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THE ATTITUDE OF ROMAN POETS AND ORATORS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AS A PLACE FOR CREATIVE WORK

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A. Introduction

What kind of environment is best suited for creative artistic work and in what kind of locality is inspiration best attained? In antiquity this problem was discussed by poets, orators and theorists of rhetoric. It also interested philosophers and religious thinkers; to them it was a problem of how to experience the divine.[1] As for poets, an answer to such questions has already been given by Hesiod, when in his poem Theogonia he relates how the Muses taught him the art of singing while he tended his sheep on Mount Helicon. This experience constituted a kind of awakening of the poet's calling and the poet felt the divine influence: "Hesiodos lebte mitten in dieser Welt, in welcher der Dichter das Erwachen seines Dichtertums als das Erwachen und die Regung zugleich des Göttlichen erlebte. Beides fiel in ihm zusammen: das Staunen vor seinem Vermögen, seinem Dichtertum, und jenes vor dem Göttlichen, das er in der Natur und in sich selber erlebte." [2]

Finding a suitable environment for work became a problem especially for writers living in big cities such as Alexandria or Rome. These writers mentioned the countryside, often Mount Helicon, as the ideal locality for writing poetry, a setting that was inclusive of such symbols of water as fountains or waterfalls together with the bay leaf, important in poetic dedication.[3] But it was not always possible to retire into the country or to some other quiet place.[4] A poet or a philosopher could, of course, try to concentrate on his work regardless of his surroundings. So we read of a situation where a writer of antiquity has remained in his everyday surroundings while his mind has been occupied with entirely different ideas, to such an extent that he has become oblivious of his more mundane obligations. Horace mentions Democritus as an example of this *(miramur, si Democriti pecus edit agellos / cultaque, dum peregre*

1 A.J. Festugière, in his study Personal Religion among the Greeks, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1954, Ch. IV, The Inclination to Retirement (53—67), has made important observations on the retirement into the country of politicians and philosophers.

2 A. Kambylis, Die Dichterweihe und ihre Symbolik. Untersuchungen zu Hesiodos, Kallimachos, Properz und Ennius. Heidelberg 1965, 53.

3 A. Kambylis, *op. cit.* 67, mentions the following passages: Anthol. Palat. 5, 5—6; 7, 55, 5f; 9, 64, 3ff; 11, 24, 1—2. For Callimachus cf. Kambylis, *op.cit.* 102—104.

4 Cf. Nicander of Kolophon, who, although he was a town dweller, wrote the work Georgika, cf. Cic. de orat. 1, 69.

est animus sine corpore velox, epist. 1, 12, 12—13). Aristophanes, for his part, ridiculed Euripides for this in the Acharnians, where the latter sits in his room writing a tragedy, but his mind, concentrating on the search for a suitable theme for a tragedy, is completely detached from the world about him (Ach. 395ff).

The problem remained, however, and in this article it is my aim to discuss mainly those cases where the writer, while remaining in the town, meditates on the most suitable environment for creative work. I shall confine myself to Roman literature from the Augustan age onwards, but we should bear in mind that the Alexandrian urban milieu had already provided the point of departure. It should also be remembered that Cicero's attitude to the country is interesting. Tusculum and other villas form the setting for some of his philosophical treatises. The most famous examples are of course Tusculanae disputationes and De republica. In both works the countryside affords a peaceful environment for philosophical discussion. Rhetoric, too, can be discussed in the countryside, witness the De oratore, in which Crassus' villa at Tusculum provides the setting.

B. Horace and Other Augustan Poets

Perhaps the most vivid description of the drawbacks of a city from the point of view of creative poetic work has been given by Horace in the latter epistle of his second book of epistles (vv. 65—80). There Horace's description is based on the contrast between country and city from a poet's point of view.[5] According to Horace, all poets love the quiet of the forest [6] and feel they are under the protection of Bacchus: Bacchus for his part enjoys sleeping in the cool shadow (77—78). Horace regards these observations as sufficient to present his view of the country, for it is clear that he wishes to focus his attention mainly on a vivid description of the town. Gordon Williams has chosen lines 72—75 in particular to illustrate a poetic technique which differs completely from that employed by Vergil and Homer; examples of this technique can be found in Hellenistic literature. In Horace's presentation the observations are based on minute details appealing to all the senses, whereas in epic poetry "the scale is grand and the details are pointed with sweeping strokes that are mainly visual." [7] In his description of the town Horace mentions social duties as factors that make poetic work more difficult *(hic sponsum vocat, hic auditum scripta,* line 67); furthermore, the long distances in town from one hill to another *(cubat hic in colle Quirini / hic extremo in*

5 The contrast between town and country is also presented by Horace elsewhere in his epistles, especially 1, 7; 1, 10; 1, 14.

6 Cf. Hor. ars poetica 298.

7 G. Williams, Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry, Oxford 1968, 657.

Aventino: visendus uterque, lines 68—69) and the din of the town created by people and animals engaged in different occupations and pursuits exacerbate the situation (72—75). The description does not lack humour: the account of a funeral procession in collision with a loaded wagon represents a tragi-comic incident. The whole passus should not be regarded as viewing the city in a purely negative light, since the main emphasis lies in the description of the vibrancy and variety of life; it is only that poetic creation is not suited to this particular environment — especially in the case of the lyric poems that Horace's friend Florus, the addressee of the epistle, wishes him to write.[8] Horace, particularly in his capacity as a lyric poet, has mentioned a grove in the country as the goal of his desires: *Me doctarum hederae praemia frontium / dis miscent superis, me gelidum nemus / Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori / secernunt populo* . . . (carm. 1, 1, 29—32).

As far as Horace is concerned, we should distinguish the discussions in the epistles expressed more or less in the form of a verse essay, concerning the best place for poetic creation, and the passages in the odes where the poet describes himself in a state of inspiration.[9] In these passages Horace approaches the romantic in his description of a poet's calling, for the scene is set in a lonely and wooded mountain region with its rivers and caverns.[10] Such a longing for the wild and lonely aspects of nature does not belong to the pastoral, for the pastoral describes an ideal human community in an ideal landscape.[11]

In the literature of antiquity the divine beings, Bacchus and the Muses, were, in the artistic context, in close contact with the countryside.[12] Accordingly, it was suggested that the countryside was of divine origin, while towns were made by men, or as Varro expresses it:

> Cum duae vitae traditae sint hominum, rustica et urbana, quidni, Pinni, dubium non est quin hae non solum loco discretae sint, sed etiam tempore diversam originem habeant. Antiquior enim multo rustica, quod fuit tempus, cum rura colerent homines neque urbem haberent. Etenim vetustissimum oppidum cum sit traditum Graecum Boeotiae Thebae, quod rex Ogygos aedificarit, in agro Romano Roma, quam Romulus rex.

8 The word *poemata* in line 65 expressly refers to lyric poems, cf. Kiessling—Heinze, Horaz: Briefe, *ad loc.*

9 Cf. carm. 2, 19, 1—4; carm. 3, 4, 6—8; carm. 3, 25, 2—5 and 12—14. Cf. I. Troxler—Keller, Die Dichterlandschaft des Horaz, Heidelberg 1964, 47—69. Cf. also Prop. 3, 3, 27—30 and Kambylis, *op.cit.* 163—173.

10 The German romantic poet Novalis has translated Horace's ode 3, 25, see E. Fraenkel, Horace, Oxford 1957, 258—259.

11 Cf. R. Coleman's article on the essential features of the pastoral in: Greek and Latin Literature. A Comparative Study, ed. by J. Higginbotham, Oxford 1959.

12 Concerning Bacchus and the Muses see T. Oksala, Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz, Helsinki 1973, 45—50 and 77—85.

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> ... immani numero annorum urbanos agricolae praestant. Nec mirum, quod divina natura dedit agros, ars humana aedificavit urbes ...
>
> (rust. 3, 1—2 and 3—4)

It was naturally significant for Horace's as well as for Vergil's creative work that both poets spent most of their time in the country. Attention was drawn to this fact in antiquity itself. The biographer Suetonius specifically reports that Vergil very seldom visited Rome.[13] And although Vergil owned a town house in a select district of Rome, he nevertheless lived mostly in the country:*habuitque domum Romae Esquiliis iuxta hortos Maecenatianos, quamquam secessu Campaniae Siciliaeque plurimum uteretur.*[14] Of Horace, Suetonius says: *Vixit plurimum in secessu ruris sui Sabini aut Tiburtini, domusque eius ostenditur circa Tiburni luculum.*[15] The donation of an estate by Maecenas can also be considered significant for Horace's creative work. This is specifically remarked on in the second collection of satires.

Horace and Vergil differ, however, in their attitudes towards the town. Vergil is averse to the attention paid to him there,[16] whereas the numerous lively descriptions by Horace imply that he often actually longs for the pleasures of the town.[17] Horace's poems contain comparatively sparse reference to the practice of agriculture. The few passages where he describes himself engaged in agricultural tasks (e.g. epistle 1, 14), rather create the impression of a town inhabitant looking for a change; Horace can hardly be said to have dedicated himself to such work. The passages again that speak of failures of the crops etc. (e.g. carm. 3, 1, 29—32), are largely literary conventions and do not really testify to the poet's personal participation. Vergil's case is slightly different: he is well acquainted with the different aspects and problems of agriculture. The elegists again are closer to Horace: their attitude towards agriculture is more like that of the amateur. In some respects the Augustan poets had, however, profound experience of the difficulties appertaining to an estate: many of them had lost their estates in confiscations;[18] and they attached equal importance to the formation of *latifundia.*[19]

Although Ovid describes the delights of the town intensively and although he congratulates himself on not having been born in

13 Suet. Vita Verg. 11.
14 *Ibid.* 13.
15 Suet. Vita Hor.
16 Suet. Vita Verg. 11.
17 Horace's attitudes are very changeable, see particularly sat. 2, 7, 28—29: *Romae rus optas, absentem rusticus urbem / tollis ad astra levis* and epist. 1, 18, 12: *Romae Tibur amem ventosus Tibure Romam.*
18 See Williams, *op.cit.* 45—46.
19 Hor. carm. 2, 18, 23—28, cf. Kiessling—Heinze, *ad loc.;* Tib. 2, 3, 41—42, K.F. Smith, *ad. loc.,* mentions several parallels.

the old days when rural habits prevailed,[20] he, too, admits once or twice that a rural environment is best suited for the composition of poems. In his collection Amores Ovid maintains:

> Stat vetus et multos incaedua silva per annos;
> credibile est illi numen inesse loco.
> Fons sacer in medio speluncaque pumice pendens,
> et latere ex omni dulce queruntur aves.
> Hic ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris —
> quod mea, quaerebam, Musa moveret opus —
> venit odoratos elegeia nexa capillos,
> et, puto, pes illi longior alter erat (3, 1, 1—8).

Even in his Tristia Ovid has maintained that the work of a poet required retirement into the peace and quiet of solitude: *carmina secessum scribentis et otia quaerunt.*[21] The passage quoted from the Amores is a highly detailed account of the ideal environment. It is a typical idyll consisting of a shady grove or wood *(silva, nemoralibus umbris* — very often grove and wood are iuxtaposed in descriptions of this kind[22]), and then a fountain, which in literature is often defined by the adjective *sacer,* and birds and their song.[23] This kind of idyllic landscape should not be confused with the quasi-romantic landscape presented by Horace in his Bacchus-odes (cf. above).

C. Theoretical Discussions in the First and Second Centuries A. D.

While studying the use of the verb 'anachorein' in a political sense, A.J. Festugière suggests that ἀναχώρησις achieved popularity among the Roman nobility, which may explain why Epicureanism acquired a large following.[24] Apart from philosophers and theoreticians of rhetoric, the first and second centuries A.D. afford many instances among poets of retirement into the country, together with the opportunity for composing poetry.[25] Thus Juvenal, for example, describes the perfect poet, whom he can conceive only in his mind:

> Sed vatem egregium, cui non sit publica vena,
> qui nil expositum soleat deducere, nec qui
> communi feriat carmen triviale moneta,
> hunc, qualem nequeo monstrare et sentio tantum,
> anxietate carens animus facit, omnis acerbi
> inpatiens, cupidus silvarum aptusque bibendis
> fontibus Aonidum (7, 53—59).

20 Ov. ars 3, 113—128.

21 Ov. trist. 1, 41.

22 For the parallels see Gudeman's commentary on the Dialogus by Tacitus, p. 248.

23 Music is an important element in the idyll, cf. Coleman, *op.cit.* 108.

24 Festugière, *op.cit.* 55. E. Bernert, Naturgefühl, RE XVI, 1855, has emphasized that the endeavour to immerse oneself in the solitude of the country was genuinely Roman.

25 W. Wili, Horaz und die augusteische Kultur, Basel 1948, 49, mentions that the theme of town versus country was the favourite theme of the Roman writers in the years 40—10 B.C. This is of course true, but it was a motif that was naturally popular throughout later Roman literature.

This passage appears to have its origin in the political conditions of the time, since Juvenal here claims that the poet should not suffer any distress *(anxietate carens animus,* line 57). As was seen above, even Ovid laid down the condition of *otium* as an essential prerequisite for the poet's work. Juvenal has added the woods and fountains which Ovid also referred to. Juvenal further states that he himself feels happy in the country:

> "... Ergo vale nostri memor, et quotiens te
> Roma tuo refici properantem reddet Aquino,
> me quoque ad Helvinam Cererem vestramque Dianam
> converte a Cumis. Saturarum ego, ni pudet illas,
> auditor gelidos veniam caligatus in agros." (3, 318—322)

As for the prose writers of the first century,[26] Seneca discusses problems of this kind in his 104th epistle. There he examines the importance of one's dwelling-place to health and peace of mind in general.[27] Right at the beginning of the letter Seneca mentions that he has left for his villa in Nomentanum in order to shake off a fever. He explains that he is following the example of his elder brother Gallio, who had said of his own illness that it was not an illness of the body, but of the place.[28] A little later Seneca describes the effects of different environments on his life. He refers to the depressing atmosphere of the town *(gravitatem urbis),* to the smell of kitchens full of the smoke from cooking *(illum odorem culinarum fumantium),* and goes on to state that his health had immediately improved after he had rid himself of these factors. The atmosphere in the country soon made it possible for Seneca to get down to work *(Incipio toto animo studere).* In his opinion this applies, however, only in isolated cases, for later on he maintains that generally speaking the place is not a decisive factor; a man's mind can achieve solitude even amidst many pressing concerns:

> Non multum ad hoc locus confert, nisi se sibi praestat animus, qui secretum in occupationibus mediis, si valet, habebit; at ille, qui regiones eligit, et otium captat, ubique, quo distringatur, inveniet (104, 7).[29]

The most interesting area of study, however, concerns the attitudes of Quintilian, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger in this matter, especially because as leading writers of their age they were in contact with each other. Pliny had studied rhetoric under Quintilian[30] and the same thing is alleged to be true of Tacitus.[31] Both Quintilian

26 Idealization of the countryside was in general a popular theme in the literature of this period, cf. e.g. Dio Chrysostom.

27 Cf. Hor. carm. 3, 29, 9—16; epist. 1, 11; 1, 17, 6—8.

28 Even Cicero went to the country occasionally for reasons of health, see epist. ad fam. 7, 26, 1. On Seneca cf. Tac. ann. 14, 56.

29 Cf. Hor. epist. 1, 11, 27: *Caelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt.*

30 Plin. epist. 2, 14, 9; 6, 6, 3.

31 Cf. Schanz—Hosius, Geschichte der römischen Literatur, zweiter Teil, München 1935, 604. On the literary milieu of the period, see R. Syme, Tacitus I, Oxford 1963, part II, 59—131.

and Tacitus wrote a treatise on rhetoric (De causis corruptae eloquentiae, Dialogus de oratoribus). Pliny for his part addressed more than one letter to Tacitus. We should, of course, remember that the practice of rhetoric was generally considered an activity connected with town life. Even Alcaeus, describing himself as an exile, mentioned that he lived in the country and missed the speeches at the agora:

ὀ τάλαις ἔγω
ζώω μοῖραν ἔχων ἀγροϊώτιναν
ἰμέρρων ἀγόρας ἄκουσαι
καρυ[ζο]μένας ἴγεσιλαΐδα
καὶ β̣[ό]λ̣λ̣ας· [32]

By virtue of its precise antitheses and vivid characterization Dialogus de oratoribus by Tacitus is one of the outstanding works of Roman literature; one of the antitheses consists of a dialogue on the role of town and country in literary composition. Tacitus has Curiatius Maternus speak as follows:

> Nemora vero et luci et secretum ipsum, quod Aper increpabat, tantam mihi afferunt voluptatem, ut inter praecipuos carminum fructus numerem, quod non in strepitu nec sedente ante ostium litigatore nec inter sordes ac lacrimas reorum componuntur, sed secedit animus in loca pura atque innocentia fruiturque sedibus sacris (12, 1).

Maternus here enumerates unpleasant political and social activities which Horace, too, referred to in the passage of the epistle discussed above and which also appear in the satires.[33] As a contrast to the unpleasant aspects of town life he mentions *loca pura* and *sedes sacrae*. The attribute 'holy' is appropriate here: Maternus means that in the country the poet is closer to the divine and to inspiration than in town, the country being, according to Varro, of divine origin (see above). Maternus' thoughts relate to bygone times *(aureum saeculum)*, when there were no conflicts and no rhetors, only poets inspired by the divine:

> Ceterum felix illud et, ut more nostro loquar, aureum saeculum, et oratorum et criminum inops, poetis et vatibus abundabat, qui bene facta canerent, non qui male admissa defenderent (12, 3).

Maternus places the speaker and the poet in sharp contrast to each other[34] and declares that he agrees with Vergil in giving preference to peaceful solitude:

32 Alc. fr. 130 (LP). For this topic, cf. F. Cairns, Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry, Edinburgh 1972, 59ff.

33 Hor. sat. 1, 1, 9—10; 2, 6.

34 For discussion in antiquity on the superiority of poetry and rhetoric, see Gudeman *ad loc.*

> Ac ne fortunam quidem vatum et illud felix contubernium comparare timuerim cum inquieta et anxia oratorum vita. Licet illos certamina et pericula sua ad consulatus evexerint, malo securum et quietum Vergilii secessum . . . (13, 1).

It is quite appropriate to refer to Vergil, whose love of country life was well-known from his literary work. Maternus' words demonstrate that Marcus Aper, with whom he converses, is hardly in agreement with him about the attractions of the countryside *(nemora vero et luci et secretum ipsum, quod Aper increpabat,* 12, 1). Gudeman has characterized Aper in the following way: "Aper ist der Typus des self-made man, der kraft seiner Begabung der Hindernisse Herr geworden, die dem Erfolg eines homo novus und Provinzialen in der Weltstadt im Wege zu stehen pflegen." [35] As an upstart Aper does not appreciate art and literature. He practically rebukes Maternus for such interests:

> 'Adeo te tragoediae istae non satiant', inquit Aper, 'quo minus omissis orationum et causarum studiis omne tempus modo circa Medeam, ecce nunc circa Thyestem consumas, cum te tot amicorum causae, tot coloniarum et municipiorum clientelae in forum vocent . . .' (3, 4).

Instead of appearing as speakers at public assemblies, the poets retire into solitude to compose poetry. Aper has presented the case effectively: in sharp contrast to the two tragic figures of mythology, successfully presented in Roman dramatic literature[36], he has placed good and instructive relations between men: *tot amicorum causae, tot coloniarum et municipiorum clientelae.* The following thought of Aper's is, then, more or less ironic:

> Adice quod poetis, si modo dignum aliquid elaborare et efficere velint, relinquenda conversatio amicorum et iucunditas urbis, deserenda cetera officia, utque ipsi dicunt, in nemora et lucos, id est in solitudinem secedendum est (9, 6).

Aper cannot understand why the poet's creative work requires giving up such things as *conversatio amicorum* and *iucunditas urbis.*

Another theoretician, Quintilian, who has studied these questions fairly extensively (inst. 10, 3, 22—25), has only qualified approval for the countryside. It is true, he admits, that the idea of the favourable influence of solitude and quiet is a commonplace. But from the point of view of study and learning, woods and groves are by no means the best places; nor do they provide the stimulus for further work:

> Mihi certe iucundus hic magis quam studiorum hortator videtur esse secessus. Namque illa, quae ipsa delectant, necesse est avocent ab intentione operis destinati (10, 3, 22).

35 Gudeman, *op.cit.* 69.
36 Cf. Quint. inst. 10, 1, 98.

Quintilian goes on:

> Quare silvarum amoenitas et praeterlabentia flumina et inspirantes ramis arborum aurae volucrumque cantus et ipsa late circumspiciendi libertas ad se trahunt, ut mihi remittere potius voluptas ista videatur cogitationem quam intendere (10, 3, 24).

Here Quintilian has depicted a typical idyll; it includes the obligatory forest, the river, breezes and the song of birds (cf. Ovid above). According to Quintilian's somewhat casuistical way of thinking they seduce the writer's attention and thus prevent him from working effectively. That is why Quintilian exhorts men to adopt Demosthenes' method. According to Plutarch, Demosthenes had had an underground study built. He withdrew to this room every day to practise gestures, movements and the right declamation, and there he sometimes remained for two and a half months. The basis of the exercises was provided by the conversations he had had with the people he had met. On leaving his friends, he went into his underground study and there went over what they had talked about and refuted the conclusions.[37]

In the case of Demosthenes, as described by Quintilian as well as by Plutarch, the question does not so much concern the attaining of inspiration as the technical work of writing. Quintilian's argument seems to be a little forced. His thinking, however, becomes clearer when one considers the statement made by his commentators that here Quintilian was thinking particularly of rhetors.[38] As a rhetor deals with public and political affairs, it is quite natural to assume that a rural environment would inhibit effective work. To the poet nature can give inspiration, which is not so important to a speaker. At all events, it should be noted that Quintilian requires absolute peace, while Aper as described by Tacitus wishes to remain in close contact with his friends and clients all the time.

On the other hand, while observing the actual working methods of the writers of antiquity, one can easily see that the beauty of natural surroundings was by no means a distraction to actual composition. Pliny the Younger was able to make notes and meditate in the middle of the woods just as well as in town, as the sixth letter of the first book of his epistles bears witness: *Iam undique silvae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium, quod venationi datur, magna cogitationibus incitamenta sunt.* Correspondingly, Pliny writes in his ninth letter (Book I) how very well-suited a country life is to literary pursuits:

> nulla spe, nullo timore sollicitor, nullis rumoribus inquietor, mecum tantum et cum libellis loquor. O rectam sinceramque vitam! O dulce otium honestamque ac paene omni negotio pulchrius! O mare, o litus, verum secretumque μουσεῖον, quam multa invenitis, quam multa dictatis! (1, 9, 6).

37 Plut. Dem. 7, 3—4, cf. Quint. inst. 10, 3, 25.

38 Peterson's commentary, *ad loc.*

In this rhetorical passage Pliny emphasizes how a solitary life among books is a rich one, because no expectations, no fears and no rumours disturb it. Besides, on several occasions Pliny has referred to his estate in the same vein as Cicero and Horace. The drawbacks of farming often become apparent[39], but Pliny seems to be at his best when he is enjoying the advantages of country life and satisfying his interest in literature.

In spite of its brevity Pliny's letter 9, 10 provides us with important information. The letter is addressed to Tacitus and the very opening words *(cupio praeceptis tuis parere; sed aprorum tanta penuria est, ut Minervae et Dianae, quas ais pariter colendas, convenire non possit)* make it clear that Tacitus has humorously exhorted Pliny to reconcile his interest in hunting with his literary pursuits. The letter also provides evidence that Tacitus has mentioned a country environment as being favourable to literary creation *(poemata ... quae tu inter nemora et lucos commodissime perfici putas)* (cf. above the opinions of Maternus in Tacitus' Dialogus). Pliny has, however, not been able to compose any remarkable poetry, but has been busy writing speeches instead. This kind of work, however, resembles the labours of country life rather than its enjoyments *(magisque laboribus ruris quam voluptatibus simile)*. So, in the case of Pliny, it can be stated that not even a rural environment is always decisive for a writer's creative work. *Invita Minerva* artistic work does not succeed, whatever the environment.

D. Conclusions

The writers of antiquity prescribe a country setting when they discuss poetic dedication. In the choice of environment favourable for poetic creation they very often prefer the country, which is also the theme of their poetry. They can describe themselves as inspired in a lonely country environment or they can view the countryside with longing from the perspective of the town. In the latter case an idyll is most often presented by using conventional topics. Other poetic topics are usually included, such as reflections on the golden age and the divine origin of the country — not to mention the fact that the description of the contrast between urban and rural surroundings often provides an opportunity for ventilating one's philosophy of life. In this case reflections on man's possibilities for attaining the ideal state of happiness occupy the central position.

Rhetors, on the other hand, regard the composition and writing of speeches as an essential part of political activity, not suited to being carried out in the country. On the contrary, the beauty of one's

39 R. Syme, *op.cit.* 84 n. 7, mentions the following passages: 2, 4, 3; 2, 15, 2; 4, 6, 1; 8, 2; 9, 37, 2ff.

natural surroundings may, in fact, divert one's thoughts from the real task in hand. The technical aspects of the work require absolute quiet (Quintilian), but, since speaking is closely related to social and political life, continuous contact with the outside world is required (Aper apud Tacitum).