

# ETYMOLOGIZING THE CONVIVIUM: VARRO'S *NESCIS QUID VESPER SERUS VEHAT*<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

Among the literary productions of the prolific M. Terentius Varro were miscellanies inspired by the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. Cynic Menippus, the *saturae Menippeae* or 'Menippean Satires'.<sup>2</sup> Varro used the genre for a variety of comic and moralizing purposes. Fragments of one such satire, *Nescis quid vesper serus vehat* "You never know what the late evening may bring",<sup>3</sup> preserved chiefly in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* 13.11, offer guidelines for the ideal *convivium* or dinner party.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the language of that satire – in particular, what literary techniques the fragments display; what idea those techniques are meant to express; and what the cultural context of that idea is. The technique of the satire is highly playful. Not only are the elements of the ideal *convivium* described: almost every aspect of them features a pun or conceit. Verbal play was a traditional feature of the Greek symposium. In describing its Roman counterpart Varro has thus crafted a sympotic voice. But his is not mere verbal play; rather, the play has a distinct purpose. An examination of the puns and conceits reveals that, in almost every case, they supply etymologies. Varro's der-

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the genre, see M. Coffey, *Roman Satire*, Bristol 1989<sup>2</sup>, 149–164; E. Woytek, 'Varro', in J. Adamietz (ed.), *Die Römische Satire*, Darmstadt 1986, 311–355.

<sup>3</sup> On the sentiment of the title, cf. below pp. 9–11.

ivations, in this satire as elsewhere, reflect a core principle of ancient linguistics: a signifier was held to reflect the true nature of the signified, and etymologizing could be an act of recovering the, as it were, prelapsarian order.<sup>4</sup>

Whether, in a satirical genre, Varro is quite serious about “recovering” the ideal form of the *convivium* is a question I take up, such as it can be taken up, below. But the fragments, in and of themselves, certainly seem meant to justify a quite particular version of a contemporary social practice. The precepts and their etymologies point to an ideal *convivium* neither as hierarchical or ostentatious as the Roman *convivium* could be, nor again as political or roisterous as the Greek symposium could be. The satire imagines a venue for the cultured elite as a social and intellectual, which is to say not a political, class – that is, as a group bound by educated taste, not riven by competition. This *convivium*, one might say, is to gatherings what the Republican aristocrat’s country villa was (or could be) to architectural space: a place where social superiority was asserted, not through contests, but by shared aesthetic experiences, typically of Greek coloring – a place of balance and harmony where art and culture joined and ambition did not divide. This is, of course, hardly a vision unique to this satire. Most of the precepts of the satire have parallels elsewhere, within sympotic literature and without.<sup>5</sup> But Varro’s twists on them are often distinctive; and in particular his ingenious – and unremitting – puns and like effects in service of the vision of the satire deserve notice. Indeed that vision is not fully clear without unpacking the figures of speech and thought. Stylistic analysis of the closest and most fine-grained kind may thus make bold to contribute to larger questions of social and intellectual history.

Gellius sometimes paraphrases Varro and sometimes quotes him; it is thus worth relating the bulk of Gellius’ account:<sup>6</sup>

1. [333] Among M. Varro’s *Menippean Satires* is a particularly charming book with the title, “You never know what the late evening will bring”, in which he discusses the ideal number of dinner participants and the character and furnishings of the dinner

<sup>4</sup> Varro treated etymology in the lost Books 2–4 of *de Lingua Latina*, but some sense of the plan of those books and his method, which includes recovering the original meaning of names, can be inferred from surviving books. Cf. H. Dahlmann, *Varro und die hellenistische Sprachtheorie*, Hildesheim 1964<sup>2</sup>, 1–14.

<sup>5</sup> Some parallels will be noted, but it is not my first purpose to survey this vast area fully. A convenient point of departure for the *topoi* of sympotic literature is S.-T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch’s table talks*, Gothenburg 1989–1996. Another topic that, for the narrow purposes of this article, must also be left to one side is the social development and significance of Roman banqueting; on this, see L. Landolfi, *Banchetto e Società Romana dalle origini al I sec. a.C.*, Rome 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. nos. 333–341 in F. Bücheler, *Petronii satirae, adiectae sunt Varronis et Senecae satirae similesque reliquiae*, Berlin 1963<sup>3</sup>; numbering followed by J.-P. Cèbe, *Varron: satires ménippées*, vol. 9, Rome 1990, 1429–1432; W.A. Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro: Satirae Menippeae*, vol. 2, St. Katharinen 2002, 601–616.

party itself. 2. He says the number of participants should begin from the number of the Graces and proceed to the number of the Muses: that is, that when the participants are few, they will be no fewer than three; when they are many, they will be no more than nine. 3. [334] He writes, "It is not meet for there to be many, because a crowd (*turba*) is disorderly (*turbulenta*). And a crowd never reclines: at Rome it stands and at Athens it sits. [335] The party itself", he says, "must have four elements; then and only then is it complete (*absolutum*) in all its components (*numeris*): if fashionable fellows (*belli homunculi*) are gathered (*conlecti*), if a [choice] place is picked out (*electus*), if the [right] time is chosen (*lectum*), and if the furnishings are not neglected (*non neglectus*)". [336] He continues, "One must choose (*legere*) guests neither talkative (*loquaces*) nor mute (*mutos*): eloquence (*eloquentia*) belongs in the forum and before the benches, and silence (*silentium*) belongs not at a party but in the bedroom". 4. [337] Varro thinks that on such an occasion the conversation should not concern stressful or complicated matters but should be nice and inviting, and useful without sacrificing charm and pleasure – the kind of conversation that makes our character more lovely and agreeable. 5. [338] "And that happens", he says, "if we chat together about the kind of topic that concerns the practice of our shared life, which there isn't the leisure (*non otium*) to discuss in the forum and in the conduct of business (*negotiis*). [339] As for the host", he continues, "he should be not so much clean (*lautum*) as not dirty (*sine sordibus*)", [340] and, "Not everything should be read at a dinner party (*convivio*), but in particular those things that have practical value (*βιωφελῆ*) and are at the same time pleasing [so that that aspect, too, may seem not to have been missing (*defuisse*) rather than overdone (*superfuisse*)]". [341] Varro also suggests the ideal form of dessert, as follows: "Desserts", he says, "are the sweetest (*maxime ... mellita*) when they're not sweet (*mellita*); dainties (*πέμμασιν*) don't get along with digestion (*πέψει*)".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 1. [333] Lepidissimus liber est M. Varronis ex satiris Menippeis, qui inscribitur: nescis, quid vesper serus vehat, in quo disserit de apto convivarum numero deque ipsius convivii habitu cultuque. 2. Dicit autem convivarum numerum incipere oportere a Gratiarum numero et progredi ad Musarum, ut, cum paucissimi conviviae sunt, non pauciores sint quam tres, cum plurimi, non plures quam novem. 3. [334] 'Nam multos' inquit 'esse non convenit, quod turba plerumque est turbulenta et Romae quidem stat, sedet Athenis, nusquam autem cubat. [335] Ipsum deinde convivium constat' inquit 'ex rebus quattuor et tum denique omnibus suis numeris absolutum est, si belli homunculi conlecti sunt, si electus locus, si tempus lectum, si apparatus non neglectus. [336] Nec loquaces autem' inquit 'convivas nec mutos legere oportet, quia eloquentia in foro et aput subsellia, silentium vero non in convivio, set in cubiculo esse debet'. 4. [337] Sermones igitur id temporis habendos censet non super rebus anxiis aut tortuosis, sed iucundos atque inevitabiles et cum quadam inlecebra et voluptate utiles, ex quibus ingenium nostrum venustus fiat et amoenius. 5. [338] 'Quod profecto' inquit 'eveniet, si de id genus rebus ad communem vitae usum pertinentibus confabulemur, de quibus in foro atque in negotiis agendis loqui non est otium. [339] Dominum autem' inquit 'convivii esse oportet non tam lautum quam sine sordibus', [340] et 'In convivio legi non omnia debent, sed ea potissimum, quae simul sint βιωφελῆ et delectent [potius ut id quoque videatur non defuisse quam superfuisse]'. [341] Neque non de secundis quoque mensis, cuiusmodi esse eas oporteat, praecipit. His enim verbis utitur: 'Bellaria' inquit 'ea maxime sunt mellita, quae mellita non sunt; πέμμασιν enim cum πέψει societas infida'. The words in square brackets are supplied from Gel. 1.22.5, where more of the sentence is quoted. In fr. 341 Macrobius (2.8.2) has *dulcibus* for πέμμασιν.

Varro's language is thick with precious figures.<sup>8</sup> Most prominent are plays on words – *παρονομασίαι* or *adnominatioes*. The most obvious pun rings changes on forms of *–lect–*: a *convivium* is perfect *si belli homunculi conlecti sunt, si electus locus, si tempus lectum, si apparatus non neglectus* (335). But almost every phrase has some kind of word-play. For example, in the *convivium* one is to discuss topics that there isn't the leisure (*non est otium*) to discuss in the forum during the conduct of business (*neg-otiis*, 338). Also prominent, as we will see, are other, equally precious figures: the *ἀντίθετον* or *contrarium*, in which opposing or complementary expressions are set against each other; and *ἀντανάκλασις* or *refractio*, in which the same word is used in more than one sense.<sup>9</sup> In sum, the style of the quoted excerpts is, quite precisely, sophistic: the pun and the antithesis, at least, are figures that according to Cicero had a special home in the style of the sophists<sup>10</sup> – a point to which we will return.

## II. *Elegantia*

These figures of speech and thought almost all provide etymologies. The effect is illustrated perfectly by the puns on *–lect–* already noticed: the word-play recalls original meanings in order to reveal something essential about the *convivium*. All of the words come from the same root, which means 'gather' or 'choose'.<sup>11</sup> Two of them preserve that meaning intact: *conlecti* 'gathered together, chosen to form a group' and *lectus* 'chosen'. But the meaning of two others has drifted away from the original sense of the root. In one the drift is not very far.

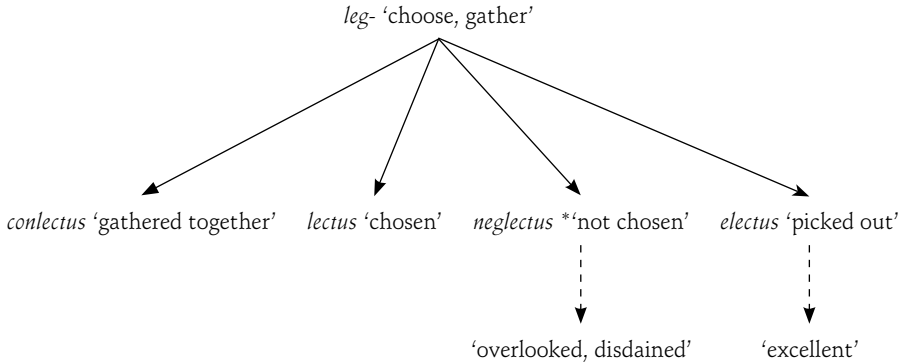
<sup>8</sup> For a survey of Varro's style, see E. Woytek, 'Stilistische Untersuchungen zur Satura Menippea Varros', *Eranos* 70 (1972), 23–58; on wordplay, pp. 50–58. On wordplay as a feature of the Cynic school of philosophy, see W.D. Desmond, *Cynics*, Berkeley 2008, 123–124.

<sup>9</sup> *adnominatio*: *Rhet. Her.* 4.29; *contrarium*: *Rhet. Her.* 4.21; *refractio*: Quintilian 9.3.68.

<sup>10</sup> [*sophistae*] *adversa contrariis [referunt]* (= *antithesis*) (Cic. *Orat.* 65, cf. 38); *immutazione litterae quasi quaesitae venustates* (= *adnominatioes*, Cic. *Orat.* 84), to be avoided by the plain style orator, as suggesting *elaborata concinnitas et quoddam aucupium delectationis* "contrived neatness and, as it were, hunting after amusing effects" – which are marks of the sophistic style (Cic. *Orat.* 38).

<sup>11</sup> The pun is noticed by Cèbe, *Varron*, 1440 and Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 605, but its significance is only partly explored. Krenkel cites comparable figures from the satires (e.g. *provocare, advocare, recovare*, in fr. 504; *cepit, recepit*, in fr. 298). Cèbe notes that the word-play, together with the cola articulated by *si*, "traduisent le goût des classifications nettes"; similarly Krenkel, noting that the careful classification recalls a *Lehrbuch*. Krenkel's translation nicely replicates the effect of the pun: "wenn nette Leutchen zusammengesucht sind; wenn der Ort gut ausgesucht ist; wenn der rechte Zeitpunkt gesucht ist; wenn bei der Vorbereitung nichts unversucht geblieben ist".

*Electus* meant simply ‘chosen [from some implied group]’ but came to mean also ‘well-chosen, rightly chosen’ and therefore virtually ‘excellent’<sup>12</sup> (Eng. ‘select’ vs. ‘selected’; Pol. ‘wyborowy’ vs. ‘wybrany’). (In fact, the same is true of *lectus*, as we will see below). In the other the drift is farther: from an original ‘not gather, not choose, refuse to select’ (\**nec-lego*), *neglegere* came to mean ‘disregard, reject’. But when the four words are set closely together, the juxtaposition draws out their common origins; it is as if a semantic tree suddenly appeared:



This is not mere esprit. Rather, the semantic tree has a message: the perfect *convivium* requires careful selection. To host a proper party is to have to make a series of deliberate choices. Etymology points the way to the true order of things.

What kind of choice? That is made clear in the first instance by a further effect of the pun itself. The pun suggests the importance of ‘making choices regularly’, ‘intently’, or ‘carefully’, which are exactly the proper meanings of *elegans* ‘tasteful, elegant’, in origin a durative or intensive of *eligere* and another member of the *-leg-* family.<sup>13</sup> The sense was palpable to the ancients: Donatus glosses *elegans* in part as *qui eligere sciat*.<sup>14</sup> The semantic tree that appears points to a missing member of the family. This is quite like an affect of Alexandrian poets and their Augustan imitators, whereby a missing word is suggested by the presence of its

<sup>12</sup> TLL 5.2.386.12–81. The development appears to belong to the late Republic, e.g. *electius verbum* (Rhet. Her. 4.36), *electissima pessimi poetae scripta* (Catul. 36.6), *res vero bonas verbis electis graviter ornateque dictas quis non legat?* (Cic. Fin. 1.8).

<sup>13</sup> For comparable formations, cf. *occupāre* ‘seize’ (‘take and hold, take permanently’) vs. *occipere* ‘begin’ from *cap-* ‘take’; *accubāre* ‘lie’ vs. *accumbere* ‘lie down’; *educāre* ‘nurture’ (‘continually direct to a result’) vs. *ēducere* ‘lead out’. Cf. A. Ernout, *Morphologie historique du Latin*, Paris 1974, 141–142; A. Ernout, A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Paris 1985, 349 (‘un intensif duratif’); D.H. Steinbauer, *Etymologische Untersuchungen zu den bei Plautus belegten Verben der lateinischen ersten Konjugation*, Regensburg 1989, 136ff.

<sup>14</sup> ‘elegantem’ ... *qui eligere sciat aut qui ipse sit eligendus* (Don. ad Ter. Eun. 408); cf. *elegantes ex eligendo*, Cic. ND 2.72.

etymology. For example, in the *Georgics*, Vergil twice describes a bird who “cuts the air with her wings” (*secat aethera pennis*, 1.406, 409); the bird, never named by Vergil, is the *ciris* (κείρις), into which Scylla was transformed for cutting (κείρειν) her father’s magic lock of hair.<sup>15</sup> Rather as κείρις is summoned by Vergil’s *secat*, so *elegantia* is summoned by all the forms of *-lect-*.

In what does this *elegantia* consist? The satire consistently points to two chief criteria: to balance and to, let us call it, “composition”, that is, to the creation of a harmonious whole by special attention to selection and arrangement of some elements and by the exclusion of certain others.

### III. Balance

The *convivium* of this satire is conceived of as a balance between extremes – an *aurea mediocritas*.<sup>16</sup> The ideal table-companions are to be neither talkative nor silent (336) – a midpoint between opposites. The ideal host is to avoid *sordes* ‘dirtiness’ rather than aim to be *lautus* ‘clean’ as such (339) – again apparently a midpoint. The ideal material to be read should seem, not to have been overdone, but not to have been missing – yet another midpoint – and should be both useful and pleasant (340) – a union of opposites. A similar ideal informs topics of conversation. Topics useful to shared life should be discussed (338); conversely, unpleasant and difficult topics should be avoided. The ideal dessert should not be too sweet (341) – an extreme avoided.

#### III.A. Conversation

Each of these expressions of balance is supported, and its meaning considerably deepened, by etymological verbal play. Thus the ideal conversation: it is beneficial *si de id genus rebus ad communem vitae usum pertinentibus confabulemur, de quibus in foro atque in negotiis agendis loqui non est otium* “if we chat together about the kind of topic that concerns the practice of our shared life, which there isn’t the leisure to discuss in the forum and in the conduct of business” (334). In the phrase *ad communem vitae usum* there is a gloss on the etymology of *convivium* – ‘living (-viv-) jointly or together (con-)’.<sup>17</sup> Varro’s pun makes the proper topic for converse

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. R.F. Thomas, *Georgics: Volume 1, Books I–II*, Cambridge 1988, 137. For a list of such suppressed etymologies, cf. J. O’Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Word-play*, Ann Arbor 1996, 79–83.

<sup>16</sup> Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 611–612 sees the concept in fr. 340, but it extends more widely.

<sup>17</sup> Cicero makes the etymology twice: *bene enim maiores accubitionem epularem amicorum, quia vitae coniunctionem haberet, convivium nominaverunt, melius quam Graeci, qui hoc idem tum computationem, tum concenationem vocant, ut, quod in eo genere minimum est, id maxime probare videantur* “Our

at a *convivium* appear to be encoded in its very name; the name of the event is, as it were, made to script the event itself.

But *communis vitae usus* is more than just a gloss; it takes the idea of “shared life” in a particular direction. A near-parallel from Cicero's *de Amicitia* is instructive. The Stoics, says Laelius in that dialogue, claim that only the good man is wise, “but they refer to a wisdom that hitherto no mortal has ever attained; we, by contrast, should have an eye, not to ideals or aspirations, but to the features of practical living (*ea quae sunt in usu vitaeque communi*)”.<sup>18</sup> Cicero's phrase describes practical, moral philosophy.<sup>19</sup> The connotations of Varro's *communis vitae usus* were doubtless similar. Varro's gloss makes the *convivium* into a venue for practical philosophy. This is very like the vision of a *cena* in a satire of Horace, where the topic of conversation is not real estate or the theatre, but philosophy that “pertains to us” (*ad nos pertinet*, cf. Varro's *pertinentibus*):

Thus talk begins, not of others' villas or houses,  
or whether Lepos dances well or poor –  
instead, we go back and forth about  
what pertains to us and it's wrong to ignore:  
whether riches or virtues make men happy;  
whether need or right attracts us to friends;  
what the nature of good is, and what its highest end.<sup>20</sup>

If Varro's *ad communem vitae usum* glosses *convivium*, it also presses upon it a particular idea of what “life” means.

That idea illuminates three other details. First, the conversation of the guests is described as *confabulari* ‘chat together’. *Confabulari* is an ante-classical and apparently colloquial word, in Republican Latin only otherwise in Plautus and Terence. It is very apt to the satire's vision: the preverb *con-* stresses the communal

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ancestors called the practice of lying down to a meal with friends ‘living together’ because it involves sharing life – a better word than the Greeks use: they call the same practice ‘drinking together’ (=συνπόσιον) or ‘dining together’ (=σύνδειπνον), thereby seeming to give the greatest significance to the aspect of the practice that is the least significant” (*Sen.* 45). Cf. a letter to Paetus: ... *sapientius nostri quam Graeci: illi συμπόσιον aut σύνδειπνον, id est comotationes aut con- cenationes, nos convivia, quod tum maxime simul vivitur* (*Fam.* 9.24.3).

<sup>18</sup> ... *sed eam sapientiam interpretantur quam adhuc mortalis nemo est consecutus, nos autem ea quae sunt in usu vitaeque communi, non ea quae finguntur aut optantur, spectare debemus* (*Amic.* 18).

<sup>19</sup> That is, to the exclusion of physics and dialectics: cf. *philosophia in tris partis est tributa, in naturae obscuritatem, in disserendi subtilitatem, in vitam atque mores* “Philosophy concerns three areas: the mysteries of nature, the exactness of argument, and life and morals” (*Cic. de Orat.* 1.68).

<sup>20</sup> *ergo | sermo oritur, non de villis domibusve alienis, | nec male necne Lepos saliet; sed, quod magis ad nos | pertinet et nescire malum est, agitamus, utrumne | divitiis homines an sint virtute beati, | quidve ad amicitias, usus rectumne, trahat nos | et quae sit natura boni summumque quid eius* (*Hor. Sat.* 2.6.70–76). The appropriateness of philosophy to the symposium is a matter of debate in Plutarch (*Quaest. Conviv.* 1.1 = 612E–615C).

aspect of *communis vitae usus*; and the humble tone of the word nicely matches the practical connotations of the phrase. Those connotations explain a second detail. In Gellius' paraphrase, the conversation should avoid *res anxiae aut tortuosae* (337). *Tortuosus* is used by Cicero to refer to Stoic dialectic;<sup>21</sup> Gellius surely correctly understood Varro to have the very thing in mind. Such dialectic, rarefied and intricate, would certainly have stifled conversation.<sup>22</sup> *Confabulator*, by contrast, suggests livelier converse – as does Horace's frequentative *agitamus*, properly 'be occupied with' but sometimes also 'treat [in words], discuss'.<sup>23</sup> If the gloss *communis vitae usus* is the script, *tortuosus* describes what lies outside it, and *confabulari* provides a stage direction – as it were *semplicemente*.

The connotation of philosophical discussion illuminates one other detail, as it happens another etymological pun. The topics for conversation are to be those that "there isn't the leisure (*non otium*) to discuss in the forum and in the conduct of business (*negotiis*)". The etymology sets 'business' opposite to 'leisure'. That is an obvious derivation. But what is significant here is the meaning implied for *otium*. As the context for philosophical discussions, *otium* is obviously not 'idleness' but purposeful 'leisure', rather as Cicero famously meant it: free time devoted to thinking about the meaning of things. Cicero's dialogues, commonly set in a villa, are an obvious parallel; we will see them again. Broadly parallel, too, is the view, here implied but overt in Cicero, of philosophy as a separation from the demands of public and political life. The etymological figure thus indexes both sameness and difference. That is, *otium* and *negotium*, if they are opposites, are also counterparts: both are the business of serious men, who alternately depart from, and return to, *otium*. There, then, is a distinction from the otherwise similar Ciceroian view. Cicero's own separation from political life was forced; no such compulsion appears in Varro. Varro's *convivium* and its conversations do not seem to be a retreat but a refreshment, not a consolation but an aspiration. They are, as we will see, an artful exercise in solidarity.

An etymological pun also supports the description of the material to be read at a dinner party, and again with normative force. "Not everything should be read at a dinner party (*convivio*), but in particular those things that have practical value

<sup>21</sup> *totum tortuosum genus disputandi* (Luc. 98), *nec enim in Torquati sermone quicquam implicatum aut tortuosum fuit* (Fin. 3.3, of an Epicurean who does not use dialectic). Elsewhere Cicero uses the metaphor of *spinae* 'thorns' (*Peripatetici autem ad placandos animos multa adferunt, spinas partiendi et definiendi praetermittunt*, Tusc. 4.9; cf. Fin. 3.3, 4.79).

<sup>22</sup> Plutarch comparably advises that topics be "fairly simple" (ὀγχοτέρας) and "not difficult", lit. 'not sticky' (μὴ γλίσχυρας), "so that the less intellectual guests may neither be stifled nor turned away" (ἵνα μὴ πνίγωσι τοὺς ἀνοητοτέρους μὴδ' ἀποτρέπωσιν) (*Quaest. Conviv.* 1.1.5 = 614D, tr. P. Clement).

<sup>23</sup> For this sense of *agito* = *disputo*, cf. TLL 1.0.1337.21–36.

(βιωφελῇ) and are at the same time pleasing (340).<sup>24</sup> Why βιωφελῇ and not simply *utilia*, as in Gellius' paraphrase? And if a Greek word, why not ὠφέλιμος, the usual word for 'useful' as a counterpart to 'pleasant' (ἡδύς)? Varro's word, βιωφελής, derived from the word for '[manner of] life' (βίος), draws out the etymology of *convivium*, which appears earlier in the sentence. But why the Greek word at all? As with *ad communem vitae usum*, the connotations that the word brings with it enrich and direct the etymology. βιωφελής in its earliest other attestations is frequently linked to the fruits of intellectual life, especially didactic – an idea (δόξα, Phil. Jud. som. 2.42.2), precept (δόγμα, Phil. Jud. ebr. 214), teaching (μάθημα, Phil. Jud. som. 1.52, 2.256, Abr. 101), or treatise (πραγματεία, Ath. Deip. 7.96).<sup>25</sup> If Varro also felt that that was the sphere to which the word belonged, that is, if βιωφελής connoted didaxis, then Varro is signalling the genre which he thinks most appropriate to *convivia*: philosophical teaching – the intellectual apparatus of which was of course Greek.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that, if the satire can be taken at all seriously, its very manner obeys the precept of being useful and pleasant. In offering detailed advice it is, of course, "useful"; but the sophistic style in which it is written is specifically designed to "please": Cicero says that style is designed "not to stir hearts but to calm them; not so much to persuade as to please" (*non perturbare animos sed placare potius, nec tam persuadere quam delectare*, Orat. 65).

### III.B. *Vesper Serus*

It is perhaps in this light that the title of the satire, *Nescis quid vesper serus vehat*, "You never know what the late evening may bring", should be seen. The sentiment of the title, expressing the fickleness of Fortune, was apparently proverbial. Thus *quid vesper ferat incertum [est]* in Livy (45.8.6).<sup>27</sup> Why this proverb as a title? In view of the dinner of Nasidienus in Hor. Sat. 2.8, which is orchestrated so elegantly but ends in disaster, and of the mockery, elsewhere in the *Menippeans*,

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Horace's observation *aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae | aut simul et iocunda et idonea dicere vitae* "Poets want to help or to please, or to say things that are both pleasant and useful for living" (Ars 333–34).

<sup>25</sup> Varro's is the first attestation of βιωφελής; in Greek texts the word does not appear until Philo Judaeus.

<sup>26</sup> "Die Menippeischen Satiren des Varro sind oft in den Rahmen eines Gastmahles = *convivium*, *cena* eingebunden ... und bieten so Beispiele für Themen guter, bildender, erbaulicher Gespräche" – for example, the *Endymiones* probably treated a trip through the heavens (Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, vol. 1, 172–173); *Est Modus Matulae* concerned the virtues of moderation; the *Lex Maenia* examined different aspects of *pietas* (*ibidem*, 414); the theme of the *Marcopolis* appears in its subtitle, *περί ἀρχῆς*; and the *περί ἐξαγωγῆς* concerned suicide.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *quivis beatus versa rota Fortunae ante vesperum potest esse miserrimus* "Any happy person, with a turn of the wheel of Fortune, can be utterly wretched before evening" (Amm. 26.13). Cf. A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*, Leipzig 1890, no. 1881.

of excessive knowledge,<sup>28</sup> Krenkel finds the usual meaning of the proverb – *fortuna varia est* – entirely apt.<sup>29</sup> For Cèbe Varro has stretched the proverb somewhat beyond its usual sense to mean that, since fortune is indeed variable, life should be enjoyed in the moment: *carpe diem*.<sup>30</sup>

But in either case the proverb, which concerns the cosmic order and one's response to it, is precisely the kind of philosophical topic ideal for discussing at a proper Varronian *convivium*. That is, *the title itself* provides a topic that is βιωφελής. But not only that: the *convivium* is also inscribed into the words of the title. The key is *serus*. *Serus* does not appear in other citations of the proverb.<sup>31</sup> This is not surprising: the point of the proverb is that the day's end may bring change; specifying which phase of the day's end adds nothing. "One's fortune may change by evening" sounds like a proverb; "One's fortune may change by late evening" does not particularly sharpen that sense. *Serus*, then, probably did not belong in the proverb. Macrobius omits it when specifically quoting the title of the dialogue (1.7.2) – perhaps reverting to the usual form of the expression as he quoted from memory? But adding *serus* has a nice effect: *vesper serus* – quite like *ad communem vitae usum* – becomes a gloss on *convivium*. 'A late evening' is one way of describing a *convivium*, which sometimes began only then and regularly lasted until then. Furthermore, *vesper* itself meant not only 'evening'; in older Latin it also meant 'supper'. Hence, for example, *ego ire in Piraeum volo, | in vesperum parare piscatum mihi* "I want to go to the Piraeus, to get myself some fish for supper" (Pl. *Most.* 66–67). Varro doubtless knew that and also knew that *vesperna* was an old word for an 'evening meal' (Paul. Fest. p. 54 M).<sup>32</sup> *Vesper serus*, then, may mean not only 'a late evening', implying a *convivium*, but also 'a supper taken late', describing a *convivium* outright. Varro's title, to my mind, thus has a double meaning. The ordinary meaning *nescis quid vesper vehat* remains – an undertone, as it were, warning that fortune is indeed variable. But the title as it stands, *nescis quid vesper*

<sup>28</sup> *Multiplex scientia*, fr. 6; *ars iners*, fr. 359.

<sup>29</sup> Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 616: "Nach der Vorlesung über eine ordentliche *cena*, die vielleicht der pedantische Gastgeber selbst vortrug, muß Varro der Satire einen ganz überraschenden Schluß gegeben hatten, der ist im Titel embryonal angelegt: all die theoretisch ausgeklügelten Grundsätze und Richtlinien schlugen um in eine völlig unerwartete und sehr praktische Katastrophe".

<sup>30</sup> Cèbe, *Varron*, 1433–1434 with references.; q.v. for other interpretations of the title.

<sup>31</sup> A partial exception is Vergil, who quotes part of the title: *denique, quid Vesper serus vehat, unde serenas | ventus agat nubes, quid cogitet umidus Auster, | sol tibi signa dabit* "In short, what the late evening brings, whence the wind drives the serene clouds, what wet Auster intends – [of these things] the sun will give you signs" (Verg. *Geo.* 1.461–3). Vergil means *Vesper* in the sense 'evening star' (cf. *Geo.* 1.251) and, like Varro, bends the meaning of (part of) the proverb, here to describe weather. But the original idea of the full proverb – *fortuna varia est* – remains: in the immediately following section portents and civil war are described.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Polish *wieczór* 'evening' ~ *†wieczera* 'evening meal, supper'.

*serus vehat* – “You don’t know what a *convivium* may bring” – to my mind sounds a different note, not so much warning of disaster as promising consolation and even offering delight. To put it another way, the title provides a useful topic and also specifies the pleasant venue in which the topic is to be discussed; the title is, in its own way, a union of τὸ ὠφέλιμον and τὸ ἡδύ.

### III.C. Desserts

The unity of the pleasant and the useful underlies another one of the precepts that call for balance, and again etymological word-play deepens the effect. Desserts are not to be too sweet: *Bellaria ... ea maxime sunt mellita, quae mellita non sunt; πέμμασιν enim cum πέψει societas infida* “Desserts ... are the sweetest when they’re not sweet; dainties don’t get along with digestion” (341). Here is an ἀντανάκλασις or *refractio*, in which a word is used in two senses. *Mellitus* originally meant ‘honeyed, sweetened with honey’ (*mell-*). Thus the word is used of *favi* ‘honey-combs’ (Varro *R.R.* 3.16.22) and *placenta* ‘a cake’ (Hor. *Ep.* 1.10.11). But *mellitus* came to be used as a term of endearment. Cicero applies it to his son (*Att.* 1.18.1); Catullus to Juventius (99.1), Juventius’ eyes (48.1), and Lesbia’s pet sparrow (3.6). Varro’s precept plays the two senses against each other. This *refractio* counts as a normative etymology. It was a peculiarity of ancient etymological method that things were sometimes thought to be named, not for what they are, but for their opposites – etymology κατ’ἀντίφρασιν or ‘by contradiction’. *Bellum* ‘war’, for example, was derived from *bellus* ‘nice, pretty’ on the grounds that “war isn’t pretty” (*antiphrasis est unius verbi ironia, ut ... bellum, hoc est minime bellum*, Don. *gram.* 4.402 Keil).<sup>33</sup> The name of a thing, to this way of thinking, may be the opposite of its true nature.

The same principle of etymology κατ’ἀντίφρασιν applies to πέψις ‘digestion’ and πέμμα ‘dainty, cake’. They might seem to be compatible, because they are both versions of ‘cooking’ (πέσσω); but in fact they work against each other.<sup>34</sup> Varro signals the kind of etymological method he is here using by an unusual phrase. There

<sup>33</sup> This etymology was widespread in the later tradition; cf. R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, Leeds 1991, 78. The (pseudo-)Augustinian *de dialectica* 6 describes the technique, rendering it as *per contrarium*.

<sup>34</sup> The principle is articulated by Plutarch’s Philinus: αἱ δὲ πολλὰ καὶ ποικίλα ποιότητες ὑπεναντιώσεις ἔχουσαι καὶ δυσμαχοῦσαι φθείρονται πρότερον προσπίπτουσαι, καθάπερ ἐν πόλει μιγάδων καὶ συγκλύδων ἀνθρώπων πλῆθος οὐ ῥαδίως μίαν οὐδ’ ὁμοπαθοῦσαν ἴσχουσαι κατὰστασιν, ἀλλ’ ἐκάστη πρὸς τὸ οἰκείον ἀντιτείνουσα καὶ δυσσύμβατος οὔσα πρὸς τὸ ἀλλόφυλον (“When a number of divergent qualities in food are united, essentially opposed and clashing as they are, they encounter each other prematurely and are destroyed. Like a mob of ill-assorted ruffraff in a community, these elements cannot easily establish unity and harmonious order among themselves, but each pulls in its own direction, and will not come to terms with an alien kind”, *Quaest. Conviv.* 4.1.2 = 661C, tr. P. Clement).

were many ways to express the idea that *πέψις* and *πέμμα* are contrary: *opposita sunt, contraria sunt, male componuntur*, etc. But to express the idea Varro says that between them there is a *societas infida*. I rendered the phrase ‘not get along with’ but properly it means ‘a faithless association’. Varro is using the technical language of Roman law. The bedrock of a *societas* ‘alliance, association, partnership’ was *bona fides* ‘good faith’ (thus a *socius* suing a partner brought an *actio bonae fidei*). ‘Dainties’ and ‘digestion’ might *seem* like they could be ‘partners’ (*socii*); but in fact that partnership will prove to be ‘faithless’ (*infidus*). *Societas infida* is a metaphor for etymology *κατ’ἀντίφρασιν* drawn from Roman law.

There are two points to take from the metaphor. First, the language of law perhaps makes a further contribution: like the metaphor of cosmic or rhetorical order explored below, the language of law suggests that arranging a banquet requires the systematic application of properly understood principles. Aemilius Paulus famously made a like analogy, comparing *convivia*, not to law, but to generalship.<sup>35</sup> Second, the reference to etymology *κατ’ἀντίφρασιν* is a clear sign, above and beyond the, to my mind, already clear evidence of the satire’s verbal play, that etymological method was intentionally adopted as a technique of the satire. Varro here names the tool, or one of the tools, whose marks are otherwise so evident in the text.

### III.D. The Host

The description of the ideal host, too, is anchored by a play on words, also with etymological effect – here, another (kind of) *refractio*. *Dominum autem convivii*, says Varro, *esse oportet non tam lautum quam sine sordibus* (339), literally, “The host should be not so much clean as not dirty”. On the surface the precept seems to suggest moderation. But how exactly? Is the precept not a tautology? What is the practical difference between ‘clean’ and ‘not dirty’? The tautology suggests the true meaning of the comparison does not have to do with cleanliness *per se*. Rather, the comparison uses the apparent tautology of the literal meanings to rank their metaphorical meanings. The chief meaning that *lautus* has here is one that appears already in Plautus: ‘respectable, ‘well-turned out’, ‘fine’, ‘tasteful’.<sup>36</sup> By the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE the word had a special connection to feasts<sup>37</sup>: Afranius speaks of

<sup>35</sup> *vulgo dictum ipsius ferebant et convivium instruere et ludos parare eiusdem esse, qui vincere bello sciret*. “A saying of his was in circulation that laying a table and organizing games were part and parcel of being the sort of person who knew how to secure military victory” (Livy 45.32.11). Cf. Plut. *Aem.* 28.6.

<sup>36</sup> *TLL* 7.2.1053.54–7.2.1054.2. This ‘respectability’, of course, was coincident with upper-class privilege; hence *lautus* also acquired the senses ‘wealthy, well-to-do’ (e.g. in *Halaesina civitate tam lauta tamque nobili*, Cic. *Fam.* 13.32.1) and even something like ‘morally excellent’ (*nihil tibi erit lautius, nihil gloriosius*, Cic. *Fam.* 15.14.4).

<sup>37</sup> *TLL* 7.2.1054.19–39.

a *lautus conviva* (com. 368); Cicero criticizes a crude party for having *nihil ... lautum, nihil elegans, [nihil] sumptuosum* (Pis. 67). *Sordes* here probably signifies, not a general 'baseness' or 'lowness', but specifically 'stinginess' 'niggardliness' or 'illiberality': 'liberality' and 'generosity' are criteria more appropriate to a host's duties than a general moral quality. Furthermore *sordes* is elsewhere used to describe a meager outlay of food: the Roman people, claims Cicero, "doesn't like extravagant feasts – but stinginess and a lack of generosity even less" (*non amat profusas epulas, sordes et inhumanitatem multo minus*, Mur. 76). The metaphorical uses of *lautus* and *sordes*, then, belong to different semantic spheres: *lautus* has to do with taste and aesthetics, *sordes* with hospitality and generosity.<sup>38</sup> To be 'not so much clean (metaphorically)' as 'not dirty (metaphorically)' is *not* a tautology: it means a host should be less concerned with putting his own taste on display than with providing for and tending to his guests; he is to think of them before himself. The etymologies of the words – their literal, original meanings – are made to reveal their true relative value.<sup>39</sup>

Here, then, is a kind of *refractio*: the context of *lautus* and *sordes* – a satire about dining – requires the words to be taken in their metaphorical senses, which are from different semantic fields; but their juxtaposition draws out the literal meanings, which are from the same semantic field,<sup>40</sup> and thereby suggests that the words can be ranked one against the other. Perhaps an English example can replicate the effect. 'Hot' not only means 'of high temperature' but may also mean 'sexually attractive'; 'warm' means not only 'of pleasantly raised temperature' but also 'emotionally open'. In "Lovers should be warm but not too hot", the imagery of temperature suggests the concepts 'hot' and 'warm' can be related; the logical form of this particular sentence suggests that 'warm' is more important than 'hot'; and that organizes the metaphorical meanings, suggesting that lovers' emotional availability is more important than their sexual attractiveness. At all events a further detail of Varro's Latin deserves notice. If the good host is to be generous, neither is he to be extravagant in his generosity: he is only to avoid stinginess. Being *profusus* (to recall Cicero's term from above) would also be to draw attention to oneself. The very form of the phrase *sine sordibus*, a kind of litotes, contributes to the moral vision.

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<sup>38</sup> Woytek, *Stilistische Untersuchungen*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Pliny makes the same pun: *accid[it] ut ... cenarem apud quendam, ut sibi videbatur, lautum et diligentem, ut mihi sordidum simul et sumptuosum* "It happened that I had dinner with someone who thought he was elegant and careful but who I thought was both ungenerous and extravagant at the same time" (*Epist.* 2.6.1). The host served different food and drink to different categories of guest.

<sup>40</sup> Woytek, *Stilistische Untersuchungen* 55: "[Varro lässt] hinter der übertragenen Wortbedeutung die ursprüngliche zum Vorschein kommen ...".

### III.E. Table Talk

That dinner-companions should be neither too talkative nor too reticent is an obvious sort of precept. But, here, too, as with the other expressions of balance, word-play, here arranged in a *contrarium* or antithesis, deepens and complicates the idea. Thus runs Varro's advice: *nec loquaces autem convivas nec mutos legere oportet, quia eloquentia in foro et apud subsellia, silentium vero non in convivio, set in cubiculo esse debet* "One must choose guests neither talkative nor mute: eloquence belongs in the forum and before the benches, and silence belongs not at a party but in the bedroom" (336). The structure is obviously antithetical: the *loquax* person displays *eloquentia* and the *mutus* person displays *silentium*. The problem is that the pairs thus produced are mismatched. Take the first pair. *Eloquentia* is the fluidity of formal speech,<sup>41</sup> proper, as Varro says, to the forum or the lawcourts (which is to say, to deliberative or contional and to judicial oratory); but *loquacitas* is garrulity, the volubility of unchecked conversation. *Eloquentia* is a virtue; *loquacitas* is a vice.

Why the mismatch? The morphology of *eloquentia* and *loquax* point the way. In the logic of Varro's satire, their apparent differences are belied by their morphology: the affixes of both mark them out as extreme versions of *loqui* 'speaking'. (Older) adjectives in *-ax* typically indicate an excessive degree of the root:

*mord-* 'bite' ~ *mordax* 'snappish, quick to bite' (of a dog)

*ed-* 'eat' ~ *edax* 'voracious'

*av-* 'be eager' ~ *audax* 'bold, rash' ('too eager'; contrast *avidus* 'eager')

Thus Cato's apothegm *patrem familias vendacem, non emacem esse oportet* 'The master of the household should be quick to sell – not quick to buy' (Agr. 2). As for the preverb *e(x)-*, it may connote, among other things, completion or thoroughness:

*acuo* 'sharpen' ~ *exacuo* 'make very sharp, sharpen to a point'

*audio* 'hear' ~ *exaudio* 'hear plainly, manage to hear despite impediments'

*doceo* 'teach' ~ *edocceo* 'teach thoroughly, inform fully'

*uro* 'burn' ~ *exuro* 'burn up, burn out, consume'

*Eloquentia* in the meaning 'perfect speech, thorough speech', belongs, wholly or partly, to this very group. The elements, respectively, of excess and thoroughness are the very ones that Varro foregrounds in *de lingua Latina*: *hinc dictus loquax, qui nimium loqueretur; hinc eloquens, qui copiose loquitur* ... "The *loquax* person is so called for talking too much; the *eloquens* person is one who talks copiously" (6.57). As with *-lect-*, juxtaposition suggests etymology, and etymology has the function we are now familiar with: it points to a deeper truth. *Eloquentia* and

<sup>41</sup> *Eloquor* and *eloquentia* also have a neutral sense, simply 'able to speak', e.g. *omnes res, animantes et inanimas, mutas et eloquentes* (Rhet. Her. 4.61; cf. 4.66), but that is obviously not the intended meaning here.

*loquacitas* illuminate each other. For all their apparent difference, they are *both* forms of excess talking. *Loquacitas* unbalances social gatherings: the garrulous person forces everyone to become his audience and makes himself the center of attention.<sup>42</sup> But Varro's etymological play implies that *eloquentia*, too, creates exactly the same kind of unbalance.<sup>43</sup> That makes sense: the fluid speaker also needs an audience and also makes himself the center of attention. *Eloquentia* and *loquacitas* both prevent the 'chatting together' (*confabulatio*) that the satire enjoins.

In short, *eloquentia* and *loquacitas* are things that look different but are really the same – an apparent virtue is, in the ethics of Varro's *convivium*, really a vice. The same is true for *mutus* and *silentium*, the other half of the antithesis. *Silentium*, which means the 'absence of sound' (not only of speech), 'stillness', 'tranquility' is, or can be, a virtue of the *convivium*. Verres' *convivia* were raucous affairs, often ending in brawls, according to Cicero anyway, who contrasts them to *convivia* conducted "with that modesty typically found at the dinner parties of magistrates" and "with the silence (*silentio*) of praetors or commanders of the Roman people".<sup>44</sup> Cicero has in mind a sedate rhythm of conversation, long with pauses, set by a stately presider and observed by deferential guests. The technical sense of *silentium*, 'ceremonial silence', observed in taking the auspices (cf Cic. *Div.* 2.71), is not far different.

*Mutus*, by contrast, is a narrower word: 'unable to speak', a physical defect, and also sometimes 'unwilling to speak'. The latter is sense relevant to a *convivium*, and that, one can safely infer, is a vice. An incident from Pliny is instructive. He reproves certain guests at a *recitatio*: fluid speakers by their own lights, they listened to a reading 'like deaf-mutes' (*surdus mutisque similes*), not opening their lips, not moving their hands, not even shifting their position. By that dour stiffness they evidently meant to project sobriety and discrimination. But for Pliny the effect was otherwise: "What was the meaning of all this seriousness? Of all this intellectual sophistication? Of all this, better said, indolence, arrogance, perversity – in a word, derangement? To spend a whole day for the sole purpose of giving

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<sup>42</sup> The *Disticha Catonis* warn "Be sure among party-guests to keep your speech restrained, lest they say you talk too much, as you try to seem urbane" (*inter convivas fac sis sermone modestus | ne dicare loquax, cum vis urbanus haberi*, 3.19).

<sup>43</sup> Among less than ideal guests Plutarch's Theon name τοὺς μὲν δημαγωγοῦντας καὶ δικάζομενους παρὰ δέϊπνον, which P. Clement aptly renders "those who play the politician and those who harangue a jury" (*Quaest. Conviv.* 1.4.3 = 621B) – also a reference to deliberative or contional and to juridical oratory, as in Varro's *in foro et apud subsellia*.

<sup>44</sup> *Erant autem convivium non illo silentio populi Romani praetorum atque imperatorum, neque eo pudore qui in magistratuum conviviis versari solet, sed cum maximo clamore atque convicio; non numquam etiam res ad pugnam atque ad manus vocabatur* (Ver. 2.5.28). Yonge aptly translates 'orderly silence'.

offense, of leaving as an enemy the person you came to see as a friend!"<sup>45</sup> The lesson is easily transferred to *convivia*: refusing to speak can sour the spirit of equality by giving the impression of superiority.

For Varro there is no difference between these two kinds of silence. Like both kinds of excessive talking, both kinds of excessive not-talking are divisive. Varro banishes not-talking the same way he banished talking: by a trick of morphology – or rather, in this case, the absence of morphology. What is the abstract noun of *mutus* – ‘being unable to speak’? *Mutus* does not form *mutitas*. When a noun is needed, *taciturnitas* serves. Cicero in vexation remarks Pompey’s *tarditas et taciturnitas* (*Fam.* 1.5b.2), his “slowness and insistence on silence”. Cicero’s *bête noire* Cn. Calpurnius Piso was always *tristis*, *taciturnus*, *subhorridus* and *incultus*: sour, reticent, rather shaggy and unkempt (*Sest.* 21). At all events, the absence of a clearly related abstract noun left Varro free to say that being *mutus* is a form of *silentium* – that the vice is a form of an apparent virtue. But that virtue, like *eloquentia*, is a virtue that belongs to another space: as *eloquentia* to the *forum*, so *silentium* to the bedroom, which is *par excellence* a tranquil space. As Varro notes elsewhere, bedrooms were specially designed for silence.<sup>46</sup>

The forum and the lawcourts, then, are the repository for *eloquentia*, and the bedroom the repository for *silentium*, when those apparent virtues are banished from the *convivium*. The locales, however, have another effect. The forum and lawcourts are the quintessential public and political places; the bedroom, the quintessential private area. The excluded extremes thus imply that the *convivium* is neither fully private nor fully public and political. That is a thoughtful way of defining its character. Both location and behavior could be seen as hybrids. The *triclinium* was in a private building but meant to host guests and to that extent public. There, as in the *curia* or on the Rostra, the guests put their wit on display, but to delight each other, not confound their opponents, and to that extent in a private fashion. The architectural space of the *convivium* exhibits the very same balance between extremes that Varro’s other precepts enjoin.

<sup>45</sup> *Recitabatur liber absolutissimus. hunc duo aut tres, ut sibi et paucis videntur, disertis surdis mutisque similes audiebant. Non labra diduxerunt, non moverunt manum, non denique assurrexerunt saltem lassitudine sedendi. quae tanta gravitas? quae tanta sapientia? quae immo pigritia arrogantia sinisteritas ac potius amentia, in hoc totum diem impendere ut offendas, ut inimicum relinques ad quem tamquam amicissimum veneris? (Epist. 6.17.2–3).*

<sup>46</sup> *quare in quibus rebus non subest similis natura aut usus, in his vocabulis huiusce modi ratio quae <a>eri non debet: ergo dicitur ut surdus vir, surda mulier, sic surdum theatrum, quod omnes tres ad auditum sunt comparatae; contra nemo dicit cubiculum surdum, ad silentium, non ad auditum; at si fenestram non habet, dicitur c<a>ecum, ut c<a>ecus et c<a>eca, quod omnia habent lumen habere debent (L.L. 9.58).*

## IV. Composition

I suggested above that the *elegantia* which must govern a *convivium* had two components: balance and composition. We may now turn to the latter. The need for artful composition is expressed vividly by a metaphor. If the *convivium* has the four elements Varro names, *tum denique*, says Varro, *omnibus suis numeris absolutum est* “then and only then it is complete in all its components” (335). The phrase deserves attention: that was not a normal, wholly naturalized way of saying ‘perfect in all respects’; other expressions would have been less remarkable.<sup>47</sup> According to the *TLL*, Varro’s is the first attested instance of *absolutus* in the meaning *perfectus, ad finem productus, nulla re indigens* (1.0.177.60). This is also probably the first instance of *numerus* in the sense ‘constituent part’, a calque of ἀριθμός.<sup>48</sup> The source of these novel uses is tolerably clear: they begin in philosophical and rhetorical texts. “Good things”, writes Cicero, “contain every element of virtue” (*[recta] ... omnes numeros virtutis continent*, *Fin.* 3.24).<sup>49</sup> Perfectly arranged phrases can be *absolutus*; in a περίοδος or ‘well-rounded sentence’, “It is necessary to arrange the words in a kind of poetic cadence, so that the resolution [of the periods] is perfect and very elegant” (*oportet verba sicuti ad poeticum quendam exstruere numerum, ut perfecte et perpolitissime possint esse absolutae*, *Rhet. Her.* 4.44.1). In one place Cicero uses both words: “[The good] is perfect and finished and, as [the Stoics] also say, has all its elements” (*perfectum atque absolutum est et, ut idem dicent, omnes numeros habet*, *Off.* 3.14). If *absolutus* and *numerus* had philosophical, rhetorical, or other such intellectual connotations, then Varro’s language here is deliberately metaphorical: it makes the *convivium* into a well-thought out, organic whole – a full and round and perfect idea, or a round and full and perfect poetic phrase.

In this perfect whole, how are the parts to be arranged? What fits where? That is defined by the forms of *-lect-* we have already seen. That paronomasia works in two ways: it unifies and it divides. The unification we saw: the metaphor suggests the importance of choice in every element of a *convivium*. But there is also division: the particular form of *-lect-* in each phrase suggests that not every choice has the same importance or character.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. e.g. *vir omnibus rebus praecellentissimus* (Cic. *Ver.* 4.97); *ea igitur omnia in quo summa erunt, erit perfectissimus orator* (Cic. *opt. gen.* 6, cf. *Leg. Man.* 13, *de Orat.* 1.259, 3.15); *in omni genere perfecta* (Cic. *de Orat.* 1.131, cf. *Amic.* 79).

<sup>48</sup> For some examples of the Greek use, cf. A.S. Pease, *M. Tullii Ciceronis de Divinatione libri duo*, Darmstadt 1963, 122 n. 3. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and Lewis & Short take their first attestations of this sense of *numerus* from Cicero, respectively *Fin.* 3.24 (cited in the text) and 4.56 (*alia [peccata] pauciores quasi numeros officii praeter[eunt]*; note *quasi*, perhaps apologizing for the novelty of the language).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *quod omnes habet in se numeros veritatis*, Cic. *Div.* 1.23; *expletum omnibus suis numeris et partibus*, ND 2.37.

#### IV.A. Appointments

*Apparatus non neglectus* illustrates the point: why *non neglectus*? Varro might have said *conlectus*: the accumulation of *objets* was an affectation of some hosts.<sup>50</sup> Varro might also have said *electus* or *delectus*: the display of ‘well-chosen’ objects was doubtless a part of many *convivia* and certainly an affectation of some hosts.<sup>51</sup> Instead Varro uses the not emphatic litotes ‘not overlooked’, as if tasteful appointment must not hinder, but does not make, a dinner. Why not? Broadly, the satire is interested not in the static observation of beauty but in the active sharing of *life* (*convivium*, βιωφελῆ, *ad communem vitae usum*). But more specifically the issue here is social hierarchy. Grand appointments drew attention to the persona of the host, as the *Cena Trimalchionis* famously shows. Varro’s ideal host is to avoid that sort of self-display. This is precisely what we have already seen in the precept that a host be *non tam lautum quam sine sordibus*.

#### IV.B. Place and Time

Let us turn to the place and the time: *si electus locus, si tempus lectum* ‘if a place is picked out (*electus*), if the right time is chosen (*lectum*)’. The place, then, is to be *electus*. Here is a pun within the larger pun on forms of *-lect-*. *Locum eligere* is a regular idiom for ‘pick out a [suitable] place’, which makes some sense in this context. But surely Varro also had in mind the extended sense of *electus*, ‘excellent’

<sup>50</sup> For an example, cf. Cicero’s attack on the extravagance of Sulla’s henchman Chrysogonus: *domus referta vasis Corinthiis et Deliacis, in quibus est authepsa illa quam tanto pretio nuper mercatus est ut qui praetereuntes [quid] praconem enumerare audiebant fundum venire arbitarentur. Quid praeterea caelati argenti, quid stragulae vestis, quid pictarum tabularum, quid signorum, quid marmoris apud illum putatis esse? Tantum scilicet quantum e multis splendidisque familiis in turba et rapinis coacervari una in domo potuit* “His house is stuffed with Corinthian and Delian vases, among which is a samovar that he recently bought at such a high price that when passers-by heard the crier call it out they thought a whole farm was up for sale. And how much embossed silver, how many coverlets, paintings, statues, how much marble do you think he has? As much as could be gathered in one house from robbing so many well-off families!” (*Rosc. Am.* 133).

<sup>51</sup> Gaius Gracchus was faulted by Drusus for buying silver dolphins (δελφίνας ἀργυρούς), doubtless a centerpiece, for 1250 drachmas a pound (Plut. *Tib. Gr.* 2.4). Livy dates the beginning of such affectation to the return of the army of Cn. Manilius Vulso from Galatia in 187: *ii primum lectos aeratos, vestem stragulam pretiosam, plagulas et alia textilia, et quae tum magnificae suppellectilis habebantur, monopodia et abacos Romam advexerunt. tunc psaltria sambucistriaeque et convivalia alia ludorum oblectamenta addita epulis; epulae quoque ipsae et cura et sumptu maiore apparari coepit* “They were the first to import to Rome bronze couches, expensive bedding, coverlets, and other textiles, as well as one-legged tables and sideboards which at the time were extravagant furniture. It was at this time that lutists and sambuca-players, as well as other pleasant convivial relaxations, began to be featured at banquets. The dinners themselves also began to be prepared with greater attention and expense” (39.6.7–9). On the development of such extravagance, see Landolfi, *Banchetto e Società*, 51–73 (= ch. 2 “Il lusso mensae ovvero i rischi di una mancata frugalità nel ii sec. a.C.”).

or 'well-chosen'. A room of the right size with an attractive view was an ideal.<sup>52</sup> *Electus* thus seems to carry both of its meanings at once; it is as if the sentence were *si electus locus electus est* "if a fine place has been picked out" or "if a choice place has been chosen". That reading is, if not quite forced, then certainly urged by the position of *electus*: the other participles, *conlecti*, *lectum*, and *neglectus*, appear after their nouns, the usual place for participles in periphrastic passives; *electus* occurs before, a common place for an adjective. That is, position makes *electus* an adjective; parallelism to the other clauses makes *electus* a participle. Here, then, is another (kind of) *refractio*. In a *convivium* choosing is the same as choosing well. That sheds light on the expression *tempus lectum*. *Lectum*, like *electum*, can mean both 'chosen' and 'well-chosen'.<sup>53</sup> The ambiguity is probably meant here, too, and in this case it extends to the noun *tempus*, which can mean, not simply 'a time' (χρόνος) but 'the right time, the appropriate occasion' (καιρός). In short, the phrase can mean either "If the right time is chosen" or "if the time is well chosen".

When is the right time? What is a well-chosen place? The time we can infer only from the title. Neither do the physical details of the place, which are important in sympotic literature and architectural theory, appear in the excerpts recorded by Gellius. But there is one implicit element that is very clear: the size of the table, which should seat no more than nine. Why nine? The fragments give two answers to the question, one positive – why an upper limit of nine exactly? – and one negative – why not many?

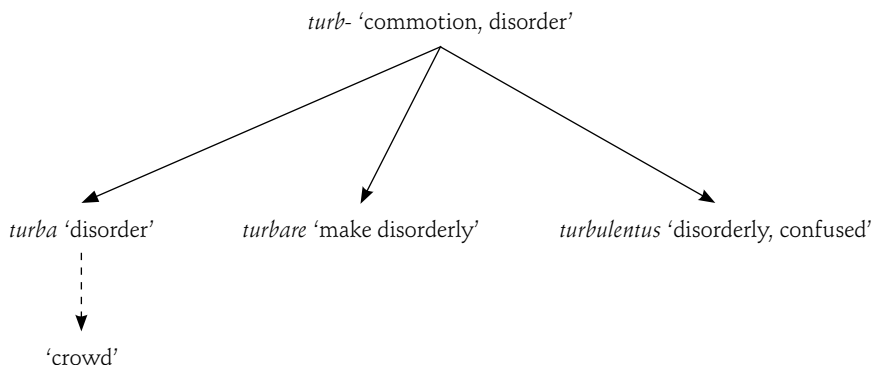
#### IV.B.1. Avoiding Crowds

First the negative answer: why not many? *Nam multos*, Varro warns, *esse non convenit, quod turba plerumque est turbulenta* ... "It is not meet for there to be many, because a crowd is disorderly" (334).<sup>54</sup> The juxtaposition of *turba* and *turbulenta*, as with the juxtaposition of forms of *-lect-*, draws out the semantic relationships of the family. The meaning 'crowd' is a development of an original, and in the classical period still robust, meaning, 'disorder, disturbance, commotion'. That is the basic meaning of all the other derivatives, from the earliest texts forward – for example, *turbare*, which means 'make disorderly, upset, disturb' (not 'make crowded') or *turbulentus* itself, which means 'restless, disturbed, confused' (not 'congested'). In short, again a semantic tree appears:

<sup>52</sup> Vit. Arch. 6.3.8; 6.3.10.

<sup>53</sup> TLL 7.2.1133.27 – 1134.5.

<sup>54</sup> Plutarch *Quaest. Conviv.* 5.5 = 678C–679E is a discussion of the same problem, occasioned by Plutarch's own experience: on his return from Alexandria he was fêted at various parties, at all of which "many were included who had even the slightest apparent claim to an invitation, and consequently the gatherings were turbulent and broke up early" (τὰ συμπόσια θορυβώδεις εἶχε τὰς συμπεριφοράς καὶ τὰς διαλύσεις ταχέως, 678C, tr. P. Clement).



The development would have been obvious to Varro, if not from such forms, then from Greek *τύρβη*, which means ‘disturbance’ – but not ‘crowd’.<sup>55</sup> Again an *adnominatio* reveals the true order of things: a *turba* is *turbulenta*, a ‘crowd’ is ‘disorderly’ or ‘restless’.<sup>56</sup> In Latin crowds, quite literally, *mean* disorder. In a *convivium* which is to be like a perfect idea or a well-turned phrase, disorder has no place.<sup>57</sup>

Varro supports this etymology with a conceit: *et [turba] Romae quidem stat, sedet Athenis, nusquam autem cubat* (334): the ‘crowd’ stands at Rome, sits at Athens, but never reclines.<sup>58</sup> The conceit involves a double move. First, two crowds of a quite specific kind – the Athenian *ἐκκλησία* and the Roman popular assemblies<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> For a good example of that sense – expressing a sensibility very like Varro’s in this passage – , cf. Xen. Cyr. 1.2.3, explaining why hawkers were kept out of the Persian court: *ὥς μὴ μὴνῶνται ἢ τούτων τύρβη τῇ τῶν πεπαιδευμένων εὐκοσμία* ‘lest their bawling be mingled with the orderliness of the educated’.

<sup>56</sup> The pun, if it is obvious, does not seem to have been trite; at any rate it is not repeated until Augustine: *quid possit aliud dicere turba turbulenta?* (Ioh. evang. 30.2; *turba* in Biblical translations renders *ὄχλος*); *detestantes turbulentas humanae vitae molestias paene iam firmaveramus remoti a turbis* *otiose vivere* (Conf. 6.14); cf. Epist. 44.6.

<sup>57</sup> Is there also an etymology *κατ’ἀντίρρασιν* in *multos esse non convenit*? When people *conveniunt* ‘come together’, then *multi sunt* ‘they are many’, but that is something that *non convenit* ‘is not fitting’. *Convenit* in the sense ‘be seemly’, a favorite expression of Lucretius (1.880, 2.581, 2.776, 2.822, 3.55, 3.455, 3.459, 3.679, 3.682, 5.534, 6.703), is quite rare in the far more extensive writings of Varro – besides this passage, only in three others, always for the sake of *variatio* when another expression for ‘seemliness’ has preceded (L.L. 9.15, L.L. 10.54, R.R. 1.5.3). If that was not also the case here, perhaps *convenit* was chosen to play against the literal sense of *convenire* ‘come together’.

<sup>58</sup> *Stat* is the correction of M. Hertz for the *constat* of the MSS.

<sup>59</sup> By Varro’s time the (revived) Athenian assembly met, not on the Pnyx, but in the stepped Theater of Dionysos; the Roman assemblies stood in the forum, *Campus Martius*, or *area Capitolina*, depending on the assembly and its purpose. Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 604 sees a reference to theater-goers. Standing at shows was indeed the ancient practice (Tac. Ann. 14.20) but already by the time of Plautus wooden benches were regular. Morphology and wit tell against Krenkel’s view: Varro uses a present tense (*Romae turba stat*), and the quip falls flat if it has to refer to a practice from over a hundred years before. *Turba*, of course, occasionally

– are adduced as representative *turbæ*; and then the postures required of those *turbæ* are viewed through the lens of convivial practice, which in both Greece and Rome required reclining.<sup>60</sup> The assembled citizens, who must stand or sit, are necessarily ‘not at rest, not in repose’, and thus epitomize the claim that ‘crowds’ are by nature ‘restless’.

The conceit is amusing even if its sophism is obvious – but why use it at all? Varro’s point was complete with *turba ... turbulenta*. He didn’t need to mention assemblies. Nobody needs to be told not to invite the whole forum to dinner (Andrew Jackson’s first inaugural notwithstanding). Or Varro could have mentioned only a Roman assembly. Why does the conceit have the form it does? There are, I think, two reasons. First, the conceit, like the pun, represents the text’s intellectual stance. The goal of ancient etymology was to discover meaningful patterns. But that work need not be confined to words: other aspects of human activity can also be ‘etymologized’, their true relations made apparent. Varro’s conceit does exactly that: it points up that sitting assemblies and standing assemblies, an obvious point of contrast between Athenian and Roman habits, only *seem* to be different. Here, just as with *eloquentia* and *loquacitas*, an apparent distinction collapses. The customs of communal festivity, which in both Athens and Rome call for reclining, reveal that the customs of political assemblies, however apparently different, really amount to the same thing – restlessness embodied.

Second, and more important, the *turbæ* of Athens and Rome provide a counterpoint to Varro’s ideal of the *convivium*. Unruly crowds came in many forms; Varro might have chosen any of them to illustrate his point. Why political assemblies in particular? They raise another issue partly coincident with size. The ‘restless’ posture of political assemblies reflects their function precisely: politics is a ‘restless’ business. Not for nothing did Epicurus, whose watchword was ἀταραξία, decree of his ideal wise man οὐδὲ πολιτεύσεται “ ... nor shall he take part in politics”.<sup>61</sup> The political *turbæ* in their ‘restlessness’ are emblematic of the effects not only of size but also of function. If turbulence is to be avoided at a *convivium*, then not only crowds *per se* but also politics must be avoided. Here, then, is another link to *eloquentia*, which Varro banishes from the *convivium* to the forum: neither the *turba* nor the *eloquentes* who spoke to the *turba* are welcome.

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refers to the forum crowd: thus e.g. *in foro turbaque* (Cic. *Rep.* 1.28), *cum se de turba et a subselliis in otium ... contulerit* (Cic. *de Orat.* 2.143, where *subsellia* refers to judicial speeches and *turba* to contional or deliberative speeches; cf. *in foro et apud subsellia*, fr. 336). Cèbe, *Varron*, 1439–40 strangely takes fr. 334 to refer to large communal feasts, then wonders that Varro contradicts the evidence of, e.g. Liv. 39.46.3, that *triclinia* were used for such feasts.

<sup>60</sup> The semiotics of the reclining male, symbolic of leisure and privilege, are explored by M. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status*, Princeton 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Diog. Laert. 10.119 = fr. 8 Usener. Cf. *Epicuri mentionem facis et audes dicere μη πολιτεύεσθαι?* (Cic. *Att.* 14.20.5).

It is worth recalling the setting of Cicero's *de Oratore*. In 91 BCE, at a period of great tension between the *optimates* and the *eques*, and between Roman citizens and the Italian allies, several prominent men and their protégés withdrew to a country villa owned by one of them:

At first – and this was the reason they had come [to Crassus' Tusculan villa] – they had a long discussion, up until the last moment of the day, about the times and the whole political situation; the many objections and observations of those three consulars, Cotta recalled, were so perceptive that no evil subsequently befell the body politic which they had not seen coming so long before; and, when that conversation was completed, so gracious was Crassus, that, when they had bathed and were at table, all the grimness of the earlier conversation vanished, and Crassus' delightful manner and charming talk made it seem that they had spent the day in the senate-house and the evening at a party at the villa.<sup>62</sup>

Even among a covey of like-minded aristocrats in a country villa, politics begot 'grim conversation' (*tristitia sermonis*) that made the afternoon seem like a tense session in the senate-house. Their *convivium* could not get under way without a preparatory bath, a washing away, both literal and symbolic, of the afternoon's toil, and could not go on without Crassus' 'delightful manner' (*iucunditas*) and 'charming talk' (*in loquendo lepos*).

In short, the pun *turba* ~ *turbulenta* with its supporting conceit hints at the dangers of mixing politics and the *convivium*. What must be embraced instead of politics? We have seen one answer to that already: the readings of the *convivium* must be devoted *ad communem vitae usum*. There is another answer: guests must be at least three and no more than nine, or as Varro puts it, no fewer than the Graces and no more than the Muses (333).<sup>63</sup> Why the Graces and Muses? Varro might have said no fewer than the chief stars of Orion's Belt and no more than the chief stars in Leo. But then the implicit image would have been of lordly violence. The Graces and Muses are obviously chosen to suggest the spirit of his ideal *convivium*: good cheer and elegant speech – exactly the *iucunditas* and *in loquendo lepos* of Crassus.<sup>64</sup>

But there is more to Varro's image than that: the image, in effect, makes good cheer and elegant speech obligatory. The numbers of the two groups of goddesses

<sup>62</sup> *Hi primo die de temporibus deque universa re publica, quam ob causam venerant, multum inter se usque ad extremum tempus diei conlocuti sunt; quo quidem sermone multa divinitus a tribus illis consularibus Cotta deplorata et commemorata narrabat, ut nihil incidisset postea civitati mali, quod non impendere illi tanto ante vidissent. Eo autem omni sermone confecto, tantam in Crasso humanitatem fuisse, ut, cum lauti accubissent, tolleretur omnis illa superioris tristitia sermonis eaque esset in homine iucunditas et tantus in loquendo lepos, ut dies inter eos curiae fuisse videretur, convivium Tusculani* (Cic. *de Oratore* 1.26–27).

<sup>63</sup> Macrobius preserves the same stricture: *in quo [Varro] convivarum numerum hac lege definit, ut neque minor quam Gratiarum sit, neque quam Musarum numerosior* (Sat. 1.7.12).

<sup>64</sup> On the sense of *lepos* in *de Oratore*, and its special connection to Crassus, see B.A. Krostenko, *Cicero, Catullus, and the Language of Social Performance*, Chicago 2001, 207–214 (hereinafter CCLSP).

neatly match the physical limitations of the *triclinium*, with its three couches around three sides of a table.<sup>65</sup> Varro's numbers put at least one and no more than three persons on each couch.<sup>66</sup> Ten or more participants would require crowding, which, as we have seen, literally means 'disorder'.<sup>67</sup> Here, too, then, is a kind of etymology. Etymology aims to discover true patterns, and from that perspective, as with the conceit of bodily postures, Varro's method here is etymological: which divinities should be patrons of the *convivium* can be read off the very form of the *triclinium*, if it is looked at correctly. Its structure is not chance but a reflection of its true meaning. To lie down at a *convivium* demands becoming a Grace or Muse.

#### IV.C. Guests

Let us turn last to the *belli homunculi* who must be *conlecti*. In them are crystallized all the themes that have thus far been appearing: a small group, avoidance of politics, and elegance of speech. To see this, we must consider each element: *belli*, *homunculi*, and *conlecti*. The particularity of each word can be set into relief by imagining alternatives:

|                                              |                         |                      |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| not <i>viri</i>                              | nor even <i>homines</i> | but <i>homunculi</i> |
| not <i>boni, fortes, ...</i>                 |                         | but <i>belli</i>     |
| not ( <i>se-, de-, e-, ø-</i> ) <i>lecti</i> |                         | but <i>conlecti</i>  |

Why *bellus* and not *bonus*? *Bellus* has a very particular force: here, as elsewhere, it highlights subjective experience, describing not what is objectively 'good' but what is felt to be 'nice' by some evaluating party.<sup>68</sup> In older Latin the evaluator typically has only his own standards in mind. Thus *nimi' bellus atque ut esse maxime optabam locus* "A very nice place – exactly the way I wanted it!" (Pl. *Bac.* 724–5). But by the late Republic a somewhat broader use is apparent, referring to the tastes of some small group. When Catullus accuses a dinner guest of pilfering a napkin, he says *Marrucine Asini, manu sinistra | non belle uteris* "Marrucinus Asinius, that's not

<sup>65</sup> Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 602; Cèbe, *Varron*, 1439.

<sup>66</sup> Three was the standard maximum per couch in Varro's time, but the number could be violated: cf. *saepe tribus lectis videas cenare quaternos* (Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.86). Crowded benches are a mark of a sordid dinner in Cicero (*Graeci stipati quini in lectulis, saepe plures*, *Pis.* 67).

<sup>67</sup> Here it is perhaps relevant that the *turba* was a category in a Roman law Varro may have known, and the minimum number for a *turba* appears to have been ten: *turbam autem ex quo numero admittimus? Si duo rixam commiserint, utique non accipiemus in turba id factum, quia duo turba non proprie dicuntur: enimvero si plures fuerunt, decem aut quindecim homines, turba dicetur* "What is the minimal number for constituting a 'crowd'? If two people start a brawl, we would never understand that to have happened 'in a crowd', because two people cannot properly be called a 'crowd'; rather, if there were more people – ten or fifteen persons – it could be called a 'crowd'" (*Dig.* 47.8.4.3, citing Ulpian, who *ad loc.* refers to a distinction of Marcus Antistius Labeo).

<sup>68</sup> Krostenko, *CCLSP*, 51–59. *Bellus* is in origin a diminutive of *bonus* (\**dwen-olo-*) and as such well suited to express subjectivity. Cf. P. Monteil, *Beau et Laid en Latin*, Paris 1964, 224.

a nice way to use your left hand" (12.1–2), where the reference is to etiquette.<sup>69</sup> This sense is like English 'fashionable' or 'tasteful', which, used of persons, mean that they are aware of a set of aesthetic standards shared by certain others and apply those standards to themselves. Varro, as it happens, is the first author in whom this sense of *bellus* is clearly attested: *omnes videmur nobis esse belli festivi, saperdae cum | simus σαπροί* "We think that we are fine and witty – but in fact we're smelly smelt".<sup>70</sup>

*Bellus*, then, specifically signals what we have already seen: the small group. But Varro probably has something more specific in mind: not only the small group but also elegance of speech. Here we have not merely *bellus*: we have *bellus* with a form of *homo*. *Bellus homo* appears in two other places in the *Menippeans*. In one, the man less interested in actual wrestling than in the "wrestling of the Stoics", that is, dialectical argument, is a *bellus homo*, a champion, it seems, of the "paper stadium".<sup>71</sup> In another, the literarily sophisticated audience of an ἀκροάσις, a 'lecture' or 'recitation' (the *recitatio* of post-Augustan Latin)<sup>72</sup> are *belli homines*.<sup>73</sup> In short, Varro's *bellus homo* is devoted to literary culture.<sup>74</sup> He is interested not in the *virtus* of *viri* but in *lepos*. That is doubtless exactly the sense of our passage. The Graces and Muses, as we have seen, are the patrons of a *convivium*, and texts are read. What is more, Varro's own voice, with its verbal sophistication, not only describes the *convivium* but, as I have already suggested, is itself a sympotic voice – the voice, we may now say, of the *bellus homo*.

<sup>69</sup> Krostenko, *CCLSP*, 241–246.

<sup>70</sup> 312 Bücheler, Krenkel; 311 Cèbe. The *saperda* is not, so far as I know, actually a kind of 'smelt', but I was attempting to preserve the phonetic figure (*saperdae* σαπροί).

<sup>71</sup> in charteo stadio ἐπιτάφιον ἀγῶνα quo quis certasset animo, bellus homo magis delectatus Stoicorum pancratio quam athletarum (519 Bücheler). The 'funeral contest' is probably that for Menippus himself (the satire is called Τάφη Μενίππου), but otherwise the lines pose difficulties of reading and interpretation. For *quo quis certasset* Cèbe, Varron, vol. 12 [1998] 1971 (cf. 1988–1990) reads *quo quivis certasset*; for ἐπιτάφιον ἀγῶνα quo quis certasset, Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, vol. 3, 1007 reads *ago agona quo quisque certasset*. At all events the final phrase is clear, as is the venue for the performance of the *bellus homo*, the "stadium of paper", that is, "literary activity" (Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, vol. 3, 1008, Cèbe, Varron, vol. 12 [1998], 1990 with references.).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Cic. Att. 15.17.2: *et me hercule ipsius litterae sic et φιλοστόργως et <εὐ>πινῶς scriptae ut eas vel in acroasi audeam legere* "And I swear his letters were written so affectueusement and élégamment that I would be ready to read them even in a public reading".

<sup>73</sup> *Diogenem litteras scisse, domusioni quod satis esset, hunc quod etiam acroasi bellorum hominum* (*Men.* 517 Bücheler, Krenkel, Cèbe) "... that Diogenes knew enough of literature for everyday use, whereas our man knew enough for a public lecture in front of a fashionable audience". Here Diogenes is doubtless Diogenes of Sinope, a founder of Cynicism, and *hunc* is Menippus (cf. Cèbe, Varron, vol. 12 [1998], 1985–1986; Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, vol. 3, 1003–4).

<sup>74</sup> For another application of *bellus* to literary culture, cf. *theatrum quidem sane bellum habuisti*, referring to the audience before whom Atticus gave a reading of Cicero's *pro Ligario* (Att. 13.20.2). The Atticus of Martial 2.7, in the richer literary culture of the empire, is *bellus* as a declaimer, a historian, poet, mime writer, epigrammatist, and grammarian – and also as an astrologer, singer, dancer, lyrist, and ball player. For a treatment of the various other nuances of *bellus homo*, cf. Monteil, *Beau et Laid*, 230–233.

But Varro probably has something still more specific in mind: not only the small group and not only elegance of speech, but also – a theme we have seen – the absence of politics. Here another word has its effect. Why specifically the diminutive *homunculus*? The diminutive is normally pathetic. Lewis and Short gloss ‘a little or weakly man, manikin’. In one instance in Plautus shipwreck victims earn the exclamation *hui, homunculi quanti estis* “Gosh, what poor fellows you are!” (*Rud.* 153–155).<sup>75</sup> In another instance, Cicero, in good Academic fashion, promises to lay out philosophical issues, not like Pythian Apollo speaking firm truth, but the best he can, “just one ordinary person out of many (*homunculus unus e multis*) figuring out what’s likeliest”.<sup>76</sup> Both examples illustrate a typical connotation of *homunculus*: the ‘little person’ lacks complete effectiveness.<sup>77</sup> Is that note of pathos entirely missing here? Not quite, I don’t think.<sup>78</sup> In a literarily sophisticated group, each saloniste may delight in the wit of the others; or each may seek to outdo the others. *Bellus* and comparable words (*facetus, lepidus, venustus*) commonly reflect that latter competitiveness. In Cicero’s *excursus de ridiculis* in *de Oratore* they mark out the superior wit;<sup>79</sup> in Catullus the words draw a hard, bright line around his stylish coterie.<sup>80</sup> Varro’s *bellus homo* is no different: he relishes verbal sparring and apparently stands ready to critique literary mediocrity. The *lepos* of the *bellus homo* could be just as divisive as the *virtus* of *virī*. Plutarch’s Lamprias refused to seat sophist next to sophist or poet next to poet at his symposia to keep jealous squabbles from breaking out.<sup>81</sup> The use of the diminutive form of *homunculi*, I suggest, is meant to soften that competitive side of being fashionable. That fashion of the

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *homunculi quanti sunt, quom recogito!* (*Pl. Capt.* 51), in a prologue which also observes *enim vero di nos quasi pilas homines habent* “For the gods treat us men like playthings” (‘balls’) (22).

<sup>76</sup> *Geram tibi morem et ea quae vis, ut potero, explicabo, nec tamen quasi Pythius Apollo, certa ut sint et fixa, quae dixerō, sed ut homunculus unus e multis probabilis coniectura sequens* (*Tusc.* 1.17).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *nos homunculi indignamur, si quis nostrum interit aut occisus est* “We humans, weak as we are, rage if one of our own dies or is killed” (*Sulpicius apud Cic. Fam.* 4.5.4).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Krenkel, *Marcus Terentius Varro*, 606: “*Homunculus* ist hier eine liebevolle Verkleinerung, die auch Achtung vor der geistigen Größe ausdrücken kann, wie Cicero zeigt, wenn er den genialen Erfinder Archimedes nennt (*Cic. Tusc.* 5.64) *humilem homunculum*, ein schlichtes Menschenkind, aber eines mit göttlichen Einsichten ..., dem (*Sil. Ital.* 14.344) *caelum terraeque patent*”. *Contra Cèbe, Varro*, 1441, n. 59, who sees *homunculus* as having only a positive charge here (‘braves gens’ and not ‘pauvres petits hommes’) and translates “des gens sympathiques” (1430). The other diminutive of *homo*, *homullus*, is also pathetic in Varro, as in *mundus maxima est domus homulli* (92 Bücheler = 92 Cèbe; “ici dépréciatif et marqu[ant] le dédain ou la pitié”, *Varron*, vol. 3, 1975, 419).

<sup>79</sup> Krostenko, *CCLSP*, 205–229.

<sup>80</sup> So especially in Catullus: see B.A. Krostenko, ‘Catullus and Elite Republican Social Discourse’, in M. Skinner (ed.), *A Companion to Catullus*, Malden MA, 2007, 212–232, esp. 217–219.

<sup>81</sup> σοφιστήν δὲ κολύω συγκατακλίνεσθαι σοφιστῇ καὶ ποιητὴν ποιητῇ ‘πρωχὸς γὰρ πρωχῶι φθονέει καὶ αἰοῖδός αἰοῖδῶι’ καίτοι Σωσικλῆς οὗτος καὶ Μόδεστος ἐνταῦθα συνερείδοντες ἔπος παρ’ ἔπος ἀναζωπυρεῖν φλόγα μεγάλην κινδυνεύουσιν τὰ κάλλιστα (*Quaest. Conviv.* 618E–F, quoting Hes. *OD* 26).

“little man” is not politics by another name. Even men otherwise of the right sort can be pugnacious.

In short, Varro’s ideal is equality. That is expressed in the sense *conlecti*. This is not *selecti* ‘picked out in a way that cuts out others’ nor *electi* ‘picked out so as to be prominent’ nor even *lecti*, which might be taken as ‘excellent’; this is *conlecti*, ‘picked so as to be together’. That harmonizes well with the constant stress on community (*confabulemur, ad communem vitae usum*). Are the usual connotations of *colligo* relevant? The word was very common of ‘assembling’ ‘gathering’ or ‘marshaling’ military forces (*TLL* 3.0.1610.80–1611.24, *L&S* s.v. A.2, *OLD* s.v. 6) – the very image, as we have seen, that Aemilius Paulus used to describe his own skill as a host.

## V. Conclusion

Is Varro quite serious about all of this? It is hard enough to put forward claims about fragmentary texts, so much the more when the text might be satirical or ironic and might not even be in the author’s own voice. Even so, for four reasons, none sufficient in itself but of some force taken together, I suggest that the text is meant more or less seriously. First, Gellius and Macrobius both represent the text as Varro’s genuine advice. The satire was, it seems, not in the voice of a character. If the satire was ironic, it escaped the notice of Gellius and Macrobius.

Second, the extraordinarily dense etymological play reflects the very approach to language and culture Varro displays elsewhere, chiefly in *de Lingua Latina*. I don’t mean to suggest that in our satire Varro believed he had, by way of etymology, uncovered the Platonic form of communal dining; I would put the claim more modestly: I mean that a particular kind of convivial practice seems to have been one that Varro felt was worth a thoroughgoing etymological defense. Ancillary to this argument is the fact that the etymologies are for the most part not frivolous – making fanciful links to mythic stories, say: rather the etymologies defend the importance of careful choice, harmony, and useful beauty, which are valuable ideas.

Third, other satires suggest that Varro was ready to criticize contemporary excess and defended moderation. The vision of the *convivium* of this satire is broadly consonant with that stance. Fourth, and to my mind most important (as the method of this article no doubt suggests), the satire’s vision of the *convivium* is distinctive. Communal dining, including *convivia* and symposia, had many variations, and the *convivium* of this satire can be thought of as creating a kind of “middle space” among the variations – rather as it carves out a space for the *convivium* between the forum and the bedroom. If the Greek symposium, on the whole, forged solidarity where the Roman or Etruscan equivalent often reinforced hierarchy, then the *convivium* of this satire is like the Greek. There is

no express ban on a *locus consularis*, but the satire does suggest the lordly silence of a magistrate and his control of conversation is not ideal. But while there is thus a message of equality, neither is there any sign of the roistering and drinking that was the symbol (and perhaps cause!) of equality in (some) Greek symposia; and politics, a common topic of discussion therein, seems to be conceived of as entirely divisive, almost as if politics had nothing to do with the common life that the satire idealizes. In the satire it is, rather, consciously artful behavior that unifies the common life. Here is a likeness to the small and elegant sympotic world that lies behind some of Catullus' polymetrics. But neither is the Catullan world a perfect parallel: in Varro's world aestheticism is not to be cultivated for its sake – the beautiful must also be useful – nor must it serve as proxy politics, truculently assigning people to their places. A closer parallel, it seems to me, is the atmosphere of Cicero's Tusculan villa as he depicts it in his dialogues. There, the toils of politics are laid aside, and the apparatus of the Greek intellectual world is used to explore issues of common concern. Even where there are intellectual differences – for example in *de Oratore*, where Crassus holds that oratory is an art (τέχνη) and Antonius that it is a knack (ἐμπειρία) – shared graces overcome them or at least counterbalance them. But Cicero's vision is not a perfect parallel, either. For Cicero philosophy and aesthetics were meant to serve the politically active man; art and thought supported statecraft; *lepos* was the handmaiden of *virtus*. In this satire, by contrast, it almost seems that *lepos* supplants *virtus*; the *convivium* is, not a supplement, but the truest form of life, artfully acting out relationships in their proper form. But, on another level, that idea is actually identical to the Ciceronian conception: it depends on a vision – even, a fantasy? – of a unified, gracious, educated, mutually supportive upper class. That vision was surely a response to the deeply divisive and highly competitive real life of Roman aristocrats. Varro's effort to carve out a “middle space”, then, has, to my mind, psychological authenticity. In the contentious late Republic it must have been attractive to theorize *παιδιὰν οὐκ ἄχαριν οὐδ' ἀφιλόσοφον* – “amusement that lacked neither grace nor philosophy” (cf. Plut. *Brut.* 34.8).

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