl. The bibliography on this speech is particularly vast. See conveniently the updated edition of the speech by Calboli (2003: 99–224).
\textsuperscript{39} Polybius 30.4–5; Livy 45.20–25.
\textsuperscript{40} Gellius 6 (7). 3.
\textsuperscript{41} Habinek 1985: 193–94; Traglia (1985: 353–54) identifies similar structures in other fragments of this speech used as clausulae at the end of colon and period. Calboli (2003: 395–96) has extended Habinek’s metrical analysis to the entire fragment, corroborating the presence of cretics in last position even while remaining hesitant before Cicero’s testimony about the lack of \textit{numerus} in Cato (Brut. 68).
atque prolixis  –  O  –  x
atque prosperis  –  O  –  O  x
animum excellere  –  O  –  O  x
atque superbiam  –  O  –  O  x
atque ferocia  –  O  –  O  x
augescere atque crescere42  –  O  –  O  x

I know that most people, when things evolve favorably, fortunately, and prosperously, become overconfident and their arrogance and cruelty augment and grow.

The content of this fragment suggests that Cato began his senatorial intervention by reaffirming his legitimacy as a speaker. He did so by challenging his audience to acknowledge his practical wisdom and his oratorical virtuosity at the same time. Cato launched his challenge with a strong assertion of the self by placing *scio*, “I know,” in initial position and by pronouncing a generalizing *sententia* about human nature immediately after.43 Tiro picks up the challenging tone when he condemns Cato’s opening statement as too arrogant, harsh, and reproachful since, in his opinion, it would have implied that the senators were unable to think the matter through because of their successes.44 What he fails to observe is that Cato would have also staked out his cultural deftness by using a poetic meter as the structuring principle for organizing the *carmen*-like tricolon, the accumulation of synonyms, and the phonetic reiterations that, on other occasions, constituted the backbone of his speech. Some have suggested that one of Cato’s aims was to undermine the success that the speech by the head of the Rhodian embassy, Astimedes, had attracted.45 If so, his desire to display his cultural mastery regardless of any other particular purpose becomes even more notable.

On the whole, the formal link between Cato’s oratory and the *carmen*

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42. 32.118 Sbl.
43. Cato’s choice to begin his intervention with *scio* is not limited to the *Pro Rhodiensibus*, see Sbendorio Cugusi 1982: 320; 42–43 (with references to *Rhet. Her.*1.8). The other instance, however, has to do with what appears to be a defense speech rather than a senatorial intervention (23.90 Sbl).
45. Cugusi and Sbendorio Cugusi 2001: 331–32. The two editors rely on Polybius (30.4.6) who asserts that the speech by Astimedes was also circulated in written form. Moreover, by drawing on Gellius (6 (7). 3.7), who refers to *Pro Rhodiensibus* as a text and as a component of the *Origines*, they elaborate on the impact of the speech on a reading public rather than as a performance. For speculations about the circulation of this speech together or separately from the *Origines*, see Calboli 2003: 5–11.
prompts us to conceptualize oratory as a song, that is, as an embodied practice marked by formalized speech acts and bodily movements. Understanding oratory in this way has its methodological advantages, for it allows us to focus on the sociocultural aspects that made it similar to and yet distinct from other types of public song. Formalization (the repetition of certain verbal and bodily acts) and periodization (the repetition of these acts at certain times) suggest that oratory was homologous to other public songs performed in the cityscape of Rome, including poetic drama. As opposed to these other songs, oratory was privileged in its significance and consequences because access to the contexts in which it was practiced (the Senate house, the rostra in the forum, and the law courts) was limited exclusively to those who belonged to the highest echelons of society.

From these restricted contexts Cato capitalized on actions as factors determining the social quality of individuals and appealed to patterned behaviors situated in the past in order to sustain his relocation into the center of power. Among these patterned behaviors are the strategies of formalization generally associated with the *carmen*. It is precisely by exploiting these strategies that Cato contributed to the invention of Latin prose, acting very much along the lines suggested by Eric Hobsbawm, that is, by appropriating elements that were closely related to the past and values associated with it. In the *Brutus* Cicero argues that oratory existed long before Cato by pointing to Brutus, the founder of the Republic, and proposing that he must have had a certain degree of oratorical skills because he had been able to interpret an oracle correctly and had established offices, laws, and courts. Interestingly, Cicero constructs his argument by drawing on a scenario organized around the triangular relationship between *carmen*-related rituals, embodied authority, and the socio-cosmological order that Cato had exploited in his oratorical performances. In the same vein, Cicero mentions that while performing a public sacrifice as a *flamen carmentalis* Marcus Popilius was forced to hurry to the assembly and by his authority and speech he was able to allay a riot.

By bringing into view the same cultural framework that Cato had exploited some generations before, Cicero makes evident that this framework was informed by a highly articulated system of embodied schemes. In the context of second-century B.C.E. Rome Cato’s self-serving incorporation of these schemes went hand in hand with the unfolding of practical

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46. See Habinek 1998b; 2005a *passim.*
strategies for keeping under control the challenges posed by an expanding empire on the ruling elite as a whole.

The metrical echoes that we detect in Cato’s speeches emerge as a variation on the same practices of communal and individual expansion that had guided the employment of poets and other cultural mediators in the first place. Through Cato we can see that the embodied appropriation and display of alien and nonelite cultural forms within the restricted contexts of oratory helped intensify the performer’s presence within and mastery of the socio-cosmological order. But as we shall see next, in the economy of in-group relations these mimetic acts produced an additional space on which battles over cultural ownership, political power, and social values were fought.

Differential Imitations

*Slavish Replications versus Empowered Appropriations*

I have already pointed out how the *Pro Rhodiensibus* reveals Cato’s intent to show off his cultural mastery before his peers from the very start. His desire of self-display makes absolute sense in light of the competitive nature of Roman intraelite relations and went hand in hand with other gambits meant to enhance his honor and decrease that of his competitors. These included shaming the appropriative moves adopted by his peers and proposing a self-sufficient pattern of cultural mastery.

Perhaps delivered in 184 B.C.E., the so-called speech *Si se M. Caelius tribunus plebis appellasset* is generally interpreted as a preemptive defense of his censorship centered on ridiculing the oratorical performances of M. Caelius, an otherwise unknown tribune of the plebs.\(^{50}\) Cato’s narrow focus on his opponent’s use of the body has long been read as a sign of his resistance to a modernist style that overvalued *actio*.\(^{51}\) Resting upon the retrospective projection of the later opposition between Asianism and Atticism, this reading fails to view Cato’s oratorical strategies in their immediate purview.\(^{52}\) What remains of this speech sheds important light on some of the features that, for Cato, distinguished slavish imitations of nonelite and alien cultural expressions from the empowered appropriations in which he engaged.

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50. For a discussion of dating, structure, and content of this speech, see Sbendorio Cugusi 1982: 259–61. For the identification of M. Caelius, see Niccolini 1934: 116–18.
52. For a critique of this type of retrospective projections, see Sciarrino 2007: 58.
One of the longest surviving fragments from the *Si se M. Caelius tribunus plebis appellasset* reads as follows:

> Numquam tacet, quem morbus tenet loquendi tamquam veternosum bibendi atque dormiendi. Quod si non conveniatis cum convocari iubet, ita cupidus orationis conducat qui auscultet. Itaque auditis, non auscultatis, tamquam pharmacopolam: nam eius verba audiuntur, vero se nemo committit si aeger est.\(^{53}\)

He never shuts up, the malady of speaking holds him just like that of eating and sleeping holds the hydropic. If you do not gather when he calls upon an assembly, he is so eager to hold a speech that he would hire listeners. So you hear him but don’t listen, just as you do with someone who sells medicines on the street: his words are heard, but no one indeed entrusts oneself to him if sick.

Caelius’ exercise of oratory is here debased to the pathological incontinence that plagues someone suffering from dropsy. His manner of calling upon a popular assembly is equated to what a street performer does when hiring a claque to boost the number of listeners. Drawn into the frame, these listeners are also said to pay heed to him as they would to a street hawker of alien extraction selling unreliable cures. Accordingly, Cato constructs an image of Caelius in speech by measuring his opponent’s oratorical performances against culturally-specific schemes linking embodied practices to social types. By doing so, he figures Caelius as someone missing even the most intuitive understanding of and control over the associations elicited by the body in action. In the economy of Cato’s speech, this representation serves to nullify his right to take up the role of plaintiff and delegitimizes his authority as a magistrate.\(^{54}\)

Three other fragments attributed to the same speech expand on Caelius’ misuse of the body:

> Quid ego cum illo dissertem amplius, quem ego denique credo in pompa vectitatum ire ludis pro citeria, atque cum spectatoribus sermocinaturum?\(^{55}\)

Why should I keep debating with that man, who—I believe—is willing to

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\(^{53}\) Cato, *orat.* 22.81 Sbl.

\(^{54}\) Sbendorio Cugusi (1982: 259) points out that the speech presupposes an attack on Cato’s censorship initiated exclusively by a magistrate.

\(^{55}\) Cato, *orat.* 22.83 Sbl.
go to festival processions exhibited in place of a caricature-like statue and to interact with the spectators?

Descendit de cantherio, inde staticulos dare, riducularia fundere.\textsuperscript{56}

He comes down from the workhorse, then moves softly around, and engages in mocking acts.

Praeterea cantat ubi collibuit, interdum Graecos versus agit, iocos dicit, voces demutat, staticulos dat.\textsuperscript{57}

Moreover he sings when it pleases him, from time to time he performs Greek verses, tells jokes, changes the pitch of his voice, and moves softly around.

If we weed out the scorn that Cato heaps on Caelius, what we are left with is the image of an elite individual striving to enhance his authoritative assertions by mimicking nonelite practices. This image confirms that Cato’s vested interest in taking up poetic forms was part of a much larger elite phenomenon of self-aggrandizement through cultural appropriations pursued by embodied means. But precisely because Caelius is represented as acting upon the same social imperatives that guide Cato’s mimetic moves, the target of Cato’s contempt cannot be identified simply with Caelius’ adoption of Hellenizing or modernist customs, as is often argued.\textsuperscript{58} It also needs to be related to his attempt to characterize Caelius as incapable of anchoring his cultural appropriations to ancestral archetypes. Accordingly, Caelius’ failure is represented as a submission to alien and unbecoming impulses having the misfired effect of transforming the oratorical space into a moving stage hosting a hodgepodge of histrionic acts. In other words, Cato typifies Caelius as someone inept at producing an independent song according to the constraints dictated by the embodied tradition of authoritative speaking. Accordingly, the only thing that Caelius would have achieved was nothing more than reenacting foreign compositions and making an unchecked use of his voice and body. For our purposes, Cato’s representation of Caelius’ mimetic acts are a convenient foil for understanding the cultural disowning that, on the one hand, accompanied Cato’s appropriation of socially secondary cultural forms

\textsuperscript{56} Cato, \textit{orat.} 22.84 Sbl.
\textsuperscript{57} Cato, \textit{orat.} 22.85 Sbl.
\textsuperscript{58} Sblendorio Cugusi 1982: 260–61; Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001: 305–9 \textit{passim}.
and, on the other, supported his activation of ancestral schemes. Other speeches allow us to explore further Cato’s strategies of self-possessed appropriation.

Commentators have long noted that a fragment derived from the Dierum Dictarum de Consulatu Suo, a defense speech delivered by Cato in 191–190 B.C.E., is poetic in diction and hexametrical in form:

Deinde postquam Massiliam praeterimus, inde omnem classem ventus
Auster lenis fert; mare velis florere videres.

Hence, after we passed Marseille, then a gentle south wind carried the entire fleet; you could have seen the sea blooming with sails.

Hexametrical forms are to be found in Plautus’ cantica in the form of heroic clausulae and are more fully deployed in other more or less contemporary nonelite expressions; however, the extension of the hexametrical rhythm one foot beyond the clausula and its framing of a poetic image in what is obviously a narrative section points to Ennius and his Annales as Cato’s source of imitation. Later authors suggest that Cato sponsored Ennius’ arrival to Rome in 204 B.C.E. and that the two enjoyed close familial ties. If so, the insertion of an Ennian-like phrase during an oratorical performance that seems to have taken place before the completion of the Annales makes a great deal of sense. Indeed, it would indicate that Cato’s engagement with Ennius had less to do with what the poet could do for him than with his interest in taking hold of the poet’s imports and putting on them his mark of ownership. After all, Cornelius Nepos obliquely points to Cato’s proprietorial attitude when he describes his initiative to take Ennius to Rome as his “Sardinian triumph.”

In 191 B.C.E., during the campaign led by M’. Acilius Glabrio against Antioch III, Cato spoke as a military tribune before the Athenian assembly. Very little remains of the speech that he pronounced, but what does

60. Cato, orat. 4.17 Sbl.
61. Questa 1967: 248; 257–58; 265; for their presence in other nonelite cultural expressions, see the case of the epitaph for the mime Protogenes discussed by Massaro 2001.
63. Nepos, Cato 1.4; Cicero, De Sen. 10.
64. For dating, see Goldberg 2005: 11.
65. Nepos, Cato 1.4.
66. Sources on this episode of Cato’s life are Livy 35.50.4; Plut. Cato Mai. 12.4 and,
remain has attracted a great deal of attention:

Epistulis bellum gerit (⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻⁻⁻⁺⁺⁺⁺⁻AppBar
First of all, our sources make clear that the concentration of cultural wealth in Rome and in the highest social spheres had less to do with a disembodied conception of national identity than with an embodied process of cultural expansion. Once we take as a fact that Cato’s address to the Athenians testifies to an environment in which learning Greek and reading Greek literature was becoming a routine elite practice, his employment of an interpreter suggests that the use of linguistic skills and literary knowledge as means to gain authority was a contested matter. In Athens Cato would have asserted himself as a Roman ruler not only by addressing the local audience in Latin, but also, and more especially, by having his speech translated into Greek. By viewing the scene conjured up by Plutarch from a performance-oriented perspective, it is impossible to disregard that the interpreter’s voice would have amplified Cato’s oratorical address. In this sense, one should not underestimate the fact that, in the process of translating, the interpreter would have retranslated Cato’s translation from Demosthenes embedded in his speech. As such, Cato would have impressed his Athenian listeners by presenting himself not only as a political leader but also as a self-sufficient and self-confident proprietor of their cultural patrimony.

Another episode recounted by Plutarch provides us with further clues. According to Plutarch, in 155 B.C.E., the philosopher Carneades arrived in Rome on a diplomatic mission and delays in the senatorial hearing gave him the chance to lecture before an enthralled audience. Cato sped up Carneades’ departure and reproached the senator C. Acilius for showing too much eagerness in offering himself as an interpreter.\(^71\) It is customary to simply note that in Cato’s eyes Acilius had cheapened his senatorial status by acting as a subaltern.\(^72\) But if we read this episode by taking into account Cato’s own use of an interpreter in Athens, what we realize is that he also viewed Acilius’ loss of authority as directly proportional to the one gained by Carneades. For what Acilius had done was not to exploit his linguistic competence to produce an independent song, but to make himself instrumental to the performance of the Greek philosopher. Consequently, the episode dramatizes a crucial difference between acts of translation. It is one thing to remain attached to the source and perform a simple transposition across linguistic boundaries; it is quite another to draw freely from the source and leave an imprint on it by making it one’s own.\(^73\) The political dimension associated with Cato’s understanding of cultural mastery as a form of authority is well illustrated by Polybius in his account of Cato’s reaction to the history in Greek composed by another Roman senator, Postumius Albinus.

\(^{71}\) Plutarch, *Cato Mai.* 12.7; see also Pliny, *NH* 29.14

\(^{72}\) E.g., Gruen 1992: 73.

\(^{73}\) On interpreters vis-à-vis Cicero’s theorization of translation, see McElduff 2009
According to Polybius, in the preface to his work Postumius had asked his readers to excuse him if, being Roman, he was not fully competent in the Greek language and methods of inquiry. To this, he adds:

In my opinion Marcus Porcius answered him [i.e., Postumius Albinus] very fittingly. For he stated that he wondered about the reasons that pushed him to apologize. If the Amphictyonic assembly had ordered him to write a history, perhaps it would have been necessary to write so and make excuses; but to write of his own will and under no compulsion and then again to ask for forgiveness if he should produce barbarisms made no sense at all, and was just as useless as if a man who had entered his name at the games for the boxing or the pancration, once in the stadium, when the time to fight arrived should beg the spectators to excuse him if he should not be capable of enduring the effort or the blows.

(trans. Paton—modified)

This passage could not make more conspicuous the extent to which for Cato cultural mastery and political supremacy were entwined both conceptually and practically. First, Postumius’ apology for his linguistic and cultural shortcomings is represented as a failure to meet the demands that went along with his senatorial role and as a denial of Rome’s ascendancy over Greece. Second, the invocation of boxing and pancration for exemplary purposes gives substance to a conceptualization of cultural mastery and political supremacy in bodily and competitive terms. Third, the allusion to a spectatorship reaffirms scrutiny by a judging audience as an essential process for the acquisition of authority. In this respect, the passage as a whole suggests that for Cato the audience that mattered the most was the Roman ruling elite to which both he and Postumius belonged.

Good Authoritative Habits Are Learned at Home

Generally acclaimed as the first work of Latin prose that survives in its entirety, the De Agricultura is a text divided into 162 chapters. These chapters are introduced by titles most probably added by later editors. Despite the implicit order that the chapter organization may suggest, scholars have

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74. Cf. also Plutarch, Cato Mai. 12.5 and Gellius 11.8. Gellius states that at the start of his work Postumius stated his Roman and Latin origins as well as his unfamiliarity with Greek (“nam sum,” inquit, “homo Romanus natus in Latio, Graeca oratio a nobis alienissima est”). Gellius’ version of Cato’s response deviates from Polybius’ and is drawn from Nepos, Vir. Ill. 13.

75. Polybius 39.1.1–9.
long been struggling with its seemingly irreducible inconsistencies. First of all, the Preface does not appear to be well integrated with what follows. While in the opening section Cato supports agricultural practices against usury and commerce, the remainder takes the form of a series of instructions that range from agricultural topics to medical, dietary, legal, and religious prescriptions. To be precise, the first twenty-two chapters deal with the themes of purchasing, locating, managing, and expanding an existing farm. The next thirty chapters or so (chapters 23–53) are organized around farm operations starting with the grape-harvest and ending with a variety of summer operations, while the third part (69–130) includes medical and veterinary recipes as well as instructions for making bread and cakes. The final part is composed of miscellaneous materials including instructions on rituals, contract templates, suggestions on where to buy equipment, more instructions to be given to the overseer, and other recipes.

The assemblage of haphazard materials and the piling up of instructions on different topics can be described as the main features of this text, but repetitions and associations hinging on particular objects or practices add up to the impression of an overarching lack of organization. For example, instructions on the layering of trees are given in chapter 51 and 52, and then duplicated in 133. On the other hand, the *amurca* or the dregs that remain after the pressing of olives link together instructions on the construction of the threshing-floor, a cure for a sterile olive tree, a mixture meant to keep caterpillars off vines, a solution for scabies in sheep, and, finally, a number of suggestions on how to preserve myrtle and twigs bearing berries (chapters 91–101).  

In an important monograph published in the late nineteen-seventies, Alan Astin suggested that “the fundamental explanation for the lack of system and the lack of disciplined thought in the *De Agricultura* is to be found precisely in Cato’s role as the virtual founder of Latin prose literature, a role which is invariably recognized but the implications of which are easily overlooked. . . . Cato did not live in an environment which constantly inculcated ideals [of relevance, consistency, clarity] and techniques of composition, and had little previous experience of constructing books and equally little opportunity to benefit from the experience of others.”  

In recent years, the preoccupation over Cato’s failure to compose a well-wrought piece of literature has been superseded by a more fruitful effort to view the *De Agricultura* within its own cultural horizon.

Building upon Thomas Habinek’s reevaluation of the *De Agricultura*, Brendon Reay has brilliantly explored Cato’s most recognized strategy of self-promotion, the presentation of himself as the modern embodiment of former farmer-statesmen like Manlius Curius Dentatus (consul in 290, 284, 275, 274 B.C.E. and censor in 272 B.C.E.) and Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (consul in 460 B.C. and dictator in 458 B.C.E. and 439 B.C.E.). In a speech pronounced after his censorship, perhaps in 183 B.C.E., Cato defends his services and turns to his agricultural roots. The move implies that, just like those figures of old, his hands-on labor in the fields has been the source of his frugality, austerity, and industry and had prepared him to be equally ready to act on behalf of the State:

Ego iam a principio in parsimonia atque in duritia atque industria omnem adulescentiam meam abstinui agro colendo, saxis Sabinis, silicibus repastinandis atque conserendis.\(^{78}\)

From the very beginning I confined my entire youth in thrift and austerity and industry by farming, by clearing away Sabine rocks and stones again and again, and planting.

According to Reay, Cato’s agricultural biography in this fragment needs to be understood as a strategy of aristocratic self-fashioning that finds its most articulate expression in the Preface to the *De Agricultura*:

Est<o> interdum praestare mercaturis rem quaequerere, nisi tam periculosum sit, et item fenerari, si tam honestum sit. maiores nostri sic habuerunt et ita in legibus posiverunt, furem dupli condemnari, feneratorem quadrupli. quanto peiorem civia existimarint feneratorem quam furem, hinc licet existimare. et virum bonum quom laudabant, ita laudabant, bonum agricolam bonumque colonum. amplissime laudari existimabatur qui ita laudabatur. mercatorem autem strenuum studiosumque rei quaerendae existimo, verum ut supra dixi, periculosum et calamitosum. at ex agricolis et viri fortissimi et milites strenuissimi gignuntur, maximeque pius quaestus stabilissimusque consequitur minimeque invidiosus, minimeque male cogitantes sunt qui in eo studio occupati sunt.\(^{79}\)

Let us grant that at times it is better to make money by trading, were it not

so hazardous, and likewise to loan money at interest, if it were as honorable. Our ancestors thought so and established in their laws that a thief should be punished twofold, a usurer fourfold. How much worse a citizen they reckoned a usurer than a thief, one can reckon from this. And when they praised a good man, they praised him thus: “good farmer and good cultivator.” A man who was praised in this way was reckoned to have been praised to the fullest. Now I reckon a trader to be energetic and zealous in his pursuit of profit but, as I said above, he is liable to danger and disaster. But from farmers come both the bravest men and the most energetic soldiers, and, as a consequence, their livelihood is especially respected, most secure and least susceptible to hostility from others, and those who are engaged in this occupation are least likely to be malcontents.

(trans. Reay—slightly adapted)

By evoking the ancestors as a generic group in the same way as he does in his speeches, Cato stakes out here the claim that agriculture and its practitioners hold the highest place in the Roman social and ethical hierarchy. To put it in Reay’s words, his argument “unfolds historically, with Cato carrying forward into the present the evaluative process (existimo) and conclusion (farmers are superior) established by the ancients (existimarint, amplissime laudari existimabatur qui ita [bonum agricolam bonumque colonum] laudabatur). The conspicuous repetition of forms of the verb existimare dramatizes the superiority of agriculture over and against other occupations, and, at the same time, characterizes this superiority as traditional, for the origin of agriculture’s lofty social valuation is ascribed to the anonymous (and therefore unimpeachable) maiores.”80 What is more, Cato’s movement from the past to the present coincides with a shift into the first person (existimo).81 The shift has the effect of making the evaluative opinion of the ancestors his own, constructing the possibility of presenting himself as an incarnated ancestor. Through such a ploy, Cato sets the stage for what follows, a catalogue-like string of advice about the care of the land expressed in the imperative mood or in the hortatory subjunctive.

For the most part, Cato’s advice is addressed to an anonymous (would-be) master/head of the household, a dominus/pater familias that stands in a synecdochal relation with the Latin-speaking elite addressees of the entire work. His advice centers on the management of an estate that has little to do with the small plot figured in his evocation of earlier farming practices.

In fact, his precepts relate to the acquisition, equipment, organization, and administration of a villa-based estate powered by slave and hired labor where the day-to-day operation is the responsibility of an overseer (*vilicus*), probably a slave acting on behalf of his largely absent owner (*dominus/pater familias*). As Reay once again notes, Cato is able to bridge the gap between the past figured in the Preface and the present that informs the remainder by relying on a cultural tenet typical of traditional aristocracies: the extension of the master’s body through servile prostheses with which the master accomplishes various tasks and transactions. The pervasive use of the second person expresses this tenet by effacing the distinction between the work of the (would-be) *dominus/pater familias* and the labor of his subalterns. This effacement feeds the illusion that the *dominus/pater familias* is doing the same agricultural work as in the past; nowhere, however, does the confusion between master and slave entail that the former is supposed to get his hands dirty. In the same sense, the commands that are now and then directed to the *vilicus* do not imply that Cato counted the *vilici* among his readers; on the contrary, they represent the kind of commands that his elite addressees are invited to use when dealing with their own *vilici*.

Reay’s interpretation draws heavily on the pivotal role that the *De Agricultura* has long enjoyed in the interpretation of the socioeconomic transformations that took place in Italy after the Second Punic War. In recent years, however, the nature and impact of the war against Hannibal on agricultural practices in central Italy and the population growth in Rome has been undergoing a major reappraisal. If this were not enough, archaeologists are undermining the documentary value of the *De Agricultura* altogether. For Nicola Terrenato, the presence of large villas in both central Italy and Rome before Cato’s time is at odds with his invocation of hands-on farming that we find in the Preface; his prescriptions for wine presses call for sizes and capacity that are not even equaled two hundred years later, when wine was produced on a much larger scale. Also, Cato’s unawareness of the vitally important amphora system needed to trade wine and oil (which in his time was just starting at some sites in southern Italy) casts serious doubt on his understanding of the realities of the new trade. For my purposes, the rift between reality and representation that Terrenato has identified counters the unquestioned definition of the *De Agricultura* as a handbook and corroborates the necessity of rethinking its nature and scope.

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84. Terrenato forthcoming.
One way to do so is to acknowledge the centrality of the body. Reay’s attention to how Cato exploits the prosthetic function of slaves to reenact the past draws attention to the participation of the body in the transmission of knowledge and memory. If viewed in terms of scenario, the mythology of the farmer-statesmen makes evident that Cato relies on embodied frameworks within which shared memories are localized and individual bodies act in very specific ways. In the older scenario the farmer-statesman lives in the country and his body is single-handedly engaged in agricultural work. When the State calls, he moves out of that space and returns to it only after fulfilling his duty. Cato’s imperatives presuppose the older scenario and build onto it by bringing to center stage the dominus/pater familias, the master/head of the household. He is seldom present at the farm and acts in the agricultural setting through the work performed by those whom he commands. Since the new scenario is legitimated by reference to an older scenario linking agricultural and political activities, the change in the way the body acts signals much more than just Cato’s vested interest in his own aristocratic self-fashioning. At one level, the shift may be informed by the problems of ruling without being physically present that Rome’s military successes had intensified. If so, the imperatives that structure the De Agricultura have the performative force of creating the slave-powered farm as the setting in which (would-be) domini/patres familias can learn the skill of extending their bodies through the bodies of others. At another level, the older scenario promotes a view of self-sufficiency that obscures the long-standing gentilician reliance on subordinates and promotes self-mastery as the springboard for an effective aggrandizement of the self. Attention to how Cato constructs the environment of his farm and the characters that act within it reveals the scope of Cato’s prose from yet another perspective.

It is generally assumed that, when composing the De Agricultura, Cato had his own farm in mind and that its location should be identified somewhere between southern Latium and northern Campania. At 8.2 Cato speaks about the organization of vegetable gardens outside Rome; Venafrum and Casinum are mentioned at 136 in relation to variations on tenancy agreement; Suessa is indicated as the place in which an olive crushing mill can be bought (22.3); finally, at 135 he gives a list of places for the purchase of clothes and tools and refers to Cales, Minturnae, Lucania, Trebla Alba, Pompeii, Rufrium, Capua, and Nola. In her recent book, Romulus’ Asylum, Emma Dench relies on these references in order to problematize our understanding of Romanization as the one-way appro-

Inventing Latin Prose

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The appropriation of Roman cultural and political motifs on the part of the Italians and to propose in its stead a more nuanced model of imperialism. Her model takes into account not only the subjugation of people but also the transformation of land on a large scale. Interestingly, she locates the seeds of this practice in the fourth century B.C.E. and in the traditions relating to the conquest of Sabinum by Curious Dentatus, one of the farmer-statesman inherent in the scenario evoked by Cato in the Preface. Finally, she brings into relief the proprietorial behavior displayed by the Romans in general; at the same time, she stresses the multiple focal points revealed by the notion of specialties associated with individual locations.86

The link between the reconfiguration of conquered land and the fourth-century B.C.E. figure of Curious Dentatus uncovered by Dench helps us see that Cato’s imperatives construct the farm environment on a territory perceived as already conquered and reorganized. This underlying perception, in turn, sustains Cato’s overall proprietorial stance, a stance that encompasses the local specialties that he mentions and the knowledge embodied by those who are commanded to do the actual work. To be sure, there is not a single sentence in the De Agricultura that does not project Cato’s expertise over the practical techniques or material instruments that the vilicus, the slaves, or the hired workers are to adopt in performing their job. Indeed, Cato is so in control of the subordinate characters who populate the De Agricultura that in chapter 2.2 he is even able to anticipate the actions as well as the words of the vilicus:

Si ei opus non apparet,
   Dicit vilicus sedulo se fecisse,
   Servos non valuisse,
   Tempestates malas fuisse,
   Servos aufugisse,
   Opus publicum effecisse.

If the work seems wanting,
The overseer says that he has done his best,
That slaves were sick,
That the weather was bad,
That the slaves ran away,
That they were involved in public work.

86. Dench 2005: 162–73.
Writing in the early fifties and commenting on the dialogic nature of this passage, Antonio Mazzarino pointed out that by structuring the *vilicus*’ justifications into cola marked by assonances and rhyming, Cato parades a feeling of self-satisfaction for knowing what the *vilicus* will say.\(^{87}\) Although not stated as follows, Mazzarino’s impression derives from two elements: one, the words attributed to the *vilicus* are of Cato’s own making and, two, their *carmen*-style structuring communicates that for him the *vilicus*’ excuses are a trite and timeless reality. As I have pointed out earlier, the remains of Cato’s speeches suggest that he used the *carmen*-style in order to enhance his authoritative presence. In this instance, he puts similarly formalized speech of his own making into the mouth of the *vilicus* not only to display his grasp of the ways of the world, but also to construct this character’s lesser status. This fact becomes particularly conspicuous once we look at the list of replies that Cato proposes to the *dominus/pater familias* as responses to the *vilicus*’ justifications:

\[\text{Cum tempestates pluviae fuerint, quae operae per imbrem fieri potuerint: dolia lavari, picari, villam purgari, frumentum transferri, stercus foras efferri, sterculum fieri, semen purgari, funes sarciri, novos fieri, centones, cuculiones familiam oportuisse sibi sarcire. Per feras potuisse fossas veteres tergeri, viam publicam muniri, vepres recidi, hortum fodiri, pratum purgari, virgas vinciri, spinas eruncari, expinsi far, munditias fieri; cumb servi aegrotarint, cibaria tanta dari non oportuisse.}\(^{88}\)

If the weather has been bad, this is the work that could have been done while it rained: washing and pitching vats, cleaning the farm, moving grain, shoveling dung outside, making a dung-heap, cleaning the seed, mending ropes, making new ones, the slaves could have been mending their cloaks and hoods. During the holidays, the old ditches could have been cleaned, the public road redone, the hedges cut, the vegetable patch dug, the meadow cleared, the vines tied up, the thorny plants cut back, the grain husked, a general clean-up done; when the slaves have been sick, not too much food should have been given.

(trans. Dalby—slightly adapted)

From a structural point of view, this list is composed of periods consisting of small units made up, for the most part, of a noun and a passive infinitive.

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In turn, each unit is linked through rather weak assonances created by the infinitival endings. When compared to the list of excuses attributed to the *vilicus*, this new list features Cato holding back from imposing a tight pattern of speech on the *dominus/pater familias*. He does not structure the list of replies into clear cola and appears to simply outline the kind of answers that the *dominus/pater familias* may choose to use in order to respond to a subordinate. In this sense, Mazzarino was right when he said that it is a great mistake to intervene in the manuscript tradition and modify the list to match the *vilicus*’s excuses.89 Certainly, by leaving the passage as is we observe that degrees of formalization and imposition of speech serve to mark a character’s relative standing.

The connection between formal constraints, imposition of speech, and construction of characters displayed in these two passages calls attention to the social dimension inherent in the way later Romans referred to prose as *verba soluta* (loosened, unrestrained words). Indeed, it makes clear that prose emerged from within the tradition of the *carmen* and presented itself as speech acts attached to individuals involved in authority-building activities and free from formal restrictions enforced by others. On the other hand, the instructional dimension that informs Cato’s interplay with the anonymous *dominus/pater familias* inside the world of the *De Agricultura* and, by synecdoche, with the addressees of his work qualifies the link between the emergence of prose and the social formation of a new aristocracy. In order to clarify this twofold outcome, I find it useful to return to the *carmen* by plumbing more deeply recent insights into the understanding of ritual and ritualization.

While it is often stated that the *carmen*-style finds its roots in marked social events such as religious rites and juridical actions, less attention has been paid to the link between language and body that this statement implies.90 This lack of attention derives mostly from the fact that in ritual contexts formalized speech plays a key role by enabling the effectiveness of the accompanying actions. But formalized speech is itself a component of embodied schemes and these schemes structure a social actor’s experience of the world through endless oppositions and homologies. Deployed through the body understood in all of its dimensions, these oppositions and homologies privilege one activity over others and generate hierarchical schemes that are perceived as ordering the world. In this view, formalized

89. Mazzarino 1952: 131.

90. Some have also proposed that the extension to the juridical sphere belongs to a later stage, see Luiselli 1969: 123–71; De Meo 1986: 116 and passim. Cf. also Frankel 1964: 69–70, 223.
speech, body postures, periodicity, and invocation of divine beings are among the strategies that sustain the differentiation of certain activities from others. Ritualization refers precisely to this process of privileging. To put it in Catherine Bell’s words, “ritualization is fundamentally a way of doing things to trigger the impression that these practices are distinct and the associations that they engender are special. A great deal of strategy is employed simply in the degree to which some activities are ritualized and therein differentiated from other acts.”\textsuperscript{91} In the same vein, Bell reminds us that the goal of ritualization does not relate to the resolution of conflict or to social solidarity as such, but rather to the re-production of ritualized agents, people who are able to act on the instinctual knowledge of the schemes of hierarchization in such a way as to appropriate and mold a whole range of experiences in an empowered manner.\textsuperscript{92} Accordingly, she defines ritual mastery as the “ability—not equally shared, desired or recognized—to (1) take and remake schemes from the shared culture that strategically nuance, privilege, or transform, (2) deploy them in the formulation of a privileged ritual experience, which in turn (3) impresses them in a new form upon agents able to deploy them in a variety of circumstances beyond the circumference of the rite itself.”\textsuperscript{93}

The so-called Prayer to Mars that we find in chapter 141.2–4 of the \textit{De Agricultura} is considered one of the earliest examples of \textit{carmen}; as such, next to the Preface it is the passage that has received most of the scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{94} The Prayer to Mars, however, is not the only instance of \textit{carmen} that we encounter in the \textit{De Agricultura}.\textsuperscript{95} And even in this case, the highly structured context created by the shorter prayers and the formally marked instructions that precede them should not be disregarded. Closer attention to the entire section will serve to bring into focus Cato’s ability to impress upon his elite addressees a new form of shared schemes of doing and speaking stemming from the \textit{carmen}; what in other words we identify as Latin prose and the Romans as \textit{verba soluta}:

139. Lucum conlucare romano more sic oportet: porco piaculo facito, sic verba concipito:

\textsuperscript{91} Bell 1992: 220.
\textsuperscript{92} Bell 1992: 221 and \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{93} Bell 1992: 116.
\textsuperscript{94} See recently, Courtney 1999: 62–67, De Meo 1986: 133–69. For more strictly linguistic analysis and comparative observations, see Watkins 1995: 197–225; for a renewed view of this prayer via the Saturnian, see Mercado 2006.
\textsuperscript{95} See also chapters 83, 131, 132, 134; as far as I know, Dalby (1998: 21) is the only one to clearly acknowledge that there is more to look at than just the Prayer to Mars.
“Si deus, si dea es quoium illud sacrum est, uti tibi ius est porco piaculo facere illiusce sacri coerendi ergo harumque rerum ergo, sive ego sive quis iussu meo fecerit, uti id recte factum siet, eius rei ergo te hoc porco piaculo immolando bonas preces precor uti sies volens propitius mihi, domo familiaeque meae liberisque meis; harumce rerum ergo macte hoc porco piaculo immolando esto.”

140. Si fodere velis, altero piaculo eodem modo facito, hoc amplius dicit: “Operis faciundi causa”; dum opus, cotidie per partes facito; si interimiseris aut feriae publicae aut familiares intercesserint, altero piaculo facito.

141. Agrum lustrare sic oportet: impera suovitaurilia circumagi: “Cum divis volentibus quodque bene eveniat, mando tibi, Mani, uti illace suovitaurilia fundum, agrum, terramque mean quot ex parte sive circumagi sive circumferenda censeas, uti curas lustrare.”

2. Ianum Iovemque vino praefamino, sic dicit: “Mars pater, te precor quaesoque uti sies volens propitius mihi, domo, familiaeque nostrae: quoius rei ergo agrum, terram, fundumque meum suovitaurilia circumagi iussi, uti tu morbos visos invisque, viduertatem vestitudemque, calamitates inimicilesque prohibessis, defendas, averruncesque, utique tu fruges, frumenta, vineta, virgultaque grandire beneque evenire siris, 3. pastores pecuquaque salva servassi duique bonam salutem valetudinemque mihi, domo, familiaeque nostrae; harumce rerum ergo, fundi, terrae, agrique mei lustrando lustrique faciendi ergo, sicii dixi, macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus immolandis esto; Mars pater, eiusdem rei ergo macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus esto”; item.


Si minus in omnis litabit, sic verba concipito: “Mars pater, si quid tibi in illisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus neque satisfactum est, te hisce suovitaurilibus piaculo”; si uno duobusve dubitabit, sic verba concipito: “Mars pater, quod tibi illoc porco neque satisfactum est, te hoc porco piaculo.”\[96\]

139. To open up a clearing, you must use the Roman rite, as follows. Do sacrifice of an expiatory piglet, and say it thus:

“Whatever god, whatever goddess you may be to whom this place is

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sacred, since it is proper to sacrifice the expiation swine for the taking of this sacred place, therefore, may what I do or what another by my order does be rightly done. Therefore in slaughtering for you this expiation swine I pray with good prayers that you be willing and favorable to me, to my house and household and to my children; wherefore, accept the slaughter of this expiatory piglet.”

140. If you want to dig there, do another Expiation. Say explicitly “for the purpose of working the land.” Then do some of the work on each consecutive day till all is done. If you interrupt it, or public or household holidays intervene, you must do another Expiation.

141. You must consecrate the field as follows. Instruct Pig, Sheep and Ox to be driven all around:

“So that all may turn out well with the gods on our side, I entrust to you, Mr. X, to consecrate by your care my farm, my field, and my land; driving or drawing around Pig, Sheep, and Ox wherever you may determine.”

First invoke Janus and Jove with wine, and say:

“Father Mars, I ask and pray that you be ready and favorable to me, our house and household. Wherefore I have ordered Pig, Sheep and Ox to be driven all around my field, land and farm, so that you will prevent, ward off and avert sicknesse seen and unseen, childlessness and fruitlessness, disaster and storm; so that you will permit fruits, grains, vines and saplings to flourish and come to fruition; so that you will keep safe shepherds and flocks and give good heart and health to me, our house and household. Therefore, for the consecration and making sacred of my farm, field and land as aforesaid, accept the slaughter of this suckling Pig, Sheep and Ox.” Repeat:

“ . . . therefore, Father Mars, accept the slaughter of this suckling Pig, Sheep and Ox.”

Do it with a knife. Have strues and fertum at hand. Offer immediately. As you slaughter the piglet, lamb and calf, then:

“ . . . therefore accept the slaughter of Pig, Sheep and Ox.”

Mars must not be named, nor must one say “lamb” or “calf.” If all the offerings are unpromising, say it thus: “ . . . Father Mars, if anything dissatisfies you in that suckling Pig, Sheep and Ox, I offer you this Pig, Sheep and Ox in expiation.”

If only one or two are doubtful, say it thus: “ . . . Father Mars, since you were dissatisfied with that piglet, I offer you this piglet in expiation.”

(Trans. Dalby—slightly modified)

Following the arrangement that we find in the text, we first have the sacrifice of a piglet. According to Cato, this is to be done while clearing a
Inventing Latin Prose

new piece of land and must be accompanied by a general prayer for the safeguarding of the entire household. Cato’s injunctions are expressed by two clauses dominated by future imperatives and joined by asyndeton: porco piaculo facito, sic verba concipito (“you ought to perform the sacrifice of an expiation piglet, you ought to pronounce words conceived along these lines,” 139). In the next chapter, Cato states that the same prayer is to be performed in case of actual ploughing: si fodere velis, altero piaculo eodem modo facito, hoc amplius dicito (“if you want to dig there, you ought to do another expiation following the same method and say this explicitly,” 140). Once again, we find the use of two clauses featuring future imperatives joined by asyndeton; this time, however, the two clauses follow a more legalistic pattern, being preceded by a future-less-vivid hypothetical clause that sets up the condition of the action directed by the imperatives.97 Finally, in chapter 141, Cato gives instructions about the actual lustration of the field. The act is divided into two movements: first, the dominus/pater familias is instructed to order the herdsman to drive the animals around by adopting a specific formula; afterwards, the dominus/pater familias is urged to pronounce the prayer to Mars. For the first act, he says: agrum lustrare sic oportet: impera suovitaurilia circumagi (“it is necessary to lustrate the field in this way: order that the pig, sheep, and ox be driven all around”). Accordingly, he states the necessity of the lustration and instructs the dominus/pater familias in the present imperative to command a subaltern to perform an action. Afterwards, but before finally unfolding the Prayer to Mars, Cato instructs the dominus/pater familias to establish a relationship with the divine world through libation and prayer: Ianum Iouemque uino praefamino, sic dicito (“you ought to invoke first of all Janus and Juppiter with wine and say in this way”).

In all of these instances, we see the prevalence of future imperatives directed to the dominus/pater familias; some are also joined by asyndeton in such a way as to stress the simultaneity of doing and saying.98 In legal contexts, the future imperative—known also as the imperative of instruction—is standard in main clauses and is used for instructions to be carried out whenever required or after some condition has been fulfilled.99 Conversely, the present imperative tends to be used for commands to be carried out immediately. In the above scene, the only instance of present

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98. The prevalence of future imperatives coincides with what we find in the De Agricultura as a whole. Vairel-Carron (1975: 287–88) counts 976 instances of the second person future imperative, and only 31 of the present imperative.
imperative (141) serves to advise the *dominus/pater familias* to command the execution of an action. What follows, however, is not simply a command; it is a speech act that, on the one hand, draws its performativity from the ritual actions outlined in chapters 139–41 and, on the other, marks the *dominus/pater familias’* act of bestowing on a generic underling (*Manius*) the power of consecrating his property on his behalf.

Bearing formalities drawn from the *carmen* such as figura etymologica (*preces precor*), asyndetical synonyms (*volens propitius*), archaicisms (*quoium, siet*), and *uti*-clauses (*uti sies*), the opening prayer appeases the local divinity and solicits his or her assistance in the endeavor of transforming a piece of uncultivated land into an agriculturally productive field. But the plea and the sacrifice that the *dominus/pater familias* is supposed to perform also unfold the relations of power working within the household by explicitly invoking its structure in all of its spatial and human dimensions (cf. *mihi, domo familiaeque meae liberisque meis*, “for me, my house, my household, and my children,” 139). Thus, the sequence of actions that occupies chapters 139 can be taken as a ritual act that is so thanks to the innumerable oppositions and homologies that are both spoken out and acted upon. The most conspicuous include binaries like divine/human, cultivated/uncultivated, speaking/not speaking, everyday speech/formalized speech, doing/not doing, commanding/executing. Basic to the understanding of the entire event, however, is these binaries’ relationship with classifications that homologize the act of clearing and ploughing a new field in the context of a farm to the *sulcus primigenius* that marked the foundation of cities and colonies.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, in these classifications Cato’s experience with censorial practices plays a pivotal role. Indeed, it is hard to miss that the *suovitaurilia* that he projects in the context of the farm is a redeployed form of the rite that the censors performed during the taking of the census.¹⁰¹ In light of this, the activities unfolded in the *De Agricultura* have less to do with the performance of routine agricultural practices than with Cato’s manipulation of traditions and conventions filtered through his own perception and experience of reality. By taking this passage as a working sample, I propose to analyze more pointedly how Cato deploys the *carmen* tradition in his instructional addresses to the *dominus/pater familias*.

As I have noted above, Cato puts into the *vilicus’* mouth formalized speech of his own making in order to construct this character’s lesser

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¹⁰¹ See Gargola 1995: 77. It is generally taken for granted that the civic and the private rites of lustration are related without taking into account that this relationship may have been Cato’s invention.
standing and display his hold on power relations. Conversely, the looser formal organization that marks the list of replies proposed to the dominus/pater familias calls attention to the equivalence between freedom from externally imposed speech and social authority. This scheme can be seen to guide Cato elsewhere.

For example, when he articulates the first and foundational advice to the dominus/pater familias for inaugurating the cultivation of a new field, Cato adopts the verb concipere in the future imperative (139); later on, he anticipates the addenda to the prayer to Mars with the same verbal form (140.4). In the sphere of law and religion the Romans distinguished between concepta verba and certa verba: the former phrase refers to words that have undergone some type of adjustment either in pattern or form; the latter, to words that are fixed and unchangeable in pattern or form.102

In chapter 83 Cato prescribes the making of offerings for the health of the cattle without mentioning any particular prayer and concludes: hoc votum in annos singulos, si voles, licebit vovere (“you may make this offering every single year if you are willing to do so”). The same liberty characterizes the prescription of a spring offering for the oxen in chapter 132: Vestae, si voles, dato (“you do that for Vesta if you like”). If we look outside the rituals and at the contracts that we find in chapters 136–37 and 144–50, we see that these do not set out the main points of the agreement; rather, they tend to focus on potentially problematic clauses. Since they are not complete, these contracts cannot be considered texts to be rehearsed verbatim in the first place. As Britta Ager rightly points out, if it makes sense that the details of the contracts needed to be modified by the reader, the same conclusion should be applied to the rituals that are, in fact, found alongside the contracts. Like the contracts, so too the rituals appear to be providing frameworks within which some variation is anticipated. After all, a noticeable link between the two spheres is the use of generic names. In the sequence of actions surrounding the Prayer to Mars the subordinate who is supposed to lead the three animals is called Manius; in the contract templates in chapter 144 (contract for hiring olive harvesters) and 145 (contract for the milling of olives) this is L. Manlius, with the prenomen alluding to the different standing of the person involved in the figured transaction.103

Taken together, these passages suggest that Cato does not bind the dominus/pater familias to repeat his exact words in the exact same way;

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103. Ager 2009.
on the contrary, he imposes on him the choice of varying and modulating the model of speech and behavior that he proposes. After all, Cato does the same when redeploying expressions from one instance of prayer to the other. For example, the phrase *uti sies volens propitius mihi, domo, familiaeque nostrae* that we find in the opening prayer to the *suovitaurilia* (139) is integral to the Prayer to Mars that concludes the sequence of structured activities. The longer version, *bonas preces precor uti sies volens propitius mihi, domo familiaeque meae liberisque meis* embedded in the prayer to Mars features also in the prayers to Ianus and Jupiter pronounced during the sacrifice of a sow before the harvest (134.2 and 3). Thus, what stands out from such strategies is that Cato addresses the *dominus/pater familias* by commanding him to both master and freely manipulate patterns of speech and behavior that, by deferring back to a super-ordinary reality, guarantee the order of things. In other words, Cato relates to the *dominus/pater familias* as a Roman father would to his son.

That Cato was particularly concerned about the education of his children is well known. In this respect, it is customary to point to Plutarch, who states that Cato took in his hands the upbringing of his son and did not allow him to be taught by Chilon, a Greek slave and *grammatistes* living in his household. Fortunately for us, Cato’s educational choices also find expression in a number of fragments hortatory in tone and generally considered to be part of a larger work known as the *Ad Filium*.

The study of these fragments is characterized by a generalized tendency to fit what remains into some coherent Greek literary precedent and into books organized by subjects. This tendency tends to override the tradition of father-to-son teaching that underlies Cato’s strategic choices in the first place. The near contemporary parody of an exchange between father and son that we find in Plautus’ *Trinummus* (276–390), so pervasively filled with maxims, could be effective only if the embodied schemes that sustained the parody were well entrenched. Together with the often-cited agricultural precept, *hiberno pulvere, verno luto, grandia*  


105. Exemplary in this sense are Astin’s comments (1978: 339–40). The division into topics is still followed by Cugusi and Sbendorio Cugusi in their 2001 edition of the fragments. Cf. also Sbendorio Cugusi and Cugusi 1996: 193 and the introduction to their edition (2001:75–76). And yet, already in the early nineteen-fifties Mazzarino had unfolded a sound philological argument against seeing in the *Ad Filium* an encyclopedic project and had brought into the foreground their nonliterary model as well as their oracular tone.
farra, Camille, metes (‘Camillus, you will reap abundant spelt in the dust of winter and the mud of spring,’ Festus, 82.18–22L), the Trinummnus is a crucial pointer to the understanding of intergenerational instruction as a ritualized practice that looks to the carmen tradition.

At a formal level, the inclusion of father-to-son teaching under the rubric of carmen is warranted by the bipartite structure and the two-line length that characterize most of the surviving sententiae. While contextual details are hard to discern, it is clear that, generally speaking, a sententia objectified shared schemes of perception and action through the body of the social actor who articulated it. During the interaction, this same social actor communicated an empowered and empowering understanding of the cosmos.\textsuperscript{106} Seen in this light, sententiae associated with intergenerational relations emerge as a subgenre characterized by the interpellation of the younger party by name.\textsuperscript{107} This form of interpellation appeals emotionally and persuasively to the younger listener by prompting him to act according to the framework that the older speaker makes explicit and, therefore, to extend generationally the knowledge embodied by the older speaker. That this extensibility was a ‘bodily matter’ strictly entangled with the greater authority enjoyed by the speaker can, perhaps, be more easily observed if we use other instances of interpellation by name as a foil. One such instance, as I note above, is to be found in the lustration scene of the De Agricultura where the dominus/pater familias is asked to call by name the herdsman upon whom he bestows the power to drive the animals on his behalf during the rite (141). Whereas the herdsman acts simply as a prosthesis to the master’s physical body, sententiae involving a generationally lopsided relationship call into play embodied knowledge as well. In the tradition of juridical responsa the act of summoning by name located the hierarchical relationship between speaker and listener in a chain of homologies and oppositions that looked to a legitimating and superordinary reality. On this score, Aldo Schiavone has recently pointed out that in the archaic period the responsum constituted an authoritative manifestation of the recondite knowledge of the pontifices and had a structuring and regulatory impact on the ways the patres related to one another. For Schiavone, the fact that the responsa often contain the name of the consulting person underscores the practical nature of ius and its intricate

\textsuperscript{106} Some useful remarks on proverbs and similar types of speech acts are in Bourdieu 1990: 107–11. For a view on sententiae in relation to the system of sapientia, see Habinek 2006.

\textsuperscript{107} Note that Cicero acts upon the same cultural framework in his De Officiis (1.1).
relationship with a shifting but always exclusive social network. The *Ad Filium* needs to be viewed under this light.

Interpellation by name marks only three fragments grouped under the heading of *Ad Filium*, but the didactic tone of the remaining ones suggests that we are dealing with the same father-to-son relationship. In some cases, this impression is philologically confirmed by the reference "*Ad Filium*" that precedes the quotation or is implied by an imperative prescribing a behavior, a practice, or an action that is clearly associated with the elite. Accordingly, sometimes the son is explicitly called upon, as in *orator est, Marce fili, uir bonus dicendi peritus* ("An orator, my son Marcus, is an honorable man skilled in speaking," *Ad Filium* fr.*18 C&Sbl); other times the topic gives a clue, as in the famous case, *rem tene verba sequuntur* ("Hold the subject matter, the words will follow," *Ad Filium* fr. 19* C&Sbl). Focused on authoritative speaking, these two precepts follow the bipartite structure that we find in other samples of maxims. In turn, the expanded and modified version of the first of the two precepts just mentioned, *vir bonus est, Marce fili, colendi peritus cuius ferramenta splendent* ("an honorable man, my son Marcus, is skilled in cultivating and his instruments shine," *Ad Filium*, fr. 7 C&Sbl) undermine modern attempts to impose encyclopedic headings on this material and reveals once again Cato’s tendency to expand received schemes. In fact, we are not dealing here with two separate precepts, one about oratory and another about agriculture. Critics have long pointed out that the latter expresses the same preoccupation with the definition of the *vir bonus* that we find in the Preface to the *De Agricultura*; what has gone unnoticed is that agricultural and oratorical themes belong to the same sphere of activities. As the *De Agricultura* teaches us, speaking authoritatively is the same as caring for one’s farm since what the latter ultimately means is to exercise one’s control over the weave of constraints and possibilities that inform power relations.

Just as with the case of structural expansion, topical dilation is to be

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108. Schiavone 2005: 66–69; 144–45. It would appear that the *responsum* concluded with a maxim as well. I should also like to point out that Cato and his son are central to the scholarly discussion of *ius*. Indeed, the *De Agricultura* bears a clear sign of his juridical expertise in the contracts inserted into it; as I mention above, these too feature a generic name to be replaced by the *pater familias* adopting Cato’s templates. For further bibliography and discussion, see Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001: 2.234–47.

109. The interpellation by name appears in Cato, *Ad Filium* fr. *1; 7; *18 C&Sbl. I should also add that the material that Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi (2001: 2. 422–39) collect under this title is organized as if it were conceived as a book divided into specific topics.

110. For the philological argument, see Astin 1978: 338.

understood as an expression of Cato’s mastery of received traditions. In this sense, the longest fragment attributed to the *Ad Filium* (Pliny *NH* 29.14 = *Ad Filium* 1 C&Sbl) so focused on alien cultural practices like Greek literature and medicine is rather outstanding. In fact, it pushes the boundaries of precept-oriented father-to-son instruction in length and topicality so much that Cato can be seen to rein in his intervention by incorporating a direct address to his son, an explicit invocation of the pre-poetic figure of the *vates*, and a strong concluding imperative. What is crucial for our purposes is to recognize that by acting in such a self-possessed way Cato displays his holistic understanding of reality and impresses on his son a new tangible orientation to an unchanging cosmos. Not surprisingly, later commentators describe Cato’s precepts as oracular in manner and pitch. According to astin (1978: 338) downsizes the importance of this later reception.

In the mid-nineteen-fifties Antonio Mazzarino constructed a rather inspiring editorial history for the *De Agricultura* that took into serious account the precepts transmitted under the title of *Ad Filium*. From the comments that Pliny the Elder attaches to the piece on Greek literature and medicine, Mazzarino inferred that Cato had also made reference to a private *commentarius*. This would have contained medical recipes gathered over time which Cato would have used in order to care for his extended household. From such a *commentarius*, Cato would have derived a series of precepts addressed to the son without any particular order and focused on a great variety of topics (agriculture, medicine, and rhetoric). Finally, Cato would have gone on to compose the *De Agricultura*, a text left unfinished that included some of the previous material. That he intended to circulate this outside of his household would find confirmation in the suppression of the son’s interpellation. I will return to the specifics of Cato’s use of the writing medium in the following chapter; for the moment, I find it important to go back to two of Mazzarino’s points.

Clearly, in his philological reconstruction Mazzarino adopted an editorial model that has more to do with modern literary drafting than is warranted. Even so, by positing that the *De Agricultura* grew out of the *Ad Filium* he obliquely pointed to Cato’s tendency to modify and stretch

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inherited schemes. In his speeches Cato displays this tendency when he inserts alien and nonelite expressions into traditional and authoritative forms drawn from the *carmen*; in the *De Agricultura* when he intervenes in the intergenerational tradition of father-to-son instruction by structurally and topically expanding it. On this score, the conspicuous suppression of the son’s address constitutes a further expression of the same overall attitude. This suppression finds different resolutions in the Preface and the body of the *De Agricultura*: in the Preface it sustains his language of praise and evaluation;\(^{114}\) in the remainder it serves him to construct the *dominus/pater familias* as the character with whom his addressees are invited to identify and to whom he relates on a man-to-man relationship.\(^ {115}\) Finally, if a performance-oriented approach to the *Ad Filium* allows us to see that Cato’s interpellation to his son was guided by the aim of preparing him for a great variety of authoritative roles, by the same token the *De Agricultura* reveals that every single (would-be) estate owner who turned to the *De Agricultura* would have figured himself as Cato’s metaphorical son. Accordingly, while displaying Cato’s self-possessed grasp of the socio-cosmological order, the *De Agricultura* encoded forms and themes that secured its exclusivity and contributed to the socialization of a very small sector of Roman society.

\(^{114}\) Habinek 1998a: 46–50.
\(^{115}\) A feature stressed by Gratwick 2002: 70.