

# Space and Spatial Metaphor in the Texts of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger

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Hannah Kirk-Evans

## Space and Spatial Metaphor in the Texts of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger

This thesis looks at the use of spatial images and metaphors in the works of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger. It considers natural and architectural spaces in the works of both authors and explores how each made use of this imagery to serve the aims of his texts. While acknowledging the important differences between the two men and their works, the study aims to show that a sustained reading of the two authors alongside one another is a productive and worthwhile endeavour, and one which can enrich our understanding of their respective texts. The main focus of the study is on the works of these authors, but the thesis also offers a contribution to studies of literary representations of the built world and of the environment in the first and second centuries CE.

*For my mother,  
Stephanie.*

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## Preface

My MPhil thesis (University of Cambridge, 2016) looked at spatial uncertainty in the Younger's *Panegyricus*, and I wrote one examined essay on the Younger's villas. I discuss some of the same passages and material throughout this thesis (particularly in Ch. 2 and Ch.3), but my focus in this project has been different and I did not consider the Elder's text in my MPhil work.

## Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of St John's College. St John's has been an extraordinary environment in which to spend much of the last decade, and I am deeply grateful to the college and its benefactors for enabling me to undertake my graduate studies at St John's, as well as to all those who have made it such a wonderful place to spend time.

I thank my supervisor, Emily Gowers, for her invaluable insight and support during my PhD (and for removing every use of the word 'arguably' from my written work over the years). Her formidable knowledge of Latin literature and careful guidance have deeply enriched this project and I feel very fortunate to have benefitted from her teaching. Any remaining instances of 'arguably' in this thesis are entirely the fault of its author.

The Faculty of Classics has provided both a stimulating intellectual environment in which to learn and a compassionate community. I, and this project, have benefitted greatly from the generous sharing of advice, information and support from members of the Faculty. The Faculty's graduate community in particular has been a great source of encouragement and friendship during my time as a postgraduate student. There are many people I could name here, but I am very grateful to have known such an interesting and kind group of people, and the many conversations in the common room (both academic and otherwise) have been a memorable and immensely enjoyable part of PhD.

This thesis was worked on and completed during the global COVID-19 pandemic and has, therefore, been concluded at a time when many of us have found ourselves separated from those we love. Given this fact, I am even more thankful for the ongoing support and encouragement of my friends, even if at a distance. The Friday night quiz group (Jess, Antoni, James, Joe, Kweku and Christina) have livened up many a winter evening and injected a much-needed sense of fun into the more difficult months of the last year. Christina Faraday has offered a listening ear, sage advice, and many delicious homemade biscuits over the last four years, for all of which I am eternally grateful. I thank Jonna Petzold and Caroline Pollard for over a decade of friendship, for their continual encouragement, and for leading the way in the

completion of their own PhD projects. I count myself very lucky to have experienced an enduring friendship that has grown as we have, and I look forward to what the future holds.

My partner, John, has been a constant source of strength and support. Every day, I am reminded of how fortunate I am to share my life with someone to whom kindness comes so effortlessly and who never fails to make me laugh, even on dark days. I look forward to our next adventure (possibly outside our flat).

I thank all my family for their encouragement at every stage. I have missed you all dearly.

Finally, I thank my mother, Stephanie, for her unending love and support, and for teaching me the power of a good story.



## Introduction

furor est, profecto furor, egredi ex eo et, tamquam interna eius cuncta plane iam nota sint, ita scrutari extera, quasi vero mensuram ullius rei possit agere qui sui nesciat, aut mens hominis possit videre quae mundus ipse non capiat.<sup>1</sup> *NH* 2.4

It is madness, downright madness, to go out of that world, and to investigate what lies outside it just as if the whole of what is within it were already clearly known; as though, forsooth, the measure of anything could be taken by him that knows not the measure of himself, or as if the mind of man could see things that the world itself does not contain.  
(trans. Rackham)

itaque soleo ridere cum me quidam studiosum vocant, qui si comparer illi sum desidiosissimus. ego autem tantum, quem partim publica partim amicorum officia dstringunt? quis ex istis, qui tota vita litteris adsident, collatus illi non quasi somno et inertiae deditus erubescat? *Ep.* 3.5.19

So I cannot help smiling when anyone calls me studious, for compared with him I am the idlest of men. But am I the only one, seeing that so much of my time is taken up with official work and service to my friends? Any one of your life-long devotees of literature, if put alongside my uncle, would blush to feel themselves thus enslaved to sleep and idleness. (trans. Radice)

This is a study of the divergent but connected works of two men, Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger. The former, a friend of the emperor Vespasian, was enmeshed in the machinery of the imperial system during the early days of the Flavian dynasty, while the latter witnessed the bloody end of the same dynasty, and the delicate transition to the reigns of Nerva and Trajan. The former was a prolific writer and researcher, producing a large corpus of work over the course of his lifetime, of which only the *Natural History*, his celebration of the natural world

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<sup>1</sup> All Latin and translations are taken from the Loeb editions of the texts; I have indicated in the text where I have adapted any translations.

in thirty-seven books, survives. The Younger, by contrast, has left to us a rather more slender body of work, in his ten books of *Epistles* and one surviving speech, the *Panegyricus*.

Connected by blood, and also by their proximity to imperial power at significant moments of regime change, the two men and their works nonetheless reveal multiple significant differences. Clearly, on the surface at least, a large-scale work on the natural world and natural phenomena would seem to have little in common with the artfully crafted letters of a writer and lawyer, writing to the great and good of the literary and political spheres of his day. However, I believe that a full-length study of the works of the two authors alongside one another is a productive and worthwhile undertaking. Indeed, the connection between the two men has long intrigued scholars and has recently been the subject of an excellent biography.<sup>2</sup>

Scholarship on the two men, to which I will return later in this introduction, tends to approach the subject with several major questions. One of these questions is what insight the Younger's letter on the Elder (*Ep.* 3.5) can give us into the Elder's working habits and the texts he produced.<sup>3</sup> Scholars interested in this question have analysed this letter in terms of what it can tell us about the Elder's daily routine, both as it relates to the other routine letters in the collection and as it relates to questions of literary production more broadly.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the majority of the works mentioned by the Younger in this catalogue are now lost. A further point of interest for scholars has been the personal relationship between the Elder and the Younger, and the ways in which the Younger's letters on the Elder might reflect this. Opinions have varied significantly on the question of the Younger's attitude to the Elder, ranging from views that see the Younger as engaging with almost unmitigated praise for his uncle as a heroic figure, to those that would see outright hostility in the Younger's treatment of the Elder.<sup>5</sup> Another focal point in scholarship on the two authors has been the Younger's presentation of the natural world, and the ways in which his letters on nature and natural phenomena might have been

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<sup>2</sup> Dunn (2019).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Henderson (2002b), Gibson and Steel (2010) 126-130 on the Younger's construction of the Elder's literary career, Whitton (2019) 388-398 on *Ep.* 3.5 and the Younger's use of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* in modelling his relationship with the Elder in this letter.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2002a) on the Elder and the Younger, Gibson and Morello (2012) 104-126 on routines, including that of the Elder.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Jones (2001), Gibson and Morello (2012) 108-123 on the Elder and Vesuvius, Keeline (2018a).

influenced by, or have made reference to, his uncle's work.<sup>6</sup> Of course, all these questions also have relevance for this study. However, in contrast to the approaches outlined above, I will not privilege any one area in my consideration of the two authors' works.

Rather, my aim in this study is a broader one: I intend to consider how the presentation of space in the works of the Elder and the Younger can be used as a way in to exploring how they each thought about the world more generally. As I will go on to outline, I take a broadly comparative approach in this thesis, using the topic of space and spatial metaphor as a vehicle with which to compare and contrast the outlooks of the two authors involved. I am, of course, interested in the relationship between the two men, and the insights into this we might glean from reading their works. However, I am more interested in the relationship between their texts, and more broadly, the relationship between how each author conceptualised the world around him.

Such a study necessarily leads into a consideration of how the political circumstances of the time shaped the worldview of each of our authors. I will survey the existing scholarship on this area later in this introduction, but for now it suffices to say that, for all the significant points of difference between the contexts in which the two men were producing most of their literary outputs, there are also some important parallel moments in their respective lives and careers. Both occupied significant positions in imperial society and were closely involved with the mechanisms of imperial power at notable moments of regime change. One important strand of this study will, then, inevitably be concerned with the impact of political change on the ways in which authors conceptualised and depicted the world, something that has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, this study also considers literary representations of the environment and of architecture in the first and second centuries CE, as they appear in the works of these two authors. As I explore later in this introduction, studies that use spatial and environmental theory to approach classical texts have become increasingly prevalent in recent years. As the primary

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Sherwin-White (1966) *ad loc.* on *Ep.* 4.30, Neger (2018) on *mirabilia* in the *Epistles*.

<sup>7</sup> I will return to this point later in this introduction, but examples include Carey (2003) and Murphy (2004) on the *Natural History* and imperial politics; Rimell (2015) on the Roman fascination with confinement and enclosure as a response to the outward motions of empire, cf. Rimell (2018) on congested straits and waterways.

aim of this study is to analyse the relationship between the works of the Elder and the Younger, I cannot offer comprehensive survey of these topics. However, I hope that the spaces considered here still offer a sample, through which we may explore Roman treatments of space and place in early imperial Roman literature. Across this introduction, I will aim to provide an outline of the historical contexts in which our authors were writing, as well as lay out the methodological framework I am taking in greater detail. Finally, I will aim to give an overview of the shape of Plinian scholarship up to this point, and to argue for the virtues of reading the works of these two authors side by side.

### Comparative Reading

In designing the methodology for this study, I have drawn on multiple different frameworks. In terms of my approach to the works of the Elder and the Younger and the relationship between them, I do not intend this thesis to be an intertextual study in the strict sense. Although I do point out what I believe to be points of intertextual connection between the two authors' works throughout the thesis, in general I take a more broadly comparative approach to the texts considered.<sup>8</sup> Even in places where we do not find the Younger making a specific intertextual reference to the *Natural History*, I believe that it is still a worthwhile and productive endeavour to read the works of the two authors alongside one another. The Elder and the Younger were, of course, writing very different texts, at different points in time, in the service of different aims. Nevertheless, even these points of difference can raise interesting questions and illuminate specific features of their respective works.

Writing about the Elder and the Younger alongside one another is clearly not a new enterprise. As noted above, scholars have pointed out that the Younger may be drawing on the Elder's work in his letters on natural phenomena.<sup>9</sup> Roy Gibson has argued for the significance of the *Natural History* for the Younger Pliny and his work, claiming that the Younger had read

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Saussy (2003) 338 on comparative literature: 'Comparative literature is largely a discipline of the *and* type. It does its work best as a chain of *ands*: this relation and that relation and that relation... – each *and* modifying the sense of those that came before.'

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Sherwin-White (1966) on *Ep.* 4.30, Neger (2018).

his uncle's work, and engaged with it to a significant degree.<sup>10</sup> Gibson demonstrates that a series of subtle references to the Elder's work may be found in the Younger's *Epistles*, showing that the Younger draws on the *Natural History* not only in the places where such references might be expected, but also in more unexpected places.<sup>11</sup> Of course, one of the focal points for scholars interested in the relationship between the Elder and the Younger are the latter's letters on the eruption of Vesuvius and the Elder's death. Many scholars have used these letters to analyse and characterise the relationship between the two men, with opinions occupying differing points on a scale that ranges from hero-worship to outright hostility.<sup>12</sup>

However, to my knowledge there has not yet been a full-length study of the works of these two authors alongside one another. Appreciation of potential connections with the Elder's work in the Younger's texts will allow us to better understand the literary texture of the Younger's work. This study will also represent a contribution to our understanding of the reception of the *Natural History* in the Roman world. Aude Doody's 2010 study provides valuable insight into the work's later reception, and other scholars have also explored the influence of Pliny's ideas on later writers and later science.<sup>13</sup> However, fewer scholars have studied the work's Roman reception in detail. Finally, this thesis also contributes to scholarship on literary representations of the natural world and architecture. Evidently, this final aim owes much to the recent surge of interest in spatial theory in the field of Classics, and I turn now to consider this in more detail.

### Spatial Theory

The increased interest in questions of space and place across the humanities in general and classics in particular – the 'spatial turn' – has been well documented. This focus on the

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<sup>10</sup> Gibson (2011) 189 and *passim* for the argument that the Younger was 'a close and careful reader of the *Natural History*, and – more importantly for the history of the reception of Pliny's great work – expected his best readers to be similarly inclined.' Contrast Henderson (2002b) 273-277 on the Younger having read the preface of the *Natural History*, but possibly not the whole work.

<sup>11</sup> Gibson (2011) 189-195.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Gigante (1989), Jones (2001), Ripoll (2003), Berry (2008), Keeline (2018).

<sup>13</sup> Doody (2010). See e.g. Bodson (1986) on zoology in Pliny, Eastwood (1986) on the legacy of Pliny's astronomy, Doody (2009) on the *Medicina Plinii*.

productive application of spatial theory to ancient literature has resulted in the production of much stimulating work in the field of Roman literature in recent years. In her 2015 book, *The Closure of Space in Roman Poetics: Empire's Inward Turn*, Victoria Rimell explores the Roman fascination with enclosed and constricted spaces in the literature of the early imperial period.<sup>14</sup> Rimell sees this interest in enclosed spaces as a response to the outward-driving motions of empire, arguing that these literary spaces, with their scenes of enclosure and sometimes violent explosion, mirror and reverse the movements of empire.<sup>15</sup> Rimell's work provides a stimulating and novel insight into these texts, foregrounding space and spatial metaphors as a dominant concern of Roman authors of the period. Elsewhere, she explores similar concerns with regards to the natural world, exploring how depictions of the natural world as somehow restricted or constrained can reflect the drives and movements of imperial power.<sup>16</sup>

This increased interest in matters related to spatial theory in the field of ancient literature has also resulted in a number of edited volumes, which approach the topic from a variety of different angles. One such volume, edited by Felton, entitled *Landscapes of Dread in Classical Antiquity*, explores the connection between depictions of landscape and ideas of negative emotion.<sup>17</sup> The volume takes in a wide range of landscapes, including Tacitus' presentation of the landscapes of Germania and also suburban and domestic settings, including the Younger's depiction of a haunted house in *Ep.* 7.27.<sup>18</sup> The 2017 edited volume *Imagining Empire: Political Space in Hellenistic and Roman Literature*, edited by Victoria Rimell and Markus Asper, contains chapters which explore the relationship between literary spaces and imperial politics from multiple different angles.<sup>19</sup> A further volume, edited by Spentzou and Fitzgerald, *The Production of Space in Latin Literature*, also explores constructions of space in the work of ancient authors.<sup>20</sup> Willis's 2011 work, *Now and Rome: Lucan and Vergil as Theorists of*

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<sup>14</sup> Rimell (2015).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ead.* (2018) on congested and constricted straits in Roman poetry.

<sup>17</sup> Felton (ed.) (2018).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Doroszewska (2018) on suburban spaces as demonic; Felton (2018) on *daimones* and urban space; Van Broeck (2018) on the wetlands in Tacitus' *Histories*.

<sup>19</sup> Rimell and Asper (eds.) (2017).

<sup>20</sup> Fitzgerald and Spentzou (2018).

*Politics and Space*, also seeks to explore the intersection between ancient literature, imperial politics and spatial theory.<sup>21</sup> Other important work has focused on more specific elements of space and place in Roman literature. For example, Andrew Riggsby's work on the Roman *cubiculum* has provided valuable insight into the individual nature of certain spaces in the Roman *domus*, and the way in which political action not only took place within its walls, but was shaped by the physical structure of the building.<sup>22</sup> Riggsby's work on Pliny's villas also approaches the question of space from a different angle, through the dual consideration of space and time in the letters on Pliny's country estates, arguing that these spaces refuse to be mapped or read along straightforward spatial lines.<sup>23</sup>

Taking a slightly broader view, there has also been productive scholarly work carried out on the Roman *domus* more generally, such as that of Shelley Hales.<sup>24</sup> Other scholars have considered the ways in which urban and rural landscapes are depicted across ancient literature, and how presentations of the city and of the country function in different ways across the works of different authors. For example, Diana Spencer's 2010 work on Roman landscape approaches the construction of landscapes in Roman texts and culture from a number of different angles.<sup>25</sup> Timothy O'Sullivan's work on the role of walking in Roman culture approaches the topic of space and spatial mapping from a different perspective, taking in both literary portrayals of walking as well as actual walking practices from the Roman world.<sup>26</sup> This increased interest in the spaces of ancient literature has, then, produced a diverse and stimulating body of work, which represents one important influence on the present study. However, the other main structuring principle for my investigation stems from a consideration of the historical and political climates in which these authors were writing, to which I will now turn.

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<sup>21</sup> Willis (2011).

<sup>22</sup> Riggsby (1997), (2009) on the importance of space in Roman historiography.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* (2003).

<sup>24</sup> Hales (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Spencer (2010). See also Worman (2015) on the significance of landscape images and metaphors in ancient literary theory.

<sup>26</sup> O'Sullivan (2011), see also Macaulay-Lewis (2011). Newsome (2011) on movement in ancient cities more generally.

## The Flavians

rebellione trium principum et caede incertum diu et quasi vagum imperium suscepit firmavitque tandem gens Flavia... Suet. *Vesp.* 1.1

The empire, which had long been unsettled and, as it were, drifting, through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors, was at last taken in hand and given stability by the Flavian family. (trans. Rolfe)

Vespasian's assumption of the reins of empire in 69 CE launched a new ruling dynasty at Rome, that of the Flavian emperors. Truly dynastic in a way the Julio-Claudian line had not been, as the imperial power was handed from father to son to brother, the beginning of the Flavian line represented a decisive departure from what had gone before. Trying to leave behind not only the turbulent period of civil war which had ultimately brought Vespasian to power, but also the decadent and theatrical reign of Nero, the Flavians needed a robust programme of imagery and policy to set them apart from their predecessors.

Indeed, as scholars including Naas have explored, the reign of Nero became a useful point of contrast for the Flavian emperors, and for Flavian authors, against which to position their new political regime. As Naas writes, this decision also had an impact on literature produced in the Flavian period:

Enfin dans la littérature, pour le dire vite, les Flaviens opposent au goût baroque promu sous Néron un retour au classicisme.<sup>27</sup>

As many scholars have shown, the way in which Vespasian sought to mark himself out as different from the final Julio-Claudian emperor was by a programme of ideology and imagery that looked back to the early days of the empire, and to the reign of Augustus in particular. Tuck, writing on imperial image-making in the Flavian period, writes of the importance of the reign of Augustus as a reference point for the Flavian emperors:

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<sup>27</sup> Naas (2002) 73.



The circumstantial analogies were clear: a new imperial family had arisen from the chaos of civil war, and was confronted with the broad project of founding a dynasty; there was also a need to consolidate power and to restore the state. Many of Augustus' programmatic efforts to craft his public image were pertinent and, with little or no adjustment, directly applicable to Vespasian's situation in the early 70s.<sup>28</sup>

Gallia has analysed Flavian interventions in the physical fabric of Rome, arguing that the city posed an important challenge to the new dynasty:

For later emperors, the challenge of dealing with a pre-existing urban landscape encompassed not just monuments hallowed by antiquity, but the interventions of their predecessors as well. Within the richly layered landscape of Imperial Rome, novelty, however significant, would always be seen as part of a continuum.<sup>29</sup>

As Gallia shows, large-scale building projects could often take many years to complete, and subsequently were routinely started under one emperor and completed under another.<sup>30</sup> Appreciating the constantly changing nature of the fabric of Rome will become more relevant later in this study, when I turn to consider public architecture and the ways in which both the Elder and the Younger interacted with the re-shaping of the urban landscape. Gallia also argues that the civil war that preceded Vespasian's reign would have posed its own challenges of repair and restoration, both in terms of the collective psychological health of the Roman people and in terms of the physical fabric of the city, which had suffered damage due to the conflict.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Tuck (2016) 109. Cf. Boyle (2003) 31-32 on the difficulties of interpreting the programme of Flavian building.

<sup>29</sup> Gallia (2016) 148. Cf. Elsner (1998) 64: 'Any imperial intervention in the visual environment – however conservative or radical – was a sign of continuity'. Elsner (1988 63-4) also notes that imperial building could be problematic in a number of ways for those who undertook it: 'A key problem for imperial builders was the need to make a new and grandiose statement while at the same time not veering to the excessive. Too extravagant an architectural, visual, or topographic gesture could meet with virulent polemical condemnation. None the less, for an emperor not to build in a manner worthy of his office was inviting a mediocre reputation in perpetuity. Squaring this circle – the demand to be ever more dramatically innovative while never too outrageously exceeding the bounds of traditional decorum – is one of the most persistent features of the imperial office (and not only in matters of art and architecture).'

<sup>30</sup> Gallia (2016) 149.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* 151.

As is well known from a famous passage in Tacitus' *Histories*, the real change that took place after the end of Nero's reign was that it became apparent that an emperor did not need to be based in Rome to assume the highest form of imperial power:

finis Neronis ut laetus primo gaudentium impetu fuerat, ita varios motus animorum non modo in urbe apud patres aut populum aut urbanum militem, sed omnis legiones ducesque conciverat, evulgato imperii arcano posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri. Tac. *Hist.* 1.4.

Although Nero's death had at first been welcomed with outbursts of joy, it roused varying emotions, not only in the city among the senators and people and the city soldiery, but also among all the legions and generals; for the secret of empire was now disclosed, that an emperor could be made elsewhere than at Rome. (trans. Moore)

This shift of the heart of imperial power away from the city of Rome evidently had significant ramifications for all subsequent Roman emperors. Regarding Vespasian's reign specifically, Pogorzelski writes that the extended period of time the emperor spent in Alexandria demonstrated, in concrete terms, the Tacitean sentiment cited above:

His administrative policies may appear to centralize authority, but they do so through multiple centers, challenging the unity of the center and prefiguring a time when the city of Rome would lose its preeminence in favor of a variety of other geographical centers.<sup>32</sup>

Many scholars have identified a preoccupation with boundaries and their consolidation among the Flavian emperors. Dart describes the Flavians as 'judicious frontier architects', arguing that consolidating the boundaries of empire was a priority for Vespasian and his two sons.<sup>33</sup> As we will go on to see, this concern with borders and boundaries is something we see reflected in the work of authors of the period, including the Elder Pliny. When Vespasian died in 79 CE, his son Titus became emperor in his place. The relatively brief reign of Titus was dominated by a

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<sup>32</sup> Pogorzelski (2016) 225. See Babcock (2000) on the introduction of the Flavians in Tacitus *Histories* 4.

<sup>33</sup> Dart (2016) 211 and *passim* on Flavian military policy more generally.

series of natural disasters, including the eruption of Vesuvius.<sup>34</sup> The Elder was closely acquainted with the Flavian emperors and his *Natural History* is dedicated to Titus. Paul Roche writes of the work's preface:

The *Natural History* is dedicated to Titus in a sustained performance of court interiority. The prefatory epistle moves fluidly between the fiction of familiar and private communication between intimate acquaintances and its status as a public address to Vespasian's heir.<sup>35</sup>

Roche analyses the preface in the context of its contemporary politics, arguing that the opening epistle 'clearly engages with contested elements in the public image of the Flavian dynasty'.<sup>36</sup> Roche goes on to detail how, in his preface, Pliny carefully responds to potential concerns or points of tension in the public image of the Flavians.<sup>37</sup> Roche also describes the Flavian emperors as 'patrons of individual industry', pointing to similarities between the Elder and Vespasian noted by other authors.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in 81 CE, following Titus' death, the last of the Flavian emperors, Domitian, took up the reins of empire. His fifteen-year reign, ending in his assassination, would have an enduring legacy, in the most part thanks to authors such as Tacitus and the Younger Pliny, and it is to this I now turn.

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<sup>34</sup> See Suet. *Tit.* 8.3-4: *quaedam sub eo fortuita ac tristia acciderunt, ut conflagratio Vesuvii montis in Campania, et incendium Romae per triduum totidemque noctes, item pestilentia quanta non temere alias. in iis tot adversis ac talibus non modo principis sollicitudinem sed et parentis affectum unicum praestitit, nunc consolando per edicta, nunc opitulando quatenus suppeteret facultas.* Zissos (2016) on the reception of the Younger's account of Vesuvius, and the history and reception of Pompeii.

<sup>35</sup> Roche (2016) 435. On the preface, see also Howe (1985), Sinclair (2003) 288-289 on *NH* *pref.* 20 and the idea of inheritance: 'the preface has an overarching testamentary purpose where the subject of writing and reading are concerned. The elder Pliny clearly envisions that his heir will be among those to come who will participate in Roman letters. Like father, like son – even when the son is a nephew adopted after one's death. Roman literature repeatedly uses the father-son relationship as one of its primary authenticating tropes. Writers produce writers; writing produces writing.' Cf. Citroni Marchetti (2011) 27-29.

<sup>36</sup> Roche (2016) 439.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* 438-441.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* 438. Roche cites both Suetonius' biography of Vespasian and the Younger's *Ep.* 3.5 as instances where this parallel is notable.

## Domitian

tempore vero suspecti periculi appropinquante sollicitior in dies porticum, in quibus spatari consuerat, parietes phengite lapide distinxit, e cuius splendore per imagines quidquid a tergo fieret provideret. Suet. *Dom.* 14.4

As the time when he anticipated danger drew near, becoming still more anxious every day, he lined the walls of the colonnades in which he used to walk with phengite stone, to be able to see in its brilliant surface the reflection of all that went on behind his back.  
(trans. Rolfe)

The reign of the last of the Flavian emperors, Domitian, has long been a source of intrigue for scholars of the period. Domitian came to power in 81 CE, after Titus' early death at the age of 41 and reigned for fifteen years, before he met a violent end and was assassinated in 96 CE. The posthumous condemnation of Domitian by writers such as the Younger Pliny and Tacitus has undoubtedly coloured the picture of him as a ruler that has endured over the centuries, as one of Rome's 'bad' emperors. In the *Panegyricus*, the Younger presents a picture of Domitian as a cruel and violent ruler, who flouts the rules for appropriate behaviour as an emperor at every step. Pliny's Domitian is a murderous tyrant, who cowers alone in his palace, shunning the usual social obligations in favour of a life of isolation.<sup>39</sup> He is also a military disaster, holding sham triumphs while failing to achieve any decisive victories, and so cowardly that he is even afraid in a boat on a still lake.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, he is the opposite of Pliny's Trajan, a dynamic figure who achieves success in both the military sphere, as an experienced soldier, and also in domestic matters, and is presented as revolutionising Rome in a number of important ways.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Pan.* 49. On Domitian eating alone (*Pan.* 49.6-7) and the motif of the lone diner more generally, see Braund (1996), 43-46 on Domitian.

<sup>40</sup> *Pan.* 16.34, 82.1-3. Manolaraki (2008) 376: 'The brave and weathered Trajan is starkly contrasted to a nauseous Domitian, whose seasickness becomes a matter of foreign policy and national disgrace.'

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* (2012a) on Pliny's description of Trajan's hunting in the *Panegyricus* and the ways in which he used it to present Trajan in a morally positive way.

The reign of Domitian has offered fertile ground for scholarly debate. Some have approached the period in terms of the perspective offered by the later literary sources, exploring the ways in which these texts construct and reconstruct the events of Domitian's reign in order to serve their own particular aims, both literary and political.<sup>42</sup> Others have explored the historical events of Domitian's reign in order to examine the relationship between these later literary sources and the actual events of the emperor's reign, as far as these can be ascertained.<sup>43</sup> In his study of Domitian's relationship with the senate, Jones challenges the idea that Domitian's posthumous condemnation was universal.<sup>44</sup> He summarises the situation regarding such condemnation of the previous emperor by a new regime in the following terms:

In the Roman oligarchy, a family just elevated to primacy was obliged to stress its superiority over its former equals, and especially so at the time when the new dynasty replaced the old. It could only be hindered by deifying the last incumbent; and since in all ages a military or political *coup* requires that the assumption of power and the removal of the former dynasty be instantly justified, a new regime must promise drastic changes; it must vilify its predecessor.<sup>45</sup>

Jones also critiques the idea that Domitian was somehow overlooked by Vespasian in comparison with Titus, arguing that in terms of the consulships each held, there was not a demonstrable difference between the two brothers.<sup>46</sup> He challenges the idea, put forward by Pliny in the *Panegyricus*, that Domitian's military endeavours were a complete failure, saying that Domitian's foreign policy was one which sought to consolidate the frontiers of the empire, rather than undertaking an aggressive programme of expansion.<sup>47</sup> Jones writes that a large part

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<sup>42</sup> On the negotiation of the Domitianic past by later authors, see e.g. Beutel (2000) on Pliny's use of the past in his political narratives, Wilson (2003), Flower (2006) Haynes (2006), Whitton (2010) on *Ep.* 8.14, (2012) on Pliny and Tacitus, Geisthardt (2015), Penwill (2015), Moreno Soldevilla (2017) on Pliny, Martial and political change; Rimell (2018a) on Martial, Roche (2018).

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Waters (1969) on the continuation between the reigns of Domitian and Trajan, Jones (1979), Galimberti (2016) for an overview of Domitian's reign, Dészpa (2016) on the Flavians and their relationship to the senatorial class, 177-183 on Domitian.

<sup>44</sup> Jones (1979).

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* 22-3.

of Domitian's difficulty was that he failed to produce an heir, and that we should be sceptical of extrapolating too far from the Younger's perspective:

The hostility reported by Pliny is not a guarantee that every senator felt deeply hostile about Domitian, nor is it even an accurate barometer of senatorial dislike. It is as reliable a measure of their feelings as would have been the applause resounding in the Curia had Domitian managed to provide himself with an adult male heir. Thus, while not rejecting the entire literary tradition, it is legitimate to doubt the extent of senatorial hostility towards Domitian.<sup>48</sup>

Evidently, the idea of inheritance and the passing of power down the family line was an important one for Roman emperors generally, and for the Flavian emperors specifically. However, Jones also attributes Domitian's negative reception by some senators to restrictions that the emperor placed on the possibilities for promotion that were open to praetors.<sup>49</sup> For the purposes of this study, which is focused on the view of the world as put forward by the literary texts of the Elder and the Younger, the question of the credibility of the Younger's picture of Domitian is not a central one. Of course, this is not to say that the reasons behind the Younger's presentation of the world are not important, but rather that I am more interested in the circumstances that lead to this presentation, rather than the veracity of the resulting literary product. Nonetheless, it provides some important contextual information.

A more relevant framework for this study is the body of work undertaken in recent years that has focused on the ways in which writers such as Pliny and Tacitus constructed the events of the recent past in a particular way in order to serve their own literary and political aims. This work tends to focus on the construction of political discourse in the period following Domitian's death. In particular, Lisa Cordes' work, which uses concepts borrowed from semiotic theory such as 'preferred reading' and 'recoding' has provided stimulating insight in this area: she argues that after the death of certain emperors, including Nero and Domitian,

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<sup>48</sup> Jones (1979) 63, 86 on the credibility of the *Panegyricus*: 'The implication of Pliny's *Panegyricus* that he had attracted universal senatorial opprobrium is as unconvincing as would have been the Panegyric of a pro-Domitianic senator, supposing that Domitian had been able to ensure that an adult relative succeeded him.'

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* 82.

elements of imperial panegyric could be reinterpreted as part of a more critical discourse.<sup>50</sup> Following Domitian's assassination in 96 CE, there was evidently a significant and problematic gap left in his place, since he did not have a male heir to take over from him directly. The figure who would fill this gap would be Nerva, followed shortly after by his adoptive son Trajan.

### Nerva and Trajan

In the introduction to his *Agricola*, Tacitus celebrates the new age heralded by the reigns of Nerva and then Trajan:

nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerva Traianus, nec spem modo ac votum securitas publica, sed ipsius voti fiduciam ac robur adsumpserit...Tac. *Agricola* 3.1

Now at last heart is coming back to us: from the first, from the very outset of this happy age, Nerva has united things long incompatible, the principate and liberty; Trajan is increasing daily the happiness of the times; and public confidence has not merely learned to hope and pray, but has received assurance of the fulfilment of its prayers and so has gained strength. (trans. Hutton and Peterson, revised by Ogilvie et al.)

Like Tacitus, the Younger Pliny also depicts the accession of Nerva and, more importantly, Trajan, as a pivotal moment in Roman history, and as one at which the empire moved from a period of tyranny to one of freedom and openness. Nerva's reign clearly presented something of a problem for contemporary authors, including Pliny in his *Panegyricus*. Nerva was already

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<sup>50</sup> Cordes (2014), (2017). See also Geisthardt (2015) on the self-representation of the senatorial elite, with particular reference to Pliny and Tacitus, and the role played by these authors in shaping the political discourse of the time, e.g. Geisthardt (2015) 24: 'Nicht zuletzt deshalb schlug sich der Übergang von der Herrschaft Domitians zu den Alleinherrschaften Nervas und Trajans auch sehr deutlich in ihren Texten nieder, die den radikalen Umbruch in der Regierungspraxis der Principes nicht einfach beschreiben, sondern in seiner Diskursivierung mitgestalten und damit grundlegend zum zeitgenössischen Verständnis des trajanischen Prinzipats beitragen'. Cf. Roller (2015) on the way later authors conceptualised the transition from republic to empire with reference to the senate. Roller argues that Pliny does not employ a narrative of imperial decline in the senate in the same way as Tacitus.

in his mid-sixties by the time he came to power in 96 CE, and his sixteen-month reign was troubled by a serious mutiny, before he died from illness in 98. Pliny acknowledges the mutiny in the *Panegyricus*, calling it a ‘wound inflicted on the state’ (*magnum rei publicae vulnus impressum est*, *Pan.* 6.1), but in the speech largely presents Nerva as the facilitator of Trajan’s accession and greatness as emperor.<sup>51</sup>

Trajan came to power in 98 CE. An experienced soldier, when he became emperor he was absent from Rome on military duties. This fact may have brought with it some amount of anxiety, and a certain lack of fixity that may have been concerning to some at Rome.<sup>52</sup> As explored above, with regards to the Flavian emperors, the idea that the emperor no longer needed to be solidly based in Rome was clearly an important turning point. For the present study, the most relevant point is clearly the way in which the Younger and his contemporaries present the reign of Trajan as a decisive departure from the reign of Domitian. The question of how different Trajan’s reign was in practical terms from that of Domitian is clearly a complex one. In his analysis of Domitian’s relationship with the senate, Jones writes:

Now Trajan, pursuing much the same policies as Domitian, secured a favorable reputation. He had a relative as successor and also encouraged attacks on Domitian’s morals and personality so as to disguise the fact that his policies were being continued – but the essential difference would appear to be his tact and preference for diplomatic methods; he was less direct than Domitian and adroit enough to treat the senate with extreme deference. But Domitian had secured the initial odium with his radical changes, and this left his successor with room to maneuver. He could afford to make minor concessions such as admitting a few patricians to military commands. But he was no less autocratic.<sup>53</sup>

As Jones suggests, the differences between Domitian and Trajan’s reign in terms of basic policy and the day-to-day running of the empire may have been fairly minimal. In a shift of this kind,

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<sup>51</sup> See e.g. *Pan.* 5-10.

<sup>52</sup> See *Pan.* 9.3: *paruisti enim, Caesar, et ad principatum obsequio pervenisti, nihilque magis a te subiecti animo factum est quam quod imperare coepisti, iam Caesar iam imperator iam Germanicus absens et ignarus, et post tanta nomina, quantum ad te pertinet, privatus.*

<sup>53</sup> Jones (1979) 87. Cf. Waters (1969).



therefore, the real work was done by authors such as Pliny and Tacitus, who used their works to shape the discourse of the time concerning the change in regime. Scholars have analysed this moment following Domitian's assassination, in which these authors sought to construct their narratives concerning the recent past. Kirk Freudenburg writes of Pliny's letters:

These letters, it should by now be clear, do much more than simply provide information *about* Roman social political history of the period. They are themselves active agents *in* that history. They represent Pliny at his most intense and competitive, struggling to contain the damage, and to define himself as a certain kind of highly-valued subject within a world of competing, and sometimes potentially damaging, selves.<sup>54</sup>

Freudenburg's description of the letters as 'active agents' is particularly suggestive. It is clear, as scholars have shown, that when approaching the works of authors such as Pliny and Tacitus, who were also involved in the political machinery of the day, we cannot separate the literary from the political.<sup>55</sup> If Domitian lurks as a looming presence in the shadows of the *Epistles*, Trajan is also a subtle, if far less threatening, presence throughout *Epistles* 1-9. His appearances in the first nine books are fairly infrequent, although when they do occur, they are significant.<sup>56</sup> The somewhat blurry portrait of the emperor comes into sharp focus in the tenth book of the *Epistles* and, of course, in the *Panegyricus*.

These two portraits of Trajan, that of Book Ten and that of the *Panegyricus*, are clearly quite different from one another, in large part due to the differences in form and purpose between the texts. In the *Panegyricus*, the Younger presents Trajan as a dynamic figure, hovering between the realms of mortals and the divine, who revitalises the empire and ushers in a new age of freedom with his reign. The Trajan of Book Ten is clearly efficient in a far more administrative sense, dealing with the issues that arise in the province of Bithynia and Pontus through his correspondence with Pliny. Across all of the Younger's works, then, we develop a patchwork picture of the new emperor, one which shows him to be an efficient, dynamic and benevolent ruler.

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<sup>54</sup> Freudenburg (2001) 229.

<sup>55</sup> See Rutledge (2009) 429 and *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> On which, see Gibson (2015).



## The Elder Pliny and the *Natural History*

periit clade Campaniae; cum enim Misenensi classi praeesset et flagrante Vesuvio ad explorandas propius causas liburnica pertendisset, nec adversantibus ventis remeare posset, vi pulveris ac favillae oppressus est, vel ut quidam existimant a servo suo occisus, quem aestu deficiens ut necem sibi maturaret oraverat. Suet. *Vita Plinii Secundi*.<sup>57</sup>

He lost his life in the disaster in Campania. He was commanding the fleet at Misenum and setting out in a Liburnian galley during the eruption of Vesuvius to investigate the causes of the phenomenon from nearer at hand, he was unable to return because of head winds. He was suffocated by the shower of dust and ashes, although some think he was killed by a slave, whom he begged to hasten his end when he was overcome by the intense heat. (trans. Rolfe)

The lasting image of the Elder Pliny in the popular imagination remains that of the intrepid scientist, sailing off into the distance against the backdrop of an erupting volcano, his quest for scientific knowledge ultimately costing him his life. Born well into the reign of Tiberius, the Elder's life and career would go on to span that of eight emperors of Rome, making him a witness to the dramatic and bloody end of the Julio-Claudian line, the ensuing civil war, and, finally, the rise of a new dynasty, that of the Flavian emperors. Although the dating of the *Natural History* is not exactly certain, it was written after the end of Nero's reign and was, therefore, imbued with the optimism of the new Flavian regime.<sup>58</sup> Across his life, the Elder took on the various roles of military commander, lawyer and writer. He became a close friend of the emperor Vespasian, ensuring that by the end of his life he was thoroughly embedded in the workings of the imperial machine. This wide-ranging career undoubtedly gave him a perspective on many elements of Roman society that influenced his textual outputs. From the ancient sources, the most famous textual portrait of the Elder is of course that written by the Younger Pliny – I will, of course, return to these letters throughout this study, but the Younger's

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<sup>57</sup> On this text and the question of its authorship, see Reeve (2011).

<sup>58</sup> See Naas (2002) on the political context of the *Natural History* and its status as a specifically Flavian work.

depiction of his uncle's relentless work schedule in *Ep.* 3.5 has been an important touchstone for many later studies of the Elder and his work.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the heroic image of the Elder at Vesuvius that has remained so enduring, the picture that emerges of the Elder and his *Natural History* in academic work on the subject is not always so flattering.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, for a work containing such a variety of material as the *Natural History* does, scholarly work on the text also appears in a variety of forms. As Aude Doody observes, the Elder's work has long been used as a source by scholars interested in various aspects of the ancient world, providing valuable data about Roman science, culture and art.<sup>61</sup> However, as Doody also notes, Pliny's value to scholars has not necessarily guaranteed him a favourable reception in terms of his work's credibility or its literary merit.<sup>62</sup> It is this view of Pliny as merely compiling information in an unimaginative manner that Doody argues against in her book on the reception of the *Natural History*. In particular, she critiques the easy alignment of the work with the genre of the encyclopaedia, arguing that to do so overlooks the work's unique nature in the corpus of Latin literature.<sup>63</sup> Doody outlines the aims of her study as follows:

I intend to open up the more alarming possibility of a radical Pliny, writing a peculiar and innovative natural history that is profoundly and thoughtfully unlike other scholarship that survives from antiquity. As I will suggest, the *Natural History* represents an odd idea of what one should know about nature – and how one should know it – in the context of Roman writing. Reading it through the lens of a later genre of encyclopedia has too easily naturalised the strangeness of Pliny's text.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2002b).

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Goodyear (1982) 671: 'In truth Pliny had neither literary skill nor sense of propriety, and he failed to discipline his thoughts. Instead of adopting the plain and sober style appropriate to his theme, he succumbs to lust for embellishment.'

<sup>61</sup> Doody (2010) 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 2-3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Ch. 1 and *passim*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 4. See also König and Woolf (2013) on encyclopaedism in ancient literature, 40-44 on Pliny.

In her work, Doody demonstrates that scholarly appraisals of the *Natural History* that deem it somehow inadequate or disappointing are often due to a failure to judge the work on its own terms, instead seeking to measure the Elder's project against works that may appear thematically similar, but which turn out to be different in important ways.<sup>65</sup> She shows the uniqueness of Pliny's quantitative approach to the study of the natural world, which never claims to be the thorough scientific study or didactic philosophical treatise that many critics have sought in its pages. To me, Doody's approach seems a productive one, in that it appreciates the value of the Elder's work for what it does contain, rather than condemning it for what it does not.

Scholarship on the *Natural History* has tended, therefore, to fall into two main groups: on the one hand, there are those scholars who are interested in the information the work contains for what it can tell us about the ancient world and ancient scientific practices, and on the other, those who are interested in how Pliny presents this information and the outlook of his work more broadly. This first group tends, broadly, to contain mainly historians and those interested in Roman science, while the latter is more often populated by those with an interest in Latin literature and Pliny's place within it.<sup>66</sup> The 1986 volume edited by French and Greenaway, *Science in the Early Roman Empire: Pliny the Elder, his Sources and Influences*, falls into the first group outlined above: the chapters it contains deal primarily with the science contained in the *Natural History* and what it can tell us about Pliny's scientific approach more broadly, ranging from Bodson's discussion of zoology in the *Natural History*, to Healy's investigation of Pliny's treatment of mineralogy.<sup>67</sup> This field of study is less relevant to the aims of my project, since it deals more with the actual technicalities of Pliny's science than with the *Natural History* as a text, but it is nonetheless interesting to note the enduring influence of Pliny's work on later scientific developments and practices. The volume edited by Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Pliny the Elder: Themes and Contexts*, also brings together multiple

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<sup>65</sup> Doody (2010) 1-23 and *passim*. Cf. Lloyd (1983) 147: 'Pliny was one of the most learned men of his age, and one who was, as we have seen, broadly committed in principle to the importance of personal observation. The indifference of his performance in practice – the lack of significant original contributions to botany, for instance – can be related in part to the very conflict which it may be suggested arose for him between learning and research. The encyclopedic enterprise described in the preface to book I dictated a certain approach.'

<sup>66</sup> On the scientific side, see e.g. Lloyd (1983) 136-149, French and Greenaway (eds.) (1986), Healy (1999), Rocca (2016) on anatomy and physiology in ancient science, 440-441 on Pliny.

<sup>67</sup> Bodson (1986), Healy (1986).

different areas of work on the Elder and the *Natural History*, covering topics ranging from Lao's piece on the Elder's use of economic language, to Gibson's important piece on the significance of the *Natural History* for the Younger, discussed above.<sup>68</sup>

Another prominent sub-section of work on Pliny concerns his philosophical outlook, as explored notably by Sandra Citroni Marchetti and Mary Beagon.<sup>69</sup> Beagon's work demonstrates the complex relationship the Elder's work has with Roman Stoicism, arguing that it does not represent a purely Stoic work, but that the philosophy functions as a broader intellectual framework for Pliny's thought.<sup>70</sup> Citroni Marchetti examines the scheme of moralising language employed by the Elder in the *Natural History*, considering how this intersects with the work's other aims, both scholarly and political.<sup>71</sup> This is particularly productive as it intersects with his condemnation of *luxuria*, which she ties to baser human desires for consumption of all kinds.<sup>72</sup> Although, as these scholars show, tying the Elder's work to one specific philosophical school is challenging, an appreciation of the multiple influences and strands of thought at work in the *Natural History* is nonetheless beneficial.

Other scholarship on the *Natural History* has focused more on its explicitly political elements, reading the text in terms of what it can tell us about Pliny's political outlook and relationship to the dominant political ideology of the time. Recent examples of this type of work include that of Valérie Naas, Sorcha Carey and Trevor Murphy. Naas' work analyses the

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<sup>68</sup> Gibson and Morello (eds.) (2011), Gibson (2011), Lao (2011). The conference volume *Pliny l'Ancien: Témoin de son temps* also offers a broad range of insights into the Elder's work, ranging from the historical to the cultural and philosophical.

<sup>69</sup> Citroni Marchetti (1991), Beagon (1992), (2005), Beagon (2011) on curiosity and wonder in the *Natural History*. Beagon writes of the Elder's work (2011 86): 'To understand nature for Pliny is to understand that wonder and explanation can knit together in a never-ending circle of intellectual curiosity, rather than presenting the inquirer with a simple and finite one-way journey from wonder to explanation. This is the essence of reality, of consciousness, of being truly alive'.

<sup>70</sup> Ead. (2005) 15: 'Pliny's Stoicism, however, was not the carefully worked-through theorizing of the specialist philosopher; it was the general background knowledge of a well-educated man, a world-view in effect almost unconsciously absorbed and displayed. As such, it acts as a valuable indication of educated attitudes generally'.

<sup>71</sup> Citroni Marchetti (1991).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Dészpa (2016) 169-170 on *luxuria* as a useful tool for creating a distinction between the past and the present.

*Natural History* in terms of its relationship with Flavian ideology and the ways in which Pliny's text both reflects and reinforces the main points of the Flavian political agenda.<sup>73</sup> Both Carey and Murphy's work considers how the *Natural History* reflects imperialist concerns more broadly, exploring how the Elder's work demonstrates a view of nature and the world that centres on Rome as the dominant power.<sup>74</sup> Carey's work focuses particularly on depictions of art and material culture in the *Natural History*, exploring how they can function as a symbol of imperial power. She writes, of the famous image of the buildings of Rome in Book 36:

For Pliny, in effect, the whole world belongs in the inventory of Rome's belongings. At 36.101, we find a triumphant statement of this theme – Rome has not only conquered the world with her buildings (*sic quoque terrarum orbem victum ostendere*), but, even more than this, if one were to pile her buildings one on top of the other, it would be clear that Rome is, in fact, a world in her own right.<sup>75</sup>

For Murphy, on the other hand, it is the way Pliny presents the world, in terms of both geography and ethnography, that betrays his imperialist viewpoint.<sup>76</sup> Murphy argues for an interpretation of the *Natural History* as a 'political document' and a 'cultural artefact of the Roman empire'.<sup>77</sup> He sees in the Elder's representation of the world a reflection of his imperial politics, in that Rome is always the central, focal point of the work and, therefore, of the world.<sup>78</sup> He also draws out a tension in the Elder's work, between this imperialist drive to order

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<sup>73</sup> Naas (2002).

<sup>74</sup> Carey (2003), Murphy (2004). See also Schmeling (2000) on the mental image Romans had of the world, Doody (2011) on names in the *Natural History* and the way naming forms an important part of how the Elder represents the world, Fear (2011) 23 on Pliny's imperialism and his presentation of the Roman Empire as a morally positive force.

<sup>75</sup> Carey (2003) 94.

<sup>76</sup> Murphy (2004) *passim*. Murphy is not entirely complimentary regarding Pliny's prose style, writing that: 'The language of the *Natural History* is remarkable for its instability, its sentences that seem to race headlong after a completeness always out of reach.' (34-5), 9 for the view that the work 'presents a surface that is uneven and inconsistent'. This idea of unevenness and instability is intriguing: although I would not necessarily view it as a fault in the Elder's work, Murphy's analysis of the text as somehow destabilised by its pursuit of knowledge is of interest.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 19-20, 50-2, 71-3, 173-4, 188-193 and *passim*.

and catalogue the world according to the structuring principles of the Roman empire and Roman thought, and the inherent unboundedness and chaos of the natural world.<sup>79</sup> Murphy also discusses the ways in which the Elder's presentation of the natural world is characterised by a sense of constant conflict, especially when it comes to his depiction of natural borders such as rivers and mountain ranges.<sup>80</sup>

Analysing the work in terms of what it can tell us about the political discourse of the time, as well as the ways it fits into imperial ideology more broadly, certainly seems to be a productive frame through which to view the text. In this study, I hope to approach the *Natural History* from a holistic angle, building on the work of scholars outlined above. I am certainly interested in the relationship between the *Natural History* and the political environment of the time, but my focus will be mainly on the relationship between the Elder's work and the Younger's, and the ways in which both authors responded to, and represented, the world around them in different ways. As this is a primarily literary study, rather than a historical or philosophical one, my main focus will be on the literary texture of the *Natural History*, and the way in which it functions as a literary text, as well as a vehicle for conveying knowledge.

As the range of scholarship produced on the *Natural History* demonstrates and, as I hope, we will go on to explore in greater detail in this discussion, part of the joy of the Elder's work lies in the endless possibilities it raises and the multitude of narratives it contains. Trevor Murphy describes the *Natural History* as 'many-voiced', and it seems to me that this is what makes it such a stimulating text to read and engage with, as we trace these threads of conversation that run throughout the Elder's work, and reach beyond it.<sup>81</sup> If then, the first of our authors is known for a sprawling, multivocal work that sought to encompass the entire known world at the time, the work of the second is of a very different nature, and it is to the Younger I will now turn.

### The Younger Pliny

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid. passim.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* e.g. 138-154 on rivers and mountains.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 10.



If the enduring image of the Elder is that of the fearless scientist sailing towards an active volcano, that of his nephew is less obviously dynamic. Known for his career as a lawyer and a senator as much as for his literary output, the Younger Pliny has, like his uncle, often suffered from allegations of dullness and perhaps excessive self-satisfaction.<sup>82</sup> Born during Nero's reign, the Younger established his career under the Flavians, and ultimately witnessed the dynasty's violent end with the assassination of Domitian in 96 CE. A skilled orator and a successful lawyer, Pliny became one of the most prominent figures among the milieu of educated literary men of his time, and his collection of letters is peppered with mentions of, and letters addressed to, many well-known figures of the time.<sup>83</sup>

As with the Elder's work, the Younger's *Epistles* have met with varying scholarly opinions over the years. Part of this variation, as is also the case with the *Natural History*, is due to differences in what readers of the *Epistles* are looking for in the Younger's text, and what they see it as representing. Although a less fashionable view now, scholars in the past have seen the *Epistles* as an entirely unedited correspondence, which could therefore be read as direct and uncomplicated evidence of Roman life. Even if the view of the *Epistles* as unedited is no longer the dominant one, this does not mean that the Younger's work cannot be usefully analysed from a historical perspective. Most notably, Sherwin-White's commentary on the *Epistles* has productively analysed the collection in terms of the social and historical significance of the events the Younger's letters narrate.<sup>84</sup>

Other views vary, from an edited collection of 'real' letters, to an entirely constructed, purely literary, text. Since Guillemin's 1929 study of the literary texture of the *Epistles*, and some of the intertextual connections present in the collection, there has been an increasing amount of literary scholarship focused on the Younger's work.<sup>85</sup> This work has taken various forms, with

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<sup>82</sup> See e.g. Goodyear (1982) 659: 'Pliny's view of his times is tinged with complacency and humbug: only a few letters reveal that this is not the best of all possible worlds. He readily and unquestioningly adopts the attitudes and conventions of the affluent and leisured class which he adorned. Social and cultural trivialities occupy him inordinately, and indeed his worst anxiety is lest public duties should distract him from the pleasures of friendship and study'.

<sup>83</sup> Morello (2007) on the idea of inclusivity in Pliny's letters.

<sup>84</sup> Sherwin-White (1966).

<sup>85</sup> Guillemin (1929).

some scholars mostly focused on the intertextual texture of the work, seeking to demonstrate the ways in which the Younger is often constructing elegant and complex webs of intertextual connection with the works of other authors.<sup>86</sup> Whitton's recent study of the importance of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoris* for the *Epistles* demonstrates, on a large scale, the ways in which an extended intertextual relationship can operate through a series of subtle moments and gestures in the Younger's writing.<sup>87</sup> In this study, I am not attempting to prove such a concrete intertextual relationship. Rather, I wish to consider how the inter-connected lives of two men might open up possibilities for reading their texts alongside one another in a more sustained manner.

As far as my own position on this question goes, I do not think it implausible that Pliny may have had a genuine correspondence with many of the people mentioned in the collection. We know that the practice of circulating literary works among friends and acquaintances was common among elite Roman men, and it seems entirely sensible that Pliny would also have been involved in such practices.<sup>88</sup> However, I also think that we cannot overstate the highly clever, crafted and conscious nature of the *Epistles* and must approach them on their own terms, as a work designed to stimulate intellectual thought and one that wanted readers to appreciate the intelligence of the work and its author, something that was often achieved through complex literary games.

Another trend in more recent literary scholarship on the *Epistles* has focused on Pliny's self-presentation in the work, arguing that one of the Younger's main aims in his text was to construct a portrait of himself to be preserved for posterity.<sup>89</sup> Of course, perhaps the most significant context in which to read the *Epistles*, and this thread of self-presentation in particular, concerns the transition from the end of the Flavian dynasty to a new regime under Nerva and Trajan. The question of Domitian's reign and the role of Pliny, and other notable Trajanic authors, during it has exercised many scholars in recent years. This aspect of Plinian

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<sup>86</sup> Into this category would fall e.g. Whitton (2013) for commentary on Book Two, (2010) on *Ep.* 8.14, (2015a) on textual structures in the *Epistles*; Marchesi (2008), Gibson and Morello (2012). Pucci (1998) on allusion in literature more broadly.

<sup>87</sup> Whitton (2019), see also *id.* (2018) also on Quintilian, (2012) on Pliny and Tacitus. Contrast Cova (2003).

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. Johnson (2010) *passim* on reading practices in the Roman empire, 32-62 on Pliny.

<sup>89</sup> E.g. Ludolph (1997), Henderson (2002c), especially Ch. 2.

scholarship necessarily intersects with much recent historical work on the shift from the Flavian emperors to Nerva and Trajan, and the way in which this change in regime was presented in the political discourse of the time, often shaped by those who had played active roles in politics at the time.<sup>90</sup> As scholars have shown, Domitian is often a shadowy presence in the background of the *Epistles*, with the Younger's full condemnation of the assassinated emperor reserved for his *Panegyricus*, his speech of thanks (a *gratiarum actio*) dedicated to Trajan. Much Plinian scholarship, therefore, considers how the Younger is always walking a careful line in the *Epistles*, seeking to present himself in the best possible light, and as a blameless victim who had only suffered, rather than succeeded, during the reign of the last Flavian emperor.<sup>91</sup> The recent volume edited by König and Whitton, *Roman Literature under Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian: Literary Interactions, AD 96-138*, demonstrates the ways authors at this time approached this change in regime from multiple angles, as well as providing a broader insight into literary texts of the period.<sup>92</sup>

As I will explore in more detail later in this study, *Epistles* 10, Pliny's correspondence with Trajan, has long occupied a somewhat ambiguous, and often contested, space in Plinian studies. Opinions have ranged from those who see it as a completely unedited correspondence, which therefore represents good evidence of a genuine dialogue between emperor and governor, to those who want to see a more literary tone and texture to the book.<sup>93</sup> I would be inclined to side with the scholars who see some of the careful construction and strategic self-presentation of *Epistles* 1-9 present in the tenth book, too. Although *Epistles* 10 is clearly set aside from the previous nine books by several important differences, and it does seem even more likely than the rest of the *Epistles* to have a genuine correspondence at its heart, the analyses of scholars that demonstrate visible signs of editing and structuring of the book seem to me to be convincing. I am, therefore, certainly not opposed to readings of *Epistles* 10 that look for literary features, including intertextual references, among its pages.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See e.g. Cordes (2014), Geisthardt (2015).

<sup>91</sup> See e.g. Whitton (2010), Penwill (2015), Fitzgerald (2018) on Pliny and Martial.

<sup>92</sup> König and Whitton (eds.) (2018).

<sup>93</sup> On this point, see nn. 387-90.

<sup>94</sup> E.g. Gibson and Morello (2012) 260-264 on *Ep.* 1.1, Book Ten and Ovid.

As regards the *Panegyricus*, for a long time the speech suffered from a negative reception by its later critical readers. The speech was often seen (and perhaps, by some, still is seen) as dull, overblown and sycophantic.<sup>95</sup> More recent work on the speech has perhaps been a little more generous, taking into account the multiple literary and political strategies at work in the text.<sup>96</sup> The *Panegyricus* is, of course, a very valuable resource when it comes to analysing the strategies and discourse surrounding a change in regime, as mentioned above. It is also a striking text, filled with unusual imagery and language, to which I will turn later in this discussion. Especially relevant to this study is the fact that the *Panegyricus* contains the most extensive descriptions of Rome to be found anywhere in the Younger's texts. Paul Roche's work on Rome's monuments, as presented by the Younger in the speech, is particularly useful for its demonstration of the importance of a textual re-shaping of the city following a change in emperor, as it provided an immediacy that could not be matched by physical changes.<sup>97</sup> The natural world also features fairly prominently in the speech, since Trajan's suitability as emperor is frequently demonstrated through his connection with nature, and interest in outdoor pursuits.<sup>98</sup>

With a few notable exceptions, scholarship on the Younger has tended to slice his corpus into three, treating each of the parts (*Epistles* 1-9, *Epistles* 10, and the *Panegyricus*) separately and rarely considering the entire corpus as a whole.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, in this study, I aim to take in all parts of the Younger's body of work, in order to appreciate connections between them in greater detail. I hope that by doing this, not only will a greater number of links emerge between the various parts of the Younger's writings, but also that a more holistic approach will make external relationships with other texts more visible, including the relationship between the Younger's works and the Elder's *Natural History*.

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<sup>95</sup> See e.g. Goodyear (1982) 660: 'Nevertheless it has fallen, not undeservedly, into almost universal contempt. Pliny would have been wiser if he had not expanded and developed the more simple version actually delivered in the Senate (*Epist.* 3.18.1).'

<sup>96</sup> Roche (2011b), Manolaraki (2008). Additionally, the special edition of *Arethusa* entitled *Pliny the Younger in Late Antiquity* (2013), edited by Gibson and Rees, contains several articles on the enduring influence of the *Panegyricus* on later authors.

<sup>97</sup> Roche (2011b).

<sup>98</sup> See e.g. Manolaraki (2008) on the sea in the *Panegyricus*, (2012) on hunting scenes in the speech.

<sup>99</sup> The analysis of Gibson and Morello (2012) is a notable exception for treating *Epistles* 10, as well as 1-9.

## Thesis Outline

This thesis will fall into two main sections, the first dealing with the natural world and the second with architecture. The first chapter, *Landscape*, will look at the way both authors construct landscape, and by extension the world, in their respective works. Here I focus on the second book of the *Natural History*, on the shape of the universe and the elements, reading it alongside passages from the Younger's work, in particular his *Panegyricus*. In doing so, I will consider the similarities and differences in the way the two authors build worlds with and in their texts, and I will explore how their different, but parallelable, political contexts interact with one another. In the second chapter, *The Body*, I look at the presentation of bodies and the use of bodily imagery by both authors. Beginning with the *Natural History* and the Elder's use of corporeal imagery, I explore how he makes use of this imagery to both explain and celebrate the natural world, while also condemning human excess. Specifically, I explore how these images centre on the vulnerability of bodily boundaries, often a source of celebration when it comes to the natural world and its processes, but one of fear and danger when it is linked with human excess. I then move to consider the topic of bodily vulnerability in the Younger's *Epistles*. Whereas in the Elder's text, bodily vulnerability can be presented as a symptom of moral decline, for the Younger, it becomes a sign of moral rectitude, used by the Younger as a sign of the suffering he and his contemporaries had endured during the reign of Domitian.

In the second section, I turn to architecture. I begin with *Domestic Architecture*, in which I consider how both authors present domestic space in their texts. I take as my starting point nests and nest-like spaces from the works of the Elder and the Younger, taking in the Elder's descriptions of birds' nests, as well as his passages on famous trees and tree-houses, before moving to the Younger's work, where we find the word 'nest' (*nidus*) used to suggest intimate connections with their occupants, something which the Younger can use to his advantage in a political sense. His treatment of domestic space more generally often shows a connection with scenes of illness and death, scenes which once more the Younger can use to suggest close personal relationships with politically significant figures. The final chapter, *Public Space*, focuses on the tenth book of the *Epistles*. Both authors use depictions of public spaces to negotiate their relationship to imperial power and its structures, albeit in very different ways.

For the Elder, his presentations of public spaces celebrate examples of public architecture that fulfil utilitarian functions in keeping with the ideology of the Flavian regime. For the Younger, the negotiation of public space and imperial power operates on both an immediate level, as he corresponds directly with the emperor on a series of problematic building projects found in his new province and an ideological one, as he positions himself as an important part of the new Trajanic regime.<sup>100</sup> By reading the two texts alongside one another, we may better appreciate points of contact between the two, and therefore perhaps approach the question of the literary status of *Epistles* 10 from a different perspective.

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<sup>100</sup> Roller (2001) Ch. 4 on ways of modelling the relationship between emperor and subject, 257-272 on Pliny.

## Chapter One: Landscapes

### Introduction

For both the Elder and the Younger, landscapes formed an important part of their respective textual projects, albeit in very different ways. Of course, for the Elder, writing a natural history, space and place are the basis of much of the work's content. However, scholars have also demonstrated the importance of place and landscape for the Younger's works.<sup>101</sup> The topic of landscape in the *Natural History* in particular is a vast one. The philosophical significance of the Elder's landscapes, as well as the ways in which they bolster the Elder's narrative of Roman imperial power and his condemnation of *luxuria*, have been explored in detail.<sup>102</sup> Here, then, I intend to focus on some specific elements of the Elder's landscapes. In this chapter, I will explore some points of contact between landscapes from the Elder and the Younger's works, in order to examine the ways in which the Younger may have made use of features of the Elder's work in the construction of his own textual world. On the surface at least, the more bounded and contained landscapes of the *Epistles*, enclosed by their epistolary form as well as their subject, would appear very different from the open, sprawling landscapes of the Elder's work. However, I hope here to show that there may be more contact between the two than first appears. First, I will explore how both authors present landscapes as constantly changing and changeable in their works. Both authors play with shape and scale in their text, reshaping and distorting the landscapes of their texts in order to serve the aims of their respective projects. I will then move to consider the connection between landscape and portraiture in both authors' works.

### Changing Landscapes, Changing Worlds: *Natural History* 2 and the *Panegyricus*

In the Younger's *Panegyricus*, his speech of thanks given to Trajan in 100 CE, Pliny presents a world left shaken by the events of the recent past. Making frequent use of images of spatial change and disruption in his text, Pliny presents Trajan as simultaneously renovating and revitalising the empire and also as providing some much-needed stability after the decidedly

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<sup>101</sup> E.g. Méthy (2009) for Pliny's construction of the geography of the Roman Empire, Gibson (2020) for the use of place as a structuring tool in a biography of the Younger.

<sup>102</sup> E.g. Beagon (1992), Carey (2003), Murphy (2004).

negative disruption caused by Domitian's reign. The work's preoccupation with instability is perceptible not only in the contrasting portraits of the two emperors, but also in its landscapes, which repeatedly shift and change in accordance with the political change Pliny discusses.<sup>103</sup> Here, I explore the possibility that the Younger takes inspiration for elements of the world of the *Panegyricus* from the Elder Pliny's *Natural History*. In particular, I will argue for similarities between the environment he constructs in the *Panegyricus*, and his portrait of Trajan in the speech, and the second book of the *Natural History*. This book is focused on the Elder Pliny's conception of the world and the universe and includes his views on the shape of the earth, the elements and their properties and behaviours, as well as a selection of natural phenomena.<sup>104</sup>

The picture that emerges of the universe in the Elder's work is one which features both stability and chaos, simultaneously certain and wavering (*omnium rerum certus et similis incerto*, 2.2). Pliny's picture of the universe draws on a number of influences, including that of Stoic philosophy, which is often preoccupied with instability and flux.<sup>105</sup> Scholarly responses to Pliny's philosophical leanings have varied, but Beagon's assessment of Pliny's Stoic tendencies as 'not the carefully worked-through theorizing of the specialist philosopher', but rather 'the general background knowledge of a well-educated man' seems a fair one.<sup>106</sup> A pair of articles by Miriam Griffin explores the relationship the Elder and Younger had with philosophy and philosophical works. She makes the interesting point that of the two authors, it

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<sup>103</sup> I explored Pliny's images of spatial instability in the *Panegyricus* in my Cambridge MPhil thesis (2016). Here, therefore, I will not treat the subject in detail. Although I discuss some of the same passages here, in that piece of work I did not discuss the potential for a connection with the *Natural History*, which is my focus here.

<sup>104</sup> On which, see Wallace-Hadrill (1990); Henderson (2011b). Cf. Herbert-Brown (2007) on astronomy in Pliny and his rejection of astrology.

<sup>105</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 84, on the Posidonian idea of cosmic sympathy as 'explicitly invoked' here.

<sup>106</sup> Beagon (2005) 15: 'Pliny's Stoicism, however, was not the carefully worked-through theorizing of the specialist philosopher; it was the general background knowledge of a well-educated man, a world-view in effect almost unconsciously absorbed and displayed. As such, it acts as a valuable indication of educated attitudes generally'. Cf. *ead.* (1992), Paparazzo (2011) *passim* and 106: 'I am not maintaining that he was an adept, scholarly competent follower of Stoicism. However, as a member of the Roman upper-class of the first century AD, he was inevitably exposed to the appeal of this doctrine, which was the dominant philosophy at Rome in his day, and his training in grammatical studies must have provided him with further, straightforward technical knowledge of it.'; 110-111. Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 84: 'Philosophically, Pliny's science is squarely based on the sort of Stoic ideas fashionable in Rome at this period, and particularly associated with Posidonius.'



is the Younger who engages more explicitly with philosophical questions.<sup>107</sup> Despite this fact, when it comes to the landscapes found in these texts, those of the *Natural History* would seem to offer up more material immediately recognisable as Stoic in nature.

As scholars have noted, there was a similarity between the political situations faced by the Elder and the Younger during their lifetimes.<sup>108</sup> For the Elder, this was the violent end of Nero's reign, followed by a period of civil war and the establishment of a new, Flavian, regime. For the Younger, it was the similarly bloody end to the Flavian dynasty as Domitian, following his so-called 'reign of terror', was subsequently assassinated by his own guards.<sup>109</sup> Considering these parallel political situations may sharpen our appreciation of commonalities between the two authors' works, particularly when we turn to the physical worlds of the texts under consideration here.

In a famous passage from Book Two, where the Elder Pliny outlines his conception of divinity, he also makes reference to Vespasian's role in rescuing an 'exhausted empire':<sup>110</sup>

deus est mortali iuvare mortalem, et haec ad aeternam gloriam via: hac procures iere Romani, hac nunc caelesti passu cum liberis suis vadit maximus omnis aevi rector Vespasianus Augustus fessis rebus subveniens. (*NH* 2.18)

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<sup>107</sup> On the Younger Pliny's relationship with philosophy, see Griffin (2007a) *passim*. Griffin (2007b) 88: 'It is important to note that the language of the Elder Pliny already hints that he has less interest than his nephew in the adherents and teaching of the standard Greek philosophical schools, and even that philosophers in the ordinary sense occupy a less prominent place on his mental landscape than on that of his nephew.'

<sup>108</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2002b) 283-284.

<sup>109</sup> There is a considerable amount of scholarship on Domitian's so-called 'Reign of Terror', as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, but see e.g. Beutel (2000), Haynes (2006); Flower (2006).

<sup>110</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 82-83; 83: 'These thoughts underpin Pliny's own conception of what he is doing: he is both performing an act of worship, of gratitude in describing the works of nature, and at the same time, we may suspect, he is himself aspiring to the divine by helping his fellow mortals.' Cf. Naas (2002) 94: 'Voulant définir le terme *deus*, Pline le caractérise par son action, aider les hommes, et en donne comme exemple Vespasien. Ainsi, l'empereur flavien s'inspire du divin et de la nature dans l'exercice de sa fonction.' On the motif of tiredness in post-Domitianic authors, see e.g., Haynes (2006) 152-4 on the motif of lost voices in Tacitus, as well as the idea of Domitian's reign as a kind of death, Whitton (2010) on *Ep.* 8.14.

God is people helping one another, and this the road to eternal glory: Roman leaders went by this route, now by the same path, with a heavenly step, together with his children goes the greatest ruler of all time, Vespasian, coming to the aid of an exhausted world. (trans. adapted from Rackham)

Pliny's alignment of his *Natural History* with Flavian ideology and the imperial family has been explored by many scholars.<sup>111</sup> In particular, Valérie Naas sees the political aspect of the Elder's work as a fundamental part of its form and function, arguing that the return to traditional imperial and Augustan values with which the Flavians aligned themselves is visible throughout the *Natural History*.<sup>112</sup> Here, as Pliny describes the deification of Vespasian, we find the celebration of this event combined with the image of Vespasian coming to the rescue of the empire.<sup>113</sup> In this description of divinity, defined by the Elder as mortals helping one another, Vespasian becomes the ultimate helper, taking on the burdens of a wearied universe. As Beagon has noted, there is also an important spatial element to the political message of the *Natural History*, which we see here as Vespasian's journey to deification is mapped out in the language of a physical journey through space (*via...caelesti passu...vadit*).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> E.g. Beagon (2005) 6-7 and 6: 'In its final form, however, the *HN* is in many ways a product of the Flavian era, the work of an author in sympathy with the general tone of imperial policies. In his comments on the Flavians and their imperial predecessors, Pliny articulates the emphases and attitudes promulgated by the new regime.'

<sup>112</sup> Naas (2002), e.g. 53: 'L'aspect politique de l'*HN* n'est plus à démontrer: on connaît l'amitié de Pline pour Titus, son compagnon d'armes, et l'on verra que Pline affiche dans son oeuvre son parti-pris en faveur des Flaviens et qu'il soutient leur légitimité en les plaçant dans la continuité d'Auguste, par opposition avec Néron. L'*HN* est émaillée de prises de position envers les empereurs, les jugements le plus critiques allant à Caligula et à Néron. La dédicace à Titus renforce cet éclairage politique et fait de l'encyclopédie plinienne un inventaire de l'Empire que l'auteur offre à celui qui en sera bientôt le maître. Ainsi, dans l'*HN* se retrouvent plusieurs phénomènes d'origine politique: l'encyclopédie se situe dans la lignée du contrôle de l'Empire systématisé par Auguste et dont elle serait un pendant culturel. Ce bilan constitue également une réponse à la volonté manifestée par les Flaviens de reprendre en main l'Empire après les bouleversements néroniens et les guerres civiles et de renouer avec les bases augustéennes du pouvoir.'

<sup>113</sup> On Vespasian as an ideal Stoic ruler, see Beagon (2005) 6-7.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 23: 'Titus is also representative of totality on a spatial level; with his father, he controlled a world empire. The totality of the *HN*'s enterprise has an important spatial aspect, in that the work reflects a contemporary vision of Roman imperial expansion. Rome's control of the spatial and conceptual totality of empire was frequently expressed through the itemizing of its individual components in a collective format focused on the city itself.'

The image of an emperor rescuing a fatigued empire bears resemblance to the situation the Younger sets up in the *Panegyricus*, where Trajan rescues an empire which is not only tired but threatening to collapse, after the wounds left by not only the reign of Domitian, but also the military coup under Nerva:

confugit in sinum tuum concussa res publica, ruensque imperium super imperatorem imperatoris tibi voce delatum est. *Pan.* 6.3-4

The country reeled under its blows to take refuge in your embrace; the empire which was falling with its emperor was put into your hands at the emperor's word... (trans. Radice)

In the *Panegyricus*, Pliny's image of Trajan rescuing the empire is a recurrent theme, through which he emphasises the damage done to both Rome and its citizens by Domitian's reign. The use of imagery of spatial instability to discuss political uncertainty is by no means unique to Pliny, but here we can see a clear similarity between the figures of Vespasian in the Elder's text and Trajan in the Younger's.<sup>115</sup> In both passages, the emperor is presented as appearing at the right moment to save the empire following a period of turbulent uncertainty.

Both authors also explore how political turbulence could affect, among other things, the landscape of knowledge and scholarship. In two notable passages, we see the Elder Pliny express his surprise at the endurance of forms of study such as meteorology:

quo magis miror orbe discordi et in regna, hoc est in membra, diviso tot viris curae fuisse tam ardua inventu, inter bella praesertim et infida hospitia, piratis etiam omnium mortalium hostibus transituros fama terrentibus, ut hodie quaedam in suo quisque tractu ex eorum commentariis qui numquam eo accessere verius noscat quam indigenarum scientia, nunc vero pace tam festa, tam gaudente proventu litterarum artiumque principe, omnino nihil addisci nova inquisitione, immo ne veterum quidem inventa perdisci. *NH* 2.117-118.

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. e.g. Juvenal's Third *Satire*, Larmour (2016), on Juvenal, the city of Rome and Roman identity.

This makes me all the more surprised that, although when the world was at variance, and split up into kingdoms, that is, sundered limb from limb, so many people devoted themselves to these abstruse researches, especially when wars surrounded them and hosts were untrustworthy, and also when rumours of pirates, the foes of all mankind, terrified intending travellers – so that now-a-days a person may learn some facts about his own region from the note-books of people who have never been there more truly than from the knowledge of those who live there – yet now in these glad times of peace under an emperor who so delights in productions of literature and science, no addition whatever is being made to knowledge by means of original research, and in fact even the discoveries of our predecessors are not being thoroughly studied. (trans. slightly adapted from Rackham)

non erant maiora praemia in multos dispersa fortunae magnitudine, et ista plures sine praemio alio quam posteros iuvandi eruerunt. mores hominum senuere, non fructus, et inmensa multitudo aperto quodcumque est mari hospitalique litorum omnium adpulsu navigat, sed lucri, non scientiae, gratia; nec reputat caeca mens et tantum avaritiae intenta id ipsum scientia posse tutius fieri. *NH* 2.118.

The rewards were not greater when the ample successes were spread out over many students, and in fact the majority of these made the discoveries in question with no other reward at all save the consciousness of benefiting posterity. Age has overtaken the characters of mankind, not their revenues, and now that every sea has been opened up and every coast offers a hospitable landing, an immense multitude goes on voyages – but their object is profit not knowledge; and in their blind engrossment with avarice they do not reflect that knowledge is a more reliable means even of making profit. (trans. Rackham)

Pliny here tells us that it is unsurprising that people relied so much on these forms of study in times of strife and discord.<sup>116</sup> The language used at the start of this passage is jarringly violent, as Pliny describes the division of the world into kingdoms in the language of dismemberment (*quo magis miror orbe discordi et in regna, hoc est in membra, diviso tot viris curae fuisse tam*

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<sup>116</sup> On the forms of study emphasised in the *NH* and, in particular, its rejection of the liberal arts in favour of more practical areas of study, see Pedersen (1986).

*ardua inventu...*), mirroring the violence of the discord that drove people to seek solace in such disciplines in the past. In this passage, Pliny laments that in the current age of peace, the progress of scientific discovery has stalled.<sup>117</sup> However, this is not due to the current emperor, Pliny is at pains to tell us, who takes great interest in such discoveries (*tam gaudente proventu litterarum artiumque principe*), but to mankind's current obsession with profit (*sed lucri, non scientiae, gratia*). Specifically, Pliny describes how it is this greed, rather than a desire for scientific discovery, which has motivated people to open up the world through sea travel.<sup>118</sup>

Here, therefore, we have a good, peace-bringing emperor and an open world, but this has, paradoxically, led to the stagnation of scientific study. Here the collective mind and intellect of mankind has become unseeing, even though more of the world is available to be viewed than ever before.<sup>119</sup> Conversely, in the *Panegyricus*, a good emperor and an open world have led to a renewed interest in study. Trajan's accession has led to the resurrection of *studia* (*ut sub te spiritum et sanguinem et patriam receperunt studia!*, *Pan.* 47.1), an important theme for

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<sup>117</sup> On the complexity of this question of decline, see Beagon (2007) 36-37: 'Pliny's text does not, then, support the idea either that the spirit of inquiry was dwindling as opposed to narrowing in focus, or that nature itself was in terminal decline. But if the overall image is one of timelessness and eternity, that of the individual *mirabilia* is one of transience. Live ones die and dead ones decay, to be replaced by others. Even the elemental and meteorological phenomena are in a state of continual flux, never the same from one day to the next.' See also Beagon (1992) 177-201 on the ambiguous nature of the sea in the *NH*, especially 180-3 on the validity of motives for sea travel.

<sup>118</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 85-90 on luxury and nature in the *NH* more generally; 89: 'I hope I have said enough to show that Pliny's declamations on luxury cannot be treated as excrescences in the *Natural History*. They form an essential part of the argument, the underpinning and justification for his scientific labours.'; 90-92 on luxury and social order; 92-96 for its role in Greco-Roman identity. On Pliny's pessimistic view of humanity, see Naas (2002) 297: 'Une certain pessimisme sur le malheur de la condition humaine parcourt toute l'*HN*: l'enthousiasme de Pline pour le genre humain s'assortit d'une condamnation récurrente de la cupidité et de l'immortalité des hommes. Il s'agit alors d'un *topos* moral où Pline oppose la décadence des mœurs récentes aux qualités des Anciens. Ainsi, loin de décrire objectivement la nature et de soumettre tous ses domaines au même regard, Pline laisse apparaître ses propres jugements dans la manière même dont il compose les différents livres de l'*HN* et dont il traite leur sujet.'

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Saylor (1982) on The Younger's *Ep.* 8.20 and the expansion of the world leading to a tendency for people to overlook what is in front of them. Cf. Ash (2018) 139-140 on the relationship between 8.20 and the *Natural History*.

the lives and works of the two authors.<sup>120</sup> Fittingly, it is the divine breath, which held up the universe in the *Natural History*, which the Younger here uses to describe the revival of learning under Trajan.<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, in the world of the *Panegyricus*, Trajan has also opened up the landscape, particularly via the sea, through the bestowal of Roman citizenship, and through trade. However, unlike in the *Natural History*, this is untainted by connotations of problematic greed, as Trajan is seen to unite previously disparate places with his new programme of imperial beneficence.<sup>122</sup>

magnificum, Caesar, et tuum disiunctissimas terras munificentiae ingenio velut admovere, immensaue spatia liberalitate contrahere, intercedere casibus occursare fortunae...*Pan.* 25.5

It was your special distinction, Caesar, to join, as it were, far distant lands by the ingenuity of your generosity, to contract vast spaces in the exercise of your liberality, to overcome hazards and oppose fortune... (trans. Radice)

nec vero ille civilius quam parens noster auctoritate consilio fide reclisit vias portus patefecit, itinera terris litoribus mare litora mari reddidit, diversasque gentes ita commercio miscuit... *Pan.* 29.2

Herein he [Pompey] proved himself no finer citizen than our Father, who in his wisdom and authority and devotion to his people has opened roads, built harbours, created routes overland, let the sea into the shore and moved the shore out to sea, and linked far distant peoples by trade... (trans. Radice)

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<sup>120</sup> On *Epistles* 3.5, see Henderson (2002c); Gibson and Morello (2012) 106-126; Gibson (2011) 195-203. Pliny makes repeated reference to the stalling of his political and literary careers during the reign of Domitian and whose surviving work most likely dates from after Domitian's death – on the dating of the *Epistles*, see e.g. Whitton (2013) 15-16; Bodel (2015) on the publication and arrangement of Pliny's *Epistles*; On the question of Pliny's career under Domitian, see e.g. Bartsch (1994) 167-169, Roche (2011a) 20, Penwill (2015), Whitton (2015b).

<sup>121</sup> See Pedersen (1986) 175.

<sup>122</sup> On the philosophical significance of liberality in Pliny, see Griffin (2007a) 469-474.

In these examples, we find Trajan altering and opening up the landscape. Changes to the landscape as a result of imperial activity and expansion were evidently not unambivalent for Roman authors.<sup>123</sup> However, in these examples, Pliny is at pains to stress that the consequences of Trajan's alterations of the landscape are universally beneficial. Trajan has been able to break down boundaries through his generous foreign policy, in which not only are geographical boundaries collapsed, but so too are the social barriers which divide people (*diversasque gentes ita commercio miscuit*). Trajan thus reshapes the landscape not only in terms of its physical landscapes but also in terms of the people who populate these landscapes. We find in these examples images of simultaneous expansion and contraction, as Trajan both draws together previously disparate peoples and places and throws open roads and ports to create an enlarged world.

Intriguingly, we might also observe a parallel between this depiction of Trajan's effect on the landscape and another passage from the Elder's work, from Book Three. In this passage, the Elder is introducing his discussion of the geography of Italy. He gives a brief outline of the places or peoples who make up Italy, before reflecting on the fact that this is an inadequate treatment of the subject:

nec ignoro ingrati ac segnis animi existimari posse merito si obiter atque in transcurso ad hunc modum dicatur terra omnium terrarum alumna eadem et parens, numine deum electa quae caelum ipsum clarius faceret, sparsa congregaret imperia ritusque molliret et tot populorum discordes ferasque linguas sermonis commercio contraheret ad colloquia et humanitatem homini daret, breviterque una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria fieret. *NH* 3.39-40

I am well aware that I may with justice be considered ungrateful and lazy if I describe in this casual and cursory manner a land which is at once the nursling and the mother of all other lands, chosen by the providence of the gods to make heaven itself more glorious, to unite scattered empires, to make manners gentle, to draw together in converse by community of language the jarring and uncouth tongues of so many

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<sup>123</sup> See e.g. Pelling (2006) on Julius Caesar.

nations, to give mankind civilisation, and in a word to become throughout the world the single fatherland of all the races. (trans. Rackham)

Many of the attributes that the Elder assigns to Italy here are also present in the Younger's presentation of Trajan discussed above. The Elder's vision of Italy, and consequently of Roman imperial power, is also shown as bringing together geographically distant places and peoples. His presentation of Italy as divinely chosen also bears comparison with the Younger's presentation of Trajan in the *Panegyricus*, where the term *electus* also takes on an additional significance in the context of Trajan's adoption by Nerva. The term *sermonis commercium*, used here to express the unifying, or totalising, potential of Italy's power, echoes the more financial *commercium* used by Trajan in the passage above. As has been explored, the Elder's depiction of Italy possessed a deeper political significance, looking back to the policies and ideology of Augustan Rome.<sup>124</sup> This passage, then, would seem a good place for the Younger to look in his construction of the Trajanic landscape in the *Panegyricus*.

Returning now to the second book of the *Natural History*, the other side of this image of global unification through empire was a picture of a natural landscape that was subject to internal discord.<sup>125</sup> As Murphy notes, 'In the *Natural History*, geography makes most sense when it is narrated, and the favourite narrative is the spectacle, the fight in the arena, the battle of nature (*dimicatio naturae*)'.<sup>126</sup> A notable passage in which this preoccupation with conflict is visible is found in Book Two:

sic ultro citro conmeante natura ut tormento aliquo mundi celeritate discordia accenditur nec stare pugnae licet, sed adsidue rapta convolvitur et circa terram inmenso rerum causas globo ostendit, subinde per nubes caelum aliud atque aliud obtexens. *NH* 2.104.

Thus as nature swings to and fro like a kind of sling, discord is kindled by the velocity of the world's motion. Nor is the battle allowed to stand still, but is continually carried

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<sup>124</sup> Bispham (2007). Cf. Bergmann (2001) on Italy and allusive landscapes, with reference to the work of Pausanias.

<sup>125</sup> See Murphy (2004) 148-149.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 151.



up and whirled round, displaying in an immense globe that encircles the world the causes of things, continually overspreading another and another heaven interwoven with the clouds. (trans. Rackham)

In this famous passage, where Pliny compares the movement of the universe to that of a sling (*ut tormento*), we see his picture of the universe as one which is characterised by both constant movement and violence. As in the examples considered above, here too there is constant revolution (*adsidue...convolvitur*), which serves to generate further discord in the universe (*...mundi celeritate discordia accenditur nec stare pugnae licet*). The workings of the universe (*rerum causas*) are displayed in the ever-swirling nexus of conflict and change that makes up the universe in the *Natural History*.<sup>127</sup>

Landscapes of and in conflict also appear in the *Panegyricus*, whether it is in discussion of Trajan's military career and the role of landscape in these conflicts, or in the interaction between Trajan and Domitian and the landscape of Rome. In one such passage, Pliny praises Trajan's restraint in pausing at the Danube, even though he would have been sure of victory had he crossed (16.2-4).<sup>128</sup> Pliny then goes on to supply a contrastive image of what would happen if Trajan had chosen to invade:

quodsi quis barbarus rex eo insolentia furorisque processerit, ut iram tuam indignationemque mereatur, ne ille sive interfuso mari seu fluminibus immensis seu praecipiti monte defenditur, omnia haec tam prona tamque cedentia virtutibus tuis sentiet, ut subsedissemontes, flumina exaruisse, interceptum mare inlatasque sibi non classes nostras sed terras ipsas arbitretur. *Pan.* 16.5

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. *NH.* 30.13, on the universal popularity of magic across the world, despite the conflicts that happen in it (*adeo ista toto mundo consensere quamquam discordi et sibi ignoto.*) and the great service the Romans have done in eradicating it; *NH.* 31.2 on the power of water (*terras devorant aquae, flammis necant, scandunt in sublime et caelum quoque sibi vindicant ac nubium obtentu vitalem spiritum strangulant, quae causa fulmina elidit, ipso secum discordante mundo.*)

<sup>128</sup> Henderson (2011a) 158: 'The line is drawn at the Danube bank between crossing over to glory-hunt a triumph (*transeas*, 16.2) à la Domitianic mock-up, and [17] waiting in beautiful Trajanic non-aggression for the real thing to come, with mighty chieftains' names on display (*ingentia ducum nomina nec indecora nominibus corpora*, 17.2).' Cf. Braund (1996) on river frontiers, including the Danube; Dart (2016) on frontiers in the Flavian period.

...but now, if some foreign king shall presume so far in his folly as to call down your just wrath and indignation on his head, though he be defended by the seas between, the mighty rivers or sheer mountains, he will surely find that all these barriers yield and fall away before your prowess, and will fancy that the mountains have subsided, the rivers dried up and the sea drained off, while his country falls a victim not only to our fleets, but to the natural forces of the earth! (trans. slightly adapted from Radice)

Here, the landscape has again become combative, but the connotations are not negative. The landscape becomes another soldier in the service of Trajan's aims, as the Younger emphasises the harmony between Trajan and the natural world. Unlike the image of civil war found in the Elder's depiction of nature (*ipso secum discordante mundo*, NH 31.2), here we find the landscape participating in conflict without negative moral connotations. What is more, whereas in the Elder's text the openness of the landscape is somewhat ambivalent, bringing with it a certain amount of inertia as well as peace, here the changes to the landscape are presented as positive and dynamic.

To conclude this section of the discussion, I will turn from these landscapes of chaos and movement to the stabilising forces at their centre. As has been explored, for the Elder there was a constant tension between the fluidity and mutability of his subject matter and the structure imposed by his textual project, and by the perceived fixity of Roman imperial power.<sup>129</sup> As part of his discussion of the universe, the Elder Pliny describes the positions and qualities of the four elements. His discussion of the varying weights and physical properties of the elements suggests a tension between instability and solidity which runs throughout the passage (*meabilem...suspensam...ne ruant suspendi levibus in sublime tendentibus... inquieto... mundi... circuitu... volubile universitate...pendent...errantia*, NH 2.10-12). Pliny depicts the earth as held suspended by the force of *spiritus*, the divine breath which Pliny tells us is a vital force, and one which spreads throughout and supports the entire universe.<sup>130</sup>

It is the constant reciprocal tension between the light and heavy elements, Pliny tells us, which holds the universe in balance (*ita mutuo complexu diversitatis effici nexum...* NH 2.11).

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<sup>129</sup> See e.g. Carey (2003), Murphy (2004) for Pliny's negotiation of Roman imperial power.

<sup>130</sup> On the similarity between air in Pliny's picture of the elements, and the Stoic *pneuma*, see Pedersen (1986) 175; Beagon (2007) 25 and *passim*.

This image of a universe in constant motion and upheaval is later contrasted with Pliny's description of the sun in the same passage. In contrast with the constant movement of the elements, the sun is presented as a calming, solidifying force in the universe.

eorum medius sol fertur amplissima magnitudine ac potestate, nec temporum modo terrarumque sed siderum etiam ipsorum caelique rector. hunc esse mundi totius animum ac planius mentem, hunc principale naturae regimen ac numen credere decet opera eius aestimantes. hic lucem rebus ministrat aufertque tenebras, hic reliqua sidera occultat inlustrat, hic vices temporum annumque semper renascentem ex usu naturae temperat, hic caeli tristitiam discutit atque etiam humani nubila animi serenat, hic suum lumen ceteris quoque sideribus fenerat, praeclarus, eximius omnia intuens, omnia etiam exaudiens... NH 2.12-13.

In the midst of these moves the sun, whose magnitude and power are the greatest, and who is the ruler not only of the seasons and of the lands, but even of the stars themselves and of the heaven. Taking into account all that he effects, we must believe him to be the soul, or more precisely the mind, of the whole world, the supreme ruling principle and divinity of nature. He furnishes the world with light and removes darkness, he obscures and he illuminates the rest of the stars, he regulates in accord with nature's precedent the changes of the seasons and the continuous re-birth of the year, he dissipates the gloom of heaven and even calms the storm-clouds of the mind of man, he lends his light to the rest of the stars also; he is glorious and pre-eminent, all-seeing and even all-hearing... (trans. Rackham)

Here, the sun is an anthropomorphic, divine being, who brings peace to the turbulent universe. As we might expect, Pliny mentions the conventional power associated with the sun, that of illumination (*hic lucem rebus ministrat aufertque tenebras*). However, he does this by stressing that the sun not only casts physical light, but also brings a form of mental and spiritual clarity (*hic caeli tristitiam discutit atque etiam humani nubila animi serenat*), in keeping with its position as the soul and mind of the world (*hunc esse totius animum ac planius mentem*). Pliny also notes the structure the sun brings to the universe – the sun is an ordering presence, which marks the changes of the seasons and the years (*hic vices temporum annumque semper*

*renascentem ex usu naturae temperat*).<sup>131</sup> The sun is also a benevolent ruler, lending its light to the other stars (*hic suum lumen ceteris quoque sideribus fenerat*).<sup>132</sup>

Association between emperors and the sun in both literary texts and the visual arts was not uncommon in the imperial period, although following the reign of Nero its connotations were somewhat ambivalent.<sup>133</sup> Mary Beagon has written about Pliny's use of solar imagery in Book Twenty Seven of the *Natural History*, in which Pliny compares the Roman people to a second sun.<sup>134</sup> Beagon explores the particular Stoic significance of this imagery, both in Book Twenty Seven and also in the passage quoted above from Book Two:

The Roman people, controlling and guiding the commerce in nature's gifts, is itself equated with nature in terms of beneficence to the human race, but specifically in terms of its world-wide regulatory function. The sun was regarded as the particular embodiment of the divine rationality of the universe in Stoic thought and is called 'the soul and mind of the world, the supreme ruling principle and divinity of nature' in *HN* 2.13. By the first century AD, these Stoic cosmological ideas could add further resonances to a metaphor, originating in Greek political theory and developed under the influence of the Hellenistic philosophical tradition, which described the human ruler as the soul or mind of his people or empire, an embodiment of divine Reason or *Logos*.<sup>135</sup>

She goes on to discuss the importance of solar imagery in Roman imperial ideology and iconography more generally, particularly as concerns the use of this imagery by emperors.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. *Pan.* 58.3 on ordinary people being allowed to be consul again: *contigit ergo privatis aperire annum fastosque reserare, et hoc quoque redditae libertatis indicium fuit quod consul alius quam Caesar esset*.

<sup>132</sup> The verb *fenerare* is quite unusual, as it implies lending money in order to make profit. *L&S s.v.* I for the meaning 'to lend on interest'. The Younger uses the same verb at 3.19.8, as part of his consideration of purchasing an additional property.

<sup>133</sup> See Marlowe (2006) on the Arch of Constantine and the role of Sol later in the empire, Hannah and Magli (2011) 498-502 on the connection between Nero and the sun in the Domus Aurea, Bergmann (2013) 340-351 on the association between Nero and the sun in art, La Rocca (2017) 195-202 on Nero and the sun, Vout (2017) 186-190 on the possible identification of Nero with Apollo in a Campanian wall-painting.

<sup>134</sup> Beagon (2005) 25-27.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 25-29.

Regarding Vespasian's dedication of the Colossus of Nero to the sun god, Beagon claims that Vespasian may have been 'motivated by some consciousness of the philosophical and cosmological imagery which could be applied to the ruler or ruling people, and their empire.'<sup>137</sup> Beagon identifies that the combination of this solar imagery with another popular political simile, the comparison of the emperor with the hero Hercules, was popular with the emperor Augustus, and picked up again in Vespasian's self-representation, which looked back to the Augustan period.<sup>138</sup> Pliny, Beagon notes, draws a comparison between these well-known political images and the Stoic idea of the sun as a calming force.<sup>139</sup>

The Elder's picture of the sun, therefore, clearly forms part of a larger tradition of imagery which connected the sun with concepts of ruling and governance, with significance for both philosophical and political spheres. This imagery was multi-faceted, and different elements could be chosen for emphasis as it suited the purpose of the user. Indeed, this connection was not always a wholly positive one. Domitian, too, had been connected with the sun in both literature and art (...*atque oritur cum sole novo, cum grandibus astris clarius ipse nitens et primo maior Eoo*, *Silv.* 4.1.3-4).<sup>140</sup> McCullough, writing on the comparison of Domitian to the sun in Statius' *Silvae* 4.1, comments:

A vision of the emperor as filled with divine light and of that light appearing where he is not physically present reinforces an impression of an omnipresent and all-seeing divine Domitian; and gazing upon a god in his glory is dangerous. Domitian illuminates

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*: 'But the bringer of order and peace is equally an embodiment of the Stoic sun, which Pliny not only describes as regulating the world (2.13), but even, in a striking metaphor, as "calming the storm-clouds in the mind of man"'. Seneca, in *De Clementia* 1.7, came close to Pliny's parallels between imperial peace and the rule of the sun in the heavens when he compared the quiet, well-ordered *imperium* to a calm and shining sky and political disorder to a storm: in both cases, the implicit contrast is the presence or absence of the sun.'

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Statius *Silv.* 4.1, on which see McCullough (2008) 153-155. Cf. Scott (1933) on Statius praising Domitian as a divine figure. Cordes (2014) on the semiotic concept of 'preferred reading' and its significance for the ways the image of an emperor could be reinterpreted after his death. Cordes looks at how Pliny and other authors reinterpreted Domitianic panegyric to construct their negative pictures of him after his assassination. Cordes (2017) for a more extensive treatment of this strategy.

the world over which he reigns, and can gaze down on it all. But that world cannot gaze at him, for there is a lethal danger in doing so.<sup>141</sup>

Statius compares Domitian to the sun, but this is not the egalitarian sun of the *Natural History* but a dangerously dazzling force, which harms those who look too closely. Writing his speech in praise of Trajan, the *Panegyricus*, only four years after Domitian's assassination, it was this kind of problematic imagery that the Younger Pliny wished to avoid, or at least needed to navigate carefully. Scholars have explored the preoccupation with light and dark which runs through the Younger Pliny's texts, from Roy Gibson's exploration of the dark pessimism which spreads over Book Nine of the *Epistles*, to John Henderson's discussion of Pliny's sun-traps as a sign of his desire for imperial approval in *Ep.* 2.17.<sup>142</sup> In the *Panegyricus*, this fascination with light and dark becomes a juxtaposition of the dark shadows of Domitian's reign with a new age of light and openness brought by Trajan, as explored by Paul Roche in his work on Pliny's presentation of monuments in the *Panegyricus*.<sup>143</sup> In what follows, I would like to explore some potential connections between the Elder's depiction of the sun, and the Younger's depiction of Trajan in the *Panegyricus*. Keen to avoid the painfully dazzling light of Domitian's reign, and the inevitably dark shadows it cast, Pliny needed to find a middle ground.

The Elder's depiction of the sun in the *Natural History* offered just such a middle ground. To begin, I will briefly outline the ways in which Pliny engages with the connection between the sun and the figure of the ruler. First, the image of the ruler as a calming force which features in the Elder's depiction of the sun, and which Beagon identifies as a feature of Stoic thought about ruling is clearly also present in the Younger's speech. Early in the *Panegyricus*, Pliny discusses the period of turbulence that preceded Trajan's accession, particularly the military mutiny which occurred under Nerva. He explains this period of unrest by saying that such a turbulent time was necessary, in order to make the peace brought by Trajan's reign seem all the better when it arrived.<sup>144</sup> Pliny uses the simile of a storm to illustrate this point, saying that the calm after the storm is all the more appreciated because of the tumult that has come before

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<sup>141</sup> McCullough (2008) 154.

<sup>142</sup> Gibson (2015); Henderson (2003) 123.

<sup>143</sup> Roche (2011b), see e.g. 60-66 on the *Domus Flavia*.

<sup>144</sup> See Manolaraki (2008) 375. Henderson (2011a) 149: 'Pliny lays on the spooky atmosphere thick and embellishes the clichés that paint this '~~coup~~' a velvet revolution: storms before calm, the ups and downs of life...'

*(...ac sicut maris caelique temperiem turbines tempestatesque commendant, ita ad augendam pacis tuae gratiam illum tumultum praecessisse crediderim. Pan. 5.8).*<sup>145</sup>

Later, describing Trajan's adoption by Nerva, Pliny claims that all traces of turbulence dissipated the moment Nerva was able to rest the burden of empire on Trajan's shoulders (*statim consedit omnis tumultus*, Pan. 8.5). Trajan is thus presented not only as someone who brings peace after conflict, but specifically, as a figure who does this in a way likened to processes from the natural world. Elsewhere in the work, Pliny engages even more specifically with the ruler-as-sun motif. In his discussion of Trajan's relationship with his soldiers, Pliny compares Trajan to a star:

est haec natura sideribus, ut parva et exilia validorum exortus obscuret: similiter imperatoris adventu legatorum dignitas inumbratur. tu tamen maior quidem omnibus eras, sed sine ullius deminutione maior: eandem auctoritatem praesente te quisque quam absente retinebat; quin etiam plerisque ex eo reverentia accesserat, quod tu quoque illos reverebare. *Pan. 19.1-3*

In the heavens it is natural that the smaller and weaker stars should be overshadowed by the rising of the greater ones, and in the same way an emperor's legates can feel their prestige dimmed when he appears. But you could be greater than all without anyone's suffering from your majesty; no one lost in your presence the authority he had enjoyed before you came, and many found men's regard for them the greater because you shared it too. (trans. Radice)

Like the sun in the Elder's description, Trajan is here likened to the most powerful star in the universe. As with the Elder's sun, which generously shared its light with other stars, the Younger's Trajan does not make others feel inferior because of his majesty, but instead allows the light of his glory to shine on those around him. Once more we find stellar imagery used to express Trajan's generosity and egalitarian nature, so that Pliny's ruler is depicted as not only a good emperor, but one who is chosen and supported by the very fabric of the world.

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. Beagon (2005) 27 on this image in Seneca.

This depiction of Trajan as a star continues throughout the work. In his discussion of the corn-supply, Pliny praises Trajan for not taking excessive amounts of grain from allies:

quippe non ut ex hostico raptae perituraeque in horreis messes nequiquam quiritantibus sociis auferuntur. devehunt ipsi quod terra genuit, quod sidus aluit, quod annus tulit, nec novis indictionibus pressi ad vetera tributa deficiunt; emit fiscus quidquid videtur emere. *Pan.* 29.3-4.

Harvests are not snatched as if from enemy soil to perish in our granaries, carried off from allies who lament in vain; instead, these bring of their own accord the produce of their soil, the year's harvest nurtured by their climate; unburdened by fresh impositions they can meet long-standing obligations, and the imperial exchequer pays openly for its purchases. (trans. Radice)

Like the Elder's sun, the Younger's Trajan has restored order to nature, in that harvests are now being taken in more reasonable quantities and at more reasonable times.<sup>146</sup> Here we find both a practical and a symbolic function in Pliny's words – not only does he praise Trajan's management of the grain and corn supplies as a prudent decision which has resulted in less waste of produce, but by stressing the natural processes involved, he once more links Trajan with these processes and with the natural world. Given what we have seen so far, we might notice this particularly in Pliny's mention of the sun nourishing the grain (*quod sidus aluit*). Trajan, like the sun, is now ensuring that the grain will grow properly, but he will also extend this benefit, in order to ensure that nature's bounties can be shared among as many people as possible.<sup>147</sup> Trajan has here shed illumination on the situation, bringing transparency to the process of grain acquisition.

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<sup>146</sup> Henderson (2011a) 159.

<sup>147</sup> On Trajan and the grain supply more generally, see Manolaraki (2012b) 235-243; 242-3 on the links with Pompey (both the historical figure and the character in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*) in Pliny's discussion of the grain supply. Cf. Hutchinson (2011) 140 on the comparison between Trajan and Pompey: 'Pompey's achievement is matched with deeds of his which themselves rise into sublimity; they grow in space and reach a spatial sublime...'



Elsewhere in the work, Pliny more explicitly compares Trajan to the sun. Following his praise of Trajan's punishment of the *delatores*, he gives approval to Trajan's actions in the following terms:

quae singula quantum tibi gratiae dispensata adiecissent! at tu simul omnia profudisti, ut sol et dies non parte aliqua sed statim totus, nec uni aut alteri sed omnibus in commune profertur. *Pan.* 35.4-5.

Had you dispensed these favours singly our gratitude would be immense; instead, you chose to pour them out together, like the light of the day or the sun, shining not partially on one man or another, but instantly as a bright whole over all alike. (trans. Radice)

Here, through his just actions, Trajan shines a light upon all his subjects, once more in an egalitarian manner. The image of the sun is used to emphasise the paradoxical nature of Trajan's position: he is able simultaneously to occupy the highest position and exist on the same level as his citizens, a paradox which is visible both in the imagery of the speech, in which he occupies the supreme position in the universe, and in the real world, in which he occupies the supreme position in the empire.<sup>148</sup> Once more, this is the egalitarian sun of the *Natural History*, which shares its light and warmth with the other stars which surround it (*nec uni aut alteri sed omnibus in commune profertur*). This is in stark contrast with Statius' portrait of Domitian mentioned above, in which Domitian shines more brightly than all the other stars in the sky.<sup>149</sup> Rather than a dazzling, autocratic force, Pliny's Trajan is a source of communal warmth and light.

Remaining with the theme of justice and punishment, in his outline of an emperor's juridical responsibilities, Pliny draws a connection between the responsibilities of an emperor and those of a god, and once more compares Trajan to a swift-moving star (*O vere principis etiam dei curas.... velocissimi sideris more omnia invisere omnia audire*, *Pan.* 80.3).<sup>150</sup> Again, the similarities between this passage and the Elder's depiction of the sun in Book Two are clearly visible. Not only do we again find Trajan likened to a star, but we also find the same emphasis

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<sup>148</sup> On which, see Rees (2001).

<sup>149</sup> See McCullough (2008) 154.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Durry (1938) *ad loc.* for a comparison between this passage and the Elder's depiction of the sun.

on seeing and hearing everything as we find in the *Natural History* passage.<sup>151</sup> Trajan has become an omniscient and omnipresent force in Pliny's text, but uses this power for good rather than bad, once more bringing peace and calm to a world shaken by conflict. Much like the Elder's sun, Trajan has a restorative effect on the world he rules over, bringing both calm and abundance as part of his new regime. This natural imagery also allows the Younger Pliny to navigate the potentially tricky question of imperial surveillance, as he presents Trajan as an emperor who is able to see and hear everything which happens in his empire, but who uses this power for good, in order to be able to extend his generosity towards as many people as possible.<sup>152</sup> This connection with the work of the Elder, or at least with natural imagery more broadly, therefore serves an important literary and political function in the *Panegyricus*, allowing Pliny to construct an image of Trajan which carefully treads the line between benign omniscience and threatening surveillance.

#### Landscapes and Portraiture: The *Epistles*

I bring this chapter to a close by turning from the Younger's *Panegyricus* to his *Epistles*. As scholars have shown, place plays an important but often subtle role in the Younger's epistolary work. Gibson, in his recent biography of the Younger, uses location as the structuring principle of his work on the Younger's life.<sup>153</sup> As has been noted, the landscape of the *Epistles* is often a vague and undefined one, peppered with moments of elaborate and poetic detail. Rome in particular is kept undefined in the Younger's letters, with most of his descriptive passages devoted to more rural locations.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. *Pan.* 55.11, on Trajan's image being constantly preserved in the words and thoughts of his subjects: *Quod quidem prolixè tibi cumulateque contingit, eius laetissima facies et amabilis vultus in omnium civium ore oculis animo sedet.*

<sup>152</sup> On imperial surveillance from a spatial perspective, see e.g. Fredrick (2003).

<sup>153</sup> Gibson (2020). See also Arnold (2008) for the importance of space in autobiography.

<sup>154</sup> Büttler (1970) 132 on Pliny giving less detail than we would expect about Rome: 'Sehen wir vom literarischen Betrieb und den Ereignissen vor Gericht und im Senat ab, so berichtet Plinius erstaunlich wenig – und wenn, dann Negatives (9,6) – vom Leben in der Kapitale. *urbs nostra* nennt er sie zwar (1,10,1; 8,20,2), aber sie bringt ihm nur Arbeit und Mühsal; zur Stadt selbst, zum Glanz und zur Pracht der *Roma aeterna* hat er keine Beziehung.' Cf. Laurence (2011) on the city in Martial.

Here, I intend to focus on one element of the landscape in particular and explore a connection between landscape and a portrait of the Younger in his epistolary work. In *Ep.* 8.8, the Younger details a recent visit he has made to the source of the river Clitumnus. The letter's multiple literary significances have been explored in detail.<sup>155</sup> However, here I consider the letter from another angle, as a Plinian self-portrait. The river was already well-known in Latin literature by Pliny's time, appearing most notably in Virgil's *Georgics*.<sup>156</sup> In this letter, the Younger describes how the source of the river is located at the bottom of a wooded hill:

modicus collit adsurgit, antiqua cupressu nemorosus et opacus. hunc subter exit fons et exprimitur pluribus venis sed imparibus, eluctatusque quem facit gurgitem lato gremio patescit, purus et vitreus, ut numerare iactas stipes et relucentes calculos possis. *Ep.* 8.8.2

There is a fair-sized hill which is densely wooded with ancient cypresses; at the foot of this the spring rises and gushes out through several channels of different size, and when its eddies have subsided it broadens out into a pool as clear as glass. You can count the coins which have been thrown in and the pebbles shining at the bottom. (trans. Radice)

The description contains many popular features of the ancient *locus amoenus*, a setting which is often connected with moments of literary inspiration: a wooded grove, a spring and a pool of clear water.<sup>157</sup> The meta-literary potential of the letter has been noted, particularly by Neger, writing on *mirabilia* in the *Epistles*:

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<sup>155</sup> See e.g. Morello (2015), Neger (2018).

<sup>156</sup> Maurer (1953).

<sup>157</sup> Neger (2018) 190 on the alternation between the Younger's presentation of natural scenes that fit the *locus amoenus* type, and those which show nature as destructive and violent. Here we might also compare the Elder's description of the river Peneus in the Vale of Tempe at *NH* 4.31: *in eo cursu Tempe vocant v passuum longitudine et ferme sesquiugeri latitudine ultra visum hominis attollentibus se dextra laevaue leniter convexis iugis intus valle luco viridante. hac labitur Penius, vitreus calculo, amoenus circa ripas gramine, canorus avium concentu. accipit amnem Orcon, nec recipit, sed olei modo supernatantem, ut dictum est Homero, brevi spatio portatum abdicat poenales aquas Dirisque genitas argenteis suis misceri recusans*. On the relationship between the Younger's wonders of the natural world and the Elder's, see also Ash (2018), Shannon (2013). Shannon argues that the Younger presents his methods of investigation into the natural world (which involves an emphasis on first person action and observation) as superior to those of the Elder.

Whereas accounts of dreams or visions are part of a larger political narrative, descriptions of miracles of nature, which belong to the sphere of *otium*, give Pliny the opportunity to reflect upon his role as a writer.<sup>158</sup>

The letter moves to describe the spring becoming a river, as well as the nearby temple, where one might pass time reading the inscriptions that people have written there (*in summa nihil erit, ex quo non capias voluptatem. nam studebis quoque: leges multa multorum omnibus columnis omnibus parietibus inscripta, quibus fons ille deusque celebratur, Ep. 8.8.7*). Regarding this moment of reading contained in the Younger's account, Neger writes:

Moreover, within the narrative of the letter we may read this account of religious communication as a *mise en abyme* mirroring Pliny's epistolary praise of the *fons Clitumnus*. Whereas the writers of the sub-literary inscriptions in the *templum* stay anonymous, Pliny steps out as an individual who composes his texts for posterity.<sup>159</sup>

Given the setting of the letter, an already literary river, and the literary type of letter (a visit to a sacred spring), it seems apposite that we would also find the Younger making comment on the processes of reading and writing in the text. Neger's observation of a claim to literary permanence and mastery by the Younger in this letter also seems entirely fitting with the letter's mood and tone. I wonder, then, whether we might take this further and read a self-portrait of the Younger into the description of the river:

inde non loci devexitate, sed ipsa sui copia et quasi pondere impellitur, fons adhuc et iam amplissimum flumen, atque etiam navium patiens; quas obvias quoque et contrario nisu in diversa tendentes transmittit et perfert, adeo validus ut illa qua properat ipse quamquam per solum planum, remis non adiuvetur, idem aegerrime remis contisque superetur adversus. iucundum utrumque per iocum ludumque fluitantibus, ut flexerint cursum, laborem otio otium labore variare. *Ep. 8.8.3-4*

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<sup>158</sup> Neger (2018) 180-81.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* 194.

Then it is carried on, not by any downward slope of the land but by its own volume and weight of water: one minute it is still a spring and the next a broad river navigable for boats to which it can give a passage even when two are moving in opposite directions and must pass each other. The current is so strong that although the ground remains level, a boat travelling downstream is hurried along without needing its oars, while it is very difficult to make headway upstream with oars and poles combined. Anyone boating for pleasure can enjoy hard work alternating with easy movement simply by a change of course. (trans. Radice)

The water, moved by its own power and without any help from the landscape, ultimately becomes a large and powerful river.<sup>160</sup> This image of the river seems to be in keeping with Pliny's representation of himself throughout the *Epistles* as a talented and resourceful orator, achieving success even in adverse circumstances.<sup>161</sup> Morello has highlighted the preoccupation in Book Eight with questions of different perspectives and points of view,<sup>162</sup> something which we here see enacted on a physical and spatial level by the movement of boats on the river, which is broad enough to accommodate two passing each other in different directions. Finally, the phrase used to describe the option for rowers on the river to move between *otium* and *labor* according to their personal preference (*laborem otio otium labore variare*) might well read as an epigraph for the Younger's whole epistolary collection.<sup>163</sup> In this brief consideration of a landscape from the *Epistles*, then, I hope to have shown another way in which the landscape plays an important function in the Younger's work.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that the Elder's *Natural History* was an important point of reference for the Younger in the construction of the landscapes of his works. For both authors, constructing landscapes that fitted with the view they wished to present of the world

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<sup>160</sup> See Murphy (2004) 138-140 for the similarities between this river and the Elder's Tiber.

<sup>161</sup> See e.g. *Ep.* 3.11.3, on which see Strunk (2013) for an evaluation of Pliny's career under Domitian. See e.g. Baraz (2012) on Pliny's *Ep.* 7.27 and Pliny having narrowly escaped prosecution under Domitian. Jones (2005) 51-3 on rivers and rhetoric.

<sup>162</sup> Morello (2015) *passim*.

<sup>163</sup> See e.g. *Ep.* 1.3.3, 1.9.7, 3.1.11-12. See Leach (2003) on *otium* as a status symbol in the *Epistles*.

constituted an important part of their respective textual projects. I have argued here that the Younger was inspired by the Elder in his construction of landscapes, particularly in his *Panegyricus*, where the Elder's image of a world in chaos, rescued by a stabilising force at its centre, proved particularly suggestive for the Younger's depiction of the world under Trajan. In the final part of this chapter, I considered landscape from another angle, exploring a potential connection between the Younger's letter on the Clitumnus and examples of Plinian self-portraiture observed elsewhere in the collection.<sup>164</sup> Across these examples, then, we find that not only do landscapes possess a significant amount of symbolic potential in the works of both authors, but also that they offered a fruitful space in which the Younger could engage with his uncle's work.

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<sup>164</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2003).

## Chapter Two: The Body and Corporeality

### Introduction

In one of the best known scenes from the *Epistles*, the Younger Pliny describes the final moments of his uncle's life:

innitens servolis duobus adsurrexit et statim concidit, ut ego colligo, crassiore caligine spiritu obstructo, clausoque stomacho qui illi natura invalidus et angustus et frequenter aestuans erat. *Ep.* 6.16.19-20

He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed, I imagine because the dense fumes choked his breathing by blocking his windpipe which was constitutionally weak and narrow and often inflamed. (trans. Radice)

As ash and debris fall around him, the Elder Pliny staggers and finally falls to the ground, into a sleep-like state from which he will not wake up. Against the backdrop of the volcano's violent eruption, the Elder's habitually inflamed and narrow airways become fatally constricted. This dramatic letter, and its partner (*Ep.* 6.20, which describes the Younger's actions during the eruption) have, unsurprisingly, attracted a lot of scholarly attention over the years.<sup>165</sup> In particular, the Younger's letters on Vesuvius have long been seen as a fruitful place for exploring the relationship between the Elder and the Younger and their respective literary works.<sup>166</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that in his depiction of his uncle's death we find language familiar from the pages of the Elder's work.

I will return to this passage in more detail later, but across this chapter more broadly I want to consider the ways in which the Elder and Younger make use of corporeal imagery in their works. Of course, the two men were writing radically different texts, at different times, and for

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<sup>165</sup> E.g. Bedon (2004) on volcanoes in Pliny and other authors. Cova (2004) for a summary of scholarship on the Vesuvius letters and a consideration of the account's veracity.

<sup>166</sup> E.g. Görler (1979), Jones (2001), Ripoll (2003), Galtier (2004), Riemer (2005), Méthy (2007) 421, Berry (2008), Marchesi (2008) 171-189, Gibson (2011), Gibson and Morello (2012) 108-115, Eco (2016), Keeline (2018a). See also the recent biography by Dunn (2019).

different purposes. Despite this, it is striking that we do in fact find points of similarity between their uses of bodily imagery. I will begin with the Elder's work. The use of corporeal analogy to explain and explore processes from the natural world was a well-established tool for ancient scientific writers, including the Elder, so it is not surprising that these images appear throughout the *Natural History*.<sup>167</sup> What I am interested in here, then, is not the question of why Pliny uses these images. Rather, I am interested in how he uses bodily imagery to explore the permeable boundaries between humans and their environment in a more subtle sense. The relationship between mankind and nature is, of course, central to the Elder's work and has therefore been discussed extensively, but here I am interested specifically in how this relationship manifests itself in the imagery of bodily vulnerability.<sup>168</sup>

From the *Natural History*, I will then move to consider the human body in the Younger's *Epistles*. The human body in the *Epistles* is often a political space, used to negotiate a relationship with the problematic recent past. As scholars have shown, for Pliny and his peers, bodily vulnerability often served as a badge of honour, a sign of having suffered rather than succeeded during the reign of Domitian.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, corporeal imagery also appears in the Younger's letters when he writes about the natural world. Regarding this latter category, I will here consider how the Younger might be drawing on the permeable border between mankind and the natural world that is visible in his uncle's work in his own writing on natural phenomena. In doing so, I hope to find meaningful points of contact between the texts of the two men. I do not intend to prove a precise intertextual relationship, nor to argue that the Younger always has the Elder in mind when he is writing about bodies or using corporeal imagery. Such an interpretation would seem to ignore the multiple important differences between the *Natural History* and the *Epistles*. However, I believe reading these passages alongside one another is still a worthwhile endeavour as, despite their differences, we do in fact find many interesting points of contact between the works of the two authors.

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<sup>167</sup> See e.g. Rosenmeyer on Seneca's conception of nature, Williams (2005a), Doody (2013), Welsh (2014), Connors (2015), Wee (2017).

<sup>168</sup> E.g. Wallace-Hadrill (1990), Citroni Marchetti (1991), Beagon (1992), (2005), Conte (1994) 76-82.

<sup>169</sup> See e.g. Haynes (2006), Whitton (2010).



### Permeable and Vulnerable Boundaries in the *Natural History*

Boundaries of different kinds in the Elder's work have attracted attention from many scholars for multiple reasons. Much of this scholarship has focused on geographical boundaries, where Pliny tends to represent and re-order the world along imperialist lines.<sup>170</sup> Trevor Murphy has written at length on the importance of these geographical boundaries in the *Natural History*. In particular, he considers the significance of rivers and mountains in Pliny's work, exploring how the two work as opposing forces in the *Natural History* and operate in a state of constant strife.<sup>171</sup> He shows that rivers are often ineffective boundaries in Pliny's work, whereas mountains serve this purpose more effectively.<sup>172</sup> This concern with boundaries and their efficacy, Murphy suggests, is closely tied with an imperialist view of the world. Regarding Pliny's treatment of peoples and lands far from Rome, he writes:

How can Rome make sure of its centrality without acquiring a perimeter? You cannot occupy the centre until you acquire something to surround you. Acquiring territory means visiting a new land, fixing it securely in place with an entry in map or gazetteer, and renaming it as a part of your own outskirts. Above all, what you acquire must be solid and immobile – your outskirts must not run away from you twice a day.<sup>173</sup>

This need for solid boundaries, as Murphy shows, is fundamental to Pliny's textual and political project. Here, I consider how this desire to firm up physical and political boundaries overlaps with Pliny's treatment of the body and his use of corporeal imagery in his work. The Elder's concern with boundaries also evidently intersects with his condemnation of *luxuria* in the *Natural History*. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has written on how the Elder sets the natural world and mankind's luxurious behaviour in opposition to one another and uses this opposition as a rhetorical strategy across his work.<sup>174</sup> Wallace-Hadrill explores the complex relationship between luxury and nature in the Elder's work, and the multiple ways in which he blames

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<sup>170</sup> See e.g. Naas (2002); Carey (2003), Murphy (2004), Naas (2011) on *mirabilia*.

<sup>171</sup> Murphy (2004) 138-154.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 173-4. See also Conte (1994) 73.

<sup>174</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) *passim*. See also Conte (1994) 79-82.

luxury for the disruption and distortion of the natural shape and order of the world.<sup>175</sup> In a similar vein, Sandra Citroni Marchetti has also written on the Elder's treatment of *luxuria*. She focuses particularly on appetitive desire and consumption, both in terms of actual acts of eating and drinking and of the consumption of luxurious goods and resources, exploring their significance in relation to the Elder's alignment with Flavian ideology and his moralistic programme.<sup>176</sup>

We might build on this by also noting a metaliterary aspect to these bodily images. As many scholars, including Conte and Aude Doody, have shown, there are multiple strategies at work when it comes to the reading of largescale texts such as the *Natural History*.<sup>177</sup> Again, the connection between the body and the book was a well-established one in the ancient world, and repeated images of ruptured or threatened boundaries in the *Natural History* suggest that such a connection is also operative here.<sup>178</sup> Noting the number of internal references in the *Natural History*, Conte writes:

Pliny foresees that it will be read in specialized segments or homogeneous stretches and consulted episodically and punctually. And the author often guides us in recognizing affinities and differences among the various sectors of his erudition – perhaps terrified lest the enormous construction suddenly fall apart and return to the primordial magna of scattered and unrelated notecards.<sup>179</sup>

This idea of an underlying anxiety in the *Natural History* concerning the work's size and structure is of particular interest. Given Pliny's preoccupation with cataloguing and ordering information, as explored by many scholars, including Doody, I consider here whether we might also read Pliny's repeated images of rupturing or broken boundaries in a metaliterary sense: even as the natural historian seeks to meticulously catalogue and contain the wonders of the natural world, nature seeps, leaks and bursts out from the categories and pages of the *Natural*

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<sup>175</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 85- 96.

<sup>176</sup> Citroni Marchetti (1991) 135-142, 204-208 and *passim*.

<sup>177</sup> Conte (1994); Doody (2010).

<sup>178</sup> See e.g. Rimell (2002) on Petronius.

<sup>179</sup> Conte (1994) 69. See also Williams (2005b) 161-163 on Pliny's preoccupation with boundaries as explored by Conte, and on the difference in approach between the *Natural History* and Seneca's *Natural Questions*.

*History*.<sup>180</sup> This is not to side with the Plinian critics of the past who saw the *Natural History* as an unwieldy, unstructured and unsophisticated work.<sup>181</sup> In fact it is the opposite. Given that Pliny tells us in the second book of the work, his introduction to the universe, that trying to grasp its scale and extent is foolish and impossible (*NH* 2.3-4), it seems a sophisticated and elegant strategy that at every level of the text, the natural world repeatedly bursts from its constraints.

In this chapter, I approach the question of boundaries from a different viewpoint. There has been considerable work done on the vulnerable or permeable body in the field of Latin literature, as well as across the humanities more broadly.<sup>182</sup> The intersection between this work and the increased interest in space in the field, as exemplified by the work of scholars such as Victoria Rimell could, I believe, also be usefully applied to Pliny's text.<sup>183</sup> Here, I argue that we might also approach Pliny's work in this manner, specifically regarding his use of images of consumption and digestion throughout the *Natural History*.<sup>184</sup> I first focus on depictions of bodies, both human and animal, whose boundaries are presented as vulnerable or permeable in the *Natural History*. I then discuss instances when the boundaries between the body and the landscape are dissolved or collapsed, both through the Elder's use of bodily imagery in order to explain or explore natural phenomena and through his description of human processes or activities through the language of the natural world. In doing so, I examine the multiple ways in which bodily imagery is used across the *Natural History*, before moving to consider the ways in which his nephew uses these ideas in his own work.

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<sup>180</sup> Doody (2010) on the status of the *NH* as a text and its organising structures. Cf. Murphy (2004) 45-8 on straits, in particular the strait separating Italy and Sicily, and the Isthmus of Corinth: 'In each of these cases the thinness of the separating limit tempted an ancient author to imagine removing the division and combining the parts into a repeated whole.' (47).

<sup>181</sup> E.g. Goodyear (1982).

<sup>182</sup> See e.g. Edwards (2002) on pain in Seneca, Larmour (2007) on Juvenal and abjection.

<sup>183</sup> See e.g. Rimell (2002) on Petronius, (2015) on enclosed space in Roman literature, (2018b) on congested waterways in Roman verse.

<sup>184</sup> On the significance of food in Roman literature, see Gowers (1993).

## Insects

I begin with bodies at the microscopic level and Pliny's treatment of insects in Book 11.<sup>185</sup> At the opening of the book, Pliny marvels at the minute intricacy of these tiny bodies, saying that although we routinely wonder at the might of larger animals, the small forms of insects are in fact the perfect place in which to see the power of nature in its entirety (*cum rerum natura nusquam magis quam in minimis tota sit. NH 11.4*).<sup>186</sup> Doody writes of Pliny's treatment:

Pliny champions the smallest creatures as a source of microcosmic insights into nature and encourages the reader to persevere with his insistence that nothing is off limits when it comes to the appreciation of nature. For Pliny, nature is present in tiny things, and each fact about them is necessary to the contemplation of nature. In the world of nature, nature is present in each natural object; in the world of Pliny's text, each discrete fact makes manifest the wonder of nature.<sup>187</sup>

Pliny goes on to spend much of Book Eleven discussing insects, their anatomies and their behaviours. Of particular interest for the present discussion is the fact that, although Pliny tells us that it is only humans that are subject to a destructively excessive appetite (*morbus esuriendi semper inexplebili aviditate uni animalium homini, NH. 11.283*), in Book Eleven we also find images of insects' bodies made vulnerable by their desire to consume. In one particularly striking example, Pliny describes a parasite which feeds off the blood of its host:

est animal eiusdem temporis infixo semper sanguini capite vivens atque ita intumescens, unum animalium cui cibi non sit exitus: dehiscit cum nimia satietate, alimento ipso moriens. NH 11.116

There is an animal belonging to the same season that always lives with its head fixed in the blood of a host, and consequently goes on swelling, as it is the only animal that

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<sup>185</sup> On insects, see e.g. Weiss (1926) on Pliny's entomology, Busvine (1976) on insects and hygiene, including in the ancient world, 128-129, 176-178, 188, 205 on Pliny. Egan (2014) on insects in ancient texts.

<sup>186</sup> *NH* 11.1-4, on which see Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 83-4.

<sup>187</sup> Doody (2010) 24.

has no vent for its food: with gorging to excess it bursts, so dying of its very nutriment.  
(trans. Rackham)

In this visceral image, we find the parasite literally eating itself to death; unable to control its appetite, and with no exit-route for the nourishment it takes in, it is torn apart by the force of what it has consumed.<sup>188</sup> The usual processes of nourishment and the need for all animals to live in order to survive here becomes compressed and distorted, as the vital act of nourishment is at once condemned and also combined with the creature's death. We also find the same phrase that Pliny uses to describe the parasite's gorging, *nimia satietas*, applied to moths:

nascuntur et in ipso ligno teredines quae ceras praecipue adpetunt. infestat et aviditas pastus, nimia florum satietate verno maxume tempore alvo cita. *NH* 11.66

Moreover moths are born in the wood itself that specially attack the combs. And another bane is their greed for food, as their belly is moved, specially in the spring time, by their devouring a surfeit of flowers. (trans. Rackham)

Although the moths' greed does not result in the explosion of their bodies, it still causes a disruptive effect, as evidenced by the physical movement of their stomachs (*alvo cita*) and the negative language Pliny uses to describe their appetite (*infestat et aviditas*). Furthermore, in his extended discussion of bees, he describes the process by which honey is made:

itaque tum prima aurora folia arborum melle roscida inveniuntur, ac si qui matutino sub divo fuere, unctas liquore vestis capillumque concretum sentiunt, sive ille est caeli sudor sive quaedam siderum saliva sive purgantis se aeris sucus. utinamque esset purus ac liquidus et suae naturae, qualis defluit primo! nunc vero a tanta cadens altitudine multumque dum venit sordescens et obvio terrae halitu infectus, praeterea e fronde ac pabulis potus et in utriculos congestus apium – ore enim eum vomunt, ad hoc suco florum corruptus et alvi vitiis maceratus, totiensque mutatus, magnam tamen caelestis naturae voluptatem adfert. *NH* 11.30-31.

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<sup>188</sup> Of course, *exitus* can also mean death, so we might observe another layer of blurring of the boundaries between nourishment and death here.

Consequently at that season at early dawn the leaves of trees are found bedewed with honey, and any persons who have been out under the morning sky feel their clothes smeared with damp and their hair stuck together, whether this is the perspiration of the sky or a sort of saliva of the stars or the moisture of the air purging itself. And would it were pure and liquid and homogeneous, as it was when it first flowed down! But as it is, falling from so great a height and acquiring a great deal of dirt as it comes and becoming stained with vapour of the earth that it encounters, and moreover having been sipped from foliage and pastures and having been collected into the stomachs of bees – for they throw it up out of their mouths, and in addition being tainted by the juice of flowers, and steeped in the vices of the stomach, and so often transformed, nevertheless it brings with it the great pleasure of its heavenly nature. (trans. adapted from Rackham)

While this is not a violent rupture of the body of the kind shown in the parasite passage above, here confusion of bodily boundaries appears in a different form. In this passage, in fact, the blurring of boundaries operates on multiple levels. Pliny begins the passage by explaining that honey is a dew-like substance. The language he uses to describe the substance is that of bodily functions and processes, as he offers a series of possible explanations, saying that it could be the *caeli sudor*, the *siderum saliva*, or the *purgantis se aeris sucus*. This substance, whether it is already honey when it comes from the sky, or dew which later becomes honey, becomes tainted on its journey to the ground. One way in which this process happens is through the bees' consumption and regurgitation of the honey, so that it becomes *alvi vitiis maceratus*. These instances of sweat, saliva and vomit bring us firmly into the world of bodily secretions and functions, possibly somewhat at odds with the *caelestis naturae voluptatem* Pliny praises the honey for bringing.<sup>189</sup>

The collapse of bodily boundaries functions here on two levels. On one level, the process of the honey coming to the earth is described in the language of digestion, collapsing the distinction between the processes of the natural world and those of the body. What is more, on a specific level, the making of honey requires the fluidity of the bees' own bodily boundaries, as they consume and vomit up the substance. This process of repeated transformation (*totiensque mutatus*) through which honey is made is presented by Pliny as an explicitly bodily

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Gowers (1993) 19 on vomiting and emetics as used in attacks on luxury.

one.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, he also tells us that, like the insects described above, bees can also do fatal damage to their bodies through the over-consumption of honey (*NH* 11.67), thus presenting a natural process as one which is linked to, or which requires, bodily vulnerability.

The critique of greed and *luxuria* was, of course, a structuring principle of the *Natural History*, and perhaps we see here how this critique manifests itself in even the smallest bodies of the work. As Wallace-Hadrill notes, negative features of the natural world are often a warning sign for problematic behaviours in the human world, and across these examples we may be seeing insects used in this way.<sup>191</sup> However, given that these bodies are praised as among nature's most wondrous creations, we could also read these passages as a celebration of the refusal of nature to be contained, even in a work that aims to catalogue and categorise its contents down to the smallest detail.

### Drinking

When it comes to acts of excessive consumption by humans, Pliny's language takes on a markedly darker tone. Citroni Marchetti has explored the role played by the Elder's treatment of insatiable appetites in his moral language and outlook, identifying a frustrated cannibalistic desire at the root of many other appetitive urges.<sup>192</sup> As mentioned in the opening of this discussion, scholars have also explored examples obviously luxurious behaviour in the Elder's work in some depth, but here I take a slightly different angle, focusing not on eating but on drinking.

In Book 14 of the *Natural History*, the Elder discusses excessive drinking. The discussion is unsurprisingly condemnatory, given his critique of excess throughout the work.

ac si quis diligentius reputet, in nulla parte operosior vita est – ceu non saluberrimum ad potus aquae liquorem natura dederit, quo cetera omnia animantia utuntur, at nos vinum bibere et iumenta cogimus – tantoque opere, tanto labore et inpendio constat

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. Petronius *Sat.* 56, on which see Rimell (2002) 59.

<sup>191</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 87 on e.g. shellfish as a luxurious foodstuff often causing food poisoning.

<sup>192</sup> Citroni Marchetti (1991) 139-143, 263.

quod hominis mentem mutet ac furorem gignat, milibus scelerum ob id editis, tanta dulcedine ut magna pars non aliud vitae praemium intellegat. *NH* 14.137-138

And if anybody cares to consider the matter more carefully, there is no department of man's life on which more labour is spent – as if nature had not given us the most healthy of beverages to drink, water, which all other animals make use of, whereas we compel even our beasts of burden to drink wine! and so much toil and labour and outlay is paid as the price of a thing that perverts men's minds and produces madness, having caused the commission of thousands of crimes, and being so attractive that a large part of mankind knows of nothing else worth living for! (trans. Rackham)

Pliny here expresses his distaste regarding the popularity of wine. He laments that so much energy is expended on its production, when nature has already provided water for people to drink. This obsession with wine has resulted in a disruption of the normal boundaries between humans and animals: according to Pliny, humans should drink water as it is natural for all animals to do so, but instead, people force their animals to drink wine. As part of his exposition, Pliny writes that an excessive desire for drink often drives people to engage in morally objectionable behaviours:

cautissimos ex iis in balineis coqui videmus exanimesque efferri, iam vero alios lectum expectare non posse, immo vero nec tunicam, nudosque ibi protinus et anhelos ingentia vasa corripere velut ad ostentationem virium ac plena infundere, ut statim vomant rursusque hauriant; idque iterum tertiumque, tamquam ad perdenda vina geniti, et tamquam effundi illa non possint nisi per corpus humanum. *NH*. 14.139-140

The most cautious of these [*sc.* toppers] we see getting themselves boiled in hot baths and being carried out of the bathroom unconscious, and others actually unable to wait to get to the dinner table, no, not even to put their clothes on, but straight away on the spot, while still naked and panting, they snatch up huge vessels as if to show off their strength, and pour down the whole of the contents, so as to bring them up again at once, and then drink another draught; and they do this a second and a third time, as if they were born for the purpose of wasting wine, and as if it were impossible for the liquor to be poured away except through the human body. (trans. slightly adapted from Rackham)



Throughout this passage, we find bodily boundaries and acts of consumption occurring in distorted and unsettling ways. The drinkers are described as being cooked (*coqui*) in hot baths and carried out in a state resembling death.<sup>193</sup> Their desire to drink more leads them to flout social norms, not even stopping to dress before consuming more wine. In a problematic distortion of the natural regurgitations of the bees discussed above, here the drinkers gulp down wine in huge quantities, only to vomit it up and drink more. We might also see a dissolution of bodily boundaries in this passage through the assimilation between the *ingentia vasa* snatched up by the drinkers, and the wine-vessels they become through their excessive consumption (*effundi illa non possint nisi per corpus humanum*).<sup>194</sup>

alius ut quantum biberit tantum edat pretium vinolentiae lege accipit, alius quantum alea quaesierit tantum bibit. tunc avidi matronam oculi licentur, graves produnt marito; tunc animi secreta proferuntur: alii testamenta sua nuncupant, alii mortifera elocuntur rediturasque per iugulum voces non continent, quam multis ita interemptis, volgoque veritas iam attributa vino est. *NH* 14.140-142.

One man gets a prize for tipsiness on condition of his eating as much as he has drunk; another drinks as many cups as are demanded of him by a throw of the dice. Then it is that greedy eyes bid a price for a married woman, and their heavy glances betray it to her husband; then it is that the secrets of the heart are published abroad: some men specify the provisions of their wills, others let out facts of fatal import, and do not keep to themselves words that will come back through a slit in their throat – how many men having lost their lives in that way! and truth has come to be proverbially credited to wine. (trans. Rackham)

<sup>193</sup> Cf. e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 86.11 (on which, see Rimell 2015 182,188), 108.16. Rimell (2015) 178-198 on *Ep.* 86. On baths for medicinal purposes in the *Natural History*, see Fagan (2006).

<sup>194</sup> See e.g. Rimell (2002) 30 on *effundere* in Petronius' *Satyricon*: 'Incorporation in the *Satyricon* is imaged as that which we are always anxious to achieve, but can never completely preserve: the neat hierarchy of eater over eaten begins to disintegrate when literature is also imaged as a live, hungry body, devouring other literary material and continuing to eat away inside its educated host; boundaries begin to melt when the act of recitation, particularly of poetry, is described in terms of a liquid outpouring of bodily content: *effudit, effudisset*... This text's central theme of self-transformation is a paradox that builds as many limitations and walls as it demolishes, producing a readership that is not simply *free* to be confused but on the contrary is paranoid to react at all.'

Gluttony in one area necessarily leads to the same over-indulgence in others, such as matching one's excessive drinking with over-eating (*alius ut quantum biberit tantum edat pretium vinolentiae lege accipit*, 14.140), indulging in drinking games (*alius quantum alea quaesierit tantum bibit*, 14.141) and making eyes at married women (*tunc avidi matronam oculi licentur...* 14.141).<sup>195</sup> The most violent threat to bodily boundaries caused by excessive drinking comes when Pliny tells us how people often reveal secrets when drunk that ultimately lead to their deaths. Here Pliny uses the notably physical phrase *redituras... per iugulum voces* (14.141) to refer to words which will lead to the speaker's murder, the voice standing as a metonym for their blood. In this example, the over-consumption of alcohol results in a final, fatal distortion of normal bodily processes, as the image of the body as an ineffective container discussed above is taken to its most violent extreme.

This thread of imagery continues when Pliny describes the physical effects of repeated drinking on the body:

hinc pallor et genae pendulae, oculorum ulcera, tremulae manus effundentes plena vasa, quae sit poena praesens furiales somni et inquiet nocturna, praemiumque summum ebrietatis libido portentosa ac iucundum nefas. *NH.* 14.142

From this [i.e. heavy drinking] comes pale skin and hanging cheeks, sores of the eyes, shaking hands that spill the contents of full vessels, tormented sleep and unquiet nights, which are a fitting punishment, and, the greatest reward of drunkenness, monstrous lust and delight in wickedness. (trans. adapted from Rackham)

Here, Pliny lists shaking hands as one of the physical side-effects of drinking too much. These tremors, he tells us, can cause the afflicted person to spill liquid from vessels they are carrying. This passage, then, brings the images of leaky vessels full circle, as those who have themselves

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<sup>195</sup> See Gowers (1993) 238-241 on the link between food and sexual appetite. Edwards (1993) Ch. 3 on the body and morality, specifically on the term *mollitia* and the ways in which behaviour coded as effeminate intersected with Roman morality, 80-81 on the connection between luxury and effeminacy, 87-90 on the relationship between gendered behaviour and nature.

become faulty receptacles through their over-consumption of wine now make other vessels ineffective through their shaking hands. As with the examples concerning insects from the previous section, here too excessive consumption leads to a violent compromise of bodily integrity. However, there is an explicitly moralising tone in these passages that is not present in the discussion of insects, as Pliny shows the potentially disastrous consequences of humans' excessive behaviour. Whereas in the Elder's discussion of insects, their bodies and their intricacies were part of their fascination, here, we find only humans paying the price for their gluttonous behaviour.

### Landscape

The final set of images I wish to consider from the *Natural History* are those relating to the natural world and the landscape. The topic of the work's presentation of the landscape is a vast one, and here I will focus on just one facet of it, namely the Elder's use of the language of consumption and digestion to describe processes that take place in the natural world.<sup>196</sup> In her exploration of food's significance in Roman literature, Emily Gowers writes that

There is something about eating, despite all the inhibitions, that gives us a uniquely graspable sense of the relationship between the Romans and their universe.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See e.g. Beagon (1992) 39-42 on corporeal imagery in Pliny's presentation of the earth; Murphy (2004) for discussion of landscape and the Elder's imperial politics.

<sup>197</sup> Gowers (1993) 4. See also Conte (1994) 76 on the relationship between Pliny's view of nature and mankind: '...Pliny's nature is not conceived as an autonomous reality different to man, but lives the same life as humankind does, simultaneously a projection of human desire and an image of their existential drama.' McInerney (2014) on the eating of meat and gastronomy in Greek and Roman culture, 267: 'Gastronomy is conventionally understood as the art and science of good eating. It is clear that the Greeks and Romans came to value both highly, but food writing is never a discourse solely concerned with producing cook-books and fancy foods. Gastronomy is an expression of how a community views itself according to its alimentary needs and tastes, and how members see themselves in relation to others in the community, as providers, consumers, and gourmands. In the gastronomic writing of the Greek and Romans we glimpse these societies undergoing profound changes, becoming both more complex and yet often more anxious.'

As Gowers argues, Roman depictions of food and its consumption could offer a window into wider ideas the Romans held about the world and about their literary texts.<sup>198</sup> Here, then, I wish to consider how the Elder uses the language of consumption as a means to construct the processes of the natural world. Although the use of this kind of language was fairly widespread in ancient scientific writing, I believe in Pliny's text it possessed a significance beyond the commonplace. In the second book of the *Natural History*, Pliny describes the effects of an earthquake:

hiatus vero alias remanet ostendens quae sorbuit, alias occultat ore conpresso rursusque ita inducto solo ut nulla vestigia exstent: urbibus plerumque devoratis agrorumque tractu hausto, maritima autem maxime quatuntur, nec montuosa tali malo carent... NH 2.194

Also the gap sometimes remains open, showing the objects that it has sucked in, while sometimes it hides them by closing its mouth and drawing soil over it again in such a way as to leave no traces; it being usually cities that are engulfed, and a tract of farmland swallowed, although seaboard districts are most subject to earthquakes, and also mountainous regions are not free from disaster of the kind... (trans. Rackham)

Here, a gap in the earth created by the earthquake is described as though it were a person opening their mouth to display the food they are eating, while in the second scenario mentioned this mouth is closed (*ore conpresso*), keeping what is consumed hidden from sight. The language of ingestion recurs throughout the passage (*sorbuit...devoratis.... hausto*), as Pliny presents the rupture of the earth's surface as caused by, and causing, processes of consumption and ingestion. In the *Natural History*, the verb *devorare* appears over eighty times, largely to describe the swallowing of remedies or medicines, or in discussion of the eating habits of animals.<sup>199</sup> The verb can also be used of inanimate objects to describe the kind of process we

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<sup>198</sup> Gowers (1993).

<sup>199</sup> *L&S* s.v. I for physical swallowing, IIa for inanimate objects, IIb for swallowing with a sense of haste or greed, IIc for repression, IId for wasting or consuming, IId2 for destruction. See *NH* 8.29 on elephants eating stones; 8.46 on lions; 8.72 on hyenas; 8.101 on elephants eating chameleons; 8.111 on seals; 8.129 on bears; 8.165 on horses; 9.65 on bream; 9.71 on fish; 9.145 on *scolopendra* vomiting up hooks they have swallowed and catfish avoiding swallowing hooks; 9.147 on jellyfish; 10.2 on ostriches; 10.15 on eagles swallowing the feathers of other

find here.<sup>200</sup> We do find this use of the verb in other authors, so it is not unique to Pliny, but the preponderance of the verb more generally throughout the *Natural History* is, I believe, of

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birds; 10.115 on the shoveler-duck eating shells and vomiting them back up; 10.139 on fattening poultry; 10.141-2 on eating birds that can speak with human voices (as cannibalism); 10.197 on snakes eating and vomiting up birds after eating them whole; 10.205 on goldfinches; 11.57 on bees that steal honey; 11.91 on scorpions; 11.270 on acoustics, the voice as swallowed up by sawdust; 11.280 on boars that have eaten lizards as poisonous to eat in some places; 13.33 on the fruit of the palm tree; 13.72 on the use of papyrus as chewing-gum, where only the juice is swallowed; 15.105 on the cornel and lentisk; 19.116 on birds eating garlic seeds; 20.105 on eating Megarian bulbs as medicine; 20.216 on coriander seed (medicinal); 20.261 on fennel juice (medicinal); 21.176 on Parthenium (medicinal); 22.144 on lentils (medicinal); 22.152 on bitter vetch (medicinal); 23.20 on wild vine as something that should not be swallowed (medicinal); 23.73 on white olives; 23.110 on Cytinus; 23.141 on cherries; 23.152 on bay leaves (medicinal); 24.126 on lycium (medicinal); 24.174 on the unfilial plant; 25.21 on the britannica plant as a medicine for illnesses caused by waters or by specific regions; 26.30 on bechion (medicinal); 27.20 on aloe; 27.27 on androsaemon (medicinal); 27.70 on Cnidian grain as needing to be swallowed with bread to avoid burning the throat; 27.127 on proserpinaca (medicine); 28.170 on eating the dung of she-goats as a cure for ophthalmia; 28.199 on eating parts of hares (medicinal); 28.230 on ox-horn as medicinal; 28.246 on using stones swallowed by hinds to ward off miscarriage; 29.42 on egg yolks as a remedy for spitting blood; 29.63 on bugs as a spurious remedy; 29.69 on vipers; 29.100 on poultry brains as an antidote; 29.101 on the livers of dogs as a remedy; 30.19 on eating moles' hearts for divination; 30.30 on the *buprestis* (a type of beetle); 30.45 on snails as medicine; 30.63 on osprey as having only a single intestine; 30.89 on lizards as medicine; 30.91 on swallows' hearts as medicine; 30.92 on kites' livers as medicine; 30.102 on the heart of the sea-diver as medicinal; 31.121 on soda (medicinal); 32.13 on murena eating through fishing lines; 32.36 on salamanders as medicine; 32.55 on crabs as medicine; 32.109 on the medicinal properties of small fish that have been swallowed; 32.112 on seal rennet as medicinal; 32.115 on the eyes of river crabs as medicinal.

<sup>200</sup> See e.g. *NH* 20.1 on water putting out fire. Cf. e.g. *Ov. Her.* 3.63-6: *devorer ante, precor, subito telluris hiatu / aut rutilo missi fulminis igne cremer, / quam sine me Pthiis canescant aequora remis, et videam puppes ire relictas tuas!*; *Trist.* 5.2.73-6: *hinc ego dum muter, vel me Zanaclaea Charybdis/ devoret aque suis ad Styga mittat aquis, / vel rapidae flammis urar patienter in Aetnae, / vel freta Leucadii mittat in alta dei*; *Ov. Ibis* 315-6: *utque necatorum Darei fraude secundi, / sic tua subsidens devoret ora cinis*; *Sen. Ep.* 79.2-3: *neutrum autem incredibile est, nec montem, qui devoretur cotidie, minui, nec manere eundem, quia non ipsum exest, sed in aliqua inferna valle conceptus exaestuat et aliis pascitur. in ipso monte non alimentum habet, sed viam*; *Ep.* 91.9 on earthquakes: *quotiens Asiae, quotiens Achaiae urbes uno tremore ceciderunt? quot oppida in Syria, quot in Macedonia devorata sunt?*; *NQ* 3.19.4: *habet ergo non tantum venas aquarum terra, ex quibus contrivatis flumina effici possint, sed amnes magnitudinis vastae, quorum aliis semper in occulto cursus est, donec aliquo sinu terrae devorentur; alii sub aliquo lacu emergunt*; *NQ* 3.27.14: *non est res satis sobria lascivire devorato orbe terrarum*; *Vitr. De Arch.* 4.1.4: *...isque eas colonias in Asiam deduxit et Cariae fines occupavit ibique civitates amplissimas constituit Ephesum, Miletum, Myunta (quae olim ab aqua est devorata...)*; *De Arch.* 10.2.11: *non est autem alienum etiam Chersiphronos ingeniosam rationem exponere. is enim scapos columnarum e lapidicinis cum*

interest. In a text that is so preoccupied with consumption of all kinds, the use of this language may take on a weight beyond the simply explanatory. The same language is used elsewhere throughout Pliny's work to describe other dramatic changes in the landscape, such as the collapse of mountains or coastal erosion:

atque ut sinus et stagna praeteream, ipsa se comest terra. devoravit Cibotum altissimum montem cum oppido Cariae... *NH*. 2.205.

And to pass over bays and marshes, the earth is eaten up by herself. She has devoured the highest mountain in Caria, Cibotus... (trans. Rackham)

...quingentos longa stadios fuit quondam, mox quattuor fere partibus quae ad Boeotiam vergebant eodem mari devoratis oppida habet reliqua Iulida, Carthaeam... *NH* 4.62

...it [the island of Ceos] was formerly 62 ½ miles long, but more recently about four-fifths of it lying in the direction of Boeotia has also been swallowed up by the sea, leaving the towns of Iulis and Carthaea... (trans. Rackham)

In both these examples, the language of ingestion or consumption is used to describe changes in the fabric of the natural world. The first passage includes the striking image of the earth eating itself, positioning these processes as part of a constant cycle of self-consumption. Moreover, the recurrence of the verb *devorare* across both passages again underlines the alignment of changes to the earth's boundaries with the process of eating. Although this kind of imagery was often employed by ancient scientific writers to make scientific processes appear more comprehensible or less threatening, I believe that here we may be witnessing something slightly different. The *Natural History* as a text is fixated on questions of consumption in a way that not all ancient scientific texts were. It therefore makes sense that the Elder would also use this language in his depictions of the natural world, as a means of conceptualising and representing its processes.<sup>201</sup>

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*deportare vellet Ephesi ad Dianae fanum, propter magnitudinem onerum et viarum campestrum mollitudinem non confisus carris, ne rotae devorarentur, sic est conatus.*

<sup>201</sup> Williams (2005a) 424-5 on a use of the metaphor of digestion in Sen. *NQ* 5.

Another example comes from the work's fifth book, where Pliny is discussing some different theories regarding the source of the river Nile. He presents the theory of Timaeus in the following way:

Timaeus mathematicus occultam protulit rationem: Phialam appellari fontem eius, mergique in cuniculos ipsum amnem vapore anhelantem fumidis cautibus ubi conditur; verum sole per eos dies comminus facto extrahi ardoris vi et suspensum abundare ac ne devoretur abscondi... *NH* 5.55-56.

The mathematician Timaeus produced a very recondite theory – that the source of the Nile is a spring called Phiala, and that the river buries itself in burrows underground and breathes forth vapour owing to the steaming hot rocks among which it hides itself; but that as the sun at the period in question comes nearer the river water is drawn out by the force of the heat and rises up and overflows, and withdraws itself to avoid being swallowed up. (trans. Rackham)

Again, the verb *devorare* is used to describe a potential change in the landscape. The river is presented as a living, breathing entity, that seeks to conceal itself to avoid being consumed.<sup>202</sup> In the Elder's passage, the river becomes almost like a timid animal, burrowing underground to hide from a predator. In a dramatic passage from the opening of Book Six, Pliny once more uses this kind of language to describe the effects of Ocean on the landscape:

non fuerat satis oceano ambisse terras et partem earum aucta inmanitate abstulisse, non inrupisse fractis montibus Calpeque Africae avolsa tanto maiora absorbuisse quam reliquerit spatia, non per Hellespontum Propontida infudisse iterum terris devoratis: a Bosporo quoque in aliam vastitatem panditur nulla satietate, donec exspatianti lacus Maeotii rapinam suam iungant. *NH* 6.1

The Ocean was not content to have encircled the earth, and with still further cruelty to have stolen away a portion of her surface, nor to have forced an entrance through a breach in the mountains and rent Gibraltar away from Africa, so devouring a larger area than it left remaining, nor to have swallowed up a further space of land and flooded the

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<sup>202</sup> On the Elder's presentation of the Nile, see Murphy (2004) 143-144.

Sea of Marmara through the Dardanelles; even beyond the Straits of Constantinople also it widens out into another desolate expanse, with an appetite unsatisfied until the Sea of Azov links on its own trespass to its encroachments. (trans. slightly adapted from Rackham)

Here, Ocean is presented as a rapacious consumer, whose insatiable appetite leads to a violent attack on the earth which results in the forceful rupture of its surface and features. Mountains are left shattered by the water's actions (*fractis montibus*), while the land is swallowed up (*terris devoratis*). The mention of *satietas* reminds us that concerns about appetite are always present. Rather than the *nimia satietas* that caused the insects' death or distress discussed above, here *nulla satietas* characterizes the insatiable appetite of the water. We also find similar language occurring in Book 31 of the work (*terras devorant aquae*, *NH* 31.2) in a discussion of the natural force of water, to which I will return later in this chapter.

Across these passages, then, we find that the rupturing of boundaries is, in fact, made essential to the structures and processes of the natural world. The recurrence of this imagery of the violation and disruption of bodily boundaries suggests that it is a deliberate strategy in the Elder's work. Moreover, these permeable and fallible boundaries are often where wondrous elements of the natural world are found, whether it is the heavenly delights of honey, the minute forms of insects, or the violence of Ocean. In the human realm, bodily boundaries are threatened in a more explicitly harmful and dangerous way as mankind's excessive appetite and desire to consume results in violent threats to bodily integrity. In the *Natural History*, then, there is clearly an association between human bodily vulnerability and dubious moral behaviours. In the Younger's *Epistles*, we find the opposite to be true.

### Ailing Bodies in the *Epistles*

Bodily vulnerability in the *Epistles* unsurprisingly plays a very different role from the one it does in the *Natural History*. Rather than being concerned with mankind's place in the natural world, the Younger is more concerned with man's place in the world of politics. Scenes of illness and death are thus often overtly political in the Younger's correspondence. They frequently focus on politically significant figures and are mostly used to position Pliny, and those around him, in a favourable light regarding the events of the recent past. Keen to show that they had endured rather than enjoyed the reign of Domitian, Pliny and his peers often used



discussion of physical frailty as a shorthand for moral rectitude and endurance, and as a sign of a refusal to accept the posthumously condemned emperor.<sup>203</sup>

In what follows, then, I will consider images of vulnerable bodies from throughout the *Epistles*: as they relate to politically significant figures from the letters, the natural world, and the figure of Pliny himself. By reading these passages alongside one another, we can see how images of bodily vulnerability form an important strand in the narrative of the *Epistles*. Moreover, although I am not necessarily arguing for specific points of intertextual connection between the Younger and the Elder in all of these passages, I do believe we can see in these images significant moments at which the Elder's thought and work are informing that of the Younger.

### Corellius Rufus

In *Ep.* 1.12, Pliny recounts the circumstances of the death of Corellius Rufus, a senator who had served as a mentor to Pliny.<sup>204</sup> Pliny expresses his profound grief, writing that the fact Corellius Rufus died of his own volition made his death more painful than if he had died from an illness (*est enim luctuosissimum genus mortis, quae non ex natura nec fatalis videtur, Ep.* 1.12.1). However, the reason for Corellius' suicide was in fact an illness, from which he had suffered for many years:

tertio et tricensimo anno, ut ipsum audiebam, pedum dolore correptus est. patrius hic illi; nam plerumque morbi quoque per successiones quasdam ut alia traduntur. *Ep.* 1.12.4-5

At the age of thirty-two, as I heard him say, he developed pain in his feet. He inherited it from his father; for, as is the case with other things, most diseases are handed down through the line of succession. (trans. adapted from Radice)

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<sup>203</sup> See nn. 42-56 in the Introduction.

<sup>204</sup> On the death of Corellius, see Büttler (1970) 77-78. Büttler notes (77-78) that this death scene is more personal than many others in the *Epistles* and its heroic nature only makes it more tragic; Beutel (2000) 178-9 on Corellius' death and Pliny's contrast of the Domitianic past with the present.

Although Pliny does not specifically name the illness, simply describing it as a *dolor*, it has been assumed to be a kind of gout or arthritis. Pliny describes Corellius' illness as one which began in his feet, but over time spread through his whole body:

hunc abstinencia sanctitate, quoad viridis aetas, vicit et fregit; novissime cum senectute ingravescentem viribus animi sustinebat, cum quidem incredibiles cruciatus et indignissima tormenta pateretur. iam enim dolor non pedibus solis ut prius insidebat, sed omnia membra pervagabatur. *Ep.* 1.12.5-6.

As long as he was young and active he could keep it under control by temperate living and strict continence, and latterly when he grew worse with advancing age, he bore up through sheer strength of mind, even when cruelly tortured by unbelievable agony; for the disease was now no longer confined to his feet as before, but was spreading through all his limbs. (trans. Radice)

The language Pliny uses here is striking: he presents Corellius' management of his illness in his youth as a physical battle, from which he emerged victorious (*vicit et fregit*). Even when he was older and could no longer physically conquer the disease in this way, Pliny tells us that he showed great mental fortitude in the face of considerable pain.<sup>205</sup> Stanley Hoffer has written on this letter and its political and personal resonances for Pliny.<sup>206</sup> Hoffer claims that Corellius' gout serves as a symbol of the ailing Roman state during the period from the end of Nero's reign to Trajan's accession.<sup>207</sup> He goes on to tease out other significant dates in the letter, arguing that the shape of Corellius' life is used throughout the letter to symbolise the shape of the recent political past, and to position Pliny within it.<sup>208</sup> Hoffer argues that the onset of Corellius' illness in 62-3 and death in 97-8 are significant as the first coincides with the

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<sup>205</sup> On illness and death as presenting opportunities for putting moral values into practice and showing strength of spirit, see Bütler (1970) 71: 'vielmehr sieht er in Krankheit und Tod die Gelegenheit, die sittlichen Postulate unter erschwerten Bedingungen in die Tat umzusetzen und die Überlegenheit des Geistes selbst in extremis zu beweisen'. Bütler (1970) Ch. 6 on illness and death in the Younger's writings more generally. Tzounakas (2011) on references to Stoic ideas and Seneca's work (particularly *Ep.* 86) in *Ep.* 1.12, Edwards (2002) on pain in Seneca.

<sup>206</sup> Hoffer (1999) 141-159 on Corellius' death.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* 143-144.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* 141-145.

beginning of the turbulent final years of Nero's reign and the second with the accession of Trajan.<sup>209</sup> He also claims that the high point of Corellius' life, when he was able to control his inherited disease, coincided with the reign of Vespasian (who did not inherit the position of emperor), and that his deterioration echoes the ends of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian lines.<sup>210</sup> Moreover, Hoffer also observes a connection between Corellius and Nerva, arguing that both allowed a transition from political turbulence to stable government to take place:

Nerva is to Trajan as to Corellius is to Pliny, both being prominent elderly senators who kept their authority intact through the dark days of Domitian in order to deposit it into the young, healthy, and untarnished laps of Trajan the emperor and Pliny the senator.<sup>211</sup>

Here, I wish to consider the possibility that there is another succession narrative at play, in addition to the obvious connection between Pliny and Corellius and the political narrative that Hoffer identifies. In Book 26 of the *Natural History*, the Elder gives the following description of gout:

podagrae morbus rarior solebat esse non modo patrum avorumque memoria, verum etiam nostra, peregrinus et ipse, nam si Italiae fuisset antiquitus, Latinum nomen invenisset. insanabilis non est credendus, quippe quoniam et in multis sponte desiit et in pluribus cura. *NH* 26.100

Gout was a rarer disease within the memory, not only of our fathers and grandfathers, but also of our own generation. It is also itself a foreign complaint; had it existed in Italy in early times it would have received a Latin name. It must not be considered incurable, for many cases have been cured without treatment, and yet more with it.  
(trans. Jones)

The Elder's assessment of gout is of interest, since it differs in several ways from the Younger's depiction of Corellius' disease. Of particular interest is the fact that the Elder tells us that gout had been relatively unusual in Italy within recent memory. The phrase *patrum avorumque*

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<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* 145. Cf. Roller (2001)

*memoria* introduces the same ideas of inheritance as we found in the Younger's work (*per successiones...traduntur*), but whereas in *Ep.* 1.12 the disease was present not only in the memories but in the bodies of Corellius and his father, here the Elder treats it as a relatively rare occurrence. Moreover, compared to the very pessimistic picture put forward in the Younger's letter of Corellius' disease as excruciatingly painful and hard to treat, the Elder presents a far more positive view. The Elder tells us that in many cases gout goes away without any kind of treatment, and that with treatment it is even more likely to be cured. Indeed, throughout the *Natural History*, the Elder lists a large number of possible remedies for the condition.<sup>212</sup>

The Elder's use of the terms *sponte* and *cura* to describe the absence and presence of treatment respectively is also notable. In the Younger's letter, he describes how Corellius had chosen to end his life (*decessit Corellius Rufus et quidem sponte... Ep.* 1.12.1), while at the letter's close he asks Calestrius Tiro to offer him comfort in a new way, since he has exhausted all possibilities from sources he already knows and these are powerless in the face of his grief (*nam quae audivi legi sponte succurrunt, sed tanto dolore superantur, Ep.* 1.12.13). Free will is evidently a prominent theme in the Younger's letter, where Corellius' determination to outlive Domitian and then his equal determination to die by suicide are presented in terms of philosophical reasoning. While I would not wish to put too much emphasis on this single word, it is suggestive that the Elder's description of gout presents it as a disease that may leave of its own accord, while in the Younger's letter the choice to die is the only way for Corellius to escape its agony.

If we do choose to read an echo of the *Natural History* in this letter, it would seem to me to add an additional narrative layer to those already observed in the letter. It does not seem improbable that, in writing a letter on a significant figure in the Younger's life who was afflicted by a terrible disease, he might have turned to the pages of his uncle's work. If we do

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<sup>212</sup> See e.g. *NH* 20.4, 20.9, 20.17, 20.18, 20.29, 20.77, 20.81, 20.87, 20.88, 20.146, 20.157, 20.201, 20.213, 20.220, 20.259, 21.131, 21.174, 22.34, 22.37, 22.42, 22.59-60, 22.71, 22.76, 22.105, 22.133, 22.143, 22.145, 22.160, 22.161, 23.16, 23.75, 23.117, 23.126, 24.23, 24.47, 24.53, 24.58, 24.63, 24.100, 24.147, 24.188, 25.24, 25.54, 25.60, 26.100-101, 26.103, 27.25, 27.27, 27.56, 27.63, 28.21, 28.41, 28.66, 28.71, 28.74, 28.82, 28.96, 28.104-105, 28.116-117, 28.125, 28.136-137, 28.140, 28.219-221, 28.223, 30.39, 30.76-77, 31.11, 31.72, 31.102-103, 31.122, 32.110-111, 32.123, 34.153, 35.180, 36.132-133.

accept this, what we find in *Ep.* 1.12 may be the Younger re-working his uncle's ideas in the context of his own time. By the time the Younger was writing, he had witnessed the bloody end of the same dynasty under which his uncle had enjoyed a successful career. On this reading, Corellius' illness becomes not just a symbol of political change, but also an acknowledgement that the events of the recent past had been so damaging that full recovery was not possible. In a letter so preoccupied with role models and lines of inheritance, the case for seeing another hereditary connection here is all the more attractive.

### Verginius Rufus

The second letter I wish to consider in this context is *Ep.* 2.1, on the death of Verginius Rufus, Pliny's *tutor* and another of his senatorial role models whom he praises extensively in the collection. Verginius was not an uncontroversial figure: he was a military commander who played a significant role during the revolt of Vindex towards the end of Nero's reign.<sup>213</sup> Plutarch recounts that Verginius was saluted as emperor by his soldiers and encouraged to assume the role, but that he refused and was generally opposed to the idea of an emperor who was not elected by the senate.<sup>214</sup> The clash between Verginius and Vindex resulted in the latter's death and in Verginius again being asked to take up the role of emperor by his soldiers, but once more he refused and ultimately went into retirement.<sup>215</sup> A similar account is also found in Dio's *Roman History*, who adds the detail that one of Verginius' soldiers inscribed one of the standards with the imperial titles, but that Verginius removed them.<sup>216</sup> As we learn in

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<sup>213</sup> Sherwin-White (1966) on 2.1.2, 142 on Verginius' career.

<sup>214</sup> Plut. *Galb.* 6.1-3.

<sup>215</sup> Plut. *Galb.* 6.3-4.

<sup>216</sup> Dio 63.22-25 on the revolt of Vindex, 25.1-3 on Verginius' refusal to become emperor. Dio, like Plutarch, also says that Verginius may have refused because he believed that soldiers should not have the right to bestow imperial power, but adds that Verginius may just not have wanted to be emperor at all. Townend (1961) 338 writes that the Elder Pliny's lost historical works may have been behind Plutarch and Dio's versions of the revolt of Vindex. He notes (*passim*) that the sources on Verginius' involvement in the revolt that survive are from his friends and supporters, and that the conflicting account of Cluvius does not survive. As Townend shows (339-40), there were clearly implications of this event for the accession of Vespasian and his self-presentation. Whereas Verginius had decisively refused his soldiers' repeated exhortations to become emperor, Vespasian had accepted the position in similar circumstances (339). Levick (1999) 61 on Verginius being encouraged to be emperor; 64-5 on the Rhine legions and Verginius; 108 on Verginius being brought out of retirement under Nerva; 234 for Cluvius' account

Pliny's letter, Tacitus gave the eulogy at his state funeral, and we also find an account of Verginius' actions during the revolt in the *Histories*.<sup>217</sup>

Verginius was evidently a personally significant figure for both the Elder and the Younger, as he came from a nearby area and was the Younger's *tutor*, his legal guardian following the death of his father.<sup>218</sup> In the letter on his death, the Younger expresses the close personal affection he felt for him:

et ille quidem plenus annis abit, plenus honoribus, illis etiam quos recusavit: nobis tamen quaerendus ac desiderandus est ut exemplar aevi prioris, mihi vero praecipue, qui illum non solum publice quantum admirabar tantum diligebam; primum quod utrique eadem regio, municipia finitima, agri etiam possessionesque coniunctae, praeterea quod ille mihi tutor relictus adfectum parentis exhibuit. *Ep.* 2.1.7-8.

He died too when full of years and rich in honours, even those which he refused; and it is left to us to miss him and feel his loss as a figure from a past age. I shall feel it more than anyone, since my admiration for his public qualities was matched by personal affection. I had many reasons to love him; we came from the same district and neighbouring towns, and our lands and property adjoined each other; and then he was left by will as my guardian, and gave me a father's affection. (trans. Radice)

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of the end of the Julio-Claudian regime and the fact that the Younger took his account seriously, and Verginius as one of Tacitus' oral sources for his account of the Flavians. On Verginius' controversial career, see also Klodt (2015) 349-355 and *passim*.

<sup>217</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 1.8-9. Sherwin-White (1966) 144 on the dating of these events (Verginius' death and funeral), which he suggests probably took place in 97. Shotter (1967) 377-381 and *passim* on Tacitus' somewhat ambivalent stance towards Verginius in the *Histories*, which he attributes to Verginius' lack of decisive action during the revolt of Vindex.

<sup>218</sup> See Sherwin-White (1966) 144 on the fact that this means Pliny's father must have died some time before 76, as this type of guardian was only assigned to children under the age of fourteen. Sherwin-White also notes that it is odd that it was Verginius, rather than the Elder, who was assigned as Pliny's guardian. Bernstein (2009) 249-255 on surrogate father figures in the *Epistles*. Klodt (2015) 362 on Pliny positioning himself in the role of Verginius' son and heir: 'So wie mit der "Leichenrede" in epist. 2,1 beansprucht Plinius auch mit dem "Grab" für Verginius in epist. 6,10 den Platz eines Sohnes und Erben', *passim* on Pliny and Verginius.

As Ilaria Marchesi has demonstrated, *Ep.* 2.1 is a highly allusive letter, displaying a strong relationship with Tacitus' *Agricola*. She argues that Pliny, via a blurring of the genres of oratory and historiography, intends his mourning of Verginius in the *Epistles* to supplement, or perhaps supersede, Tacitus' more public means of mourning, both in the *Agricola* and in the eulogy the historian gave at Verginius' state funeral.<sup>219</sup> In this passage, we can clearly see Pliny emphasising his close personal connection to Verginius, as he moves in concentric circles through the ties that bound the two men, from their shared hometown, to the shared borders of their properties to, finally, Verginius' position as a surrogate father to the Younger.<sup>220</sup>

Here, I am again interested in whether negotiation of another paternal connection might be lying, concealed, in Pliny's mourning of Verginius. I am specifically interested in the details of Verginius Rufus' ultimately fatal injury. As Pliny tells us, the old man damaged his hip by falling on a slippery surface while holding a heavy book:

nam cum vocem praepararet acturus in consulatu principi gratias, liber quem forte acceperat grandiore, et seni et stanti ipso pondere elapsus est. hunc dum sequitur colligitque, per leve et lubricum pavimentum fallente vestigio cecidit coxamque fregit, quae parum apte collocata reluctantae aetate male coiit. (*Ep.* 2.1.5)

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<sup>219</sup> Marchesi (2008) 189-198. Of interest for the present discussion is the emphasis Marchesi places on Pliny's body in this letter and the physical performance of his grief (195-6). Although Marchesi discusses the letter in some detail, she says little of the actual account of Verginius' injury and death, noting only that the details 'receive attention in a typically Plinian gesture' (190 n.80).

<sup>220</sup> See e.g. Bernstein (2008) 205: 'Pliny's maternal uncle served as his "father through adoption" (*per adoptionem pater*, *Ep.* 5.8.5). However, as consular, friend of Trajan, and author of the *Panegyricus*, the Younger Pliny presents the Elder Pliny as a model to be surpassed in social rank, literary achievement, and mode of life. Rather than imitate this adoptive father, then, Pliny makes his own selection of preferential models from a group of successful men of the previous generation. He presents himself as the figurative son of Verginius Rufus and Corellius Rufus'. *Ibid. passim* on paternal models in the *Epistles*. Cf. Klodt (2015) 362. Cf. Gibson and Morello (2012) 106-107 on the Elder as an insufficient role model for the Elder, 104-135 on Pliny's role models in the *Epistles* more generally and Pliny's negotiation of his relationship with the Elder, which Gibson and Morello identify as crucial to Pliny's self-construction in the *Epistles*, 108: 'For all the glamour and attractiveness of this consular triad, the Younger's relationship with the Elder is essential to Pliny's identity within the *Letters*. As such the Younger makes sustained effort to come to terms with the implications of that relationship, particularly in the first six books of the correspondence.'

He was rehearsing the delivery of his address of thanks to the Emperor for his election to his third consulship, when he had occasion to take up a heavy book, the weight of which made it fall out of his hands, as he was an old man and standing at the time. He bent down to pick it up, and lost his footing on the slippery polished floor, so that he fell and fractured his hip. This was badly set, and because of his age it never mended properly. (trans. Radice)

Pliny's account of Verginius' fall is interesting for a number of reasons. First, Verginius' accident occurs while he is preparing to give a speech of thanks to the emperor on election to the consulship (*acturus in consulatu principi gratias*, *Ep.* 2.1.5). Verginius' death, and therefore the dramatic date for this letter, fell three years before Pliny gave his own *gratiarum actio*, the *Panegyricus*.<sup>221</sup> Yet for a later reader of Pliny, it is hard to read this line without thinking of Pliny's own speech, and therefore constructing a connection between the two men. Clearly, the Younger wished to stress his close personal connection with Verginius in this letter, as evidenced by the first passage cited above.<sup>222</sup>

The Younger writes that Verginius happened to pick up a large book shortly before his fall (*liber quem forte acceperat grandiolem*, *Ep.* 2.1.4). The use of *forte acceperat* and its suggestion of coincidence might already remind us of another moment from the *Epistles* – Pliny's programmatic introduction to the collection:

collegi non servato temporis ordine (neque enim historiam componebam), sed ut quaeque in manus venerat. *Ep.* 1.1-2

I have now made a collection, not keeping to the original order as I was not writing history, but taking them as they came to my hand. (trans. Radice)

The verb *colligere* is here used to describe both Verginius' attempts to recoup his fallen text and Pliny's assembling of his epistolary collection. While Verginius' text has slipped from his hands, Pliny's has come into his (*ut quaeque in manus venerat*, 1.1.1). We might also read a

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<sup>221</sup> Whitton (2013) 16.

<sup>222</sup> On which, see Marchesi (2008) 190-1. Marchesi (190-198) comments on how Verginius' interventions were actually public ones, but Pliny is careful to present them as personal.



metatextual significance into Pliny's comment that it was a large text that Verginius was reading. In the quotation from *Ep.* 1.1 given above, the Younger firmly distances his epistolary work from the writing of history. Pliny returns to the issue of historiography in *Ep.* 5.8, where he famously contrasts history and oratory and asks that he be allowed to delay embarking on a project of this kind.<sup>223</sup> As part of his discussion of the genre, the Younger writes that he had a familial precedent for writing this kind of text:

me vero ad hoc studium impellit domesticum quoque exemplum. avunculus meus idemque per adoptionem pater historias et quidem religiosissime scripsit. invenio autem apud sapientes honestissimum esse maiorum vestigia sequi, si modo recto itinere praecesserint. *Ep.* 5.8.4-5

In my case family precedent is an additional incentive to work of this kind. My uncle, who was also my father by adoption, was a historian of scrupulous accuracy, and I find in the philosophers that it is an excellent thing to follow in the footsteps of one's forbears, provided that they trod an honest path. (trans. Radice)

If we have this passage in mind, the fact that Verginius' fall occurs on a slippery surface, on which he loses his footing while reaching for the fallen volume (*per leve et lubricum pavementum fallente vestigio cecidit*), may take on an additional weight.<sup>224</sup> The phrase *fallente vestigio* is especially suggestive here: in a letter praising a venerable role model, to find the image of a failing footstep, a word freighted with metaliterary resonance, might lead us to think of the Younger's consideration of following in his uncle's footsteps from *Ep.* 5.8. Given that *Ep.* 2.1 is a letter in which we find the Younger mourning and praising a quasi-paternal figure, we might also see Pliny's rejection of writing a large-scale literary text as extending to the Elder's work. This scene, then, might be read as not only part of Pliny's mourning of Verginius,

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<sup>223</sup> On which, see e.g. Gamberini (1983) 58-72, Keeline (2018b) 325-329 on the Ciceronian resonances in this letter.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. Celsus *De Medicina* 8.4.3 on using a probe to determine whether bones have been broken in the case of head injuries: *ubi specillum ad os venit, si nihil nisi leve et lubricum occurrit, integrum it videri potest; si quid asperi est utique qua suturae non sunt, fractum os esse testatur*. On *vestigium*, *L&S* s.v. Ib3 for the meaning of 'trace' or 'vestige'.

but as a declaration of his chosen textual mode and a rejection of other footsteps in which he might have followed.<sup>225</sup>

## Pliny

All the categories of bodily vulnerability discussed above, in images pertaining to oratory, politics, and literature are, of course, nowhere more present than in the figure of Pliny himself. Throughout the *Epistles*, Pliny presents himself as physically frail or somehow weakened at several significant points. Many of these instances are related to his voice, or to his body while speaking. The connection between oratory and the body was, of course, a live one in ancient thought, both in terms of the actual physical performance of the speech, and also in a more metaphorical sense.<sup>226</sup> The concept of the *recusatio*, a performed public act of refusal that

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. Keeline (2018a) 197 on this image from *Ep.* 5.8 and the Younger choosing not to follow in the Elder's footsteps, including a potential irony in this metaphor when the Younger tells us (in *Ep.* 3.5) that his uncle rarely walked.

<sup>226</sup> Many of the most notable examples of this use of imagery from the *Epistles* are tied up with Pliny's depiction of his hostile relationship with the *delator* Regulus. In *Ep.* 1.20, Pliny recounts that Regulus described his own style of speaking as 'going for the jugular' ('*Tu omnia quae sunt in causa putas exsequenda; ego iugulum statim video, hunc premo.*', *Ep.* 1.20.14). Here cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.7.32-36. In *Ep.* 4.7, on Regulus' mourning of his son, Pliny again critiques Regulus' public speaking, saying that his lungs are weak, he stammers and he has a bad memory (4.7.4), with which we might contrast *Ep.* 6.29.6 on the orator Isocrates as having a weak voice, but still being judged a good orator. In Book Six, we find Pliny reporting the death of Regulus (6.2), where he again takes the opportunity to critique Regulus' oratorical practices. Here, too, there is a focus on the body, as Pliny recounts how Regulus was often pale with fear when speaking, and also used to draw a ring of eyeliner around either his right or left eye depending on whether he was speaking for the defence or the prosecution (*Ep.* 6.2.2). It is unsurprising, given Pliny's treatment of Regulus throughout the *Epistles*, that we find Pliny presenting Regulus' oratorical style as either characterised by excessive violence or as hampered by his own physical inadequacy. Tempest (2017) 181-2 on Pliny's presentation of Regulus as an example of a bad orator in *Ep.* 4.7, 184 on the weakness of Regulus' lungs as contrasted with Pliny's successful projection of his voice. Cf. Rutledge (1999) on the misconception that imperial *delatores* were more violent than their equivalents during the Republic, which he attributes in part to the hostile treatment *delatores* received from contemporary sources, including Pliny (561-2). *Ep.* 2.20 (7-8 and *passim*) on Regulus and *captatio*, alternately prolonging the lives or hastening the deaths of his targets in order to benefit financially. On Regulus, see Ash (2013) for the role Pliny's depiction of the *delator* plays in his own self-representation, Marchesi (2018) on Regulus and the relationship of Pliny's text to those of Martial and Lucan. Cf. Tracy (1980) on the figure of the *captator*. More broadly, see e.g. Kennedy (1994) 170 on *controversiae* as often containing violence, Hoffer (2007) on the motif of indigestion in Cicero.

operated in both the literary and political spheres, has been extensively explored by scholars.<sup>227</sup> Kirk Freudenburg, in an article on Horace and Augustus, has demonstrated that the act of *recusatio* as performed by emperors had many important similarities with the literary *recusatio* performed by poets.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, Ruth Morello has explored the motif of ‘having nothing to say’ in the *Epistles*, tracing the multiple significances of this trope in Pliny’s work.<sup>229</sup> Morello identifies two different iterations of this theme in the *Epistles*: the recurrence of the ‘nothing to say’ motif in individual letters, and the phenomenon in Pliny’s work of covering letters which purportedly accompany speeches or other pieces of writing, but which rarely mention the title or content of the work.<sup>230</sup> Morello also outlines one of the advantages of this second technique – it allows Pliny to create the impression of a large corpus of work without needing to be too specific:

In including a number of unspecific cover letters in the collection, Pliny suggests the existence of a rather large number of works; this is a useful strategy for a man conscious of the proportion of his public activity which could not interest posterity (2.14.1). Thus his vaguer letters also contribute to the self-constructed picture of a man with the potential to live up to his prolific uncle’s example.<sup>231</sup>

Here, I am interested in how this vagueness about the volume of his literary production might intersect with the Younger’s presentation of his body as weakened or enfeebled by the Domitianic past, particularly where this apology for a lack of literary production relates to the Younger’s relationship with the Elder and the *Natural History*. Scholars, including Morello, have identified the Elder’s prolific literary production as a source of potential anxiety for his nephew.<sup>232</sup> By approaching this anxiety through the lens of corporeality, I will explore how Pliny presents Domitian’s reign as rendering him physically incapable of producing not only the volume, but also the style, of work that his uncle had done.

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<sup>227</sup> See e.g. Race (1978), Morello (2003), Freudenburg (2014).

<sup>228</sup> Freudenburg (2014).

<sup>229</sup> Morello (2003).

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid. passim*.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* 202.

<sup>232</sup> Morello (2003) 202.

For example, in *Ep.* 2.11, Pliny describes speaking for more than four hours at the trial of Marius Priscus, who had previously been governor of Africa and was now being prosecuted by the people of that province.<sup>233</sup> He mentions that during the trial, Trajan even intervened at one point to prevent him from over-exerting himself while speaking:

Caesar quidem tantum mihi studium, tantam etiam curam (nimium est enim dicere sollicitudinem) praestitit, ut libertum meum post me stantem saepius admoneret voci laterique consulerem, cum me vehementius putaret intendi, quam gracilitas mea perpeti posset. *Ep.* 2.11.15

The Emperor did indeed show such an attentive and kindly interest in me (I should not like to call it anxiety on my behalf) that more than once, when he fancied I was putting too much strain on my rather delicate physique, he suggested to my freedman standing behind me that I should spare my voice and my lungs. (trans. Radice)

Here, Pliny presents Trajan as a protective figure and himself as physically slight, weakened by the task of speaking.<sup>234</sup> The term *gracilitas*, which can be used of speeches as well as bodies, draws a contrast between the delicacy of Pliny's frame and the robustness of his oratorical performance, while implying that giving such a speech comes at an intense physical cost.<sup>235</sup> We find a parallel for such a scene in *Ep.* 5.19, where Pliny writes to Valerius Paulinus, concerning a freedman in his household, named Zosimus.<sup>236</sup> The letter is a request that Zosimus

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<sup>233</sup> Whitton (2015a) 139 calls the letter 'a triumph of Plinian advocacy'. Whitton analyses the letter in the wider context of the structure of *Epistles* 2, arguing that the book's second half moves towards a more withdrawn, pessimistic mood (140-143), a retreat which Whitton argues prefigures the Younger's retreat at the end of Book 9 (142), and which ties into a broader narrative of political change for Pliny and the empire (142-3).

<sup>234</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 10.18.1, in which Trajan writes to Pliny expressing regret that he and his party were not able to reach Bithynia without illness: *cuperem sine querela corpusculi tui et tuorum pervenire in Bithyniam potuisses, ac simile tibi iter ab Epheso ei navigationi fuisset, quam expertus usque illo eras*. Keeline (2018a) 184-5 on Pliny's slight frame as in contrast with the Elder's.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Tempest (2017) 184-5, who reads this letter in combination with the collection's focus on *otium*, arguing that the connection Pliny draws between exercise and oratory in *Ep.* 9.36 demonstrates the important role played by *otium* in Pliny's success as an orator.

<sup>236</sup> See Keeline (2018b) 318 for the possibility that Pliny might have had Cicero and Tiro in mind when writing this letter, even if he is not making a specific literary point: 'We postulate a supremely cynical Pliny if we believe

be allowed to come and stay at Valerius Paulinus' property in Gaul, in order that he can recuperate from his illness.

In the letter, Pliny highlights Zosimus' skills as a reader across a number of genres (*Ep.* 5.19.3). He particularly stresses the unique nature of Zosimus' skills and the affection he feels for him:

haec tibi sedulo exposui, quo magis scires, quam multa unus mihi et quam iucunda ministeria praestaret. accedit longa iam caritas hominis, quam ipsa pericula auxerunt..  
*Ep.* 5.19.4-5

I have told you all this in detail so that you may better realize all the pleasant services I receive from Zosimus which no one else can give me. I have moreover long felt for him an affection which has increased with the dangers he has come through... (trans. Radice)

Pliny here writes that the risk of Zosimus' illness has increased his strength of feeling about his freedman.<sup>237</sup> Specifically, this is an affliction that affects Zosimus when he is speaking and reading aloud, causing him to cough up blood. In the letter, Pliny recalls the first time Zosimus was first affected by this condition, during a performance:

nam ante aliquot annos, dum intente instanterque pronuntiat, sanguinem reiecit atque ob hoc in Aegyptum missus a me post longam peregrinationem confirmatus redit nuper; deinde dum per continuos dies nimis imperat voci, veteris infirmitatis tussicula admonitus rursus sanguinem reddidit. *Ep.* 5.19.6-7

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that his primary motive in tending to the health of those in his care was to align himself with Cicero. And yet when publishing such a letter for posterity, some thought of Tiro and Cicero may well have crossed his mind.'

<sup>237</sup> We might compare *Ep.* 8.1, in which we again find a member of Pliny's household afflicted by an ailment affecting the voice. This time, it is his *lector*, Encolpius, who is affected, his throat irritated by dust on a journey: *Encolpius quidem lector, ille seria nostra ille deliciae, exasperatis faucibus pulvere sanguinem reiecit. quam triste hoc ipsi, quam acerbum mihi, si is cui omnis ex studiis gratia inhabilis studiis fuerit!* (*Ep.* 8.1.2). On this letter, see Morello (2015) 153-5. Ratti (2011) for the intriguing possibility that the author of the *Satyricon* may have been a freedman of Pliny, 90 on this letter.

Some years ago he was exerting himself during a passionate performance when he began to spit blood. I then sent him to Egypt, and after a long stay there he recently returned with his health restored. Now after demanding too much of his voice for several days on end he has had a slight return of his cough as a reminder of the old trouble, and once again has brought up blood. (trans. Radice)

Here, the damage caused by oratory is certainly real rather than metaphorical, since speaking actually does aggravate Zosimus' condition. Specifically, it is over-exerting himself while speaking that causes Zosimus to become unwell, as speaking for multiple days in a row causes a recurrence of an ailment that was originally triggered by an impassioned performance. I wonder, then, whether we might draw a comparison between Pliny's depiction of Zosimus here and his presentation of his own strenuous speech-making in *Ep.* 2.11.<sup>238</sup> I suggest this parallel for a number of reasons: first, the commitment to oratorical performance, even at the risk of endangering one's health, is present in both letters. Second, in both letters we find affectionate concern for the person speaking: in *Ep.* 5.19, this is Pliny's concern for Zosimus, while in *Ep.* 2.11, it is Trajan's concern for Pliny. In drawing a connection between these two letters, Pliny could both draw a connection between himself and his freedman, as determined speakers, and himself and the emperor, as bestowers of care and concern.<sup>239</sup> We might also see a parallel between Pliny and Zosimus in the former's comment that his affection for Zosimus grew owing to the danger he had experienced, which is reminiscent of some of Pliny's references elsewhere in the collection to dangers he has faced personally.<sup>240</sup> The language he uses to describe Zosimus' cough is reminiscent of the post-Domitianic rhetoric employed by Pliny and other

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<sup>238</sup> We might here compare *Ep.* 3.18, where Pliny recounts a reading he gave of his *Panegyricus* while he was revising it for publication. In his account of this reading, Pliny describes how he spoke for two days and was then asked to continue for a third by those who had attended the reading: *cepi autem non mediocrem voluptatem, quod hunc librum cum amicis recitare voluissem, non per codicillos, non per libellos, sed "si commodum" et "si valde vacaret" admoniti (numquam porro aut valde vacat Romae aut commodum est audire recitantem), foedissimis insuper tempestatibus per biduum convenerunt, cumque modestia mea finem recitationi facere voluisset, ut adicerem tertium diem exegerunt. Ep.* 3.18.4-5. Henderson (2002c) 141-151 on this letter.

<sup>239</sup> Bell (1990) 38-9 on Pliny's care for Zosimus as not purely from self-interest.

<sup>240</sup> See e.g. *Ep.* 3.11.3: ... *tot circa me iactis fulminibus quasi ambustus mihi quoque impendere idem exitium certis quibusdam notis augurarer*, on which, see Strunk (2013).

authors, as Zosimus' symptoms serve as a warning of the pain suffered before (*veteris infirmitatis...admonitus*).<sup>241</sup>

Another example of this imagery occurs in *Ep.* 3.9, on the trial of Caecilius Classicus, another letter regarding the trial of an ex-governor facing prosecution from the people of the province. Describing the efforts of himself and his colleague in the trial, Pliny says:

verebamur ne nos dies ne vox ne latera deficerent, si tot crimina tot reos uno velut fasce complecteremur... *Ep.* 3.9.9

It looked as though we should run short of time and lose our breath and voice if we bundled so many accusations and defendants all together, so to speak... (trans. Radice)

Here, we find Pliny worrying that he and his colleague will not be up to the physical task of tackling the huge amount of material and work involved in the case. The desire of Trajanic authors to represent themselves as weakened or wounded by the Domitianic era has been explored at length by many scholars.<sup>242</sup> In particular, discussion of lost or weakened voices served as an especially powerful and convenient motif for writers seeking to position themselves afresh in the new regime. Holly Haynes has discussed Tacitus' use of this trope throughout the *Agricola*, arguing for its intersection with questions of *memoria*, and demonstrating that for Tacitus and his peers, living under a bad emperor signified

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<sup>241</sup> In the letter, Pliny also emphasises Zosimus' temperate nature (*erit autem opus modico; est enim tam parvus et continens, ut non solum delicias verum etiam necessitates valetudinis frugalitate restringat*, *Ep.* 5.19.9), which bears resemblance to Pliny's descriptions of his own self-restraint when unwell from elsewhere in the collection (e.g. *Ep.* 7.21.3: *balineum adsumo quia prodest, vinum quia non nocet, parcissime tamen*), cf. *Ep.* 7.26 on the virtues of the sick man.

<sup>242</sup> E.g. Flower (2006) 234-271 on memory and memory sanctions in the Flavian and Trajanic periods, Haynes (2006) 157-9 and *passim* on the *Agricola*, Whitton (2010) on *Ep.* 8.14, Penwill (2015) on the politics of writing in the Trajanic period more generally. Cf. Haynes (2004) on the significance of the term *vocabulum* in Tacitus, and on language and imperial discourse more generally.

a kind of death even for those who did not actually lose their lives, that they left behind an unrecoverable part of themselves, and that this death or loss is engendered by the repression of speech.<sup>243</sup>

Whitton has examined this motif in Pliny's *Ep.* 8.14, exploring how he uses a web of intertextual references to construct a picture of the voiceless senate under Domitian as trapped in a state of exile.<sup>244</sup> In this letter, Pliny writes to Titius Aristo concerning the recent trial in the senate of the freedmen of Afranius Dexter, who were accused of his death, in which Pliny feels that he acted wrongly.<sup>245</sup> Pliny contextualises his potential mistake by explaining the ways in which his generation had suffered during their development as senators, owing to Domitian's regime:

iidem prospeximus curiam, sed curiam trepidam et elinguem, cum dicere quod velles periculosum, quod nolles miserum esset. *Ep.* 8.14.8

We too were spectators in the Senate, but in a Senate which was apprehensive and dumb, since it was dangerous to voice a genuine opinion and pitiable to express a forced one. (trans. Radice)

eadem mala iam senatores, iam participes malorum multos per annos vidimus tulimusque; quibus ingenia nostra in posterum quoque hebetata fracta contusa sunt. breve tempus (nam tanto brevius omne quanto felicius tempus) quo libet scire quid simus, libet excercere quod scimus. *Ep.* 8.14.9-10

On becoming senators we took part in these evils and continued to witness and endure them for many years, until our spirits were blunted, broken and destroyed with lingering effect; so that it is only a short time (the happier the time the shorter it seems) since we

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<sup>243</sup> Haynes (2006) 152-3.

<sup>244</sup> Whitton (2010) 120-130 and *passim*. Cf. Mratschek (2020) 26-33 on Sidonius Apollinaris' obituary of Lampridius as making reference to the parallel murders in Pliny's *Ep.* 3.14 and 8.14, and images of voicelessness and strangulation in relation to trauma.

<sup>245</sup> Beutel (2000) 180-181, 258-262 on *Ep.* 8.14, Morello (2015) 169-170 on the same letter, and *passim* on Book 8 generally.



began to want to know our own powers and put our knowledge into practice. (trans. Radice)

Here, we can see how the language of bodily vulnerability is again used to describe the transition from the reign of Domitian to that of Trajan.<sup>246</sup> Once more, we find an image of the senators as fundamentally changed by what they have lived through, so that even once better times have arrived, they have not fully recovered from the past. Whitton points to Pliny's intertextual references to Tacitus' *Agricola* in these passages, noting that the motif of shared guilt, expressed through the repeated first-person plural verbs, is one which appears in both works.<sup>247</sup> We can see, then, that these examples reveal a clear political purpose to Pliny's presentation of himself as frail or vulnerable, as he attempted to present himself and his peers as blameless victims of Domitian's regime.<sup>248</sup>

If these instances represent points at which Pliny presents himself as vulnerable in the public sphere, there are also occasions when we find an ostensibly more private sense of infirmity. In *Ep.* 7.21, Pliny writes to his colleague Tertullus about a recent eye ailment:

pareo, collega carissime, et infirmitati oculorum ut iubes consulo. nam et huc tecto vehiculo undique inclusus quasi in cubiculo perveni et hic non stilo modo verum etiam lectionibus difficulter sed abstineo, solisque auribus studeo. *Ep.* 7.21.1-2

I obey, dear colleague, and I am seeing to my eye trouble as you bid me. I travelled here in a closed carriage with the light completely excluded, so that I might have been

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<sup>246</sup> Cf. Tacitus *Hist.* 1.1: *mihi Galba Otho Vitellius nec beneficio nec iniuria cogniti. dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim: sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est. quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiores securioresque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.*

<sup>247</sup> Whitton (2010) 125-6.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* 119-120 on the way that this letter is structurally paralleled with *Ep.* 2.11. This imagery also appears elsewhere throughout the *Epistles* and the *Panegyricus*. In *Ep.* 7.27, a letter to Licinius Sura on some supernatural happenings, Pliny also recounts how he managed to escape a charge against him that was found in Domitian's desk after his death, on which see Baraz (2012).

in my private room, and now that I am here I am neither writing nor reading – no easy sacrifice, but I have made it – and am working only by ear. (trans. adapted from Radice)

Gibson and Morello consider this letter in relation to the theme of *otium* in the *Epistles*, arguing that although Pliny's illness enforces leisure time, it also bears resemblance to times of *negotium* since it keeps Pliny from engaging in *studia*.<sup>249</sup> This letter becomes even more interesting when read alongside *Ep.* 3.5, the Younger's letter on the Elder's daily routine and work habits. In the latter, the Younger tells us that the Elder always travelled in a litter and that he criticised the Younger for wasting valuable time walking which he could have spent working.<sup>250</sup> In the same letter, the Younger also mentions that the Elder often worked by listening or dictation, so that he could continue to work at times when it was not possible to read or write as he would normally.<sup>251</sup> In *Ep.* 7.21, the Younger is forced to employ habits more similar to those of the Elder, but rather than leading him to produce more work, it has the opposite effect.

Reading this letter alongside the more public or political examples discussed above, we might observe some similar strategies at play. Although this letter is not about the Domitianic past in the way that *Ep.* 8.14 is, letters such as these nonetheless contribute to an overall picture of Pliny as weakened or vulnerable throughout the *Epistles*. In particular, the idea of retreat or retirement which runs throughout the letter bears comparison with tropes used to discuss the recent past.<sup>252</sup> In *Ep.* 7.21, Pliny describes how he has been sitting inside in half-darkness during his recovery:

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<sup>249</sup> Gibson and Morello (2012) 194.

<sup>250</sup> *Ep.* 3.5.15-16: ...*qua ex causa Romae quoque sella vehebatur. repeto me correptum ab eo, cur ambulare: "poteras" inquit 'has horas non perdere'; nam perire omne tempus arbitrabatur, quod studiis non impenderetur.* On this letter, see e.g. Henderson (2002c) 75-101, Ker (2004) 234-236 on the letter and the Elder's *lucubratio*, Citroni Marchetti (2011) 34, 56-60, 72, 98-102; Gibson and Morello (2012) 108-126 on *Ep.* 3.5 in the context of the collection's routine letters, Keeline (2018a).

<sup>251</sup> *Ep.* 3.5.10-13, 14-16.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 9.36.1-2: *evigilo cum libuit, plerumque circa horam primam, saepe ante, tardius raro. clausae fenestrae manent; mire enim silentio et tenebris ab iis quae avocant abductus et liber et mihi relictus, non oculos animo sed animum oculis sequor, qui eadem quae mens vident, quotiens non vident alia.* See Lefèvre (1987) 258-261 on *Ep.* 9.36 and Pliny's need for change and variety in his daily routine, as well as his desire, in contrast to Spurinna, to be alone in his villa.

cubicula obductis velis opaca nec tamen obscura facio. cryptoporticus quoque adopertis inferioribus fenestris tantum umbrae quantum luminis habet. sic paulatim lucem ferre condisco. *Ep.* 7.21.2-3

I can darken my rooms by drawing the blinds, without making them too dark, and the light in the roofed arcade is reduced by half when the lower windows have their shutters closed. By this means I am gradually reaccustoming myself to full daylight. (trans. Radice)

Of course, there is evidently a practical element to this – Pliny has been suffering from an illness affecting his eyes and there is presumably a medical need for this process of readjustment. However, given what we know about the *Epistles*, there is always more at work than what is happening on the surface. There is a clear similarity in tone between Pliny's description of his recuperation and his return to daylight after illness in this letter, and the images we find in the work of Pliny and other Trajanic authors of a return to the light heralded by Trajan's accession after the darkness of the Domitianic past.<sup>253</sup>

Across these passages, then, we can see Pliny continually presenting himself as physically infirm throughout the *Epistles*. As scholars have shown, an important function of these passages is to present Pliny as wounded or weakened by Domitian's regime, in keeping with similar tropes used by other authors of his time. What is more, these passages can be read as a form of *recusatio* that is not just limited to the Younger's political activities, but which extends from the political sphere to the literary realm. This becomes particularly significant when we read these letters with the figure of the Elder in mind. On this reading, the letters might then become an apology not only for Pliny succeeding under a bad emperor, but also for not being able to produce literary works of the kind his uncle had done, both in terms of volume and in terms of content. In the following section, I will turn to the natural world, in order to explore how this performed inability to write the kind of work the Elder had also infiltrates the Younger's presentation of nature.

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. Sen. *Apoc.* 12, on lawyers coming back to life at the funeral of Claudius: *iurisconsulti e tenebris procedebant, pallidi, graciles, vix animam habentes, tanquam qui tum maxime reviviscerent*.

## The Younger's Natural World

The final category of images of bodily vulnerability I consider in this chapter relates to the Younger's presentation of the natural world in the *Epistles*. To consider this category in the *Epistles* brings our discussion full circle, as we turn to images from the Younger's work which are familiar from his uncle's *Natural History*. Specifically, the passages I consider here all revolve around images of restricted breathing or suffocation in the context of the natural world. The use of corporeal images to explain natural phenomena was not uncommon, and it is not surprising that we also find these images in the Younger's letters. However, by considering some of these examples in greater detail, I hope to show that there is more at work in these letters than the adoption of a common or standardised vocabulary. In this section, I consider three letters, *Ep.* 4.30 on the workings of a spring at Comum, and *Epistles* 6.16 and 6.20, on the eruption of Vesuvius and the death of the Elder Pliny.

### *Ep.* 4.30

In *Ep.* 4.30, Pliny writes to Licinius Sura concerning the workings of a mysterious spring in his hometown of Comum. As others have noted, this spring is also described by the Elder Pliny in the *Natural History*, where it receives only a passing mention in comparison to the Younger's more extended treatment.<sup>254</sup> Du Prey writes of the spring:

Pliny certainly knew of it, because he devoted to its predictable gushes a minute description (bk. 4, ep. 30) that enlarged on the one in the *Natural History* written by his late uncle. (The study of nature ran in the family.) At the precise spot where the spring spills into the lake, there still unfolds a magnificent prospect encircled by mountains. Scenes of natural beauty like these must have nurtured in the young Pliny the special love of scenery his letters so strongly convey.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> *NH* 2.232. Du Prey (1994) 6, Lefèvre (1988) 239, where Lefèvre also notes that the letter's position at the end of Book Four emphasises its importance.

<sup>255</sup> Du Prey (1994) 6.

As Du Prey and other scholars have observed, the Younger is clearly engaging with natural scientific writing, and with the Elder's *Natural History* in particular, in this letter.<sup>256</sup> Scholars have argued that, in enlarging this small moment from the *Natural History* into an extensive description, the Younger offers his own contribution to both natural historical enquiry and the literature of *mirabilia*, a tradition to which his uncle's work offered an important contribution.<sup>257</sup> The letter has been read as an opportunity for the Younger to engage in generic play with such works in the context of a meal at the water's edge.<sup>258</sup>

While I certainly accept the premise that the Younger is engaging with the *Natural History* in this letter, I wonder whether we might further nuance our understanding of the way this interaction takes place. Pliny begins the letter by describing the source of the spring:

fons oritur in monte, per saxa decurrit, excipitur cenatiuncula manu facta; ibi paulum retentus in Larium lacum decidit. *Ep.* 4.30.2

There is a spring which has its source in a mountain and then runs down over the rocks to a small artificial grotto, where it is caught and held for a time; then it flows down into Lake Como. (trans. Radice)

huius mira natura; ter in die stasis auctibus ac diminutionibus crescit decrescitque. cernitur id palam et cum summa voluptate deprenditur. iuxta recumbis et vesceris, atque etiam ex ipso fonte (nam et frigidissimus) potas; interim ille certis dimensisque momentis vel subtrahitur vel adsurgit. *Ep.* 4.30.2-4

This is its remarkable feature: three times a day it fills and empties with a regular increase and decrease of water, and this can be seen quite clearly and is a great pleasure

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<sup>256</sup> See also Lefèvre (1988) 239-245.

<sup>257</sup> Sherwin-White (1966) 310 on Sura and nature writing more broadly, Neger (2018) on the differing functions of different kinds of *mirabilia* in the *Epistles*.

<sup>258</sup> Lefèvre (1988) 243-245. Hindermann (2009) on the connection between the country and literary composition and Pliny's relocation of oratorical composition from the city to the country.

to watch. You settle yourself close by for a meal and also a drink from the ice-cold water of the spring; meanwhile it ebbs and flows at regular intervals. (trans. Radice)

The unusual word *cenatiuncula*, which only occurs once in Pliny (and, indeed, only once in all surviving Latin literature), makes it explicit that we are dealing with water whose path has been diverted and shaped by human architecture. The mention of outdoor dining implies a luxurious setting, where the natural world becomes another ornament for diners to enjoy. Pliny describes how the movements of the spring can be seen by placing an item, such as a ring, at the edge of the water and watching it become gradually covered or revealed (*Ep.* 4.30.4-5). The letter's opening presents the spring as a source of entertainment to those dining nearby and the function of the water is mirrored by the function of the letter, providing an amusing diversion for periods of leisure.

After Pliny has described the unusual movement of the spring, which fills and empties three times a day, he goes on to speculate about the potential reasons for the water's movement. The first possible explanation he offers is that there is a hidden air current which opens and closes the spring's outlet:

spiritusne aliquis occultior os fontis et fauces modo laxat modo includit, prout inlatus occurrit aut decessit expulsus? quod in ampullis ceterisque generis eiusdem videmus accidere, quibus non hians nec statim patens exitus. nam illa quoque, quamquam prona atque vergentia, per quasdam obluctantis animae moras crebris quasi singultibus sistunt quod effundunt. (4.30.5-6)

Is there some hidden current of air which opens and closes the vent and outlet of the spring, possibly by blocking the way on entry and leaving it free when forced out? We see this happen in the case of bottles and similar vessels with narrow restricted necks, which though tilted downwards, pour out their contents in jerks with a repeated gulping sound as if checked by the opposing inrush of air. (trans. Radice)

The term *spiritus*, which Pliny uses in this letter to describe the movement of air in the spring is, of course, a common scientific term, with multiple possible meanings.<sup>259</sup> Unsurprisingly, it

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<sup>259</sup> L&S s.v. Ib1 for 'air', Ib2 for 'exhalation', Ib3 for 'breath', Ic2 for 'inspiration' in a divine sense, Ic3 for 'life'.

appears frequently in the *Natural History*, where it often serves to translate the Stoic idea of *pneuma* and also throughout Seneca's scientific writings, which scholars have also seen as a point of reference for this letter.<sup>260</sup> To briefly give examples of this terminology from the Elder's work, he uses the term, as part of a bodily analogy, in his discussion of tidal patterns:

circa litora autem magis quam in alto deprehenduntur hi motus, quoniam et in corpore extrema pulsum venarum, id est spiritus, magis sentiunt. 2.218

But these motions are observed more round the coasts than in the deep sea, since in the body too the extremities are more sensitive to the pulse of the veins, that is of the breath.

(trans. Rackham)

In this passage, Pliny tells us that the patterns of tides are more visible around the edges of land, and compares this phenomenon to the human body, where the extremities are more sensitive to the actions of the veins and the breath (*spiritus*). More generally, images of restricted breathing and suffocation are used by the Elder throughout the *Natural History*. For example, in describing the workings of thunder and lightning, he gives the following explanation:

posse et repulso siderum depressum qui a terra meaverit spiritum nube cohabitum tonare, natura strangulante sonitum dum rixetur, edito frangore cum erumpat ut in membrana spiritu intenta. posse et attritu, dum praeceps feratur, illum quisquis est spiritum accendi. *NH* 2.113

It is also possible for breath emerging from the earth, when pressed down by the counter-impact of the stars, to be checked by a cloud and so cause thunder, nature choking down the sound while the struggle goes on but the crash sounding when the

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<sup>260</sup> See e.g. Pedersen (1986) 175 on air in the *Natural History* as having common ground with *pneuma*, Lefèvre (1988) 244-5, Rosenmeyer (2000) 113-115 on *spiritus* and bodily analogy, Sherwin-White (1966) 310-311 on *Ep.* 4.30.5: '...Pliny here follows his uncle's theory, originating in the Stoic notion of the world-spirit, that the world has its own breath which causes natural phenomena: *NH* 2.102ff'. Scholars have also noted links with Senecan scientific writing in this letter: Gibson and Morello (2012) 198-199, Trinacty (2020) on the Senecan influences on this letter and *Ep.* 8.20, 84-90 on *Ep.* 4.30.

breath bursts out, as when a skin is stretched by being blown into. It is also possible for this breath, whatever it is, to be set on fire by the friction during its headlong progress.  
(trans. Rackham)

We also find natural forces tied to strangulation in the Elder's Pliny's discussion of water, which opens the thirty-first book of the *Natural History*:

terras devorant aquae, flammās necant, scandunt in sublime et caelum quoque sibi vindicant ac nubium obtentu vitalem spiritum strangulant, quae causa fulmina elidit, ipso secum discordante mundo. *NH* 31.2

Water swallows up the land, destroys flames, climbs aloft and conquers even the sky, and by a blanket of clouds chokes the life-giving spirit, so forcing out thunderbolts, the world waging civil war with itself. (trans. adapted from Jones)

The description here takes on an almost apocalyptic tone, as Pliny describes the power of water to destroy. Once more we find the language of violent attack, as Pliny speaks of how the waters could easily overwhelm the entire world (*devorant...necant....vindicant...strangulant*). Of particular interest for the present discussion is the phrase *vitalem spiritum strangulant*, which might bring to mind both Pliny's earlier description of the thunderclap and also the Younger's account of the tidal spring.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> A similar phrase occurs in Celsus' *De Medicina*, describing the various ailments for which blood-letting is an appropriate treatment, and including as one of the options: *ergo vehemens febris, ubi rupet corpus, venaque plenae tument, sanguinis detractioem requirit; item viscerum morbi, nervorum et resolutio et rigor et distentio, quicquid denique fauces difficultate spiritus strangulat, quicquid supprimit subito vocem, quisquis intolerabilis dolor est, et quaecumque de causa ruptum aliquid intus atque collisum est...* *De Medicina* 2.10.6-7. In this medical context, Celsus is describing choking or difficulty in breathing as a circumstance which calls for bloodletting. On choking, we might compare *NH* 11.176 on the workings of the throat, and how our anatomy usually prevents us from choking when we eat and drink. On breathing in Celsus, see Debru (2001) 52-4. Kuriyama (1995) for a comparative examination of bloodletting in ancient Greece and China, 33-36 and *passim* for the connection between ancient interest in bloodletting and concerns regarding excess in the body, Keyser (2017) on the symbolism of blood-lines and uses of blood in ancient medicine. In Celsus' examples, we find the buildup of pressure in the body being relieved via bloodletting. As with the examples from the natural world discussed above, here we find the combination of suppression of forces beneath the surface, here a bodily surface rather than that of the earth, and subsequently, the forcible rupturing of those surfaces. We might also make a point of comparison



For the Younger to be drawing on language familiar from the *Natural History* in this letter is not particularly surprising. However, in addition to this kind of engagement with his uncle's work, I wonder whether we might complicate the picture slightly. To return to the passage on the Younger's spring cited above, what is particularly interesting is that, while Pliny is ostensibly merely describing the passage of water through a neck of a vessel, or spring, the language used to do so is violently corporeal. The imagery of breathing runs throughout this passage – *os* and *fauces* can mean 'mouth' and 'throat' – lending a sense of animacy to the movement of water described. The image then becomes more violent, as Pliny moves to describe the analogous situation of water flowing out of bottles or other vessels, in the phrase *non hians nec statim patens exitus*. While of course the primary meaning here is the opening of the vessel, the potential for *exitus* to also mean death may be active here, a punning which Rimell notes as a popular trope in Stoic writing, particularly in Seneca.<sup>262</sup> This sense of the word is brought to the fore by the language of gaping and yawning, even if this is negated (*non hians nec statim patens exitus*), which brings to mind the image of a violent struggle or attack. The underlying potential for violence is then intensified in the following lines – Pliny describes the intermittent pouring of water from the vessels in language which sounds like a person gasping their final breaths (*per quasdam obluquantis animae moras crebris quasi singultibus sistunt quod effundunt*).

Victoria Rimell has written on the imagery of constricted and congested waterways in Latin literature, particularly poetry, and how this intersects with questions of imperial power and identity.<sup>263</sup> She describes the Romans' fascination with these bodies of water, observing that

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between the *Natural History* passages and one from the sixth book of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, which deals with the topic of earthquakes. In particular, the verb *strangulare* occurs as part of Seneca's passage on why there is no point in fearing the danger of nature, when one might easily die from a more mundane cause. In this passage, Seneca asks what the point would be of fearing the sea or a tidal wave, when one might die from choking on a drop of water: *ego extimescam emotum sedibus suis mare et ne aestus maiore quam solet cursu plus aquarum trahens superveniat, cum quosdam strangulaverit potio male lapsa per falces? quam stultum est mare horrere, cum scias stillicidio perire te posse!* Sen. *NQ* 6.2.5. On the *Natural Questions*, see e.g. Williams (2005a), (2005b), (2006), (2012); Hine (2006). On civil war in the *Natural History*, see Cotta Ramosino (2002).

<sup>262</sup> Rimell (2015) 122; *passim* for the Roman fascination with spatial constriction more generally.

<sup>263</sup> *Ead.* (2018b).

Latin literature returns us to these slim, fervent bodies of water again and again, making them crucial figures for first-century reimaginings of empire's contested limits, for the aporetic structures of imperialistic desire, and for the violent, witty Romanization of Alexandrian poets in the context of expanding empire.<sup>264</sup>

Rimell is primarily speaking about poetic texts, and she does not mention Pliny, but the idea of an imperial fascination with constricted waterways may also be applicable to the *Epistles*. If we return to *Ep.* 4.30, the letter appears to have darkened since its opening, this violent language standing in marked contrast to the peaceful scene with which the letter opens. This imagery of suffocation or choking continues when Pliny offers up his final possible explanation for the spring's behaviour, that there might be some more water hidden out of sight, whose movement controls that of the spring:

an nescio quod libramentum abditum et caecum, quod cum exinanitum est, suscitatur et elicit fontem; cum repletum, moratur et strangulat? scrutare tu causas (potes enim), quae tantum miraculum efficiunt: mihi abunde est, si satis expressi quod efficitur. Vale.  
*Ep.* 4.30.10-11

Or is there some force of water hidden out of sight which sets the spring in motion when it has drained away, but checks and cuts off the flow when it has filled up? It is for you to investigate the cause of this remarkable phenomenon, as you have the ability. I have done more than enough if I have managed to describe clearly what happens. (trans. Radice)

Again, the language of suffocation infuses Pliny's description of the unknown source of the spring's movements. The suggestion of some unfathomable weight of water is sinister and threatening (*abditum et caecum...exinanitum est*), while the use of the verb *strangulare* picks up on the language of restricted breathing from earlier in the letter.<sup>265</sup> In addition to the

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<sup>264</sup> Rimell (2018b) 262. Cf. Murphy (2004) 46: 'Narrow straits dividing mighty continents, like thin isthmuses dividing important seas, exercised a perennial fascination on the Romans.'

<sup>265</sup> Trinacty (2020) 84-89 argues that much of the language Pliny uses in this letter is typical of Seneca's scientific prose. I do not deny the presence of the *Natural Questions* in this letter but think we may also see a number of

connection with Seneca's scientific writing that scholars have seen in this letter, we might also see Senecan tragedy as an influence on Pliny's description. Although the verb *scrutari* is frequently used of scientific investigation by both Seneca and the Elder, it is also the same verb used by Seneca of Oedipus, as he tears out his own eyes: *scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina, / radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul / evoluit orbes*, while the phrase *mihi abunde est* and the subsequent *satis*, recalls Seneca's Atreus.<sup>266</sup> A nod to Seneca's Atreus is particularly suggestive here, given what we have explored so far in this discussion in terms of the connection between the natural world and images of consumption. *Thyestes* as a play is, of course, deeply preoccupied with images of consumption and digestion, its sickening zenith being Thyestes' ingestion of his own children in a scheme masterminded by his brother. Atreus, too, is an appetitive force in the play, as he is driven to commit terrible crimes by both his insatiable jealousy and tyrannical desire for power.<sup>267</sup>

What initially appears as an innocent and entertaining letter on a natural marvel, then, may, like the spring, be concealing something more beneath its surface. If we do accept a connection with Senecan tragedy here, it may complicate the relationship we can observe between the Younger's letter and the *Natural History*. If the Younger is selecting a subject for his letter from his uncle's work, but then challenging the reader's expectations by alluding not purely to the *Natural History*, or to scientific writing, but also to Senecan tragedy, the letter takes on a complexity beyond a description of a pleasant natural setting. More specifically, if we do choose to see a connection with Seneca's *Atreus* in particular here, the Younger may indirectly

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other influences at play. Cf. Connors and Clendenon (2016) on ancient understanding of karst terrain and how this understanding influenced depictions of subterranean spaces in ancient texts, Garani (2009) on the *Aetna*.

<sup>266</sup> Sen. *Oed.* 965-965-967: *scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina, / radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul / evoluit orbes...* On which, see Rimell (2015) 6. See also Tac. *Ann.* 14.51 on the death of Burrus, Sen. *Thy.* 105-6: *actum est abunde. gradere ad infernos specus / amnemque notum.* 279-80: *bene est, abunde est: hic placet poenae modus/ tantisper,* 888-891: *bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi. / sed cur satis sit? pergam et implebo patrem / funere suorum.*

<sup>267</sup> E.g. Rimell (2015) 133-5 on the relationship between Seneca's *Ep.* 41 and the grove in the *Thyestes*. In particular, Rimell highlights how an interest in interiority links both texts, and can lead to an uncomfortable reading of *Ep.* 41: 'Can the realization that what we thought was outside is in fact inside, illustrated by the dark, sublime grove, avoid resurrecting the moment Atreus' unveils his outrageous, god-like genius: the presence of Thyestes' sons not outside the dining room but *inside* their father's body?' (134)

be gesturing to the preoccupation with conception and ingestion that we have seen appears throughout the Elder's work.

In this letter, then, we find the Younger playing textual games with his characteristic subtlety. Presenting his reader with a letter that purports to be merely an entertaining diversion, he then employs language and images that not only play with his Senecan and Plinian models, but also present the natural world as something threatening and sinister. In her discussion of *otium* in the *Epistles*, Leach points to the fact that the Younger, in his letters on his villa properties, potentially conceals some facets of their luxurious nature and asks:

Does the lingering influence of Uncle Pliny's disciplined scientific morality cause his nephew to omit decorative specifications in order to conceal the presence of material luxury within his house?<sup>268</sup>

In this letter, in which we find a luxurious setting for a natural phenomenon with sinister undertones, expressed in language and imagery familiar from the Elder's work, we might well imagine that the Younger had the Elder's 'disciplined scientific morality' in mind.<sup>269</sup> Through a complex web of textual references, the Younger is able to both point to his uncle's work in surprising and unexpected ways. Rather than reading into this letter a sense of discomfort around luxury, which other letters in the Younger's collection would seem to contradict, I would instead argue that the sinister language we find here may be to do with a sense of discomfort concerning the natural world more generally. Nowhere is the Younger's possible fear of nature more relevant (nor, indeed, more justified) than in his letters on the eruption of Vesuvius, and it is to these I will now turn.

#### Ep. 6.16 and Ep. 6.20

I opened this discussion with the Younger's description of the Elder's death during the eruption of Vesuvius. To conclude this chapter, I return to these letters, to consider their relationship with bodily vulnerability in more detail. As I noted in the introduction, the Younger's depiction of the Elder's death uses language similar to the language he uses to describe the eruption of

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<sup>268</sup> Leach (2003) 155.

<sup>269</sup> By contrast, Lefèvre (1988) 245-6 notes the pleasure Pliny takes in luxury in this letter.

the volcano, which is, in turn, language familiar from the *Natural History*. The Younger's letters on the eruption of Vesuvius are almost certainly the two best-known letters in his epistolary corpus. Much scholarly discussion has understandably focused on the relationship between the Elder and the Younger and the question of whether or not the Younger presents his uncle as a positive role model in the letters. Answers to this question have been varied, with some critics seeing these letters as presenting the Elder in a heroic light, whereas others read a far more ambivalent or even critical attitude into the Younger's picture of the Elder.<sup>270</sup> Both Gibson and Marchesi have commented on the way in which the letters work as a supplementary text to the *Natural History*, filling in the description of Vesuvius' eruption which the Elder was never able to write.<sup>271</sup> Here, I am interested in how we see this process of supplementation operating on the level of the letters' language.

The images of breathing and restricted breathing explored in the previous section of this discussion are, unsurprisingly, also found in these letters. For example, the Younger describes the cloud of smoke given off by the volcano in the following terms:

nam longissimo velut trunco elata in altum quibusdam ramis diffundebatur, credo quia recenti spiritu evecta, dein senescente eo destituta aut etiam pondere suo victa in latitudinem vanescebat...6.16.6

...for it [i.e. the cloud] rose to a great height on a sort of trunk and then split off into branches, I imagine because it was thrust upwards by the first blast and then left unsupported as the pressure subsided, or else it was borne down by its own weight so that it spread out and gradually dispersed. (trans. Radice)

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<sup>270</sup> For the letters as showing the Elder in a more positive light, see e.g. Büttler (1970) 80-84, Görler (1979), Jones (2001), Ripoll (2003), Galtier (2004), Riemer (2005), Berry (2008), Méthy (2007), Marchesi (2008) 171-189, Gibson (2011), Gibson and Morello (2012) 108-115 (although see 115-116 on the rejection of the Elder as a model in the context of writing history). For a more ambivalent or negative picture, see e.g. Eco (2016), Keeline (2018a). See also Gigante (1989) on the Vesuvius letters, 28-48 on his depiction of the Elder and *exitus* literature as his model, cf. Butler (1970) 80. See also Augoustakis (2005) on Pliny's use of historiographical devices in *Ep.* 6.20.

<sup>271</sup> Marchesi (2008) 175: '*Ep.* 6.20, for instance, comes to take the place of the naturalist's unwritten account of the eruption. The notes he dictated to his *notarius* while sailing towards Pomponianus' house are lost (*Ep.* 6.16.10), but in this letter Pliny gives us an addendum to his uncle's *Natural History*.' Gibson (2011) 203. Cf. Taub (2003) 169-189 on Pliny's approach to meteorological events in general.

Here, the term *spiritus* is used to describe the blast forcing the cloud out of the volcano. Furthermore, the word *truncus* is always especially evocative when thinking about corporeal imagery. Since Virgil and Lucan, it is hard to read this word without having the dismembered bodies of first Priam, and then Pompey in mind.<sup>272</sup> Furthermore, many scholars have observed often disturbingly corporeal elements in Roman writing on trees.<sup>273</sup> Marchesi, in her analysis of this letter, argues against Gigante's reading of Virgil as the main intertextual model for *Ep.* 6.16, arguing that historiographical sources are more relevant here.<sup>274</sup> However, given the use of the verb *senescere* in this passage, we may wish to take a corporeal reading of the *truncus* here a little further.<sup>275</sup> In a letter commemorating the death of the Elder, we may wish to read an intertextual significance into these lines too, and to read this image of a trunk-like shape, ageing and disintegrating, as foreshadowing the death of the Elder that is to come.

In *Ep.* 6.20, *spiritus* is also used to describe the bursts of flame emerging from the cloud during the eruption:

ab altero latere nubes atra et horrenda, ignei spiritus tortis vibratisque discursibus rupta,  
in longas flammarum figuras dehiscebat... *Ep.* 6.20.9.

On the landward side a fearful black cloud was rent by forked and quivering bursts of flame, and parted to reveal great tongues of fire, like flashes of lightning magnified in size. (trans. Radice)

In these examples, we find the language of breath and restricted breathing which, as we saw above, the Elder frequently employed in the *Natural History* in order to depict or explain natural phenomena. To return again to the Elder's descriptions of thunder and lightning

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<sup>272</sup> *Aen.* 2.567-568, *BC* 8.674-6755, 692-699, 721-723, 752-754, 9.11-14, 51-54.

<sup>273</sup> Thomas (1988) on violence done to trees in Virgil's works, Gowers (2011) on trees in the *Aeneid*, Rimell (2015) 189-198 on tree-cutting and corporeality in Sen. *Ep.* 86.

<sup>274</sup> Gigante (1989) 38-39, Marchesi (2008) 175-176 on Gigante's view as coloured by the clear allusions to Virgil in *Ep.* 6.20. Gigante (1989) 54-61 argues that Lucretius *DRN* 6 is Pliny's main model for the scientific language used to describe the eruption.

<sup>275</sup> See Gigante (1989) 52 on this verb as a play on *vanescere*.

mentioned above, we may observe some similarities between the Elder's presentation of these phenomena and the Younger's description of the eruption of Vesuvius.

his findi nubem, illis perrumpi, et esse tonitrua inpactorum ignium plagas ideoque protinus coruscare igneas nubium rimas. *NH* 2.112-113.

The latter cleaves the cloud, the flashes burst through it, and thunderclaps are the blows of the fires colliding, causing fiery cracks at once to flash out in the clouds. (trans. Rackham)

laeva prospera existimantur quoniam laeva parte mundi ortus est; nec tam adventus spectatur quam reditus, sive ab ictu resilit ignis sive opere confecto aut igne consumpto spiritus remeat. *NH* 2.142.

Flashes on the left are considered lucky, because the sun rises on the left-hand side of the firmament; and their approach is not so visible as their return, whether after the blow a fire springs from it or the breath returns when its work is done or its fire used up. (trans. Rackham)

In his description of Vesuvius' eruption, the Younger specifically compares what he can see to magnified strokes of lightning and, on reading these passages from the Elder, we may imagine that it is the lightning flashes of the *Natural History* that the Younger may have had in mind. In both authors, we find the images of clouds cleaved and ruptured by lightning and fire, along with the compression and eruption of air. In the first passage from the Younger, this is the dissipation of the cloud of smoke from the volcano, while in the second passage, and the passages from the *Natural History*, it is a more violent and forceful dispersal of air. Nevertheless, across these passages, we can see similarities in vocabulary that would suggest the Younger had the Elder's work in mind.

Furthermore, the Elder describes the marvel of the earth's suspension in the following terms:

intervenit sententia quamvis indocili probabilis turbae, inaequali globo, ut si sit figura pineae nucis, nihilominus terram undique incoli. sed quid hoc refert alio miraculo exoriente, pendere ipsam ac non cadere nobiscum? – ceu spiritus vis, mundo praesertim

inclusi, dubia sit, aut possit cadere natura repugnante et quo cadat negante! *NH* 2. 161-162.

There is an intermediate theory that is acceptable even to the unlearned crowd – that the earth is of the shape of an irregular globe, resembling a pine cone, yet nevertheless is inhabited all round. But what is the good of this theory when there arises another marvel, that the earth herself hangs suspended and does not fall and carry us with it? As if forsooth there were any doubt about the force of breath, especially when shut up inside the world, or as if it were possible for the earth to fall when nature opposes, and denies it any place to fall to! (trans. Rackham)

In the surrounding text, the Elder is discussing the shape of the earth and how it can be that the earth could be spherical and yet people be able to stand on its surface all the way around. In this passage, the Elder mentions one theory that the earth is shaped like a pinecone. He then goes on to say that there is a bigger marvel at issue here, namely how the earth is able to remain suspended. Pliny exclaims at the power of *spiritus*, which is such that it can hold the earth in the air. Again, this *spiritus* is specifically enclosed within the earth (*mundo inclusi*), in alignment with the discussions of natural processes found elsewhere in the Elder's work. The mention of the pinecone is of interest here, since the Younger describes the cloud created by Vesuvius' eruption as being in the shape of a pine tree:

nubes – incertum procul intuentibus ex quo monte (Vesuvium fuisse postea cognitum est) – oriebatur, cuius similitudinem et formam non alia magis arbor quam pinus expresserit. *Ep.* 6.16.5-6

It was not clear at that distance from which mountain the cloud was rising (it was afterwards known to be Vesuvius); its general appearance can best be expressed as being like a pine rather than any other tree... (trans. Radice)



It does seem plausible that when writing this letter, the Younger had the Elder's work in mind.<sup>276</sup> This is true not only when the Younger is describing the natural phenomenon of the volcano, but also when he is describing the Elder's death. The Younger's repeated use of imagery of breathing culminates in his description of the Elder's restricted breathing as he dies:

innitens servolis duobus adsurrexit et statim concidit, ut ego colligo, crassiore caligine spiritu obstructo, clausoque stomacho qui illi natura invalidus et angustus et frequenter aestuans erat. *Ep.* 6.16.19-20

He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed, I imagine because the dense fumes choked his breathing by blocking his windpipe which was constitutionally weak and narrow and often inflamed. (trans. Radice)

The use of the term *spiritus* across these different moments from the two letters foregrounds its multiple potential meanings, as the violent explosion and eruption of air and smoke from the earth during the volcano is at once mirrored and reversed in the violent constriction of the Elder's airways as he dies.<sup>277</sup> The use of a term which, in the *Natural History*, the Elder used to describe the devastating power of nature, the workings of its phenomena and the divine breath which holds the earth in remarkable suspension, is here used to describe his asphyxiation. For the Elder, dying *spiritu obstructo* is at once a fitting and a particularly poignant end.<sup>278</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that bodily vulnerability is a productive lens through which to read both the Elder and the Younger's works, and to read the two alongside one another. Despite the significant differences between their projects in both form and content, there are nonetheless fruitful points of comparison. For the Elder, the vulnerability or

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<sup>276</sup> Gigante (1989) 64-5 on the Younger's employment of *similitudo*, 65 on his lack of scientific terminology: 'La straordinarietà dell'evento scopriva in Plinio una certa *egestas* di termini precisi oltre che una relativa, anche se notevole, capacità scientifica.'

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.* 61 on the Younger using the image of a universal catastrophe in his description of the Elder's death.

<sup>278</sup> For a contrasting view of the Elder's death as undignified, see e.g. Keeline (2018a).

permeability of nature's bodies, whether these are the miraculously minute bodies of insects, the over-indulged bodies of revellers, or the contours of the landscape, is another means of celebrating the wonders of the natural world and of condemning human excess. This imagery serves to blur the boundaries between mankind and the environment and to show how the actions of one mirror and motivate those of the other. Furthermore, these images may also serve a meta-literary function in the *Natural History*, as the impossibility of fully grasping and measuring the universe and the power of nature is reflected in the uncontainable nature of the work's bodies, which leak, seep and explode out of the text's pages.

For the Younger, the body is often a political space, its vulnerability a symptom of moral rectitude used to reflect on and respond to the recent past. This political significance exists even outside the letters dealing with the public realm, seeping into personal, private accounts of illness and loss. Moreover, the body is also often a space for meta-literary experiments. The use of corporeal imagery in discussions of oratory and other forms of composition often weakens the boundaries between the human body and the form of the text, while accounts of real illnesses or injuries experienced by Pliny and those around him often also take on a meta-literary significance. Throughout the letters, Pliny presents himself as physically frail, both in order to position himself favourably regarding the reign of Domitian and also, perhaps, to excuse himself from producing a work on the scale of the Elder's. Finally, the vulnerable body is where we find meaningful contact between the Elder and the Younger and their works. In *Ep.* 4.30, we might see the Elder's moralising approach to scientific writing behind his nephew's somewhat unsettling description of a luxurious tidal spring, while in the Vesuvius letters, this contact takes on a particularly poignant tone, as the Elder's vulnerable body is immortalised in the language of his own colossal tribute to the natural world.

## Chapter Three: Domestic Space

### Introduction

In one of his famous letters on the eruption of Vesuvius and the death of the Elder, the Younger describes how his uncle, having gone to the aid of a friend, found himself surrounded by increasing destruction due to the ongoing eruption of the volcano:

in commune consultant, intra tecta subsistant an in aperto vagentur. nam crebris vastisque tremoribus tecta nutabant, et quasi emota sedibus suis nunc huc nunc illuc abire aut referri videbantur. *Ep.* 6.16.15-16

They debated whether to stay indoors or take their chance in the open, for the buildings were now shaking with violent shocks, and seemed to be swaying to and fro as if they were torn from their foundations. (trans. Radice)

Here, the general chaos and destruction caused by the volcano's eruption is portrayed in an image of houses shaking, seemingly on the brink of collapse. The image of a house torn from its foundations is a potent one, found throughout ancient literature.<sup>279</sup> In this chapter, I am interested in how the Elder and the Younger approach the idea of home, and different forms of domestic architecture more generally.<sup>280</sup> Beginning with the *Natural History*, I will look at descriptions of nests, both human and animal, in the Elder's work and show how these spaces are a useful tool for examining his moralising view of human interactions with the natural world. I will begin with avian nests and move to consider some examples of human nest-

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. Eur. *IT* 46-9 for the image of a house torn from its foundations, to which I will return later. See Santoro l'Hoir (2006) 35-7 on Tacitus' use of this tragic image in the *Annals*, *passim* on the influence of tragedy on the text more generally. Gowers (2011) 89 n.8 on metaphorical uses of terms for uprooting in Greek (e.g. πρῶπιζος, ῥιζοθεν, ῥιζόω). On architectural instability in Virgil, Lucan and Tacitus, Chomse (2016).

<sup>280</sup> The Roman *domus* has received considerable attention from scholars across the fields of literature, archaeology and social history, e.g. Wallace-Hadrill (1988), Bergmann (1994) on the role of memory in the *domus* and the case study of the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii, Hales (2003).

building, first in the *Natural History* and then in the *Epistles*. From here, I will turn to domestic space more generally in the *Epistles*, exploring how the often negative connotations of these spaces, through their connection with death or illness. Finally, I will consider the Elder's depictions of labyrinths, which constitute an example of domestic space that is distorted or distorting. Through an exploration of these presentations of domestic space, I show how both authors made use of these spaces to different ends in their works.

### Problems of Domestic Space

Before I turn to a closer examination of domestic architecture in the Elder and Younger's works specifically, I will first give a brief overview of the topic of Roman domestic space more broadly. As has been demonstrated by many scholars, attempting to map our own ideas of privacy and communality directly onto Roman spaces and patterns of thought is a misguided task.<sup>281</sup> The way in which we might conceive of our homes as purely private spaces would not have been so for many Romans, especially for members of the senatorial elite, who may have owned multiple homes in Rome and beyond. In this vein, Shelley Hales has written on the importance of visibility and visibility in and of the *domus* for elite Romans.<sup>282</sup> In her opinion, views in and out of the elite *domus* set up a relationship between the house's owner and those who visited it, or even just viewed it, from the surrounding environment. Hales also writes of the symbiotic relationship between the *domus* and the city:<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> See e.g. Wallace-Hadrill (1988), Treggiari (1998) on the opposition of the *domus* and the *forum* in Cicero (3: 'In Roman thinking about the house, public and private join up and overlap. The threshold of the house does not mark a barrier between public and private worlds, but a marker over which household members and non-members pass to go in or out.'). Newlands (2002) Ch. 2 on the house in Statius *Silv.* 1.2 and 3.4, Milnor (2005) on the symbolic potential of domesticity in the Augustan period, and the development of this concept in the early imperial period, Cooper (2007) for analysis of the *domus* with reference to both Vitruvius' *de Architectura* and later Christian sources, Russell (2015) on public space in Republican Rome. Russell's work also includes interrogation of the concepts of public and private in the Roman world. Rees (1998) on Pliny's use of *privatus* concerning individuals, 79-83 on Trajan's private life in the *Panegyricus*.

<sup>282</sup> Hales (2003) 43-48 and *passim*.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.* 55. This relationship could clearly also become problematic or distorted, such as in the Elder's description of the palaces of Caligula and Nero: *sed omnes eas duae domus vicerunt. bis vidimus urbem totam cingi domibus principum Gai et Neronis, huius quidem, ne quid deesset, aurea. nimirum sic habitaverant illi qui hoc imperium fecere tantum, ad devincendas gentes triumphosque referendos ab aratro aut foco exeuntes, quorum agri quoque minorem modum optinuerunt quam sellaria istorum!* *NH* 36.111, on which see e.g. Naas (2002) 382-3: 'Espace

In many respects, the city was an overgrown house and the house, a microcosmic city.

The close relationship between the space of the *domus* and the urban landscape in which it was situated was one which could be seen and felt throughout the internal structure of the house. Wallace-Hadrill notes that one way in which the multiple functions of the Roman house were made apparent on the visual level in the Roman house was through a blending of architectural features:

It is by borrowing the language of actual public spaces in the domestic context that architect and decorator can evoke in the visitor the ‘feel’ of something more than a private house.<sup>284</sup>

Wallace-Hadrill also explores the way in which levels of privacy in the Roman house fell on a spectrum, with the level of seclusion they offered operating relative to that offered by other spaces in the *domus*.<sup>285</sup> On the level of the individual room, Andrew Riggsby has analysed the space of the *cubiculum* and the blend of what we would term ‘public’ and ‘private’ activities that took place within its walls.<sup>286</sup> Riggsby argues that, rather than what we would call ‘private’ activities, it was secret activity that often took place in the *cubiculum*.<sup>287</sup> He goes on to say that the structure of the Roman *domus* was designed to limit the potential capacity of *cubicula* to harbour secret and subversive behaviour:

Large, open halls allow for panoptic surveillance of all the attached small rooms. *Cubicula* are a prototypical example of confinement. They are arranged so as to

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public et terrain privé s’inversent en une image saisissante, celle du “monde renversé”, lieu commun dans la diatribe morale et la satire à diverses époques. L’inversion matérielle illustre le renversement des valeurs: ce “monde renversé” traduit toute l’indignation de Plinie qui en appelle au souvenir de ses contemporains et qui les associe à sa réprobation, allant jusqu’à affirmer que les champs des grands hommes occupaient moins de place que les boudoirs de ces mauvais empereurs.’ Cf. Drinkwater (2018) 248-263 on the *Domus Aurea* and the influence of anti-Neronian sentiment on its reception, whereby some legitimate concerns about the project and its execution could become part of a much larger discourse of Neronian excess and immorality.

<sup>284</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1988) 59.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* 58-9 and *passim*.

<sup>286</sup> Riggsby (1997).

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.* 44-51.

constrain the effects of the secrecy they produce and hence to reduce their power as sites of resistance to behavioral norms.<sup>288</sup>

Others have analysed the relationship between physical structures from the Roman world and the representation of such spaces in written texts. For example, Gretchen Meyers has explored Vitruvius' use of rhetorical terms in his description of built space in the *de Architectura*.<sup>289</sup> She argues that the Vitruvian borrowings of rhetorical language in describing architectural structures points to the ability to communicate shared by buildings and texts.<sup>290</sup> On the macroscopic level, the idea of home may be said to have taken on a different shape with the beginning of the Flavian dynasty. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, the decentralization of Rome that began after Nero's death and was consolidated during the Flavian reign and beyond represents an important contextual frame for both authors.

On a more individual level, throughout the *Epistles* we often find the Younger's attention divided between the hustle and bustle of city life in Rome and the peaceful seclusion afforded him by time spent at one of his country estates. We find many of the plural functions discussed above contained in the domestic spaces the Younger describes in his letters. It is not surprising, then, that the domestic spaces of his work are often connected with politically significant figures. As we might expect, the blend of the personal and the political contained in the Roman *domus* is also reflected in the actions of the figures that the Younger depicts in these spaces. In this chapter, I take a fairly broad definition of 'domestic space'. The spaces I will consider across this chapter are by no means all examples of traditional Roman *domus*, but are instead all spaces which allow for dwelling of some kind, even if this is not always their primary function.

### Nests

The first set of spaces I wish to consider in this chapter are nests. When discussing domestic architecture in the *Natural History*, it would seem remiss to focus solely on structures created by humans, since a significant part of the Elder's work deals with zoology, including the

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<sup>288</sup> Riggsby (1997) 51.

<sup>289</sup> Meyers (2005).

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.* 75 and *passim*.

habitats of animals. I focus here on this type of animal dwelling for a number of reasons. The nest took on a cultural significance for the Romans beyond its place in the natural world. For example, Edmund Thomas has written on the ways in which the concept of nest-building intersected with traditional Roman ideas of monumentality.<sup>291</sup> In particular, Thomas discusses the potential philosophical significance of *nidificatio*, writing that it represented ‘a microcosm of the ultimately Stoic principle that the construction of a building manifested the tendency of all things to union’.<sup>292</sup> Here, I am interested in both human and avian nest-building. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which nest-like spaces could be both monumental and intimate, and the ways in which both the Elder and the Younger exploit this tension in their works.<sup>293</sup>

In Book Seven, the Elder explains how swallows’ nests provided the original inspiration for the first homes built from clay bricks:

laterarias ac domos constituerunt primi Euryalus et Hyperbius fratres Athenis; antea specus erant pro domibus. Gellio Toxius Caeli filius lutei aedificii inventor placet, exemplo sumpto ab hirundinum nidis. *NH* 7.194

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<sup>291</sup> Thomas (2007) 255.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> The *Natural History*, of course, possessed its own monumental quality, both in terms of its integration of a vast quantity of scholarship and its celebration of the wonders of the natural world, on which see e.g. Naas (2002) 397: ‘L’*HN* illustre parfaitement cette conception du *monumentum*. L’encyclopédie plinienne, mémoire de l’époque flavienne, est organisée selon des principes idéologiques et épistémologiques qui peuvent se comprendre en rapport avec leur temps et par comparaison avec d’autres auteurs. C’est pourquoi, dans cette partie, on introduira une perspective comparative qui permet à la fois de préciser la spécificité du projet plinien et de l’inscrire dans des phénomènes culturels plus vastes dont l’*HN* constitue une expression particulière. Cette approche, aussi partielle et partielle soit-elle dans ses choix, permet néanmoins de mieux apprécier la place de l’*HN* dans l’histoire de la culture.’, 443-6 on the relationship between the Flavian Temple of Peace and the *Natural History*; Carey (2003) 74: ‘Pliny, I would argue, recognized that monuments such as Augustus’ trophy at La Turbie and Agrippa’s map draw on the visual power of the catalogue to transform empire itself into a monument; and in his incorporation of these monuments into his own text, he, in turn, exploited the capacity of the list to be a monument in its own right, to locate his account of the world in reality, and present his text as the greatest monument of all.’ Murphy (2004) 194-216 on encyclopedias and monumentality.

Brick-kilns and houses were first introduced by the brothers Euryalus and Hyperbius at Athens; previously caves had served for dwellings. Gellius accepts Toxius son of Uranus as the inventor of building with clay, the example having been taken from swallows' nests. (trans. Rackham)

Here, a bird's nest offers a template for a new way of building early human homes.<sup>294</sup> In her analysis of the Philemon and Baucis episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Emily Gowers suggests that one thread we may be able to observe in the story is a subtle thread concerning the evolution of architecture, and here, too, we find a simple, natural structure providing the template for more complex human building projects.<sup>295</sup> Across the *Natural History* more generally, birds' nests frequently appear as positive or useful spaces, in keeping with the premium the work places on *utilitas*. This utility is perceptible on a number of levels: one such use of the nests is their supposed medicinal properties, to which Pliny refers repeatedly in the work.<sup>296</sup> As this has little to do with the architectural structure or quality of these spaces, I will not dwell on it here, but it is nonetheless important to note that nests have positive connotations elsewhere in Pliny's text.

The architecture of birds' nests is praised repeatedly throughout the *Natural History*.<sup>297</sup> In one notable example from the work's tenth book, we find two extended passages praising the skill of birds in nest-building, specifically kingfishers and swallows:

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<sup>294</sup> Gowers (2005) 353-359 on the motif of the evolution of architecture in Ovid's Philemon and Baucis episode. See also Hallett (2000) on this episode, 555 on the transformation from vegetable to mineral in the structure of their house.

<sup>295</sup> Gowers (2005) 353-9.

<sup>296</sup> See e.g. *NH* 29.101, 29.113, 30.33, 30.34, 30.35-6, 30.67-8, 30.91-2, 30.104, 30.130.

<sup>297</sup> E.g. *NH* 10.90-91 on the nest-building habits of storks: *faciunt autem septem ante brumam diebus nidos, et totidem sequentibus pariunt. nidi earum admirationem habent pilae figura paulum eminenti ore perquam angusto, grandium spongearum similitudine; ferro intercidi non queunt, franguntur ictu valido, ut spuma arida maris; nec unde confingantur invenitur: putant ex spinis aculeatis, piscibus enim vivunt.* In this passage, the stork's nest emerges as an enigmatic space, as humans cannot discover the nature of the material that makes up the nest. Furthermore, the architecture of the nests is praised for its unusual shape, which makes it a protective structure. Here, then, we see that birds have achieved a feat of engineering that defies human comprehension. Cf. *NH* 10.95: *tertium est earum genus quae ripas excavant atque ita in terra nidificant. (harum pulli ad cinerem ambusti mortifero faucium malo multisque aliis morbis humani corporis medentur.) non faciunt hae nidos, migrantque multis diebus ante si futurum est ut auctus amnis attingat.* *NH* 10.95.



halcyonum nidi figura reliquarum quoque sollertiae admonet; neque alia parte ingenia avium magis admiranda sunt. hirundines luto construunt, stramento roborant; si quando inopia est luti, madefactis multa aqua pinnis pulverem spargunt. ipsum vero nidum mollibus plumis floccisque consternunt tepefaciendis ovis, simul ne durus sit infantibus pullis. in fetum summa aequitate alternant cibum. notabili munditia egerunt excrementa pullorum, adultioresque circumagi docent et foris saturitatem emittere. *NH* 10.92-93

The shape of the kingfisher's nest reminds one of the skill of all the other birds as well; and the ingenuity of birds is in no other department more remarkable. Swallows build with clay and strengthen the nest with straw; if ever there is a lack of clay, they wet their wings with a quantity of water and sprinkle it on the dust. The nest itself, however, they carpet with soft feathers and tufts of wool, to warm the eggs and also to prevent it from being hard for the infant chicks. They dole out food in turns among their offspring with extreme fairness. They remove the chicks' droppings with remarkable cleanliness, and teach the older ones to turn round and relieve themselves outside of the nest. (trans. adapted from Rackham)

alterum est hirundinum genus rusticarum et agrestium quae raro in domibus diversos figura sed eadem materia confingunt nidos, totos supinos, faucibus porrectis in angustum, utero capaci, mirum qua peritia et occultandis habiles pullis et substernendis molles. in Aegypti Heracleotico ostio molem continuatione nidorum evaganti Nilo inexpugnabilem opponunt stadii fere unius spatio, quod humano opere perfici non posset. in eadem Aegypto iuxta oppidum Copton insula est sacra Isidi quam ne laceret amnis idem muniunt opere, incipientibus vernis diebus palea et stramento rostrum eius firmantes, continuatis per triduum noctibus tanto labore ut multas in opere et mori constet; eaque militia illis cum anno redit semper. *NH* 10.93-94

There is another kind of swallow that frequents the country and the fields, which seldom nests on houses, and which makes its nest of a different shape though of the same material – entirely turned upward, with orifices projecting to a narrow opening and a capacious interior, and adapted with remarkable skill both to conceal the chicks and to give them a soft bed to lie on. In Egypt, at the Heracleotic Mouth of the Nile, they block

the outflow of the river with an irremovable mole of continuous nests almost two hundred yards long, a thing that could not be achieved by human labour. Also in Egypt near the town of Coptos there is an island sacred to Isis which they fortify with a structure to prevent it being destroyed by the same river, strengthening its point with chaff and straw when the spring days begin, going on for three days all through the nights with such industry that it is agreed that many birds actually die at the work; and this spell of duty always comes round again for them with the returning year. (trans. Rackham)

In these passages, Pliny praises swallows both for their skill in constructing the external structures of their nests and for the ways in which they make the insides of their homes comfortable for themselves and their offspring. The birds display ingenuity at every level of construction: when building their nests, they are inventive when faced with a lack of building materials; when it comes to the insides of the nests, they are able to make them soft and comfortable. This skill in building is then reflected in their fair and efficient housekeeping, as they ensure their homes are kept clean and tidy. Pliny then turns to describing another kind of swallow's nest. This structure is described as a womb-like space, which creates a cosy environment for the chicks inside, as it conceals and protects them within its structure. From these examples, Pliny moves to describing larger-scale building projects by swallows. One of these is the blocking of one of the mouths of the Nile with a barrage of nests, an achievement which Pliny praises as beyond the capabilities of human builders (*quod humano opere perfici non posset*). He also describes another feat of engineering by the birds concerning a sacred island, which they protect from the flooding of the river with a structure built in a similar manner to a nest but on a large scale. The birds are so committed to this project, Pliny tells us, that some even die during the course of construction; the use of the term *militia* places the birds in the role of dutiful soldiers, willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the project.

This sense of birds as morally upstanding citizens continues elsewhere in the book, as Pliny describes the domestic lives of pigeons.

ab iis columbarum maxime spectantur simili ratione mores. inest pudicitia illis plurima, et neutri nota adulteria: coniugii fidem non violant, communemque servant domum: nisi calebs aut vidua nidum non relinquit. *NH* 10.104

Next to partridges the habits of pigeons are most noticeable for a similar reason. These possess the greatest modesty, and adultery is not known to either sex; they do not violate the faith of wedlock, and they keep house in company – unless unmated or widowed a pigeon does not leave its nest. (trans. Rackham)

As with the examples discussed above, here too pigeons and their homes are characterised by moral rectitude. The pigeons in this example are monogamous and refuse to abandon their homes, unless their mate dies. Although Pliny's description of pigeons does become more ambiguous, when he goes on to describe their capacity for cruelty, nonetheless this initial passage presents their nests as morally correct spaces.<sup>298</sup> In these examples from the natural world, then, we find nests presented in a positive light, as spaces that require architectural skill and ingenuity to create, and provide intimate domestic spaces characterised by a sense of moral propriety.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> *NH* 10.104-105.

<sup>299</sup> In Book 35, Pliny writes that the republican consul Appius Claudius was the first person to privately dedicate shields in a public space: *verum clupeos in sacro vel publico dicare privatim primus instituit, ut reperio, Appius Claudius qui consul cum P. Servilio fuit anno urbis CCLVIII. posuit enim in Bellonae aede maiores suos, placuitque in excelso spectari et titulos honorum legi, decora res, utique si liberum turba parvulis imaginibus ceu nidum aliquem subolis pariter ostendat, quales clupeos nemo non gaudens favensque aspicit.* *NH* 35.12. Pliny here states that this Appius Claudius was the first person to dedicate shields bearing family portraits in this way (On Appius Claudius, see Winkes (1979) 482, *passim* on funeral customs in Pliny and these types of images on shields; Davies (2017) 66-9; 209 on the shields. Cf. Russell (2015) 92-3; on the fact that the novelty of Appius Claudius' actions lay in the fact these were family portraits rather than spoils of war; 119-20.) Pliny notes that shields containing images of children are particularly popular among viewers. This was something that could be employed in the service of political aims, on which see Corbier (2007) 79-80: 'As Pliny has it, the originality of the first [i.e. Appius Claudius Pulcher] was to have associated, in a temple dedicated to Bellona by a distant ancestor in 296 BC, the *clipei* of his ancestors (placed high enough off the ground to be seen by all and accompanied by the lists of the offices held by them, also very legible) and the *paruulae imagines* of the *liberum turba*, guarantors of the continuity of the line. In emphasizing the legitimate pleasure of beholding such portraits, Pliny recognizes the basis of the political use of children to arouse the sympathies of the common people: by his time the practice had a long history, since the days when the family of Augustus had used and abused it.' Corbier (2007) *passim* on painting and ancestral memory in *NH* 35. Cf. Gowers (2011) on family trees in the *Aeneid*. For the present discussion, it is of particular interest that Pliny describes the group of children that could be depicted on the shield as a *nidus*. Of course, this is Pliny's term and does not describe an actual nest depicted on the shield. Nonetheless, the fact the Elder uses the term is worth noting, since it suggests that the collocation discussed above between birds, their homes and morality could also be harnessed in the service of political aims.

However, when we turn to attempts by humans to ape the architecture of animals or to re-shape the natural environment, these spaces could be problematic.<sup>300</sup> In Book Twelve of the *Natural History*, Pliny describes how the emperor Caligula built himself a dining room inside a plane-tree:

aliud exemplum Gai principis in Veliterno rure mirati unius tabulata laxaeque ramorum trabibus scamna patula, et in ea epulati, cum ipse pars esset umbrae, quindecim convivarum ac ministerii capace triclinio, quam cenam appellavit ille nidum. *NH* 12.10-11

Another instance is connected with the Emperor Caligula, who on an estate at Velletri was impressed by the flooring of a single plane-tree, and benches laid loosely on beams consisting of its branches, and held a banquet in the tree – himself constituting a considerable portion of the shade – in a dining-room large enough to hold fifteen guests and the servants: this dining-room the emperor called his ‘nest’. (trans. adapted from Rackham)

In contrast to the large structures built by birds, which were presented as impressive feats of engineering and morally positive endeavours, here this nest-like structure is presented as an example of excessive luxury and consumption. Citroni Marchetti discusses Pliny’s treatment of the plane tree, and this passage in particular, in her examination of Pliny’s moralistic language and outlook in the *Natural History*.<sup>301</sup> In particular, she notes that Caligula’s use of the plane tree as a dining room results in the tree’s loss of some of its natural characteristics,

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<sup>300</sup> Cf. *NH* 16.3 on the Chauci, who live on a lake and build their houses from stilts in order to prevent them from flooding: *illic, misera gens, tumulos optinent altos aut tribunalia extructa manibus ad experimenta altissimi aestus, casis ita inpositis, navigantibus similes cum integant aquae circumdata, naufragis vero cum recesserint, fugientesque cum mari pisces circa tuguria venantur*. Here, the Chauci and their homes are characterised by instability and liminality, as they live on land periodically covered by the sea (*operiens aeternam rerum naturae controversiam dubiamque terrae an partem maris*). Their suspended homes render them at one moment successful sailors and at the next shipwrecked. Whereas the arboreal bedrooms discussed above allowed their owners to enjoy the natural world, here these suspended spaces leave their inhabitants at the mercy of nature and its dangers.

<sup>301</sup> Citroni Marchetti (1991) 220-221.

as it becomes merely a vehicle for luxury.<sup>302</sup> In this passage, Caligula has not just manipulated and re-shaped the tree's natural form to his own ends, but has even taken on part of the tree's natural function – by casting a shadow himself (*ipse pars esset umbrae*), he provides a distorted version of the pleasant shade that would usually be offered by the tree's branches.<sup>303</sup> Pliny is clearly playing with scale in this passage, emphasising the large size of the tree and the capacious dining room Caligula constructs in its branches, as well as the size of the emperor himself, but then deflating these ever-enlarging spaces by ending the passage with the fact that Caligula called this space his *nidus*, bringing us back to small and intimate space.

Although not explicitly described as a nest, we find a comparable space in Pliny's account of another notably large plane tree, in which Mucianus once held a banquet:

...nunc est clara in Lycia fontis gelidi socia amoenitate, itineri adposita domicilii modo, cava octoginta atque unius pedum specu, nemorosa vertice et se vastis protegens ramis arborum instar, agros longis obtinens umbris, ac ne quid desit speluncae imagini, saxea intus crepidinis corona muscosos complexa pumices, tam digna miraculo ut Licinius Mucianus ter consul et nuper provinciae eius legatus prodendum etiam posteris putaverit epulatum intra eam se cum duodevicensimo comite, large ipsa toros praebente frondis, ab omni adflatu securum, oblectante imbrum per folia crepitu laetiolem quam marmorum nitore, picturae varietate, laquearium auro, cubuisse in eadem. *NH.* 12.9

...at the present day there is a celebrated plane in Lycia, allied with the amenity of a cool spring; it stands by the roadside like a dwelling-house, with a hollow cavity inside it 81 feet across, forming with its summit a shady grove, and shielding itself with vast branches as big as trees and covering the fields with its long shadows, and so as to complete its resemblance to a grotto, embracing inside it mossy pumice-stones in a

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.* 221. Gowers (2010) on a room belonging to the emperor Augustus which Suetonius reports he called 'Syracuse'. Gowers analyses Augustus' private room, as well as those of other emperors and writers, including Claudius' treehouse and the Younger's *diaeta*, arguing that Augustus' private space allowed the emperor to engage with threatening political ideas in a safe and domesticated context.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Beagon (1992) 82: 'His description of Caligula's use for a banquet of a plane-tree fitted out for the purpose (12.10) is not condemnatory of the practice itself but pokes fun at the disproportionate size of the emperor for the occupation of what he called his *nidus*, in which "ipse pars esset umbrae".'

circular rim of rock – a tree so worthy to be deemed a marvel that Licinius Mucianus, who was three times consul and recently lieutenant-governor of the province, thought it worth handing down to posterity also that he had held a banquet with eighteen members of his retinue inside the tree, which itself provided couches of leafage on a bounteous scale, and that he had then gone to bed in the same tree, shielded from every breath of wind, and receiving more delight from the agreeable sound of the rain dropping through the foliage than gleaming marble, painted decorations or gilded panelling could have afforded. (trans. Rackham)

In this passage, the tree Pliny describes takes on a monumental quality, as he emphasises its unusually large form. This association with monumentality is then reinforced when Pliny turns to Mucianus, whom Pliny says wanted the fact he had held a banquet in the tree commemorated. Furthermore, the mention of other materials more typically associated with monuments and memorials in architecture makes the tree appear as a monument more enduring than the usual architectural types. Pliny also makes heavy use of simile in this passage. The tree is first compared to a *domicilium*, a kind of dwelling, before Pliny goes on to draw out a comparison between the tree and a cave or grotto.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, by mentioning other architectural materials and features at the close of the passage, Pliny compares the tree to other architectural forms. The tree's architectural qualities are therefore repeatedly emphasised throughout the passage, as it becomes like a building in Pliny's account. As Ash explores, the picture of Mucianus we can glean from other sources shows him as a fairly extravagant figure, but in this passage we find an interesting contrast drawn between the simple pleasures offered by the natural world and the traditional man-made trappings of luxury.<sup>305</sup> She observes that if Mucianus wrote his *Mirabilia* after he had already fallen out of favour with the Flavians, then his hedonistic nature would have been in conflict with the political ideology of the time. However, she notes that if

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<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*: 'This tree would appear to be a phenomenon occurring in the wild – Pliny says it stands by the roadside – so that the comparison is a straightforward one of natural versus man-made beauty. Yet it is not irrelevant to mention it here because Pliny is sufficiently taken by Mucianus' enthusiasm to record it in detail. We could, of course, put this down entirely to Pliny's fascination with marvels of nature. Yet we might surmise that Pliny was also half-consciously thinking of various horticultural devices used by men to imitate the rustic pleasures of a leafy house. He specifically says that this plane tree is like a house: 'itineri adposita domicii modo...'

<sup>305</sup> Ash (2007) 10-11 and *passim*.

the work was actually produced during the Neronian period, it would have been more in keeping with the emperor's tastes and ideology.<sup>306</sup>

In this passage there seems to be an entire *locus amoenus* contained within this plane tree, which Pliny tells us bears resemblance to a grotto. The luxurious tree-house, therefore, exemplifies the blurring of boundaries between nature and architecture. We find a space that bears a remarkable similarity to this one in the Younger's *Epistles*, in his depiction of a garden bedroom in the grounds of his Tuscan estate.<sup>307</sup>

marmore splendet, valvis in viridia prominet et exit, alia viridia superioribus inferioribusque fenestris suspicit despicitque. mox zothecula refugit quasi in cubiculum idem atque aliud. lectus hic et undique fenestrae, et tamen lumen obscurum umbra premente. nam laetissima vitis per omne tectum in culmen nititur et ascendit. non secus ibi quam in nemore iaceas, imbrem tantum tamquam in nemore non sentias. *Ep.* 5.6.38-39

It is built of shining white marble, extended by folding doors which open straight out into greenery; its upper and lower windows all look out into more greenery above and below. A small alcove which is part of the room but separated from it contains a bed, and although it has windows in all its walls, the light inside is dimmed by the dense shade of a flourishing vine which climbs over the whole building up to the roof. There you can lie and imagine you are in a wood, but without the risk of rain. (trans. Radice)

Mary Beagon notes a connection between these settings in her discussion of the Elder's plane tree but does not argue the point in detail.<sup>308</sup> Here, I wish to push this point a little further. In this passage, we again find a contrast between greenery and marble, in a similar vein to the

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<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.* 10-11, 16-17.

<sup>307</sup> As part of my Cambridge Mphil (2016), I wrote an essay on Pliny's villas and their connection with rhetorical memory techniques. I discussed this passage, but did not consider a connection with Elder's work.

<sup>308</sup> Beagon (1992) 82: 'The vine-shaded bedroom in the Younger Pliny's Tuscan villa (*Ep.* 5.6.39) is surely a simple imitation of the pleasures enjoyed by Mucianus; his uncle is clearly impressed by the vines to be seen climbing all over certain houses, a natural-looking display of spontaneity, but instigated and controlled by man all the same.'

passage from the *Natural History*. But in contrast to the Elder's description of Mucianus and his plane tree, here natural and man-made luxury are combined in the Younger's garden.

The passage seems to almost fold in itself: rather than making the space appear more open, the room's multiple doors and windows instead emphasise its secluded position, as they offer views of only greenery. While in the Elder's passage, Mucianus enjoys falling asleep to the sound of the rain, in the Younger's passage, it is protection from the rain which is praised. While these two passages are essentially describing the same situation, the difference in emphasis seems pertinent – in the Elder's passage, natural beauty is juxtaposed with man-made luxury and emerges victorious, whereas in the Younger's, it is the filtering of nature through human architecture that is desirable.<sup>309</sup> Throughout the passage, we find the vocabulary of separation and continuity recurring. Pliny emphasises the connection between the building and the outside world, as he describes how its doors open directly into the greenery outside, and the seclusion of the interior space, in which the bed is nestled in its own separate and dimly lit alcove. This indoor-outdoor space allows its inhabitant to bridge the gap between the building and the outside world using their imagination, able to appreciate the outside world while remaining warm and dry inside.<sup>310</sup> We also find increasing levels of privacy as we move through the space: the garden room already appears as a secluded and private space, but the inclusion of the alcove creates the possibility of an even greater level of isolation.

The final nest-like space I consider comes from Book Six of the *Epistles*. In *Ep.* 6.10, Pliny recounts how a visit to his mother-in-law's villa in Alsium brought his *tutor* to mind, since the house used to belong to him:

cum venissem in socrus meae villam Alsiensem, quae aliquamdiu Rufi Vergini fuit, ipse mihi locus optimi illius et maximi viri desiderium non sine dolore renovavit, hunc enim

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<sup>309</sup> See Hindermann (2009) 227 on the emphasis on artificiality in *Ep.* 2.17: 'Plinius' *locus amoenus* ist kein unbelassener, natürlicher Ort, sondern ein von Plinius erschaffener.'

<sup>310</sup> See e.g. Lefèvre (1977) 523: 'Man ist in der Natur, und ist doch nicht in der Natur. Man wiegt sich in dem Gefühl, von der Natur umgeben zu sein, aber man vermeidet ängstlich das Unangenehme der Natur: die Unbilden des Regens. Man ist nur bereit, die Natur ästhetisch zu rezipieren. So wie man die Landschaft nur als Gemälde in die architektonische Gestaltung miteinbezieht, bezieht man auch die Natur nur wie etwas Äußerliches, rein Ästhetisches in sein Danken und Fühlen mit ein. Man ist nicht bereit, sich als ein Glied der Natur zu fühlen, den Zusammenhang der ganzen Natur zu akzeptieren.' See also Spencer (2010) 132-134 on the *zothecula*.



colere secessum atque etiam senectutis suae nidulum vocare consueuerat. quocumque me contulissem, illum animus illum oculi requirebant. *Ep.* 6.10.1-2

I have been visiting my mother-in-law at Alsium, staying in the house which for a time belonged to Verginius Rufus. The mere sight of the place revived all my grief and longing for that great and noble man. This was where he lived in retirement, calling it the nest of his old age; and wherever I went, I missed the thought and the sight of him. (trans. adapted from Radice)

I will return to this letter in more detail later in this discussion, but Pliny's description of Verginius' home as a *nidulus* is intriguing. From the offset, this house which had belonged to Pliny's *tutor* and now belongs to his former mother-in-law is linked with personal feelings of grief concerning Verginius' death.<sup>311</sup> The sight of the house alone is enough to provoke Pliny's emotions, as a visit there has renewed (*renovavit*) the grief Pliny had presumably felt when Verginius first died. As Gowers' analysis of Augustus' private workshop within his palace shows, places of retreat often had political undertones. We might also note here that this was a nest that Verginius only made use of in his retirement and old age (*hunc enim colere secessum atque etiam senectutis suae nidulum vocare consueverat*).<sup>312</sup> As we have seen, Verginius was not an uncontroversial figure in Roman history and it was therefore beneficial for the Younger to present his relationship with Verginius in a more personal manner. The space of the nest here affords him that opportunity, as he approaches Verginius' death and commemoration as a bereaved friend.

#### Shaken Foundations and Closed-off *cubicula*: The House, Death and Illness in the *Epistles*.

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<sup>311</sup> On this letter, see Leach (2013), Klodt (2015).

<sup>312</sup> See e.g. Gowers (2010) 85 for the translation of imperial politics into domestic space: 'One might say that Augustus' "Syracuse" allowed him to play at drawing his own shapes on the ground and at telescoping his empire into his own city, even into his own house, by incorporating a Sicilian colony known to be offshore, rebellious, magnificent, but always ruined and no longer at its cultural height, into a private fantasy. On his map of the empire, Syracuse was merely an annexe or a suburb.'

One way in which domestic space becomes problematic in Pliny's letters is through repeated association with illness and death. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Riggsby has demonstrated the peculiar potency of the space of the *cubiculum* in the Roman *domus*.<sup>313</sup> Riggsby explores the multiple possible uses of this room, which clearly went beyond the simple definition of 'bedroom' so often given to the Latin word.<sup>314</sup> In particular, Riggsby identifies a connection between the *cubiculum* and secret activities, which he marks as distinct from what we would think of as typically 'private' actions.<sup>315</sup> However, Riggsby also notes that Pliny praises Trajan in the *Panegyricus* for carrying out his daily business activities in public, arguing, by comparing sources that point to examples of such activities being carried out in *cubicula*, that this was not the usual venue for this type of activity.<sup>316</sup> However, as Riggsby concludes, this did not mean that *cubicula*, and Roman houses more generally, were apolitical spaces.<sup>317</sup> In fact, the opposite was true.

As we saw in the previous chapter, discussions and depictions of death and illness in the *Epistles* are often political scenes and recur throughout the letters. As I have already discussed the deaths of Corellius Rufus (*Ep.* 1.12) and Verginius Rufus (*Ep.* 2.1) elsewhere, I will not return to them in detail here. However, it is nonetheless useful to note that the setting of these scenes in domestic spaces may have a bearing on our reading of them. For example, Pliny's conversation with Corellius takes place in the latter's country home, in the inner sanctum of his *cubiculum*, where even his trustworthy wife leaves Corellius and Pliny to speak in private,<sup>318</sup> as the intimacy afforded by the space allows Corellius to confess his political agenda to his friend.

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<sup>313</sup> Riggsby (1997).

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.* 43-5 and *passim*.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* 47-8.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.* 53 and *passim*.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.* 44 on this letter. Riggsby comments on the secret nature of Pliny and Corellius' conversation, since both Corellius' wife and slaves are dismissed beforehand. Riggsby points out that the fact Pliny mentions this detail suggests that the *cubiculum* would most likely normally have been staffed.

However, here I wish to consider a different set of episodes in more detail, all of which centre on key families in the so-called ‘Stoic opposition’.<sup>319</sup> Pliny focuses on a set of trials that occurred around the year 93, in which seven members of this group were variously executed or exiled.<sup>320</sup> Jacqueline Carlon has summarised well the significance of members of this group for Pliny and his letters, exploring how his repeated reference to the families in this group throughout the *Epistles* should be taken as a sign that cultivating this relationship could be useful to Pliny, rather than being a reflection of genuine friendship.<sup>321</sup> If we understand that these letters form an important part of Pliny’s project, then, the role played by domestic space in these letters becomes of interest. The first episode is not a deathbed scene but deals with a house shaken by death. In *Ep.* 4.21, Pliny describes how the house of the younger Helvidius Priscus has been destabilised by the death of his two daughters. Pliny reflects on his affection for Helvidius, and his sadness that now only one of his children survives:

nam patrem illarum defunctum quoque perseuerantissime diligo, ut actione mea librisque testatum est; cui nunc unus ex tribus liberis superest, domumque pluribus adminiculis paulo ante fundatam desolatus fulcit ac sustinet. *Ep.* 4.21.3-4

...for my love for their father has remained constant since his death, as my defence of him and my published speeches bear witness. Now only one of his three children survives, left as the sole prop and stay of a family which not so long ago had many members to support it. (trans. Radice)

The house of Helvidius, which had previously stood solidly on firm foundations, is now left balancing precariously, held up by only a single support. Although *domus* here clearly refers to Helvidius’ family and not to the physical structure of the house, the language used in the

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<sup>319</sup> Carlon (2009) 22 for justification of use of this term. See also Rogers (1960) on the treason trials under Domitian, Power (2014) on the biography of Helvidius Priscus and Suetonius *Domitian*.

<sup>320</sup> For a fuller discussion of the dating of these trials, and of Pliny’s praetorship, see Whitton (2015b) 14-15 and *passim*. Whitton challenges the conventional view of the dating of Pliny’s praetorship, arguing that it may have been later, in late 93 or 94.

<sup>321</sup> Carlon (2009) 60-67. Cf. Geisthardt (2015) 190: ‘Indem er ein enges freundschaftliches Verhältnis zwischen sich und den “Oppositionellen” inszeniert, erhalten die Exilierten und ihre Familienangehörigen für das plinianische Selbstbild einen symbolischen Wert, da sie seinen “inneren” Widerstand gegen das domitianische Regime und den Antagonismus zu dessen Vertretern beweisen.’

passage nonetheless creates a connection between the two. The family unit is depicted as if it were an architectural structure and the bereavements suffered by the family are represented as a threat to its integrity. The structure of house and family have become one, an image through which Pliny demonstrates the damaging effect of the deaths of the two women on what is left behind. Helvidius' son, who is not named here, is absorbed into the structure of the house, as he, despite his grief and solitude (*desolatus*), has become its new foundation (*fulcit ac sustinet*). The verb *fulcire*, used here by Pliny to describe the crucial role now played by Helvidius' son, is the same verb used by Virgil in *Aeneid* 4 to describe Atlas holding up the sky.<sup>322</sup> In this letter, Helvidius' son assumes a role of mythological importance, tasked with the upholding of the house and values of his legendary predecessors.<sup>323</sup> Pliny clearly wishes to emphasise his own connection to the family here, stressing his affection for, and support of Helvidius. Carlon has noted how, in this letter, Pliny foregrounds his own grief, and even inserts himself into a quasi-parental role.<sup>324</sup> Clearly, there was a political advantage for Pliny in portraying himself as having close personal, even familial ties, with the families of the Stoic opposition, as he could show himself to have been on the right side of history without taking too much personal risk.

We might see further proof of this goal when the image of unstable domestic space then reappears at *Ep.* 7.19, a letter regarding the ill-health of Fannia, another significant figure from these families.<sup>325</sup> Once again, we find the image of a house destabilised by illness and the threat of death:

ac mihi domus ipsa nutare, convulsaque sedibus suis ruitura supra videtur, licet adhuc posteros habeat. quantis enim virtutibus quantisque factis adsequentur, ut haec non novissima occiderit? (7.19.8)

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<sup>322</sup> Virg. *Aen.* 4.247.

<sup>323</sup> Gierig (1800-1802) *ad loc.* also notes precedents for such an image in Greek tragedy, citing a line from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* as one such example. He cites line 57 in particular (στῦλοι γὰρ οἰκῶν παῖδες εἰσιν ἄρσενες), for the image of a male child in particular as supporting the house. Here too, as in Pliny's letter on Helvidius' daughters, only one column remains standing (μόνος δ' ἐλείφθη στῦλος, 50). He also notes a potential similarity with Virg. *Aen.* 12.59 (...in te omnis domus inclinata recumbit).

<sup>324</sup> Carlon (2009) 50.

<sup>325</sup> On this letter, see Beutel (2000) 182-183.

To me it seems as though her whole house is shaken to its very foundations and is tottering to its fall, even though she may leave descendants; for how can their deeds and merits be sufficient to assure that the last of her line has not perished in her? (trans. Radice)

Even the fact that Fannia has surviving relatives is not enough to mitigate the thought of her death, which would constitute so decisive a rupture as to bring the house to the ground.<sup>326</sup> As noted above, the link between the instability of the home and the threatened disintegration of the family inside is by no means a new image and a parallel between this scene and the opening of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* has been noted.<sup>327</sup> As with the Euripidean passage, in which Iphigenia recounts a dream in which she sees her father's house fall to the ground, Pliny's description has the sense of a vision or premonition, given that Fannia is still alive. Use of this image allows Pliny to occupy a privileged, quasi-prophetic position in the narrative, whereby he can look forward to the destruction of the house that will occur when Fannia does eventually die. The image of the shaken house provides another important way in which Pliny can situate himself more prominently in the narrative of the families of the Stoic opposition, as the house's dramatic destabilisation (*nutare...conuulsaque...ruitura*) becomes a means of shoring up his own political connections.<sup>328</sup>

Elsewhere, in *Ep.* 3.16, we find the elder Arria facing the illness of her son and husband. Pliny tells this story as part of a series of exemplary stories about Arria, which he says are admirable but lesser known (*non minora...sed obscuriora*, 3.16.2).<sup>329</sup> In this story, both Arria's

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<sup>326</sup> Carlon (2009) 56: 'Placed among the heroines of the past, Fannia's life takes on mythic proportions that her descendants cannot possibly match, prompting Pliny's fears that she will be the last of her line (8).'

<sup>327</sup> Gierig *ad loc* sees the same tragic trope that was present in *Ep.* 4.21 in this letter too. The Euripidean passage also contains the image of the house shaken from its foundations (χθονὸς δὲ νῶτα σεισθῆναι σάλῳ, Eur. *IT* 46) and falling to the ground (φεύγειν δὲ κἄξω στήσας θριγκὸν εἰσδεῖν, / δόμων πίπτοντα, πᾶν δ' ἐρείψιμον στέγος / βεβλημένον πρὸς οὐδας ἐξ ἄκρων σταθμῶν, 47-49). Cf. Deane (1918) 51-52 on Pliny's two citations of Euripides elsewhere in the *Epistles*, as well as the playwright's popularity among Roman sources; Petrone (2003) on Pliny and theatre; Schwerdtner (2015) on Pliny's use of literary citation more generally.

<sup>328</sup> For Tacitus' use of the image of the shaken house, and the connections of the *domus* with tragedy more generally, see Santoro L'Hoir (2006) 37 (on the house falling to the ground or being torn apart); 33-70; 220-222; 229-234.

<sup>329</sup> Büttler (1970) 73-75 on this letter, Ch. 6 on illness and death in the *Epistles* more generally.

son and husband have fallen seriously ill, and her son dies. Keen not to upset her husband, Arria organises and attends his funeral alone, yet pretends to her husband that their son is still alive. Pliny describes this plan in terms of Arria's movement throughout the house:

huic illa ita funus paravit, ita duxit exsequias, ut ignoraret maritus; quin immo quotiens cubiculum eius intraret, vivere filium atque etiam commodiorem esse simulabat, ac persaepe interroganti, quid ageret puer, respondebat; 'bene quievit, libenter cibum sumpsit.' deinde, cum diu cohibitae lacrimae vincerent prorumperentque, egrediebatur; tunc se dolori dabat; satiata siccis oculis composito vultu redibat, tamquam orbitatem foris reliquisset. Ep. 3.16.4-6

Arria made all the preparations for his funeral and took her place at the ceremony without her husband knowing; in fact, whenever she entered his inner sanctum she pretended that their son was still alive and even rather better, and, when Paetus kept asking how the boy was, she would answer that he had had a good sleep and was willing to take some food. Then when the tears she had held back for so long could no longer be kept from breaking out, she left the room; not till then did she give way to her grief. Her weeping over, she dried her eyes, composed her face, and returned as if she had left the loss of her child outside the room. (trans. adapted from Radice)

Arria's performance is demarcated by the walls of her husband's bedroom – her grief is something which can only exist outside this space. Her physical, bodily boundaries mirror the architectural ones inside the house – as she crosses the threshold, her performance begins, and when the physical signs of her grief threaten to break through, she must leave the room. We might again see a potential tragic connection here, as the *domus* once more becomes a setting for familial collapse. Indeed, the space of the *cubiculum* functions somewhat like a stage here, as Arria's performance is confined within its walls.<sup>330</sup> Carlon writes that in his depiction of Arria here, Pliny characterises her in terms traditionally used of men, so that Arria in this letter seems more like a Stoic *sapiens*, or one of the great men Pliny commemorates in obituary letters in the corpus.<sup>331</sup> She is, therefore, more closely aligned with the other political deaths

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<sup>330</sup> Cf. Santoro L'Hoir (2006) 229-234 on the relationship (and its confusion) between the Roman *domus* and the theatre.

<sup>331</sup> Carlon (2009) 44.

and illnesses found throughout the *Epistles*, involving politically prominent men. The combination of Arria's political significance and the staging of this scene in a domestic environment strengthens, therefore, the picture of the *domus* Pliny constructs throughout these letters, as a space of turbulence and upheaval, both on the level of the individuals affected by illness and grief, and as the political disturbances they come to symbolise.

Throughout the *Epistles*, therefore, Pliny uses the image of the *domus* both to demonstrate the destabilising effect of illness and grief on the individuals they centre on, and to demonstrate his own allegiance to the families they belong to. The political aspect to these episodes is clear, since Pliny's relationship, whether historical or literary, to the so-called 'Stoic opposition' to Domitian is an issue which runs throughout the *Epistles*. As we have seen, the veracity of Pliny's representation of his relationship with members of this opposition is debatable.<sup>332</sup> However, this is not the main issue at stake here. Rather, if we accept that crafting a sense of allegiance to these figures was something Pliny was keen to cultivate in the *Epistles*, then the role that these images of domestic space play regarding this aim is what is relevant. From these three passages, therefore, we can see that Pliny uses the image of the house not just to demonstrate the adversity faced by these families. By demonstrating his support not only in the public sphere of the courts, but through images of domestic space and a demonstration of concern for domestic matters, such as death and illness, Pliny is able to insert himself into a prominent position in this narrative, and to construct a picture of his comprehensive care for these families.

Another, more unusual, example occurs later in the *Epistles*, in *Ep.* 6.24, where Pliny describes the joint suicide of a couple from the bedroom of their lakeside home, as a result of the husband's suffering from an incurable illness.<sup>333</sup> As Pliny recounts, he was informed of this event by a friend while sailing on Lake Como:

navigabam per Larium nostrum, cum senior amicus ostendit mihi villam, atque etiam cubiculum quod in lacum prominet: 'ex hoc' inquit 'aliquando municeps nostra cum marito se praecipitavit.' *Ep.* 6.24.2

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<sup>332</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White (1966) 426.

<sup>333</sup> See Mratschek (2003).

I was sailing on our Lake Como with an elderly friend when he pointed out a house with a bedroom built out over the lake. ‘From there,’ he said, ‘a woman of our town once threw herself with her husband.’ (trans. Radice)

Once more we find a connection between the *cubiculum* and illness and death, as Pliny describes the site of the joint suicide as a *cubiculum* built to jut out over the lake. Pliny goes on to describe how the man’s illness was incurable, and that when his wife saw the signs of it, she told him that suicide was the only option, ultimately tying herself to him with rope to join him in death (6.24.3-4). Pliny compares the heroic actions of this woman with those of the Elder Arria, saying that the only reason more people have not heard this story is because the woman was less famous than Arria (*Ep.* 6.24.5). We might, then, also see a spatial connection between this passage and the letter discussed above concerning the Elder Arria.<sup>334</sup> Both passages centre on the space of the *cubiculum*, and both feature the stories of virtuous women faced with illness and death. Whereas Arria was forced to conceal her grief when she was inside the walls of her husband’s *cubiculum*, here it is the woman’s frankness, rather than her dissimulation, that is the target of Pliny’s praise. The boundary of the *cubiculum* is here, as in the story about Arria, a significant one, as it represents not only the literal route to the couple’s death, but also a symbolic journey to a higher plane of virtue for the wife, and a freedom from the confines of an ailing body for the husband.

In this section, I hope to have demonstrated some of the meanings of domestic space in the Younger’s work. While detailed descriptions of domestic space are not necessarily common in the *Epistles*, Pliny’s use of domestic settings nonetheless contributes in an important way to the events he describes. As is apparent from the examples discussed above, this is particularly true in letters which deal with characters and events with which Pliny associates some degree of political risk or uncertainty. Carlon says of Pliny’s approach to the events of 93:

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<sup>334</sup> Büttler (1970) 75 on the link between this letter and Pliny’s discussion of Arria: ‘Die Parallele zu Arrias Tod ist dabei so offenkundig, daß man die Vermutung wagen darf, die Unbekannte habe deren berühmtes Beispiel vor Augen gehabt: auch hier wirkt die Frau als treibende Kraft, sie lebt dem Gatten vor, wie er zu handeln hat, sie steht exemplarisch in Mittelpunkt, während der Mann in seiner kläglich-passiven Rolle außerhalb des eigentlichen Geschehens bleibt.’ Ch. 6 on illness and death in the *Epistles* more broadly. Carlon (2009) 180 for this letter as reinforcing Pliny’s view of Arria as an exemplary figure. Cf. Mratschek (2003) 227 on Pliny’s comparison of these two letters in a moral sense.



In our times, Pliny's modification of his past might be called 'spin' – the twisting of facts just enough to make them reflect well rather than poorly on the actor. But spin generally requires some recitation of what actually happened, however perverted causation and outcome become in the process. Pliny gives his reader no account of his own actions in the events of 93 but chooses instead to rewrite his role through a carefully constructed tapestry of friendships, with anxieties about and obligations to members of the Stoic opposition and with his subsequent ineffectual efforts some years later to avenge men long dead.<sup>335</sup>

One aspect of this manipulation of events in Pliny's writing is achieved through his construction of the spaces in which these events take place. In the *Epistles*, domestic space, or at least the domestic space of others, is not always comforting. Instead, it is often a place troubled by illness and death, which is both destabilised by, and serves as a reminder of, painful feelings of grief. The reasons for this are manifold: as is the case elsewhere in the *Epistles*, Pliny is careful to present a version of events which serves him well. His use of domestic space is one facet of this careful (self-)presentation, as he is able both to foster intimate connections with politically significant figures, but also to downplay potential danger in these episodes by couching them in an explicitly personal setting. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on intimacy in these spaces. As we have seen across these passages, the sense of familiarity Pliny fosters in these letters allows him to explore political matters from a different angle. By inserting himself into the intimate settings of important political figures, Pliny is able to present himself as personally acquainted with these figures in a way which avoids outright claims of political allegiance. As I will touch on later in this discussion, Pliny's relationship with his own homes throughout the *Epistles* also turns out to be a complex one. While in the city, Pliny constantly longs to escape to the country, but once he reaches his rural retreats, the desire to escape persists.<sup>336</sup> We may read this as characteristic of Pliny's view that the only true retreat is intellectual escape, into the cerebral world of *studia*. But the restlessness of the *Epistles* might also belie a deeper sense of discomfort about the idea of home.

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<sup>335</sup> Carlon (2009) 64.

<sup>336</sup> See e.g. Lefèvre (1977) on Pliny isolating himself in his villa, cf. Henderson (2003) 123 on *Ep.* 2.17.20: 'Here I think we see Pliny "ultimately" as he wanted to be seen – in an alcove with a couch and two chairs, soundproofed from the business which makes his dream a reality and from the noises of life, its tempests and lightning-flashes, even from the light of day; *buried* away, alone, with his books at Christmas (2.17.24)'.

### The Nest as Tomb: Verginius Rufus (Again)

I turn now to the most permanent and final type of dwelling space, the tomb. As we saw in the opening of this discussion, small and intimate domestic spaces can be fertile ground for expressions of immortality or for acts of commemoration. Evidently, the connection between the domestic and the commemorative is particularly live when the space concerned is a tomb. To explore this in more detail, I return to the letter cited earlier in this discussion, *Ep.* 6.10 on the house of Verginius Rufus. Eleanor Leach has analysed this letter in the context of two pairs of letters concerned with tombs and commemoration, *Ep.* 6.10 and *Ep.* 9.19 on Verginius Rufus, and *Ep.* 7.29 and *Ep.* 8.6 on the tomb of the freedman Pallas.<sup>337</sup> She argues for the significance of Pliny's focus on epigraphical material in these two pairs of letters, as she explores how the Younger treats these two somewhat divisive examples of commemoration in different ways.<sup>338</sup> Claudia Klodt has also considered the letters on Verginius' death and his tomb. She argues that through the letters on Verginius (*Ep.* 2.1, *Ep.* 6.10 and *Ep.* 9.19) Pliny both glosses over the potentially controversial aspects of Verginius' past, while also asserting the superiority of his texts, and of literature in general, over physical commemorative inscriptions.<sup>339</sup> Here, then, I summarise the main points of the letter and its preoccupation with methods of commemoration. However, my main interest in this chapter is the domestic sphere, and specifically the spatial elements of the Younger's presentation of Verginius' tomb.

*Ep.* 6.10 raises many of the same concerns as the spaces mentioned thus far in the discussion, and, as we have seen, the house is described by the Younger as a *nidulus*, a small nest-like space. In this letter, Pliny recounts that visiting the house, previously owned by Verginius, prompted him to visit Verginius' tomb:

libuit etiam monimentum eius videre, et vidisse paenituit. est enim adhuc imperfectum, nec difficultas operis in causa, modici ac potius exigui, sed inertia eius cui cura mandata est. subit indignatio cum miseratione, post decimum mortis annum reliquias

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<sup>337</sup> Leach (2013).

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.* 125-6 and *passim*.

<sup>339</sup> Klodt (2015).

neglectumque cinerem sine titulo sine nomine iacere, cuius memoria orbem terrarum gloria pervagetur. at ille mandaverat caveratque, ut divinum illud et immortale factum versibus inscriberetur:

hic situs est Rufus, pulso qui Vindice quondam  
imperium adseruit non sibi sed patriae.

*Ep. 6.10.2-4*

I had also an urge to see his tomb, but then I was sorry I had seen it. It is still unfinished, not through any difficulty of construction (it is on a modest, even a humble scale) but because the man in charge of it takes no interest. I was filled with indignation and pity to think that nine years after Verginius's death his remaining ashes should still lie neglected without a name or inscription, although his glorious memory travels over the whole world. And yet he had made proper provision for recording in verse the immortal deed whereby his name lives for ever:

Here lies Rufus, who once defeated Vindex and  
set free the imperial power  
Not for himself, but for his country. (trans. Radice)

This passage is interesting for our present discussion for a number of reasons. First, we see here domestic space (specifically, a villa space) serving as a prompt for memory, and grief. As we recall, the house, which was once Rufus' 'nest' in his retirement, conjures up a picture of the man (*illum animus illum oculi requirebant*, *Ep.6.10.2*), the repeated pronouns weaving Verginius' memory into Pliny's eyes and mind.<sup>340</sup> In contrast to public monuments, where commemoration might serve as a salve to grief,<sup>341</sup> here, the house has only renewed (*renouavit*) Pliny's grief at the loss of its owner.

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<sup>340</sup> Hales (2003) 47 for the connection between architecture and memory in the Roman house: 'It seems that the visual was a significant basis of thought, a hypothesis reinforced by the standard technique of memory, which advocated a memory based on images, not words. The memory technique, advocated explicitly by Quintilian, implies that the Romans were accustomed to receiving messages from the art and architecture around them. They expected to see images as depositories for *memoriae*, and they were aware that the architecture around them could induce certain feelings or recollections.'

<sup>341</sup> Cf. e.g. *Ep. 2.7.7*.

Returning to Rufus' former house then prompts Pliny to visit his *tutor's* tomb. But when he does, he finds it still unfinished, even though nine years have passed since Rufus' death. The idea of the 'insufficient tomb' evidently had a long literary heritage, stretching throughout ancient literature and beyond.<sup>342</sup> In an echo of Lucan's Pompey, we find Verginius left without an adequate burial, and the punning on *situs* 'situated' and *situs* 'decay' would also seem fitting in this case. Although Verginius had taken pains to write his own epitaph, his tomb now stands *sine titulo sine nomine*.<sup>343</sup> The paltry nature of Verginius' tomb stands in contrast to his *gloria memoria*, which has a global reach. Leach writes of the passage:

Because these verses epitomize what Rufus meant to himself, their absence leaves his life story unfinished. By making his stylus the tool to engrave the scant autobiography,

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<sup>342</sup> In Book Twelve of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the cremation of Achilles: *iam timor ille Phrygum, decus et tutela Pelasgi / nominis, Aeacides, caput insuperabile bello, / arserat: armarat deus idem idemque cremarat; / iam cinis est, et de tam magno restat Achille / nescio quid parvum, quod non bene compleat urnam, / at vivit totum quae gloria compleat orbem.* (Ov. Met. 12.612-617); Lucan BC 8.789-800: *... tunc, ne levis aura relectos / auferret cineres, saxo compressit harenam, / nautaque ne bustum religato fune moueret, / inscripsit sacrum semusto stipite nomen: / 'Hic situs est Magnus.' placet hoc, Fortuna, sepulchrum / dicere Pompei, quo condi maluit illum / quam terra caruisse socer? temeraria dextra, / cur obicis Magno tumulum manesque uagantes / includis? situs est, qua terra extrema refuse / pendet in Oceano; Romanum nomen et omne / imperium Magno tumuli est modus; obrue saxa / crimine plena deum.* (BC. 8.789-800) In the Lucanian example we also find an old man, presented throughout the work as committed to his *patria*, who receives a burial deemed inadequate for his proper memorialisation. The preoccupation with the *nomen*, a significant part of Pompey's characterisation as the *nominis umbra* (BC 1.135), is common to the two passages. This is unsurprising, given the focus on commemoration and memorialisation. We might also note the similarity of both Pliny and Lucan claiming that their subjects will achieve, or have already achieved, worldwide fame, despite their lack of fitting memorial (*cuius memoria orbem terrarum gloria peruagetur / Romanum nomen et omne*, Ep. 6.10.3; *Imperium Magno tumuli est modus*, BC 8.799). There is a tension between eternal fame owing to reputation and the failure of physical memorials to do justice to those they commemorate. Lucan is clearly deliberately playing with this spatial tension; the whole Roman empire, and by extension the world, is Pompey's memorial, while he is simultaneously housed in a paltry and unstable tomb, so that even a *levis aura* could scatter his remains. For discussion of this passage, see e.g. Spencer (2005) 60-64. In Ep. 6.10, then, we might say that Pliny is taking on something of the role of Lucan's Cordus, constructing a memorial to a great man in the face of its likely erosion and degradation. Just as in Lucan's text, the point that emerges is that favoured by many Roman authors, that physical memorials will always be disappointingly friable when compared to the enduring permanence of a successful literary text.

<sup>343</sup> Leach (2013) 128 on this phrase implying that Verginius' tomb did not even have a basic epitaph.

Pliny brings the story to completion. By telling why Rufus matters, he establishes Rufus' distinction in a reciprocal relationship with his own.<sup>344</sup>

This visit to Verginius' tomb leads Pliny to reflect more generally on the importance of loyalty and memorialisation:

tam rara in amicitiiis fides, tam parata oblivio mortuorum, ut ipsi nobis debeamus etiam conditoria exstruere omniaque heredum officia praesumere. nam cui non est verendum, quod videmus accidisse Verginio? cuius iniuriam ut indigniorem, sic etiam notio rem ipsius claritas facit. Vale. (*Ep.* 6.10.5-6)

Loyalty in friendship is so rare and the dead so easily forgotten that we ought to set up our own monuments and anticipate all the duties of our heirs. Which of us has no reason to fear the fate of Verginius? His fame only makes the wrong done to him all the more conspicuous for being undeserved. (trans. Radice)

Here, Pliny emphasises further the juxtaposition of Verginius' fame and the sad fate of his tomb due to a negligent heir. Pliny here uses the example of Verginius as an opportunity to encourage his readers to take responsibility for their own commemoration, since friends cannot be reliably depended on to take up this role, a claim that chimes with Pliny's philosophy elsewhere in the *Epistles*.<sup>345</sup> In *Ep.* 6.10, we also find Pliny playing with space and scale, given that the setting of the letter is Verginius' *nidulus*. The use of the diminutive form here suggests this was a place that Verginius felt particular affection for, fostering the same kind of cosy intimacy as we saw in the nests in the Elder's work. The space of the nest becomes even more interesting in the context of the overall shape of the letter – the narrative narrows from the space of Verginius' house, which evokes his memory, to the small space of his inadequate tomb, and then moves dramatically outwards in its reference to Rufus' global fame and mention of his military successes abroad.

Pliny also picks up on the tension between written and physical memorials later in the *Letters*, again with reference to Verginius Rufus. In *Epistle* 9.19, he pits him against Frontinus, who

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<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.* 128-9.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* 141-2.

supposedly requested no physical monument be erected in his memory, but nonetheless documented his deeds and achievements.<sup>346</sup> Pliny argues that Frontinus was in fact being less modest, since he expected to be remembered through his work:

an restrictius arbitraris per orbem terrarum legendum dare duraturam memoriam suam quam uno in loco duobus versiculis signare quod feceris? *Ep.* 9.19.6-7

Do you really think that it shows more reticence to publish throughout the world that your memory will live on, than to record your achievement in a single place in a mere couple of lines? (trans. Radice)

Here we see the same tensions between the physical scale of the memorial and the global reach of memorialisation as mentioned above. The language of spatial constriction and expansion run through the lines, as Pliny aligns Verginius Rufus' restrained morality with his spatially restricted memorial. The term *restrictius* makes this alignment particularly clear, as, although it is clearly meant in its moral sense here to mean 'more modest', the verb *restringere* also has the physical meaning of binding or tightening something.<sup>347</sup> Pliny here shows another side to the physical limitations of Verginius' tomb, as its small size becomes not a source of regret, but a sign of Verginius' temperate nature.

The themes raised in the Younger's letter on Verginius' tomb may also bring to mind a passage from the Elder's work. In Book 2, as part of his exposition on the earth's benevolent nature, he writes:

sic hominum illa ut caelum dei, quae nos nascentes excipit, natos alit, semelque editos sustinet semper, novissime complexa gremio iam a reliqua natura abdicatos tum maxime ut mater operiens, nullo magis sacra merito quam quo nos quoque sacros facit, etiam monumenta ac titulos gerens nomenque prorogans nostrum et memoriam extendens contra brevitatem aevi... *NH* 2.154

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<sup>346</sup> On which see Leach (2013).

<sup>347</sup> *L&S* s.v. I, IIb2 for the moral sense of 'modest'.

She belongs to men as the sky belongs to God: she receives us at birth, and gives us nurture after birth, and when once brought forth she upholds us always, and at the last when we have now been disinherited by the rest of nature she embraces us in her bosom and at that very time gives us her maternal shelter; sanctified by no service more than that whereby she makes us also sacred, even bearing our monuments and epitaphs and prolonging our name and extending our memory against the shortness of time... (trans. Rackham)

In this passage, the Elder describes how the earth shows kindness to humans across the course of their lives, from birth to death. He describes how after people have died, they enter into a relationship of mutual sanctification as earth covers human bodies in her embrace. Pliny here presents the earth as the facilitator of human commemoration, as she holds up the monuments and inscriptions that preserve the memories of those who have died. In this passage, we find the same tension between intimacy and the global reach of fame as we saw in the Younger's letter, as the earth both draws mankind into its final, intimate, embrace and simultaneously ensures the extension and promulgation of its memory.

Keeping the images of nests and nestlings from the *Natural History* in mind, we may observe the Younger playing with questions of inheritance and commemoration in other ways in his letters on Verginius and his tomb. The fact that it is Verginius' tomb that we find immortalised in the Younger's *Epistles*, and not that of the Elder Pliny is significant. As we know, the Elder will receive his own moment of epistolary commemoration just a few letters later in the sixth book (*Ep.* 6.16, 20), but no tomb or burial place is ever mentioned. In situating *Ep.* 6.10 in Verginius' *nidulus*, the Younger both alludes to, and distances himself from, the view of domesticity put forward in the Elder's work.

In this letter, Pliny combines personal and political acts of commemoration regarding Verginius, but ultimately encases the memory of a potentially controversial individual in the acceptable shell of personal mourning. The space of the nest allows the Younger to achieve better this blend of public and private mourning, as it allows him to situate Verginius, along with his political past, in a space which is tied to the simple and intimate domesticity we saw as a feature of the birds' nests in the *Natural History*. We might imagine that a letter about Verginius and his memory would read very differently if it had not been narrated through this frame of the domestic setting and through the doubling of the personal connection, as Pliny's

former mother-in-law now inhabits a home previously lived in by one of the Younger's most significant surrogate father figures. These events could have been conveyed through a more traditional narrative of Verginius' life, but instead we view them through a personal journey to a space with intimate personal significance for the Younger. As with the letters concerning the families of the Stoic opposition, Pliny inserts himself into a crucial role, here as the facilitator of the endurance of Verginius' memory, reminding his readers that there is always space for political conversations, even in the most intimate settings.

### Labyrinths

The final domestic space I consider from the *Natural History* is the labyrinth, the archetypal distortion of domestic space. While I am aware that my definition of 'domestic space' is somewhat loose in this chapter, the idea of the labyrinth as a dwelling space was, of course, fundamental to its mythology.<sup>348</sup> In the penultimate book of the *Natural History*, the Elder turns to these spaces and discusses famous examples of labyrinths from around the world. As has been observed, he presents these spaces as unnatural and worthy of condemnation in multiple different ways.<sup>349</sup> The Elder's discussion of labyrinths follows his treatment of a number of vertically ambitious building projects in stone, including pyramids and obelisks. He dismisses the pyramids as an example of ostentatious displays of wealth by kings in Egypt (*regum pecuniae otiosa ac stulta ostentatio*, NH 36.75), saying that the motivations for their construction was often either greed or vanity, such that the projects often remained incomplete (*multa circa hoc vanitas hominum illorum fuit. vestigia complurium incohaturum extant*, NH 36.75-6). He begins his discussion of labyrinths by confirming that they do actually exist, even though one might easily think otherwise:

dicamus et labyrinthos, vel portentosissimum humani inpendii opus, sed non, ut existimari potest, falsum. NH 36.84

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<sup>348</sup> See e.g. Doob (1990) 30-31 on the way authors alluded to the labyrinth's dark side without explicitly naming the Minotaur.

<sup>349</sup> See e.g. Carey (2003) 89-91. On the image of the labyrinth and its employment in domestic contexts, see Thomas (2007) 255.



We must mention also the labyrinths, quite the most abnormal achievement on which man has spent his resources, but by no means a fictitious one, as might well be supposed. (trans. Eichholz)

The connection between labyrinths, narrative and fictionality was clearly a live one in ancient literature and though, and the Elder's writing on the topic was no exception. Regarding the floorplan of the Egyptian labyrinth, he writes:

positionem operis eius singulasque partes enarrare non est... *NH* 36.87

The ground-plan and the individual parts of this building cannot be fully described...  
(trans. Eichholz)

In such a setting, we clearly cannot read this comment without thinking of Virgil's famous lines on the Shield of Aeneas:<sup>350</sup>

tum levis ocreas electro auroque recocto,  
hastamque et clipei non enarrabile textum.  
*Aen.* 8.624-5.

...then the smooth greaves of electrum and refined gold, the spear, and the shield's untellable fabric. (trans. adapted from Rushton Fairclough)

Of course, it is also impossible not to observe a connection between these labyrinthine spaces from Pliny's work and the form of the text itself.<sup>351</sup> Although he has a more mundane reason for not being able to describe the full ground-plan of the labyrinth, namely the fact that it stretches across several different regions,<sup>352</sup> we may also see a broader point about labyrinthine structures here, which suggests that they cannot easily be disentangled on a textual level, as

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<sup>350</sup> Doob (1990) 241-2 on the shield of Aeneas, 241 on the shield as 'at once a work of complex art heralding the end of Aeneas's labors and a harbinger of war and violence' Ch. 8 for labyrinths in the *Aeneid* more generally.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.* 227-253 on the importance of the labyrinth for the structure and style of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>352</sup> *NH* 36.87.

well as a physical one.<sup>353</sup> Pliny was clearly an author who was very aware of the labyrinthine nature of his own work.<sup>354</sup> In the first book of the *Natural History*, Pliny provides a table of contents which enables the reader to navigate his potentially unwieldy work: it functions as a metaphorical ball of wool in Pliny's textual labyrinth.<sup>355</sup> Doody has written on the crucial role played by the *summarium* in the Elder's text:

Pliny's joke that his *summarium* means no one will read his text exposes the logic of reading that later encyclopedias insist upon, but making the joke at all suggests that reading the book right through is still the normative methodology that Pliny generally expects his readers to follow. Making a joke about using rather than reading the *Natural History* reflects a central ambivalence in the text, an uncertainty about how information should be stored that results from the uncertainty about how it should best be read.<sup>356</sup>

With this context in mind, I turn to the actual descriptions of labyrinths given by the Elder. Pliny begins his list by describing the first labyrinth to be built, in Heracleopolis in Egypt.<sup>357</sup> As Pliny tells us, the reason for the structure's construction is debated, with suggestions including that the space was either the palace or the tomb of Moeris, or a temple to the sun-

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<sup>353</sup> See e.g. Doob (1990) 24: 'As later metaphorical uses of "labyrinth" suggest, any complicated building with many chambers and corridors is potentially labyrinthine; any building or mental process difficult to penetrate or escape without a guide is a kind of maze; and the most authentic mazes, at least in literature, are multicursal, allowing wrong choice and, consequently, perpetual entrapment.'

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.* Ch. 7 on texts as labyrinths in medieval literature.

<sup>355</sup> See Doody (2010) (especially Ch. 3 on the *summarium*) on reading strategies in the *Natural History* and the work's reception.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.* 95-6. Cf. Doob (1990) 220: 'If labyrinths need explication, so do labyrinthine texts, whether the explication comes through the guidance of a commentary or preacher or through readers' flight on their own wings of contemplation. Naturally, the complex text contains labyrinthine dangers: careless readers or listeners may be lost, lazy, or seduced into interminable error; the goal may seem trivial in comparison to the labors involved in reading it. But the ideal labyrinthine text is finally penetrable and extricable, albeit with difficulty, for its intended audience; it is as useful and magnificent a work of art as the ancient buildings, proving that persistent artistry and equally persistent interpretative labors triumphantly convert confusion and chaos into order and meaning.' Doob is largely discussing medieval texts in this chapter of her work, but the point would also stand for a work such as the *Natural History*.

<sup>357</sup> *NH* 36.84.

god, the final option being the most widely accepted.<sup>358</sup> He goes on to say that this labyrinth was the inspiration behind Daedalus' Cretan version:

hinc utique sumpsisse Daedalum exemplar eius labyrinthi quem fecit in Creta non est dubium, sed centensimam tantum portionem eius imitatum, quae itinerum ambages occursusque ac recursus inexplicabiles continet, non – ut in pavementis puerorumve ludicris campestribus videmus – brevi lacinia milia passuum plura ambulationis continente, sed crebris foribus inditis ad fallendos occursus redeundumque in errores eosdem. NH 36.85-86

Whatever the truth may be, there is no doubt that Daedalus adopted it as the model for the labyrinth built by him in Crete, but that he reproduced only a hundredth part of it containing passages that wind, advance and retreat in a bewilderingly intricate manner. It is not just a narrow strip of ground comprising many miles of 'walks' or 'rides,' such as we see exemplified in our tessellated floors or in the ceremonial game played by our boys in the Campus Martius, but doors are let into the walls at frequent intervals to suggest deceptively the way ahead and to force the visitor to go back upon the very same tracks that he has already followed in his wanderings. (trans. Eichholz)

The original Egyptian labyrinth was so elaborate, Pliny tells us, that Daedalus only produced one hundredth of it in his version.<sup>359</sup> Pliny explains that this style of labyrinth was particularly disorienting because it was not simply a single path, but instead contained multiple doors to trick the person walking through the maze into thinking that they had found the correct path ahead. In her discussion of ancient textual presentations of labyrinths, Penelope Reed Doob argues that Pliny and other others whose primary interests were historical or geographical were largely interested in factual treatments of the labyrinths, whereas more literary authors such as Ovid and Virgil had a greater interest in their mythological and symbolic potential.<sup>360</sup> However, even if Pliny's purpose was not primarily literary, I think we may still read a metaliterary significance into his labyrinthine spaces.

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<sup>358</sup> NH 36.84-85. See Lloyd (1970) on the Egyptian labyrinth and the textual and archaeological evidence for it. Lloyd (93-96 and *passim*) concludes that it is most likely that the labyrinth was a kind of temple.

<sup>359</sup> On this passage, see Naas (2002) 344-345.

<sup>360</sup> Doob (1990) 17-18.

Pliny goes on to describe the next labyrinths in his chronological list, one in Lemnos and one in Italy. Pliny then remarks on an unusual element of the Egyptian labyrinth, that the entrance and columns were made from Parian marble, while the rest of the structure was made of granite. Pliny remarks particularly on the strength of the structure, and the way in which it has endured through the centuries:

secundus hic fuit ab Aegyptio labyrinthus, tertius in Lemno, quartus in Italia, omnes lapide polito fornicibus tecti, Aegyptius, quod miror equidem, introitu lapidibus e Paro columnisque, reliqua e syenite molibus compositis, quas dissolvere ne saecula quidem possint, adiuvantibus Heracleopolitis, quod opus invisum mire respectavere. *NH* 36.86

This Cretan labyrinth was the next in succession after the Egyptian, and there was a third in Lemnos and a fourth in Italy, all alike being roofed with vaults of carefully worked stone. There is a feature of the Egyptian labyrinth which I for my part find surprising, namely an entrance and columns made of Parian marble. The rest of the structure is of syenite, the great blocks of which have been laid in such a way that even the lapse of centuries cannot destroy them. Their preservation has been aided by the people of Heracleopolis, who have shown remarkable respect for a work that they hate. (trans. slightly adapted from Eichholz)

Although the residents of the area detest the labyrinth, Pliny tells us, they have nonetheless taken the care to preserve it.<sup>361</sup> Again, we might see something significant in the elements of the labyrinth that the Elder chooses to emphasise here. He stresses the physical durability of the structure in language familiar from more literary claims at immortality (quas dissolvere ne saecula quidem possint). In particular, we might think of Horace's *Odes* 3.30 at this moment:<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> On which, see Carey (2003) 93: 'As in his account of the pyramids, Pliny openly plays on what should be perceived as wondrous. At 36.86 he marvels (*quod miror equidem*) at the entrance and marble columns of the Egyptian labyrinth at Heracleopolis, but the real wonder is that the people of Heracleopolis have helped to preserve a monument which they detest (*quod opus invisum mire respectavere*). For Pliny *mirabilia* are objects which should be preserved, precisely on account of their wondrousness (*gratia miraculi*). In his account of the labyrinth at Heracleopolis he ironically reverses this idea, so that, rather than that the labyrinth is a wonder worthy of conversation, the wonder is that such a monstrous structure should have survived.'

<sup>362</sup> On literary monuments, including *Odes* 3.30, see e.g. Fowler (2000) Ch. 9.

exegi monumentum aere perennius  
regalique situ pyramidum altius,  
quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens  
possit diruere aut innumerabilis  
annorum series et fuga temporum.  
Horace, *Odes* 3.30.1-5

I have finished a monument more lasting than bronze, more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids, one which neither corroding rain nor the ungovernable North Wind can ever destroy, nor the countless series of the years, nor the flight of time. (trans. Rudd)

Although the Elder is discussing labyrinths rather than pyramids in the passage cited above, we may nonetheless position the Elder's work as positioning itself in the same tradition as Horace's. In his comment regarding the people of Heracleopolis respecting the labyrinth as a feat of engineering, even though they do not like it, we might even recall the Younger's comment that his uncle thought no work was so bad it could not be useful in some way (*dicere etiam solebat nullum esse librum tam malum ut non aliqua parte prodesset*, *Ep.* 3.5.10-11).

Pliny then goes on to give a more extended description of the labyrinth from Egypt, and of the experience of walking through it:

fessi iam eundo perveniunt ad viarum illum inexplicabilem errorem, quin et cenacula clivis excelsa, porticusque descenduntur nonagenis gradibus; intus columnae porphyrite lapide, deorum simulacra, regum statuae, monstificaef effigies. quarundam domuum talis est situs ut adaperientibus fores tonitrum intus terribile existat, maiore autem in parte transitus est per tenebras. *NH* 36.87-88

it is when he is already exhausted with walking that the visitor reaches the bewildering maze of passages. Moreover, there are rooms in lofty upper storeys reached by inclines, and porches from which flights of 90 stairs lead down to the ground. Inside are columns of imperial porphyry, images of gods, statues of kings and figures of monsters. Some of the halls are laid out in such a way that when the doors open there is a terrifying

rumble of thunder within: incidentally, most of the building has to be traversed in darkness. (trans. Eichholz)

The labyrinth is, unsurprisingly, a vast and confusing space, filled with both complex architectural features and a number of statues. Its plot is so extensive that the person journeying through the labyrinth is already exhausted by the time they reach its entrance, and once inside, they face a series of bewildering obstacles and experiences. The shifting levels of the labyrinth, which includes both raised rooms and steep steps leading deep underground create a sense of visual trickery. In addition to the visual confusions, we also find sounds which make the place appear more threatening, as the mysterious noise of thunder is heard even inside the space, which is mostly in permanent darkness.<sup>363</sup> The passage plays with ideas of threatening interiority in a manner reminiscent of Seneca's *Thyestes*, and the labelling of the labyrinth's halls as a *domus* presents the labyrinth as a sinister version of a domestic space.

Pliny then moves to discuss an Italian example of a labyrinth, built by King Porsena of Etruria as a tomb. He says that the project was so decadent, that even the vanity of kings outside

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<sup>363</sup> cf. Sen. *Thy.* 999-1001; 1041-1044. We might also draw a comparison here between these passages and the Younger's description of the palace under Domitian in his *Panegyricus*: *obversabantur foribus horror et minae et par metus admissis et exclusis; ad hoc ipse occurso quoque visuque terribilis: superbia in fronte, ira in oculis, femineus pallor in corpore, in ore impudentia multo rubore suffusa. non adire quisquam non adloqui audebat, tenebras semper secretumque captantem, nec umquam ex solitudine sua prodeuntem, nisi ut solitudinem faceret.* *Pan.* 48.4-5; *ille tamen, quibus sibi parietibus et muris salutem suam tueri videbatur, dolum secum et insidias et ultorem scelerum deum inclusit. dimovit perfregitque custodias Poena, angustosque per aditus et obstructos non secus ac per apertas fores et invitantia liminia irrupit: longe tunc illi divinitas sua, longe arcana illa cubilia saevique secessus, in quos timore et superbia et odio hominum agebatur.* *Pan.* 49.1 Although the palace space is not explicitly described as labyrinthine, here too we find shadowy spaces filled with networks of corridors and rooms, in which Domitian becomes the mythological monster at the maze's heart. See Thomas (2007) 255 on the example of a construction of an octagonal wall in Domitian's palace, seen after his death, as we see here, as 'a tyrant's lair filled with dark, impenetrable corridors' [As noted in a previous chapter, my Cambridge MPhil thesis explored spatial uncertainty in the Younger's *Panegyricus*]. Doob (1990) 21-22 on Pliny's description of the labyrinth suggesting it was not like those depicted on mosaics in the classical period, or other multicursal labyrinths of the time, which did not involve false turns, and this as also marking it as distinct from the *lusus Troiae*, 26-30, 235-7 on the *Lusus Troiae*. She also discusses the doors on the Temple of Apollo in *Aeneid* 6 as an example of the labyrinth shown in a negative light (30-31). On the temple doors, see also Casali (1995).

Italy was exceeded (*simul ut externorum regum vanitas quoque Italiam superetur*, NH 36.91). In discussing this labyrinth, Pliny quotes Varro's description of the space:

sed cum excedat omnia fabulositas, utemur ipsius M. Varronis in expositione ea verbis: Sepultus sub urbe Clusio, in quo loco monimentum reliquit lapide quadrato quadratum, singula latera pedum trecenum, alta quinquagenum. in qua basi quadrata intus labyrinthum inextricabile, quo si quis introierit sine glomere lini, exitum invenire nequeat. NH 36.91-92.

But since irresponsible story-telling here exceeds all bounds, I shall in describing the building make use of the very words of Marcus Varro himself: 'He is buried close to the city of Clusium, in a place where he has left a square monument built of squared blocks of stone, each side being 300 feet long and 50 feet high. Inside this square pedestal there is a tangled labyrinth, which no one must enter without a ball of thread if he is to find his way out.' (trans. Eichholz)

The reason for quoting Varro here, Pliny tells us, is that there are many untrue stories told about the labyrinth, again confirming the connection between labyrinths and fictionality noted above. Pliny thus uses a reference to Varro as a solidifying strategy, to firm up his description of these confounding spaces. Here we find Pliny alluding to the mythological significances of the labyrinth, as he recounts that the only way to escape the labyrinth is by using a ball of string to trace one's way back to the exit. The space is again described as *inextricabilis*, a fitting term here, as the unravelling thread becomes the only hope of surviving a space which cannot be unravelled or disentangled.<sup>364</sup>

The quotation from Varro goes on to detail the fact that the labyrinth also contained inside it a number of pyramids, stacked atop one another in groups to form a tower. Pliny notes that Varro was ashamed to record the heights of the final level of the pyramid structure, but that Etruscan sources record that the height of this final level was equal to that of the entire remainder of the structure. Sorchá Carey analyses these spaces in the context of her exploration

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<sup>364</sup> See Doob (1990) 24 on the potential solutions to labyrinths. Doob (1990) 229 writes of Aeneas: 'Through his labors, Aeneas becomes a second, more complex, version of Theseus, the maze-tamer king who knows how to handle *errores*, and of Daedalus, inventor, artist, exile, and shaper of chaos.'

of the conflict in the *Natural History* between the work's condemnation of luxury and excess and its goal to catalogue everything.<sup>365</sup> She writes of Pliny's account of the Italian labyrinth:

It is the natural conclusion to a narrative which has been consistently asserting both Roman supremacy over the world and Roman possession of the world. Even in matters of luxury, Rome outdoes all others. It is inevitable that the city which is the ultimate microcosm, filled to overflowing with its possessions from all over the world, should contain *luxuria*.<sup>366</sup>

Across these passages, then, we find that the labyrinths come to function as a symbol for many of the problems of Pliny's textual project. As well as the tension Carey identifies between the Elder's philosophy and the intended scope of his project, in the labyrinths we also see the Elder wrestling with the question of writing such a substantial work on a textual level. In his treatment of these twisting, turning and deeply allusive spaces, we find the Elder pointing up the potential lack of navigability in his own work. As Carey's analysis pinpoints, one of the most significant issues for the Elder in writing the *Natural History* is one of containment, and the labyrinth, with its dark interiority and the threat of a monster lurking inside, is an excellent image with which to express this anxiety.

#### Coda: Villas

It would seem remiss to discuss domestic architecture in the *Epistles* without mention of the Younger's letters on his portfolio of villas. These letters are, of course, some of the best known from the collection and have been discussed extensively by scholars, the two most famous being *Ep.* 2.17, on Pliny's Laurentine estate, and *Ep.* 5.6, on his Tuscan property.<sup>367</sup> For this

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<sup>365</sup> Carey (2003) Ch.4, on Book 36.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>367</sup> E.g. du Prey (1994), *passim*; 8 on Pliny as the inventor of a new kind of literary form in his writing on architecture: 'Whatever the tradition before Pliny's time – and it may have been considerable, as these few extant prose fragments suggest – it fell to him to develop and perfect a new genre of letter. With his mouthwatering evocations of nature and the built environment, he devised what might be called the literary house and garden tour.' See also Bergmann (1995), Wallace-Hadrill (1998) on the cultural symbolism of villas, Henderson (2002c) 15-20 on *Ep.* 2.17 and *Ep.* 5.6, Myers (2005) on gardens in Pliny and Statius, 112-123 on Pliny; Chinn (2007) on *Ep.* 5.6 and ecphrasis, Spencer (2010) 113-134 on the villas and their landscapes, Whitton (2015a) 113-116 on



reason, I do not intend to explore these letters in detail here, but briefly touch on one element of these letters. The Younger's villas do not display the kind of intimacy that we find in other depictions of domestic space in his letters, as we will go on to see. As has been demonstrated, the spaces depicted in these letters are solitary and often empty, the descriptions populated usually only by Pliny himself.<sup>368</sup> Andrew Riggsby has also written on the way in which Pliny's villa letters do not represent a straightforward mapping of the physical villa spaces, but are instead more focused on the combination of space and time, in depicting the typical experience of occupying these spaces.<sup>369</sup>

Although the Younger's letters on his villas are, in many ways, very different spaces from the labyrinths from the Elder's work discussed above, there are, nonetheless, some conspicuous similarities between the two. The letters on the Younger's Laurentine and Tuscan estates also exhibit a high degree of awareness regarding their own textuality. For example, at the close of *Ep.* 5.6, the Younger draws a link between his description of the estate and literary ecphrases from epic:

vitassem iam dudum ne viderer argutior, nisi proposuissem omnes angulos tecum  
epistula circumire. neque enim verebar ne laboriosum esset legenti tibi, quod visenti  
non fuisset, praesertim cum interquiescere, si liberet, depositaque epistula quasi  
residere saepius posses. *Ep.* 5.6.41

I should have been trying long ago not to say too much, had I not suggested that this letter should take you into every corner of the place. I don't imagine you will find it tiresome to read about a spot which could hardly tire you on a visit, especially as you have more opportunities if you want an occasional rest, and can take a seat, so to speak, by putting down the letter. (trans. Radice)

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*Ep.* 2.17, 131 on *Ep.* 5.6, Mratschek (2018) 221-229 on the significance of Domitius Apollinaris as the addressee of *Ep.* 5.6, *passim* on the significance of Domitius Apollinaris for Pliny and Martial.

<sup>368</sup> On which, see Marchesi (2015). Marchesi explores how the emptiness of Pliny's spaces (particularly his villas) is connected to the production of literary works that takes place inside them.

<sup>369</sup> Riggsby (2003). Cf. du Prey (1994) 8-10 on Pliny's lack of specific architectural detail in the villa letters, in favour of an emphasis on feeling.

vides quot versibus Homerus, quot Vergilius arma hic Aeneae Achillis ille describat;  
brevis tamen uterque est quia facit quod instituit. *Ep.* 5.6.43

You know the number of lines Homer and Virgil devote to their descriptions of the arms of Achilles and Aeneas: yet neither passage seems long because both poets are carrying out their original intention. (trans. Radice)

The Younger's villa letters are self-conscious of their own literary status, as evidenced by his reference to the relationship between the tour and its literary form, and to epic ecphrasis, shows. As we saw above, the Elder's labyrinths also showed awareness of their own textuality, and their own epic connections. As Roy Gibson has noted, regarding *Ep.* 5.6 there may also be a very specific and deliberate connection with the Elder and his work. Gibson notes that the Younger's comment about the soil at the Tuscan estate needing to be ploughed nine times is a significant echo of a line from the *Natural History* regarding Tuscan soil, an echo which Gibson argues supports the view that the Younger inherited the estate from his uncle.<sup>370</sup> As he writes:

The Younger, so we might interpret, has effectively built his own villa on or over a site or buildings owned by the Elder, to a design which the Elder – tactfully not mentioned here – would not have found fit for his own purposes. A better metaphor for the Younger's relationship with the Elder could hardly be discovered.<sup>371</sup>

As Gibson notes, the villa the Younger describes in his letter may not have been one of which the Elder would have approved. Other scholars have also noted that the luxurious nature of the Younger's villas stands in opposition to his uncle's condemnation of private extravagance and excess.<sup>372</sup> Combining extensive description of natural spaces with luxurious architectural features, the Younger's villa letters both gesture to the content of the *Natural History* while firmly distancing themselves from its approach to the natural world. Rather than truly domestic spaces, they are instead spaces of *studia*, places where the Younger can both hone his skills as a writer, and also display both his connection to, and independence from, what has gone before.

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<sup>370</sup> Gibson (2011) 194-5.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.* 95.

<sup>372</sup> See e.g. Milesch (2003) 320.

## Conclusion

For both the Elder and the Younger, dwelling places and domestic architecture are fertile spaces in their texts. For the Elder, the intimate cosiness of bird's nests can provide inspiration for human architecture, but it can also be adopted and distorted by humans in their extravagant behaviour. The nest in the *Natural History* functions as a symbol of a morally laudable space which animals naturally inhabit, but which humans distort through an unnatural expansion and distortion of its basic structure. The Younger picks up on this symbolism in his own work and in his own nest-like spaces. In the *Epistles*, these spaces often have a more keenly political edge, as he capitalises on the balance between intimate and simple dwelling spaces and their more luxurious counterparts. His garden bedroom, which appears markedly similar to Mucianus' treehouse from the *Natural History*, seeks to navigate this tension between natural retreat and the extravagant re-shaping of nature that his uncle condemns. Furthermore, Verginius' 'nest' of a house, which contains his paltry tomb, is a fertile space for the Younger to navigate his relationship with Verginius, in terms of both the political significances of this relationship and his close personal connection with his dead *tutor*.

When we turn to consider houses in the *Epistles* more generally, we find that these spaces are often connected with significant accounts of death and illness. Once more, intimate domestic spaces are the ideal settings for Pliny to negotiate political relationships with significant figures from history. Of course, this is partly due to the differences in how the Romans conceptualised privacy and private spaces from our own ideas of these concepts. However, we can clearly see the Younger playing with this tension between intimacy and public matters in his treatment of the spaces of the *domus* and the *cubiculum*. In particular, he achieves this through repeatedly presenting these spaces as destabilised. We see that across the *Epistles*, Pliny presents houses as mirroring the turmoil of those living inside them, and as domestic architecture as a productive language for describing personal tragedies. Again, there is a political edge to this, as Pliny is able to insert himself into the intimate spaces of politically significant figures, as is the case with the members of the Stoic opposition.

Turning from houses to the most final of dwelling places, the tomb, we saw that Pliny's treatment of the small space Verginius' tomb in the sixth book of the *Epistles* allowed him to explore larger concerns with literary immortality. In *Ep.* 6.10, we saw the Younger activate the long-standing literary image of the inadequate tomb or memorial, and in doing so, insert

himself into the role of the facilitator of Verginius' memory.<sup>373</sup> The position of the tomb in Verginius' *nidulus* allows Pliny to commemorate a potentially controversial figure in a safe context, while also gesturing to spaces from the Elder's text.

Finally, we can see that for both authors, distortions of domestic space can be particularly productive for both authors. Beginning with the labyrinth, a space that has always held particular fascination for literary authors, we saw that both the Elder and the Younger utilise labyrinthine spaces in their works. For the Elder, his discussion of labyrinths both fits into his programme of documenting marvellous feats of engineering and also allows for some intertextual gestures that prompt metapoetic readings of the images as symbols for the experience of reading the Elder's work.

For both the Elder and the Younger, then, the space of the home is a particularly suggestive one. Straddling both the human world and the animal kingdom, the world of private intimacy and that of public business and politics, and even the realms of life and death, the dwelling spaces we find across the works of both authors are repeatedly shown to be fertile sites for constructing literary meaning. Despite the significant differences in textual form and, often, in attitude between their respective literary works, we can nonetheless trace common threads across the ways both the Elder and the Younger treat domestic space, threads that turn out to pull us deeper into the textual mazes of both authors' literary worlds.

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<sup>373</sup> Cf. Leach (2013).

## Chapter Four: Public Building

### Introduction

In this final chapter, I move away from the world of domestic architecture to the realm of public space. The topic of public and urban space in the ancient world is, of course, a vast one.<sup>374</sup> Public architecture, both in Rome and beyond, was always a significant medium for the celebration and consolidation of imperial power, a medium which became particularly important at times of change in political regime.<sup>375</sup> More broadly, there was a fascination in Roman thought and literature with the tension between permanence and instability inherent in the process of constructing architectural monuments.<sup>376</sup> This tension was often a productive one for ancient authors, and many Roman imperial texts engage with the fallibility of physical monuments while also praising their construction as examples of the power and splendour of empire. Here, I am interested in the question of how both the Elder and the Younger made use of this aspect of public architecture in their works, in order to harness symbolic capital in service of their political and literary aims.

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<sup>374</sup> See e.g. Favro (1999) on the active role played by Rome's landscape in ceremonial events, Favro (2006) on the difficulty of conceptualising Rome in a single image, Miller (2013) on monuments in Rome; Nielsen (2013) on the development of imperial architecture; Quenemoen (2013) on architecture from the time of Nero to that of Hadrian. Quenemoen considers how the damage sustained by Rome's architectural fabric due to repeated fires (most notably the fire of 64) had an influence on Roman building techniques and style, particularly as concerns the use of concrete and brick. Quenemoen also critiques the view that there was a revolutionary moment in architecture in the first century AD, arguing that: 'Looking more broadly at Roman architectural history, it becomes increasingly evident that Roman architects and builders neither thought of themselves as breaking radically with the past nor as establishing new tenets of architecture overnight. Late first-century architecture was firmly rooted in established conventions – materials, design practices, and construction techniques – and characterized by a great deal of experimentation and uncertainty.' (64), Russell (2015) on public space in Republican Rome.

<sup>375</sup> E.g. Woolf (2003) on Rome's shift from the empire's real ruling centre to a more symbolic centre, as constructed in Latin texts. Roche (2011b) on Pliny's presentation of Rome's monuments in the *Panegyricus*.

<sup>376</sup> See e.g. Jenkyns (2013), (2014). For the idea of Rome as constantly changing in a different context, see Favro (2017) on the realities of building work in marble in Augustan Rome.

## Public Space in the *Natural History*

Pliny's descriptions of public architecture, especially those examples coming from Rome itself, are some of the best known and most frequently cited passages from the *Natural History*. From the image of Rome as a tower of its most significant monuments to his depiction of Rome as suspended above its network of drains, images of marvellous feats of engineering have remained intriguing over the millennia. As these architectural passages have been the focus of much scholarly work, I do not intend to consider them all in detail here. Rather, I will briefly touch on some of the central themes that emerge from the Elder's descriptions of public space.

As scholars have explored, there exists a fundamental tension in the Elder's work between his desire to catalogue the marvellous sights and happenings of the world, to detail the acquisitive power of the Roman empire, and his condemnation of *luxuria*. Sorchá Carey has explored the way in which this tension is present in the Elder's depiction of architectural marvels from Rome, as he wrestles with the problem of how his project necessarily reproduces the excess it seeks to condemn.<sup>377</sup> This conflict often leads to depictions of public architecture in the *Natural History* that revolve around concerns with fluidity and permanence. These qualities were, of course, intriguing to writers other than Pliny and formed an important part of the presentation of Rome in antiquity and beyond.<sup>378</sup>

In a more mundane example of architectural precariousness from the *Natural History*, the Elder describes how the theft of mortar has caused many of Rome's buildings to collapse:

ruinarum urbis ea maxume causa, quod furto calcis sine ferumine suo caementa componuntur. intrita quoque ea quo vetustior, eo melior. in antiquorum aedium legibus invenitur, ne recentiore trima uteretur redemptor; ideo nullae tectoria eorum rimae foedavere. *NH* 36.176

The chief reason for the collapse of buildings in Rome is the purloining of lime, as the result of which the rough stones are laid on each other without any proper mortar. It is also a fact that the slurry improves with keeping. In the old building laws is to be found

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<sup>377</sup> Carey (2003) Ch. 4 on collecting and *passim*.

<sup>378</sup> E.g. Fowler (2000) Ch.9 on monuments and time.

a regulation that no contractor is to use a slurry that is less than three years old. Consequently, old plaster work was never disfigured by cracks. (trans. Eichholz)

Pliny tells us that the theft of lime, that leaves bare bricks balanced atop one another, as well as the use of insufficiently fresh mortar, is the main cause of buildings falling into ruin in the city. Pliny reflects that this problem was less common in the past, when regulations stipulated that fresh mortar needed to be used, meaning that older structures did not have the same cracks in their plaster work as newer ones. Even in this relatively benign passage, the language used by the Elder betrays a deeper sense of disquiet, as his mention of the city, rather than of individual buildings, creates a sense that the whole of Rome is collapsing. Furthermore, his use of the verb *foedare* in reference to cracking plaster introduces a more visceral sense of the cracked and disfigured fabric of the buildings.<sup>379</sup>

The connection seen in this passage on lime, between the past and a sense of increased stability, is also visible in some of the better known architectural passages in the Elder's text. Most notably, the Elder's description of Rome's network of subterranean sewers and drains praises these long-standing structures for their solidity:

permeant conrivati septem amnes cursuque praecipiti torrentium modo rapere atque auferre omnia coacti, insuper imbrium mole concitati vada ac latera quatiant, aliquando Tiberis retro infusus recipitur, pugnantque diversi aquarum impetus intus, et tamen obnixa firmitas resistit. trahuntur moles superne tantae non succumbentibus cavis operis, pulsant ruinae sponte praecipites aut inpactae incendiis, quatitur solum terrae motibus, durant tamen a Tarquinio Prisco annis DCC prope inexpugnabiles... *NH* 36.105-6

Through the city there flow seven rivers meeting in one channel. These, rushing downwards like mountain torrents, are constrained to sweep away and remove everything in their path, and when they are thrust forward by an additional volume of rain water they batter the bottom and sides of the sewers. Sometimes the backwash of

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<sup>379</sup> The language used here is somewhat reminiscent of Juvenal's third *Satire*, especially 3.190-196. On *Satire* 3, and its relationship to Virgil, see Staley (2000), Syme (1979) on Juvenal's relationship to Pliny and Tacitus, Umurhan (2018) on Juvenal and globalization.

the Tiber floods the sewers and makes its way along them upstream. Then the raging flood waters meet head on within the sewers, and even so the unyielding strength of the fabric resists the strain. In the streets above, massive blocks of stone are dragged along, and yet the tunnels do not cave in. They are pounded by falling buildings, which collapse of their own accord or are brought crashing to the ground by fire. The ground is shaken by earth tremors; but in spite of all, for 700 years from the time of Tarquinius Priscus, the channels have remained well-nigh impregnable. (trans. Eichholz)

Whether because of earthquakes, fires, or constant rebuilding and renovation, the landscape of the city is always evolving and changing, yet it also contains buildings and structures that have remained in place for centuries.<sup>380</sup> The sewers constitute the only barrier between two ever-changing spaces, the shape-shifting city above and the tumultuous waters below. An unlikely parallel for this kind of architectural resilience may be found in Pliny's discussion of spiders and their webs, from the eleventh book of the *Natural History*:

specus ipse qua concamaratur architectura! et contra frigora quanto villosior! quam remotus a medio aliudque agentis similis, inclusus vero sic ut sit necne intus aliquis cerni non possit! age firmitas, quando rumpentibus ventis, qua pulverum mole degradante? *NH* 11.82-3

With what architectural skill is the vaulting of the actual cave designed! and how much more hairy it is made, to give protection against cold! How distant it is from the centre, and how its intention is concealed, although it is really so roofed in that it is impossible to see whether somebody is inside or not! Then its strength – when is it broken by the winds? what quantity of dust weighs it down? (trans. Rackham)

Here, Pliny praises the architectural skill of the spider's web. Despite being an apparently fragile structure, its resilience is striking, and Pliny uses the same term, *firmitas*, as he did in his praise of the sewers. The final line of the passage echoes the sewer description on a microscopic scale, strong winds replacing the rushing waters, and the mass of stone (*moles*)

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<sup>380</sup> On Rome's sewers, see Isager (1991) 198- 199; Murphy (2004) 188-193 on the Elder Pliny's depiction of the Cloaca Maxima; Gowers (1995). Cf. Naas (2002) 387-390 on Pliny's view of the true marvels of Rome, and the importance of utility.



transported in the sewer passage becomes here specks of dust. Although I do not wish to push for a point of connection between these two passages, I do think it is of interest that the qualities the Elder praises in the sewers are those which are also visible in his presentation of structures from the natural world. Rome's sewers are so successful because they have become part of the fabric of its landscape, shaken and yet remaining firm.

Elsewhere, we find examples of architectural ambition that clearly do not achieve this kind of harmony with the natural world. Two famous examples of this come from a pair of Republican theatre-building projects, one by the aedile Marcus Scaurus and one by Gaius Curio, tribune in 50 BC. The former was an incredibly lavish temporary theatre, built with a wide variety of expensive materials.<sup>381</sup> Scaurus' theatre is simultaneously intriguing and offensive to Pliny in part because of its temporary nature, the use of such lavish resources on something that was never designed to last a key part of the distaste it provokes (*in aedilitate hic sua fecit opus maximum omnium quae umquam fuere humana manu facta, non temporaria mora, verum etiam aeternitatis destinatione*, 36.114).<sup>382</sup>

Curio's theatre, on the other hand, was not lavish in terms of its materials, but ambitious in its design, being made of two separate but connected theatres that could then revolve and become an amphitheatre. Its temporary wooden structure creaking and whirling, again stands in marked contrast to the solid permanence of the sewers and drains below Rome.<sup>383</sup> For example, the Elder writes of the theatre's audience:

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<sup>381</sup> *theatrum hoc fuit; scaena ei triplex in altitudinem CCCLX columnarum in ea civitate quae sex Hymettias non tulerat sine probro civis amplissimi. ima pars scaenae e marmore fuit, media e vitro, inaudito etiam postea genere luxuriae, summa e tabulis inauratis; columnae, ut diximus, imae duodequadragesimum pedum*, NH 36.114-15. On Scaurus' theatre, see Isager (1991) 200, Davis (2000) 137-143, Naas (2002) 383-387, Carey (2003) 96-97, Schultze (2007) 132. Cf. Dodge (2013) on theatre-building, architecture and spectacle more generally.

<sup>382</sup> See Carey (2003) 96.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* 98 for this as a very deliberate strategy: 'Earlier, in his account of obelisks, it was the boats which brought the monoliths to Rome that provided the spectacle. In Curio's theatre, the roles are reversed, so that the conquerors who brought the obelisks back to Rome are installed as exhibits in the fragile boats which carry them. The discourse of *mirabilia* has been inverted to demonstrate how in Curio's theatre, the Roman people have been conquered by their own excess.'

super omnia erit populi sedere ausi furor tam infida instabilique sede. en hic est ille  
terrarum victor et totius domitor orbis, qui gentes, regna diribet, iura exteris mittit,  
deorum quaedam immortalium generi humano portio, in machina pendens et ad  
periculum suum plaudens! *NH* 36.118-119.

What will prove to be more amazing than anything is the madness of a people that was  
bold enough to take its place in such treacherous, rickety seats. Here we have the nation  
that has conquered the earth, that has subdued the whole world, that distributes tribes  
and kingdoms, that despatches its dictates to foreign peoples, that is heaven's  
representative, so to speak, among mankind, swaying on a contraption and applauding  
its own danger! (trans. Eichholz)

In this well-known scene, the Elder condemns the reckless actions of the audience, willing to  
risk their lives for the sake of watching a performance. Rome's imperial might is here  
contrasted with the folly of those who choose to sit in the shaking structure, the danger itself  
becoming a cause for celebration. He later contrasts the grief felt following a natural disaster  
with the misplaced willingness of the Roman people who choose to sit in the rickety structure  
(*hauriri urbes terrae hiatibus publicus mortalium dolor est: ecce populus Romanus universus,  
veluti duobus navigiis inpositus, binis cardinibus sustinetur et se ipsum depugnantem spectat,  
periturus momento aliquo luxatis machinis!* *NH* 36.119-120). The cities swallowed down by  
the earth in the imagined disaster (*hauriri urbes terrae hiatibus*) are contrasted with the boat-  
like structures on which the audience are raised dangerously high. Carey writes of Curio's  
theatre:

We are presented with the unnatural counterpart of Pliny's earlier image of Rome as  
the 'hanging city' (*urbs pensile*) [sic]. In Curio's theatre the whole of Rome dangles on  
a perilous contraption (*in machina pendens*), in contrast with its ideal counterpart,  
pictured at 36.104 hanging over the sewers.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.* 97-8. On Curio's theatre, see also Isager (1991) 201-202, 202 on these theatres as 'fraudulent wonders',  
Schultze (2007) Schultze's excellent analysis of the passage touches on a number of important themes from the  
*Natural History*, including the Elder's use of the language of viewing and spectatorship, as well as the Elder's use  
of Curio's theatre as political metaphor for Republican Rome at the time.

The Elder critiques these two projects as representing the wrong kind of instability or precariousness, seen as irresponsible and hubristic. Unlike the sewers or other marvellous feats of engineering praised in the *Natural History*, these projects confound and confuse the natural order of the world. As has been noted, these structures do not possess any of the utility that the aqueduct and sewer projects did, which makes them morally suspect.<sup>385</sup>

This play between nature and architecture is also visible in Pliny's discussion of an unusual type of translucent stone:

Nerone principe in Cappadocia repertus est lapis duritia marmoris, candidus atque tralucens etiam qua parte fulvae inciderant venae, ex argumento phengites appellatus. hoc construxerat aedem Fortunae quam Seiani appellant, a Servio rege sacratam, amplexus aurea domo; quare etiam foribus opertis interdiu claritas ibi diurna erat alio quam specularium modo tamquam inclusa luce, non transmissa. *NH* 36.163

During Nero's principate there was discovered in Cappadocia a stone as hard as marble, white and, even where deep-yellow veins occurred, translucent. In token of its appearance it was called 'phengites' or the 'Luminary Stone.' Of this stone Nero rebuilt the temple of Fortune, known as the shrine of Sejanus, but originally consecrated by King Servius Tullius and incorporated by Nero in his Golden House. Thanks to this stone, in the daytime it was as light as day in the temple, even when the doors were shut; but the effect was not that of windows of specular stone, since the light was, so to speak, trapped within rather than allowed to penetrate from without. (trans. Eichholz)

Here, the natural material used to construct the temple lends a luminous quality to the space.<sup>386</sup> The space is presented as both enclosed and enclosing in the passage, as it simultaneously

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<sup>385</sup> E.g. Naas (2002) 387-390.

<sup>386</sup> For a different play between nature and architecture in the Elder's discussion of stone, see also *NH* 36.125: *et inter plurima alia Italiae ipsius miracula marmora in lapicidinis crescere auctor est Papirius Fabianus, naturae rerum peritissimus, exemptores quoque adfirmant compleri sponte illa montium ulcera. quae si vera sunt, spes est numquam defutura luxuriae*. Here, Pliny lists of one of Italy's marvels a fact recorded by another natural historian, Papirius Fabianus, that marble grows in quarries, adding that those who work in the quarry say they have observed that the cuts made where the marble has been quarried fill with new rock. On this passage, see Naas (2002) 390. Naas comments that by citing two different sources, Pliny is effectively distancing himself from

contains the light generated by the stone and is itself contained in the larger structure of the Domus Aurea. This sense of enclosure may take on a further significance given that it is the Domus Aurea specifically that the Elder is discussing here. His anti-Neronian perspective is well-known, and we may see in the language of this passage another instance of Neronian excess and consumption. The inverse of this image appears in the Elder's discussion of a channel cut in a mountain under the orders of Claudius, in order to drain the Fucine Lake:

eiusdem Claudii inter maxime memoranda equidem duxerim, quamvis destitutum successoris odio, montem perfossum ad lacum Fucinum emittendum inenarrabili profecto impendio et operarum multitudine per tot annos, cum aut contrivatio aquarum, qua terrenus mons erat, egereretur in verticem machinis aut silex caederetur quantaque intus in tenebris fierent, quae neque concipi animo nisi ab iis qui videre neque enarrari humano sermone possunt! *NH* 36.124-125

One of the most remarkable achievements of the same emperor, Claudius, neglected, though it was, by his malicious successor, is, in my opinion at least, the channel that he dug through a mountain to drain the Fucine Lake. This, I need hardly say, entailed the expenditure of an indescribably large sum of money and the employment for many years of a horde of workers because, where earth formed the interior of the mountain, the water channel had to be cleared by lifting the spoil to the top of the shafts on hoists and everywhere else solid rock had to be cut away, and operations underground (and how vast they were!) had to be carried out in darkness, operations which only those who witnessed them can envisage and no human utterance can describe. (trans. Eichholz)

In this dramatic feat of engineering, the structure of the mountain is altered, requiring considerable resources.<sup>387</sup> Unlike in the passage above regarding the translucent stone, where

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the story: 'On remarque en effet la double mention des sources – le naturaliste qui lui-même rapporte la témoignage des carriers –, par laquelle Plinie refuse de prendre l'information à son compte, procédé fréquent pour relater des merveilles invraisemblables.'

<sup>387</sup> See Murphy (2004) 201-3 on Claudius and the public staging of natural spectacles. Murphy also cites the account of Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.56-7 on the draining of the lake, 57 on the banquet) regarding Claudius' plan to host a banquet in front of the mountain with the lake draining through. As Tacitus writes, the planned banquet resulted only in fear and panic, due to the speed of the water and the damage it caused. Carey (2003) 89-90 on how this

the temple structure enclosed and encased the stone's natural luminescence, here the mountain is hollowed out in order to allow the passage of water. The Elder's emphasis on the inability of the project to be conveyed in words is of particular interest. Both the amount of money spent on the project and the actual processes by which it was achieved are presented as somehow unwriteable, bestowing the scene with an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue, reminiscent of the labyrinths discussed in the previous chapter.

Public architecture in the *Natural History*, then, is a key site of negotiation for the Elder, a source of wonder and appreciation for human skill and ingenuity, but also an area where luxury and greed can quickly take control. As the scholars cited above have shown, public architecture constitutes a space where the Elder negotiates his relationship to Rome, its empire and even his own text. As we will go on to see, public architecture also proved to be an important tool with which the Younger could explore his own place in the imperial landscape, and the function of his texts in the landscape. It is to this, rather different landscape, that I will now turn.

#### *Epistles Ten: Public (Re)building with Pliny and Trajan.*

I end this study with an examination of the final book of the *Epistles*. Book Ten has long posed a number of interesting interpretative challenges for its readers. Questions of the book's level of editing, its purpose, and its literary status have been extensively debated. For a long time, the dominant view was that it was a largely unedited book, a selection of genuine correspondence between Pliny and Trajan that bore little to no relation to the other books of the *Epistles*.<sup>388</sup> This view has since been challenged, with several important scholarly

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passage forms part of Pliny's narrative on *mirabilia* and Roman power, in which he assumes the power to discern what is truly marvellous. Carey contrasts Pliny's dismissive description of Lake Moeris in Egypt with his more praiseworthy description of Claudius' attempts to drain the Fucine Lake. Cf. Naas (2002) 357-360 on Lake Moeris.

<sup>388</sup> For a more recent summary of the view that the letters were not substantially edited, see e.g. Coleman (2012) 233: 'If Pliny handles the language of the bureaucracy with greater clarity than other Roman bureaucrats whose efforts have survived, this does not put it on the same footing as the superbly crafted Latinity of the first nine books.'; 234 on theories about the editing of Book Ten: 'The most obvious one is that the "private" letters prefacing Book 10, and the presence, throughout the book, of letters of recommendation unrelated to Pliny's staff in Bithynia, suggest that the collection represents the contents of a file labeled "Emperor," and that it was added to Pliny's published correspondence as a tenth book by someone else after his death. The correspondence is messy

contributions arguing for Book 10 as a sophisticated and highly considered work, freighted with potential and meaning reaching far beyond the simply logistical.<sup>389</sup> Here, I build on the work of these scholars and my analysis proceeds from the assumption that the correspondence was certainly edited, whether by Pliny himself or by someone else.<sup>390</sup> The identity of this editor seems unlikely to be established with any certainty, but the idea that it was Pliny himself is an attractive one.

A tension between finality and novelty runs through the concluding book of the *Epistles*. The question of the book's ending, and whether or not it suggests that Pliny died during his time as governor, appears repeatedly in scholarship on the book.<sup>391</sup> As with the question of the possible identity of the book's editor, this seems a problem that is unlikely to be solved neatly. However, there is something to be gained from reading Book 10 with the thought in mind that

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by comparison with the nine books of private letters: some of Trajan's replies, and almost all the enclosures, are missing, and the collection ends abruptly.'

<sup>389</sup> For these significant challenges to the established view of Book 10, see Stadter (2006), Woolf (2006, Noreña (2007). Woolf nuanced these views in a later article (2015), arguing that the 'instrumentalist' reading taken in these approaches placed too much emphasis on the idea of the letters as a reflection of Pliny himself, in the place of a focus on the significance of the letters as texts (135-138). Woolf argues in this article that the literary texture of Book 10 has not been sufficiently appreciated (*passim*), posing the intriguing prospect of reading the tenth book as a 'sequel' to the previous nine, on which broadens and reframes the events of the previous books, particularly as concerns Trajan (139-149). Ludolph (1997) 49-56 on Book 10 and the ways it confirms the literary status of Books 1-9. Gibson (2020) Ch. 8 for a more biographical view of Pliny's governorship.

<sup>390</sup> E.g. Stadter (2006) *passim*. Stadter sees Pliny as the most likely editor of the book, and argues that this was a deliberate project, undertaken with Trajan's approval, to convert their existing correspondence into a moral text, modelling the ideal relationship between emperor and governor (68-9 and *passim*); Noreña (2007) 261-272 on the possible circulation of Book Ten and some options for editor; cf. Woolf (2006) 96-97 and *passim*; Woolf (2015) 133-5 on the edited nature of Book Ten, 135 for Book Ten as 'a deliberate and artful creation, if one different than Books 1-9: that difference, moreover, must be fundamental to readings of it, rather than treated as an obstacle to be ignored.'

<sup>391</sup> For this debate, see Stadter (2006) 69-70; Woolf (2006) 96, Noreña (2007) 270-271. This possibility has prompted some debate among scholars regarding the ending of Book 10, and whether it constitutes a fitting ending to the work, or whether it suggests the collection was never finished to Pliny's satisfaction. Woolf (2015) 149 points to the difficulty in neatly ending a correspondence more generally: 'Less common is the tactic of asking what kinds of endings particular genres demand. Epic, for example, has been thought difficult to put a stop to. How does one end a correspondence? Someone has to have the last word (in this case Trajan, of course).' Madsen (2009) 16-17 on the ending of the book as suggesting the correspondence was genuine.

it was likely written towards the end of Pliny's life. In his analysis of the later books of Pliny's correspondence, Gibson observes a move towards an increasingly pessimistic outlook, at least as far as politics is concerned, as we reach the close of *Epistles* 1-9, a pessimism that Gibson argues may have been linked to, or brought about by, the longest period of uninterrupted time Trajan spent in Rome.<sup>392</sup> As has been noted, this closing moment at the end of Book Nine turns out to be a false one, the collection's movement towards darkness being undermined by the existence of a tenth book.<sup>393</sup> This intriguing text, then, both comes at the end of the epistolary collection and at the same time is imbued with novelty. This tension between endings and beginnings, past and future, is, I will go on to argue, something that Pliny explicitly engages with in his letters to Trajan.

For the purposes of this study, I am interested in one narrative in particular from Book Ten, which relates to public building projects. A survey of current building projects seems to have been one of Pliny's projects during his time as governor, as he attempted to resolve more widespread financial issues.<sup>394</sup> Although these letters on architectural matters do not contain the same level of detail or literary texture as we find elsewhere in the Younger's corpus, I nevertheless believe that they are worthy of further consideration. My argument in what follows is this: that Pliny draws on the symbolic and ideological potential of public buildings, well-documented by scholars, to create his own narrative of restoration and renewal in his letters to Trajan. At a time when Pliny found himself physically, and perhaps also politically, distanced from Rome and the centre of empire, he could use his skill as a writer to overcome this distance and to write himself back into Roman politics.

Of course, this symbolic potential was not confined to the world of Pliny's text. Urban building projects throughout the empire presented useful opportunities for the current emperor to leave his mark on the landscape. For example, Thomas notes regarding Book Ten:

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<sup>392</sup> Gibson (2015).

<sup>393</sup> E.g. Woolf (2015) 132: 'Nine books have led us from dawn to dusk and now the day is finished. Except it is not.' Cf. Gibson (2015) on the revisionist role of the ninth book; Gibson and Morello (2012) on the collection's demand for re-reading.

<sup>394</sup> Gibson (2020) 207-8 on the fact that although governors of provinces were permitted to carry out this kind of survey, it was not often expected that they would actually carry it out in as much depth as Pliny did. See also Sherwin-White (1966) 527-8.

The correspondence between Trajan and the younger Pliny, his appointed legate in Bithynia, reveals the ideological purpose of provincial architecture. Pliny pointed out such meanings, although Trajan himself modestly affected to address only practicalities.<sup>395</sup>

I do not wish to deny here the physical reality of these interventions in the landscape, although they will not be the focus of this chapter. Rather, I am interested in how Pliny's letters in Book Ten supplement this process of transformation and also situate their author at its centre. In Pliny's letters concerning building projects we find a focus on two particular areas – the reuse and adaptation of existing structures and materials to repair or build new structures, and the future glory promised by the completion of these projects for Trajan and the Trajanic age. Here, I will argue that Pliny's focus on the plasticity of the past and its reuse for the acquisition of future has a broader relevance for our understanding of the literary and political context in which Pliny and Trajan wrote these letters. I will also argue that Pliny makes use of old material in more ways than one, in drawing on ideas and motifs familiar from the previous nine books of the *Epistles* in his narrative of restoration and revitalisation. In this chapter, I will consider three categories of building projects from *Epistles* 10: the largest group is made up of projects relating to water and water management, but I will also consider a set of buildings with problematic foundations, and also memorials as part of this discussion.

### Water

As we know, the spectre of the Domitianic past was never far from the Younger's mind in writing his *Epistles*. However, scholars have tended to see Book Ten as not participating in anti-Domitianic rhetoric in the same way as the previous nine books or the *Panegyricus*, as some scholars argue that correspondence would have been the same between any governor and emperor.<sup>396</sup> I do not wish to argue here that this kind of correspondence was completely unique

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<sup>395</sup> Thomas (2007) 150, 173.

<sup>396</sup> E.g. Coleman (2012) for Book Ten as an example of bureaucratic conventions more broadly; Waters (1969) on the similarities between Trajan's reign and Domitian's.



to Pliny and Trajan nor that it could not have occurred between any other individuals.<sup>397</sup> However, as the scholars cited above have shown, this certainly did not mean that the negotiation of the past, and the deliberate demarcation of Trajan's reign as different from what had gone before, was not relevant to the correspondence.<sup>398</sup>

In this first section, I consider examples of problematic water architecture from Pliny's province. The metaphorical potential of water in ancient literature is well documented, and several scholars have explored the significance of water imagery as it relates to Pliny's presentation of Trajan throughout his works.<sup>399</sup> As part of his analysis of Pliny's developing political pessimism across *Epistles* 1-9, Gibson points to the fact that the two letters in Book 8 in which Trajan directly features are both connected with water. The first is *Ep.* 8.4, which deals with the epic the poet Caninius Rufus is writing about Trajan's military successes in Dacia, while the second is *Ep.* 8.17, on the disastrous flooding of the Tiber. Gibson writes:

In his two appearances in Book 8, the emperor's complete success with rivers abroad contrasts with his partial success (and relative failure) in controlling Rome's river at home. The metaphorical potential of the contrast hardly needs spelling out.<sup>400</sup>

Here, I will consider how the control and management of water might also function as a metaphor for the governance of the empire under Trajan in Book Ten, albeit in a different way.

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<sup>397</sup> Cf. Noreña (2007) 260: 'The real significance of Book 10 for our purposes lies neither in the particular circumstances of provincial administration in Bithynia nor even in the distinctiveness of Trajan's relationship with Pliny but simply in the fact that this particular dossier, unlike its many contemporary counterparts, was published and has survived, providing us with a valuable insight into the nature of Trajan's epistolary communications with his representatives and other imperial officials.' Waters (1969) for a view of Trajan and Trajanic policy as very similar to the reign of Domitian in many ways.

<sup>398</sup> Noreña (2007).

<sup>399</sup> Saylor (1972) on *Ep.* 6.33 and Pliny's use of Trajan's harbour project as a metaphor for the emperor's own good qualities; Manolaraki (2008) on waterscapes in the *Panegyricus*, and the importance of water for Pliny's rhetoric and his portrayal of Trajan; Gibson (2020) repeatedly stresses the significance of water for the Younger generally (e.g. 35: 'Did a boyhood in the Italian lakes leave no discernible mark on Pliny as an individual? Perhaps it did after all. Water is a constant preoccupation: flowing, ebbing, running, and navigable'). Gibson also cites these examples from Book Ten as part of the Younger's interest in water (35, see also 203-4).

<sup>400</sup> *Id.* (2015) 216.

Each type of water architecture I consider here is used by Pliny, I argue, to elicit a different aspect of good governance.

## The Nicomedian Water Supply

I begin with Pliny's letters regarding the need for a proper water supply in Nicomedia. The issue is introduced in *Ep.* 10.37, in which Pliny writes to the emperor to ask his thoughts on a stalled aqueduct project:

in aquae ductum, domine, Nicomedenses impenderunt HS XXX CCCXVIII , qui imperfectus adhuc omissus, destructus etiam est; rursus in alium ductum erogata sunt CC . hoc quoque relicto novo impendio est opus, ut aquam habeant, qui tantam pecuniam male perdiderunt. *Ep.* 10.37.1-2

The citizens of Nicomedia, Sir, have spent 3,318,000 sesterces on an aqueduct which they abandoned before it was finished and finally demolished. Then they made a grant of 200,000 sesterces towards another one, but this too was abandoned, so that even after squandering such enormous sums they must still spend more money if they are to have a water supply. (trans. Radice)

The residents of Nicomedia, Pliny reports, have poured vast sums of money into the aqueduct project, but are still without water. Two attempts at the construction of the aqueduct have been abandoned, and more money must be spent to ensure an adequate water supply.<sup>401</sup> However, Pliny believes he has found a solution to the issue. He describes how he has carried out a visit to a spring that could be used as a water source:

ipse perveni ad fontem purissimum, ex quo videtur aqua debere perducī, sicut initio temptatum erat, arcuato opere, ne tantum ad plana civitatis et humilia perveniat. manent adhuc paucissimi arcus: possunt et erigi quidam lapide quadrato, qui ex superiore opere detractus est; aliqua pars, ut mihi videtur, testaceo opere agenda erit, id enim et facilius et vilius. *Ep.* 10.37.2-3

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<sup>401</sup> See e.g. Rogers (2018) on water culture in the Roman world, Bruun (2013) on Roman water supplies. Talbert (1980) 431-432 on this letter and its reply.

I have been myself to look at the spring which could supply pure water to be brought along an aqueduct, as originally intended, if the supply is not to be confined to the lower-lying parts of the town.<sup>402</sup> There are very few arches still standing, but others could be built out of the blocks of stone taken from the earlier construction, and I think some ought to be made of brick, which would be easier and cheaper. (trans. Radice)

For the present discussion, I am particularly interested in two elements of this passage: Pliny's emphasis on visiting the site himself, and his suggestion that the new aqueduct be constructed from the remains of the old. On the first point, in his claim to have visited the potential water source himself (*ipse perveni ad fontem purissimum*), Pliny may simply be emphasising his diligence in conducting a proper survey.<sup>403</sup> However, we have seen elsewhere in the *Epistles* that surveys of natural phenomena can be freighted with symbolic meaning, such as Pliny's visit to the pure and glassy water (*purus et vitreus*) of the source of the Clitumnus in *Ep.* 8.8.<sup>404</sup> Perhaps the most intriguing part of the letter is Pliny's suggestion that a new aqueduct be built using materials discarded following the previous failed attempts (*manent adhuc paucissimi arcus: possunt et erigi quidam lapide quadrato, qui ex superiore opere detractus est*).<sup>405</sup>

Pliny ends the letter by asking that Trajan send an engineer or architect to help with the problem:

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<sup>402</sup> Intriguingly, we can also detect a subtle verbal parallel between this letter and *Ep.* 9.26, Pliny's letter on the ideal orator: *tutius per plana sed humilius et depressius iter; frequentior currentibus quam reptantibus lapsus, sed his non labentibus nulla, illis non nulla laus etiamsi labantur*, *Ep.* 9.26.2. Although this is not a significant verbal overlap, we might nonetheless wish to consider the ways in which Pliny's construction of himself in the other nine books of the *Epistles* is also at work here in the tenth book. See Cugusi (2003) on *Ep.* 9.26, 1.20 and rhetoric in the *Epistles*, Whitton (2019) 249-261 on *Ep.* 9.26 and Quintilian.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Peachin (2004) 55 on Frontinus: 'This *princeps vir* will do his finger-pointing based on painstaking autopsy, on careful study of the records. He personally knows absolutely, exactly, the current situation.'

<sup>404</sup> Gibson (2015) 214-215 on *Ep.* 8.8, and the Younger's choice to create a structural parallel between this letter and *Ep.* 8.17, on the flooding of the Tiber, rather than the more benign *Ep.* 8.20. On 8.8, see Neger (2018).

<sup>405</sup> The superlative form *paucissimi* used here is of interest. The word only appears eight times in all of the *Epistles*, and several of these are at significant moments in the collection. One of these examples occurs at the end of *Ep.* 5.5, on the death of Gaius Fannius: *nec dubito te quoque eadem cogitatione terreri, pro istis quae inter manus habes. proinde, dum suppetit vita, enitatur ut mors quam paucissima quae abolere possit inveniatur*. 5.5.7-8. Another is found in *Ep.* 5.15, to Arrius Antoninus: *quo magis hortor, ut quam plurima proferas, quae imitari omnes concupiscant, nemo aut paucissimi possint*. *Ep.* 5.15.2.

sed in primis necessarium est mitti a te vel aquilegem vel architectum, ne rursus eveniat quod accidit. ego illud unum adfirmo, et utilitatem operis et pulchritudinem saeculo tuo esse dignissimam. *Ep.* 10.37.3

But the first essential is for you to send out a water-engineer or an architect to prevent a third failure. I will add only that the finished work will combine utility with beauty, and will be well worthy of your reign. (trans. Radice)

Pliny's phrasing here is of interest – he wishes to prevent the aqueduct project failing again, but the language he uses to express this plan suggests a more general wish not to repeat the mistakes of the past (*ne rursus eveniat quod accidit*). He also stresses the potential cultural capital of this kind of project, as it will combine both practical functionality and aesthetic value. The phrase *dignissimam saeculo* used here also recalls the language of *Ep.* 10.1, in which Pliny writes to Trajan to celebrate the latter's recent accession.<sup>406</sup> Across this letter, then, we find an emphasis on making use of aspects of the past, while moving in a different direction for the future. This is, of course, a significant theme across the Younger's work more generally, and I believe that we are seeing a version of these ideas in this letter.

### The Canal in Nicomedia

We find similar themes at play in another set of letters, involving a canal project in Nicomedia. Pliny begins his first letter on the subject by explicitly saying that he sees the search for building projects that would bring Trajan symbolic capital as part of his project in the province:

intuenti mihi et fortunae tuae et animi magnitudinem convenientissimum videtur demonstrari opera non minus aeternitate tua quam gloria digna, quantumque pulchritudinis tantum utilitatis habitura. *Ep.* 10.41.1-2

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<sup>406</sup> *Ep.* 10.1.2: *Preco ergo ut tibi et per te generi humano prospera omnia, id est digna saeculo tuo contingant.* On the *felix culpa* motif in this letter and the *Panegyricus*, see Hoffer (2012).

In consideration of your noble ambition which matches your supreme position, I think I should bring to your notice any projects which are worthy of your immortal name and glory and are likely to combine utility with magnificence. (trans. Radice)

Pliny again stresses the combination of *utilitas* and *pulchritudo* as being key to this kind of project, as with the letters regarding the aqueducts discussed above. The mention of works worthy of Trajan's *aeternitas* might also bring to mind broader themes of immortality from across the Younger's work. As well as facilitating the construction of physical monuments to Trajan through the province's public architecture, in these letters Pliny is also constructing a textual monument to the emperor, and to the relationship between the two men. The particular project Pliny discusses in this letter is a plan to connect a lake in Nicomedia to the sea, in order to facilitate the easier transport of goods and resources. In the letter, Pliny outlines the project, notes that it would require a large amount of labour but that this could be fulfilled by people locally, and requests that Trajan send an engineer or architect to assess the site. He ends the letter with an account of his own visit to the prospective canal site:

ego per eadem loca invenio fossam a rege percussam, sed incertum utrum ad colligendum umorem circumiacentium agrorum an ad committendum flumini lacum; est enim imperfecta. hoc quoque dubium, intercepto rege mortalitate an desperato operis effectum. sed hoc ipso (feres enim me ambitiosum pro tua gloria) incitor et accendor, ut cupiam peragi a te quae tantum coeperant reges. *Ep.* 10.41.4-5

I have looked at the site myself and find there is a canal dug by one of the former kings of Bithynia, though whether this was intended to drain the surrounding fields or to connect the lake with the river I am not sure; it was left unfinished, and again I cannot say if this was because the king died suddenly or despaired of finishing the work. This, however, only fires me with enthusiasm to see you accomplish what kings could only attempt: you will forgive my ambition for your greater glory. (trans. Radice)

Once more, we find Pliny emphasising not only the practical function, but the symbolic potential, of a project of this nature.<sup>407</sup> Here, we are again faced with an abandoned, unfinished

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<sup>407</sup> On this letter, see Farnsworth (1996) 36-38, *passim* for deliberative discourse in Book 10.

work that Pliny claims could be successfully completed and improved at Trajan's orders.<sup>408</sup> We find two other examples of works described as *imperfectus* from the first nine books of the *Epistles* – the first is the work of Fannius in *Ep.* 5.5 (*sed hoc utcumque tolerabile; gravius illud, quod pulcherrimum opus imperfectum reliquit, Ep.* 5.5.2) and the second is the tomb of Verginius Rufus in *Ep.* 6.10: (*libuit enim monimentum eius videre, et vidisse paenituit. est enim adhuc imperfectum... Ep.* 6.10.2-3). Both are clearly significant, the first being a work of all those killed under Nero and the second a monument to Pliny's *tutor*. While I would not wish to push an intertextual reading of this passage, I think it is certainly worth reflecting on the fact that unfinished works could hold a possess a particular potency in Pliny's texts, as they do throughout Latin literature. Pliny is once more central to this process, as he emphasises that he personally visited the site of the canal, and linguistically juxtaposes Trajan's glory with his own ambitious drive (*me ambitiosum pro tua gloria*). Towards the close of the passage, Pliny's language becomes increasingly impassioned (*incitor et accendor*), as the canal project becomes not just about efficient civil engineering, but about the triumph of the Roman empire over monarchy.

The issue of the canal is then revisited by Pliny in *Ep.* 10.61, in which Pliny responds to the question raised by Trajan in *Ep.* 10.42 (his response to Pliny's original letter on the canal) of whether the proposed project would cause the lake to be completely drained of water. In *Ep.* 10.61, Pliny gives a thorough reply and offers several possible solutions to the problem.<sup>409</sup> These suggestions include: not joining the lake directly to the river, but keeping them apart by means of a narrow piece of land separating the two, so that the two bodies of water do not meet, but have the same advantages as if they did (*potest enim lacus fossa usque ad flumen adduci nec tamen in flumen emitti, sed relicto quasi margine contineri pariter et dirimi. sic consequemur, ut neque aqua videtur flumini mixtus, et sit perinde ac si misceatur. Ep.* 10.61.2), using a variety of strategically placed dams to conserve water, and building a longer and deeper canal without use of the river to balance the movement of water. All the options

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<sup>408</sup> On the connection between death and authorship, and unfinished texts in the context of Neronian writing and death scenes, see Connors (1994).

<sup>409</sup> Radice (1962) 160-2 on the possibility that Pliny's position as the *curator alvei Tiberis et riparum et cloacarum urbis* may have given him an interest in this type of engineering projects, even if the amount of specialist knowledge he had is uncertain, *passim* for Pliny's general interest in practical and scientific matters.

proposed by Pliny involve the careful management of the flow of water, considered use of the natural environment and carefully planned interventions.

If we recall the work of scholars quoted above regarding Pliny's use of water metaphors in his depiction of Trajan, these letters on the potential canal project may be read as having a greater significance. This project of connecting the lake to the sea is not, in Pliny's presentation of it, motivated by hubris or an overt desire to control the landscape. Rather, it is presented as a considered and thoughtful project, which aims to work with the natural environment in the first instance. In contrast to *Ep.* 8.17, where, as Gibson notes, Trajan's interventions in the landscape prove ineffectual against the Tiber's flooding, here we find an image of calm and careful management of the natural resources, even if they are prospective at this point. We may also observe a connection between Pliny and Trajan's project to conserve resources (both financial and material) generally in the province and their plan to contain and conserve the lake's waters here.

### The Baths at Prusa

The next example of water-related architecture I explore here concerns a set of baths at Prusa. *Ep.* 10.23 introduces the question of the baths:

Prusenses, domine, balineum habent; est sordidum et vetus. itaque magni aestimant novum fieri; quod videris mihi desiderio eorum indulgere posse. *Ep.* 10.23.1

The public bath at Prusa, Sir, is old and dilapidated, and the people are very anxious for it to be rebuilt. My own opinion is that you could suitably grant their petition. (trans. Radice)

...quod alioqui et dignitas civitatis et saeculi tui nitor postulat. *Ep.* 10.23.2

This is, moreover, a scheme which is worthy of the town's prestige and the splendour of your reign. (trans. Radice)

As with the structures discussed so far in this chapter, we again find a building that has become dilapidated and is in need of reconstruction or repair. As we will go on to see, the connection



between renovation and hygiene can be a useful one in Book Ten, and here we find the old bathhouse described as *sordidum*, a term that can connote a lack of cleanliness as well as a state of disrepair. Again, we find Pliny stressing the potential symbolic value of this renovation project, both for the town where the baths are located and for Trajan. The letter begins with the sordidness of the baths and ends with the excellence (*nitor*) of Trajan's reign, the process of transformation from squalor to splendour charted in the structure of the letter.

Pliny then revisits the issue of the baths in *Ep.* 10.70. He believes that he has found a suitable location for the construction of the new structure, which is on the site of the ruins of a formerly extravagant house.

quarenti mihi, domine, Prusae ubi posset balineum quod indulsisti fieri, placuit locus in quo fuit aliquando domus, ut audio, pulchra, nunc deformis ruinis. per hoc enim consequemur, ut foedissima facies civitatis ornetur, atque etiam ut ipsa civitas ampliatur nec ulla aedificia tollantur, sed quae sunt vetustate sublapsa relaxentur in melius. *Ep.* 10.70.1-2

I have looked around Prusa, Sir, in search of a possible site for the new bath for which you have graciously given your permission, and chosen one which is occupied at present by the unsightly ruins of what I am told was once a fine house. We could thus remove this eyesore and embellish the city without pulling down any existing structure; indeed, we should be restoring and improving what time has destroyed. (trans. Radice)

As with the example of the aqueducts discussed above, here too we find Pliny favouring a strategy of restoration rather than demolition. Just as in the case of the sewer at Amastris, the house's state of disrepair is causing the appearance of the whole city to suffer. Once more, Pliny emphasises his personal agency in the process, as he describes how he himself identified the site for the new baths. Again, if we read this letter as part of a broader narrative of Trajanic renewal and restoration, we might attach a greater symbolic meaning to Pliny's words.<sup>410</sup> In particular, the fact that this is a transformation of what was presumably a luxurious private

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<sup>410</sup> The idea of a natural and harmonious regeneration and renovation of public space is something we also find in the *Panegyricus*, where Pliny depicts Trajan's interventions in the landscape of Rome as a process of spontaneous reincarnation. See e.g. *Pan.* 51.

residence into a public space designed to benefit the town as a whole. In his depiction of Trajan, both here and elsewhere in the Younger's corpus, we repeatedly find Pliny working to emphasise Trajan's acts of public beneficence and drawing a contrast between Trajan's actions, which benefit the whole empire, and those of previous emperors who were more concerned with private luxury.<sup>411</sup> In suggesting this plan for the new baths, Pliny is able to insert himself into this same narrative of public generosity, something we find him doing throughout the letter collection.<sup>412</sup> As with the examples discussed above, here, too, Pliny suggests refurbishment, once more using the materials of the past to construct the splendour of the future.

### The Sewer at Amastris

In *Ep.* 10.98, Pliny presents Trajan with a problem that has occurred in the town of Amastris, where an uncovered sewer is running through the heart of the civic centre:

Amastrianorum civitas, domine, et elegans et ornata habet inter praecipua opera pulcherrimam eandemque longissimam plateam; cuius a latere per spatium omne porrigitur nomine quidem flumen, re vera cloaca foedissima, ac sicut turpis immundissimo adspectu, ita pestilens odore taeterrimo. *Ep.* 10.98.1-2

Among the chief features of Amastris, Sir, (a city which is well built and laid out) is a long street of great beauty. Throughout the length of this, however, there runs what is called a stream, but is in fact a filthy sewer, a disgusting eyesore which gives off a noxious stench. (trans. Radice)

quibus ex causis non minus salubritatis quam decoris interest eam contegi; quod fiet si permiseris curantibus nobis, ne desit quoque pecunia operi tam magno quam necessario. *Ep.* 10.98.2

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<sup>411</sup> For Trajan's generosity, see e.g. *Pan.* 20-32 on Egypt, 47-49 on the imperial *domus* under Trajan, as contrasted with Domitian's palace. See also *Ep.* 6.33, on which Saylor (1972).

<sup>412</sup> Hoffer (1999) 93-110 on Pliny and the right of three children, Henderson (2002a) on *Ep.* 1.19, Manuwald (2003) on *Ep.* 4.13 and Pliny seeing himself as part of the same tradition of generosity as Nerva and Trajan, Augoustakis (2006) on *Ep.* 4.13 and Comum, Gibson (2020) Ch. 7 on Comum and Pliny's acts of generosity.

The health and appearance alike of the city will benefit if it is covered in, and with your permission this shall be done. I will see that money is not lacking for a large-scale work of such importance. (trans. Radice)

The putrid river/sewer is disrupting the town's carefully ordered appearance, ruining Amastris' beauty with its unappealing appearance and odour.<sup>413</sup> Of particular interest here is the capacity for deception that Pliny attributes to the sewer – it purports to be a river (*nomine quidem flumen*), but this name conceals a less palatable reality. As Gowers observes, Pliny plays with the idea of concealment here, deliberately uncovering the sewer and its filth in his letter in order to demonstrate his keenness to have it covered over.<sup>414</sup> Pliny presents to Trajan the dual benefits of *salubritas* and *decor* that this project might unlock, arguing that this work is essential and that he will find the funds to ensure it can be carried out.<sup>415</sup>

As we know from other sources, drains and sewers often fulfilled functions other than just the practical in the Roman world. Of course, the most well-known example of this was Rome's Cloaca Maxima, the drain that ran through the city and came to be imbued with a good deal of symbolic significance.<sup>416</sup> Scholars have explored the possibility that along with its role as a drain, the Cloaca may have also been seen as a sacred space.<sup>417</sup> Beyond this, Rome's sewer and drainage system also came to function as a symbol of Roman skill in architecture and engineering, and of the triumph of this skill over the potential chaos of the world.<sup>418</sup> In the Younger's letter, then, we are faced with a scaled-down version of a process that occupied a more significant position in Roman thought. What is more, given the preoccupation of Trajanic

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<sup>413</sup> The connection between hygiene and order, and dirt and its disruption, has of course been the subject of a great deal of scholarly work. Douglas (1966) has long been a significant work in this area. See also e.g. Smith (2007), Davies (2012).

<sup>414</sup> Gowers (1995): 31.

<sup>415</sup> The other occasion at which *salubritas* is mentioned in Book Ten also relates to a discussion of a water supply, in connection with the town of Sinope (*Ep.* 10.90-91).

<sup>416</sup> On the Cloaca Maxima, see Gowers (1995), (2012).

<sup>417</sup> Hopkins (2012).

<sup>418</sup> Murphy (2004) 188-193 on the Elder Pliny's depiction of the Cloaca Maxima, 193: 'Because of the Cloaca Maxima, Rome is not just a city built on clay. It is a "hanging city" (*urbs pensilis*) suspended above the roar and chaos of the floods, a marvel in itself of permanence, order, and beauty rescued from turbulent water by the Roman sense of shame.'

political discourse with the creation of a new age of freedom and transparency, in which the dangerous concealment of the past is shed for a new age of openness, Pliny is here able to present himself as an agent of such a change.<sup>419</sup>

### Shaky Foundations: *Ep.* 10.39

In *Ep.* 10.39, Pliny writes to Trajan regarding a number of failed building projects at Nicaea and Claudiopolis. The projects include a theatre, a gymnasium and a set of baths and, according to Pliny, all the projects have been badly handled, with the result that a lot of money has been spent but the buildings all remain unfinished. All the buildings discussed in this letter exhibit problems with their foundations in particular. Foundational moments and the act of building foundations clearly possess a good deal of symbolic significance in Latin literature, and while I would not wish to argue for an intertextual reading of these passages, I believe there may be something significant in Pliny's emphasis on foundations here.

The first project Pliny describes is a theatre at Nicaea, which has been abandoned in a half-finished state:

theatrum, domine, Nicaeae maxima iam parte constructum, imperfectum tamen, sestertium (ut audio; neque enim ratio operis excussa est) amplius centies hausit; vereor ne frustra. ingentibus enim rimis desedit et hiat, sive in causa solum umidum et molle, sive lapis ipse gracilis et putris: dignum est certe deliberatione, sitne faciendum an sit reliquendum an etiam destruendum. nam fulturae ac substructiones, quibus subinde suscipitur, non tam firmae mihi quam sumptuosae videntur. *Ep.* 10.39.1-3

The theatre at Nicea, Sir, is more than half built but is still unfinished, and has already cost more than ten million sesterces, or so I am told – I have not yet examined the relative accounts. I am afraid it may be money wasted. The building is sinking and showing immense cracks, either because the soil is damp and soft or the stone used was poor and friable. We shall certainly have to consider whether it is to be finished or

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<sup>419</sup> Cf. Peachin (2004) 55-6; 114-124 on Frontinus' claims that with him as *curator aquarum*, abuses of the water supply that have taken place in recent times will cease, and administrative reforms to the office under Nerva.

abandoned, or even demolished, as the foundations and substructure intended to hold up the building may have cost a lot but look none too solid to me. (trans. Radice)

As with the letters concerning the water supply discussed above, in this letter we again find an example of a public architecture project that has been abandoned while still unfinished. Since neither the crumbling stones of the foundations nor the soft ground they are built on can support the weight of the structure, huge cracks have begun to appear (*ingentibus... rimis...hiat*). The language of doubt pervades the passage – Pliny offers up a range of possible causes and solutions in a series of contrastive pairs, but without any decisive assertions (*sive...sive; deliberatione; sitne... an sit relinquendum an... destruendum*), while the subjunctives and gerundives keep his evaluation tentative, making it appear as though the shakiness of the building has extended into Pliny's prose. The building has become a gaping chasm into which time and money are being, according to Pliny, wrongly poured (10.39.1), and he is unsure what should be done about it. As a result, the structure is sagging and cracking, and Pliny fears it may not be possible to salvage it. Pliny offers the emperor various options regarding what is to be done with the building project, saying that a decision will not to be reached as to whether the preferred strategy of renovation will be possible in this case, or whether the structure will need to be demolished.

His evaluation of the building's supports as looking expensive but, in fact, proving to be ineffective is also of interest (*non tam firmae mihi quam sumptuosae videntur*, 10.39.2). In the context of Pliny's letter, which forms part of Pliny's survey of the misuse of finances in public building projects, this confirms Pliny's message to Trajan, that the people of Nicaea have spent too much money to too little effect. However, this discord between the appearance of the building and its real structural integrity adds another layer of uncertainty to the account, as it suggests that a structure may look sound, but what lies beneath may be very different.

The next problem introduced by Pliny concerns a gymnasium, also at Nicaea, which the residents have tried to rebuild after its destruction in a fire, attempting to enlarge and improve the previously existing structure. Pliny also says that the residents have been over-ambitious in their planning:

iidem Nicaeenses gymnasium incendio amissum ante adventum meum restituere coeperunt, longe numerosius laxiusque quam fuerat, et iam aliquantum erogaverunt; periculum est, ne parum utiliter; incompositum enim et sparsum est. *Ep.* 10.39.4

The citizens of Nicaea have also begun to rebuild their gymnasium (which was destroyed by fire before my arrival) on a much larger and more extensive scale than before. They have already spent a large sum, which may be to little purpose, for the buildings are badly planned and too scattered. (trans. Radice)

Pliny reports that both the plans for the gymnasium and the spending have been expansive, but to no avail, as the plans are not well thought out. In contrast to the canal project discussed above, in which Pliny detailed careful plans to conserve the lake's water, here resources are being wastefully squandered due to inefficiency and a lack of organisation. The final project described by Pliny in this letter is a bath-building project at Claudopolis. In this case, the problem is not the building itself but the choice of site, which is at the foot of a sizeable mountain. Pliny recounts how the choice of location is forcing those attempting to build the bath to dig, which is preventing them from carrying out the actual construction:

Claudiopolitani quoque in depresso loco, imminente etiam monte ingens balineum defodiunt magis quam aedificant... *Ep.* 10.39.5.

The people of Claudopolis are also building, or rather excavating, an enormous public bath in a hollow at the foot of a mountain. (trans. Radice)

The buildings detailed in this letter, then, are shown to be faulty in every direction. Attempts to build upwards result in shaky foundations, attempts at width and solidity end in crumbling walls, while attempts to dig downwards turn the citizens of Claudopolis from builders to archaeologists. In his response to Pliny's letter about these building issues, Trajan gives the following response:

quid oporteat fieri circa theatrum, quod incohatum apud Nicaeenses est, in re praesenti optime deliberabis et constitues. mihi sufficiet indicari, cui sententiae accesseris. *Ep.* 10.40.1

The future of the unfinished theatre at Nicaea can be best settled by you on the spot. It will be sufficient for me if you let me know your decision. (trans. Radice)

As Coleman notes, Trajan's brief reply is essentially a refusal of Pliny's request for assistance in this matter, as the emperor goes on to say that he will not send an architect from Rome, as there should be many available nearer to Pliny.<sup>420</sup> However, despite Trajan's refusal, the language of this opening line still suggests that Pliny is being given some amount of power in terms of deciding what is the best course of action regarding these building projects. Pliny thus still operates as an intermediary between Trajan and the landscape and is able to have his own influence on the urban environments he encounters, even if this influence is dependent on the emperor's approval and permission.<sup>421</sup> As is mentioned elsewhere in the book, part of the reason Trajan may have refused Pliny's request is that all the surveyors and architects at Rome were occupied with his own extensive building projects in the capital.<sup>422</sup> We might read this letter, then, as Pliny trying to claim his own foundational moment, far from Rome, in the hope that by shoring up the shaky foundations of these buildings, he can solidify his connection with Rome and the emperor.

### Memorials

Throughout the first nine books of the *Epistles*, Pliny frequently displays a preoccupation with processes of commemoration, memorialisation and the quest for immortality through literary achievement.<sup>423</sup> In *Epistles* 10, we are faced with different kinds of memorialisation, as Pliny

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<sup>420</sup> Coleman (2012) 203-4 on this refusal and the language used by Pliny in his request and Trajan in his response. Cf. Sherwin-White (1966) 549: 'In 17B, 37, and 39 he asks for the loan of Roman-trained architects and surveyors, because he does not trust the corrupt local experts. This sort of request might well have been settled by a lesser official at Rome, yet the rescripts contain manifest evidence of the personal attention of Trajan.'

<sup>421</sup> Cf. Coleman (2012) 204 on the way in which Pliny often presents his requests for Trajan's advice as asking his permission. The verb *constituere*, used here in Trajan's response to Pliny to indicate that he should resolve the issue, is the same verb used by the Elder to describe the building of the first houses (*NH* 7.194), discussed in an earlier chapter.

<sup>422</sup> Gibson (2020) 203 on Pliny's lack of reference to Trajan's building projects, despite the fact that Trajan mentions them.

<sup>423</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2002). Thomas (2007) on monumentality more generally, Fowler (2000) Ch. 9 on literary monuments.

and Trajan work to reshape the landscape in line with their values and ideals. This process of transformation also includes encounters with the existing memorials belonging to those who live in the province. In *Ep.* 10.68, Pliny recounts that residents in the province have requested permission to move the graves of their relatives, since their commemorative monuments have become dilapidated:

petentibus quibusdam, ut sibi reliquias suorum aut propter iniuriam vetustatis aut propter fluminis incursum aliaque his similia quocumque secundum exemplum proconsulum transferre permetterem... *Ep.* 10.68

Certain persons have asked me to follow the practice of the senatorial governors and permit them to move to a site of their choice the remains of their deceased relatives, either because their monuments have suffered through lapse of time or the flooding of the river or for other similar reasons. (trans. Radice)

In this letter, Pliny is writing to Trajan in his capacity as Pontifex Maximus to seek advice on the best course of action in this situation.<sup>424</sup> However, the language used in this letter might encourage us to read a significance beyond the purely administrative into this request. The phrase *iniuria vetustatis* seems particularly suggestive, as it recalls language found elsewhere in Pliny's work, as well as in the work of other Trajanic authors, where the recent past is viewed as a wound or injury that has been sustained.<sup>425</sup> Mention of monuments, and their vulnerability to the passage of time also clearly puts us in mind of many other significant moments from throughout the other books of the *Epistles*, where Pliny consistently shows himself to be concerned with the preservation of the memories of his own deeds and those of others. On the readings I have suggested here, the discussion of these public spaces contributes to a sense that Book 10 is a monument to Pliny, Trajan and the Trajanic age. As we know, Pliny always wrote

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<sup>424</sup> See Sherwin-White (1966) 550 on the apparent strangeness of this letter and the fact that Trajan did not find it an unusual request, 550-1 on the letter.

<sup>425</sup> E.g. *Pan.* 6.1 on the mutiny under Nerva: *magnum quidem illud saeculo dedecus, magnum rei publicae vulnus impressum est...*, Tac. *Ag.* 3.2-3: *quid, si per quidecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium, multi fortuitis casibus, promptissimus quisque saevitia principis interciderunt, pauci et, ut <sic> dixerim, non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus, exemptis e media vita tot annis, quibus iuvenes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae aetatis terminos per silentium venimus?* Woolf (2006) 104-5 on Book Ten as a complement to Tacitus' *Agricola*.



with one eye on the past and one eye on the future, and in this book we find him building his final monuments, in apparent harmony with Trajan.

### Conclusion

Here, then, I hope to have shown that descriptions of public building in the tenth book of the *Epistles* possess a significance beyond the merely logistical. Building on the work of scholars who have demonstrated the symbolic potential of a text such as this for both Pliny and Trajan, I have here argued that Pliny makes particular use of these descriptions in order to present himself as an important agent in the process of the transformation of the province's urban landscape. Through his thoughtful combination of restoration and innovation, Pliny could position himself as the ideal Trajanic governor, judiciously conserving resources and re-working existing structures while ensuring they acquired a sense of innovation and of separation from what had gone before. Even at a point in his life and his career at which Pliny may not have felt able to effect change in the capital, his actions in the province model a process of renovation and renewal with parallels to those the emperor was carrying out in Rome. Although distanced from Rome and from Trajan, both physically and perhaps personally, Pliny was able to present himself as a dynamic and proactive figure; the editing of the correspondence creating a sense of efficiency and speed that would have been impossible given the great distance separating the two men. Somewhat paradoxically, it is the most problematic building projects that yield the greatest results. Surrounded by tottering ruins, crumbling foundations and abandoned sites, Pliny (himself slightly crumbling and tottering by this point) was able to build firm new foundations of his own.

## Conclusions

The Elder's famous, and often quoted, assertion that *vita vigilia est* ('life is being awake') has lingered in our perception of the author as a voracious reader and recorder of facts, who worked through the night in order to compile his monumental work on the natural world. The Younger, whose slender body of work seemingly stands in stark contrast to his uncle's supposedly unwieldy volumes, has been seen, despite his own protestations, as similarly committed to carrying out his official duties, as well as to the production of his literary work, which he saw as the only guaranteed route to immortality. In this study, I have tried to show that, despite all their differences, reading the work of uncle and nephew alongside one another is a productive undertaking and one that illuminates features of both authors' works.

I began from a broad viewpoint, by considering the world-building techniques of both authors in my first chapter on Landscape. I first explored how the Elder's *Natural History* may have been an important reference point for the Younger in writing his *Panegyricus*, offering as it did a good model for a world in chaos with a stabilising and consolidating force at its centre. I then moved to explore the idea of landscape as self-portrait in the *Epistles*, aiming to add to the existing scholarly picture of the literary significances of the Younger's depiction of the source of the Clitumnus by exploring the possibility that it contains within it a self-portrait of the Younger.

In my second chapter, The Body and Corporeality, I explored the ways in which both authors use corporeal imagery, or discussions of bodies, in different ways. I began with appetitive desires and acts of consumption in the *Natural History*, building on the work of scholars who have tied these desires to Pliny's moral programme and condemnation of *luxuria* more generally. I expanded this to take in not only actual, human acts of excessive consumption, but also the ways in which this language operates on every level of the Elder's depiction of nature. In particular, I focused on the violent rupturing of bodily boundaries that occurs throughout the *Natural History*, arguing that these smaller instances of vulnerability mirror and reinforce the larger dissolution of boundaries that scholars have identified in the work's landscapes. I then moved to the *Epistles*, in order to explore how the body is often a political tool for the Younger in his work. Building on the work of scholars who have shown that bodily vulnerability was often a source of political strength for post-Domitianic authors, I explored how the Younger

used bodily frailty to present himself and his contemporaries in a positive light politically. I ended by considering the Younger's use of corporeal language in his depictions of the natural world. Specifically, I focused on images of strangulation and restricted breath, which are similar to images found in the *Natural History*, to explore the often-sinister undercurrents in the Younger's depiction of the natural world. Finally, I turned to the Younger's letters on Vesuvius, in order to explore how the Younger pays tribute to his uncle, and to the *Natural History*, by depicting his death in language reminiscent of the Elder's work.

In the third chapter, on Domestic Architecture, I explored the ways in which both authors present domestic space in their respective works, often to divergent but overlapping ends. I began by considering nests and nest-like spaces from the works of both authors, investigating how these spaces function as both symbols of moral rectitude and of a simple, homely cosiness which is to be aspired to and commended, and as vehicles for higher-reaching acts of commemoration and aims at textual immortality. I began with the Elder's discussions of bird's nests, where we find the simple and cosy spaces mentioned above, before moving to explore some of the human nests we find in the *Natural History*, which are shown to be more morally questionable building projects. In the Younger's *Epistles*, we find spaces that are not explicitly named as nests, but which bear comparison with some passages from the Elder's work, such as the Younger's outdoor bedroom in one of his villa estates, and also the villa of his deceased *tutor*, Verginius Rufus, which is specifically described as a *nidulus*. Here, I considered how the nest is a particularly good vehicle for moral or political discourse for both authors, as its immediate sense of intimacy and cosiness allows the transmission of a less comfortable message at its heart. I then moved to consider the destabilising effect of illness and death on domestic architecture in the *Epistles*, exploring how the Younger often uses images of architectural instability in order to portray the disruptive effect illness and death can have on a household. Domestic spaces are also shown to be distorted in other ways in the works of both authors, whether in the sinister labyrinths of the *Natural History* or the Younger's secluded villas.

The fourth and final chapter, on Public Building, largely focused on the tenth book of the *Epistles* and the relationship between the way this book presents public space and the way in which this kind of space is depicted in the *Natural History*. Building on the work of scholars who have argued for the merits of reading some amount of literary intention and texture into *Epistles* 10, I hope here to have shown that reading some of these letters alongside passages

from the Elder's work can be a productive exercise. Specifically, I argued that problems of public space constitute an important way in which both authors negotiate their relationship with imperial power, and with the imperial administration. In the Elder's work, the examples of public architecture he praises most enthusiastically are those which are closely connected to the governing Flavian ideas of practicality and utility, and which seem to be constructed in harmony with the natural world. In the Younger's work, we find this negotiation happening in a more immediate form, as the Younger discusses problems of public building directly with the emperor himself. In the letters written to Trajan from his provincial posting, problematic examples of public building projects allow the Younger to show his abilities as a governor, and also his relationship with the emperor, in a positive light.

Overall, what I hope to have shown throughout this study is that, for all their differences, there are more points of convergence between the works of the Elder and the Younger than one might at first imagine. In our two authors, we find two men who saw in literary production, in the repeated acts of reading, excerpting and writing, a path to a higher goal, whether it was the cataloguing of the universe and its contents, or a guarantee of some degree of personal immortality. The surviving texts of these two authors have left them rather different portraits to be handed down to posterity, but both men, it must be concluded, went into their respective times, and their respective projects, with their eyes wide open.

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