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POETICS OF ORIENTIUS’ “COMMONITORIUM”

Poetry is a kind of discourse distinct from ordinary, everyday speech; it is an institution, a kind of speech that a society has marked as special, with special rules applying to its production and reception. Didactic poetry is a kind of poetry that it aims to instruct (Toohey, 2013: 2). In didactic poetry the reader is invited to consider not just the message and the brilliant language of its exposition, but what lies behind the message, the human values and the vision which the poem embodies. The article analyzes the work of Orientius “Commonitorium” and his role as an innovative writer of Latin didactic poetry as well as his position in the landscape of late antique literature of the 5th century AD.

The aim of the article is to show to what extent the defining characteristics of the genre can be found in Orientius’ poem “Commonitorium” and to trace the permutations of these features throughout the text. A full range of issues, which scholarship on Orientius has hitherto neglected, will be studied: the “poetics” of the work, that is the poetic self-awareness expressed in the poem, as well as techniques of composition, rhetorical argumentation, strategies of persuasion and narration, intertextual allusions, relationship with contemporary works and other aspects.

Scientific novelty. Whereas Latin poetry flourished under the reign of Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD) and the first century AD, only few poetic works survived which were produced in the later second and third century AD. After a long period of silence, Latin poetry had its comeback in late antiquity when in the 4th century AD various writers started composing poetic genres again. Instead of Rome, other locations became important breeding grounds for the production of literature, especially Gaul, where writers such as Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus, Sidonius Apollinaris and others were active. Whereas the genres composed by late antique writers were more or less the same as in Classical literature, most of their works differ in content and meaning (Gasparov, 1982: 2; Johnson, 2000: 335–337). Late antique writers were deeply familiar with their Classical literary predecessors, but due to the influence of Christian religion, the character of Latin literature produced in late antiquity also differs significantly from the works which were written by pagan writers in the preceding centuries. This article discusses the work of a poet who has been rarely studied so far. Orientius, whom the majority of scholars now identify with the homonymous bishop of Augusta Ausciorum (modern Auch, France) in Southern Gaul, is an important representative of didactic poetry and his work constitutes an important example in the history of the genre. His didactic poem with the title “Commonitorium”, in elegiacs was probably written around 430 AD.

In conclusion, the “Commonitorium” presents itself as a serious poem concerned with issues of paramount importance to humanity. The question of what exactly the “Commonitorium” endeavours to teach is indeed of major importance for understanding the work. It claims to be truly universal work, encompassing everything that exists. Within two books, Orientius reveals to his readers/students the way to reach salvation, both gives us specific, concrete information and tells us how we should live our lives, how we should relate to our fellow human beings and to God.

Key words: poetics, intertextuality, didactic poetry, Orientius, Commonitorium.

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ПОЕТИКА ПОЕМИ ОРІЄНЦІЯ “COMMONITORIUM”

Поетика – це своєрідний дискурс, відмінний від звичайної повсякденної мови; це інститут, різновид виступу, який суспільство позначило як особливе, із спеціальними правилами, що застосовуються до його виробництва та прийому. Дидактична поезія – це різновид поезії, яка має на меті навчити (Toohey, 2013: 2). У дидактичній

поезії читачеві пропонується розглядати не просто повідомлення та блискучу мову його викладу, а те, що ховається за повідомленням, людські цінності та бачення, які втілює поема. У статті аналізується робота Орієнція “*Commonitorium*” та його роль як новатора латинської дидактичної поезії, а також його становище в ландшафті пізноантичної літератури V століття нашої ери.

Метою статті є показати, наскільки визначальні характеристики жанру дидактичної поезії можна знайти у поемі Орієнція “*Commonitorium*”, і простежити перестановки цих ознак у тексті; досліджується весь спектр питань, якими наука про Орієнція досі нехтувала: «поетика» твору, тобто поетична самосвідомість, виражена у поемі, а також техніки композиції, риторична аргументація, стратегії переконання та оповідання, інтертекстуальні алюзії, зв'язок із сучасними творами та інші аспекти.

Наукова новизна. У той час як латинська поезія процвітала під час правління Августа (27 р. до н. е. – 14 р. н. е.) та I століття нашої ери, збереглося лише кілька поетичних творів, створених у II та III століттях нашої ери. Після тривалого періоду мовчання латинська поезія повернулася в пізню античність, коли в IV столітті нашої ери різні письменники знову почали складати поетичні жанри. Замість Риму інші місця розташування стали важливими середовищами для виробництва літератури, особливо Галлія, де діяли такі письменники, як Авзоній, Павлін Нольський, Сульпіцій Север, Сідоній Аполлінарій та інші. Якщо жанри, створені пізноантичними письменниками, були більші-менші такими ж, як і в класичній літературі, більшість їхніх творів відрізняються за змістом та значенням (Gasparov, 1982: 2; Johnson, 2000: 335–337). Пізноантичні письменники були глибоко знайомі зі своїми попередниками класичної літератури, але через вплив християнської релігії характер латинської літератури, створеної пізньою античністю, також значно відрізняється від творів, написаних язичницькими письменниками в попередні століття. У цій статті розглядається творчість поета Орієнція, якого зараз більшість вчених ототожнює з одноіменним єпископом Августи Аусціорум (сучасний Ош, Франція) у Південній Галлії, є важливим представником дидактичної поезії, і його творчість є неоціненним прикладом в історії жанру. Його дидактична поема з назвою “*Commonitorium*”, написана елегійним дистихом, ймовірно, була створена близько 430 року нашої ери.

Як **висновок**, “*Commonitorium*” представляє собою серйозну поему та стосується питань, що мають першочергове значення для людства. Питання про те, чого саме “*Commonitorium*” прагне навчити, дійсно має велике значення для розуміння твору. Цей твір претендує на справді універсальну роботу, що охоплює все існуюче, адже у двох книгах Орієнції відкриває своїм читачам / учням шлях до спасіння, дає нам конкретну інформацію та розповідає, як ми повинні прожити своє життя, як повинні ставитися до своїх ближніх і до Бога.

Ключові слова: поетика, інтертекстуальність, дидактична поезія, Орієнції, *Commonitorium*.

The relevance of the topic. This article discusses the work of a poet Orientius, who is an important representative of didactic poetry, and his work constitutes an important example in the history of the genre. His didactic poem with the title *Commonitorium*, in elegiacs was probably written around 430 AD. Our object is to show to what extent the defining characteristics of the genre can be found in Orientius' poem and to trace the permutations of these features throughout the text. A full range of issues, which scholarship on Orientius has hitherto neglected, will be studied: the “poetics” of the work, that is the poetic self-awareness expressed in the poem, as well as techniques of composition, rhetorical argumentation, strategies of persuasion and narration, intertextual allusions, relationship with contemporary works and other aspects; thus, the article tries to shed light on Orientius' role as an innovative writer of Latin didactic poetry as well as his position in the landscape of late antique literature of the 5th century AD.

The objectives of the research. Through a close reading of the text, we will examine the way how the first-person speaker presents himself. Our focus is not only on the historical author

and his readers on an extratextual level, but by following a similar approach like Katharina Volk, on the speaker or persona and his internal addressee (intratextual) (Volk, 2002: 4). By first taking a close look at the poem's self-referential passages, we will focus on the way how the poem's speaker constructs his role as teacher and poet, as well as the relationship he envisions between these two roles. We shall examine the persona's interactions with his main addressee, the ways in which the process of the teacher's speech is presented as parallel to the student's learning process, and then turn to those passages where he is speaking more specifically about his activity as a poet. While the first part of the article provides an overview of didactic poetry and discusses the criteria for defining a didactic poem, the second part focuses on Orientius' work as a case study from late antiquity.

Analysis of basic research and publications. It is not difficult to understand that Orientius' work deserves more scholarly attention: the existing monographs on the *Commonitorium* date back to 1902/3 (Bellanger, 1902) and the only English translation with annotations was published in 1945 (Tobin 1954); there still exists no modern commentary on the poem. As methods and approaches

of Classicists have substantially advanced in the last decades, the time is ripe for an analysis of Orientius' poem according to modern scientific standards. Orientius is one of those writers who improve acquaintance; and the reason is apparent. He is gifted with a respectable vein of poetical talent, has trained that talent to the best of his powers, and writes with no affectation and with the most earnest sincerity. Nor has he lacked his reward. Somehow, nearly every editor who has come to treat of his works seriously is a Latinist of the highest rank – Delrio, Commire, Ellis. The admirable critical edition of the last-named scholar is recognized, and justly recognized, as the authoritative and definitive edition of the poet. The Introduction is a model of well-digested and lucidly set-forth learning; and the volume is enriched with most valuable indices. Among the many works of Professor Ellis, none is more perfect in every respect; and that is saying a good deal (Purser, 1904: 36). M. Louis Bellanger, Professor at the Lycée of Auch, has published a most attractive Essay on Orientius, and a critical edition of the *Commonitorium* (1903). Beginning with a criticism of the text, in which he shows a complete mastery of all the literature on the subject, he discusses the date and personality, real and legendary, of the author (and this must have entailed no small amount of study); then proceeds to treat of the language, versification, style, and obligations of the poet; and finally in a masterly section dilates on the ideas expressed in the poem. As an appendix an elegant translation of the whole poem is given, enriched with short and pertinent notes. The volume is dedicated to Professor Ellis; and to no one is better due every token of respect which can be paid by a writer on Orientius (Purser, 1904: 37).

Presentation of the main material. The very notion of didactic poetry has seemed to some a contradiction in terms. In antiquity, didactic poetry was not considered a genre in its own right, and the long debate on truth and poetry was bound to raise questions about the status of didactic poetry. Didactic poetry “originated almost accidentally in Greece, blossomed nearly miraculously in Rome, and was never afterwards to be convincingly revived” (Volk, 2002: 1). If didactic poetry has one defining characteristic, it is that it aims to instruct (Toohey, 2013: 2). In didactic poetry the reader is invited to consider not just the message and the brilliant language of its exposition,

but what lies behind the message, the human values and the vision which the poem embodies.

A didactic poem does to a certain extent tell a story: the story of its own coming into being as a poem, which is at the same time the story of the teacher's instructing the student. Katharina Volk has proposed the criteria which capture the essence of both the “didactic” and the “poetic” aspects of didactic poetry and serve as a useful key to the interpretation of the individual poem. However, they do not constitute the only possible way of defining this elusive genre.

Thus, the genre of ancient didactic poetry, according to Katharina Volk, is defined by four main characteristics:

- explicit didactic intent;
- teacher-student constellation;
- poetic self-consciousness;
- poetic simultaneity.

A didactic poem could thus be described as the self-consciously poetic speech uttered by the persona, who combines the roles of poet and teacher, explicitly in order to instruct the frequently addressed student in some professed art or branch of knowledge (Volk, 2002: 40).

Having discussed the nature of didactic poetry in general, it is time to turn to Orientius' *Commonitorium* and to investigate the characteristic features of didactic poetry in this text. The *Commonitorium* can be described as a didactic epic in so far as the narrator has the explicit intent to instruct and admonish his audience. Orientius' work appears to us as a “true” didactic poem, that is, as the poem that exhibits those characteristics that Katharina Volk associates with later manifestations of the genre (Volk, 2002: 51). The *Commonitorium* establishes Orientius as an expert on human affairs and practices. Unambiguously didactic in his rhetoric and intent, the poet instructs his audience how to live their lives in a manner that guarantees eternal life.

Let us read the poem against the background of the four criteria for didactic poetry established by Volk. I shall first treat the form of the teaching speech addressed to the student by the persona and then consider the fact that the speaker's words are clearly presented as poetry. There can be no doubt that the text exhibits strong didactic intent (first criterion for didactic poetry), and teacher-student constellation (second criterion), which are apparent from the repeated addresses to the stu-

dent, who is continually exhorted to pay attention to and learn from the persona's words. Orientius' *Commonitorium* clearly signals its didactic thrust, most prominently in the statement 1.16, 2.1, drawing attention to the process of his teaching with such words as *docere* (1.16, 2.273), *statuere* (2.86), *constanter dicere* (2.399), *monitum* (1.80, 1.257, 2.1), *sermo* (1.28), *repetere* (1.345, 2.187), *praeterire* (2.189, 2.347), *expedire* (1.388), *sentire* (2.85), *debere factis tradere* (2.393). Teaching morality and how to attain eternal salvation is the speaker's aim throughout the text, and he never loses sight of his goal. He announces his subject matter in the very first lines of Book 1. The poem takes the form of a speech by the persona to the addressee, the tone of which is authoritative, instructive and considerate. The persona's didactic intent should also be implied in the speaker's frequent addresses to a "you", that is to his student. However, the speaker does nothing to present himself specifically as a teacher figure or to introduce explicitly an individualized student or students (Tobin, 1945: 6).

It is important to pose the question: for what audience is the poem intended? The answer is not always easy to find. Whom did Orientius have in mind as the recipient of his *Commonitorium*? We have to understand the student primarily as an intratextual character, a "creation of the poem itself", in other words, as one member of the teacher-student constellation typical of didactic poetry as a genre (Volk, 2002: 74). The teacher concentrates on his addressee throughout the text, continuously imparting knowledge to him and giving him detailed instruction. The speaker continuously refers to his own speech, as well as to the addressee's role as a listener. The reason why the student is silent *tacitus* is that he is the student figure in a didactic poem, where no one is allowed to speak except the poet himself (Volk, 2002: 80). While the speaker is continuously drawing attention to the process of his teaching, the student is not given a name, but an anonymous addressee is constantly being urged to take notice and pay attention. The student figure is never an independent character with genuine reactions, but always a creation of the teacher's speech. He is not given any particular traits and does not stand in a personal relationship to the speaker. Everything we know about him, we know from the speaker, and everything the speaker does not tell us must remain unclear.

The presence of this anonymous addressee enables us to claim for the *Commonitorium* the teacher-student constellation typical, and necessary, for didactic poetry.

The speaker employs numerous strategies to involve the student in his own discourse. The kinds of addresses we find in Orientius (commands, exhortations, appeals to observation, transitions to a new topic) are typical of didactic poetry in general (Volk, 2002: 206). Whether he likes it or not, the addressee and his experience are already part of the teacher's discourse. A similar strategy of evoking a sense of *tua res* (Volk, 2002: 78) in the student is the use of the ethical dative, a grammatical feature that is typically employed in discourse situations to signal personal involvement. Beginning with 1.16, where the *tibi* indicates the presence of an addressee, he continually addresses a student figure in the second-person singular to give the impression that the subject matter being treated is of immediate relevance to him. Once the poet leaves the theoretical part and turns to the instructional part of his poem, his second-person addresses increase. All second-person addresses, apart from the invocation of Christ in 1.19-42, involve the same character, the *persona discipuli* of the *Commonitorium*, who is again and again addressed in the course of the text. The speaker implies that his student has been closely following the entire poem: the poet for a moment treats him as though he was his only audience. The student is in fact the one addressee of the poem to whom the poet has been speaking all the time. It is clear that the poet does not imagine his addressee as one individual person, even though he consistently addresses him in second-person singular, never plural. Thus, the didactic poet speaks over the head of the formal addressee to a wider audience, whose identity has to be reconstructed from the text of the poem.

The *Commonitorium* belongs to the kind of didactic poetry that the Tractatus Coislinianus calls ὑφηγητική, "instructional" (Volk, 2002: 31, 41). However, the poem combines theoretical and instructional teaching; not surprisingly, the teacher addresses his student more frequently when giving him advice on practical matters. As a result, his speech is not a descriptive scholarly discourse, but a series of orders addressed directly to his student. The *Commonitorium* is clearly addressed to some kind of student, who is given

both practical advice on how to attain eternal life and theoretical information on what earthly and eternal life is. The speaker's instructions heavily rely on demanding imperatives, both singular and plural (1.4, 1.15, 1.91, 1.98, 1.209, 1.214, 1.217-224, 1.253, 1.260, 1.307, 1.309, 1.319-322, 1.402, 1.407-408, 1.413, 1.415, 1.433, 1.439, 1.456, 1.615, 2.41, 2.43, 2.45, 2.147, 2.151, 2.158-160), phrases such as *dic, rogo* (1.535), *rogo ne credas* (1.305), and repeated vocatives *lector* (1.79, 2.85, 2.330, 2.393), *fidissime lector* (2.1), *peccator* (1.611), which create a monotonous pattern in the poem, but it is never made quite clear for what kind of contemporary audience all this instruction is intended. The teacher makes extensive use also of jussive subjunctives, often in the third-person singular or plural as well as the first-person singular and plural and the second-person singular (1.53, 1.77-78, 1.213, 1.228, 1.230, 1.400, 1.445, 1.454, 1.614, 1.616, 2.6, 2.33, 2.44, 2.90, 2.211, 2.410-416), and of gerunds and gerundives (1.2, 1.16, 1.49, 1.81, 1.160, 1.191, 1.235, 1.265, 1.406, 1.411, 1.426, 1.482, 1.510-511, 1.538, 1.553, 1.558, 2.9-10, 2.78, 1.153, 2.221, 2.257, 2.272, 3.312, 2.346, 2.373-374, 2.382, 2.388).

The persona does not hand out advice in an impersonal manner, but rather finds ways to signal his own involvement in what he teaches. He thus on occasions uses the first-person plural to align himself with his student (*noster* 1.17, 1.25, 1.27, 1.30, 1.51, 1.95, 1.257, 2.11, 2.407-408; *nobis* 1.72, 1.206, 1.487). This practice is reminiscent of the speaker of *De rerum natura*, who likewise uses the first-person plural to create a strong connection between himself and his addressee. The repeated use of verbs and pronouns in the first-person plural is used in order to evoke the impression that speaker and addressee are taking part in a joint enterprise. Of course, in Latin the first-person plural is frequently used to refer solely to the single speaker ("we" equals "I"), or to make a statement about human experience in general ("we" equals "one"). However, I would argue that in the *Commonitorium* as well as in the *De rerum natura*, even the most unspecific use of the first-person plural serves to create a community of teacher and listener/student. A final prominent method used by the speaker to involve the addressee in the argument is the creation of a quasi-dialogue. As we have seen, didactic poetry is a genre that typically takes the form of a monologue, but the speaker does

his best to give a voice to his student. Rhetorical questions abound throughout the poem, and we are invited to imagine the student's humble answering to the many instances of *tot tantisque bonis domini tibi munere partis / quid tandem dignum reddis amore pio?* (1.165-166) and similar expressions (1.89-90, 1.99-100, 1.167-168, 1.191-194, 1.199-200, 1.201-202, 1.237-238, 1.277-278, 1.407, 1.415, 1.421-422, 1.493-494, 1.535-536, 1.537-539, 1.543-544, 1.557-558; 2.7-12, 2.61-62, 2.67-74, 2.75-80, 2.93-94, 2.121-150, 2.185-188, 2.219-220, 2.225-226, 2.230, 2.309-310).

It is now time to turn to a discussion of the poetic self-consciousness of the *Commonitorium*. Orientius' teaching speech clearly exhibits the third criterion for didactic poetry: his persona is a poet inspired by God, who can refer to his exhortations to his student as *te, deus omnipotens, et corde et uoce rogare, / te sine nec linguam soluere, Christe, placet*, (1.19-20) and who is willing his teaching to please the Lord (1.25-28).

Consider the lines 1.15-20 of the *Commonitorium*:
ergo, age, da pronas aures sensumque uacantem:
uita docenda mihi est, uita petenda tibi.
sed, quo sit melior nostri doctrina libelli,
et teneat rectas carminis ordo uias:

te, deus omnipotens, et corde et uoce rogare,
te sine nec linguam soluere, Christe, placet,

This passage not only identifies the content of the poem, it also clearly indicates with the help of the phrase *et teneat rectas carminis ordo uias* that what we are reading is a poem (*carmen*) and that the first person speaker is its poet. There are two somewhat unusual features about his invocation. First, the persona explicitly mentions two reasons why he is asking the help. Both of them are explained in the attributive and conditional clauses, preceding the invocation:

1) *demere qui tenebras reuocato lumine caecis,*
auditum surdis auribus inserere,
corporis et mentis saeuos depellere morbos,
soluere mutorum qui pius ora soles:
te penes officium nostri est et cordis et oris.
 (1.21-25)

2) *ergo nisi eloquium, sensum nisi, Christe,*
ministres,
conatusque animae tu nisi, Christe, regas,
ora homines omnes et muta et bruta tenebunt
quodque etiam possunt, hoc quoque non poterunt. (1.39-42)

The second interesting point about the invocation and conclusion is the fact that the speaker refers to the composition of his poem as writing (*doctrina libelli* 1.17, *verba libelli* 2.10, *scriptum* 2.398). The speaker proceeds to declare that since only the Lord is the one who gives wisdom, he will speak of Him (*ac per te de te sit tibi sermo placens* 1.28). In these passages, like in other instances, the persona's words are explicitly presented as poetry. Thus, the invocation of God and Christ as well as the following addresses to Him make the audience expect that God father and son will indeed be the subject of the song to follow.

The speaker refers to his words as *carmen* and describes his own activity as *sermo*. This choice of vocabulary is enough for the moment to establish that the speaker thinks of himself as not merely a teacher, but also a poet. The speaker of the *Commonitorium* strictly adheres to the code of "epic objectivity" (Volk, 2002: 67), limiting poetic self-consciousness nearly exclusively to the proem and epilogue of his poem. Thus, his double status as both teacher and poet is neatly expressed in the lines 1.15-42, where the persona manages to mention his subject matter, as well as his addressee, to indicate clearly that the work in the making is poetry, and to create a sense of beginning and thus to establish poetic simultaneity. The first person of a poem may even be identified with the author by name. The most compelling reason for the identification of author and persona remains the fact that in a large number of poems, namely the ones that are "self-conscious", the text itself makes this equation: *quo sit melior nostri doctrina libelli, / et teneat rectas carminis ordos uias* (1.17-18) and *nominis abscedat ne tibi cura mei* (2.416) unmistakably presents the speaker as the poet and thus invites the readers to understand that it is Orientius himself to whom they are listening. Thus, the persona does invoke God and Christ (1.19-20) and refers to his profession as a poet (1.17-18).

The speaker of the poem is a serious teacher. Absolutely convinced of the truth and importance of his mission, he goes about the conversion of his student with great zeal and dedication. However, he is also a serious poet, and there can be no doubt that he regards this aspect of his activity as equally important. The poet exhibits a certain degree of personal involvement in his subject matter (*non ignarus enim miseris succerrere tempto* 1.405), as

well as quite a bit of enthusiasm for his own task of composing poetry about it. However, he never offers any explicit reflection on why he uses poetry as a medium for his teaching. As another way of expressing a close connection between the poet and his subject matter, the speaker of the *Commonitorium* a number of times employs the figure that Godo Lieberg has called *poeta creator* or creator motif, that is he presents himself as doing what he is actually only describing (Volk, 2002: 127). Instead of staying outside his song, the poet gives the impression of being part of it. Orientius thus seamlessly combines the roles of teacher and poet. Doing so not only makes his poem coherent, but also serves an important rhetorical function: the persona is not just a teacher who also happens to be a poet, but his authority as teacher derives from the very fact that he is inspired by God.

Poetic simultaneity, the fourth criterion for didactic poetry, likewise plays a major role in the *Commonitorium*. Like the speakers of other didactic poems, the persona of the *Commonitorium* is very prominent throughout the text. Continually drawing attention to the ongoing process of his teaching, he creates a vivid sense of simultaneity with the help of self-referential statements (1.79-89, 1.611-612, 2.1-2, 2.85-86, 2.399, 2.410). However, it is striking that the reference is always only to the speaker's speaking, never to the poet's "singing" or the like. Creating the vivid impression that his instruction of his student is a process that is taking place "right now", the poet starts his work with the announcement *ergo, age, da pronas aures sensumque uacantem* (1.15) and ends with the observation *tu si commendes animo demissa per aurem / omnia, quae scriptis sunt numerata meis* 2.397-398). Throughout the poem, the speaker keeps up the illusion of simultaneity, referring to the process of his ongoing teaching and poetic composition. He summarises the material treated so far, before announcing the new topic which he is about to discuss next, with such announcements as *principio geminam debes cognoscere uitam* 1.43 (cf. 1.79, 1.91, 1.108, 1.171, 1.345, adverbs *ergo* 1.15, 1.39, 1.79, 1.253, 1.435, 1.453, 1.611, 2.347, and *quare* 1.315). Throughout the text, he shows himself aware of what has been said before and what is still to come. He clearly indicates when he is moving smoothly from one topic to the next. Orientius repeats important points in order to "fix them indelibly in the mind

of his reader” (Volk, 2002: 76). Thus, at the beginning of a poem, its composition is usually depicted as lying in the future or just about to begin. The speaker of the *Commonitorium* with the imperative in the present, invites his student for listening with age (1.15, 2.151), thus implying that the song is starting “right now”. As poetic simultaneity is not necessarily used consistently throughout a poem, in the course of a poem the speaker no longer talks about his producing a song but refers directly to his subject matter. At the end of the poem, he refers to the completion of his work. However, the sense of a beginning is also especially strong. A careful reading shows that the pupil does make gradual progress over the course of the two books and by the end should ideally be ready for further study on his or her own (2.397-418).

A sign that Orientius is speaking not just as a wise man, but indeed qua poet, is his use of the journey metaphors so popular in didactic poetry. The motif of the journey is to be regarded as an instance of the poetic journey metaphor, which depicts the poet’s composition as his travelling along a certain path. The poet applies the image of the journey metaphor not just to himself, but to his student as well. In doing so, he follows the practice of Lucretius: both teacher and student are described as travelling on what one assumes is the same path, the one from ignorance to knowledge, with the teacher leading the way (Volk, 2002: 231). The same is true in the *Commonitorium*, where the author uses the Callimachean image of the untrodden path. The learning “process” of the student is likewise presented as a journey along a path, as becomes clear already at the beginning of the poem:

*quae caelum reseret, mortem fuget; aspera uitet,
felici currat tramite, disce uiam.
nam nos, et carnis uitii et tempore uicti,
terrenum gradimur sine doloris iter. 1.3-6*

The example from this passage implies that the poet is travelling the path of song on foot. Similar to the persona of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, Virgil’s *Georgics*, Manilius’ *Astronomica*, the poet of the *Commonitorium* expresses joy of going on a poetic journey and roaming the untrodden paths:

*solaque permixtis haec sunt modo gaudia uotis,
si, quod non facimus, saltem alii faciant,*

*ut quia nunc istud, quod protinus effugit, aeuum
infidus capti degimus inlecebris,
lasciuum miserum fallax breue mobile uanum,
† heu noxarum malus origo praecipitat,
omnibus his, raptim quae sunt moritura, relictis
tu forti teneas non moritura fide. 1.7-14*

It is obvious that the image of the poet’s and student’s wandering through pathless places (1.131-160, 1.177-190, 1.279-289, 1.307-310, 2.95-104, 2.165-184) is an instantiation of the journey metaphor. A sea voyage (1.155-158) and a chariot ride (1.159-160), which are evocative of poetic simultaneity, also appear throughout the text and the poet is fond of playing with these images. In *Orientius*, the speaker’s wish to “run through” everything, especially the idea that the poet is literally travelling through the universe he describes, plays a large role. As he speaks, the poet is in the process of creating his ongoing poem about attaining eternal life and giving a vivid impression of simultaneity by implying that the speaker’s composition is going on right now (*modo, nunc*).

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Considering the history of the formation of didactic poetry as a genre, we have come to the conclusion that what is wrong with didactic poetry is its contradiction in terms. Poetry is not meant to be instructional, and teaching is certainly not expected to be poetic (Volk, 2002: 1). Having tested test *Orientius*’ poem against the four criteria for didactic poetry, we have can see that the *Commonitorium* on a formal level continues the ancient tradition of didactic poetry and that its speaker presents himself as both a teacher and a poet. His innovative subject matter, moral behaviour according to Christian belief, is a central preoccupation of the *Commonitorium*; with a comparatively simple language for late antique standards, the poem provides practical information and crucial advice about how to reach salvation. The text exhibits strong didactic intent, teacher-student constellation, poetic self-consciousness and simultaneity, that is all the four criteria f which Volk classifies as fundamental for didactic poetry or didactic poetry. As methods and approaches of Classicists have substantially advanced in the last decades, the time is ripe for an analysis of *Orientius*’ poem according to modern scientific standards.

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