

TECHNIQUES OF READING IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

INTRODUCTION

It has gradually become accepted among historians of ancient culture that the Greeks and Romans always, or nearly always, read aloud. They did not read to themselves, silently, save in rare and special cases. Either they were not able to read silently, or they felt no need to do so, or they did not enjoy doing it even when they were alone.

Here, from the introductory section of the *Cambridge History of Latin Literature*, is a recent statement of the standard view:

In general it may be taken for granted that throughout antiquity books were written to be read aloud, and that even private reading often took on some of the characteristics of a modulated declamation. It might be said without undue exaggeration that a book of poetry or artistic prose was not simply a text in the modern sense but something like a score for public or private performance.¹

A valuable new study of literacy in ancient Greece endorses 'the commonplace that the written word in the ancient world, particularly the written record of literature, was meant to be heard rather than read silently'.² The idea that the ancients preponderantly read aloud is equally widespread in German scholarship; examples range from a reference book of the 1930s,³ through a recent booklet from a series of introductions for students,⁴ to a lecture by G. Rohde.⁵ It has a firm hold on Russian scholarship too.⁶

The most detailed grounding for the view came from the Hungarian scholar, J. Balogh.⁷ He collected a large number of passages from ancient as well as from late Christian authors, in an attempt to prove that reading was both practised and conceived by the ancients (and later too, even into the seventeenth century) almost exclusively as reading aloud, even when the reading was done in solitude. The very rare cases of someone reading silently caused such surprise in those who saw it that they apparently felt it necessary to find a reason for the odd behaviour.

¹ E. J. Kenney, *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*. Vol. ii. *Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 12. Kenney also insists on these claims in a review published in *American Journal of Philology* 106 (1985), 126.

² Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 91.

³ Hans Lamer (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Antike mit Berücksichtigung ihres Fortwirkens* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 377f.: 'Wer . . . selbst las, tat es laut, so wie man auch laut schrieb. Leises lesen und Schreiben wird erwähnt, blieb aber Ausnahme'. The identical words appear in the eighth 'verbesserte und ergänzte Auflage', ed. Paul Kroh (Stuttgart, 1976), p. 420.

⁴ W. Eisenhut, *Einführung in die antike Rhetorik und ihre Geschichte* (Darmstadt, 1976), p. 93.

⁵ 'Über das Lesen im Altertum', in G. Rohde, *Studien und Interpretationen zur antiken Literatur, Religion und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1963), p. 294: 'Der antike Mensch hat bis in die spätesten Zeiten des Altertums laut gelesen, auch wenn er allein las'.

⁶ A. P. Kazhdan, *Kniga i pisatel' v Vizantii* (*Book and Writer in Byzantium*) (Moscow, 1973), p. 136; S. S. Averintsev, *Poetika rannevizantiskoi literatury* (*The Poetics of Early Byzantine Literature*) (Moscow, 1977), p. 183f. The idea is frequently used in the translators' annotations to the Russian versions (various dates) of Heliodorus, Augustine, Ovid, etc.

⁷ 'Voces paginarum': Beiträge zur Geschichte des Lauten Lesens und Schreibens', *Philologus* 82 (1927), 84–109, 202–40.

The source commonly cited for the standard view is the well-known work of Eduard Norden on the history of ancient prose style.⁸ There is no doubt that Norden's discussion, and his authority, played a significant role. But the idea itself does not originate with him. Passing over the intervening links,⁹ we find it already adumbrated by Christoph Martin Wieland, whose work was a milestone in the translation and reception of ancient literature in the second half of the eighteenth century. Commenting on Lucian, *Adversus indoctum et libros multos ementem* 2, Wieland muses on how the passage shows that all books of value to the ancients (at least the Greeks) were books they would read aloud:

Diese Stelle beweiset, *dünkt mich*, deutlich genug, daß die Alten (wenigstens die Griechen) alle Bücher, die einen Werth hatten, laut zu lesen pflegten.¹⁰

Wieland connects the supposition that the ancients only read aloud with the euphonic qualities of ancient verse and of ancient prose. He would like to press similar reading practices on his contemporaries: an aesthetic preference which implies a certain dissatisfaction with his own times.

Thus Norden was in fact reinforcing an old construct of literary historiography. Balogh took it up, it seems, because he was drawn to the idea that the task of a historian is properly completed only when some unique feature of the culture under study has been brought into the limelight.

Since Norden, the idea that the ancients habitually read aloud has been treated as a firm basis for further constructions. A case in point, where reading aloud takes on especially broad significance, is E. A. Havelock's work on the 'oral culture' that prevailed, he argues, in Athens until the beginning or even the middle of the fourth century B.C.¹¹

On the other hand, despite increasingly wide acceptance of the thesis that, for one reason or another, silent reading was scarcely practised in antiquity, a paper by Bernard Knox raised some vigorous objections to the use that Balogh made of his massive store of material.¹² Knox argued that the basic thesis should be modified as follows. Reading to oneself was known to antiquity very early and was not felt to be something extraordinary. Nevertheless, because they loved the sonorities of language, people usually read aloud, especially with works of artistic literature.

As often happens, the effect of a guarded and sceptical formulation like Knox's was that his proposal remained less well known than Balogh's dramatic claim. Some scholars now use formulations that approximate to his,¹³ but I know of only one serious attempt to go more deeply into the question. W. Rösler not only gave an

⁸ *Die antike Kunstprosa* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1923 [1st edn 1898]), Bd. 1, p. 6 ('Eine vielleicht wenigen bekannte Tatsache ist es, daß man im Altertum laut zu lesen pflegte'), referring to Augustine, *Conf.* VI 3 (to be discussed below); Nachträge (Bd. 1), pp. 1–3; cf. Bd. 2 p. 956.

⁹ The view of Fr. Nietzsche (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [1886] section 247) could subsequently have influenced many people.

¹⁰ Lucian von Samosata, *Sämmtliche Werke*, aus dem Griechischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen und Erläuterungen versehen von Christoph Martin Wieland (Leipzig, 1788–9; photoreprod. Darmstadt, 1971), Sechster Teil, p. 35 n. 3; italics mine. I consider the factual meaning of the Lucian passage he is commenting on at p. 60 below.

¹¹ E. A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton, 1982). Cp. the review (negative) by A. Lami in *Rivista di Filologia e d'Istruzione classica* 112 (1984), 438–440. Note that for Havelock the oral period *finished* with the beginning of Hellenism.

¹² B. M. W. Knox, 'Silent Reading in Antiquity', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968), 421–435.

¹³ E.g. Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore, 1990), pp. 171–74, 217 n. 16. As to the ideas of Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: Anthropologie de la lecture*

approving welcome to Knox's arguments; he also made reference to modern scientific studies of the different aspects of the reading process.¹⁴ That seemingly simple thought is most productive, and I shall follow it at some length here.

THE EVIDENCE OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The specialist literature on reading is very extensive. Systematic research on problems of reading—by observation, questionnaires, and experiment—goes back to the middle of the last century. It is not surprising that a number of substantial results have been established. For example, one might have expected to find noticeable differences of reading speed in cultures which use different writing systems. But it turned out that what varies is rather the aims, circumstances, and habits of readers.¹⁵ In particular, it has been confirmed that 'good readers everywhere read silently more rapidly than orally'.¹⁶

The psychological and physiological bases of reading are also well studied.¹⁷ Silent reading appears in childhood some time after learning to read aloud, and preserves a number of the faults characteristic of inexperienced readers; to begin with, it may even strengthen them. In general, the technique of reading to oneself is formed in normally developed children at early school age—for the most part automatically. At the elementary level, the greater complication (by comparison with reading aloud) of the process of reading to oneself, and also its convenience, is due to the fact that of the three original components—vision, voice, and understanding—only two remain: the first and the last. The processes are interdependent, and the elemental striving of readers to make the transition to reading to themselves bears witness to 'the growth of a feeling that the process of perceiving the text depends on the meaning of what is read'.¹⁸

In keeping with this, it is usual to distinguish three levels in the mastery of reading:¹⁹ (i) reading aloud; (ii) so-called subvocalization (movement of the lips, tongue, and throat without the production of audible sounds); and (iii) silent reading in the proper meaning of the phrase: namely, a visual-mental process that allows one to vary the tempo of reading (which itself becomes faster) and makes it easy to skim backwards and forwards through the text. The greater speed of silent reading is

en Grece ancienne (Paris, 1988), see the review by W. Rösler, *Gnomon* 64 (1992), 1–3. In my view our thinking is so different that any similarities in our results are coincidental and of no significance either way.

¹⁴ W. Rösler, 'Die Entdeckung der Fiktionalität', *Poetica* 12 (1980), 316 n. 92. The author finds (sensibly, in my view) that 'Die Vorstellung eines stundenlangen, sich gar über den ganzen Tag erstreckenden lauten Lesens mutet nahezu absurd an'.

¹⁵ W. S. Gray, *The Teaching of Reading: An International View* (Cambridge, MA, 1957).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷ For consultation on the psychophysiological aspects of reading I am grateful to several specialists and especially to the late Prof. Nathalie N. Traugott, who introduced me to her workshop on the pathology of reading. While she is not responsible for my conclusions, I gladly acknowledge that they ripened in discussion with her.

¹⁸ T. G. Yegorov, *Ocherki psichologii obucheniya deteyi chteniyu* (*Outlines of the Psychology of Teaching Children to Read*) (Moscow, 1953), p. 2. (An ancient parallel to this observation may perhaps be found in the pathetic story told by Aulus Gellius XIII 31 about a boaster who, under challenge, could not read aloud properly a text whose meaning he was unable to grasp.) I have also taken into account a work devoted to the specifics of reading to oneself: G. L. Anderson, *La lecture silencieuse* (Thèse, University of Geneva, Neuchâtel, 1929), esp. pp. 12 and 35.

¹⁹ Eleanor J. Gibson and Harry Levin, *The Psychology of Reading* (Cambridge, MA, 1975), ch. 10.

crucial, especially since a positive correlation has been found between reading speed and the assimilation of what is read: on the whole comprehension improves with speed.²⁰ As for serious reading deficiencies (dyslexia, paralexia, etc.), in textbooks on speech pathology we meet no references to people who read aloud normally being unable to learn to read to themselves.²¹ When there is some backwardness in linguistic development, it is a different matter. Then the teaching of reading is hindered—but in a manner that affects *all* varieties of reading together.²² In pathological cases a certain degree of mutual independence is observed between reading aloud and reading to oneself. Thus patients who retain the ability to read to themselves may be unable to read aloud an isolated syllable placed before their eyes.²³

Reading to oneself comes in varieties of its own. Experienced readers are distinguished by the ease with which they can switch from one variety to another.²⁴ Silent reading adapts more easily to different external or internal conditions.²⁵ This means that reading to oneself is a highly advantageous form of reading, so that the absence of the practice would unquestionably impoverish any culture which could be decisively shown to lack it.²⁶ All the more reason to be careful on this point when considering the ancient world. Besides, the norm is that the two types of reading are always closely connected, even intertwined with each other; it is quite wrong to think of them as exclusive alternatives.

Thus, it is not difficult to show that when a reader of any experience reads aloud—especially when it is someone whose job it is to make public announcements or give artistic performances from written texts—the habit of reading to oneself is presupposed. Indeed, it is itself an essential element in reading out loud.

Psychologists study and measure a quantity which the richly elaborated American experimental psychology of reading has termed ‘eye-voice span’ (EVS).²⁷ This indicator varies greatly among different readers. A well-developed EVS is essential if a reader is to be capable of reproducing the rhythmical and intonational pattern of the part of the sentence they are reading, in what may be a completely unfamiliar text. For the character of this pattern is fully determined only when the reader takes account of the next part of the sentence, and perhaps even the period or paragraph in which the sentence occurs. In other words, the person reading aloud needs to be able to glance ahead and read inwardly selected portions of the following text; the more experienced the reader, the more easily and reliably they do this. That is why for virtuoso reading aloud one requires not merely the ability to read to oneself, but skill at it. Both are necessary, therefore, in cultures which enjoy literacy but continue to place a high value on oral acquaintance with literary and documentary texts.

Moreover, it is quite likely that the ability to read to oneself and scan ahead may be all the more necessary for reading aloud from texts written in *scriptio continua*. In the

²⁰ A. N. Jorgenson, *Iowa Silent Reading Examinations* (University of Iowa Studies in Education, 1927), vol. IV, n. 3.

²¹ Lee Edward Travis (ed.), *Handbook of Speech Pathology* (New York, 1957).

²² R. E. Levina, *Nedostatki chteniya i pis'ma u detey* (*Defects in Reading and Writing among Children*) (Moscow, 1940), p. 57ff.

²³ Information from N. N. Traugott.

²⁴ L. M. Schwartz, *Psichologiya navika chteniya* (*The Psychology of Reading Habits*) (Moscow, 1941), pp. 84–90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–79.

²⁶ Balogh is aware of this (op. cit., p. 108) when he claims that it was in monastic scriptoria that the discovery was first made that reading aloud hinders rather than helps understanding.

²⁷ For a specialist monograph, see Harry Levin with Ann Buckler Addis, *The Eye-Voice Span* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

absence of the modern and early Roman practice of dividing words, the process of reading would require eye and mind to determine the beginnings and endings of individual words as well as sentence pattern.²⁸

Remarkably enough, keen observers of reading in antiquity were familiar *ante nomen* with the phenomenon of EVS itself. The very passage from Lucian *adv. indoctum* 2 which prompted M. Wieland to speculate that the reading of the ancients was exclusively reading aloud testifies, I believe, to a deep understanding of the difference and the connection between the two types of reading.

The point of this passage is not, I submit, that the ignorant bibliophile does not know how to read properly. The reproach against him (*ἀναγινώσκεις ἔνια πάνυ ἐπιτρέχων, ορθάνοντος τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ τὸ στόμα*/You read some [of your books] quite fluently, keeping your eyes ahead of your voice) is that while he reads nimbly enough, thanks to what we today would call a sizeable EVS, he lacks genuine understanding of the texts and of what they involve—a much harder task. Reading aloud comes into the scene because an affectation of bibliophilia needs witnesses.

An earlier parallel to this awareness of EVS may be found in some remarkably penetrating didactic observations by Quintilian (*inst. or.* I 1 33–4), which amount to a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon with which Lucian plays:

Certa sit ergo in primis lectio, deinde coniuncta et diu lentior, donec exercitatione contingat emendata velocitas. Nam prospicere in dextrum (quod omnes praecipunt) et providere, non rationis modo sed usus quoque est; quoniam sequentia intuitu priora dicenda sunt, et, quod difficillimum est, dividenda intentio animi, ut aliud voce aliud oculis agatur.

Reading must therefore first be sure, then connected, while it must be kept slow for a considerable time, until practice brings speed unaccompanied by error. For to look to the right, which is regularly taught, and to look ahead depends not so much on precept as on practice; since it is necessary to keep the eyes on what follows while reading out what precedes, with the resulting difficulty that the attention of the mind must be divided, the eyes and voice being differently engaged. (Tr. H. E. Butler)

The deep connection between reading aloud and reading to oneself goes in the opposite direction as well. Electromyograms, and the special receivers which have been developed for studying subvocalization in people reading to themselves, show that a certain amount of subvocalization—which in essence means a certain amount of inaudible reading aloud—is present to some degree or other in all readers, depending on their habits of reading, the difficulty of the text, and the problems they have been set to solve.²⁹ The interesting thing is that, despite the novelty of the electromyogram and other apparatus used by experimental psychology, this phenomenon too is partially accessible to simple introspection. It was noticed long ago by acute observers of human nature. Goethe, for example, spoke of the inward

²⁸ This would apply even when the written text was being used as a mnemonic device to assist learning by heart; cf. the remarks about *scriptio continua* in Thomas, op. cit., pp. 92–3. W. Raible has written an interesting work on the different grades of readability (*Lesbarkeit*) of different ancient texts: 'Zur Entwicklung von Alphabetschrift-Systemen. *Is fecit cui prodest*', *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 1991, pp. 5–42. In my opinion, *scriptio continua* would be bound to affect the speed and accuracy of ancient reading to some degree, but (*pace* Raible) that quantitative effect should not impair anyone's ability to practise *both* of the two kinds of reading discussed in this paper; the correlation between them must have been much the same as it is today. (Lemuel Gulliver read Brobdingnag books with the aid of a ladder: this affected the commodity and speed of his reading, but not, apparently, his previous reading techniques.)

²⁹ A. N. Sokolov, *Inner Speech and Thought* (New York, 1972 [original Russian edn 1968]), pp. 211, 263; Gibson & Levin, op. cit., pp. 340ff., 389f.

sounding and the internal performance ('innere Aufführung') of a poetic text which is not being pronounced out loud. What he is talking about, obviously, is a semi-conscious or conscious subvocalization which contributes to the aesthetic enjoyment of a text and which would be accessible to electromyographical investigation; remaining below the threshold of audibility for other people, this secret vocalization of texts can produce on us an aesthetic impression no less than we get from reading them aloud.

Thus research on a number of different aspects of reading tells us, in effect, that the expressions 'reading aloud' and 'reading to oneself', although they seem to be opposed, actually pick out *mutually complementary* forms or facets of the reading process. Both are present, in different doses, whenever reading takes place.

To conclude: if the ancients did not automatically start reading to themselves, or if, starting from time to time to read to themselves, they failed to appreciate its advantages, or if, finally, they knew a way of artificially suppressing this capacity in themselves, then indeed they confront us with a highly peculiar anthropological phenomenon. The peculiarity could not, however, be related to some special oral giftedness; nor, consequently, to the literary achievements of the ancients.³⁰ If the ancients did not read to themselves, that would not show their love for the spoken word and for the euphonies of speech, but a severe psychic handicap.

THE EVIDENCE OF AUGUSTINE

There is a huge body of evidence of various kinds in ancient writers which is relevant to the subject of reading. Rather than a full treatment of the issue, the present work is an attempt (i) to attack the interpretative strategies employed to set up the thesis that the ancients had little or no use for silent reading; and (ii) to show how it is in principle possible to prove the opposite. The appendix lists a wide selection of passages which support this conclusion.

I turn first to the well-known passage in Augustine's *Confessions* VI 3. Even Bernard Knox, who contests the probative force of most of the texts that Balogh assembled, acknowledges this passage as Exhibit A in the dossier;³¹ he accepts that it is a defensible argument for Balogh's overall position.

It is certainly true that, if the silent reading of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, struck Augustine—an experienced teacher of rhetoric in great centres of culture like Carthage and Rome, and from 354 onwards Milan itself—as a novelty without precedent, then the story of his surprise would be bound to carry great weight. It would carry weight not only for the end of the fourth century A.D., but also for the whole of Roman and indeed Greek antiquity. For it is very hard to imagine that reading to oneself could have been widely practised earlier, only to be forgotten (in

³⁰ In his brief discussion Rösler, op. cit. (n. 14 above), p. 316, looked at this vital evaluative element.

³¹ The key role played by this text can be illustrated by the following chain of references. At line 53 of Aristophanes' *Frogs* Dionysus speaks of reading Euripides' *Andromeda* to himself (πρὸς ἑαυτόν). Commenting on this, L. Radermacher, *Aristophanes 'Frösche'*, Einleitung, Text und Kommentar, *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-Hist. Klasse*, Bd. 198, Abhandlung 4 (Vienna, 1921), p. 150, says that this reading to himself was nevertheless done aloud—and refers to a footnote about reading in Siegfried Sudhaus, 'Lautes und leises Beten', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 9 (1906), 190–1. That note in turn begins with a reference to Norden's reference (n. 6 above) to Augustine *Conf.* VI 3.

relatively prosperous periods of antiquity) so completely that the highly cultured Augustine had not even heard of the possibility.

What then did Augustine say about Ambrose's reading? Here are his words at *Confessions* VI 3.3–4 (emphases added):³²

I was not at that stage groaning in my prayers that Thou wouldst come to help me. Rather, my anxious mind was intent on finding out and talking things over. Ambrose himself I pictured as one who must be blessed with the happiness of this world, since such important persons looked up to him; his celibacy was the only thing that to me seemed a burden. As for his hopes, and the struggle he had to keep up against the temptations of eminence itself, what consoled him in adversity, and how the inner mouth—the one in his heart—fed upon the nourishing joy of Thy bread, all that I lacked the knowledge even to guess at. Likewise, he did not know my anguish or the snares that threatened me, since I could not ask him the questions I wanted to ask in the way I wanted to ask them—I could never gain his ear and have words with him, because he was surrounded by crowds of busy people whose needs he was attending to. And when he was not with them, which was never for long, he would either refresh his body with the sustenance it needed, or his mind with reading. But when he was reading, *his eyes travelled across the pages and his heart searched out the meaning, but his voice and tongue stayed still*. Often we would be there—no-one was forbidden entry, but equally it was not the custom for anyone's entry to be announced to him—and we would see him *reading silently*. He always read like that. And having sat for a long time *in silence* (for who would dare disturb one so engrossed in study?), we would go away, guessing that, because he had so little leisure to refresh his mind, he was taking a rest from the clamour of other people's affairs and did not want to be distracted. Perhaps also he was protecting himself in case an obscure passage in the author he was reading led to his having to produce an explanation for some anxiously attentive listener, or to getting involved in a discussion of difficult issues. Time spent on this would result in his not reading as many books as he wished. A more legitimate reason for *his reading silently* could perhaps have been that he needed to spare his voice, which was all too liable to go hoarse. Whatever his reason for behaving this way, with that man we may be sure it was a good one.

At all events I had no opportunity to make the inquiries I wanted to make of his heart, Thy holy oracle, save only when it was something brief in the telling. That anguish of mine, which so urgently needed pouring out to him at his leisure, never found him so.

What supporters of the idea that silent reading was unknown to the ancients, or a rarity for them, conclude from this passage is chiefly that the first time Augustine saw someone reading to himself was during Ambrose's rest periods. For if it was something quite usual, why describe Ambrose's silent reading in such detail, twice using the word *tacite* and citing the concomitant external manifestations: '*... his eyes travelled across the pages ... but his voice and tongue stayed still*'? If it was a commonplace phenomenon, they reason further,³³ why would Augustine set about finding an explanation for it, or even several explanations (to avoid listeners' questions, to save his voice, to get more reading done)? If the only thing to explain was how it happened that Augustine could not obtain access to Ambrose, why not simply say that he was always busy with other people or his own affairs? It is clear that the scene Augustine describes is a digression inspired by the unusualness of what he saw.

This way of interpreting the passage magnifies the uniqueness of what Augustine described, so as to make out that his description is a crucially important item of evidence for the history of techniques of reading. The effect, in my view, is to belittle the purpose of the narrative and destroy the connection of thought. No text is less

³² It is perhaps worth remarking on the absence of any textual difficulties relevant to our concerns; the text is sound.

³³ Here I reproduce the traditional considerations, clearly formulated in a letter to the author from S. I. Muraviev (1983).

suited to such treatment. The passage is indeed important for the history of scholarship on this topic, but not for the topic itself.

The aim of the *Confessions*, the reason for the energy and art with which it is written, is to tell the story of the author's spiritual formation (in 387 Ambrose will baptize Augustine). It is not a *ποικιλογραφία* in the style of the ethnographical and aetiological excursuses in Herodotus or the paradoxographers. Our excerpt begins with Augustine's anxious longing, with his hope of Ambrose's encouragement. We are made to feel that the older and the younger man could not understand each other fully when they were together. Augustine did not yet know what it was to have pastoral duties. Ambrose was presumably not aware of the hidden forces at work in the young rhetor, so gifted but so differently endowed from himself; he was insensitive to the inward struggle of a soul on the threshold of the Church. Are we to believe that the obstacle to salvation through association with Ambrose was a newly discovered method of reading? That it was specifically silent reading, nothing else, which kept Augustine from taking part in Ambrose's readings at any time of day or night?

Note first that there is no indication, at the beginning of the excerpt, to prepare us for the story of silent reading, which in any case is too short for the genre 'description of a unique and singular phenomenon'. Secondly, suppose Augustine *was* observing a silent reader for the very first time: how was he able to tell, when Ambrose's eyes travelled oddly across the page, that he was *reading*, in fact wholly absorbed in reading?

The story becomes more coherent, and fits both the narrower and the broader contexts, if we accept that what puzzles Augustine is not Ambrose's method of reading in and of itself, but his resorting to that method *in the presence of his parishioners*. Why doesn't he read a book *with* them (aloud, naturally) so that they can discuss it together?

In fact Augustine is not so much wondering how to explain Ambrose's behaviour as trying to justify it. Although the *Confessions* was written a decade and a half after the moment of crisis that Augustine is recalling, his resentment still comes over.

We must also reckon with Augustine's later state of mind, as described a little further on at *Confessions* VI 11.18:

Behold, the passages in Scripture that I used to think absurd are no longer absurd; they can be understood differently, in a worthy sense. I will take my stand on the step where my parents stood me as a boy, until evident truth is found. But where to seek it? When to seek for it? Ambrose has no time; I have no time to read! And where am I to look for the books themselves? Where and when can I find them, to purchase or to borrow?

As we see, it was not just Ambrose's elucidations that were of interest to Augustine, but the books themselves which the Bishop, but not necessarily the teacher of rhetoric, had at his disposal (having read them apart from Augustine, and in Greek). It is natural that Augustine, feeling that Ambrose's position was one that gave other people certain rights of access to him, should be cross with his famous teacher—especially as Ambrose left the situation rather ambiguous. He did not close off access to his private apartments, which were evidently in the church precinct, but at the same time he was not going to sacrifice his domestic leisure for visitors' sake (compare *Mark* 6, 30–32). The difficulty was, on the one hand, that a mentor had to carry on his activities in the presence of people thirsting for his advice, and on the other that without some leisure for reading he would not be able to be of use to them.

Thus Augustine's demand for a justification was rooted, first, in the strains of the

paradoxical relationship between a mentor and his pupils (typical as such strains may be), and second, in his own spiritual development. He still needed time, and first-hand experience, to appreciate how it was that Ambrose could not spare him exclusive attention.³⁴ If Ambrose had read aloud, that would have been reading for other people: in particular, for Augustine. Reading to himself was—just as it is with us—reading for himself.

Now for a proof *e contrario* based on the moving and, for all readers of the *Confessions*, memorable scene in the garden (VIII 12.29):

Thus excited, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting—that's where I had left the book of the Apostle when I got up and left. I seized it, opened it, and read *in silence* the chapter my eyes first fell upon: 'Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.'³⁵ I did not wish to read further. There was no need. The moment I got to the end of the sentence, it was as though a light of certainty flooded my heart and all the shadows of doubt fled away.

Then, putting my finger in the place or marking it some other way, I closed the book and, with countenance now calm, I indicated (*indicavi*) to Alypius what had happened. He in turn indicated (*indicavit*) to me—I had known nothing about it—what had happened in his heart, in the following way. He sought to see what I had read. I showed him (*ostendi*), and he looked further than I had read. I did not know it, but what followed was this: 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye'.³⁶ Alypius applied this to himself, and showed (*aperuit*) it to me . . . Then we went in to my mother. We indicated (*indicamus*) to her what had happened. She rejoiced. We told her (*narramus*) how it all happened. She was jubilant, and she gave thanks to Thee . . . because Thou turned me to Thyself . . .

As we see, the operative phrase here is 'in silence', *in silentio*. Before the onset of the climactic moment, for a time not only Augustine, who had been convulsed with sobbing, but Alypius, too, avoided speaking much. At the moment which decided the fate of two future princes of the Church, they were almost reduced, as I would like to read the passage, to the language of signs. The verb *indicare* is repeated three times in this excerpt.³⁷ Other verbs in the immediate context include *ostendere* and *aperire*. *Narrare*, by contrast, occurs only after the crucial change. Only then did Augustine tell the story of his conversion in fully verbal form.

P. Courcelle³⁸ rightly remarks on the close parallel between this scene in the garden and the earlier narrative of Ponticianus (VIII 6.15). That scene is in fact a kind of prologue to Augustine's conversion. As in many other respects, there is a parallel there to the silent reading here:

Thus he spoke, and then, disturbed by the birth pangs of a new life, he looked back at the book: he read on and was changed inwardly, where Thou could see, and his mind was divested of the world, as soon appeared. For while he read, his heart a tumult of emotion, from time to time he let out a roar as he discerned and decided for better ways. And when already he was Thine, he said to his friend . . .

The fewer the externals described in an event of spiritual change, the more its purely spiritual, i.e. divine, nature is emphasized.

In any case, those who insist that Augustine was overcome by Ambrose's ability to

³⁴ Augustine himself eventually pronounced pride the cardinal sin of mankind. Cf. William M. Green, 'Initium omnis peccati superbia. Augustine on pride as the first sin', *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13 (1949), 406–431.

³⁵ *Rom.* 13, 13–14.

³⁶ *Rom.* 14, 1.

³⁷ The forward-looking *sic* which precedes the second occurrence of *indicare* makes it especially clear that few words were involved in the communication.

³⁸ *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1968²), p. 197.

read to himself *ought* to say that in the garden, when Augustine too has managed to read a few words to himself, *in silentio*, his shock and enthusiasm spring from the same cause. Any such interpretation of the culminating moment of the *Confessions* would be tantamount to supposing that the basic theme of the entire work is the future Bishop's struggle to master an advanced technique of reading. That would be too much even for the most extreme exponent of the rarity of silent reading.³⁹

It is not surprising, then, that the older commentators on Augustine simply formulate, with old-fashioned brevity, the only acceptable sense for the well-known description of Ambrose reading (VI 3.3–4). In 1876 Karl von Raumer wrote that the reason Ambrose did not read aloud was perhaps to avoid being forced to explain the author he was reading to some eagerly listening bystander, if that author expressed himself unclearly:

Ambrosius las nicht laut, weil er es vielleicht vermied genöthigt zu werden einem hinhorchenden, gespannten Zuhörer den Autor welchen er las, zu erklären, wenn dieser Autor sich minder klar ausgedrückt.⁴⁰

Likewise in the old Maurist translation⁴¹ headings are given to help with the train of thought. The heading of the chapter that interests us is: 'Ce qui faisoit que S. Augustin avançoit peu dans la recherche de la vérité'; the subheading is 'Discretion de S. Augustin'. Just the kind of readers Augustine would have wished for!

Equally instructive is to see how, once the 'paradoxographical' idea of people reading only aloud got rooted in the sphere of Greek 'private antiquities', it was able to infiltrate commentaries on Augustine despite its gross unsuitability to his text. In a comment on VI 3, J. Bernhart describes the passage as a unique testimony to the ancient custom of reading aloud, and indeed in the case of artistic prose, of declaiming it:

Eine im antiken Schrifttum vereinzelte Stelle, aus der wir erfahren, daß es im Altertum Gepflogenheit war, laut [und zwar Kunstprosa ohne Zweifel deklamatorisch] zu lesen.⁴²

There follows a reference to E. Norden's now familiar pronouncement.

To sum up this account of the evidence of Augustine, we may accept that in the garden, as in Ambrose's house, what Augustine described was, among other things, the phenomenon of reading to oneself. But his concern was different in the two cases. In the garden it was that two young people finally found their destiny, quite unexpectedly and—after so many words and disputes within themselves (cf. e.g. VI 10.17, VI 11.18, VIII 12.28)—almost without a word being spoken. In the apartments of the Bishop of Milan it was something else: the many conveniences of reading to oneself brought it about that Augustine had to complete his spiritual formation without the support of Ambrose. In this way, without denying Ambrose's influence on him, Augustine does

³⁹ Balogh, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–9, seeing the necessity of linking the two passages VI 3 and VIII 12 (if the first of them describes something exceptional), finds a way out: what happens in the garden is a break with tradition, in the sense that there is an interiorization both of religion and of reading!

⁴⁰ *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri tredecim*, hrsg. und erläutert von Karl von Raumer (Gütersloh, 1876), p. 126.

⁴¹ *Traduction nouvelle sur l'édition latine des Pères Benedictins de la Congrégation de S. Maur*. Avec des Notes. (Paris, 1696⁴).

⁴² *Augustini Confessiones. Bekenntnisse*. Lateinisch und deutsch. Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert von J. Bernhart (Munich, 1980 [1st edn 1955]), p. 870. Cf., more recently, James J. Donnell, *Augustine Confessions*, Introduction, Text and Commentary (Oxford, 1992), vol. 11, p. 345.

not hide his independence.⁴³

As for what can be gleaned incidentally about techniques of reading from these passages of the *Confessions*, it amounts, I think, to these two points: (i) reading to oneself does not interest Augustine in its own right, because it is an everyday phenomenon well known both to him and to his readers; and (ii) in his story about Ambrose, Augustine unintentionally reveals that he conceives of silent reading as more concentrated and, apparently, quicker. If this seems rather little, I happily admit that, once the standard view is rejected for the reasons given, the Augustine passage no longer says anything definite about techniques of reading in earlier centuries.

KNOX'S EVIDENCE

Augustine is not the only weapon, but at least since the late nineteenth century he has by general consent been the chief weapon used to minimize or deny the practice of silent reading. Having dealt with him, I turn to some literary texts which provide evidence, as Knox recognized, that silent reading was known in Greece in classical times. The task of this section is to reinforce Knox's arguments, to overcome scholarly resistance to his results, and to propose for consideration at the end a rather more radical conclusion than Knox's.

The first unambiguous evidence is from the Attic theatre. This is not a mere accident. Drama reflects life not only in words, but also in the accompanying actions performed on the stage. These actions can help a great deal in the reconstruction of real-life situations. The texts we need to examine are the letter reading scene in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.) and the consultation of the oracle in the *Knights* of Aristophanes (424 B.C.).

Taking in his hands (*Hipp.* 856ff.)⁴⁴ the inscribed tablet, Theseus makes up his mind (864–5): 'Come, let me undo the wrappings in which it is sealed and let me see (ἴδω) what this tablet wants to say (λέγειν) to me'. While Theseus is occupied with reading the terrible letter, the Chorus gives utterance to gloomy forebodings. And then comes Theseus' cry (874–5, 877ff.): Phaedra's letter does not have something to say to him, as he had put it earlier—'it shrieks, it shrieks' (βοᾷ βοᾷ).

If Theseus has remained on stage all this time, the situation is clear: he read silently and the words 'it shrieks' simply emphasize the force of the blow that fate has struck him. That indeed is how the scene is imagined by many editors with no prior involvement in arguments about silent reading.⁴⁵

⁴³ Cf. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et Postérité* (Paris, 1963), p. 572, n. 2: 'On s'explique mal qu'après avoir attribué une influence décisive à la rencontre d'Ambrose dans les deux derniers chapitres du livre V, Augustin reconnaisse, Conf. VI 3. 3 . . . , qu'il n'a pu obtenir de lui un seul entretien intime'.

⁴⁴ Here and below, passages from the dramatic poets are quoted in a prose translation which sticks closely to the text.

⁴⁵ A corresponding stage direction is to be found in the Russian translation by I. F. Annensky under the editorship of the St Petersburg scholar Th. Zielinsky, *Teatr Evripida* (Moscow, 1917), vol. 11, p. 413; variants of it in other translations. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides: Hippolytos*, Griechisch und Deutsch (Berlin, 1891), had the same idea when he prefixed to line 874 the stage direction 'herunterkommend', it being evident from his stage direction after line 851 that Phaedra's bier is elevated on high.

Someone may object: Mustn't Theseus have made an exit to read the letter? Unlikely, I think. The text gives no direct or indirect indication either of Theseus' proposed exit or of his coming quickly back again. A character's exit from the stage is usually marked by some indication in the text (one of the so-called *παρεπιγραφαί*), or it is motivated by a need, obvious to the audience, to do something specific.⁴⁶

Secondly, even if Theseus can only read aloud, why abandon his wife's body to do it? 'Obviously he is not going to read out the letter when he knows that it brings shame on his house!' But at the start he has nothing to fear—he has no inkling of anything shameful for the house in his wife's letter. (Lines 858–63 have rightly been compared with *Alcestis* 304–10: part of Theseus' tragic ignorance, his *ἄγνοια*, is the trusting way he perceives Phaedra.) In any case, Theseus is surrounded by people who are friendly to him. It is true that they are bound by an oath not to give Phaedra away beforehand. But that is something the audience knows about, not the king.

Thirdly, lines 871–3, which seem feeble in their thought, acquire good dramatic sense if they indicate the anxiety with which the Chorus follows the expressive miming of the actor who reads the message from the lovelorn slanderess (cp. *Ar. Ra.* 833ff.).⁴⁷

Notice how Euripides keeps insisting, as it were, on contrast. Whereas the letter 'shrieks' (877), the new disaster is 'unspeakable' (875 οὐδὲ λεκτόν⁴⁸). Theseus is ruined, after 'seeing' in the letter 'such a song' (879f.): οἶον οἶον εἶδον ἐν γραφαῖς μέλος[φθεγγόμενον] τλάμων.⁴⁹ There is more to this than a striking case of catachresis. It is a lover of paradox making play with the notion of a 'letter'. Compare the more straightforward version of the same oxymoron at Euripides *IT* 763: 'The letter itself will in silence speak what is written in it' (αὐτὴ φράσει σιγῶσα τὰγγεγραμμένα). Reference to the voiceless shriek⁵⁰ or the visible cry of a letter is not indubitable proof of reading it to oneself. But it does fit best with the notion that, in general, letters are read silently.

Finally, the crucial point for my thesis. When Theseus, yielding to the Chorus' request, is about to read out the letter, what he says (882ff.) is: 'I will not *any longer* (οὐκέτι) keep back within my mouth's gate this unutterable horror. Oh, my people!'. Thus the letter is now to be made public for the first time. If the terrible words it contains had been pronounced once already (whether in a shriek or a whisper), they

⁴⁶ Ernst Bodensteiner, 'Szenische Fragen über den Ort des Auftretens und Abgehens von Schauspielern und Chor im griechischen Drama', *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* Supplementband 19 (Leipzig, 1893), p. 637ff. The appendix to this dissertation (pp. 725–808) gives a convenient overview of all the entrances and exits in the extant Attic plays of the fifth century B.C.

⁴⁷ Doubts about the genuineness of this remark by the Chorus, which are based on the scholium ἐν τισιν οὐ φέρεται, i.e. 'in some copies these lines are missing', are not convincing. Ancient critics could have been led to think of athetizing precisely by the idea that the lines are feeble. Not every line in a tragedy is fated to be unforgettable, especially in the mouth of the Chorus (cp. in the *Hippolytus* itself 364ff. and 568). It is not surprising, then, that some editors remove the remark (Wilamowitz, Barrett) whereas others keep it in (Nauck, Murray, Zielinsky). Finally, even if the lines do not belong to Euripides, they must in any case go back to a man of the theatre in times not far removed from Euripides.

⁴⁸ This line too is removed by Wilamowitz, followed by Barrett, who asserts that it is a mere doublet of 846 and refuses to believe that οὐδὲ λεκτόν could be followed by λέξαι. Yet what is so odd if the Chorus contrive an excuse εἴ τί μοι λόγον μέτα ('provided it is for me to hear') for asking Theseus to recount something which, filled though it is with unspeakable suffering, both can and must be said? Zielinsky, op. cit., p. 511, is right to defend the line.

⁴⁹ Cf. κερκίδος ὕμνους in Soph. frag. 890 Radt.

⁵⁰ Assuming, of course, that we agree not to understand βοᾶ and μέλος as meaning that, when Theseus read the letter, he himself shrieked and sang.

would lose some of their fatal significance. This is no everyday announcement. It is the disclosure of a pollution hateful to the gods. Once the words are spoken, the deed cannot be undone. For Theseus to reveal the monstrous content of the letter is very nearly the same as addressing to Poseidon the prayer for vengeance against his son which follows immediately on the publication of the last testament of the rejected woman.

Thus Theseus reads a letter in front of other people—silently. No less striking is the little scene in the *Knights* (115ff.), where the down-to-earth Demosthenes, true servant of the Demos, enjoys himself at the expense of his fellow servant, the superstitious Nicias, who hands him a bundle of oracles and cups of wine. Demosthenes: 'Give it here for me to see what's in it. Oh, prophecy! Give me the cup—quick, the cup!' Nicias: 'There you are! What does the oracle say?' Demosthenes: 'Pour me another.' Nicias: 'Is that what's in the oracle, "Pour me another"?'⁷

The humour of the scene comes from Demosthenes' impartial enjoyment of the wine and of the absorbing document he has to read, not to mention the fun of bossing Nicias about. As for Nicias, all he hears as he fusses anxiously around is—not what is written in the bundle of oracles, but the disconnected exclamations of a gourmand. The circumstance that Demosthenes reads to himself elicits from Nicias no expressions of surprise, only a request for information. He does not get alarmed and call upon the gods. The scene shows that at the end of the fifth century B.C. the practice of reading to oneself is incapable of surprising anyone. What it is associated with, in the imagination of Aristophanes' contemporaries, is the notion of someone being completely absorbed in what they are reading.

Finally, Knox's third example, Antiphanes' comedy *Sappho* (c. 360 B.C.). Here the heroine propounds a riddle, so Athenaeus tells us (X 73, 450e–451b), about 'some feminine nature which keeps voiceless children in her bosom, whose cry is heard across sea and continent by any mortal they wish'. After a false solution, to the effect that it is an invective against demagogic orators, the play proceeds to the correct answer: a letter (*ἐπιστολή*). The final two trimeters of the solution express with the utmost clarity the idea that interests us: 'Yet if someone else [sc. someone other than the addressee of the letter] is standing nearby when it is being read, they will not hear it' (*ἕτερος δ' ἂν τύχη τις πλησίον ἐστὼς ἀναγινώσκοντος οὐκ ἀκούσεται*).

The material from Antiphanes confirms the evidence of the two examples from Euripides and Aristophanes. It speaks quite definitely, albeit in the 'alienating' terms required by the poetics of riddles, of silent reading of letters as the norm. More than that, the riddle staged by Antiphanes permits, it seems to me, a further inference. Since the letter riddle is alluded to in Euripides *Hipp.* 865 and *IT* 763,⁵¹ which presupposes that it would be familiar to his audience, it is likely to go back further still, perhaps even beyond the fifth century.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion I draw from our examination of these examples is that silent reading was a quite ordinary practice for wide circles of the free population of classical Athens, and possibly for earlier periods too. Further examples to strengthen this conclusion are listed in the appendix. The evidence of Augustine, so long relied upon as the disproof of silent reading, in fact confirms the case for silent reading in

⁵¹ The link was made by Henri Weil, *Sept Tragédies d'Euripide* (Paris, 1879²), in a note on *IT* 763.

the later Roman period. Similarly, if allusions to silent reading are not numerous (though the appendix collects more than are usually reckoned with), the moral is not that the practice was rare, but that it was trivial and of no interest in itself. In the examples adduced by Knox (Euripides, Aristophanes, Antiphanes) and studied anew here alongside the Augustine passage, what stands out is, first, the ordinariness of reading to oneself from the classical Greek to the late Roman periods, and second, the idea that such reading is more concentrated and quicker.

We should remember that the authors who allude to silent reading are not usually concerned with techniques of reading as such. If they mention it obliquely, it is to recount an episode in which someone's reading to himself played this or that role, or to evoke an atmosphere of the everyday, or to exploit the dramatic potential of the silence in which a person reads a text that may change their life, and so on. This explains why it is typically short texts (letters, documents, etc.) that appear in such scenes. There would be no interest or dramatic value in the representation of someone perusing a long text for hours on end. To suppose that it was predominantly short texts that people read to themselves would be to fall into an 'evidence trap'. The conclusion to draw from the evidence for silent reading of short texts is, on the contrary, that the longer the text, the more the educated public would want to read it to themselves.

I would emphasize also the sophistication of the ancients' own reflections on reading. The evidence shows them aware of the interdependence of the two types of reading, of the importance of eye-voice span, of the kind of aesthetic subvocalization that Goethe called 'innere Aufführung'. They appreciated both the advantages of silent reading, in terms of concentration, speed, and absorption of material, and the artistic demands and rewards of reading aloud. They did not reach the precision of modern psychology, but they knew much more about the complexities of the reading process than the ordinary reader does today. These ancient reflections help us to see that the phenomenon of reading itself is fundamentally the same in modern and in ancient culture. Cultural diversity does not exclude an underlying unity.⁵²

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APPENDIX: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ANCIENT EVIDENCE

For reasons of space, this appendix is a classified index to the evidence. It is hardly complete, but I believe it to be sufficient for the conclusions I want to draw. The testimonia are divided into four groups; their bearing on the problem discussed above should be clear to the attentive reader.⁵³ I have tried to include, from the material collected in the literature on the subject, most of what seemed *relevant* for

⁵² The author is grateful to A. J. Zaitsev for his interest in this study, which is indebted to some features of his interdisciplinary methodology. The paper has benefited from discussions with audiences in Moscow, Budapest, Heidelberg, and Konstanz, as well as from suggestions and criticism by the translator and the scrupulous refereeing of Rosalind Thomas. An earlier version was published in *Vspomogatelnye istoricheskiye distsipliny (Auxiliary Historical Disciplines)* XX (Leningrad, 1989), pp. 239–251. For this journal it has been considerably revised by the author and translated from the Russian by M. F. Burnyeat. The translator is indebted to Irina Levinskaya and Ruth Padel for assistance and advice.

⁵³ A Russian version of the same lists, with rather more extensive exegetical remarks, can be found in the new St Petersburg classical journal *Hyperboreus* 2 (1995).

the solution of the problem at issue here. I am grateful to colleagues who augmented my collection of the ancient evidence.

I. Passages where silent reading is more or less certainly implied

- (i) Herodotus I 123–5 (ἀκούσας in 125 and ἔλεγε in 124 are epistolographic metaphors, cp. VIII 22).
- (ii) Euripides *IA* 34ff., cp. 107f. (Agamemnon reads again and again his difficult letter, but the servant nearby does not know its contents); *Hipp.* 856f.; *IT* 763 (see above).
- (iii) Aristophanes *Eq.* 11f. (see above); *Nub.* 23 (the words ὅτ' ἐπριάμην were surely not in the ledger); *Av.* 960ff.: τὸ βιβλίον consulted silently and deftly; *Rn.* 51f.: if Dionysus reads aloud on the crowded deck, how can he know that he reads 'for himself'?
- (iv) Xenophon *Smp.* 4, 27 (only reading à deux *silently* would motivate two people being so near to one another while reading).
- (v) Plato *Comicus* = *Athen.* I 8, 5b: ἐν τῇ ἐρημίᾳ τουτὶ διελθεῖν βούλομαι τὸ βιβλίον πρὸς ἑμαυτόν.
- (vi) Antiphanes = *Athen.* x 73, 450e–451b (see above).
- (vii) Menander *Epit.* 211ff. (K-Th.) and Herodas 4, 21–5 (αὐτὴν produces a *reflection* on the text read silently).
- (viii) Plautus *Bacch.* 729–995 (Menandrian?): in 790–3 silent reading takes place as a matter of course; in 986ff. it is reading aloud which is specially motivated.
- (ix) Cicero *Fam.* IX 20 (*etiam*), cp. *Tusc.* V 116 (reading and *hearing* opposed).
- (x) Horace *Sat.* II 5, 51ff. (unambiguously silent); *Ep.* I 19, 34 (most probably the same). Cp. List III (ii) on three Horatian passages which have often been wrongly expounded; if I have them right, they belong to the evidence *for* silent reading.
- (xi) Ovid *Met.* IX 569 (*lecta sibi parte*).
- (xii) Petronius *Sat.* 129 (*intellexit* of the maid).
- (xiii) Quintilian *Inst.* I 1.33–4 (cp. List II (v)); X 3.25: for study at night one needs good health rather than strong vocal chords.
- (xiv) Josephus *Vit.* 219–23: Josephus reads, giving no indication that he is reading, cp. (x) above.
- (xv) Plutarch *Cat. Mi.* 19: Cato reads ἡσυχῇ in the assembly, and that is enough to irritate other senators without being noisy; *Cat. Mi.* 34/*Brut.* 5: Caesar reads the *billet doux* silently (in *Brut.* it is stated *expresso verbo*: σιωπῇ) while Cato, being Cato, does the same aloud; cf. *Brut.* 36.1–3, *Ant.* X, where silent reading suits the night scene better; *de Alex. mag. fort.* 340a: both Alexander and Hephaistion read a letter σιωπῇ; of course it is not the technique of reading that makes sense of the story (cf. (iv) above).
- (xvi) Pliny *Ep.* V 3, 2: Sotadicus (MSS give: Socraticus) *intellego* opposed to *lyricos lego*. Both philosophical and indecent texts would often be inappropriate for reading aloud; silent reading is very probable also in II 3, 9; III 15 (contrast); V 5, 5 (literary effect).
- (xvii) Suetonius *Aug.* 39 *taciti* . . . *legerent*: the emperor was obviously satisfied with this half-private, half-public rebuke—he seems to have had no doubt that everybody in such a situation would choose to practise the technique of silent reading; *ibid.* 45: Caesar indulged in reading at the theatre (cf. (xv) above).
- (xviii) Lucian *JTr.* I *Εὐριπίδην* . . . *καταπεπώκαμεν*: presumably an ordinary

metaphor, which can hardly be applied to reading aloud, which is expiratory; *Adv. Indoct.* 2 (List II (ix)).

(xix) Achilles Tatius I 6: if the young man reads to himself, this will produce a more innocent appearance;⁵⁴ at V 24 εὑρεν tends in the same direction.

(xx) Philostratus *VA* VIII 1 (implies the *skipping* of much material); in VIII 31 as well as IV 17 silent reading seems more suitable.

(xxi) Aristaeus I 10, 36ff. (cf. List III (i)): ἡμίφωνον may show that Cydippe stops reading aloud halfway as she *anticipated* the whole with her eye-voice span.

(xxii) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* XIV: prebaptismal *women* reading each to herself more or less silently.⁵⁵

(xxiii) Ambrose *Ep.* 47 (in the Maurist numbering = 37 CSEL), 2: if Jerome's editing of his text involved continual reading aloud, *pendere oculis* would be inappropriate.

(xxiv) Possidius *Vita S. August.* 31 (= PL 32, p. 63): it would be rather grotesque to *flere iugiter* while reading aloud.

II. Reflection by the ancients on the hygiene, the teaching, and the aesthetics of different techniques of reading

(i) Hippocrates *Vict.* 575 (Litttré): reading aloud as a health-giving practice.

(ii) Aristotle *Rh.* III 12, 1413b 3–1414a 29: γραφικὴ and ἀγωνιστικὴ λέξις partly correspond to reading silently and reading aloud.

(iii) Polybius X 47, 4–11 wants to illustrate the ease and accuracy that can be achieved through practice with a certain system of military telegraphy. He compares it to a demonstration by a young but practised reader who in a single breath reads out five to seven lines of a book he has not seen before, without any mistakes. The comparison is made the more impressive by Polybius' subtle, multi-stage analysis of the reading process itself.

(iv) Cicero *Tusc.* V 40: a deaf person reading and enjoying the process (*legenda* and *audienda* in contrast).

(v) Quintilian *Inst.* I 33–4 (discussed above): the phenomenon of eye-voice span not only understood clearly, but put to pedagogical use.

(vi) Martial III 68, 69, 86, cf. V 2, XI 15: it is indecent enough for a woman to be found sitting with Martial, not to think about pronouncing his texts aloud.

(vii) Pliny *Ep.* IX 36: hygienic advantage of reading aloud, in the spirit of the Hippocratic school; cf. Plutarch *de tuenda sanit.* 16, 130ad.

(viii) Ptolemy *Judic.* 5, 1–2: this passage is evaluated by M. Burnyeat (this journal, below). It seems to be the first documented evidence of an epistemological contrast between the two types of reading.

(ix) Lucian *Adv. Indoct.* 2 (discussed above): we have to do with a man of great EVS, but little education.

(x) Aulus Gellius XIII 31 (30): the point of the anecdote about *caninum prandium* (I owe this passage to M. Burnyeat) is that without understanding a text one cannot even read it distinctly.

(xi) Diogenes Laertius IV 31: since even the most pedestrian writer can φωνῆς ἐμπλήσαι if read by a reader with a mighty voice, it is clear that what is meant here is

⁵⁴ This passage was brought into the discussion by R. Beaton, *Times Literary Supplement* (24 May 1991), 15.

⁵⁵ Cited recently by M. Slusser, 'Reading Silently in Antiquity', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), 499.

the aesthetic subvocalization I spoke of earlier.

(xii) Ausonius *Liber protrept.* 46ff.: artistic reading aloud applied to great works of literature is additionally motivated by its usefulness for cultivated pronunciation.

(xiii) Gregory Nazianzenus *In Basil. epitaph.* (= *or.* 43) LXVI 6 and LXVII 1: the phrase *διὰ γλώσσης φέρων* deserves investigation.

(xiv) Augustine *Ep.* CXLVII (*De videndo deo liber*) 9: *scripturae ad visa pertinent corporis: oculorum, si eas legit, vel aurium, si audivit.* The contrast limps if reading has an impact on the ear.

(xv) Isidore *Sentent.* III 14, 7–9 (PL 83, p. 689): the two techniques of reading directly compared and silent reading recommended. If, as I believe is probable, Isidore is tacitly recalling Augustine's description of Ambrose reading—it is known (Schmekel, *RE* IX [1916], col. 2074) that Augustine is one of the main sources of the *Sententiae*—then this is the first text to use *Conf.* VI 3 as a piece of evidence about reading. But whatever Isidore himself had in mind, his discussion in the *Sententiae* did help to make *Conf.* VI 3 a piece of evidence about reading. A treatise of early modernity by the Jesuit Francisco Sacchini⁵⁶ argues against Isidore and recommends the use of both kinds of reading, as appropriate. In the course of this dispute Sacchini expressly refers to *Conf.* VI 3, and although he displays a decent understanding of its Augustinian context, his treatise marks an important step in the process whereby *Conf.* VI 3 became a key piece of evidence for modern theories about techniques of reading.

III. Passages which have often been cited to prove that the ancients always or preponderantly read aloud

(i) Callimachus *Aetia* III fr.75: Cydippe's reading binds her more if it is *heard*. Ovid *Heroid.* XX shapes the scene in a similar way, although the Roman poet directly admits the ability of the heroine to read silently (*sine murmure legi*) in another version of the same story (*ibid.* XXI 1).

(ii) Horace. In contrast to the *loci* from Horace cited in List I (x), three passages are assiduously adduced to prove the thesis combatted here. (a) *Sat.* I 3, 64–5, where in fact *legentem aut tacitum* equates, as Ps.-Acro explains, to *legentem aut cogitantem*.

(b) *Sat.* I 6, 122–3, where *tacitum* does not in fact serve to describe silent techniques of reading; on the contrary, the latter are used to praise peace and literary occupations as alien to the noisy brave world of the ordinary. (c) *Sat.* II 7, 1ff.: *ausculto* refers to hearing the *silence* in the room of the master; this interpretation makes the scene persuasive instead of grotesque.⁵⁷

(iii) *Acts of the Apostles* 8.28–30: Judaistic tradition required sacred texts to be read aloud.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *De ratione libros cum profectu legendi libellus deque vitanda noxia lectione.* Oratio Francisci Sacchini e societate Jesu. Ed. nova, s. 1., 1615. Chapter 14, pp. 106–112: *Silentione an voce legendum.* The merit of noticing this interesting source belongs to Erich Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit oder die Verwandlungen des Lesers* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 99ff., who introduced to scholarship the genre of *Lesepropedeutiken*. This acknowledgement does not imply, however, that I am convinced by Schön's thinking about the sense of the passage cited or by his way of handling the facts and conceptions we are both interested in.

⁵⁷ I offer a more extensive treatment of these passages in the first volume of the St Petersburg classical almanac *Drevniy Mir i My* (*The Ancient World and Us*).

⁵⁸ See *Das Evangelium nach Marcus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte.* Erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch von H. L. Strack und P. Billerbeck (Munich, 1956²), p. 687. So already G. D. Kypke, *Observationes sacrae in Novi Foederis libros* (Wratislaviae, 1755), vol. II, p. 427.

(iv) *Priapea* 68 (Bücheler): how should Priapus know Homeric texts to laugh at them if not from his master reading them aloud in the garden? Cf. Achilles Tatius VI 16, where the heroine *thinks* aloud for the sake of the plot, i.e. to inform the clandestine hearers.

(v) Lucian *Adv. Indoct.* 2 φθάνοντος τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ τὸ στόμα: see List II (ix). It should be obvious that this is *not* advice to synchronize vocalization with viewing the text read, which is what a near-illiterate person would do, but rather a condemnation of the vast, if superficial, reading of the person criticized. *Jupp. confut.* 4: on the peculiarity of ἀκούω, see List IV.

(vi) Heliodorus, *Aethiop.* IV 8, 2: ἤκουσα will be understood correctly if διηγούμενον (8,1) as applied to a *letter* is taken into account (cf. List I (i)).

(vii) Augustine *Conf.* VI 3, 3 (see above): reading silently, Ambrose pretended not to take notice of a competitive genius present during his leisure to do some work for himself.

IV. Some Greek and Latin expressions bearing on techniques of reading

(i) *Not differentiated* as to silent reading or reading aloud (compare the English pairs 'reading in memoriam/ reading room', 'read a book/ read me the letter', 'the play was read/ the play reads better than it acts', etc.):

Greek ἐπιλέγομαι (Hdt., later writers); ἀναγιγνώσκω (since Pind. *Ol.* X 1ff.); ἀκούω in the sense of 'reading'. This last is an interesting Grecism, recently studied by Dirk M. Schenkeveld, 'Prose Usages of ἀκούω 'to read', this journal 42 (1992), 129–41. Although in my view Schenkeveld is too permissive on the issues treated in the present paper, his characterization of the peculiar Greek usage of ἀκούω is rich and convincing. The impression grows that while ἀναγιγνώσκω developed somewhat in the direction of reading aloud, ἀκούω tended in appropriate contexts to signify silent reading. Already D. Kypke in his commentary (n. 58 above) on the passage of *Act. Ap.* 8 cited List III (iii) said that ἀκούω can refer to *praelectio* as well as to *lectio*.

Latin *lego*, *perlego* (*pellego*). The phrase *ab oculo legere* seems at first to refer to reading by eye alone, i.e. to reading silently, but on reflection it characterizes rather someone's promptitude in reading without preparation from an open book, regardless of whether the reading is silent or aloud, and even with some tendency to indicate a situation where other people can listen because the reading is out loud.

(ii) *Unambiguous description of reading aloud* (e.g. on occasions of ἐπιδείξεις or ἀκροάσεις): δημοσίᾳ ἀναγιγνώσκειν, ἀνάγνωσιν ποιεῖσθαι. Latin: *recito*, *praelego*.

(iii) *Unambiguous description of reading silently to oneself*: (a) πρὸς ἑαυτόν, (b) ἡσυχῇ, σιωπῇ, cf. ἡρέμα, which might have characterized what Germans call *leises Lesen*, (c) (μόνοις) ὁμμασι, ὅψει μόνη. Expressions which imply silent reading: ἐποράω (Hdt.), (δι')ὀρώ, ἐπισκοπῶ, ἐπέρχομαι (more or less at normal speed); περιθέω (skipping); καταπίνω (of extensive and avid reading). Latin: *tacite*, *sub silentio legere*; *percurrere* (*oculo*); *sibi legere*.