

THE CIRCULATION OF LITERARY TEXTS IN THE ROMAN WORLD

It is often assumed that we know very little about how literary texts circulated in the Roman world because we know very little about the Roman book trade.¹ In fact, we know a great deal about book circulation, *even though* we know little about the book trade. Romans circulated texts in a series of widening concentric circles determined primarily by friendship, which might, of course, be influenced by literary interests, and by the forces of social status that regulated friendship. Bookstores and ‘public’ libraries, which made a text available to individuals personally unknown to the author and his friends, were comparatively late developments. To trace the circulation of a Roman literary work, we shall use a schematic model to follow a literary text from its initial conception through the widening circles through which it moved.

THE INNER CIRCLES: THE AUTHOR’S FRIENDS

Once a work was drafted, authors commonly sent a copy to a close friend for comments and criticism. The copy was made in the author’s home at his own expense by his slaves. He tacitly assumed that his friend would not show the draft to anyone else.² Cicero often asked the advice of Atticus, who attached small wafers made of red wax to the passages he thought needed revision and then returned the draft to Cicero, who claimed he waited in fear of the wafers.³ Cicero, in turn, advised others on their works, as Brutus asked him to do for a speech he had given at a meeting on the Capitol but not yet made public in written form.⁴ Pliny often asked his friends for advice on his compositions.⁵

Although authors wanted honest criticism, they did not seek impersonal criticism. The ancient sources do not preserve a single case of an author requesting comments from a stranger. Rhetoricians, for example, did not ask for the opinions of other experts unless they were friends. The restricted sphere in which comments were sought and given encouraged insularity, since the author’s friends shared his background and therefore his attitudes toward such things as what was appropriate and the standards by which a work of literature should be judged.

Once the author had received his friend’s comments and initially revised the draft, he slightly widened the circle to which his work was accessible. This could be done by sending draft copies, again made in his home by his slaves at his expense, to several more friends.⁶ He could also invite a few friends to his home and recite the work to

¹ Only the author’s name will be used to refer to the following frequently cited works: Kenney = E. J. Kenney, ‘Books and Readers in the Roman World’, in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, II, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 3–32; Kleberg = T. Kleberg, *Buchhandel und Verlagswesen in der Antike* (Darmstadt, 1967), trans. E. Zunker from the original ed. (Stockholm, 1962); Quinn = K. Quinn, ‘The Poet and His Audience in the Augustan Age’, *ANRW* 30.1 (Berlin, 1982), pp. 75–180; Sommer = R. Sommer, ‘T. Pomponius Atticus und die Verbreitung von Ciceros Werken’, *Hermes* 61 (1926), 389–422.

² Cf. Cic. *Att.* 15.27 (SB 406).2; 13.21a (SB 327).

³ See *Att.* 16.11 (SB 420).1; 15.14 (SB 402).4, with Shackleton Bailey’s n. *ad loc.*

⁴ *Att.* 15.1a (SB 378).2.

⁵ See, e.g., *Ep.* 7.20, about exchanging works for comment with Tacitus.

⁶ Catullus 35 may reflect such a situation, but the poem has not and probably cannot be elucidated with complete confidence. See Quinn’s commentary *ad loc.* and F. O. Copley,

them in order to elicit their comments and reactions. Such private sessions were always small, since too large a gathering would obstruct the free flow of give and take between the author and his friends. Pliny comments, 'Recitaturus oratiunculam quam publicare cogito, advocavi aliquos ut vererem, paucos ut verum audirem'.⁷ In another letter he explains that the author who recites his work to his friends can make his decisions 'quasi ex consilii sententia'.⁸ Many other authors tested the waters in this way, including Silius Italicus, Vergil, and Horace.⁹

The small audiences at these test flights were made up of the author's friends or, in a more general sense, people with whom he was already in social contact, including patrons and clients. Just as an author did not send his first draft to a stranger, so he did not invite strangers to an experimental reading of a work in progress. This guaranteed an audience basically sympathetic, but also, one imagines, often basically unchallenging, which probably also encouraged insularity and discouraged taking literary risks. When Pliny recited his light poems, the most stringent disapproval he tempted was, as he knew, that some people thought someone of his stature should not recite such poetry (*Ep.* 5.3). Once he had decided to recite the poems, he probably received direct criticism only of the style.

These first readings were entirely closed. The audience would naturally discuss the work during and after the recitation, but the text itself did not circulate. The members of the audience were not given copies to take home and scrutinize at their leisure and, potentially, to share with others. The work remained entirely in the control of the author, who could decide whether it would ever reach a wider public either in further recitations or in written form.¹⁰

For the purposes of my discussion, I shall assume that the text is now polished and in its final form, although, obviously, the testing and revision of a work could go on indefinitely. It is only when the author sends copies to a wider group of friends that the written form of a text attains any great significance in its circulation. There is no impersonal, commercial copying at this stage; the copies are still made in the author's home by his slaves or in the home of a friend.¹¹ Atticus, for instance, made copies of his friend Cicero's works.¹² These private copies could be and probably were very good ones, since the author would carefully monitor the quality of the copyist's work in these presentation copies. As a special favour the author might proofread the copy and correct the mistakes himself.¹³

Authors presented gift copies only to their friends. We do not hear of a single author who sent a gift copy to a complete stranger. The first recipients were the dedicatee of the work¹⁴ and other friends intimately connected with it. Cicero assumes that Atticus has a copy of Tyrannio's study of Homeric prosody because the book was dedicated to him¹⁵ and elsewhere tells Atticus, 'Laudationem Porciae tibi misi' (*Catullus*, 35', *AJP* 74 (1953), 149–60, who suggests that Caecilius has sent a version that he considers ready to be released.

⁷ *Ep.* 5.12.1. Although the sincerity of Pliny's desire for serious criticism has been questioned (Quinn, 163), such scepticism is belied by Pliny's virtual obsession with testing his work on small groups of friends (Kenney, 11).

⁸ *Ep.* 5.3.8; cf. 5.12.1; 8.21.4.

⁹ Respectively, Pliny, *Ep.* 3.7.5; Don. *Vita V.* 33; and *Vita Hor.* Cf. Ovid, *Tr.* 4.10.41ff., although the works there may be at a more advanced stage of revision.

¹⁰ Cf. Quinn, 83 n. 23.

¹¹ See Shackleton Bailey's n. on Cic. *Att.* 13.21a (SB 327).1, on the *Acad.*

¹² See the fundamental paper of Sommer, op. cit. (n. 1).

¹³ Cf. Mart. 7.11, 7.17; Pliny, *Ep.* 4.26.1.

¹⁴ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 13.21a (SB 327).1.

¹⁵ *Att.* 12.6 (SB 306).2, with Shackleton Bailey's n. *ad loc.*

correctam. Eo properavi ut, si forte aut Domitio filio aut Bruto mitteretur, haec mitteretur'.¹⁶

Once the author had sent copies to these individuals, he sent copies to other friends. Ausonius, for instance, thanks Pontius Paulinus for sending him a copy of his versified condensation of Suetonius' three books on kings (25.19 Prete). Sidonius Apollinaris tells Lucontius, 'annuo iniunctis, quia dignus es, ut talia legas', when he sends his poetic trifles (*nugas*) (*Ep.* 4.18.3). Martial plays on this custom when he asks, 'Cur non mitto meos tibi, Pontiliane, libellos? | Ne mihi tu mittas, Pontiliane, tuos'.¹⁷ Sending Pontilianus a gift copy would be admitting him to a closer friendship than the epigrammatist wishes to exist.

THE OUTERMOST CIRCLE: STRANGERS

In most cases, the sending of author's gift copies of a finished text meant the effective release of the work from the author's control. It then became possible for people unknown to the author to acquire a text by making a copy from a friend's copy. When strangers could acquire copies of a work, that work can be said to have been *made public* or to have been *released*.¹⁸ The release of a text involved only a decision by the author that other people could make their own copies. If no one wanted to make a copy, no copies would ever be made except by the author himself for presentation to his friends.¹⁹

No commercial transaction whatsoever took place. If the author made another presentation copy, he paid for its creation. If someone else had a copy made, that person paid for the materials and the copying. The author was not compensated. The expense incurred is at issue when Martial writes: 'Exigis ut donem nostros tibi, Quinte, libellos. | Non habeo sed habet bybliopola Tryphon. | "Aes dabo pro nugis et emam tua carmina sanus? | Non" inquis "faciam tam fatue." Nec ego' (4.72). Quintus wants Martial to give him a copy because then Martial will bear the cost, but Martial sends him to a bookstore, not because that will produce a profit for the poet but simply because it will save Martial the cost of making a gift copy.

Most readers depended largely if not entirely on privately made copies.²⁰ Such

¹⁶ *Att.* 13.48 (SB 345).2.

¹⁷ 7.3. For a Martial poem announcing a gift, see 9.58. Tacitus ironically comments that Caesar and Brutus 'fecerunt enim et carmina et in bibliothecas rettulerunt, non melius quam Cicero, sed felicius, quia illos fecisse pauciores sciunt' (*Dial.* 21.6). D. Bo notes, *ad loc.*, that the libraries must be private since Rome did not have any public libraries at that time.

¹⁸ The basic discussions are Sommer and B. Van Groningen, 'ΕΚΔΟΣΙΣ', *Mnemosyne* 16 (1963), 1-17. See also, most recently, Kenney, 19, and J. E. G. Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism in Antiquity* (Salem, 1981), pp. 232-5. The term 'publish' should not be used because it unavoidably bears a burden of modern implications. The model of gradually widening circles might seem to leave no room for the special case of authors who died before their works, or at least some of them, had been fully released to the public, e.g., Vergil's *Aen.* and Lucretius. Even in such cases, however, the earlier steps of composition, limited circulation, and initial revision would not be missing. Literary executors, of course, might not abide by an author's wishes, as Varius and Tucca (and Augustus) set Vergil's aside, but they presumably still released works to strangers through the normal channels.

¹⁹ Although it should not be made to bear undue weight, we may see evidence of works that existed only in author's copies in Varro's statement that, of the many books he had written, 'aliquamultos, cum proscriptus esset, direptis bibliothecis suis non comparuisse' (cited by Gellius 3.10.17).

²⁰ Cf. F. G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome*² (Oxford, 1951), pp. 70-1.

copies met all needs before the Ciceronian period²¹ and, I suspect, most needs after it. Seneca, for instance, urges Polybius to be strong in spite of his sorrow because, 'Omnes illi, qui opera ingenii tui laudant, *qui describunt*, quibus, cum fortuna tua opus non sit, ingenio opus est, custodes animi tui sunt' (*Cons. Polyb.* 6.3).

An ancient author had various ways of making a text available for copying by others. First, as we have seen, he could send a gift copy to a friend without placing any restrictions on its being copied. Symmachus writes to Ausonius that, although he was not given a copy of Ausonius' poem on the Moselle, he managed to obtain one; he adds: 'spargas licet volumina tua et me semper excipias, fruemur tamen tuo opere, sed aliorum benignitate' (Symmachus, *Ep.* 1.14). Second, he could recite the work to friends and allow them to have copies made, the situation imagined in Juvenal's Third Satire, where Umbricius despairingly asks, 'Quid Romae faciam? mentiri nescio; librum, | si malus est, nequeo laudare et poscere' (3.41–2). Third, he could deposit a copy in one of the great public libraries, where it was, so to speak, in the public domain and could be copied by anyone who wished. Quintilian, in response to an imaginary critic who objects that his survey of literature left out this or that poet, insists that, 'Nec sane quisquam est tam procul a cognitione eorum remotus ut non indicem certe ex bibliotheca sumptum transferre in libros suos possit' (10.1.57), which implies that copying could be done in libraries. An Alexandrian 'edition' of a classic work, for example, could be a single copy placed in the Library out of the author's control and available for copying.²² Rome, however, did not have a single public library until Asinius Pollio founded one probably in the 30s B.C.²³ Although we should not imagine borrower's privileges extended to the entire population of Rome, inclusion in a public library could still have an effect in the small literary world of Rome. Tiberius' extreme delight in the works of the poets Euphorion, Rhianus, and Parthenius led him to include their writings and busts in 'publicis bibliothecis inter ueteres et praecipuos auctores'; as a result scholars dedicated works on those authors to the emperor and may well have offered them to the imperial public libraries.²⁴ Fourth, an author could allow or encourage his friends to make the book known.²⁵ Cicero asked Atticus to make his Greek work on his consulship known in Athens and other Greek towns.²⁶ The easiest method was for the friend to have the work recited to his friends, as Martial assumes Pudens will do with his epigrams.²⁷ Presumably a guest could ask to borrow the text to copy. Fifth, an author could deposit a copy with a bookdealer. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

THE CIRCULATION OF NON-CURRENT TEXTS

Private circulation was not restricted to new works. Non-current works, ranging from the very old to the relatively recent, also circulated privately, without the substantial intervention of any commercial system of distribution. The channels of circulation ran from one friend to another, never between strangers. A Roman did not ask someone

²¹ Sommer, 392; Kenney, 19–20.

²² Van Groningen, 'ΕΚΔΟΣΙΣ' (above, n. 18), 16; E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction* (Princeton, 1968, rev. ed., Oxford, 1980), pp. 112–13.

²³ Even then it is not clear how genuinely public the Roman public libraries were. I suspect that, while they may not have actively excluded the lower class, they probably did not need to. See A. J. Marshall, 'Library Resources and Creative Writing at Rome', *Phoenix* 30 (1976), 261.

²⁴ See Suet. *Tib.* 70.2. Cf. Joseph. *Vita* 361; *Contra Ap.* 1.50–1.

²⁵ See P. White, 'Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome', *JRS* 68 (1978), 86.

²⁶ *Att.* 2.1 (SB 21).2; cf. 12.40 (SB 281).1.

²⁷ 7.97.11; cf. *Stat. Silv.* 2. *ep.*

he did not already know to send a book even about a subject in which both were interested. This probably restricted both the number of texts in circulation and the number of people to whom particular texts were accessible.

Non-current texts were often given as presents to friends. The author himself might, at his own expense, send a copy of one of his works to a friend long after its composition and initial circulation. For example, Pliny sends, by request, a number of rolls at the same time to his friend Terentius Iunior, who lives on a country estate (*Ep.* 8.15.1). Martial tells his friend Norbanus, away from Rome in Vindeliccia with the army, that he is sending author's copies of previous books of epigrams to entertain him.²⁸ Theodosius writes to Ausonius to ask for copies of both his earlier and his current works.²⁹

Other authors' books were also often sent as presents to friends. Martial 14.183–96 is a list of epigrams to accompany such gifts, which include the *Batrachomachia*, Homer, the *Culex*, Vergil, Menander's *Thais*, Cicero, the first book of Propertius, Livy, Sallust, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tibullus, Lucan, Catullus, and Calvus' *On the Use of Cold Water*.³⁰ Ausonius sent copies of the *Fables* of Titianus and the *Chronicles* of Nepos to the praetorian prefect Probus as a present for the education of his children (25.10 Prete).

Friends often borrowed books from each other, as Cicero's correspondence reveals.³¹ For instance, in 49 B.C., while thinking about making an appeal for peace among the struggling political factions, he asks Atticus to send him a Greek work *On Concord*.³² Atticus did not send the book soon enough, so Cicero writes to ask again.³³ Having finally received the book, Cicero returned it.³⁴ On 28 May 45 B.C., he asks for two books by Dicaearchus and then on 2 June acknowledges receiving the first book and says he still awaits the second.³⁵

A friend could also facilitate requests to others, as Atticus did, for instance, when Athenodorus the Bald was slow to send Cicero an abstract the orator had requested.³⁶ Cicero also asks his friend to send him Panaetius' treatise *On Providence*, which he can acquire from Philoxenus.³⁷ Atticus was also asked to procure Theophrastus' *On Ambition* for Cicero from the books of his brother Quintus.³⁸ In Cicero's zeal for works on his consulship, he sent Atticus his own Greek work on the subject and promised to send others' works, too, if other people should write on it.³⁹

When one friend loaned a book to another, the recipient could make a copy at his own expense if he wished. When Cicero borrowed the work of the poet Alexander of Ephesus from Atticus, he copied it and then returned it.⁴⁰ Julian says that George had loaned him some books to copy when Julian was in Cappadocia and George was in Caesarea and that they had been returned (*Ep.* 23, 378c). Nymphidius borrowed

²⁸ 9.84. Men on military service obviously faced particularly difficult problems acquiring books (cf. Mart. 10.78.9–13). Maecilius Nepos took Pliny's *libelli* to the provinces when he served as a prefect (*Ep.* 4.26.2, with Sherwin-White's n. *ad loc.*).

²⁹ Auson. 1.3 Prete; Ausonius replies in 1.4 Prete.

³⁰ These poems have aroused substantial scholarly debate. Was the Livy, for instance, a complete text or an epitome? For discussions, see Kenyon, *Books* (above n. 20), pp. 94–5; R. P. Oliver, 'The First Medicean MS of Tacitus and the Titulature of Ancient Books', *TAPA* 82 (1951), 248 n. 52 (*contra* T. Birt, *Die Buchrolle in der Kunst* [Leipzig, 1907]); and Kleberg, p. 76.

³¹ Sommer, 398, mentions many examples in Cicero's *Letters*.

³² Att. 8.11 (SB 161).7, where, *ad loc.*, Shackleton Bailey briefly outlines the exchange.

³³ Att. 8.12 (SB 162).6.

³⁴ Att. 9.9 (SB 176).2.

³⁵ Att. 13.31 (SB 302).2 and 13.33 (SB 309).2.

³⁶ Att. 16.11 (SB 420).4.

³⁷ Cic. Att. 13.8 (SB 313), in which Cicero also asks Atticus to send Brutus' epitome of the history of Caelius.

³⁸ Att. 2.3 (SB 23).4.

³⁹ Att. 1.20 (SB 20).6.

⁴⁰ Att. 2.20 (SB 40).6 (with Shackleton Bailey's n. *ad loc.*) and 2.22 (SB 42).7.

the work of Mamertus Claudianus from Sidonius Apollinaris in order to copy it (Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 5.2). If the sender had a copy made for his friend's convenience, the borrower covered the expense. When Cicero was contemplating a geographical work, he tells Atticus, 'Fecisti mihi pergratum quod Serapionis librum ad me misisti... pro eo tibi praesentem pecuniam solvi imperavi, ne tu expensum muneribus ferres'.⁴¹

Since a relatively small number of copies of a text was in circulation at any given time, locating a copy could be difficult and time-consuming. Cicero comments that, although he used to read the orations of C. Fimbria when he was a boy, he can hardly find them any more (*Brut.* 129). Diodorus Siculus claims that his universal history is particularly useful because readers would not have to go to the considerable difficulty of acquiring all the histories his work supplants (1.3.8). Julian tells Priscus, 'Seek out for me all of Iamblichus' writings to his namesake. You're the only person who can do that, since your sister's in-law owns a well-corrected copy' (*Ep.* 2).

A friend could provide enormous help, particularly to someone away from the major urban centres. Sidonius Apollinaris sent Namatius, a naval officer on the Atlantic coast, two works of other authors that he had requested (*Ep.* 8.6.18). In an Oxyrhynchus Papyrus from the second century A.D. (2192), one friend writes to another: 'Make a copy of Hypsicrates, *Characters in Comedy*, Books Six and Seven, and send it to me. For Harpocration says they're among the books of Pollion. It's likely that other people also own them. He also has epitomes of Thersagoras' work on the myths of tragedy.' At that point a different hand notes,

Harpocration says Demetrius the bookdealer has them. I have told Apollonides that he should send me, from my own books, certain ones that you'll learn about from Seleucus himself later. If you find any I don't possess, make copies and send them to me. The circle of Diodorus has some I don't.

A final example shows both how individual and how avid literary exchange could be: Sidonius Apollinaris writes to his friend Faustus that a priest, while on his way to Britain carrying books written by Faustus, stopped for two months in Auvergne but did not reveal that he had the volumes. After the priest left, Sidonius found out and chased him down a day's travel away; 'capti hospitibus genua complector, iumenta sisto, frena ligo, sarcinas solvo, quaesitum volumen invenio produco lectito excerpto, maxima ex magnis capita defrustans'.⁴²

SOME EFFECTS OF THE PRIVATE CIRCULATION OF LITERARY TEXTS

A text might slip out of an author's control contrary to his intention or even without his knowledge. Ausonius became angry with Symmachus when Symmachus did not maintain confidentiality when sent one of the poet's works (Symmachus 1.31). Cicero complained to Atticus that Balbus had copied *De Finibus*, Book 5 from Atticus' copy although Cicero did not want it released yet and had not yet given Brutus, the dedicatee, a copy. He adds that Caerellia has apparently also made a copy of *De Finibus*. He asks Atticus to keep the *Academica* to himself until Varro, the dedicatee, has received a copy.⁴³

Readers often did not and could not know whether the author had actually released his work to the public. This issue, however, sounds more significant than it may in

⁴¹ *Att.* 2.4 (SB 24).1, with Shackleton Bailey's n. *ad loc.*; discussed by Sommer, 399.

⁴² *Ep.* 9.9.6–8; cf. 9.7.1.

⁴³ *Cic. Att.* 13.21a (SB 327); discussed by Sommer, 410–11. See also 13.22 (SB 329).3; 13.23 (SB 331).2.

fact have been for readers, since the main question would be whether the text they had acquired was the author's final version or an incompletely revised text. The author, however, did not want an unpolished version to circulate, since it could damage his reputation.⁴⁴

In fact, readers had no guarantee that a work was even *by* its putative author. When Cicero's speech *Against Clodius and Curio* leaked into circulation against his wishes, he exploited the potential ambiguity by suggesting to Atticus that they try to pass it off as a forgery.⁴⁵ Quintilian explains that he was all the more eager to write his *Institutio oratoria* '... quod duo iam sub nomine meo libri ferebantur artis rhetoricae neque editi a me neque in hoc comparati'.⁴⁶

Since private copies were usually made in small numbers, an author could revise his work at any time. Cicero, for instance, asked Atticus to correct the text of *Acad.* 2.94 because he had learned that *inhibere* was used incorrectly⁴⁷ and to notify the dedicatee of the change. Atticus was also asked to delete a mistakenly used name in Cicero's defence of Ligarius.⁴⁸ A substantially revised version of a text might or might not supplant the earlier version. For example, although Quintilian knew of two versions of one of Cicero's treatises, Ammianus knew only the earlier version.⁴⁹ But when Cicero asked Atticus to substitute 'Aristophanes' for 'Eupolis' in the *Orator* (29), the correction was made and is preserved in our manuscripts.⁵⁰

Private circulation implies that suppression or official discouragement could never be entirely successful⁵¹ nor were they expected to be. When a book was removed or barred by order of the emperor from the imperial public libraries, the author would be disgraced, but his writings were not destroyed, since they could still circulate in private hands.⁵² Ovid's works written in exile, for instance, did not meet a welcome in the imperial libraries – one of the exile poems even lists the public libraries from which the book was banned (*Tr.* 3.1.65–72) –, but there is no question of exclusion from private libraries. Books were even burned in Rome, such as the writings of Labienus,⁵³ but private circulation circumvented even such censorship.

THE ROMAN BOOKTRADE⁵⁴

Bookdealers, like many businessmen in Rome, tended to be freedmen, men of low social status. We come across a few names: the Sosii, for instance, who worked with Horace; Dorus, who Seneca says handled Livy; and Pollio Valerianus, the freedman

⁴⁴ See Cic. *Att.* 13.21a (SB 327).1.

⁴⁵ *Att.* 3.12 (SB 57).2.

⁴⁶ 1.pr.7. He explains that, 'Namque alterum sermonem per biduum habitum pueri quibus id praestabatur exceperant, alterum pluribus sane diebus, quantum notando consequi potuerant, interceptum boni iuuenes sed nimium amantes mei temerario editionis honore uulgauerant' (ibid.). Cf. 3.6.68 and 7.2.24.

⁴⁷ *Att.* 13.21 (SB 351).3; in fact, *inhibere* was an earlier alteration.

⁴⁸ Cic. *Att.* 13.44 (SB 336).3. Cf. Sid. *Apoll. Ep.* 2.8.2.

⁴⁹ R. M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford, 1978), p. 60.

⁵⁰ Cic. *Att.* 12.6a (SB 243).1.

⁵¹ J. Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 15.

⁵² G. Williams, 'Phases in Political Patronage of Literature in Rome', in B. K. Gold, ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, 1982), p. 20.

⁵³ Sen. *Contr.* 10. praef. 5–7.

⁵⁴ Of all the topics connected with the circulation of literary texts in Rome, the booktrade is the most prone to distortion because of the influence of supposed modern parallels. If we do not abandon the modern model, we shall be trapped into anachronistically postulating the existence of a complex system for which we have little or no evidence (e.g. Kleberg's discussion of pre-Ciceronian authors, p. 23). As long ago as 1926 Sommer demolished the notion of Cicero's

Secundus, and Trypho, who dealt with the books of Martial.⁵⁵ They were, in simple terms, the owners of small shops that dealt in luxury items. Perhaps as significant, they apparently only handled current literature and did not sell older works.⁵⁶

Their business was conducted at the retail level: each bookdealer made the copies he sold. There was little or no distribution system to support the individual shop-owner⁵⁷ and, therefore, virtually no broadly-based geographical distribution except on the individual level.⁵⁸ If a bookshop owner in a provincial city sold a copy of a book, it implies that he had made that copy, not that he had bought a large number of copies from a Rome-based distributor.

Most of the copies bookdealers sold were probably made at the specific request of a customer. The shop-owner merely needed to have on hand or to acquire exemplars of various texts from which he could make copies as necessary. A stock might be maintained of some texts, however, since Martial directs potential purchasers of his epigrams to the shop of Atrectus, who 'de primo dabit alterove nido | rasum pumice purpuraque cultum | denaris tibi quinque Martialem' (1.117.15–17).

We have no idea at all how many copies of a work might be made. A famous letter of Pliny mentions that Regulus had one thousand copies made of his eulogy for his son, but that is an unusual kind of text and Pliny thinks the number excessive and in bad taste.⁵⁹ The question is actually close to meaningless in a world of individually made copies, since the number of copies would increase directly in proportion to the number of readers who wanted one and was not related to the number made at any particular time.⁶⁰

friend Atticus as in any sense a commercial 'publisher', but decades later some scholars still inaccurately refer to 'the mass-production scriptoria of the big publishers of the ancient world, such as Atticus' (T. C. Skeat, 'The Use of Dictation in Ancient Book-Production', *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 42 [1956], 189). Many questions about the Roman booktrade simply cannot be answered on the basis of the surviving evidence (Kenney, 20), but several crucial issues can be sketched out.

⁵⁵ Sossii: Hor. *Epist.* 1.20.2, *Ars P.* 345; Dorus: Sen. *Ben.* 7.6; Pollio: Mart. 1.113.5; Secundus: Mart. 1.2.7–8; Trypho: Mart. 13.3.4. The publication of Martial's poems has been discussed by many scholars, e.g., E. T. Sage, 'The Publication of Martial's Poems', *TAPA* 50 (1919), 168–76; W. Allen, Jr *et al.*, 'Martial. Knight, Publisher, and Poet', *CJ* 65 (1970), 345–57; and Kleberg, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism* (above, n. 18), p. 235.

⁵⁷ When Kleberg contends that booksellers doubled as 'publishers' responsible for distribution, first in the form of contacts with booksellers (p. 37), he imports seriously anachronistic conceptions into the Roman marketplace.

⁵⁸ Philostr. *VS* 2.21 (603), on Proclus of Naucratis, provides an extremely rare potential counter-example. See also Hor. *Epist.* 1.20.9–13, which may involve the sending of out-of-fashion books to the provinces, although the ancient commentators took it differently (see E. Galletier, 'L'Épître d'Horace à son livre (1.20) et les commentaires antiques', *Revista Clasica* 8 [1936], 30–1).

⁵⁹ Pliny, *Ep.* 4.7.2, with Sherwin-White's n. *ad loc.* and Sommer, 414 n. 3. Kleberg, p. 62, thinks 1000 copies may not have been unusual.

⁶⁰ Kleberg (p. 63) overlooks this when he anachronistically discusses the risk of too large an 'edition' to booksellers and those he terms 'publishers'. Cf. E. G. Turner, *I libri nell'Atene del V e IV secolo a.C.*, trans. M. and L. Manfredi, in G. Cavallo, ed., *Libri, editori e pubblico nel mondo antico* (Rome, 1975), p. 21 (rev. version of *Athenian Books in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.* [London, 1952; inaug. Lecture, University College London, 1951]). Two secondary sources of texts can be mentioned here. First, school texts, whether copied by the students at the master's dictation or not, no doubt drastically increased the number of a very few works. Second, the sale of used books, if it occurred at all, may have affected the circulation of literary texts to a limited degree. It is easy to overestimate the importance of used book sales, however, since the evidence is extremely slight, as should be expected. From what sources would a used book dealer obtain his wares? The 'fascēs librorum' Gellius buys at Brundisium (9.4.1–5)

Nor do we know how the individual copies were made.⁶¹ The most common method was undoubtedly having slaves make one copy after another from a master copy, as probably happened with Regulus' one thousand copies of his eulogy of his son.⁶² Various other methods have also been suggested. To extrapolate the *pecia* system back in time, a text might be divided into sections which would then be passed out to a number of different copyists.⁶³ Alternatively, one person might dictate a text to several others who would write it out, thus producing an economy of time.⁶⁴ Our modern insistence on economies of speed and scale, however, makes it difficult for us to keep in mind that such economies did not necessarily motivate the Romans.

Book prices in bookstores also elude conclusive discussion, since they appear only very occasionally in the surviving sources. For example, as we have seen, Martial mentions that a deluxe copy of one of his books costs five denarii.⁶⁵ Three basic points, however, reduce the importance of the question. First, book prices would not have concerned the large majority of the population of the Roman world for the simple reason that they could not read.⁶⁶ Second, the economic structure of that population – with a very small number of very wealthy people, a very large number of very poor people, and no significant middle class in the modern sense – put books at any price out of most people's reach.⁶⁷ Third, as we have seen, the booktrade was merely an ancillary system of circulation beside the private channels that probably supplied the vast majority of literary texts. In short, not many people owned books in the first place and, of those who did, not many bought them at bookshops.

More tantalizing questions are who patronized bookdealers and why. The answer may lie in the fact that Roman bookdealers were not in competition with the private channels of circulation in which so much of Roman literature moved. If a Roman could acquire a text through those private channels, there was no reason for him to buy from a bookdealer.⁶⁸ Neither Cicero nor Pliny, for instance, two of our major sources for the circulation of literary texts, ever mentions going to a bookshop. This, of course, does not prove that they never visited such a shop, but it may suggest that they obtained any texts they wanted through their friends. If a reader's circle of friends included neither the author of the text nor someone who owned a copy, then bookstores might provide a helpful service. Catullus, for example, says that he will torment a friend by buying books of bad poetry and giving them to him (14.17–20). The joke may be based not only on the low quality of the poetry itself but also on

are *not* specified as used books: they are merely in bad condition (9.4.4; *contra* B. Baldwin, *Studies in Aulus Gellius* [Lawrence, Kansas, 1975], p. 17). Antiquarian or rare books, however, were sold (see, e.g., Gellius 5.4.1), but such books were valuable for their age or other qualities, not for normal use; see J. E. G. Zetzel, 'Emendavi ad Tironem: Some Notes on Scholarship in the Second Century A.D.', *HSCP* 77 (1973), 225–43, on forgeries; cf. T. Kleberg, 'Antiquarischer Buchhandel im alten Rom', *Vetenskapssamhällets i Uppsala* 8 (1964), 21–32.

⁶¹ Skeat, 'Dictation' (above, n. 54), 179–91, provides a very useful and judicious history of the question.

⁶² See Sherwin-White, ad Pliny, *Ep.* 4.7.2.

⁶³ Kleberg, p. 31.

⁶⁴ Skeat, 'Dictation' (above, n. 54).

⁶⁵ 1.117.17. Much modern discussion has focused on Martial's epigrams for presents of books, 14.183–96 (see above, n. 30). The enormous variation in the gifts for which Martial gives epigrams in the rest of Book 14, however, precludes any definitive discussion of book prices on the basis of those poems.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kenyon, *Books* (above, n. 20), p. 80.

⁶⁷ J. J. Phillips, 'Book Prices and Roman Literacy', *CW* 79 (1985), 36–8, overlooks this. See T. P. Wiseman, 'Pete nobiles amicos: Poets and Patrons in Late Republican Rome', in B. K. Gold, ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, 1982), 39; Marshall, 'Library Resources' (above, n. 23), 254–5.

⁶⁸ See Mart. 4.72, quoted above.

the implication that the poets he mentions were so terrible that no one in his circle would know them or own a copy of their poetry.

Since even the élite used bookstores as gathering-places⁶⁹ and since booksellers put up advertisements on their doorposts,⁷⁰ the shops would expose the work of unknowns to the literary upper crust. That exposure might conceivably and eventually produce social contact, which, at least theoretically, might provide a way to break into the concentric circles of circulation and friendship and might even result in the discovery of a patron.⁷¹ Monetary gain directly from the sale of copies was not a factor.⁷²

Other advantages have been suggested by modern scholars but are overstated. First, a bookstore was a place to send people who wanted a copy,⁷³ as Martial sends the obnoxious Quintus,⁷⁴ to whom he does not want to give a gift copy and with whom he does not want to acknowledge the degree of friendship that would imply. This, however, would only be done in awkward situations, not as a common practice. Second, bookshops have been thought to provide some safeguard for the accuracy of the text, at least early in its circulation,⁷⁵ although the relatively unregulated circulation of texts would substantially limit this advantage.

The booktrade appears to become more important during the first century A.D., so that by Pliny's time it seems to have become an accepted method for the circulation of literature,⁷⁶ although by no means the only method. Martial, as we have seen, often mentions the dealers who handle his books. Pliny asks Suetonius, 'Patere me uidere titulum tuum, patere audire describi legi uenire uolumina Tranquilli mei' (*Ep.* 5.10.3). The orator is delighted to hear that his works are popular with people who buy them in bookshops.⁷⁷ Quintilian is given heart by the encouragement of Trypho, who sells his books (*Praef.* 3). By Pliny's time, at least some authors thought it appropriate to give a copy of a work to a bookseller, who could then make and sell copies if anyone wanted them. Even if bookshops did become more important, however, private channels did not lose their importance. Such channels would have continued to serve the literary needs of the established literary and social élite and would also have continued to provide non-literary works such as commentaries and lexica.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ See Gell. 5.4.1; 13.31.1; 18.4.1. Cf. Athenaeus 1.1.d-e. Catullus writes of looking for a friend *in omnibus libellis* (55.4). Quinn, *ad loc.*, argues that although 'C. no doubt means places where books were displayed for sale', we do not 'need to assume (as some do) that *libelli* = "bookshops"'. The assumption, however, is a natural one.

⁷⁰ See Mart. 1.117.11.

⁷¹ Cf. P. White, 'Positions for Poets in Early Imperial Rome', in B. K. Gold, ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, 1982), 62. R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 137-8, argues that the importance of literary talent and education in social mobility resided primarily in acquiring contacts, which would then, on the standard basis of personal relationships, work the advancement.

⁷² See White, 'Positions for Poets' (above, n. 71), 52-3.

⁷³ Kenney, 21.

⁷⁴ Mart. 4.72, quoted above.

⁷⁵ Kenney, 21.

⁷⁶ Kenney, 22; cf. Sherwin-White, *ad Pliny, Ep.* 4.7.2. It is very difficult to evaluate this issue because of the nature of our sources and their distribution in time. Martial provides many of the extant references to bookshops, but at approximately the same time Pliny is surprised at the very existence of bookshops in the Three Gauls (*Ep.* 9.11.2) and does not mention visiting any Roman bookshops himself. Bookshops may occur relatively frequently in Martial's epigrams simply because his poetry is a collection of ephemeral and topical pieces, which would be likely to mention various kinds of shops.

⁷⁷ *Ep.* 1.2.5-6. Sherwin-White, *ad Pliny, Ep.* 1.2.5, argues that the distribution of Pliny's books was entirely in the hands of booksellers. Pliny distributed copies on his own as well, however.

⁷⁸ On non-literary works, see S. West, 'Chalcenteric Negligence', *CQ* 20 (1970), 290.

The increasing importance of bookshops may be due to several factors. First, authors in Pliny's time may have wanted to reach further beyond the narrow circles of their own friends and their friends' friends.⁷⁹ It would be misleading to think of this as an increase in authors' ambitions, since this might seem to imply that earlier writers were men of modest ambitions. Rather, the change may have represented a somewhat broader conception of the potential audience for a literary work. Even so, wider distribution does not imply an enormous increase in the number and diversity of the reading public, since the potential audience remains the intellectual aristocracy. The change would still be profound, nonetheless, since it implies the partial freeing of literature from the bonds of friendship.

Second, a larger role for bookshops may reflect the emergence of a relatively new type of Roman writer. For older Roman writers, literature was always seen as merely one facet of the life of an aristocrat, albeit a very important one. Although writing and reading undoubtedly affected their social relationships, those relationships were also based on other ties such as politics, marriage alliances, and family traditions. For the newer writers such as Martial, however, arriving in Rome from abroad, lacking the ties of politics and the other elements of aristocratic friendship, literature provided a point of access to the aristocracy, a way of making contact with the élite. For them literature played a functional role in addition to its earlier one. Any financial advantage, however, came from the well-established system of patronage.

Third, since, as has been argued above, bookshops enjoyed no special status above that of any luxury shop, that very commonality of commercial status may hint that literature was becoming something that could be bought and sold like perfume or expensive fabric. Since literature had been and remained a symbol of social status, its reduction to a marketable commodity may indicate a weakening of the hold of the traditional aristocracy on the control of access to social status. In earlier Roman society, one had to be a member of an aristocratic group to acquire access to works that circulated primarily within that group. In this later period, bookstores made it at least theoretically possible for access to literature to precede and perhaps even to facilitate access to certain refined circles.

Yet, for all these suggestions, Roman literature remained the preserve of the aristocracy except in oratorical events and public performances. If bookshops helped literature move out of the strict control of aristocratic groups of friends, they actually did so only to help outsiders gain access to those élite circles.⁸⁰

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⁷⁹ Cf. Quinn, 152, although I question whether 'The problem which dogs Roman literature throughout its history is the lack of an audience large and representative enough to make the writer feel he is fulfilling a valid social function'.

⁸⁰ My thanks go to Katherine A. Geffcken, Mary R. Lefkowitz, Miranda C. Marvin, James N. Rash, and the editors and referees of *CQ* for helpful suggestions and to Wellesley College and the American Council of Learned Societies for supporting my research.