Roaming the World

Some aspects of nature and place in Latin literature

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Abstract

This thesis considers representations of nature and place in a selection of Latin texts and argues that these have an important function in ancient Roman literature in helping Roman writers to reflect on aspects of Roman history and culture. It also analyses some common Roman responses to particular types of natural environment.

In the Introduction, definitions of ‘nature’ and ‘place’ are discussed, and a selection of previous works dealing with nature in ancient Roman literature are compared with the present study. Ancient training in rhetoric and mnemonics, which have some bearing on how Roman writers and their readers may have responded to the physical world, are also analyzed.

Chapter I discusses the relationship between Rome and its natural environment. It argues that in Roman accounts of the building and early history of the city, it is the Roman people’s responses to water (in the form of rivers, lakes, drains and aqueducts) and wood (in the form of trees and forests) which is regularly emphasized.

Chapter II examines some of the links between nature and national identity, before turning to some of the natural symbols of Roman society. It is argued that Roman writers show a particular interest in the ways in which nature and place can attain meaning as a result of human activity and in using them to write about events from Roman history.

The central part of the thesis examines two specific areas of nature: farms and gardens. It argues that whereas both farms and useful, productive gardens are seen as models of the ideal relationship between human beings and nature, pleasure-gardens appear in just the opposite light. Yet with the writings of Statius and the younger Pliny, there appears a new admiration for human beings’ capacity to alter nature in ways which had previously been loudly condemned.

Chapter V turns to representations of forests and other wild places in Latin literature. In particular, it argues that there was generally perceived to be an opposition between Rome and wild nature. This is reflected in accounts of Roman conflicts in places such as Gaul and Germany, as well as in descriptions of Roman building projects, which are often depicted as battles against nature itself.
The final chapter looks beyond ancient Roman literature to the works of some later writers and argues that their descriptions of the city of Rome were often clearly shaped by their acquaintance with ancient literature. These later writers, however, take ancient descriptions of the pre-Roman wilderness and apply them to the ruined city of their own day. In doing so, they suggest that the history of the city has come full circle, and that nature has in its turn achieved a victory over Rome.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Caitlin Stone
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I dedicate this thesis to my parents Ronald and Enid Stone, and to my brother Toby Stone.
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### Abbreviations

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<td><em>T. L. L.</em></td>
<td><em>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</em> (Leipzig, 1900– )</td>
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Abbreviations for journal titles generally follow those used in *L’année philologique*. Abbreviations for classical authors and their works follow those used in *L. S. J.* and the *O. L. D.*
Introduction

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*¹

To think of ancient Rome is often to think of great buildings and monuments: roads, columns, arches and aqueducts; the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the Appian Way. But Roman culture might equally be associated with certain natural features: the Tiber, the seven hills, the Lupercal; the farms of the city’s founders or the swamps and forests of Germany. This thesis considers how aspects of nature — both individual natural features and particular types of natural environment — came to be associated with Roman history and ideas of Romanness; in other words, how Roman actions gave meaning to the natural world and so transformed ‘“space” into “place”’.² It also considers some of the common attitudes towards natural environments which appear in ancient Roman texts. My aim is not, however, to seek out a single ‘Roman response’ to nature. Rather, I aim to explore some of the ‘cultural landscapes’³ of ancient Rome and to

² Kennedy (1999), 21. Schama (1995), 12 makes a similar point: ‘it was always the inherited tradition … that made landscape out of mere geology and vegetation.’
³ Cf. Rackham (1996), 17–18 on ‘the tendency for different groups of people to create different cultural landscapes out of what looks like much the same physical environment.’ It is important to distinguish this area of study from related areas such as ‘landscape history’, ‘ecological history’ or ‘human ecology’. These, as Rackham explains, deal with changes which take place in natural environments; the study of ‘cultural landscapes’, on the other hand, is concerned not with what natural environments are actually like, but rather with how human beings perceive them to be (Rackham [1990], 92).
consider how Roman writers use elements of nature to write about Roman history, Roman culture and Roman identity.

One of the underlying themes of this study is that Romans came to see the world in some distinctively ‘Roman’ ways. Lucretius, for example, depicts his atoms as tiny Roman citizens: they make *concilia* and *foedera* (Lucr. 1.586; 2.302; 5.310, 924; 6.906–7), they experience a kind of civil unrest (Lucr. 2.899–91) and they engage in political plots (Lucr. 2.125–31). Vergil’s bees are buzzing *Quirites* (Verg. G. 4.201) who live *sub fasce* (G. 4.204) and worship their own *lares* (G. 4.43). In the *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny aligns the rule of Rome with that of *Natura*,5 while in the *Fasti*, Ovid transforms time itself into a Roman form.6 This way of writing is in part a feature of these writers’ didactic method; they use recognizably Roman images to explain otherwise difficult or unfamiliar concepts. But it also suggests a conscious attempt to depart from Greek predecessors and to set up some distinctively ‘Roman’ ways of relating to nature and place. We might say that in exploring the natural world — whether physically or only in their writings — Roman writers both roamed and ‘Rome-ed’ it.

Before going any further, however, it may be useful to discuss some of the terms which will be used in the following chapters. ‘Place’ is, I hope, a relatively straightforward term which I use primarily to refer to particular natural spots, such as the Tiber or the Palatine hill, and occasionally to constructed ones such as the city of Rome itself.7 ‘Nature’, on the other hand, has been justifiably described by one writer as ‘perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language’.8 Probably the most familiar sense of ‘nature’ today (and the sense in which I most often use it) is ‘the features and products of the earth itself, as contrasted with those of human civilization.’9 One of the earliest instances of the word being used this way in English appears in John Dryden’s translation of Vergil’s *Georgics*:

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5 E.g. Plin. Nat. 27.25. See Beacon (1992), 189.
6 On this aspect of Ovid’s work, see Beard (1987).
7 Cf. *O.E.D.*, s.v. 3.a: ‘A particular part of space, of defined or undefined extent, but of definite situation. Sometimes applied to a region or part of the earth’s surface.’
9 *O. E. D.*, s.v. 13.a.
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But time is lost, which never will renew,
While we too far this pleasing path pursue,
Surveying nature with too nice a view.¹⁰

The Latin *natura* does not appear in Vergil’s original lines (*Sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus, | singula dum capti circumuectamur amore*, Verg. G. 3.284–5) and in fact was only rarely used in the sense which Dryden intends.¹¹ More often, when Roman writers want to express comparable meanings, they must use a periphrasis such as such as *natura loci* (cf. Caes. *Gal.* 3.9, 4.24–6, 8.15; Cic. *Agr.* 2.35.95) or *rerum natura* (Lucr. 1.21, 1.25; Plin. *Nat.* 4.88, 5.88).¹² Classical Latin also lacks a single word counterpart to our ‘plant’, instead using a more specific term such as *plantae* (properly ‘shoots’ or ‘cuttings’) or *stirpes*, or else a phrase such as *quae generantur e terra* (Cic. *Sen.* 15.52) or *res quae gignitur e terra* (Cic. *Fin.* 4.5.13).¹³

English speakers, by contrast, are spoiled for choice when it comes to words to refer to the non-constructed world: ‘nature’, ‘landscape’, ‘environment’, ‘creation’, ‘scenery’ and ‘countryside’ might all be used to refer to roughly similar areas. Matters become more complicated, however, when it comes to determining just what — or where — ‘nature’ is. Raymond Williams identifies part of the problem, observing that nature is ‘what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago — a hedgerow or a desert — it will usually be included as natural’.¹⁴ Williams is partly right, in that it is to a certain degree time which determines whether or not we regard something as part of nature. Sometimes the memory of human activity has been lost, with the result that what we today think of as ‘nature’ may in fact have been created by ‘culture’. Oliver Rackham notes that in Greece, for example, major environmental changes, such as land-clearing, culmination and animal extinctions, took place before they could be recorded in

¹⁰ Dryden, *The Georgics* 3.450. Before this, ‘nature’ (like the Latin *natura* and the Greek *φύσις*) referred primarily to the essential qualities of a given thing.
¹² A similar problem faced Greek writers, who lacked a word comparable to our ‘landscape’. See Adam Parry (1989), 8 and *passim*.
¹³ For this observation, see Powell (1988), 213 (ad Cic. *Sen.* 15.52).
¹⁴ Raymond Williams (1976), 188.
writing. Consequently areas which appear ‘natural’ may do so simply because we are unaware of the involvement of human beings in creating them. Nature, then, is often that which only seems not to have been altered by human activity.

Ideas of nature are also relative. A landscaped park or cultivated field might seem natural in comparison to some more obviously constructed environment, such as a city. One of the most significant changes in our perceptions of nature occurred over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was during this period that a widespread appreciation of wild spots developed in the face of expanding large-scale commercial agriculture and increasing urbanization. Many English writers openly regretted the increase in clearing and cultivation which occurred at this time. William Wordsworth, who frequently spoke out against excessive human interference in nature, lamented: ‘In the eye of thousands and tens of thousands, a rich meadow, with fat cattle grazing upon it, or the sight of what they would call a heavy crop of corn is worth all that the Alps and the Pyrenees in their utmost grandeur and beauty could show to them.’ Yet the tidy agricultural landscapes which so displeased Wordsworth today appear more ‘natural’ than the industrial scenes which in turn replaced them.

Concepts of nature and place also vary among different cultural groups. The study of these ‘cultural landscapes’ has become a popular one in recent years. Books such as Francis Spufford’s *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*; Roslynn D. Haynes’ *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*; David C. Miller’s *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*; Matt Cartmill’s *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* and Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory* all consider how human beings make sense of natural environments and, in a sense, create ‘nature’ in our minds.

Surprisingly little, however, has been written about Rome and nature. Moreover what has been written tends to look at Roman nature in a limited sense. Firstly there are those works which look at what we might call ‘emotional responses’ to nature and place among Roman citizens. This is the focus of a

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17 Wordsworth (1977), 151.
number of late Victorian and early twentieth-century studies, such as Archibald Geikie’s *The Love of Nature Among the Greeks and Romans* and Henry Rushton Fairclough’s *Love of Nature Among the Greeks and Romans.* Others have explored Roman attitudes to nature and place by searching for some of the places familiar from Latin literature. Gilbert Hight, for example, describes his travels through Italy and his attempts to find the spots where Horace tended his fields, Vergil pottered in his garden, Tibullus tended his vines and Ovid capered in a rustic festival. Hight — and writers of similar works — seek in part to show Roman writers’ skill in describing natural scenes. Alexander McKay’s *Vergil’s Italy,* for example, includes a number of photographs to ‘testify to the fidelity of Vergil’s writings to the topography and nature of the land.’

More recent studies of Roman nature have tended to move away from these attempts to uncover common patterns in Romans’ landscape preferences (although the belief in the Romans’ love of nature persists) and to look instead at subjects such as Rome’s manipulation of nature to demonstrate Roman power, the urban landscape of Rome and the meanings attached to Roman places or images of nature as they appear in particular Roman texts. The manipulation of nature as a demonstration of power (whether personal or national) is not of course unique to Roman culture, but it is often said that Romans were particularly skilled at this kind of display. Nero, for example, planned to build a canal between lake Avernus and Ostia; while Julius Caesar proposed to alter the course of the Tiber itself.

More generally, as Nicholas Purcell points out, Roman roads, aqueducts, bridges

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18 See too Sellar (1883), 163–6, 204–14, 268–72 and passim; idem (1899), 180–2, 241, 319 and passim.
19 E.g. Tilly (1947); Hight (1957); McKay (1970).
20 Hight (1957).
21 McKay (1970), 16. Others have tended to be more sceptical about both Roman writers’ knowledge of geography and their capacity to provide accurate geographical information. See, e.g., Walsh (1958b); idem (1961), 153–7; Horsfall (1985).
23 Non-Roman examples include, among many others, Xerxes’ bridge of boats across the Hellespont (Hdt. 7.33–7), the Hanging Gardens of Babylon (D.S. 2.10; Str. 16.738) and Herod’s harbour at Caesarea (J. BJ 1.409). See too Purcell (1987), 190–92.
and land-division can all be seen as symbols of Roman power imposed on to nature itself: ‘the display of the power of the conqueror to grasp the landscape, human and physical, and change it’, Purcell writes, ‘is what is essential to Roman imperialism.’

Similar arguments have been put forward in regard to the constructed landscapes of the amphitheatre. These, it has been suggested, presented a kind of reversal of Rome’s real position in the world and its vulnerability in the midst of the wild landscapes all around:

Rome saw itself as an embattled island of civilization surrounded by a savage world. The arena deliberately turned this world-view inside out: the savage world was surrounded and contained by Rome. There at their feet they could see the brutality of the wild world beyond their frontiers. It was a living demonstration of the power of Rome.

Changes to landscape can also be used to reinforce an individual’s power. Zoja Pavlovskis and Jutta Römer write about early Imperial Rome and the craze at this time for ‘the delights of a life spent in a setting not natural but improved by man’s skill’.

Next, there are discussions of individual writers’ treatment of nature. Mary Beagon looks at Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*, taking as her main theme the human race’s interaction with nature as it is revealed throughout Pliny’s work. Beagon also considers Pliny’s ‘practical’ approach, which she regards as a characteristically Roman one: ‘A command of both words and actions, combined in and bonded together by a practicality of outlook, was regarded as characteristic of the Roman approach to life. In Roman eyes, the Greeks often overtheorized …’

Vergil’s representation of nature in the *Georgics* is David O. Ross’ main interest, but he also writes more generally about common Roman perceptions of

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26 Purcell (1990a), 23. Also Purcell (1990b).
31 Pavlovskis (1973), 1.
32 Others, not discussed here, include Gillis (1967) on Lucretius; Segal (1969) on Ovid; Davies (1971) on Cicero.
33 Beagon (1992) and (1996).
34 Beagon (1992), 12.
nature. Ross makes the observation that whereas we tend to locate ‘nature’ in wild places,\(^{35}\) for Romans ‘nature’ was the farm: ‘“nature” was not the world of flora and fauna and other natural forces that it is for us …, but the world of cultivated growth within the farm’s sacred \textit{termini}.\(^{36}\) Ross rightly reminds us that ideas of nature are neither fixed nor consistent, and that an understanding of Vergil’s \textit{Georgics} depends in part on an understanding of Vergil’s idea of nature.

Finally, a number of recent studies of the urban landscape of Rome have also discussed Roman ways of responding to places. Catharine Edwards’ \textit{Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City} and Mary Jaeger’s \textit{Livy’s Written Rome} discuss how places within the city gradually gained meaning, and how these meanings were in turn interpreted by ancient writers. Edwards, for example, explores aspects of the relationship between written and material Romes, arguing that ‘[t]opography, for Romans, perhaps played a greater role than chronology in making sense of the past. Past time was conflated and places became vehicles for a kind of non-sequential history … ’ \(^{37}\) Jaeger discusses similar ideas, but looks specifically at Livy’s history and its role in imposing meanings on to Roman places.\(^{38}\) Works such as these are important because they reinforce just how much, particularly in Roman culture, places can take on meaning as a result of human actions.

Roman writers were themselves aware of the links between nature, place and human activity. Book 2 of Cicero’s \textit{de Legibus}, for example, takes place on the writer’s ancestral estate at Arpinum. Having enjoyed a long walk, Cicero and Atticus decide to continue their conversation on an island in the river Fibrenus (Cic. \textit{Leg}. 2.1.1). Both agree that the spot is a perfect one for reading, writing or simply for thinking (\textit{nam illo loco libentissime soleo uti, sive quid mecum ipse cogito sive aut quid scribo aut lego}, \textit{Leg}. 2.1.1). Atticus himself contrasts the natural blessings of the island to the artificial attractions of the city (\textit{Leg}. 2.1.2). But he also admits that he once used to wonder at his friend’s fondness for the spot:

\(^{35}\) On the development of a taste for wild nature, see Ellis (1909); Keith Thomas (1984), 261–3.
\(^{36}\) Ross (1987), 21.
\(^{38}\) See too Cancik (1985–6); Jaeger (1990).
So what brought about this change in Atticus’ response? It is partly the experience of seeing the place for himself (rather than merely hearing about it from his friend) that prompts Atticus’ new-found appreciation of the landscape of Arpinum. But his new feelings are heightened when he learns of Cicero’s personal attachment to the spot. For Cicero, Arpinum is important as the place of his childhood and the home of the forebears. He explains: ‘Quia, si verum dicimus, haec est mea et huius fratris mei germana patria; hic enim orti stirpe antiquissima sumus, hic sacra, hic genus, hic maiorum multa vestigia’, (Leg. 2.1.3). For Atticus, a place which once seemed a wilderness of rocks and mountains (Leg. 2.1.2) takes on a special significance because of its emotional associations for his friend. ‘To tell the truth,’ he says, ‘I myself have now become attached to the villa and to the whole area, because you were born and raised here’ (Leg. 2.2.4). Atticus goes on to explain his belief that we are most moved by places which contain some reminders of those whom we love or admire (movemur enim nescio quo pacto locis ipsis, in quibus eorum, quos diligimus aut admiramur, adsunt vestigia, Leg. 2.1.4).39

A passage in the de Finibus considers some similar ideas. At the opening of Book 5, Cicero describes a stroll with some friends in the Academy. He records Piso’s comment that we are often strangely moved when we visit the places where great men (viros dignos) have achieved great deeds:

‘Naturane nobis hoc,’ inquit, ‘datum dicam an errore quodam, ut, cum ea loca videamus in quibus memoria dignos viros acceperimus multam esse versatos, magis moveamur quam si quando eorum ipsorum aut facta audiamus aut scriptum aliquod legamus? … tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis; ut non sine cause ex iis memoriae ducta sit disciplina.’

(Cic. Fin. 5.1.2)

39 He illustrates this further by explaining that when he is in Athens, he is most pleased not by the city’s magnificent buildings or ancient works of art, but by the thought of the great men who have walked its streets before him (Leg. 2.2.4). Cf. Sen. Ep. 49.1.
By way of illustration, Piso remarks that he is himself inclined to think about Plato as he walks around the Academy. In a similar way, the sight of the senate-house in Rome prompts him to think of Scipio, Cato and Laelius (Fin. 5.1.2). Such is the power of places to stimulate thoughts, Piso concludes, that the training of the memory is based around them (tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis; ut non sine causa ex iis memoriae ducta sit disciplina, Fin. 5.1.2). Piso refers specifically to the orator’s technique of using places as aids for the memory (memoriae disciplina) but, like Atticus in the De legibus, he also speaks more generally of the ways in which places, whether natural (like Arpinum) or constructed (like Athens), can acquire meaning from the actions of human beings. So closely are places associated with the events which have taken place there, Piso remarks, that it is impossible to see them without also remembering their associations.

Not just places, but individual natural objects can also attain meaning from their associations with human activity. In the de Oratore, for example, the sight of a spreading plane-tree on Crassus’ estate reminds Scaevola of the tree which appears in Plato’s Phaedrus (Pl. Phdr. 229a–b). He suggests that they imitate Plato’s Socrates and take advantage of its shade (de Orat. 1.28) and goes on to say that it was not so much the tree and little river which made him stop, as his recollection of Plato’s speech:

‘Cur non imitamur, Crasse, Socratem illum, qui est in Phaedro Platonis? Nam me haec tua platanus admonuit, quae non minus ad opacandum hunc locum patulis est diffusa ramis, quam illa, cuius umbram secutus est Socrates, quae mihi videtur non tam “ipsa acula”, quae describitur, quam Platonis oratione crevisse: et, quod ille durissimis pedibus fecit, ut se abiceret in herbam, atque ita illa, quae philosophi divinitus ferunt esse dicta, loqueretur, id meis pedibus certe concedi est aequius.’

(Cic. de Orat. 1.28)

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40 Cicero’s other friends tell of similar experiences. Quintus Cicero remarks that passing Colonus, he was reminded of Sophocles and even of Oedipus (Fin. 5.1.3); Lucius recalls that he has visited such evocative places as the beach where Demosthenes practised declaiming and the tomb of Pericles (Fin. 5.1.5). Cicero himself relates that while strolling in the Academy he is reminded of Carneades and feels that he can see him in the place where he was accustomed to sit (Fin. 5.1.4). See further Vasaly (1993), 29–30.

41 For explanations of this technique see Cic. de Orat. 2.351–4; Quint. Inst. 11.2.17–22. See too Yates (1966), 1–26; Vasaly (1993), 100–2.
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The plane-tree, like the countryside of Arpinum, inspires admiration and interest because of its associations with human society. As Ann Vasaly observes:

[It] is not chiefly “nature” that moves the participants in the dialogue but the association of particular landscapes with human history. There is a contrast implied between places that bear the spiritual imprint of the past ... and those that are devoid of human association, such as the wilderness.  

In all of these passages, Cicero’s characters speak of the ways in which our perception of the natural world is shaped by the particular associations which it holds for us.

There are some good reasons to believe that Roman writers were unusually sensitive to the meanings attached to places. Ancient rhetorical training taught not only how to describe places (both constructed and natural), but also how to use them to influence readers. Places can be used to establish a particular atmosphere, to comment on human behaviour, to set up certain expectations in readers’ minds or to spark memories of events which occurred in similar places.

One consequence of this (to be discussed further below) is that Roman writers tend to produce highly stylized descriptions of places and to attach similar meanings to them.

A further reason for supposing that Roman writers may have been unusually sensitive to the meanings attached to places involves the mnemonic device referred to by Piso in the *de Finibus* (Cic. *Fin*. 5.1.2). This technique entails using places to memorize the words of a speech. By associating each topic of a speech with the objects to be found in a particular place (such as a cluttered room, a public building, a city or even a painting, Quint. *Inst*. 11.2.21), the orator can walk through this place in his or her mind and have each object act as a prompt to the memory. Cicero illustrates this idea clearly when he explains: ‘we use places as writing-tablets and mental images as letters’ (*ut locis pro cera, simulacris pro litteris uteremur*, Cic. *de Orat*. 2.86.354). So while images provide the direct

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44 Leach (1988), 6–7 on ‘illumination’ (in Latin *illustratio* or *evidentia*).
45 See Gordon Williams (1968), 634–81.
stimulus to the memory, they are fixed to a particular place. Quintilian adds that we can readily test this technique by thinking about our own experiences: when we return to a place which we have visited in the past, we not only recognize the place itself, but also often remember the things which we did there, the people we met and even the thoughts which passed through our minds (Quint. Inst. 11.2.17). Roman writers may, then, have been especially responsive to the meanings attached to places, and have expected their readers to be so too.

Another factor which may have some effect on Roman descriptions of nature and place is what Nicholas Horsfall describes as the ‘lexical “black hole” ’ which makes it relatively difficult to describe a place in Latin.\(^{46}\) When it comes to describing concepts such as direction, distance, space and height, Latin is often imprecise and confusing. It is in part because of the gaps in the Latin language that when Roman writers want to describe a natural spot, they often turn to the ready-made descriptions of earlier literature. In Vergil’s Aeneid, for example, a similar landscape provides the setting for a number of different events: it is in remarkably similar forests that the Sibyl and Aeneas walk before they enter the Underworld (Verg. A. 6.237–41), that Faunus speaks to king Latinus (A. 7.81–4) and that the Fury Allecto dwells (A. 7.563–71).\(^{47}\) When Vergil describes the harbour where the Trojans land in Africa (A. 1.157–73), his description recalls not only his own picture of the beach around Proteus’ cave in the Georgics (G. 4.418–22), but also a number of Homeric harbours and beaches (cf. Hom. Od. 9.136–41, 10.87–94, 13.93–115).\(^{48}\)

These similarities can be explained in part by ancient conventions for describing places.\(^{49}\) Menander Rhetor, for example, gives lessons in describing cities (346.26–353.3), harbours (351.20–352.5) and bays (352.6–352.9).\(^{50}\) The influence of this rhetorical training can be seen in Roman descriptions of certain place-types. When the younger Pliny writes of Trajan’s harbour at Centum Cellae (Plin. Ep. 6.31), he follows closely descriptions of other harbours: Vergil’s harbour on the coast of Libya (Verg. A. 1.159–68), Livy’s New Carthage (Liv.

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\(^{46}\) Horsfall (1985), 204.


\(^{49}\) Horsfall (1985), 201; Oakley (1997), 9–10.

\(^{50}\) Russell and Wilson edd. (1981).
26.42.8) and Lucan’s harbour at Brundisium (Lucan 2.616–18). This does not necessarily mean that Pliny had not seen Trajan’s harbour, but rather that he had learned how to describe harbours in general as part of his rhetorical training and that his way of seeing the harbour was unavoidably coloured by this.

There were also set ways for describing a natural occurrence. For instance, when Seneca describes a storm (Sen. Ag. 466ff.), his description owes much to the storms which assail Ovid during his journey to Tomis (Ov. Tr. 1.2; cf. Met. 11.474ff.) and Aeneas during his voyage to Carthage (Verg. A. 1.81ff.; cf. 3.192–208). Likewise when Tacitus describes the storm which Germanicus and his men encounter during their voyage back to Rome (Tac. Ann. 2.23–4), he too borrows from Vergil, and so transposes a Mediterranean storm to the chill waters of the North Sea. We should, then, be wary of reading too much specific detail into Roman depictions of places; rarely can they be used to pinpoint an actual place, and still more rarely to uncover the feelings or opinions of an individual writer. What they can be used for, however, is to uncover common cultural responses to nature and place among Roman writers, and presumably among their readers too.

As I have already noted, little has been written specifically about Roman nature, and what has been written tends to deal with Romans’ perceived landscape preferences or, more recently, with subjects such as the urban landscape of Rome or Roman control of nature. In this thesis, I examine Roman nature from a slightly different standpoint. I consider how, in a selection of Latin texts, Roman writers use nature and place to write about some specifically Roman ideas. There are, however, a number of related topics which I shall not be discussing in detail in the following chapters. I will not, for example, focus on Romans’ actual knowledge of nature nor on nature as a resource — for instance in agriculture, forestry or hunting — and the possible effects of such activities. On the whole,

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52 Horsfall (1985), 201.
55 See above, 5ff.
56 E.g. Stahl (1962); Morton (1986); French (1994).
INTRODUCTION

I do not discuss what we might call the broader ‘symbolic value’ of natural things in Latin literature; that is, how nature can be used to reflect human emotions.\textsuperscript{59} It is also worth noting that I will not for the most part examine material evidence — such as painting, sculpture, maps, gardens and surviving examples of Roman land-use and engineering\textsuperscript{60} — which can also be an important source of information about Roman perceptions of nature and place. Instead I take an intertextual approach, drawing primarily on Augustan and Silver Age texts, to explore a few selected areas of the relationship between Rome and nature.

I also hope to reflect on some of the assumptions which are commonly made about Rome’s and Romans’ interaction with natural environments. One of these, which I have already mentioned,\textsuperscript{61} is the ancient Romans’ supposed love of nature. The second assumption is that Romans were on the whole ‘active’ rather than ‘contemplative’ in their interaction with natural environments. Like the belief in the Romans’ love of nature, this idea is often advanced by scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,\textsuperscript{62} but it is a belief which persists today. It is often used to point to a notable contrast between Greek and Roman culture: whereas the Greeks uncovered the hidden workings of nature, the Romans physically altered nature, by building roads, aqueducts and other typically ‘Roman’ structures and imprinting the world with replicas of Rome itself.

I begin by considering some of the links between Rome’s landscape and its early history, and in particular the idea — promoted by many Roman writers — that the development of Rome was a struggle against natural obstacles. This is in spite of the supposed natural perfection of Italy, an idea which appears in Latin

\textsuperscript{58} See Heichelheim (1956); Morton (1986); Hughes (1994).


\textsuperscript{60} On some of these topics, see Leach (1988) (on painting); Zanker (1988), 172–83 (on the \textit{Ara pacis Augustae}); Dilke (1985), 112–29 and Nicolet (1991), 98–111 (on maps); Jashemski (1979), (1992) and (1993) and Purcell (1987) (on gardens); Attenborough (1987) and Horden and Purcell (2000) (on land-use and Romans’ impact on natural environments); Landels (1997) (on engineering).

\textsuperscript{61} See above, 5.

\textsuperscript{62} E.g. Cary and Haarhoff (1940), 195: ‘The Roman contribution to knowledge was to harness the brilliant theories of the Greeks … to the uses of the everyday world, and with their aid to improve upon land-surveying, road-construction, water-conservation, calendar-making, and other practical devices.’ Cf. \textit{ibid.}, 212–15; Cary (1954), 467. See too the comments of Purcell (1992), 448.
literature from the elder Cato onwards. In fact these laudes Italiae (or sometimes just laudes Romae) often include references to both Italy’s natural features and the Roman people’s additions to these: rivers as well as aqueducts, forests as well as fora. But it is the Roman capacity to overcome — or at least to control — the swamps and forests of Latium which is seen as the paramount achievement of the Roman power over nature. This approach was not, however, without its risks. Tampering with nature was always a perilous activity in ancient thought, and Roman enthusiasm for surmounting nature is at times tempered by a note of disapproval.

Chapter II turns to some of the ways in which Roman writers use nature and place to write about Roman characters and events. The emphasis here will be on Republican and Augustan writers, although their ways of writing about Roman place and Roman nature were often followed quite closely by later writers. My main focus is on the ways in which both individual natural features and particular natural spots came to be associated with events from Roman history and, often, aspects of Roman national identity. This idea has been taken up by a number of recent studies which look specifically at the urban landscape of Rome and how this became a kind of three-dimensional, ever-changing commentary on the history of the city. My emphasis is on literary sources, where places are often fundamental to the story of Rome’s early history. Livy, for example, uses individual Romans’ responses to Roman places to comment on aspects of their character. Vergil, Propertius and Ovid also use places to write about the history of the city, and to add an extra level of meaning to their writings.

Chapters III, IV and V each consider a particular type of landscape or area of nature as it appears in a selection of Roman texts. Chapter III looks at farms and argues that in Roman culture the farm is often an illustration of the ideal relationship between human beings and nature. This is suggested by a number of

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63 Cato ap. Solinus 2.2. See too Canter (1938) and (1939).
64 Beagon (1992), 42ff.
65 See, e.g., Baxter (1972) on Vergil’s possible influence on Tacitus.
66 E.g. Wiseman (1979) and (1986); Griffe (1981); Horsfall (1981); Cancik (1985); Purcell (1989); Dupont (1992), 73–89; Favro (1993); Catharine Edwards (1996); Jaeger (1990) and (1997). A number of more general studies of the links between nature and national identity — such as Lowenthal (1978); Williams and Smith (1983) and Walter (1988) — also include observations relevant to Roman society.
Roman accounts of the development of agriculture, where nature is imagined as having been the ‘teacher’ of various farming practices. This is not to suggest, however, that human ingenuity played no part in the process; on the contrary Roman writers regularly emphasize the importance of a practical knowledge of farming — gained through spending time in the countryside and watching natural processes — for success in agriculture. The final part of the chapter considers some Roman representations of the farm itself. Here I show that these frequently combine elements of an idealized, even unreal country life with more realistic Roman ones.

Gardens (which are the subject of Chapter IV) elicit a broader range of responses. Small, productive gardens are often praised as worthy uses of the natural environment; lavish pleasure-gardens, on the other hand, are widely criticized as both unnatural and ‘un-Roman’. This is not simply because pleasure-gardens were thought to be an essentially imported idea, but also because those who cultivated them were believed to subvert the rustic ideals of the earliest Roman citizens. With the writings of Statius and the younger Pliny, however, we find some enthusiastic responses to human beings’ ability to alter nature, and even at times to overturn it completely.

Chapter V turns to forests (and some other types of wild landscape) which, in a different way, were also often seen to be ‘un-Roman’. We know that in writing about the customs of the inhabitants of other places (the examples I have chosen are Germany and Scythia), Roman writers also often reveal much about the customs of Rome itself. My emphasis, however, is on Roman ways of writing about the topography of these places. The remainder of the chapter looks at the often inimical relationship between Rome and wild nature. This is an idea which comes across in accounts of the early Romans’ struggles against the wet and woody landscapes of Latium; but struggles of a similar kind also took place in Gaul, Germany and Britain. Here Roman legions battled not just the inhabitants of these lands, but also the wild places in which they lived. Consequently when

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68 See, e.g., Anderson (1961), ix.
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Romans write about Roman battles, they often present them as heroic struggles against a wild — and sometimes deliberately hostile — nature.

It is not only Roman writers who contemplate the relationship between Rome and nature in these ways. Many of those who travelled to the city during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries noted that the city had gradually returned to its pre-Roman state. The final chapter briefly looks beyond ancient Rome to the works of some later writers. Byron, Shelley and others can be seen to draw on their knowledge of Latin literature to comment on nature’s reappearance among the ruins of the city and so continue the ancient tradition of seeing a link between Rome — and Romanness — and nature.

This thesis therefore aims to make a contribution to our understanding of Latin literature by focussing on how Roman writers use images of nature and place in their writings and asking what these images contribute to their works. It also takes a broad approach, looking at nature and place across a range of Latin texts. In exploring this aspect of Latin literature, I also hope to increase our understanding of some more general ideas surrounding Romans’ comprehension of non-constructed environments. Approaching Latin literature through the study of nature and place can also throw some new light on the importance of nature to Roman writers as way of writing about Roman history and the Roman people’s place in the world.
I

Water and Wood

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF ROME

[If]or if the Greeks had the repute of aiming most happily in the founding of cities, in that they aimed at beauty, strength of position, harbours, and productive soil, the Romans had the best foresight in those matters which the Greeks made but little account of, such as the construction of roads and aqueducts, and of sewers that could wash out the filth of the city into the Tiber ... In a word, the early Romans made but little account of the beauty of Rome, because they were occupied with other, greater and more necessary, matters.

Strabo 5.3.8

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1. Introduction

In a passage in his Geography, Strabo notes that the development of Rome was made possible in part by its natural features: Italy is protected by surrounding seas and mountains; it has few natural harbours (and so is relatively safe from attack by sea); its inhabitants enjoy a temperate climate, a variety of plants and animals and plentiful fresh-water lakes and rivers (Str. 6.4.1). Elsewhere, however, Strabo writes with admiration of the ways in which the Roman people themselves improved on and added to these natural advantages: by building roads,

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1 Trans. Jones (1917-44).
WATER AND WOOD

aqueducts, drains and other urban amenities (Str. 5.3.8). So while nature provided the raw materials for the building of the city, it was the Roman people who were able to make use of these. Strabo here makes a clear and telling distinction between what he sees as typical ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ ways of responding to natural environments: the Roman way is not to be discouraged by the restrictions of nature, but rather to work to overcome them. It is this ‘hands-on’ approach which was believed to characterize Roman responses to natural environments and which is emphasized in Romans’ own writings. Romans could boast that they had found ways to prevail over nature by clearing forests; draining swamps; diverting rivers and building bridges, roads and aqueducts.

This chapter begins with a discussion of rhetorical praises of Rome and Italy. Here I argue that the main theme of these passages is that Rome (and Italy as a whole) is the creation of both nature and human beings. The remainder of the chapter examines responses to two prominent features of the Roman landscape: water and wood. My argument here is that these appear in Latin literature in different contexts and with quite different associations. Whereas water (in the form of rivers, lakes, swamps and springs) often appears as a hindrance to Roman progress, wood (in the form of forests and sometimes individual trees) has a more ‘symbolic’ significance. In other words, while references to water are used to point to the Roman people’s skill in building and engineering, references to wood are used to talk about the character of early Roman society and often of the early Romans themselves. My other main theme in this chapter is that Roman writers are often undecided about the consequences of the Roman people’s capacity to modify nature. This is revealed in both laudes Italiae and in accounts of the Roman people’s responses to watery and wooded environments.

From their very beginnings, both Rome and ideas of Romanness were closely linked to the Roman landscape. In the late Republican and Augustan periods, for example, passages such as Camillus’ speech at the close of Livy 5 (Liv. 5.54) and Scipio’s speech in Cicero’s de Republica (2.5–11) insist on the

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2 Strabo goes on to write that later generations of Romans attended also to the appearance of the city by building colonnades, amphitheatres, temples and tombs, and by decorating these with great works of art (Str. 5.3.8).

importance of Rome’s physical setting in shaping Roman culture and ensuring Roman greatness. Nature itself could, in a sense, be seen to lend a helping hand to Roman progress. The apparent benevolence of nature also provided support for the belief that Roman power was guaranteed by the gods themselves. This is not to take anything away from the achievements of the Roman people themselves; indeed a common theme of these and similar passages is that it was the foresight and audacity of the early Romans which enabled them to take advantage of the site by the Tiber and both to exploit its advantages and overcome its disadvantages.

The same kind of contrast appears in Roman accounts of other races. To Roman eyes, non-Roman peoples often seem held back by a sluggish acceptance of nature’s limits. The elder Pliny writes with disdain of the Chauci who are content to live amid the mud of the German marshes (Plin. *Nat.* 16.1–6). The fact that they have found ways both to adapt their behaviour to suit the environment (for instance by raising their houses above the soggy marshes, *Nat.* 16.3) and to make use of the natural commodities which are to hand (such as peat, *Nat.* 16.1) counts for little. The same criticism could at times be turned against the Roman people themselves. Livy’s Camillus chastizes the people of Rome for their reluctance to rebuild their city and recalls how the founders of Rome, who were actually little more than a rabble of outcasts and shepherds, had managed to build their settlement in a wilderness of forests and marshes: ‘*Maiores nostri, conuenae pastoresque, cum in his locis nihil praeter siluas paludesque esset, nouam urbem tam brevi aedificarunt*’ (Liv. 5.53.7).

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5 Other races are imagined as living beyond nature itself. E.g. Plin. *Nat.* 6.98 on Ceylon as *extra orbem a natura relegata*; *Nat.* 4.88 on Pterophorus as *damnata a rerum natura*; *Nat.* 5.88 on Palmyra, *velut terris exempta a rerum natura*.
2.  *Rectrix parentique mundi altera:* praises of Italy

Passages describing the natural advantages of Italy appear throughout Latin literature. Cato (*ap. Solinus* 2.2), Varro (*R. 1.2.1–7*), Cicero (*Rep. 2.5–11*), Livy (5.51–4), Vergil (*G. 2.136–76*), Vitruvius (*Vitr. 6.1.10–11*), Propertius (*Prop. 3.22.17–42*), the elder Pliny (*Nat. 3.39–42; 37.201–3*) and Rutilius Namatianus (*de Reditu Suo* 2.17–40) all praise Italy in similar terms. These passages remind us firstly just how much Roman representations of the natural world were shaped by those of earlier literature. When Livy’s Camillus speaks of the hills and river of Rome (Liv. 5.54), his speech recalls that of Scipio in Cicero’s *de Republica* (Cic. *Rep. 2.5–11*). When Cicero himself writes of Romulus’ foresight in choosing the site for his city — away from the sea, on the banks of a river and in a spot protected by hills (Cic. *Rep. 2.5–11*), he expresses ideas which had already appeared in the works of Plato (Pl. *Laws* 704d–e) and Aristotle (Arist. *Pol. 1327a*). Similarly when Propertius declares that Italy is free from horned snakes, strange monsters and other horrors (*Prop. 3.22.27–38*), he looks back to Vergil’s proud claim that Italy has never grown crops of armed men from land ploughed by fire-breathing bulls (*Verg. G. 2.140–2*). And when Vergil writes that the crops and herds of Italy surpass those of all other lands (*Verg. G. 2.136–44*), he echoes Sophocles’ *laudes Atticae* (Soph. *OC 694–701*).

Two main themes emerge from these passages. The first is that Italy’s natural advantages — not only its geographical position, but also its abundant supply of natural resources — can help to explain and justify Roman power. This

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6 Plin. *Nat. 37.201.*
7 Praises of both cities and countries are also common in ancient Greek literature. Cf. Soph. *OC 668–719* (Athens/Colonos); Thuc. 2.38 (Athens); Str. 9.400 (Ephorus on Boetia). See further Ogilvie (1965), 748 (ad Liv. 5.54.1); Cairns (1972), 63, 212–13; Richard F. Thomas (1988a), 180 (ad Verg. *G. 2.136–76*). On *laudos Romae*, see Canter (1939), 404–9.
8 Also cf. Str. 6.4.1; D.H. 1.36–7.
9 Cf. Servius’ comment on Vergil’s praises of Italy: *iam incipit laus Italiae, quam exequeit secundum praecepta rhetorica: nam dicit eam et habere bona omnia et carere malis universis* (Serv. ad *Geo. 2.136*). On this theme, see Canter (1938) and (1939).
10 See further Ogilvie (1965), 743 (ad Liv. 5.51–4).
11 Balsdon (1979), 10.
12 Cf. Prop. 3.22.5–18 where Propertius imagines his friend Tullus looking at the Gorgon’s head, the stables of Geryon and other ‘un-Italian’ marvels.
idea, which is only hinted at by Cicero and Livy, becomes a dominant theme of later praises of Italy. Second is the idea that the Roman people themselves have worked to improve on these natural advantages. Italy comprises not just rivers, mountains, lakes and forests, but also aqueducts, roads, harbours and cities. Indeed praises of Italy come increasingly to focus on the Roman people’s capacity to alter their natural environment and to show that, while it was nature which provided the raw materials for the settlement, it was the Roman people who had the initiative and abilities to make use of these.

Agriculture is one of the skills which the writers of these praises emphasize. In the Res Rusticae, for instance, Varro’s farming friend Agrarius begins by asking whether there is any land more cultivated than Italy (‘Vos, qui multas perambulastis terras, ecquam cultiorem Italia vidistis?’ Var. R. 1.2.3). Another of Varro’s companions explains that the abundance and quality of Italy’s farm land can be explained to a certain extent by the country’s geographical position. Whereas the lands north of Italy endure an almost continuous winter, Italy sits in the earth’s temperate middle zone (R. 1.2.4). Varro here uses accepted geographical knowledge and scientific theory to explain both the attractiveness of the Italian countryside and the variety of agricultural products which it produces.

But not all of the credit for Italy’s productiveness goes to nature. Varro and his friends especially admire the cultivated landscapes of Italy and the many grains and fruits which they grow. Fundarius asks:


(Var. R. 1.2.6–7)

Fundarius goes on to tell of the remarkable fertility of the Italian soil which yields more than that of any other place (R. 1.2.7). For Fundarius and Varro’s other farmer friends, it is Italy’s agricultural produce which distinguishes it from other

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13 Cic. Rep. 2.3.5; Liv. 5.54.5.
15 Varro and his friends also suggest that, even according to the theories and beliefs of non-Roman thinkers, Italy is the most fortunate of all lands. Cf. Str. 6.4.1; D.H. 1.36–7.
places. While nature has provided Italy’s climate, soil, water and plants, it is the farmer who creates the cultivated landscapes where spelt, wine, oil, grapes and many other products can grow. Varro here touches on an idea which was to become a common theme of later laudes Italiae. In writing of the products of Italian agriculture, Varro reminds us of the role of the farmers of Italy in shaping the Italian countryside. It is the cultivated landscape of Italy, with its trees, vines, grains and olives (R. 1.2.6–7), that Varro and his friends most admire, making clear that the credit for Italy’s productiveness does not go to nature alone.

A more problematic description of Italy appears in Vergil’s Georgics (G. 2.136–76). Vergil’s laudes, which are among the most widely discussed,¹⁶ have been read in a number of ways. For many, Vergil’s laudes provide an enthusiastic and unambiguous tribute to Italy. A. G. McKay, for instance writes that:

Poets have rarely reflected their environment as completely and eulogized it as fervently as Vergil…. Vergil sensed more deeply than any other poet before or after the wondrous aspects of sea and sky, of cypress, pine, ilex and olive, of spring and river, hill and dale, of the Italian landscape …. Vergil’s theme is the glorification of country life, of crops, trees and vines, livestock and bees, of inanimate and animate nature for which he feels like affection and sympathy.¹⁷

Others maintain that a closer reading of the passage reveals some uncertainty behind Vergil’s apparent enthusiasm.¹⁸ Richard F. Thomas, for example, argues:

Virgil, in the laudes Italiae, developed and extended traditional material in such a way as to suggest that civilized Italy has crossed the limits imposed by nature. At the same time he has expressed severe reservations about empire and the Roman achievement. And finally, while ostensibly claiming that Italy in some way represents a renewal of the golden age, he has subtly proved the very opposite.¹⁹

If Italy produces plump fruits, bountiful harvests (gravidae fruges, G. 2.143–4), juicy grapes and contented herds (armenta laeta, G. 2.144), it also produces cities (G. 2.155–7), dams, aqueducts (G. 2.157–64) and bellicose men (G. 2.167–72).

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¹⁷ McKay (1972), 149–50.


¹⁹ Richard F. Thomas (1982), 49.
Indeed although the land that Vergil describes in some respects enjoys a kind of golden age, it is also marked by certain iron-age characteristics: war (2.145), sacrifice (2.146–8), work (2.155), walled cities (2.155–7), building (2.161–4) and mining (2.165–6). Moreover the Italians themselves are a genus acre virum (2.167), and the Romans whom Vergil praises — the Decii, C. Marius, Furius Camillus and the Scipios — are all renowned for their achievements in war. According to this ‘pessimistic’ reading of Vergil’s laudes, in singling out the Roman people’s achievements in war, building and engineering, Vergil subtly criticizes the values of Augustus’ Roman society while on the surface seeming to praise them.

There is, however, another way of looking at Vergil’s praises which sits somewhere between McKay’s optimism and Thomas’ pessimism. What is relevant here is that Vergil points not only to Italy’s natural advantages, but also to the ways in which the Roman people have used and even improved on these. His laudes range from the products of nature (G. 2.136–54) to human works (adde tot egegias urbes operumque laborem, G. 2.155–76). In particular, Vergil chooses to describe the Roman people’s capacity to reshape their natural environment and make use of natural things. Even the ‘natural’ products which he mentions — wine, grain, olives and domesticated animals (G. 2.143–4) — are the products of agriculture and domestication; they are ‘natural’ only in the sense that they can be contrasted with the ‘unnatural’ products (or thaumata) of other lands (G. 2.136–42). When Vergil moves away from agriculture to other forms of human activity, he again includes instances of the Roman people’s ability to intervene in natural processes. The constructions which he chooses to include are those designed specifically to contain natural forces:

an memorem portus Lacrinoque addita claustra
atque indignatum magnis stridoribus aequor,

Iulia qua ponto longe sonat unda refuso

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20 On golden-age themes in this passage, see Ross (1987), 117–18.
21 See Richard F. Thomas (1988a), 188–9 (ad G. 2.169–72). Similarly Augustus is mentioned only for his military exploits (Verg. G. 2.170–2).
22 Gale (2000), 208–20 picks up on this idea, focussing on the role of the farmer as a ‘wonder worker’, able to overcome nature’s limitations.
Tyrrhenusque fretis immittitur aestus Auernis?

(Verg. G. 2.161–4)

Vergil has chosen to describe not one of Italy’s natural harbours (a common feature of traditional ethnographies), but two constructed ones: the canal from Lake Lucrinus and the Portus Iulius. Moreover his use of the word indignatum (G. 2.162) shows clearly the effects on nature itself. The ocean’s seeming resistance reinforces that these works of engineering were imposed on to nature by human beings. Like Varro, Vergil suggests that Romans have contributed to both the appearance and usefulness of their natural surroundings.

These ideas come together in the elder Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia*. Pliny closes his encyclopaedia with a panegyric to Italy (*Nat. 37.201–3*) in which he emphasizes that his homeland abounds in all the useful and healthy products of the earth:

Ergo in toto orbe, quacumque caeli convexitas vergit, pulcherrima omnium est iis rebus, quae merito principatum naturae optinent, Italia, rectrix parensque mundi altera, viris, feminis, ducibus, militibus, *civibus*, ingeniorum claritatis, servitiis, artium praestantiae, accessu cunctarum gentium facili, portuosis litoribus, benigno ventorum adflatu; quod contingit positione procurrentis in partem utilissimam et inter ortus occasusque mediam, aquarum copia, nemorum salubritate, montium articulis, ferorum animalium innocentia, soli fertilitate pabuli ubertate.

(*Plin. Nat. 37.201*)

Pliny’s exuberant praises provide a suitable ending to a work in which he has consistently glorified Italy — both its natural features and the achievements of its inhabitants — at the expense of other lands. In this passage, Pliny draws together many of the themes of his work in declaring that Italy displays an ideal union of the blessings of nature and the achievements of human beings.

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25 This addition, which completes Pliny’s list of opposite types (men and women, generals and soldiers, citizens and slaves) is suggested by Watt (1988), 214.
27 For the Roman focus of Pliny’s work, see Beagon (1992), 183–90 and *passim*.
28 Pliny is as much concerned with the ways in which human beings make use of natural products as with the products themselves; hence his interest in activities such as agriculture,
he concedes that other places enjoy a similar abundance of Nature’s gifts. Pliny leaves us in no doubt as to the superiority of his native land. It is true that other lands produce exotic products such as frankincense, gold and silk, but Italy alone enjoys a pleasant climate, natural harbours, abundant water, healthy forests, passable mountains (montium articulis), friendly animals, fertile soil and rich pastures (pabuli ubertate); what is more, it teems with crops, wine, oil, wool, flax, cloth and all that improves human life (Nat. 37.201–3). Italy also produces citizens who are able to make use of these gifts — men and women, generals and soldiers, citizens and slaves — whose abilities enable them to work with the products which Nature provides.

What all of these texts have in common is the idea that Italy is the creation of both nature and its human inhabitants. While these writers agree that Italy is exceptionally rich in plants, animals and other natural things, they also remind us that the Roman people have worked — by clearing, ploughing, planting and building — to construct their city and improve its natural amenities. Such ideas are of course in part the product of noisy Roman patriotism; but they also reveal some more general ideas about the interconnections of natural things and human works. There need not be a conflict between these, but human beings (or at least Roman ones) can be seen to augment natural products and improve on nature’s creations.

Despite the natural advantages of Italy and the abilities of her inhabitants, the development of the city of Rome was often imagined as a struggle against the natural environment of Latium. Roman texts often praise Italy for both the beauty and fertility of its landscapes and the hardy rusticity of its people. In this respect, Roman writers seem to contradict established ethnographic theory. Unlike many other places (which were seen to have either a pleasant climate but sluggish and dissolute people, or tough people but a harsh and changeable environment), Italy alone combined a kindly natural environment with hardy and virtuous inhabitants.


Cf. Plin. Nat. 5.24 on Byzacium, 6.143 on Arabia (which is felix only in luxuries), 37.203 on Spain.

Pliny notes with pride that Italy lacks the costly products to be found in Arabia, India and other exotic lands. See, for example, Nat. 13.18, 14.87. Cf. Verg. G. 2.140–8.
Underlying these passages is the suggestion that a race less resourceful and skilled than the Roman would have failed to make good use of Italy’s many advantages. The elder Pliny provides a good example of this in his account of Arabia. Like Italy, Arabia sits in the earth’s temperate middle zone (Plin. Nat. 6.143) and so enjoys comparable natural advantages (Nat. 6.143). But, unlike the Roman race, the people of Arabia exploit their land and misuse nature’s gifts in order to increase their own wealth (in universum gentes ditissimae, ut apud quas maximae opes Romanorum Parthorumque subsidant, vendentibus quae e mari aut silvis capiunt, nihil invicem redimentibus, Nat. 6.162). To modify nature for useful ends (for example in the process of producing a crop or constructing a harbour) can be seen as an admirable (and even typically ‘Roman’) form of intervention in the natural environment. It is to intervention with one aspect of nature in particular — water — that the following section turns.

### 3. Water

Both water and watery landscapes have an important place in accounts of the origins and early history of Rome. But while Italy is often praised for its rivers, lakes, springs, harbours and aqueducts,31 other types of water and watery places (which figure just as prominently in Rome’s legendary landscapes) rarely appear in ancient praises of Italy and Rome. Swamps, rain and floodwater, together with the water of the Roman drains, sewers and public baths are either overlooked, or else are associated with some of the murkier aspects of the city’s past. Perhaps this is not surprising; plashing streams and glistening lakes have a greater appeal

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31 Cf. Verg. G. 2.146, 157, 158, 159–60, 161–4; Prop. 3.22.23–6; Plin. Nat. 37.201. See too Canter (1938), 467–70 on rivers, lakes and springs; idem (1939), 406–7 and passim on aqueducts.
for most of us than muddy swamps, flooding rivers and gushing drains. But even the drains, sewers and aqueducts of Rome, which were often said to be among the greatest wonders of the city, also had some uncomfortable associations for those writing about them. This section looks at the presence of some watery spots in the city’s early literary landscapes, before examining some of the possible associations of these in Roman thinking. Finally, I discuss Roman attempts — which were not always successful — to control and utilize these waterlogged places.

(i) *Watery beginnings*

Nicholas Purcell points out that the origins and development of Rome were closely linked to the Roman ability to control and utilize natural waterways. ‘Rome,’ he writes, ‘was founded by a shepherd, the son of a god, a twin returned from a malign fate; it was also founded in a wilderness, and the wilderness was wet.’ A number of Roman writers, including Varro (*L. 5.43, 5.44, 5.156*), Livy (*5.53.9*), Tibullus (*2.5.33–4*), Propertius (*4.2.7–10, 4.9.5–6*) and Ovid (*Fast. 2.391–2, 6.401–14*), all make reference to the wet, pre-Roman wilderness. Archaeological evidence largely supports this watery picture. The Forum Romanum was once the site of several natural waterways; the Palatine hill was almost completely surrounded by water; the Velabrum was a swamp, until it was drained by the Cloaca Maxima.

Water also appears at a number of points — and in a number of forms — in Rome’s foundation myths. In particular, as Purcell shows, some of Rome’s most

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32 On common Roman responses to various forms of water, see Traina (1988), 109–32 and *passim* (on swamps), Dunbabin (1989) (on the Roman baths), Brunn (1992) (on the ocean, drains, aqueducts and springs), and Gowers (1995) (on the Roman sewers). On swamp symbolism, see Miller (1989), 47–8 and *passim*. Miller deals mainly with the swamp in nineteenth-century American literature, but also writes more generally about the associations of marshes and mud.

33 Purcell (1996), 180.

34 Also cf. D.H. 2.50.1; Plu. *Rom. 5*.

35 See further Traina (1988), 77–101; Richardson (1992), 170–1 (s.v. ‘Forum Romanum’), 280 (s.v. Palatinus Mons’), 549 (s.v. ‘Velabrum’).
important landmarks were linked to natural waterways, and campi and prata (water-fields and water-meadows)\textsuperscript{36} often provided the settings for the events of the city’s mythical past. Suitable aetiologies were created for important Roman landmarks such as the Campus Martius, the Tiber island, the Campus Tiberinus, the Prata Quinctia and the Prata Mucia. Both the Campus Martius and the Tiber island were associated with the expulsion of the Roman kings and the formation of the Republic. The Campus Martius was believed to have been the private land of the Tarquins (Liv. 2.5.2),\textsuperscript{37} while the Tiber island was formed from a mound of grain harvested from the Tarquins’ fields (Liv. 2.5.3–4; D.H. 5.13). Other watery places were associated with traditional Roman heroes. The Campus Tiberinus was a gift to the Roman people from the Vestal Virgin Gaia Taracia (Plin. Nat. 34.25; Aul. Gell. 7.7.4; Plu. Publ. 8.4); the Prata Quinctia were once the fields of the Roman hero Cincinnatus (Liv. 3.26–7); the Prata Mucia were awarded to Mucius Scaevola for his achievements in the war against Lars Porsenna (Liv. 2.13; D.H. 5.35).\textsuperscript{38}

One other watery place appears prominently in the stories which make up Rome’s early legendary history: the Tiber. Rome’s proximity to the Tiber is an important factor in distinguishing it from other ancient cities,\textsuperscript{39} and Roman writers often note the practical advantages of their city’s access to the river. Perhaps most obviously, the river enabled trade and communication with other lands. The elder Pliny, for example, writes that more than any other river the Tiber adapts itself to human activity and so facilitates Roman trade with the rest of the world (Nat. 3.54–5).\textsuperscript{40} Here again is the idea that Romans are uniquely able to utilize the geographical advantages of their city; moreover, the river itself appears to cooperate with the people who live on its banks. This is reinforced when Pliny refers to the river in human terms, imagining it as a mercator placidissimus (Nat. 3.54).

\textsuperscript{36} On these and other landscape terms, see Traina (1988), 61–5.
\textsuperscript{37} Purcell (1996), 184.
\textsuperscript{38} Purcell (1996), 184–6.
\textsuperscript{39} Purcell (1996), 188. Contrast Traina (1988), 93. For a general discussion on the link between rivers and civilization, see Herendeen (1986), 8–9 and passim.
\textsuperscript{40} Pliny’s description of the Tiber and its surrounding landscape also reminds us that human works need not be incompatible with natural features. The waters of the Tiber are carried into the city (Nat. 3.54) where they are overlooked by villas (Nat. 3.54), and Pliny clearly admires this blending of the human and the natural worlds.
Pliny here even sees the river’s frequent floods in a positive light. They might, he points out, be regarded as a warning to the Roman people to attend to their proper religious duties (*Nat.* 3.55).

Other beliefs about the city’s place on the Tiber were based more on traditional ideas about the influence of geography on the inhabitants of a particular region. Coastal cities were commonly thought to be not just vulnerable to attack, but also corrupt, immoral and decadent; their traditional customs were cheapened by foreign rites; and their citizens were lured to venture out to sea, tempted by exotic goods from far-off places and made sluggish by the pleasant climate. Carthage is a good example of such a city. Cicero, for example, writes that the Carthaginians had clearly been corrupted by the location of their city, and specifically by the influence of the sea: *Carthaginienses fraudulentii et mendaces non genere, sed natura loci, quod propter portus suos multis et variis mercatorum et advenarum sermonibus ad studium fallendi studio quaestus vocabantur* (*Cic.* *Agr.* 2.95; cf. *Rep.* 2.4.7, *Off.* 1.150). Roman references to Baiae also reflect this view of coastal places.

Unlike Carthage and other maritime cities, Rome is safely distanced from the enticements of the sea and the attractions of the beach. The Tiber enables access to the sea, but keeps the city at a safe distance from both the water itself and the corrupting influences of the ocean and the coast. Cicero’s Scipio claims that Romulus had these reasons in mind when he chose the site for his city:

> ‘hoc vir excellenti providentia sensit ac vidit, non esse oportunissimos situs maritimis urbibus eis, quae ad spem diuturnitatis conderentur atque imperii, primum quod essent urbes maritimiae non solum multis periculis oppositae, sed etiam caecis…. qui potuit igitur divinius et utilitates conplecti maritimas Romulus et vitia vitare, quam quod urbem perennis amnis et aequabilis et in mare late influentis posuit in ripa?’

*(Cic.* *Rep.* 2.3.5–2.5.10)

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41 Cic. *Rep.* 2.4.7: *est autem maritimis urbibus etiam quaedam corruptela ac demutatio morum; admiscuntur enim novis sermonibus ac disciplinis et importuntur non merces solum adventiciae, sed etiam mores, ut nihil possit in patriis institutis manere integrum.*

42 Balsdon (1979), 10.

Rome’s proximity to the Tiber, rather than to the sea itself, allowed Romans to benefit from their communications with other lands without experiencing the supposedly corrupting influences of the sea and its products. Unlike many other places, Rome was to some extent able to maintain its cultural identity.

The Tiber, then, had some clear practical advantages. But the river also has an important role as a kind of natural symbol of the city. In the second, ‘Italian’ half of the Aeneid, the river appears at a number of significant stages in Aeneas’ journey. The Trojans sail along the Tiber at the opening of Aeneid 7 (Aen. 7.25–36), and it is on the bank of the river that Aeneas realizes that he and his companions have finally reached their new patria (cum Laomodonta pubes | gramineo ripae religavit ab aggere classem, A. 7.105–6). Later, the Tiber-god himself welcomes Aeneas to Italy (A. 8.26–65) and it is by the river that Aeneas sees the omen of the white sow (A. 8.81–5). The Tiber also has a prominent place in the story of Romulus and Remus. The twins were abandoned on the bank of the swollen Tiber (Liv. 1.4.4) and were saved from drowning when the river again receded (Liv. 1.4.6).

The Tiber and its tributaries also have a role in some of Rome’s early battles. Sometimes the river is a simply part of the backdrop to Roman action; but at other times it becomes almost an active participant, as Romans purposefully use the river in the course of their battles. Livy describes how, during their early battles against the Sabines, the Romans floated burning logs down the Anio, towards a bridge occupied by the enemy. The bridge caught fire, and the Sabines were forced to leap into the river. But in avoiding being burned, many drowned (Liv. 1.37.1–2). When their weapons and equipment floated down the Tiber to Rome, the Roman people understood this as a sign of a Roman victory (Liv. 1.37.2). Here the Tiber and its tributary the Anio work together in a Roman battle, becoming firstly participants in the war, then the messengers of a Roman victory.

The river again becomes a player during the battles between the Romans and the Etruscans. Mamercus and his troops take up a position protected on the right by hills and on the left by the Tiber (Liv. 4.32.8). The very same hills and

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44 See further Cairns (1989), 109–28 on Vergil’s use of natural features to suggest Aeneas’ essential ‘Italianness’.
river, however, soon become a trap for the Veientes. Again Rome’s enemies are swept away by the waters of the Tiber:

Veientium maxima pars Tiberim effusi petunt, Fidenatium qui supersunt ad urbem Fidenas tendunt. Infert pauidos fuga in mediam caedem; obruncantur in ripis; alios in aquam compulsos gurgites ferunt; etiam peritos nandi lassitudo et uolnera et pauor degrauant; pauci ex multis tranant.

(Liv. 4.33.10–11)

In a later battle, however, the situation is reversed when the Romans find themselves opposed by their own river. This time, Livy represents the Romans as impious and foolish: they have ignored a warning from the gods (Liv. 5.32.6–7), broken the ius gentium and rejected the Gauls’ embassy (Liv. 5.36.8–11). In the course of the battle which follows, some try to escape not to their homes in Rome, but to Veii (although, as Livy points out, the Tiber lay in their way, Liv. 5.38.5). Others are forced into the Allia and are drowned: Circa ripam Tiberis quo armis abiectis totum sinistrum cornu defugit, magna strages facta est, multosque imperitos nandi aut inualidos, graues loricis aliisque tegminibus, hausere gurgites (Liv. 5.38.8). The Tiber, then, was not just one of the defining features of the city’s topography, but also at times a contributor to its history. Not only does it provide the setting for important events (as in the Aeneid and the early books of Livy’s history), it also determines the outcomes of Rome’s early battles against neighbouring tribes.

(ii) Marshes and mud

Rivers of course are just one type of water; a number of other watery places, which were just as prominent in the topography of the early city, are either overlooked by Roman writers or else have quite different associations. The Velabrum, for example, was never associated with the heroic deeds of the earliest
Romans and in fact came to be one of the more sordid areas of the ancient city.\textsuperscript{45} It also remained as a permanent reminder of the city’s boggy past.\textsuperscript{46} Those who write about the early history of the spot do so in unexpected and sometimes clearly ‘un-Roman’ contexts. Tibullus, for example, incorporates a picture of the Velabrum into a poem written to celebrate the admission of Messalla’s eldest son as one of the \textit{quindecimviri sacris faciundis} (Tib. 2.5). The first part of the poem is suitably solemn as Tibullus recounts the Sibyl’s prophecy to Aeneas (Tib. 2.5.1–22) and describes the site of the city as it must have been before the Trojans’ coming. Many elements of this picture are familiar: cows graze on the grassy Palatine (Tib. 2.5.25; cf. 2.5.55–6), simple huts stand on the Capitol (Tib. 2.5.26), shepherds decorate rough wooden statues (Tib. 2.5.27–9) and boats sail on the Velabrum (Tib. 2.5.33–4). It is at this point that Tibullus introduces a festive element into an otherwise serious poem:

\begin{quote}
\textit{at qua Velabri regio patet, ire solebat}
\par
\textit{exiguus pulsa per uada linter aqua.}
\par
\textit{illa saepe gregis diti placitura magistro}
\par
\textit{ad iuuenem festa est uecta puella die,}
\par
\textit{cum qua fecundi redierunt munera ruris,}
\par
\textit{caseus et niueae candidus agnus ouis.}
\end{quote}

(Tib. 2.5.33–8)

Tibullus’ picture of a girl travelling to her lover and bringing back gifts takes us away from the formal and quite solemn themes of the rest of the poem to the more frivolous themes of picnics and love. The city’s past prompts Tibullus to think not of the praiseworthy achievements of the early Romans, but rather of the simple pleasures of love (similar to those which he enjoys in the present) and the troublesome elegiac figure of the \textit{dives amator} (gregis diti ... magistro, Tib. 2.5.35).\textsuperscript{47}

Propertius too refers to the city’s watery origins in a surprising, if not unsuitable, context. Having declared in the first poem of his final book that he will

\textsuperscript{46} See Le Gall (1953), 94–5, 265. ‘Velabrum’ is usually derived from \textit{veho} or \textit{velum}. See Var. \textit{L.} 5.43–4; 6.24. Cf. Plu. \textit{Rom.} 5.5. See further Platner and Ashby (1929), 549–50; Richardson (1992), 406–7 (s.v. ‘Velabrum Maius’).
\textsuperscript{47} Cf. Murgatroyd (1994), 189–90.
devote himself to the rites and history of Rome (*sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum*, Prop. 4.1.69), Propertius produces a poem not about a Roman god, but about the proudly Etruscan Vertumnus (Prop. 4.2). Propertius is at least true to his word in that Vertumnus provides a number of possible explanations for his name: he redirected the course of the Tiber (Prop. 4.2.10), he watches over the changing of the seasons (*seu, quia vertentis fructum praeceepimus anni, | Vertumnus rursus credidit esse sacrum*, Prop. 4.2.11–12) and he is able to transform his appearance (*at mihi, quod formas unus vertebar in omnis, | nomen ab eventu patria lingua dedit*, Prop. 4.47–8). Vertumnus also explains his position on the Vicus Tuscus overlooking the Forum:

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hac quondam Tiberinus iter faciebat, et aiunt
remorum auditos per vada pulsa sonos:
at postquam ille suis tantum concessit alumnis,
Vertumnus verso dicar ab amne deus.
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(Prop. 4.2.7–10)  

This explanation is just as fanciful as the others which he offers for his name, and it seems that neither Vertumnus nor Propertius is here interested in serious aetiology. What is interesting, however, is that Propertius places a changeable and in a sense ‘shifty’ god in a changeable and shifting landscape.  

A further reference to the Velabrum appears in Ovid’s *Fasti* (*Fast*. 6.395–416). Ovid tells how, at the festival of Vesta, he was surprised to see a woman walking without shoes near the Roman Forum (*Fast*. 6.397–8). Another old woman, whom Ovid asked about this peculiar custom, explained that the swamps had long dried up, but the practice of walking barefoot in the area remained:

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hoc, ubi nunc fora sunt, udae tenuere paludes;
amne redundatis fossa madebat aquis.
Curtius ille lacus, siccus qui sustinet aras,
nunc solida est tellus, sed lacus ante fuit.
qua Velabra solent in Circum ducere pompas,
nil praeter salices cassaque canna fuit;
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48 For Vertumnus’ Etruscan origins, see Prop. 4.2.3–4, 49–50; *Var. L*. 5.46.  
50 Barchiesi (1994), 175–8 suggests that the strange old woman whom Ovid meets may be Vertumnus himself. Cf. *Ov. Met*. 14.654–6 where a talkative old woman is one of the forms which Vertumnus takes on.
For Ovid, as for Tibullus, the Velabrum brings to mind none of the early Roman heroes, but a rather more humble figure: a boisterous and tipsy party-goer (conviva) who sings as he goes and calls out (verba iacit) to passing sailors.

Ovid’s reference to the Velabrum, like that of Tibullus, sits uneasily with the serious themes of Roman history. Ovid associates the watery region of the Velabrum not with the hardy virtue of the city’s founders, but with a drunken reveller. Moreover Ovid is the only Roman author to refer to the quaint habit of walking barefoot in this area, suggesting either that he himself invented the custom, or that it was an aspect of the city’s muddy past which other writers chose to ignore. One reason for this might be that the Velabrum, like other damp and swampy regions of the city (and like the regular floods of the Tiber) reminded Romans of their city’s ‘slippery’ foundations. While fertile places such as campi and prata could be remembered as farms and field land, others could be seen as threats to the stability and well-being of the city.

References to the city’s marshy landscapes need to be read in the context of more general beliefs regarding marshes and mud. Many Romans seem to have had what has been described as a ‘“marshophobic” mentality’. Marshes and similar muddy places were widely regarded as places either to be drained or simply avoided. Roman agricultural writers, for example, advise against building a farmstead in a marshy region. This is partly because of the risk of disease

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51 Bömer (1958), ii, 366 (ad Ov. Fast. 6.397). Ovid’s own surprise (obstipui tacitus, Fasti 6.398) need not suggest that the custom was an unusual one, and may simply be a device to allow the old woman (and so Ovid himself) to tell the story.


53 Squatriti (1992), 5. References to another marshy place can help us to understand how Romans may have responded to the swamps of their city. Ravenna appears in Latin literature as a mysterious place where the norms of Roman society have been turned upside-down. See, e.g., Mart. 3.56–7, 3.93 and the discussion in Squatriti (1992), 4 and passim.
associated with wet and muddy places (cf. Var. R. 1.4.4; Col. 1.5.3, 1.5.6)\textsuperscript{54} although, as Paolo Squatriti points out, Romans’ knowledge of mosquito-born illnesses was fairly vague.\textsuperscript{55} Marshland was thought to be not just unhealthy, but also unproductive.\textsuperscript{56} Cato (Agr. 43.1, 155.2), Varro (R. 1.4.4, 1.6.6, 1.12.1) and Columella (Col. 1.5.3–6, 2.2.9) all mention marshes as places unsuitable for conventional Roman agriculture. Even where they recommend planting marsh crops (such as willows and reeds, Cato Agr. 9.1; Var. R. 1.23.5; Col. 4.30.2, 4.32.1), they advise planting them in orderly rows, as if to transform the marsh into an arable field.\textsuperscript{57}

Arguments against swampy spots were not just practical. Mud itself was commonly viewed as dirty, harmful, corrupting and even sometimes sinister.\textsuperscript{58} A number of Latin words (and similar English words such as ‘muddy’, ‘murky’, ‘dirty’, ‘grimy’ and ‘grubby’) are often used to suggest not just actual muddiness, but also the associated ideas of sordidness and impurity. Applied to people, words such as \textit{lutum}, \textit{lutulentus} and \textit{caenus} are terms of abuse.\textsuperscript{59} The same words, without such a derogatory sense, could also be used to describe a confused or disturbed mental state. Lucretius imagines those who long for wealth and power ‘lolling in darkness and mud’ (\textit{in tenebris volvi caenoque}, Lucr. 3.77). The exiled Ovid tells his friend the poet Severus that he seems to have lost his inclination to write poetry; just as a stream of water can be blocked by silt (Ov. Pont. 4.2.17–20), his mind is bogged down by a mud of misfortunes (\textit{limo ... malorum}, Ov. Pont. 4.2.19).

More important are the associations of marshes with primordial chaos and wild, un-Roman places.\textsuperscript{60} The concept of a formless primordial chaos is common

\textsuperscript{55} Squatriti (1992), 5.
\textsuperscript{56} Squatriti (1992), 5–6.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Cato \textit{Agr.} 47.1. See too Squatriti (1992), 6.
\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Pl. \textit{Poen.} 1.1.29, \textit{Capt.} 2.2.76, Cic. \textit{Q. Rosc.} 7.20, Pis. 1, 27, 62; Juv. 7.131. The same word is also sometimes used to describe a confused or untidy writing style. Cf. Hor. \textit{Sat.} 1.4.11, 1.10.50.
\textsuperscript{60} For a general discussion of these associations, see Borca (1995) and \textit{idem} (1997).
to a number of cultures. Perhaps the most familiar account in Latin literature appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum
unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe,
 quem dixere chaos: rudis indigestaque moles
 nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem
non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum.

(Ov. *Met.* 1.5–9; cf. *Fast.* 1.103–10)

It is only with the intervention of *deus et melior ... natura* (Ov. *Met.* 1.21) that this mess of mingled elements is rearranged into the familiar landscapes of the earth: lakes, plains, valleys and forests and mountains (*Met.* 1.36–44). Chaos of a kind returns, however, with the flood as land and water again mingle in a muddy mass (*Met.* 1.253–312). Indeed similarly amorphous landscapes were believed to exist in certain wild places, such as Scythia and Germany. Swamps were, then, reminders of both the earth’s primordial state and the undeveloped state of the wild lands beyond Rome and Italy. In a similar way, the muddy landscapes of Rome, which were not-quite-land and not-quite-water, were perhaps reminders of the potential instability of Rome and Romanness. A city which was founded on such a slippery and uncertain place could never be sure of its foundations.

Other allusions to Rome’s watery past appear in accounts of the various attempts to control the city’s watery places. The following section considers how some Roman writers see efforts to control and utilize the city’s water — through drains, sewers and aqueducts — as well as how they respond to other hydraulic features such as fish-ponds and ornamental lakes and streams.

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61 Borca (1997), 5.
62 Mud similarly undermined Roman efforts in Gaul and Germany. See below, Chapter V, 171–83.
(iii) Pipedreams

Perhaps the most striking symbols of the Roman power over water were the drains, sewers and aqueducts of the city. The process of draining marshes, reclaiming land and providing Rome with drains and sewers was traditionally ascribed to the Tarquins (Liv. 1.38.6, 1.56.2; D.H. 3.67.5, 4.44.1; Str. 5.8; Plin. Nat. 36.104). According to Livy, Tarquinius Priscus began a series of improvements to the city after his war with the Sabines (Liv. 1.38.6): parts of the city were fortified with stone walls, the foundations of the Temple of Jupiter were laid and open drains were constructed to draw off water from the boggy area around the Forum (Liv. 1.38.6). But it was under Tarquinius Superbus that the main work of building the Cloaca Maxima was completed (Liv. 1.56.2; Plin. Nat. 36.104). Important restoration work was carried out by Agrippa in 33 BC when, according to the elder Pliny, Agrippa sailed through the subterranean drains in a boat to demonstrate both the size and the efficiency of the city’s sewerage system. So large were the drains, Pliny further claims, that a wagon loaded with hay could easily travel along them (Plin. Nat. 36.104–8; cf. D.C. 49.43; Str. 5.3.8).

The drains, aqueducts and baths of Rome were said by many to be among the greatest wonders of the ancient city. For Rutilius Namatianus, Rome’s aqueducts are rivers hanging in the air (aerio pendentes fornice rivos, Rut. Nam. de Reditu Suo 1.97); for Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Rome’s sewers and aqueducts (together with her roads) are monuments to her greatness (D.H. 3.67.5); for the elder Pliny, Rome’s water-supply is worthy to be counted among the wonders of the world:

Herendeen (1986), 53 notes: ‘we think of Rome in terms of aqueducts rather than rivers whose natural course they alter.’ For some of the technical aspects of Rome’s water-supply, see Landels (1997), 34–57.

For details, see Platner and Ashby (1929), 126–7; Richardson (1992), 91–2 (s.v. ‘Cloaca Maxima’). It is in fact unclear when Rome’s earliest drains and sewers were built. See Ogilvie (1965), 156 (ad Liv. 1.38.6), 214 (ad Liv. 1.56.2). According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the job of fixing the city’s muddy places had begun much earlier. At the beginning of the reign of Tatius, he writes, there was a lake and a wood at the foot of the Capitoline hill. Tatius cut down the wood and filled in much of the lake to create the Roman Forum (D.H. 2.50.2).

See too Richardson (1992), 91–2.

Strabo writes similarly of the ‘rivers’ which flow through the city (Str. 5.3.8).
quod si quis diligentius aestumaverit abundantiam aquarum in publico, balineis, piscinis, euripis, domibus, hortis, suburbanis villis, spatia aquae venientes, exstructos arcus, montes perfossos, convalles aequatas, fatebitur nil magis mirandum fuisse in toto orbe terrarum.67

(Rpin. Nat. 36.123)

Rome, suspended above a maze of drains and waterways, was an urbs pensilis to be compared with the horti pensiles of Babylon (Nat. 36.104). In another passage (Nat. 36.105), Pliny writes of the city’s drainage system as a kind of ‘underground, backwards-flowing version of the seven-mouthed Nile.’68 If Rome lacked the splendid buildings and natural marvels of other places, it made up for their absence with a more functional wonder.69

Other references to Rome’s drains and sewers reveal the ambivalence with which Romans sometimes viewed their city’s watery beginnings. While some express awe at Rome’s drains and aqueducts, others are openly critical of the ways in which these were constructed. Livy associates the building of the cloacae with the enslavement of the Roman people. Since there were at that time no foreign slaves in Rome,70 the common people were conscripted to complete Tarquin’s programme of public works (Liv. 1.56.1). Livy claims that this was done not only to ensure that the sewers and other buildings were completed, but also to keep the plebs from becoming restless: a populace without work, Tarquin thought, was only a burden (Liv. 1.56.3). This later prompts Brutus to lament that the people of Rome, who had been accustomed to a free and dignified existence, were under Tarquin reduced to sewer-men, labourers and quarry-workers (in fossas cloacasque exhauriendas demersae; Romanos homines, uictores omnium circa populorum, opifices et lapicidas pro bellatoribus factos, Liv. 1.59.9).71 What is clear is that for Livy, even the wonder of Rome’s drainage is not without its more shameful side.

69 Praises of Rome’s drains and aqueducts often underline their usefulness in contrast to more showy structures such as pyramids. Cf. Fron. Ag. 1.16: Tot aquarum tam multis necessariis molibus pyramidas videlicet otiosas compares aut cetera inertia sed fama celebrata opera Graecorum.
70 Ogilvie (1965), 214 (ad Liv. 1.56.1).
71 Cf. Tac. Ag. 31.1 where Calgacus makes a similar complaint against Agricola.
The elder Pliny also admires Rome’s efficient water-supply (Plin. Nat. 36.104–6, 121–4), but condemns the enormous amount of human labour and suffering which was required to secure it (Nat. 36.107–8): Tarquinius Priscus plebis manibus faceret, essetque labor incertum maior an longior (Nat. 36.107). Pliny claims that many committed suicide to avoid working on the drains and adds the horrific detail that the bodies of those who did so were crucified and, as a warning to the other workers, left to be pecked by birds and gnawed by wild animals (Nat. 36.106). The meaning of this punishment is clear: crucifixion, which was usually reserved for slaves,72 was by Tarquin used against the Roman people themselves. For Pliny, as for Livy, the glory of Rome’s drains and sewers is muddied by their associations with the reign of the cruel and tyrannical Tarquinius.73

Other, quite different, concerns undermine Pliny’s view of Rome’s aqueducts. On the surface, Pliny’s account of these is full of admiration. There has never been anything greater than them in the entire world (fatebitur nil magis mirandum fuisse in toto orbe terrarum, Nat. 36.123), they are ‘unsurpassed marvels’ (invicta miracula, Nat. 36.121) worthy of ‘true regard’ (vera aestimatione, Nat. 36.121). But read beside his descriptions of other works of engineering — such as mining — Pliny’s account of the aqueducts appears in a slightly different light. At the opening of Book 36, Pliny describes the huge upheaval of mountains caused by quarrying for marble (Nat. 36.1–2). Pliny’s primary concern is with the disturbances to nature which mining causes. Mountains, he argues, were created to hold the earth together, to control rivers and enclose oceans. Unlike all other natural things, which Pliny claims were created for the benefit of human beings (Nat. 36.1), mountains were created for nature’s own use (montes natura sibi fecerat, Nat. 36.1). When we cut into mountains, Pliny claims, we damage the very framework of the earth. What is more, all of this is done simply for the sake of luxury (deliciarum causa, Nat. 36.1).74

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73 Frazer (1929), iv, 241 (ad Ov. Fast. 6.401) sees Tarquin’s use of forced labour as an impetus to the formation of the Roman Republic.
74 Also of interest here is Pliny’s perspective on changing ideas of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ behaviour. He uses the example of Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps which at the time was
objects also to the disgraceful sums of money spent on luxurious marble goods (Nat. 36.3), a thought which makes him blush with shame (Nat. 36.4).

In this respect at least, aqueducts differ from mines; whereas aqueducts perform the useful service of bringing clean and healthy water to Roman citizens, mines bring only the unnecessary luxury of marble. It has been suggested, however, that Pliny’s language in writing about the building of the aqueducts is disturbingly close to that which appears at the opening of the book, where he writes about mining.\(^75\) The building of Rome’s aqueducts also required digging through mountains (cuniculis per montes, Nat. 36.121; montes perfossas, Nat. 36.123; convalles aequatas, Nat. 36.123; montem perfossum, Nat. 36.124) and so damaging the earth’s essential structure. Moreover a number of the building works which Pliny describes entailed spending huge sums of money (Nat. 36.122).

Several factors, then, undermine Romans’ initial admiration for the city’s drains, sewers and aqueducts. The draining of the swampy areas of the city was a necessary stage in its development, but it was also a reminder of the slavery of the Roman people and the city’s unsettled foundations. The aqueducts too brought clear benefits to the city, but could only be built by means of an enormous upheaval of the natural world, an activity which was itself often regarded as risky and irreligious.

Other factors too taint the early Romans’ success at controlling their watery surroundings. The attitudes of Livy and Pliny (and those who largely overlook the soggier side of Rome’s early history) might also be explained by some of the traditional associations of water and the superstition attached to tampering with watery places.\(^76\) In a society where the water-supply is safe and efficient, water is perhaps most often associated with health and cleanliness. But water can also be dangerous, unpredictable and destructive. Oceans wear away coasts (and

\(^{75}\) This is a vast subject, and one which can be discussed only briefly here. For some useful discussions of ancient perceptions of water in various forms, see Eliade (1987), s.v. ‘Water’; Jasper Griffin (1985), 88–111; Dunbabin (1989); Bruun (1992). See too Schama (1995), 243–382 for a wide-ranging discussion of human responses to water and watery landscapes.

\(^{76}\) Catharine Edwards (1996), 108.
sometimes even whole islands), rivers flood towns and destroy farm land.\textsuperscript{77} The very existence of Rome’s drains and sewers showed that there were some aspects of nature which could never be fully controlled. Water could be channelled into pipes and pushed underground, but always threatened to come gurgling back up.\textsuperscript{78} Even the Tiber was an ambivalent form of water; on the one hand it was both a useful means of commerce and transport and a natural symbol of the city; on the other, it constantly threatened to break its banks, and its frequent floods often reduced the city to a watery chaos.\textsuperscript{79} Romans’ ambivalence towards their city’s river can be seen in one of the epithets commonly used to describe it; \textit{flavus} means not just yellow, but also muddy and dirty.\textsuperscript{80} The Tiber itself, then, was a permanent reminder of the city’s unstable foundations. While the river allowed the city to flourish, it also threatened to destroy it.

Interfering with water was also commonly regarded with suspicion. Frightening omens, such as a mighty storm and a sweating statue, were believed to have occurred when a channel was cut from the Lucrine lake to Lake Avernus (Serv. Auct. ad Verg. \textit{G}. 2.162). Tacitus records the revealing story that when, after the floods of AD 15, the senate was considering measures to contain the flooding of the Tiber, representatives from a number of Roman colonies objected to the plan, pointing out that they would be disadvantaged if the Tiber’s tributaries were dammed or diverted (Tac. \textit{Ann}. 1.79). They added another reason too for not tampering with the river, claiming: \textit{optume rebus mortalium consuluisse naturam, quae sua ora fluminibus, suos cursus, utque originem, ita finis dederit} (Tac. \textit{Ann}. 1.69).\textsuperscript{81} Tacitus cannot decide just what convinced the senate to abandon the plan

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} E.g. Sen. \textit{Nat}. 4A.2.5; Plin. \textit{Nat}. 2.170, 2.205, 3.5, 36.2. Other passages capture the ambivalent nature of water, by pointing out that it can simultaneously create and destroy. Flooding rivers, for example, can ruin crops, but they can also help to irrigate and fertilize the land. Cf. Sen. \textit{Nat}. 4A.2.1, 4A.2.10; Plin. \textit{Nat}. 18.167.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Gowers (1995), 28–9 notes that sewage pumped into the Tiber sometimes flowed back up the drains when the river flooded.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Cf. Hor. \textit{Carm}. 1.2.13–16; Tac. \textit{Ann}. 1.76; Plin. \textit{Nat}. 3.55. The Tiber’s floods were not always regarded as ill-omened; according to Dio (D.C. 53.20), after the meeting of the Senate at which Octavian received the name ‘Augustus’, the Tiber overflowed and covered all the low areas of the city. This was seen by some as a sign that Augustus ‘would rise to great heights and hold the whole city under his sway’ (Loeb trans.).
\item \textsuperscript{80} Quinn (1980), 139 (ad Hor. \textit{Carm}. 1.8.12). Also cf. Hor. \textit{Carm}. 1.2.13, 1.8.8, 2.3.18; Verg. \textit{A}. 7.31; Ov. \textit{Met}. 14.448, \textit{Fast}. 6.228 (and Bömer [1958], \textit{ad loc}.). See too Richardson (1992), 399 (s.v. ‘Tiberis’).
\item \textsuperscript{81} Cf. Beagon (1992), 197 n. 61.
\end{itemize}
(seu preces coloniarum, seu difficultas operum, sive superstition, Tac. Ann. 1.79), but the uncertain consequences of interfering with the river must surely have been a persuasive argument.

Even to interfere with water on a much smaller scale could be seen as both risky and impious. Roman hostility towards fish-ponds and other water-features is often expressed in terms of a mistrust of interfering with water.\(^\text{82}\) Fish-ponds were not just expensive and extravagant, they were also a subversion of the earth’s natural order. To build a fish-pond was to confuse the most basic of the earth’s natural divisions: that which exists between land and water.\(^\text{83}\) Those who constructed ponds brought water (and sometimes even salt-water) on to land and so presumptuously meddling with the boundaries established by nature. While diatribes against fish-ponds may be simply expressions of a traditional Roman distaste for luxury, it is telling that they are often expressed in terms of the riskiness associated with interfering with water.

These more general associations inevitably tainted Romans’ responses to the wet and muddy landscapes of their city. This traditional mistrust of water was intensified by its uniquely Roman associations, and the place of swamps, rivers and other watery places in the city’s early history. As we have seen, the drains and sewers of the city were for some Romans not only marvels of Roman engineering, but also reminders of the city’s tyrannical past. In other ways too, sewers and drains were ambiguous symbols of Roman power; while they provided an impressive show of the Rome’s capacity to take control of the watery world, they were also the city’s ‘bowels’; places where the muck of the mighty city sloshed about.\(^\text{84}\) It should come as no surprise, then, that references to the sewers (and their contents) feature prominently in Roman diatribe, and that the language of the

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\(^\text{83}\) Catharine Edwards (1993), 147.

\(^\text{84}\) For a discussion of the idea of sewers as the bowels of a city, and of other similarities between civic and bodily functions, see Gowers (1995).
cloacae was a potent form of abuse in Latin.\textsuperscript{85} It must sometimes have been difficult for Romans to reconcile the idea of drains, sewers and aqueducts as wonders of the city with their more sordid and murky associations. Some believed that drains, sewers and aqueducts demonstrated the Roman people’s power over watery environments; others saw that such power was impossible. Roman attempts to control their watery environment were, then, essentially pipedreams.

4. Woods

Many descriptions of the pre-Roman landscape of Latium mention not only its water, but also its woods. Varro, Livy, Vergil (A. 8.347–8), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (D.H. 2.15.4), Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid (Fast. 2.435–6, 3.263–4) all refer to the forests and trees of early Latium. In fact passages such as these are probably more important for their symbolic value than for their topographical accuracy. By the time of even the earliest Latin literature, human beings had fundamentally altered the landscape of peninsular Italy.\textsuperscript{86} Indeed as the elder Cato was writing his de Agri Cultura, there was probably little woodland left completely untouched by human activity.\textsuperscript{87} As a consequence of this, some modern scholars believe that for most Romans living in Italy during the historical period, the ‘wilderness’ was not a tangled forest, but an uncultivated area of scrubby growth: ‘For the vast majority of Romans in Italy, the uncultivated salus

\textsuperscript{85} Gowers (1995), 28–30. The baths too were problematic as symbols of Romanness. While on the one hand they were associated with health and cleanliness, they could also be associated with luxury and decadence, sexual assignations and cholera and other water-born diseases. See further Dunbabin (1989). See too Jasper Griffin (1985), 88–111 on the sensual and sometimes decadent associations of water.


(as opposed to *silva*) would have offered a quite sufficiently “wild” landscape to constitute a wilderness.\(^88\) These uncultivated areas were not necessarily unproductive. They provided fuel, food, medicines, stocks for fruit trees and feed for animals.\(^89\) Forests too could provide pitch, oils, unguents and fruits as well as timber for building, furniture, statues and fuel.\(^90\) They also provided a living for shepherds and woodsmen, and offered a hide-out for brigands and other outcasts.\(^91\) Indeed the woods around Rome had long been frequented by human beings, and the inhabitants of Latium had already altered the natural landscape both by using the natural resources of wooded areas and by clearing forests for agriculture and pasturing.\(^92\)

Contemporary landscape historians disagree as to how much such activities had altered the landscape of Italy and the Mediterranean region by the historical period. Russell Meiggs writes that there is little in either Greek or Roman literature to suggest that there was much concern about the ways in which human activity — and particularly the ever-increasing demand for timber — affected the natural environment.\(^93\) By contrast, J. Donald Hughes claims that deforestation and other forms of environmental degradation were of great concern to many ancient Greek and Roman writers.\(^94\) What is important, however, is that Romans themselves chose to stress their city’s woody origins. The woods of Latium were important not only for the raw materials which they provided, but also because they were the place where both Rome and Romanness had their beginnings. When

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\(^{88}\) Delano Smith (1996), 177. This may help to explain the common Roman aversion to the far more wild places of Britain, Gaul and Germany.


\(^{90}\) See further Meiggs (1986) for a discussion of the supply and uses of timber in the ancient Mediterranean region. See too Books 12–17 of Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* for an account of the many uses of trees and their products.

\(^{91}\) Forbes (1996).

\(^{92}\) While it is possible to find references to the dense and unfrequented woods of Latium in ancient writings (e.g. Tphr. *HP* 5.8.1, 3; Liv. 1.33.9, 3.22.9, 9.36.1), it is difficult to know how accurate these writings are. Cf. Perlin (1989), 103–4; Meiggs (1986), 39–48 and *passim*.

\(^{93}\) Cf. Meiggs (1986), 377: ‘Although Plato [*Critias* 111] describes the permanent damage to the environment that can be done by deforestation, there is very little evidence elsewhere in Greek or Latin literature of consciences disturbed by an excessive exploitation of forests. The only complaint known to me is a mild protest in the late Roman Empire against overcutting in the Apennine forests [Sidonius 5.441–5].’

\(^{94}\) E.g. Hughes (1994), 73: ‘No environmental problem of the Greeks and Romans was as widespread and prominent as the removal of forests and the ensuing erosion.’
writing about the history of their city, Romans imagine its transformation from a wilderness of swamps and forests to an orderly urban landscape.

A number of place-names in the city helped to remind Romans of its woody origins. The Porta Querquetulana was named from the oak trees which once grew there (Plin. *Nat.* 16.37); the Caelian Hill was likewise once named the *Querquetulanus* from the dense forest of oak trees which grew there, and was only later named the Caelian after the Etruscan Caeles Vibenna (Tac. *Ann.* 4.65); the Viminal was so named because of a growth of willows (*vimina*) which once stood there (Plin. *Nat.* 16.37); the area on the Campus Martius known as the Aesculetum commemorated the *aesculi* which had once grown there in profusion (Var. *L.* 5.152; Plin. *Nat.* 16.37); the Fagutal commemorated a particularly impressive beech tree (*fagus*, *Nat.* 16.37); Corneta was similarly named from the cornel trees which had once covered it; the Esquiline was once covered by *aesculi* (Var. *L.* 5.49). Individual trees such as the *ficus Ruminalis* (Liv. 1.4.5; Var. *R.* 2.11.5), the fig tree of Attus Navius (D.H. 3.71.5; Plin. *Nat.* 15.77) and a cypress tree believed to have been as old as the city itself (Plin. *Nat.* 16.236) also reinforced the link between the Roman people and the trees of the forest.

This link was, however, in many ways problematic for Romans. While the woods of Latium often provide an evocative setting for the events of Rome’s early history, they also appear as obstacles to Rome and Romanness. Forests and other wild places often appear as the enemies of Rome in accounts of Roman military campaigns; but these battles were in a sense a continuation of those which began with the city itself. In the *Aeneid*, the woods of Italy appear to symbolize the natural toughness of the inhabitants of early Italy. Vergil’s description of the palace of Latinus in Book 7, for example, draws attention to the king’s links to the woodland gods of Italy: the nymph Marica (*A.* 7.47), Faunus (*A.* 7.47) and Picus

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95 Others, such as the Forum Boarium, Lacus Pastorum, Caprae Palus (Liv. 1.16.1), Gallinae Albae, Caput Bubula (cf. Suet. *Aug.* 5.1) and Malum Punicum (Suet. *Dom.* 1.1), recall its pastoral beginnings. See too Bonjour (1975b), 121.
96 Cf. Pliny *Nat.* 3.39 on the Querquetulani who once inhabited Latium.
98 The elder Pliny also records that a number of Roman families took their cognomina from trees (Plin. *Nat.* 17.7).
99 See Chapter V, esp. 171ff.
(A. 7.48). Similarly, in his catalogue of Latin peoples at the close of Book 7, Vergil emphasizes their ancestral links to the forests of Latium (A. 7.647ff.). In Aeneid 8, Evander speaks of the fauns and nymphs who once inhabited the region (A. 8.314–15). Finally, in Book 9, the Rutulian Numanus Remulus boasts of his people’s woodland lives (A. 9.603–8).

To the Trojans, however, the woods of Latium are obstacles to the founding of their new city. At a number of points in the poem, Vergil describes the Trojans’ desecration of trees and forests, and the quite different consequences of their actions. Vergil establishes the contradictory relationship between Trojans and trees at an early stage in the poem, when he has Aeneas recall how he unintentionally desecrated the tomb of Polydorus when he stripped it of shrubs and leafy branches to dedicate to Venus (A. 3.19ff.). Here Aeneas is shown the impiety of his actions when the trees themselves begin to drip blood (Aen. 3.27–33), and Polydorus’ shade chastizes him (A. 3.41–6). Aeneas recognizes his transgression (against both trees and tomb), and is appropriately terrified by the portents: tum vero ancipiti mentem formidine pressus | obstipui steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit (A. 3.47–8).

At other times, however, and especially once they reach Italy, the Trojans’ repeated destruction of trees and forests produces no such ominous results. In Cumae, some of the Trojans explore the unknown streams (A. 6.8), while others ‘pillage the forests’ (pars ... rapit silvas, A. 6.7–8) for firewood. Vergil’s choice of words is revealing: rapio has strong connotations of violence, and suggests that the forest actively resists the Trojans, who can only take the wood by force. Perhaps the most famous episode of the poem — the plucking of the ‘golden bough’ — similarly suggests the natural world’s resistance to the Trojans (Aen.

100 For a useful analysis of this passage, see Horsfall (1990).
101 Verg. A. 3.22–9, 6.179–82, 6.136–48, 12.766–71. On this theme in the Aeneid, see Richard F. Thomas (1988c). Thomas ponders why, although the Trojans repeatedly attack trees and sacred woods, they never suffer the kind of divine retribution which we might have expected. He concludes: ‘That tangible punishment does not attend these acts is one of the many signs that the world which we see Aeneas creating is to be very different from the one he found. Civilization will bring with it peace and order, ... but there will be a price.’ See too Nethercut (1968), 88–9; Reckford (1974). Some have discerned similar ideas in the Georgics. Cf. Ross (1980); idem (1987), 104–9; Richard F. Thomas loc. cit., 271–3.
102 Richard F. Thomas (1988c), 266.
103 Cf. Verg. A. 2.374–5: alií rapiunt incensa feruntque | Pergama; vos celsis nunc primum a navibus itis?
6.210–11; cf. 6.136–44), but also its eventual subjugation.\(^{104}\) Another event in *Aeneid* 6 — the burial of Misenus — also involves a battle between Trojans and trees:

\[
\text{itur in antiquam siluam, stabula alta ferarum;}
\text{procumbunt piceae, sonat icta securibus ilex}
\text{fraxineaeque trabeis cuneis et fissile robur}
\text{scinditur, aduoluunt ingentis montibus ornos.}
\]

\(^{(Verg. A. 6.179–82)}^{105}\)

Vergil’s use of the impersonal verb *itur* here establishes a tone of solemnity and ritual.\(^{106}\) Likewise his description of the forest as *antiquus* (A. 6.179) suggests not only its great age, but also its sanctity.\(^{107}\) His attention to particular types of tree (*picea, ilex, fraxinea, robur, ornos*) also contrasts tellingly with the Trojans’ own indifference to the ancient forest; for them it is again just a source of wood.

In the final battle of the poem, the Trojans destroy a tree sacred to the woodland god and early Latin king, Faunus:

\[
\text{Forte sacer Fauno foliis oleaster amaris}
\text{hic steterat, nautis olim uenerabile lignum,}
\text{seruati ex undis ubi figere dona solebant}
\text{Laurenti diuo et uotas suspendere uestis;}
\]

\[
\text{sed stirpem Teucris nullo discrimine sacrum}
\text{sustulerant, puro ut possent concurrere campo.}
\]

\(^{(Verg. A. 12.766–71)}^{105}\)

This episode reinforces the contrast between the wild tribes of Italy, who worship and sustain the forests and their gods, and the Romans, who see them simply as obstacles to their battle. The type of tree which Vergil describes is also important

\(^{104}\) On this episode see, among others, Richard F. Thomas (1988c), 266–7.


\(^{106}\) Williams (1968), 264.

\(^{107}\) Williams (1968), 264, 382. This forest too, like that which provided firewood for the Trojans at the opening of Book 6, was once occupied only by wild animals (Verg. A. 6.179; cf. 6.7–8).
here. Like the people themselves, the tree is tough, but uncultivated. In the
\textit{Georgics} the same tree represents ‘the stage before man’s propagation arrives, and
… stands in opposition to the civilizing ventures of man.’\footnote{Richard F. Thomas (1988c), 269. See too Weadon (1981); Richard F. Thomas (1988a), 213 (ad Verg. \textit{G.} 2.314).} When the Trojans
destroy the tree, then, they also in a sense destroy a way of life.

All of these episodes need to be read in the context of ancient beliefs
regarding the sanctity of trees and forests. There are many examples of the
punishment which could be expected to befall those who desecrate sacred groves
or chop down sacred trees.\footnote{Probably the most familiar example is Erysichthon (Ov. \textit{Met.} 8.738–878). See too Richard F. Thomas (1988c); Henrichs (1979).} In view of these, we might reasonably have
expected Aeneas and the Trojans’ actions to meet with some kind of divine
retribution. The fact that they do not — particularly in \textit{Aeneid} 12 — suggests that
they bring with them to Italy a kind of ‘new order’, where the sense of \textit{religio}
attached to trees and forests by the native inhabitants will be lost.

Lucan also uses images of trees and deforestation to suggest the struggle
against the old order (represented by Pompey) and the new (represented by Julius
Caesar).\footnote{See further Richard F. Thomas (1988c), 268–70 and, more generally, Masters (1992), 25–7 on ‘the theme of forests, woods, trees and deforestation’ in Lucan’s poem.} The struggle is first suggested in Book 1, where Lucan likens Pompey
to a venerable but shaky oak tree (Luc. 1.136–42) and Caesar to the fiery bolt of
lightning who will destroy him (Luc. 1.151–7).\footnote{Rosner-Siegel (1983); Fantham (1996a).} The association of Caesar with
fire recurs throughout the poem, particularly when he is faced with watery
obstacles such as the Rubicon (Luc. 1.204–5), the snow of the Alps (1.183–5), the
ocean (5.403–60) or a storm (5.476–677).\footnote{Rosner-Siegel (1983), 168–70, 172–3.} The imagery involved here is all the
more striking as it entails a reversal of the normal patterns of nature: here fire
‘conquers’ water.\footnote{As noted by Rosner-Siegel (1983), 168.}

These episodes also suggest a more general opposition between Caesar and
wild nature. This comes to the forefront of the poem in Book 3 with the siege of
Massilia and Caesar’s desecration of a sacred grove (Luc. 3.394–452). To Caesar, the forests surrounding the town are a necessary source of timber (Luc. 3.375–87); having exhausted their supply, he then turns to a nearby grove:

Lucus erat longo numquam violatus ab aevo obscurum cingens conexit aera ramis et gelidas alte summotis solibus umbras. hunc non ruricoalae Panes nemorumque potentes Silvani Nymphaeque tenent, sed barbaru ritu sacra deum; structae diris altaribus arae omnisque humanis lustrata cruoribus arbor. si qua fidem meruit superos mirata vetustas, illis et volucres metuunt insistere ramis et lustris recubare ferae; nec ventus in illas incubuit silvas excussaque nubibus atris fulgura: non ulli frondem praebentibus aurae arboribus suus horror inest …

(Luc. 3.399–411)

Lucan’s brings to mind a number of earlier sacred groves, in particular those of Vergil (A. 6.180–2; cf. Luc. 3.440–1) and Ovid (Am. 3.1.1–2, 3.13.7–8; Fast. 2.435–6, 3.263–4, 3.295–6, 4.649–50). Lucan, however, distorts the Ovidian grove and turns it into a far more fearsome and even gory place.

The Roman soldiers realize the impiety of cutting down these sacred trees (Luc. 3.429–32); Caesar, however, takes up an axe himself (3.433–5) and almost dares the gods of the grove to punish him. ‘Credite me fecisse nefas’ (Luc. 3.437) he calls out. The tree he strikes is an oak (aeriam ... quercum, Luc. 3.434), and it is difficult to read this passage without recalling the passage in Book 1 where Pompey was likened to a sacred oak-tree (Luc. 1.136–42). Anyone familiar with the morals of myth — namely the fate of Erysichthon — might join with Caesar’s troops in expecting some form of divine punishment to befall the

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114 Phillips (1968) argues that this episode was based not on any real incident, but rather on Ovid’s version of the story of Erysichthon (Ov. Met. 8.738–878). Dyson (1970) points to a real event (Tac. Ann. 14.30) which may also have influenced Lucan.


116 Masters (1992), 25–6. This passage has also been seen as a comment on Lucan’s own ‘plundering of poetic material’. See Masters loc. cit., 27. See too Hinds (1987), 35–42 on word-plays between lacus, lucus and locus.

117 Rosner-Siegel (1983), 176.

Romans; the defenders of Massilia, for example, are quite gleeful at the sight of Caesar’s act of desecration: *muris sed clausa iuventus | exultat; quis enim laesos impune putaret | esse deos?* (Luc. 3.446–8). But Caesar remains (at least in the short term) unpunished (Luc. 3.448–9). Like Vergil, Lucan uses images of trees, forests and the destruction of these to comment on both individual characters (Aeneas, Caesar and Pompey) and broader historical events.

5. Conclusion

I began this chapter by arguing that Romans had mixed feelings about the site of their city. On the one hand, the topography of Rome (and of Italy as a whole) was a cause for Roman pride, as the many passages in praise of Italy testify; on the other, Romans had had to struggle against their natural surroundings to build their city and improve its amenities. Roads, drains, sewers, aqueducts and other constructions were all marvels of Roman engineering, but they were also reminders that the natural setting of the city was in reality less than perfect. As we shall see in a later chapter, this way of thinking about the development of the city also affected how Roman writers wrote about Rome’s experiences of other similarly wet and woody places. Just as the city of Rome had in a sense been imposed on to the wild landscape of Latium, Roman culture continued to define itself in terms of its opposition to wild places.119

This was not the only way that Romans shaped and ‘Romanized’ the physical world. In other ways too places could in a sense become tinted with Romanness. The following chapter turns from the earliest Romans’ attempts to reshape their natural surroundings to the ways in which their actions and beliefs gave meaning to natural spots, both in the city itself and beyond.

119 See Chapter V, below.
Roman Place and Roman History

TUESDAY 26 MARCH. We viewed the celebrated Forum. I experienced sublime and melancholy emotions as I thought of all the great affairs which had taken place there ...

James Boswell

1.

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the idea that Rome’s early history was closely tied up with the Romans’ ability to manage the natural environment of Latium. Accounts of the founding and early history of the city frequently call attention to the natural obstacles which stood in the way of the earliest Romans (as well as to the natural advantages which they so effectively exploited), and the relationship between Roman power and Roman nature is a prominent theme of rhetorical praises of Rome and Italy. The aim of the present chapter is to consider how natural environments continued to play an important role in developing ideas of Romanness, both as the settings for Roman events and as natural monuments to Roman deeds. The first section discusses some general ideas about the connections between nature and national identity, before moving on to perhaps the most famous of Rome’s natural features: the Tiber and the seven hills. Next I discuss the narrative function of certain natural features in Livy’s history. Here I argue that Livy uses places to comment on the actions and behaviour of individual Romans, as well as to tell the story of the city’s history. The final part of the chapter looks at the aetiological and historical writings of Vergil, Propertius and

1 Brady and Pottle (1955), 63.
Ovid, and considers how they too use the familiar natural features of the city to tie together their writings about Roman history and culture.

Writers have often noted that the history of Rome can be read in the city’s buildings and monuments; indeed the city of Rome has sometimes been described as a kind of manuscript on to which the Roman people’s history is written not in words, but in temples, fora, roads and bridges. Many travellers to Rome have described their experience of the city in just these terms. Petrarch, for example, writes of his time spent in Rome:

We used to wander together in that great city … and at each step there was present something which would excite our tongue and mind: here was the palace of Evander, there the shrine of Carmentis, here the cave of Cacus, there the famous she-wolf and the fig-tree of Rumina.

Edward Gibbon, who was familiar with Petrarch’s letter, remembers his first sight of Rome in a similar way:

My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm which I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect. But at the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the eternal City. After a sleepless night, I trod with lofty step the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation.

The ‘memorable spots’ which Gibbon and Petrarch describe are not only buildings (the palace of Evander, the shrine of Carmentis), but also natural features (the cave of Cacus, the fig-tree of Rumina). Indeed trees, caves and hills can be just as important as columns, temples and arches as monuments to the events of the past. Nature too, then, could be seen as a record of Roman history. Here was not just the city of Rome, but the place where many of the events which

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3 Cf. Dupont (1992), 73–4: ‘The Romans lived and thought in spacial rather than in temporal terms…. Roman memory, lacking any anchorage in the inspired works of ancient poets, was rooted in the sacred ground of the city. To walk around Rome was to travel through its memory, past Romulus’ cabin, Cacus’ rock and Egeria’s wood.’ See too Cancik (1985–6), 251 on the idea of ‘nature tinged with religion and politics’.
7 On this way of looking at the natural world, see further Tuan (1974), 93–5, 99–100.
made up Roman history, Roman culture and Roman identity had taken place. Indeed Petrarch and Gibbon were responding to a way of looking at the city, encouraged by Romans themselves, whereby national legends, historical events, popular memory and literary episodes give meaning to the physical world.

2. Natural scenes and national identity

Writers and painters have long used landscapes and natural scenes as symbols of national identity. In popular culture — such as postcards, posters and tourists’ souvenirs — a place is often represented by a particular type of landscape: Switzerland by snow-capped mountains, edelweiss, crystal lakes and goatherds; Italy by vineyards, olive groves, stony ruins and stuccoed walls; Egypt by scorched sand, palm trees, pyramids and camels. In an article in which he explores the factors which prompt us to value particular types of landscape, David Lowenthal discusses the role of a common national history in shaping our responses to natural spots. The ways in which a particular ‘landscape or locality’ figures in a people’s history can influence the landscape preferences of those with a knowledge of this history. ‘Like individuals,’ Lowenthal writes,

groups that share experiences and expectations exhibit distinctive preferences for particular places. Every nation has landscapes felt to characterize the country or to symbolize its culture. Attachment to specific localities hallowed by history or folk memory evokes patriotic feeling and fosters national identity.

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10 Lowenthal (1978), 409. Lowenthal further notes that such nationally significant places often become centres of tourism, partly because they are thought to ‘epitomize what is remarkable about the visited country’ (ibid., 410). Also cf. Williams and Smith (1983), 509: ‘the identity of the nation is bound up with memory, and this memory is rooted in a homeland. Its mountains are sacred, its rivers are full of memories, its lakes recall distant oaths and battles, all of which have been commemorated in national epics and ballads, and attracted countless legends … History has nationalized a strip of land, and endowed its most ordinary features with mythical content and hallowed sentiments.’
In English culture, for example, it is the countryside which has long had an important role as a symbol of national identity. Throughout the early modern period, images of the land and scenes of rural labour were used in both painting and literature to promote different aspects of ‘the English character’. England was a land of orderly fields and grassy hills, winding lanes and sparkling streams, thatched cottages and village greens. The inhabitants of this rural landscape — hardy labourers and jolly country squires — were believed to embody national virtues such as industry, honesty and respect for the customs of their ancestors.

Specific places (Lowenthal’s ‘localities’) can also become symbols of national identity. Most often it is a place which has been the scene of an important event in a people’s history which becomes such a symbol. In English culture, for example, places such as Hastings, Runnymede, Sherwood Forest and Stratford-upon-Avon might be seen to represent some of the people and events which have contributed to ideas of Englishness. For many Australians, places names such as Botany Bay and Gallipoli similarly bring with them stories of the events which have taken place there. Often such a place is marked by a monument, plaque, or statue; in other cases, the importance of a particular landscape is recorded in a people’s literature, folklore or popular memory. Historians, poets and other writers also often encourage these nationally significant places by ensuring that the events attached to them — whether historical or legendary — are remembered by their readers.

The city of Rome itself is one such symbolic landscape. When Romans want to evoke the city, they often do so by writing of its individual places. These, far more than its name alone, serve to produce a picture of the ancient city which encompasses not only its physical structure, but also its history. In Tristia 3.1, for example, Ovid imagines his book, a stranger in Rome (hospes in urbe, Ov. Tr. 1.1.20), visiting the evocative places of the city: the forum of Caesar, the Via Sacra, the temple of Vesta, the site of Numa’s palace, the temple of Jupiter Stator.

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11 For a recent discussion of the relationship between land and national identity in English culture, see Helsinger (1997); Lowenthal (1991).

12 Other places, especially those which have been involved in more recent historical and international events, can be meaningful in a number of cultures. Examples might be Ypres or the Somme; Pearl Harbour or Hiroshima.
and finally Augustus’ house (Ov. *Tr.* 3.1.27–32). Elsewhere too, when Ovid thinks of the city of Rome, he does so by recalling places in the city:

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aque domo rursus pulchrae loca vertor ad urbis,
cunctaque mens oculis pervidet usa suis.
nunc fora, nunc aedes, nunc marmore tecta theatra,
nunc subit aqua porticus omnis humo.
gramina nunc Campi pulchros spectantis in hortos,
stagnaque et euripi Virgineusque liquor.
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Here places in the city which held common meanings for Roman citizens come together to represent both the city of Rome and the quality of Romanness.

How was it that the city had become such a meaningful repository for ideas of Romanness? The answer lies in part in the ways in which Romans themselves were accustomed to think about both their geographical position in the world and the landscape of their city. Romans, perhaps more than any other ancient people, identified themselves in terms of their place in the natural world.14 Praises of Italy — and of Rome itself — often single out the natural blessings of the region to explain and justify Roman greatness. Furthermore, Roman writers often show how the actions of the Roman people gradually gave meaning to the non-human world. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, they did this by altering the physical environment in which they built their settlement; but the early Romans also shaped their descendants’ vision of the city by ensuring that particular parts of the landscape were forever associated the events which had taken place there. Accordingly particular natural features in the city — trees, rocks, springs, hills and other natural features — came to be revered because they were believed to have provided the settings for important events in the city’s myth-history.15

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13 On this poem, see Williams (1994), 26–48.
14 In her study of the themes of founding and capturing cities in Livy’s fifth book, Christina S. Kraus writes: ‘Romanness, on this argument, is defined by the place where the Romans live, not by their attitude or customs — the converse of the idea that a city is not its physical structures but its people’ (Kraus [1994b], 281 n. 53). I would suggest that Romanness is made up of both the place where Romans live and the meanings which Romans have given to this place; neither place nor actions alone can make Romanness.
15 Lucan touches on this idea in his account of Julius Caesar’s visit to Troy: *aspicit Hesiones scopulos silvaeque latentes | Anchisae thalamos; quo iudex sederit antro, | unde puer raptus caelo, quo vertice Nais | luxerit Oenone: nullum est sine nomine saxum* (Luc. 9.970–3). The Loeb translator renders this phrase as ‘a legend clings to every stone’.
It is for these reasons that Rome has been described as a ‘sacred landscape’ in which human activities give meaning to the physical world.\textsuperscript{16} Hubert Cancik defines a sacred landscape as ‘a thoroughly historical and social concept, which considers nature as the environment of men, always modified, exploited, destroyed, or “embellished”’.\textsuperscript{17} One of the first to write about the history of Rome in these terms was Varro. Although there were writers before him who wrote about early Roman myth and history,\textsuperscript{18} it was Varro who, in a thorough and systematic way, set about providing a corpus of writings about Roman history and culture. Like the philosophical writings of Cicero, the works of Varro were important in helping Romans to see their place in the world, and to realize their cultural independence from Greece. In a passage in the \textit{Academica}, Cicero praises Varro for his efforts to show the Roman people that their customs and history — just as much as those of Greece — were worthy of study. Varro saw no point in writing about the subjects of Greek philosophy in the Latin language, and instead wrote about the history, language and customs of Rome (Cic. \textit{Ac}. 1.9). Indeed it was Varro, Cicero writes, who acted as a guide for the Roman people when they were like strangers in their own land (\textit{Ac}. 1.9).

Topography was for Varro an essential element of the city’s history and legends. Varro was interested not so much in the natural advantages of Rome’s place on the Tiber (although, like many other Roman writers, he too indulges in some praises of Italy; cf. Var. \textit{R}. 1.2.1–7), as in the ways individual places could be used to piece together a record of the Roman past. As we know from information and extracts preserved by Saint Augustine (\textit{de Civitate Dei} 6),\textsuperscript{19} Varro produced works on sanctuaries and sacred buildings (\textit{de sacellis, de sacris aedibus}) and on holy places (\textit{de locis religiosis}).\textsuperscript{20} In the \textit{de Lingua Latina} too, Varro records the origins and significance of a number of place names in the city,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{16} Cancik (1985–6).
\bibitem{17} Cancik (1985–6), 260. See too \textit{ibid.}, 253 where Cancik further defines a ‘sacred landscape’ as ‘a constellation of natural phenomena constituted as a meaningful system by means of artificial and religious signs, by telling names or etiological stories fixed to certain places, and by rituals which actualize the space’.
\bibitem{19} Rawson (1985), 236; Catharine Edwards (1996), 5 n. 9.
\bibitem{20} Cancik (1985–6), 251; Catharine Edwards (1996), 4–6.
\end{thebibliography}
and reminds us that much of the history of the city can be read in its landscape (Var. L. 5.41–6, 144–59).\(^{21}\)

(i)  **Natural monuments: the Tiber and the seven hills**

Perhaps the most famous natural symbols of Rome are the Tiber and the seven hills.\(^{22}\) Romans were themselves aware of the importance of the Tiber to their city; not only did it facilitate trade and commerce, it also helped to shape the city’s identity.\(^{23}\) These beliefs were based in part on traditional ethnographic theory according to which natural features, such as rivers and coastlines, shaped the characters and attributes of the people who lived near them. Accordingly, Rome was ideally situated at a distance from the sea but on a navigable river, so that the inhabitants of the city could both trade with other peoples and remain relatively safe from attack by sea and the enticements of the beach.\(^{24}\) While the Tiber was of geographical and strategic importance to the inhabitants of Rome, it also came to be seen as a symbol of both the city itself and the qualities of Romanness.

The Tiber becomes an important symbol of Rome and Romanness in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Here the river, together with Hesperia as a whole, becomes one of the ‘objective geographical features which identify Aeneas’ future city’.\(^{25}\) In Book 2, for example, Aeneas tells how the ghost of Creusa appeared to him in Troy, and told him of the difficulties still to come:

\[
\text{‘longa tibi exsilia et uastum maris aequor arandum,}
\]

\(^{21}\) Varro is believed to have treated similar subjects in the *Antiquitae Rerum Humanarum* and the *Antiquitae Rerum Divinarum*. See Augustine de Civ. D. 6 on the structure of Varro’s works. See too Rawson (1985), 233–48, 312–16.

\(^{22}\) Var. L. 5.41 points out that ‘Septimontium’ was once the name of the site of the city. The importance of the hills — and indeed of many other natural spots in the city — was reinforced by the many festivals which centred around them. See further Beard (1987). The function of such festivals, Beard argues, was to ‘define and delineate Roman power, Roman history and Roman identity’ (*loc. cit.*, 1), and so to mould time itself into a Roman form.

\(^{23}\) The Tiber also had an important liminal function. Cf. Liv. 8.14.5, 8.20.9, 26.34.7; Hor. Carm. 1.2.14; D.H. 1.28.1; Juv. 8.264–5. See too Wiseman (1995), 35; Purcell (1996), 186–7.

\(^{24}\) Cf. Le Gall (1953), 42–3; Purcell (1996), 184 and *passim*.

et terram Hesperiam uenies, ubi Lydius arua
inter opima uirum leni fluit agmine Thybris.'

(Verg. A. 2.780–2)

Creusa here speaks of the Trojans’ new *patria* in terms of its natural topography: it is the western land of fruitful fields and the gently-flowing Tiber. Aeneas himself refers to the river in Book 3 of the poem. As he is about to leave Buthrotum, Aeneas speaks to Helenus and Andromache of uniting their cities to create a new Troy:

‘sì quando Thybrim uicinaque Thybridis arua
intraro gentique meae data moenia cernam,
cognatas urbes olim populose propinquos,
Epiro Hesperiam (quibus idem Dardanus auctor
atque idem causa), unam faciemus utramque
Troiam animis: maneat nostros ea cura nepotes.’

(Verg. A. 3.500–5)

In each of these passages, the Tiber (A. 2.782, 3.500) is seen as one of the defining features of the Trojans’ new land. Aeneas speaks of the Tiber in a similar way at the tomb of Anchises (*‘non licuit finis Italos fataliaque arua | nec tecum Ausonium, quicumque est, quaerere Thybrim.’* 5.82–3), and the Trojan ambassadors to Latinus similarly identify the land as the place of the Tiber (7.242). It is the river more than any other natural feature which identifies the spot where the Trojans will establish their new *patria*.26

The river becomes still more important in the second half of the poem. At the opening of Book 7, Vergil uses the peaceful setting of the river and its banks to announce a new and more auspicious stage in Aeneas’ journey:

Iamque rubescebat radiis mare et aethere ab alto
Aurora in roseis fulgebat lutea bigis,
cum uenti posuere omnisque repente resedit
flatus, et in lento luctantur marmore tonsae.
atque hic Aeneas ingentem ex aequore lucum
prospicit. hunc inter fluvio Tiberinus amoeno
uerticibus rapidis et multa flauus harena
in mare prorumpit. uariae circumque supraque
adsuetae ripis uolucres et fluminis alueo

26 Also cf. Verg. A. 5.797, 6.87, 6.873, 7.151 (with the river Numicus); 7.240–2, 7.303, 7.436.
aethera mulcebant cantu lucoque uolabant,  
flectere iter sociis terraeque aduertere proras  
imperat et laetus fluuio succedit opaco.

(Verg. A. 7.25–36)

The Tiber not only provides a passage into Latinus’ city, but also symbolizes Aeneas’ evolving ‘Italianness’. This is confirmed when later, on the bank of the Tiber, Aeneas prays to the Penates of Troy, and hails Italy as the Trojans’ new homeland (7.120–7). The river has a particularly important role in Book 8 of the poem. Here the Tiber god himself welcomes Aeneas to Italy, and advises him to seek help from Evander and the Arcadians (8.26–65). Indeed the river helpfully calms its waters as Aeneas sails to Pallanteum (8.57–8, 86–9), reminding us that nature and the gods themselves (here represented by the slimy blue god of the river) approve the Trojans’ quest.27

Like the Tiber, the seven hills were seen as defining features of the ancient city. References to Rome as the city of the seven hills first become common in Augustan literature.28 Vergil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid all refer to the city’s seven hills. Often the hills are used simply to identify and characterize the city. The seven hills, like the Tiber, help to distinguish Rome from all other cities (cf. Prop. 3.11.57–8: se septem urbs alta iurgis, toto quae praesidet orbi, | stat non humana deicienda manu; cf. Hor. Saec. 7: dis, quibus septem placuere colles). Ovid claims that his exile is all the more difficult to bear because his home is not a Greek city, but Rome. Again the city is identified by its hills:

nec mihi Dulichium domus est Ithaceve Samosve,  
poena quibus non est grandis abesse locis:  
sed quae de septem totum circumspicit orbem  
monibus, inperii Roma deumque locus.

(Ov. Tr. 1.5.67–70)

27 See Cairns (1989), 109–28 on Vergil’s use of other natural features, such as the Appennines, to suggest Aeneas’ essential ‘Italianness’. See too Herendeen (1986), 55–8.
28 Cf. Verg. G. 2.534, A. 6.783 (and Serv. ad loc.); Hor. Saec. 7; Tib. 2.5.55; Prop. 3.11.57; Ov. Tr. 1.5.69, 3.7.51–2. See too Mart. 4.64.11; Stat. Silv. 1.2.191, 1.5.23, 1.6.100, 4.1.6. Cf. Smith (1913), 461–2.
The hills can also represent the stability and security of the city. Tibullus foreshadows the future greatness of the hills by encouraging cattle to graze there while they have the chance: *carpite nunc, tauri, de septem montibus herbas | dum licet: hic magnae iam locus urbis erit* (Tib. 2.5.55–6). Vergil’s Anchises prophesies the day when Rome will have dominion over the earth and enclose seven hills within its walls (*en huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma | imperium terris, animos aequabit Olymipo, | septemque una sibi muro circumdabit arces*) (Verg. A. 6.781–3; cf. A. 1.275–7; G. 2.534). Vergil’s use of the word *arces* (rather than the more usual *montes*) to refer to the hills can perhaps be read as a recognition of the hills’ defensive value.30

Such was the connection between the city and the hills that it seemed impossible for one to exist without the other. Statius, for example, brings together the Tiber and the seven hills in a poem describing the Saturnalia and the spectacles (banquets, gladiatorial fights, dancing girls, musicians, exotic animals) which celebrated it:

> Quos ibit procul hic dies per annos!  
> quam nullo sacer exolescet aevō!  
> dum montes Latii paterque Thybris,  
> dum stabit tua Roma dumque terries  
> quod reddis Capitolium manebit.  

(Stat. Silv. 1.6.98–102)

The seven hills (natural rather than man-made monuments) could be expected to outlast the showy but ephemeral structures of other cities.31

The hills are also important for the ways in which they helped Romans to piece together events from their city’s early history. Like other topographical features, the hills of Rome came to be associated with a series of events. The Palatine was known to be the place of the earliest settlement at Rome (cf. Liv. 1.7.3, 1.33; Tac. Ann. 12.24),32 but was also believed to have the site of the old

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29 The hills were commonly referred to as *montes*. Cf. Var. L. 5.7.41; Ov. Tr. 1.5.69–70.
30 Cf. Var. L. 5.151: *arx ab arcendo, quod is locus munitissimus urbis, a quo facillime possit hostis prohiberi*.
31 The pyramids are sometimes ridiculed in this respect. Cf. Plin. Nat. 36.103; Front. Ag. 1.16.
Arcadian settlement of Pallanteum (Liv. 1.4; Verg. A. 8.51–4). Some said that it was named after the Pallantes who settled there, others after wife of Latinus (Palanto or Pallantia), others after the flocks (pecus) which once grazed on the hill (Var. L. 5.53). The Aventine was remembered both as the place where Remus stood to observe the auspices for the founding of the city (Liv. 1.6) and as the settlement of peoples conquered by the Romans (Liv. 1.33.2; D.H. 3.43). Varro records several explanations for its name: from the birds (aves) which gathered there (Var. L. 5.43); from the mythical king Aventinus (L. 5.43; cf. Liv. 1.3.9); from the coming (adventus) of people there to the temple of Diana (L. 5.43); or from the river Avens (Var. ap. Serv. ad Verg. A. 7.657). Varro himself favours the theory that the hill, like many other places, records the city’s watery beginnings, and that is was named from advectus (Var. L. 5.43). ‘Esquiline’ recorded a plantation of oak-trees (aesculi, Var. L. 5.49) which once grew on the hill or the place where Romulus kept watch (excubias...agebat, Ov. Fasti 3.245) during wars against the Sabines (Var. L. 5.49; Ov. Fast. 3.245–8).

Sometimes the name given to a particular place changed as human activity gave it new meaning. The Caelian hill, for example, was associated with the Etruscan Caeles Vibenna who provided military aid for one of the Roman kings, and was consequently rewarded with land and Roman citizenship (Var. L. 5.46; D.H. 2.36.2; Tac. Ann. 4.65). Before this, however, the hill was named Querquetulanus Mons from the oak trees which grew there (Tac. Ann. 4.65). Unlike the old name, the new name did more than simply describe the physical appearance of the hill; it showed its significance in Roman history, and so worked as a lasting reminder of its importance to the Roman people. A hill which had once been a tangle of trees had become the site of an important event in Roman history, and a little bit of Romanness had been fixed on to the landscape of Latium.

33 Var. L. 5.13 also derives ‘Palatium’ from balare.
34 For various etymologies of the name of the hill, see Var. L. 5.45; Liv. 1.3.9; Verg. A. 7.657; Serv. A. 7.657. See too Richardson (1992), 47.
35 There were plans to rename the Caelian ‘Mons Augustus’ when a statue of Tiberius survived a fire on the hill. See Tac. Ann. 4.64; Suet. Tib. 48.2.
The most important of the seven hills was the Capitoline.\textsuperscript{36} Although it was on the Palatine that Romulus had built the city’s first walls (Liv. 1.7.3, 1.33), it was the Capitol which became the head of the city which was the head of the world.\textsuperscript{37} Livy records that the importance of the hill was demonstrated to the people of Rome during the building of the Temple of Jupiter under Tarquinius Superbus (Liv. 1.55.5–6; cf. Var. L. 5.41). Having decided that the hill should be devoted to the worship of Jupiter alone, Tarquinius decided to secularize the area by removing all other shrines and sacred buildings (Liv. 1.55.2). But while the auguries allowed most of the sacred monuments to be removed, they warned against interfering with Terminus’ traditional place of worship:

\begin{quote}
inter principia condendi huius operis mouisse numen ad indicandam tanti imperii nolem traditur deos. nam cum omnium sacellorum exaugurationes admittere aves, in Termini fano non addixere; idque omen auguriumque ita acceptum est, non motam Termini sedem ununque eum deorum non euocatum sacratis sibi finibus firma stabiliaque cuncta portendere.
\end{quote}

(Liv. 1.55.3–4)

Later there appeared another and still more impressive omen of Rome’s future greatness. During the digging of the foundations for the temple, a human head was found (Liv. 1.55.5–6).\textsuperscript{38} This, Livy writes, was believed to show that ‘on this spot would stand the imperial citadel of the capital city of the world’ (\textit{quae visa species haud per ambages arcem eam imperii caputque rerum fore portendebat}, Liv. 1.55.6).\textsuperscript{39} Livy’s attention to the Capitol signals its future importance. For later writers, the hill becomes a symbol and guarantee of Rome’s stability and diurnity.\textsuperscript{40} Although it was not the political centre of Rome (located in the Curia, among other places), it was its symbolic centre.\textsuperscript{41} This means that threats to Rome

\textsuperscript{36} The Capitol was also known as the Mons Tarpeius (Var. L. 5.41).
\textsuperscript{37} For a survey of the place of the Capitol in Roman literature, see Catharine Edwards (1996), 69–95.
\textsuperscript{38} On this episode, see Borgeaud (1987); Catharine Edwards (1996), 82–5. Varro notes the names of the hill before this miraculous event: \textit{mons Tarpeius} (Var. L. 4.41) and \textit{mons Saturnius} (Var. L. 5.42).
\textsuperscript{40} See Saxl (1957); Catharine Edwards (1996), 82–95. The same idea is expressed in the aspirations of Vergil and Horace, that their works might last as long as the Capitol itself. Cf. Verg. A. 9.446–9; Hor. Carm. 3.30.7–9.
\textsuperscript{41} Borgeaud (1987), 91.
are often identified as threats to the Capitol: when the hill is threatened, so is Rome itself. Horace, for example, imagines Cleopatra plotting to destroy the Capitol (Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.6–8; cf. Ov. *Met.* 15.828). Silius Italicus similarly represents Hannibal’s soldiers impatient to possess the hilly head of Rome (Sil. 4.150–1, 7.492–3, 9.544–6). But while a threat to the Capitol was a threat to Rome, the reverse is also true: while the hill and its temple remained safe, so did the city as a whole. What made the Capitol such a compelling symbol of Roman power was the cluster of events associated with it. Tacitus, for example, uses a number of monuments in the city — including the Capitol — in his account of the murder of Galba:

> igitur milites Romani…depulsuri ac non imperatorem suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerrnt, disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis, rapidi equis forum inrumpunt. nec illos Capitolii aspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere quo minus facerent scelus cuius ulter est quisquis successit.

*(Tac. *Hist.* 1.40)*

Otho’s supporters fail to be moved by the sight of the hill and their shared knowledge of all that it represents, and so reveal their disrespect for Roman place and Roman history.

Specific places, then, could come to be seen as monuments to a people’s history and national identity. Places in Rome, for example, were not just the settings for Roman events, but also often came to be seen as natural monuments to the activities of the Roman people. Many of these places would have been meaningless without the works of writers, who recorded, shaped, embellished and added to the stories attached to places, and so ensured that these natural monuments continued to speak to the people who saw them.

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3. **Livy’s Roman landscape**

Livy’s history — and particularly its first five books — provides one of the most important accounts of the ways in which Roman history and culture came to be associated with the natural environment of Latium. Livy writes in part to show that Roman customs and beliefs can be traced to the very beginnings of Roman society; but tied to many of these customs and beliefs are places. While Livy rarely presents the kind of picture of the early city which we find in the works of Vergil and the elegists — of cattle grazing on the grassy Palatine, of Romulus’ thatched hut and of hardy senators ploughing their fields — he repeatedly draws attention to particular topographical features and shows their importance as settings for Roman events and markers of Roman identity.

(i) **Building Rome and Romanness**

Like many other Roman writers, Livy often seems unconcerned with geographical accuracy. He confuses Thermopylae with Thermum (Liv. 33.35) and refers to the town of Ilorci as ‘Iliturgi’ (Liv. 28.19.1). Livy also confuses places in Italy itself. He refers to Tannetum as a village bordering on the Po (*vicum propinquum*...
Pado, Liv. 21.25.13), although it is in fact some distance away; and he claims that the battle of Sentinum occurred in Etruria, rather than in Umbria (Liv. 10.26.7). Moreover, as many critics have noted, his descriptions of battles and marches are often very difficult to follow. Some of Livy’s errors seem to have come about from a misunderstanding of his sources; others from his unfamiliarity with the places he was writing about. In his account of Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps (Liv. 21.31ff.), for example, Livy begins by following the account provided by Polybius (Polyb. 3.49ff.). But he soon departs from Polybius’ version (Liv. 21.31.9ff.) and introduces material from a second, incompatible source. Livy then confuses matters further by reverting to Polybius’ account (Liv. 21.32.8ff.). But P. G. Walsh notes that here at least Livy may not have been as careless as we may at first think. In writing about Hannibal’s route over the Alps, Livy deliberately includes many place-names (which were in fact absent from his sources) ‘to lend an apparent precision to his account, and to give his readers the pleasure of recognising names which more recent events had made well known at Rome.’

The same motives might explain Livy’s attention to places in Rome. As Livy describes the beginnings of the city, he also describes its physical make-up. In simple terms, this entails recording and describing Roman additions of land to the original settlement on the Palatine; it was by snatching up one place after another (alia atque alia appetendo loca, Liv. 1.8.1), Livy writes, that the city of

50 Walsh (1961), 154.
51 Walsh (1961), 154. Walsh gives as an example Livy’s account of a march from Saticula to Sora by way of Lautulae (Liv. 9.23).
52 Walsh (1961), 153–7. On other ‘howlers’ in Livy, and particularly with respect to his reading and translating of sources, see Walsh (1958b). Others have suggested that Livy may not have been as careless or as uninterested as we might at first think. Girod (1982), 1192–5 remarks that Livy’s lost descriptions of Gaul and Germany (which are mentioned in the epitomes to Books 103 and 104) may have revealed more attention to places than appears elsewhere in Livy’s history, and so encouraged a quite different view of his geographical knowledge. Jaeger (1997) adds that Livy’s main interests were the history and places of Rome, and that lengthy or detailed descriptions of places outside the Roman world would have been irrelevant to his account of Roman events and achievements: ‘Livy was writing Romanocentric, not universal, history. Therefore what did not matter to Rome would have been irrelevant digression’ (Jaeger [1997], 5 n. 13).
53 E.g. Livy has Hannibal’s army cross a river which does not in fact lie in the region he has so far described (Liv. 21.31.9, 21.32.6). See further Walsh (1961), 154–6; idem (1966), 134–5.
54 Walsh (1961), 156.
55 Walsh (1961), 156.
Rome grew. So while the city begins with Romulus’ settlement on the Palatine (Liv. 1.6.4, 1.7.3), it expands as later rulers add both hills and other areas of land: Tullus Hostilius adds the Mons Caelius (Liv. 1.30.1); Ancus Marcius the Janiculum and the Maesian Forest (Liv. 1.33.6, 1.33.9); and Servius Tullius the Quirinal and the Viminal (Liv. 1.44.3). The early Romans also shaped the Latin landscape by building: temples (1.10.5–7, 1.19.2, 1.38.7, 1.55.1–9, 2.42.5), bridges (Liv. 1.33.6), walls and trenches (Liv. 1.33.7, 1.38.6, 1.44.3), salt-works (Liv. 1.33.9), drains (1.38.6), sewers (1.38.6, 1.56.2) and other public works all contributed to the form of the city.

As Livy shows, the making of Rome involved more than expanding the physical area of the city; in building their city, the early Romans also ensured that Romanness itself was imprinted on to the Latin landscape. This was not necessarily a conscious or deliberate process on the part of Livy’s early Romans; although Livy at times seems careless in describing and locating places, he shows himself to be particularly sensitive to the ways in which places can be used to trace the development of the city and the activities of the Roman people. At the beginning of Livy’s work (and indeed at the beginning of Rome itself), the landscape of Latium is a meaningless wilderness (Vastae tum in his locis solitudines erant, Liv. 1.4.6; cf. 5.53.7). Livy’s use of solitudo is revealing; it suggests not just a forested wilderness, but an empty and desolate place, lacking any of the associations which would help later generations of Romans both to make sense of their city’s landscape and to recall some of the most important events from its past. Even at an early stage in the city’s history, however, particular natural spots have been marked out by their associations with events in the human world. The Palatine hill, for example, was known as the site of Evander’s early settlement and the festival of the Lupercalia (Liv. 1.5.1–2, 1.7.3–

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56 Kraus (1994b), 270.
57 Jaeger (1990), 44 aptly describes Livy’s task as ‘writing Rome into existence, hill by hill’ See too Griffe (1981), 114.
58 Richardson (1992), 63 notes that sources disagree as to who made the Caelian hill part of the city. Cf. Var. L. 5.46 (Romulus); D.H. 3.1.5 (Tullus Hostilius); Cic. Rep. 2.18 and Str. 5.3.7 (Ancus Marcius); Tac. Ann. 4.65 (Tarquinius Priscus).
59 On the important topographical features of the city, see Platner (1929); Nash (1968); Richardson (1992).
60 Cf. Liv. 5.53.7, 8.13.15; Tac. Ag. 30.
15). Romulus himself heightens the importance of the spot by choosing to build his walls on the hill (Liv. 1.6.3, 1.7.3).

Throughout the early books of his history, Livy continues to show how particular places and natural features in the city gained significance for the Roman people because of the events which took place there.61 Livy’s early Romans shape the landscape of the city (and indeed future Romans’ perceptions of it) not only by changing its physical setting, but also in more ‘symbolic’ ways; that is, in their memorable actions (sometimes, as in the case of Horatius (Liv. 2.10–13), heroic; sometimes, as in the case of Tullia (Liv. 1.48.6–7) more shameful) which give meaning to so many places in the ancient city. By the end of Book 5, Livy has explained the importance of many of Rome’s most important landmarks and topographical features.62 Romulus has stood on the Palatine hill (which is already an important landmark in the city; cf. Liv. 1.1.5.1–2, 1.7.3–15) to observe the auspices for the founding of the city (Liv. 1.6.4). He has also enclosed a spot on the Capitoline hill to create the Asylum (Liv. 1.8.5). The Sabine Mettius Curtius has thrown himself into the muddy pool on the Forum Romanum which came to be known as the Lacus Curtius (Liv. 1.12.9–10, 1.13.5).63 The Senate has decided that the land between the city and the Tiber (which had belonged to the Tarquins) should be dedicated to Mars, to form the Campus Martius (Liv. 2.5.1–5). The crops which were growing on the Tarquins’ land (which, for religious reasons, could not be eaten) were harvested and thrown into the river; this mound, Livy writes, became the Tiber island (Liv. 2.5.1–5). Mucius Scaevola has defended the Janiculum against Lars Porsenna and his army, and the fields which he receives from the thankful Senate, Livy writes, have come to be known as the Prata Mucia (Liv. 2.13.5). Cincinnatus has ploughed his little plot of land, which has come to be known to Livy and his readers as the Prata Quinctia (Liv. 3.26–7). Gaius Fabius Dorsus has shown his sense of religious and familial duty by sacrificing on the Quirinal (Liv. 5.46.1–3).64 By the end of Book 5, then, Camillus (and with him

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61 Jaeger (1993), 353 n. 11.
62 Jaeger (1990), 45.
63 For other aetiologies for the Lacus Curtius, see Var. L. 5.148, 5.150; Liv. 7.6.1–6; D.H. 14.11.3–4; Val. Max. 5.6.2; Plin. Nat. 15.78.
64 Livy uses this story to account for the ritual procession carried out each year on the Quirinal by the gens Fabia. Cf. Ogilvie (1965), 730–2.
Livy’s readers) can look out over a landscape which has been profoundly shaped by the deeds of Roman citizens and which provides a kind of natural commentary on the history of the city (Liv. 5.51–4).

Livy also shows that places in the city can be associated with more than one event, and that the mingled memories associated with a single place (and the ambiguities which these may cause) can become important in shaping Roman responses to it. There was, it seems, often confusion as to the significance of some of Rome’s most important landmarks. Indeed some places featured in a variety of stories, and were provided with several histories. The *lacus Curtius*, for example, was simultaneously the place consecrated by the consul C. Curtius (Var. L. 5.150), the swamp into which Mettius Curtius plunged with his horse (Var. L. 5.149; Liv. 1.12.10, 1.13.5) and the chasm where Marcus Curtius sacrificed himself for the sake of the Roman people (Var. L. 5.148; Liv. 7.6.1–6).65 Just as some places were associated with a number of events, some events were associated with a number of places. There was a *ficus Ruminalis* on the Palatine near the Lupercal (Var. L. 5.54; Liv. 1.4.5; Servius ad A. 8.90; Plin. *Nat.* 15.77), but there was another in the *comitium* (Tac. *Ann.* 13.58).66 Most agreed that Romulus’ hut was on the Palatine (Var. L. 5.54; Dio 53.16.5; D.H. 1.79), but there was another *casa Romuli* on the Capitol (Liv. 5.53.8; Verg. A. 8.654; Vitruv. 2.1.5; Plut. *Rom.* 20; Sen. *Cont.* 2.1.4).67

Livy uses such uncertainties and conflicting stories to show how Romans were able to re-interpret the importance of places and the memories associated with them. One such place was the river Allia.68 In about 390 BC, Livy recounts, the Romans were defeated by the Gauls at a spot by the river Allia (Liv. 5.37.7). Livy makes clear that the defeat was largely a result of the Romans’ disregard of a divine warning (Liv. 5.32.6–7) and their neglect of the *ius gentium* (Liv. 5.36.8–11).69 But it was also caused by Roman incompetence and cowardice (Liv. 5.38.1–10). The tribunes failed either to build a camp, to fortify their position or to observe the proper religious practices (Liv. 5.38.1); the soldiers themselves either

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66 See Ogilvie (1965), 49.
68 See too Jaeger (1990), 66–72.
69 Walsh (1955), 374–5.
ran in fear to Veii or fled to the city and hid in the Citadel (Liv. 5.38.5–10). Here, as in their later battles in Gaul and Germany, the Romans are also assailed by the landscape itself. Some try to swim to safety across the Tiber, but are hampered by the weight of their arms and equipment (Liv. 5.38.8). Such was the disgrace of this defeat, that the Romans proclaimed the day to be a *dies ater* (Liv. 6.1.11).\(^{70}\)

The same place is also the setting for a later battle, when the Romans confront the Praenestines in about 380 BC (Liv. 6.28.5–6.29.10). The Praenestines mistakenly assume that the spot has been permanently tainted for the Romans by their earlier defeat. They boast among themselves that they have captured a place ‘ill-fated for the city of Rome’ (Liv. 6.28.5), and, as Sempronius points out to the Romans, foolishly rely on the fortune of the place to achieve their victory (cf. Liv. 6.29.1). They also misjudge their enemy’s reaction to the place, in assuming that just because the Romans bitterly honour the date of their earlier defeat (Liv. 6.1.11), they will also dread the place itself:

\[\text{(Liv. 6.28.5–7)}\]

But the Romans view ‘the fortune of the place’ quite differently.\(^{71}\) Livy suggests that, although the spot was once the site of a Roman defeat, this does not permanently affect Roman responses to it. Indeed the Romans are able to overlook the shameful memories of the place, and to replace them with other, more favourable, associations. For Livy’s Romans, the place is not as important as their recollections of earlier battles against the same enemy. They, unlike the Praenestines, focus on their earlier victory at lake Regillus (cf. Liv. 2.19–20), and remind themselves that here at Allia they face the same enemy and can expect the

\(^{70}\) Cf. Ogilvie (1965), 717–19.

\(^{71}\) See Walsh (1958a), 370 on *fortuna loci*, ‘the notion that a particular battle-field repeats its history.’ See too *ibid.*, 364–73 on the concept of *fortuna* in Livy, and Oakley (1997), 618 (ad Liv. 6.28.7).
same end to the battle: *Romani contra, ubicumque esset Latinus hostis, satis scire eum esse quam ad Regillum lacum devictum centum annorum pace obnoxia tenuerint* (Liv. 6.28.7). The river Allia now becomes a place commemorating a Roman victory (Liv. 6.29.8–10), as this later event overshadows the earlier.

How did the Romans, who were so sensitive to the meanings of places, manage to change the associations of the battlefield by the Allia? One suggestion is that the Day of the Allia (*dies Alliensis*, Liv. 6.1.11) played an important part in helping Romans to forget the disgrace of their defeat.\(^72\) The Romans made the defeat at the Allia a part of their calendar, ‘thus divorcing it from the place and confining it to a day’.\(^73\) According to this argument, the river becomes unimportant as Romans use the day of the battle (rather than the place itself) to remember their defeat. But it is important to recognize that the earlier battle at the Allia was not completely forgotten. Indeed it helped to shape later perceptions of the place, by inciting the Romans to achieve their later victory over the Praenestines: *locum insignem memoria cladis infriturum se potius ad delendam memoriam dedecoris quam ut timorem faciat, ne qua terra sit nefasta victoriae suae* (Liv. 6.28.8). As Livy here suggests, the earlier associations of the Allia are important since the Romans must remember them to achieve their victory over the Praenestines, and so wipe out the memory of their earlier disgrace. The Allia comes to be a record of both a defeat and a victory, and both events become part of the store of memories associated with it: if Livy’s Roman readers remembered their victory at Allia, then they must also have remembered their earlier defeat.

Livy’s Romans purposefully alter the associations of the river Allia so as to transform a reminder of a Roman disgrace into a monument to a Roman victory; but other places too had associations with several (sometimes contradictory) events. The *Capitolinus mons*, for example, was seen as an important religious site, a symbol of Rome’s enduring greatness and the ‘head’ of the city (Liv. 72 Jaeger (1990), 66–72. See too Kraus (1994a), 250 (at Liv. 6.28.5–29). Ovid provocatively suggests that the *dies Alliensis* is a good one for chasing girls since then, unlike on festive or more auspicious days, they will not expect costly gifts (*Ov. Am. 1.413–14*).

73 Jaeger (1990), 68. *Jaeger ibid.* further notes that the day ‘distances the memory of the battle at the Allia from the place by making the *dies Alliensis* a religious holiday observed at Rome’ (*ibid.*).
But the associations of the hill were altered by the actions of Marcus Manlius Capitolinus (Liv. 5.47.4–8, 6.11–20). In Book 5 of Livy’s history, Manlius appears as a Roman hero when he single-handedly defends the hill against the invading Gauls (Liv. 5.47.4–8). As a result of his bravery, Manlius is granted gifts of flour and wine, while one of the sentries who failed to see the Gauls’ approach is thrown to his death from the Tarpeian Rock (Liv. 5.47.7–10). Manlius appears again in the following book (Liv. 6.11–20), this time not as a saviour of the city, but as a threat to civic peace and a kind of second Remus. Here Manlius, motivated primarily by his hatred and envy of Camillus (Liv. 6.11.3–5), attempts to incite unrest among the Roman plebs. In particular, Manlius resents Camillus’ increasing influence at Rome which, Manlius believes, is undeserved; were it not for Manlius’ own bravery in defending the Capitol and the Citadel, then there would not have been a Rome for Camillus to save (Liv. 6.11.4–5). Manlius now uses the memory of his courageous act to attempt to gain popular support and incite the Roman people against Camillus and the other Roman nobles (Liv. 6.11.7ff.). Realizing that the Capitol is a useful and impressive reminder of his courage, Manlius repeatedly calls attention to the hill and so ensures that, whenever they look at it, the people of Rome are reminded of his daring (Liv. 6.14.4, 6.15.11, 6.16.2, 6.20.8–9, 6.20.10; cf. 6.17.4). The role of the hill as the ‘head’ of the city becomes important here; Manlius tries to convince the people that since he saved the ‘head’ of Rome, he should himself become the city’s head. Even as he is being taken away to prison, Manlius contrives to call attention to the hill:

‘Iuppiter’ inquit ‘optime maxime Iunoque regina ac Minerva ceterique di deaeque, qui Capitolium arcemque incolitis, sicine uestrum militem ac praesidem sinitis uexari

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74 See too Platner (1929), 95–8; Richardson (1992), 68–70. On the hill as the ‘head’ of Rome, see Gowers (1995), 26 (‘The Capitol was not only the uppermost part of the city, but also its public face, its moral figurehead and its purest sanctuary.’) and passim.

75 On Livy’s use of Roman topography (and particularly of the Capitol) in this story, see Jaeger (1990), 41–74; (1993); and (1997), 57–93. Jaeger argues that Livy uses the story to show ‘the superiority of written history to other forms of public record’ (50). On the possible locations of the places mentioned in Livy’s account of Manlius’ trial, see Wiseman (1979).

76 On Manlius as a kind of ‘anti-founder’ of the city, see Jaeger (1997), 58.

77 Cf. Liv. 1.26.10–11 where the father of Publius Horatius draws attention to the Horatian Spears to remind his listeners of his son’s bravery in war. See too Vasaly (1993), 17–18.

78 Jaeger (1997), 79.
Here Manlius claims to have defended not just the citizens of Rome, but even the gods themselves.

It is in his account of Manlius’ trial that Livy shows how the meaning of the hill has changed, and just how closely it has come to be associated with Marcus Manlius. At first, the trial is held on the Campus Martius, in full view of the Capitol (Livy 6.20.5, 6.20.10). The tribunes hope that the mere sight of Manlius, a patrician who has tried to use the plebs to increase his own standing in the city, will convince the Roman people to convict him:

‘quid patrum et plebis certamen facimus, quod ciuitatis esse aduersus unum pestiferum ciuem debet? … nihil minus populare quam regnum est. simul multitudo illa non secum certari uiderint et ex aduocatis iudices facti erunt et accusatores de plebe patricium reum intuebuntur et regni crimen in medio, nulli magis quam libertati fauebunt suae.’

(Livy 6.19.7)

But they fail to see just how cunning Manlius has been in using the hill as a lasting monument to his courage. During the trial, Livy writes, Manlius called upon the hundreds of plebeians whom he had helped, recalled his military achievements and displayed his military trophies (Livy 6.20.6–8); but more importantly he urged the Roman people to look at the hill and remember his selfless bravery:

et cum ea quoque quae bello gesta essent pro fastigio rerum oratione etiam magnifica, facta dictis aequando, memorasset, nudasse pectus insigne cicatricibus bello acceptis et identidem Capitolium spectans Iovem deosque alios deuoscasse ad auxilium fortunarum suarum precatusque esse ut, quam mentem sibi Capitolinam arcem protegenti ad salutem populi Romani dedissent, eam populo Romano in suo discrimine darent, et orasse singulos universosque ut Capitolium atque arcem intuentes, ut ad deos immortales iuersi, de se iudicarent.

(Livy 6.20.8–9)
Not only Manlius’ words, but also his gestures (bare his scarred chest and looking towards the hill) give poignancy to his case,⁷⁹ nevertheless it soon becomes clear that it is the sight of the hill which is Manlius’ greatest defence. Eventually the tribunes realize that Manlius will never be convicted while the people of Rome can look upon the Capitol and so remember Manlius’ former heroism (Liv. 6.20.10). The actual charges against Manlius are unimportant, Livy wryly observes, since it was not them, but the place (*non in causa, sed in loco*, Liv. 6.20.5) which made the plebs so reluctant to condemn him (Liv. 6.20.5). But Manlius’ insistence on the importance of just one place — the Capitolium — as a reminder of his bravery is also his undoing. Whereas he relies on the hill alone to save him, the tribunes have the landscape of the entire city to use against him.⁸⁰ As soon as the trial is moved out of sight of the hill, to the Petiline Grove, Manlius’ guilt becomes clear (Liv. 6.20.11). Without the hilly monument of the Capitol to remind them of his bravery, the plebs see only a boastful tyrant. Finally Manlius is executed by being thrown from the Tarpeian Rock (Liv. 6.20.12; cf. 6.17.4). Livy notes the satisfying coincidence which sees the same spot become the place of both a glorious act of bravery and a shameful death.⁸¹ Closing the story of Marcus Manlius, Livy shows that the meaning of the Capitol has changed, and in fact become more complex: *Tribuni de saxo Tarpeio deicerunt locusque idem in uno homine et eximiae gloriae monumentum et poenae ultimae fuit* (Liv. 6.29.13). The place which was once an unambiguous symbol of Roman greatness and a reminder of a heroic deed has now come to be associated with civil unrest, tyranny, personal ambition and the execution of a tyrant.

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⁷⁹ Vasaly (1993), 16.  
⁸¹ Wiseman (1979) observes that the *mons Tarpeia* was not in fact the place of Manlius’ original defeat of the Gauls (cf. Liv. 5.47.2 where the Gauls climb the *saxum Carmentis*), but that Livy here alters the details to create a more ‘symmetrical’ story: the same place becomes the scene of both Manlius’ heroism and his execution. Cf. Jaeger (1997), 76 n. 41.
The story of Manlius Capitolinus also shows how Livy uses places in Rome (and people’s responses to them) to comment on the characters of individual Roman citizens. The use of place to evoke emotion was a traditional feature of ancient rhetoric. Quintilian, for example, writes that the orator can make use of the visible world — not only places, but also people, monuments and scenes — for the purposes of both praise (commendatio) and blame (invidia) (Quint. Inst. 5.10.41). Quintilian gives two clear examples of this technique. In a passage in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Ajax attempts to convince the Greek leaders that he, and not Ulysses, deserves the arms of Achilles by having them look at the ships which he had saved from burning (Ov. Met. 13.1–6). Ajax’s argument gains strength, Quintilian suggests, because it is supported by the visible reminder of the ships themselves standing on the beach. In his second example, Quintilian writes of the techniques of Milo’s accusers in his trial for the murder of Clodius (Cic. Mil. 17, 18, 91). Milo is said to have committed the murder on the Via Appia, the road built by Clodius’ ancestor, and filled with the tombs of his family. Here, Quintilian suggests, Milo’s accusers attempt to gain sympathy for Clodius by showing the tragedy of his murder in a place so closely associated with the achievements of his family. In each of Quintilian’s examples, some object (firstly ships, then a road) becomes a visible reminder of a deed, and so becomes an evocative and persuasive part of the speaker’s argument.

Places too could be of use to writers and orators. Cicero shows himself to be especially skilled in using places — and particularly places in the city — to manipulate his listeners’ emotions. In his speech in defence of Scaurus, for example, Cicero claims to have found arguments for Scaurus’ innocence wherever his eyes happened to fall as he glanced about the city (quocumque non modo mens verum etiam oculi inciderunt, Cic. Scaur. 46). The Curia reminds him of Scaurus’

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82 Liv. 2.1.5.
84 The practice of using visible objects in this way is, some have suggested, a peculiarly Roman one. See Vasaly (1993), 26, 30; Catharine Edwards (1996), 21.
illustrious father, the temple of Castor and Pollux of his grandfather Lucius Metellus who restored it, the Capitoline Temple of both Scaurus’ father and Scaurus himself and the shrine of Vesta of the heroism of Lucius Caecilius Metellus (a forebear of Scaurus’ mother) who had once rescued the Palladium from the burning temple (Scaur. 46–8). Places could also work in just the opposite way; not to praise, but to blame. Whereas Milo’s accusers use the image of the Via Appia to attempt to gain sympathy for Clodius, Cicero uses other places — namely the hills and groves of Alba — to inveigh against him (Cic. Mil. 85):

Vos enim iam, Albani tumuli atque luci, vos, inquam, imploro atque obtestor, vosque, Albanorum obruatae arae, sacrorum populi Romani sociae et aequales, quas ille praeceps amentia caesis prostratisque sanctissimis lucis substructionum insanis molibus oppresserat; vestrae tum arae, vestrae religiones viguerunt, vestra vis valuit, quam ille omni scelere polluerat; tuque ex tuo edito monte, Latiaris sancte Iuppiter, cuius ille lacus, nemora finisque saepe omni nefario stupro et scelere macularat, aliquando ad eum poeniendum oculos aperuisti …

(Cic. Mil. 85)87

Cicero uses places in these ways because they, just as much as the actual words which he spoke, could bring to mind certain events and comment on the characters of those associated with them.

Romans could, then, be judged according to their responses to the city of Rome and its sacred places. Scaurus, for example, deserved to be acquitted because both he and his forebears had shown their respect for places of historic and religious significance in the city; by contrast, Clodius was maligned because he had desecrated the hills and groves of Alba. Each revealed his character through his response to a place. Livy uses similar ideas. At the beginning of his second book, Livy writes of the ideal Roman patriotism, that which is based on ‘respect for the family’ (pignera coniugum ac liberorum, Liv. 2.1.5) and ‘love of the place itself’ (caritas ipsius soli, Liv. 2.1.5).88 Throughout his history, Livy reveals the characters of many Romans by showing their responses to Roman

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88 On this theme in Livy’s work, see Römisch (1962), 227 and passim; Bonjour (1975a), 165ff.; idem (1975b), 12, 129 n.2, 469–74.
places, and the extent to which they share that *caritas ipsius soli* which he sees as essential to the stability of Roman society.\(^89\) ‘Good’ Romans, such as Romulus, Horatius and Camillus, revere the site of Rome, and remember the deeds of those who helped to build up the city from the Latin wilderness; ‘bad’ Romans, such as Remus, Tarpeia and Manlius Capitolinus, fail to recognize the importance and national sanctity of places in the city.

Perhaps the best representative of this respect for Roman place is Camillus. Camillus’ speech to the Roman people at the close of Book 5 (Liv. 5.51–4) is based in part on traditional praises of cities and countries, and established theories in geography and ethnography.\(^90\) Towards the end of his speech, Camillus speaks of the natural advantages of Rome’s place on the Tiber. The city enjoys healthful hills (*saluberrimos colles*, Liv. 5.54.4), a useful river (*flumen opportunum*, Liv. 5.54.4), a temperate climate and fertile soils; it has easy access to the sea; and its surrounding hills work as natural boundaries (Liv. 5.54.4). But these practical considerations are secondary to Camillus’ belief that Romanness itself exists in the soil of Latium, and that the rites and customs which hold together Roman society can be carried out only in Rome itself.\(^91\) Camillus tells the Roman people that his concern is not whether he should be allowed to live in his native city, but rather whether that city itself should remain in traditional place (*quippe ut in sua sede maneret patria, id agebatur, non ut ego utique in patria essem*, Liv. 5.51.2). Livy here returns to the idea that patriotism, and more particularly Roman patriotism, has its roots in the natural environment of Latium. The practical advantages of the site of Rome are important, but more important still are the ways in which the Roman people have imprinted events from Roman history and aspects of Roman culture on to the natural setting of their city.\(^92\)

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\(^89\) Cicero also uses the word *caritas* to describe his feelings of loyalty towards Rome and the Republic (Cic. Leg. 2.5).


\(^91\) Cf. Themistocles’ claim that a city is its people, and as such can be moved to another place. Also cf. Tac. Hist. 1.84 where Otho similarly tells the Roman army that a city is its people, and that its buildings, which are without voice and life (*muta ... et inanima*), can easily be rebuilt.

\(^92\) Tuan (1974), 95 notes: ‘The appreciation of landscape is more personal and longer lasting when it is mixed with the memory of human incidents.’
reminds the Roman people that their religion, history and national identity are inseparable from the physical landscape of Latium:

‘Vrbem auspicato inauguratoque conditam habemus; nullus locus in ea non religionum deorumque est plenus; sacrificiis sollemnibus non dies magis stai quam loca sunt in quibus fiant.’

(Liv. 5.52.2)

Camillus speaks here about a proper reverence for the rites and traditions established by earlier generations of Romans. The *loca* of the city are sacred because they have watched over significant events in the Roman people’s history. Camillus goes on to speak of the uniquely Roman customs and rites which the Roman people would have to abandon if they abandoned the city itself: the feast of Jupiter, the flame of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of Mars and Quirinus, the Roman priests and the Vestal Virgins (Liv. 5.52.7, 5.52.13–14). Certain secular practices too, Camillus argues, belong in Rome itself (Liv. 5.52.15–17).

Camillus also shows the contrast between earlier Romans, who not only worked to build the city but also established its rituals and customs, and his fellow-Romans, who want to flee the city. Whereas their ancestors, a rabble of outcasts and shepherds, worked to build the city amid the forests and marshes of Latium (Liv. 5.53.9), Camillus’ countrymen seem reluctant even to restore the city’s damaged monuments (Liv. 5.53.9). Camillus finally convinces his listeners by arguing that while the physical structures of the city — its buildings and even its people — can be moved, Romanness itself cannot. In particular he tells of his own affection for the places of Rome:

‘Equidem fatebor uobis, etsi minus iniuriae uestrae quam meae calamitatis meninisse iuuat: cum abessem, quotienscumque patria in mentem ueniret, haec omnia occurrebant, colles campique et Tiberis et adsueta oculus regio et hoc caelum sub quo natus educatusque esse; quae uos, Quirites, nunc movant potius caritate sua ut maneatis in sede uestra, quam postea, cum reliqueritis eam, macerent desiderio.’

(Liv. 5.54.3)

In this part of his speech, Camillus recalls Livy’s own definition of Roman patriotism from the opening of Book 2. Like Livy, Camillus speaks of the *caritas*
which binds him to the soil of Latium. Camillus also speaks of Rome as a parent (‘sub quo natus educatusque essem’), and so combines both familial love and civic patriotism in his feelings for the city. Finally we should note that Camillus shares with Romulus an emotional attachment to the site of the city. Just as Romulus had wanted to build a city on the place where he had spent his childhood and youth (Liv. 1.6.3, 1.7.3), Camillus speaks of his hope to stay in the place where he was born and raised, and hopes that the same features of the city which he remembered in his exile (‘colles campique et Tiberis’) will by their dearness (caritate sua) also move his listeners (Liv. 5.54.3). Camillus, then, here appears as a kind of second founder of the city.\footnote{Cf. Bonjour (1975a) 168–9; Miles (1986), 16.}

Moreover, in speaking of Rome and Romanness in these terms, Camillus displays that respect for Roman places which Livy praises at the opening of Book 2, and which is a unifying theme of his first five books.\footnote{In other ways too, Camillus’ speech looks back to the beginning of Livy’s second book. See Ogilvie (1965), 235 (ad Liv. 2.1.4).}

Similar feelings affect Gaius Marcius Coriolanus.\footnote{For the various versions of the story of Coriolanus, see Ogilvie (1965), 314–16.} Like Camillus, Coriolanus is a Roman hero who in some way offended the Roman people, and was exiled from the city.\footnote{See Ogilvie (1965), 315 (ad Liv. 2.33.3-40).} The test of Coriolanus’ character comes when he and the Volsci have marched on Rome and taken up a position outside the city’s walls (Liv. 2.39.5). When the arguments of Roman envoys and the pleas of even priests fail (Liv. 2.39.10–12), the women of Rome appeal to Coriolanus’ mother, wife, and children to urge Coriolanus not to attack the city (quoniam armis uiri defendere urbem non possent, mulieres precibus lacrimisque defenderent, Liv. 2.40.2). Coriolanus is at first unmoved by the women’s prayers and tears (Liv. 2.40.3), but is finally dissuaded from marching on Rome by the pleading and chastizing of his mother. At first Veturia simply questions her son’s love and loyalty to herself: does he, she asks, regard her as a captive or a mother; should she regard him as an enemy or a son? (Liv. 2.40.5). But, in what becomes the more important and persuasive part of her speech, she appeals to Coriolanus’ patriotic affection for Rome, and his emotional links to the land which bore and raised him:
‘Potuisti populari hanc terram quae te genuit atque aluit? Non tibi, quamuis infesto animo et minaci perueras ingredienti fines ira cecidit? Non, cum in conspectu Roma fuit, succurrít: intra illa moenia domus ac penates mei sunt, mater coniunx liberique?’

(Liv. 2.40.7)

Veturia here speaks not only as Coriolanus’ mother (reminding him of her maternal love and concern), but also as the city of Rome itself might speak.  
Indeed Livy meaningfully combines Coriolanus’ feelings for his mother with his feelings for Rome itself. Like Veturia, Rome gave birth to and nourished \((\textit{genuit atque aluit}, \text{Liv. 2.40.7})\) Coriolanus; also like Veturia, Rome mourns when he turns against her. The sight of his mother brings to mind not only his affection for his family (in fact Coriolanus is at first unmoved by the news that his wife and children have come to appeal to him, Liv. 2.40.3), but also his wider feelings of patriotism for his motherland, the city of Rome. In being moved by loyalty to both his family and his country, Coriolanus too represents Livy’s ideal of Roman patriotism. Veturia comes to symbolize Coriolanus’ motherland, and it is this shared and comparable affection — for both family and city, mother and motherland — which persuades Coriolanus to withdraw from the gates of the city. In demonstrating his enduring loyalty to the physical space of the city of Rome, Coriolanus (like Camillus), shows himself to be one of Livy’s ‘good’ Romans; one who is moved by the \textit{caritas ipsius soli} which Livy writes about at the opening of his second book (Liv. 2.1.5).

This loyalty to Roman place and Roman customs contrasts notably with the behaviour of Manlius Capitolinus.  
Whereas both Camillus and Coriolanus are moved by their feelings of Romanness — that is, by their patriotic attachment to the city of Rome and its sacred places — Manlius is motivated largely by self-interest.  
Like both Camillus and Coriolanus, Livy’s Manlius clearly understands the symbolic value of places in the city. He firstly acts to save the Capitol (Liv. 5.47.4–8), and later repeatedly uses the hill to remind the Roman people of his...

97 Bonjour (1975a) and (1975b), 430ff.
98 On Livy’s representation of Manlius’ character, see Jaeger (1997), 88–92. Jaeger argues that Livy wants to represent Manlius as a ‘would-be tyrant’ (88).
heroic act (Liv. 6.14.4, 6.15.11, 6.16.2, 6.20.8–9; cf. 6.17.4). But whereas Camillus uses the sacred places and monuments of Rome to save the city itself, Manlius uses them (and more particularly the Capitol) to save only himself.100 It is this aspect of Manlius’ behaviour that Livy prompts us to question.101 For Manlius, just one place in the city — the Capitol — comes to be more important than the city as a whole. Whereas Camillus imagines a unified picture in which the hills, river, rites and traditions all come together to make up both the city of Rome and ideas of Romanness (cf. Liv. 5.54.3), Manlius focuses on the Capitol alone. Livy prompts us to question Manlius’ loyalty to this place too. Manlius was one of the few lucky Romans to live on the hill, and so to have his property left undamaged after the Gauls’ attack (Liv. 5.47.8). So was Manlius protecting the sacred hill of Rome, or was he merely trying to save his own house?

In writing about the Capitol (and the river Allia), Livy shows how natural features can add to the texture of his history. Far from being merely backdrops to Roman deeds, natural features help to narrate the passage of Roman history and comment on the actions of Roman citizens. In using the topography of Rome in these ways — to tie together events, to show the complexity of Roman responses to places and to comment on the behaviour of individual Roman citizens — Livy reinforces the importance of place in Rome’s history and culture. Livy’s descriptions and uses of places, and especially of places in Rome, also shaped how later writers depicted the city’s topography. Tacitus’ use of places familiar from the early books of Livy’s history (as, for example, in his account of the burning of the temple of Jupiter in AD 69, Tac. Hist. 3.71–2) has been read as an attempt to highlight the contrast between the city-building zeal of Livy’s early Romans with the destructive violence of their descendants.102 Tacitus evokes the clivus Capitolinus, the Asylum and the Tarpeian rock, all of which were rich with associations for readers of Livy’s history (Tac. Hist. 3.71). His use of the phrase post conditam urbem (Tac. Hist. 3.71), which brings to mind Livy’s own phrase ab urbe condita, also prompts us to think of Livy’s work.

100 As noted by Jaeger (1997), 89.
101 On this aspect of the story, see Jaeger (1997), 57–93.
Another illustration of this idea can be seen in responses to plans to relocate Rome’s capital. Julius Caesar, for example, was rumoured to be planning to shift the capital of the Roman world either to Troy or Alexandria (Suet. *Jul.* 79.3). Mark Antony too was accused of plotting to create a new capital in Egypt (Dio 50.4.1; cf. 50.3.5). The responses to such plans reinforce the importance of the physical places of Rome to ideas of Romanness. The capital of the Roman world cannot simply be shifted to another place, but can exist only on the soil of Latium; that is, in the place where the events of Rome’s legendary past were thought to have taken place, and where natural features such as the Tiber, the Palatine, the Capitol and others were revered as monuments to these events. To disregard the importance of such places was to reject the heroic achievements of the founders and builders of the city. In contrast to Caesar and Antonius, Augustus cleverly showed his attachment to the site of Rome by building his mausoleum on the banks of the Tiber (cf. Verg. *A.* 6.872–4), and his home on the Palatine itself (Suet. *Aug.* 72.1). By behaving in these ways, Augustus effectively demonstrated his attachment to the site of Rome, and his respect for Roman history.

4. The Roman places of Vergil, Propertius and Ovid

Like Livy, Vergil, Propertius and Ovid often rely on Roman places to tell the story of Roman history. Perhaps the most famous example appears in the eighth book of the *Aeneid* as Vergil skilfully links Evander and Aeneas’ walk — from the wood

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103 Ceausescu (1976); Catharine Edwards (1996), 47.
104 Cf. Catharine Edwards (1996), 47–8. It is also worth noting that Augustus’ tomb added another ‘hill’ the city’s traditional seven, and so illustrated not only his proud Romanness, but also his ability to alter the very landscape of the city. See Nash (1968), ii, 38–43; Favro (1993), 238–9; Zanker (1988), 72–7.
105 Cf. Nicolet (1991), 192: ‘Augustus’s first and most evident concern was the assertion that the center of power would remain fixed geographically, politically, and spiritually at Rome itself.’
outside the city, where the Arcadians celebrate the rites of Hercules, to Evander’s hut on the Palatine — to particular natural features (Verg. A. 8.306–69). As has often been noted, the trees and forests of Pallanteum provide a suggestive contrast to the columns and squares of Augustan Rome; but they also work as a reminder to Vergil’s readers that the landscape of Latium — even where it has been covered over by gilded temples — remains as a natural monument to the events of the past. As he walks, Evander points out a number of noteworthy buildings and natural features: the Tiber (A. 8.331–2), the Porta Carmentalis (8.337–8), the Asylum (8.342–3), the Lupercal (8.343–4), the Argiletum (8.345–6), the Tarpeian Rock (8.347), the Capitolium (8.347–9, 8.350–1), the Janiculum (8.357–8), the Saturnian hill (8.357–8), the Forum Romanum (8.360–1) and the Carinae (8.361). Each of these places represents an episode (or sometimes several episodes) from Roman history. As Evander and Aeneas walk through the landscape of the early city, they also walk through the history of Rome itself. They move from the fauns and nymphs who once inhabited the woods of Latium (A. 8.314–18), to the arrival of Saturnus (8.319–25), the coming of Evander (8.333–6), the birth of Romulus and Remus (8.342–3), the crime of Tarpeia (8.347) and finally to Augustus’ modern Rome (8.360–1). Rather than explain in detail the significance of the spots which he mentions, Vergil lets the places themselves represent the events which have taken place there. The woods of Latium remind us of the city’s silvan beginnings; the Lupercal and the Asylum of Romulus and Remus; the Porta Carmentalis of the coming of Evander; the Tarpeian Rock of the city’s early wars; the Forum Romanum and the Carinae of the Augustan city.

Even in Evander’s time, some natural features have come to associated with earlier events. Aeneas wonders at the many relics of the men of the past (virum monimenta priorum, A. 8.312; cf. 8.356) which he sees all about him. Evander

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106 The actual course of the walk is unclear. Evander and Aeneas stop at some places (such as the altar of Carmentis), but seem only to catch sight of others (such as the Janiculum). For a useful discussion of the topography of this section of the poem, see Gransden (1976), 29–36, 123–133.

107 Similar scenes appear on the Aeneas’ shield (8.626–728): the she-wolf lying in the cave of Mars while Romulus and Remus play (Verg. A. 8.630–4), the Rape of the Sabines (8.635–7), the early wars between the Romans and other Italian peoples (8.637–51), Manlius on the Capitol (8.652–3), the conspiracy of Catiline (8.668–9) and finally the Battle of Actium (8.675–728). In his description of the shield, however, Vergil emphasizes martial episodes (cf. A. 8.629) which are largely absent from his account of Evander and Aeneas’ walk.
points out that the names of these places serve as reminders of the events which have taken place there: Latium received its name because it once hid the exiled Saturnus (Latiumque vocari | maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutus in oris, A. 8.322–3), the Tiber was named after the mysterious Thybris (8.330–2);\textsuperscript{108} the grove of Argiletum after Argus (8.345–6); the Janiculum because it was the hill on which Janus built his citadel (8.357–8); and the Saturnia after Saturnus himself (8.357–8). Indeed at one point Vergil refers quite explicitly to the ways in which a place can take its meaning from its association with happenings in the human world. One of the spots which Evander and Aeneas pass is the Argiletum:

\begin{verbatim}
nec non et sacri monstrat nemus Argileti
testaturque locum et letum docet hospitis Argi.
\end{verbatim}

(Verg. A. 8.345–6)

The grove itself bears witness to the treachery of Argus, and even remains as a lesson to future visitors to the spot.

Evander also unknowingly draws attention to places associated with events which lie in his future: he points out to Aeneas the Porta Carmentalis (A. 8.337–40), the Asylum established by Romulus (8.342–3), the cave in which the she-wolf sheltered Romulus and Remus (8.343–4), the Tarpeian Rock (8.347) and finally the Capitol itself (8.347–8). Here Vergil makes a familiar contrast between the gilded temples of his own day (\textit{aurea nunc}, A. 8.348) and the wooded landscape of the past (\textit{olim silvestribus horrida dumis}, 8.348); but he also shows that a place which is sacred in the Augustan present was also sacred in the silvan past. It is appropriate that Vergil has the king and his guest linger, at the very head of the city, to remark upon its natural sanctity.\textsuperscript{109} Evander tells Aeneas:

\begin{verbatim}
’hoc nemus, hunc’ inquit ‘frondoso uertice collem
(quis deus incertum est) habitat deus; Arcades ipsum
credunt se uidisse Iouem, cum saepe nigrantem
aegida concuteret dextra nimbosque cieret.’
\end{verbatim}

(Verg. A. 8.351–4)

\textsuperscript{108} Cf. Var. L. 5.30; Liv. 1.3.8; Verg. A. 7.30; Serv. A. 8.330.

\textsuperscript{109} Gransden (1976), 130 (ad A. 8.347–8) notes that these lines fall significantly in the exact middle of Vergil’s description of the walk (A. 8.337–58).
Vergil reinforces the importance of the place by suggesting that the Arcadians themselves sensed its future greatness. Indeed he himself contributes to the Capitol’s many associations by having Evander and Aeneas stop and talk there.

Two other Augustan texts are important for the ways in which they use natural features and landscapes to write about Roman history and identity.\(^\text{110}\) Both Propertius, in his fourth book, and Ovid, in the *Fasti*, declare that the time has come to deal with aetiological themes: the ancient rites, festivals and language of the Roman people.\(^\text{111}\) Ovid and Propertius approach their aetiological themes in different ways; for Ovid it is the sequence of Roman festivals which provides the inspiration for his description of Roman ways; Propertius mingles historical and patriotic subjects with elegiac themes. But both also write about ‘Roman’ ways of seeing landscapes and natural features.

In the first poem of his fourth book, Propertius presents a familiar picture of the contrast between the fields and hills of Rome’s past and the roads and temples of the present (Prop. 4.1.1–38). Propertius further suggests that while the Rome of the present is impressive, its splendid buildings are simply reminders of the hills and groves which once stood in their place (*Hoc quodcumque vides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est, | ante Phrygem Aenean collis et herba fuit*, Prop. 4.1.1–2). The places which Propertius mentions are important because they have been the settings of meaningful events in the past. The temple of Apollo, for example, stands on the Palatine hill which is celebrated as the place where Evander settled (*atque ubi Navali stant sacra Palatia Phoebo, | Evandri profugae procubere boves*, Prop. 4.1.3–4). The temple of Jupiter (*aurea templa*, Prop. 4.1.5) stands on the Capitol which was itself the site of Romulus’ simple hut (Prop. 4.1.6).\(^\text{112}\) The Curia Julia marks the field where the earliest senators once met (Prop. 4.1.17).\(^\text{113}\)

\(^{110}\) Tibullus rarely writes of the city of Rome and its places, but see Tib. 2.5.25–64.

\(^{111}\) Prop. 4.1.69: *sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum*; Ov. *Fast*. 1.1–2: *Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum | lapsaque sub terras ortaque signa canam*; 1.7: *sacra recognoscem annalibus eruta priscis*.

\(^{112}\) Even before the time of Romulus, Propertius reminds us, the rock was made sacred by the presence of Jupiter (*Tarpeiusque pater nuda de rupe tonabat*, Prop. 4.1.7).

Propertius’ use of places in the city to bring to mind particular stories and historical events also recalls the orator’s method for memorizing the words of a speech. Like the skilled orator, Propertius uses landmarks in the city to tie together his narrative. He moves from the temple of Palatine Apollo (Prop. 4.1.3), to the Capitoline hill (4.1.7), the Tiber (4.1.8), the Curia Julia (4.1.11) and the temple of Quirinus on the Quirinal (4.1.9). Other words in the poem may have been intended to evoke particular places. Casa (Prop. 4.1.6), for example, may have reminded Propertius’ readers of the casa Romuli; and bubus (Prop. 4.1.8) of the Forum Boarium. Propertius here represents a very ‘Roman’ way of seeing the city. While the mysterious and non-Roman Horos looks for knowledge in the stars (Prop. 4.1.75–118), Propertius recognizes that there is much to be learned about the Roman past from the natural features of the city.

The links between Roman place and Roman history also appear in Ovid’s Fasti. In his calendar poem, Ovid’s point of departure is regularly temporal; but although he rarely sets out to explain the name of a Roman place, he very often directs his narrative so as to include or even end with comments on significant sites and monuments. Names such as Latium (Fast. 1.235–8), the Janiculum (1.245–6), the Lupercal (2.381–424), the Tiber (2.389–90), the ficus Ruminalis (2.411–12), the Quirinal (2.511), the Esquiline (3.245–6), the Aventine (4.51–2), the Forum Boarium (6.477–8), the Vicus Sceleratus (6.609–10) and others are all explained in the course of Ovid’s work. But most of these aetiologies occupy only a few lines of much longer stories. In this respect, then, Ovid’s approach to Roman places seems the reverse of that of Propertius and Vergil. Whereas they use places to call up stories, characters and events from Rome’s past — so that a walk around the city becomes a journey through its history — Ovid uses Roman history to explain the names of places in the city.

Ovid’s approach enables him to highlight the links between places and events. Indeed places work together with days in Ovid’s work to tell the story of Rome’s past as, even when a place provides the focus of a particular story of episode (as in the case of the Velabrum, Fast. 6.395–416), it is generally

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115 Camps (1965), 49–50 (ad Prop. 4.1.9).
introduced by an important Roman day. The story of the Velabrum’s muddy past, for example, begins with Ovid walking through the area at the Festival of Vesta: *Forte revertebar festis Vestalibus illa, | qua Nova Romano nunc via iuncta foro est* (*Fast.* 6.395–6). Ovid locates his walk not just in time (*festis Vestalibus*), but also in place (*qua Nova Romano nunc via iuncta foro est*). Indeed the focus of the story soon shifts from the day to the place, as an old woman narrates the history of the area and explains the tradition of walking barefoot there (*Fast.* 6.401–14). It is only after this digression into the landscapes of Rome’s watery past that Ovid returns to his explanation of the Vestalia (*Fast.* 6.417–68).\(^{117}\)

Although his focus is the Roman calendar, Ovid mingles time and place, leaving the impression that the two are inextricably linked. By piling up Roman names and stories, Ovid gives to both time and nature a distinctively Roman form. In spite of his quite different approach, Ovid also reveals the links between Roman place and Roman history.

5. Conclusion

Most of the texts discussed in this chapter are products of the Augustan age; so do the ideas expressed in them represent typically ‘Roman’ ideas or only Augustan ones? The answer may be, ‘both’. It was during the Augustan period that Romans were particularly concerned with defining their place in the world, and asserting Roman ideas over those of other cultures. This process began even earlier, when writers such as Varro and Cicero began working to create a corpus of Latin literature and to set down in writing the history, customs and beliefs of the Roman people. These Augustan ways of looking at the natural world came to be


\(^{117}\) A similar shift from time to place appears in Ovid’s account of the Lupercalia (*Fast.* 2.267–452) where Ovid also turns from non-Roman explanations of a day, to Roman explanations of a place: *forsitan et quae ras, cur sit locus ille Lupercal, | quaeve diem tali nomine causa notet* (*Fast.* 2.381–2).
distinctively Roman ones. Later writers often use the places and incidents of earlier Latin literature to give meaning to their own accounts of Roman history and identity. Names of places in the city not only helped their readers to identify the places where things happened, but also brought with them memories of the events — historical, mythical and literary — which had once taken place there. Places, then, could bring an additional layer of meaning to a writer’s work.

It was not only the urban landscape of Rome which was important in shaping ideas of Roman identity. Other places too — both ‘landscapes’ and ‘localities’ — came to be seen as places where important events in Roman history were played out and where aspects of Romanitas were formed. The following chapters consider how some different types of landscape — farms, gardens and forests — are commonly depicted in Latin literature and how they are used to comment on some traditional aspects of Roman culture and identity.
III

Farms

‘Quid iam de hominum genere dicam? qui quasi cultores terrae constituti non patiuntur eam nec immanitate beluarum effeari nec stirpium asperitate vastari, quorumque operibus agri, insulae litoraque colluent distincta tectis et urbis.’

Cicero de Natura Deorum 2.99

1. Introduction

Commentators often note Roman writers’ apparent preference for cultivated over wild nature. Varro and his friends in the Res Rusticae praise Italy’s orchards, vineyards, wheat-fields and olive groves (Var. R. 1.2.6–7). Cicero’s Cato admires the orderly patterns of agriculture, from the kernels inside an ear of corn (Cic. Sen. 51) to the rows of plants in a vineyard (Sen. 53). Horace mocks his friend Aristius Fuscus’ preference for artificial landscapes (Hor. Epist. 1.10.12–23), but himself prefers the amoenitas of his farm to the wilder landscapes outside (Epist. 1.10.6–7, 49–50). The elder Pliny takes pleasure in the sight of a field planted with flax or cotton (Plin. Nat. 12.25) and of trees arranged in the tidy quincuncx formation (Nat. 17.78). The same kinds of attitude have been discerned

in Roman landscape painting, as well as in other representations of the natural world, such as the scenes on the *Italia/Terra Mater* relief on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*.

This chapter will not be about Romans’ perceived preference for cultivated landscapes, nor will it be concerned with the history of Roman farming or the technical aspects of ancient agriculture. Rather it considers some Roman representations of farms and farming, and asks what these might tell us about common Roman attitudes towards cultivated nature. I begin by examining how the practice of agriculture is represented in a selection of Roman texts. While farming is sometimes imagined as a battle against nature, it can also be seen as a process of mimicking natural processes and thereby improving natural things. In light of this idea, in Latin literature the farm often appears not as a distortion of a natural landscape, but rather as a part of nature. This idea is also suggested by Roman accounts of the development of agriculture, where nature often appears as the ‘teacher’ of various farming practices. Human involvement with nature plays an important part in this process, and Roman writers regularly emphasize the need for a practical knowledge of nature for success in agriculture. Even writers who were themselves absentee landowners — such as Varro and Columella — recommend that their readers should on occasion get their hands dirty in honest farm work. The final part of this chapter turns to some descriptions of the farm itself. While the idealization of rural life is a familiar theme, I argue that Roman writers often bring to their ideal landscapes aspects of everyday farm life, and so combine idealizing with more realistically ‘Roman’ elements.

Agriculture is often seen as the skill which defines civilized societies. In ancient thought in particular, it is the ability to plough and plant which often

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2 As described by Vitr. 5.6.9, 7.5.2; Plin. *Nat.*, 35.115–17 (where Pliny describes such a painting as *amoenissimam ... picturam*). See further Ling (1977); Leach (1974), 83–95; *idem* (1988), *passim*; Isager (1991), 131–4.
4 On Roman farming see, among others, Heitland (1921); White (1970), (1973) and (1977); René Martin (1971); Tilly (1973); Frederiksen (1980); Robert (1985); Sereni (1997).
5 On ancient agricultural practices see, e.g., White (1970).
6 See, e.g., Cairns (1975); *idem* (1979), 14, 17–19, 21, 37, 135, 137.
marks the distinction between primitive and civilized life. It is for this reason that descriptions of farming appear prominently in both ethnographic writings and accounts of the development of human civilization. A knowledge of agriculture enabled people to leave behind the uncertainty of hunting and gathering, and to adopt a more stable and ‘civilized’ kind of existence. Agriculture also alters the appearance of nature itself. The farmer comes upon land which is wild and disordered, and transforms it into land which is tame and orderly.

Roman writers had some special reasons for writing about farms, and for giving these cultivated landscapes a greater emphasis in their writings than many of their Greek predecessors. Robin Osborne argues that the countryside, and particularly the realistic countryside of the farm and agricultural labour, rarely appears in classical Greek literature or art. Even those Greek works which deal with rustic life, such as Hesiod’s Works and Days and Xenophon’s Oikonomikos, do so in a strangely restricted fashion. Hesiod is interested primarily in the moral benefits of farm work, and only rarely describes a rural scene or provides any insight into life in the Greek countryside. Xenophon similarly emphasizes the moral benefits of working the land. Like hunting, farming makes men sturdy and tough, and trains them for other pursuits such as warfare, hunting, and athletics (Oikon. 5.4–5, 8). As Osborne remarks, these descriptions of agriculture and farm life are highly selective; neither Xenophon nor Hesiod seeks to give a complete picture of life in the countryside, but each uses farming to reflect in more general ways on aspects of human behaviour.

Farms, however, had a more particular relevance to Roman society. Here, it was believed, Romans cultivated not only grains, olives and grapes, but also what were seen as distinctively ‘Roman’ behaviour and beliefs. Manius Curius, for

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7 Agriculture, together with fire, is one of the most common gifts of the ‘culture-hero’. See, among others, Guthrie (1957), 96–8.
10 See his descriptions of the beginning of ploughing (WD 465ff.), the struggles of winter (WD 504–60) and a summer picnic (WD 582–96).
11 In Greek drama too, the countryside is generally represented by stock figures such as country bumpkins and bumbling slaves or messengers. See Osborne (1987), 18; Borgeaud (1991).
12 See, e.g., Liv. pref. 7–12; Sal. Cat. 7, 9; Hist. 1.16; Cic. Rep. 5.1; Plin. Nat. 36.111.
example, was celebrated for having refused a bribe of gold from the Samnites (according to some accounts, he was cooking a hearty meal of turnips when the Samnites arrived) and preferring to live on his farm and grow vegetables. Livy tells how, when messengers came to announce to Cincinnatus that he had been declared dictator, they found him, sweaty and stripped to the waist, ploughing the fields on his humble farm (Liv. 3.26.6–8; Plin. Nat. 18.20). According to Roman myth, Serranus was happily sowing seed when he was called to the consulship (Plin. Nat. 18.20), and even the early Roman kings were content to potter in their gardens (Plin. Nat. 17.50, 19.50). As C. G. Perkell points out:

If the farmer is symbolic of Man, he is also a figure of enhanced and special resonance for Romans because he is seen to embody those qualities in themselves that they most admired and to which they attributed their exceptional military successes and consequent political power. Such qualities as endurance, courage, discipline, and simplicity were seen to characterize those who worked the land and were also seen to be responsible for Roman military expansion.

Furthermore other Romans are sometimes judged according to how far they resemble (or differ from) this ideal Roman farmer. ‘Good’ Romans reveal themselves both through their farming know-how and their respect for the simple habits of the early Roman farmers. Cicero’s defence of Roscius, for example, is based in part on his client’s simple rustic habits (Cic. Q. Rosc. 39, 75). ‘Bad’ Romans, on the other hand, reject these and instead adopt non-Roman habits and covet imported luxuries. These images were also open to manipulation. Emperors such as Augustus and Diocletian recognized the value of representing themselves as humble farming types: Augustus favoured simple foods such as cucumber, lettuce and apple (Suet. Aug. 77), and Diocletian grew his own vegetables in his retirement.

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14 See too Cic. Sen. 56, Rep. 2.49, Phil. 2.114, Mil. 72., Lael., 28, 36, Catil. 1.3; Col. 1 pref.13; Plin. Nat. 18.20.
17 These arguments could of course also be reversed, and rusticitas become a negative characteristic. On ideas of urbanitas and rusticitas, see Wallace-Hadrill (1991), 244–9; Braund (1989).
The city of Rome itself was believed to have been a rural settlement where Romulus lived in a hut of thatch, cows grazed on the grassy Palatine, shepherds decorated rough wooden statues and civic leaders hurried straight from their farms to the senate-house. Moreover, Roman religion, laws and language all give clues to Rome’s rural beginnings. The historical and cultural associations of farms in Roman society must, then, be taken into account when we consider how Roman writers depict them in their writings, and we should not be surprised if references to farms and farmers are coloured by these idealizing images.

2. Friend or foe? Farmers and nature

Farming is sometimes imagined as a kind of battle against nature in which the farmer struggles against the earth’s essential wildness to create an area which is usefully productive. This view of farming (and especially of large-scale commercial agriculture) is sometimes said to have developed in the early modern period when an appreciation of wild places — and a corresponding distaste for cultivated ones — first began to become widely accepted. Clearing and cultivation seem to have increased markedly in the eighteenth century, prompting many to question the traditional idea of the beauty of cultivated nature. The country had long been seen as a necessary refuge from the crowds, noise, smoke and supposed immorality of the city, but increasingly it was not the humanized countryside of the farm which provided this refuge, but the wild landscape of forests and mountains. Just as increasing industrialization and urbanization had prompted many to yearn for the fields and pastures of the countryside, increasing

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19 Cf. Verg. G. 2.532–40, Aen. 8.314–58; Tib. 2.5.23–38; Prop. 4.1.1–70, 4.4.9–14; Ov. Am. 3.115–20, Fast. 1.198–219.
cultivation in turn produced a longing for a landscape untouched by human works.²²

Before this, particularly throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was the orderly and symmetrical landscape of the farm which satisfied both economic requirements and prevailing aesthetic tastes. Those who admired agricultural landscapes were also echoing classical ideas — or at least what they believed were classical ideas — of the role of human beings in the world and our relationship to natural environments. Many writers of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England saw themselves as the successors of the rustic poets of Greece and Rome, and Hesiod, Vergil and Horace were imagined as hardy farmers whose works glorified the ability of human beings to cultivate the earth and make the land teem with animals and crops. Stoic ideas of purposive growth and the centrality of human beings in the world (which were so influential in the Rome of the Republic and early Empire) also coincided neatly with contemporary Christian beliefs about human beings’ place in the world.

The idea of farming as a war against nature appears also in Latin texts. In the Georgics (and particularly in Books 1 and 2), Vergil often uses overtly military language to describe the farmer’s work.²³ Vergil’s farmer crushes clods of earth (glaebas ... frangit, G. 1.94); he ‘disciplines’ (exercet) the ground and ‘commands’ (imperat) the fields (G. 1.99); he pursues (insectabere) weeds and brambles (G. 1.155). Even the farmer’s tools are ‘weapons’ (arma, G. 1.160)²⁴ and his plough a ‘chariot’ (currus, G. 1.174). The military metaphor is inconsistent, however, in that sometimes nature seems under the command of the farmer as ‘general’,²⁵ while at other times nature seems the farmer’s enemy. In Georgics 1, for example, Vergil imagines the farmer engaging in a kind of hand-to-hand combat against the earth:

quid dicam, iacto qui semine comminus arva
insequitur cumulosque ruit male pinguis harenae,

²³ For this aspect of Vergil’s poem, see Betensky (1979); Ross (1980), idem (1987), 48, 53 and passim; Perkell (1989), 34–7; Mynors (1990), 21 and passim; Gale (2000), 252–9.
Here, military language such as *iacto* (*G*. 1.104), *comminus* (*G*. 1.104), *insequitur* (*G*. 1.105) and *ruit* (*G*. 1.105) suggests an organized attack against an inimical nature. While it is true that these words can be used with what seem purely agricultural connotations, read together (and in the context of the poem as a whole), their military force seems clear. Moreover, nature seems also to deliberately resist the farmer’s efforts. The farmer’s capacity to alter by force nature is reinforced in lines 106–9, where he changes the course of a river in a conflict suggestive of Achilles’ battle against the river Scamander (*Hom. Il*. 21.257-62).

The war between the farmer and nature becomes more apparent in *Georgics* 2 when Vergil turns to arboriculture. Trees and vines, according to Vergil, require constant tending:

\[
\text{scilicet omnibus est labor impendendus et omnes cogendae in sulcum ac multa mercede domandae.}
\]

(Verg. *G*. 2.61–2)

Vergil often, as here, uses gerundives to emphasize the relentless nature of the farmer’s work. Vergil also personifies inanimate nature to reinforce the sometimes inimical relationship between farmers and nature. This comes across

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26 As Gale (2000), 253 n. 75 notes. See, e.g., Liv. 40.16.3; Col. 2.9.2; Plin. *Nat*. 18.344 (for *iacio*).
28 Richard F. Thomas (1988b), 84 (ad Verg. *G*. 1.104-10) notes: ‘the Homeric simile, which, as often comes from the poet’s everyday world and therefore contrasts with the epic society which it exemplifies, has become V.’s [sic] reality’.
29 For the military overtones of this aspect of the farmer’s work, see White (1970), 263–6.
clearly in a passage where Vergil describes how *usus* (*G*. 2.22) taught the farmer to propagate plants from cuttings:

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hic plantas tenero abscindens de corpore matrum
deposuit sulcis, hic stirpes obruit arvo,
quadrifidasque sudes et acuto robore vallos.
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(Verg. *G*. 2.23–5)

The plant from which he takes the slips (*plantas*, *G*. 2.23) is not merely an inanimate resource to be used by the farmer, but a ‘mother’. The plant itself has a ‘tender body’.\(^3\)

Yet even while admitting this violence, Vergil shows that it is in fact an essential aspect of the farmer’s work.\(^2\) Without the farmer, the earth is *inertis* (*G*. 1.94), *male pinguis* (*G*. 1.105), *invitae* (*G*. 1.224), *difficilis* (*G*. 2.179), *maligni* (*G*. 2.179) and *cunctantis* (*G*. 2.336). Similarly its natural products are *infecundae* (*G*. 2.48), *silvestribus* (*G*. 2.183) and *infelix* (*G*. 2.314). ‘The farmer’s task,’ as Monica Gale writes, ‘is to exploit the fertility of the natural world, while taming and civilizing it.’\(^3\)

The potential of farming to improve upon wild nature comes across clearly in Vergil’s account of clearing the ground:

```
... iratus siluam deuexit arator
et nemora evertit multos ignaua per annos,
antiquasque domos avium cum stirpibus imis
eruit; illae altum nidis petiere relictis,
at rudis enituit impulso uomere campus.
```

(Verg. *G*. 2.207–11; cf. 4.511–15)

Vergil does not here disguise the destructive side of the farmer’s work: his *arator* is ‘angry’, he carries away (*devexit*) the forest,\(^3\) overtops (*evertit*) ancient groves and drives the forest’s birds from the trees which were once their homes. But regardless of the destruction which it causes, the clearing of land brings about an improvement to the earth’s natural wildness (*at rudis enituit impulso uomere*

\(^3\) Cf. Plin., *Nat*. 17.67: *e matris ... corpore*.
\(^2\) On this theme in the *Georgics*, see Segal (1966); Wender (1969); Gale (2000), 252–9.
\(^3\) Gale (2000), 88.
\(^4\) For *deveho* in military contexts, cf. Caes. *Civ*. 1.54.3; *Gal*. 1.43.2.
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campus, G. 2.211). The juxtaposition of rudis (‘rough’, ‘unformed’) and enituit (‘it gleams’) emphasizes the ‘before’ and ‘after’ effect of the farmer’s efforts. Indeed not just here but throughout the poem, Vergil suggests that the earth benefits from the farmer’s apparent violence,\(^{35}\) and that without the farmer’s efforts to tame and cultivate it, the earth would produce only wild and sterile growth (Verg. G. 1.147–59, 2.179–83). It is also worth nothing that the farmer’s actions in a sense replicate those of Jupiter himself. Just as Jupiter sought to save the human race from laziness (G. 1.121–4), the farmer transforms wild nature from its idle and unproductive state (nemora ... ignaua, G. 2.208), as he transforms the once rough and untilled earth (rudis, G. 2.211)\(^{36}\) into land which is cultivated and fertile.

The farmer’s capacity to improve upon nature is also a prominent theme of Georgics 2.\(^{37}\) Vergil makes clear from the beginning of the book that although wild trees are abundant and strong (laeta et fortia, G. 2.48), they are also undisciplined and unproductive (2.47–9); it takes the farmer’s guidance to make wild trees fruitful and so of use to human beings. The farmer’s capacity to utterly transform nature is appears perhaps most strikingly in Vergil’s description of grafting (G. 2.31–4, 2.69–72). Ancient theories as to the possibilities of grafting were sometimes exaggerated,\(^{38}\) and Vergil’s account is no exception. In fact nature itself wonders at its miraculous transformation:

\[
\ldots \text{nec longum tempus, et ingens} \\
\text{exiit ad caelum ramis felicibus arbos,} \\
\text{miraturque novas fronds et non sua poma.}
\]

(Verg. G. 2.80–2)

Such extreme transformations of natural things are often portentous;\(^{39}\) here, however, they represent an improvement on nature which could not have occurred without the farmer’s intervention.

\(^{35}\) E.g. Verg. G. 1.84 (profuit); 1.95 (iuaat arua); 1.97 (suscitat).

\(^{36}\) Ovid uses the same word to describe Chaos at Met. 1.7: rudis indigestaque moles.


\(^{38}\) Pease (1933); Ross (1980). See, e.g., Plin. Nat. 17.120.

Moreover the battle which Vergil describes is far from one-sided. Farmers wage a war of sorts against wild nature, but nature itself frequently attacks farmers too. At *Georgics* 1.316–27, Vergil again uses military language (*induceret*, 1.316; *concurrere*, 1.318; *proelia*, 1.318; *eruerent*, 1.320, *agmen*, 1.322; *ruit*, 1.324), but this time to show nature’s hostility towards the farmer. Violence is a part of nature in Vergil’s poem, whether it takes the form of storms (*G*. 1.311–50), plague (3.478ff.) or the contests which take place among animals (*G*. 3.219–41).

Agriculture can, then, be seen as a way of working with nature to encourage the earth’s organic processes; according to this view, when farmers mimic processes which also take place in nature, and the products and landscapes which they produce are an extension of those which occur in nature. This idea is perhaps most closely associated with Stoic teaching. In Cicero’s *de Natura Deorum*, it is the Stoic speaker Balbus who speaks of human beings’ capacity to reshape the physical world and replace its natural wildness with an orderly pattern of fields and towns (*Cic. N.D.* 2.99). Balbus further suggests that natural forms, such as islands and beaches, combine with human works, such as farms and cities, to produce a diverse and appealing scene. Indeed human beings act as *cultores terrae* by clearing the earth of its wild and unproductive growth to produce a kind of second nature (*alteram naturam*, *N.D.* 2.152). The elder Pliny similarly asserts that the world would be choked by brambles (*rubii*), if human beings did not constantly work to clear and cultivate it (*Plin. Nat.* 17.96).

It is not, however, only Stoic thinkers who express this view. Lucretius is one non-Stoic who writes in a similar way about human beings’ role in shaping

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40 Weeds, plagues, mice, weevils and other pests also attack the farmer (*G*. 1.176–203).


42 Cf. *Sen. Dial.* 6.18.2–5. Tertullian, writing in the third century AD, expresses similar ideas: *omnia iam pervia, omnia nota, omnia negotiosa; solitudines famosas retro fundi amoenissimi oblitteraverunt, silvas arva domuerunt, fera pecore fugaverunt; harenae seruntur, paludes eliquantur; tantae urbes quan* *tae non casae quondam* (*Tert. de Testimonio Animae* 30.4).


our natural surroundings.\footnote{Lucretius’ poem was also a clear influence on the \textit{Georgics}. For an analysis of the relationship between the \textit{de Rerum Natura} and Vergil’s poem, see Gale (2000).} Explaining that the earth was not created for our benefit, he points out that it is full of imperfections: much of the world is overrun by wild animals (Lucr. 5.200–2), too rugged or swampy for human beings to inhabit, covered by ocean (Lucr. 5.202–3) or else made uninhabitable by heat or cold (Lucr. 5.204–5); without the farmer’s efforts to cultivate it, the earth would cover itself with thorns and other wild growth (Lucr. 5.206–9). Lucretius’ description of the results of agriculture also suggests an improvement on nature’s landscapes:

\begin{verbatim}
inde aliam atque aliam culturam dulcis agelli
temptabant fructusque feros mansuescere terra
cernebant indulgendo blandeque colendo.
inque dies magis in montem succedere silvas
cogebant infraque locum concedere cultis,
prata lacus rivos segetes vinetaque laeta
collibus et campis ut haberent, atque olearum
caeula distinguens inter plaga currere posset
per tumulos et convallis camposque profusa;
ut nunc esse vides vario distincta lepore
omnia, quae pomis intersita dulcibus ornant
arbustisque tenent felicibus obsita circum.
\end{verbatim}

(Lucr. 5.67–78)\footnote{Cf. Var. \textit{R.} 1.2.3–8, esp. 6–8. Arnold J. Toynbee (1965), ii, 311 suggests that Lucretius’ description of the Italian countryside reflects contemporary changes to agriculture and land-use.}

Lucretius’ use of \textit{dulcis} together with the diminutive \textit{agelli} suggests an approval of the cultivated, agricultural landscape. Lucretius also describes farming in terms which are compatible with his atomic view of the world (Lucr. 1.208–14).

What passages such as these suggest is that agriculture is beneficial to the earth, and that farms can actually become a part of nature.\footnote{Cf. Ross (1987), 22–3.} Moreover nature itself sometimes acts as a farmer, reinforcing the idea that farming is not a war against nature, but a means of co-operating with it to give natural processes a helping hand.
The idea that farming is a partnership between the farmer and nature can also be seen in some accounts of the development of agriculture. This is often represented as a shared achievement between human beings and nature. Far from being imposed on wild nature, in many Latin texts agricultural techniques are imagined to have been derived from natural processes, so that farming in fact continues (and often even improves on) the cycles and functions of nature. Even more than this, nature sometimes appears an active promoter of farmers’ work by encouraging and in a sense teaching certain agricultural techniques. This is not to say that the efforts of farmers count for nothing; on the contrary Roman writers stress that observation of nature and a ‘hands-on’ approach to farm work are essential for success in agriculture.

Here I will mainly be discussing the works of two very different Roman writers: Lucretius and the elder Pliny. Despite this emphasis, I am not trying to suggest that they are representative of a single Roman view; but the ideas which they put forward about the relationship between farmers and nature and about how agricultural landscapes fit into the broader picture of nature are, I suggest, representative of some more general cultural views. Indeed similar ideas appear in the agricultural handbooks of Varro (R. 1.18.7–8, 1.40.2, 1.45.3) and Columella (Col. pref. 20), in ‘scientific’ texts such as Seneca’s Naturales Quaestiones (Nat. 7.29.6) and Manilius’ Astronomica (1.61–5) and even in Ovid’s Ars Amatoria.48 We have already seen that Vergil suggests this in the Georgics, particularly in Book 2 where one of the main themes is that cultivation actually improves the growth of wild trees and vines: what they lose in abundance, they gain in productivity.

Vergil’s depiction of the relationship between farmers and nature relates closely in parts to Lucretius’ de Rerum Natura.49 Lucretius writes in part to discredit Euhemerist and heurematistic accounts of the development of agriculture.

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48 E.g. Ov. Am. 3.101–2. See Leach (1964) on Ovid’s use of ‘georgic imagery’ in the Ars Amatoria.
49 For a detailed discussion of Lucretius’ influence on Vergil’s poem, see Gale (2000).
civilization. Writing about the discovery of fire, for example, Lucretius rejects the story that it was stolen from the heavens and attributes it instead to nature:

fulmen detulit in terram mortalibus ignem
primitus, inde omnis flammarum diditur ardor.
multa videmus enim caelestibus incita flammis
fulgere, cum caeli donavit plaga vapore.
et ramosa tamen cum ventis pulsa vacillans
aestuat in ramos incumbens arboris arbor,
exprimitur validis extritus viribus ignis,
emicat interdum flammae fervidus ardor,
multa dum inter se rami stirpesque teruntur.
quorum utrumque dedisse potest mortalibus ignem.

(Lucr. 5.1092–101)

It was not Prometheus, Lucretius asserts, who bestowed the gift of fire, but a natural occurrence. Lucretius reinforces his argument from nature by appealing to our common experience and observation of the world. Often we see (videmus, Lucr. 5.1094) that flames flash from a thunderbolt or from the branches of a tree, or that sparks of fire jump out when we strike a stone with steel (Lucr. 6.305). In reminding us that fire exists in nature, Lucretius emphasizes that its discovery was both natural and unremarkable. He not only rejects mythical accounts of its discovery, but also suggests that the human race’s use and production of fire replicates a process which takes place spontaneously in nature.

Elsewhere Lucretius stresses the role of human ingenuity and observation in helping the human race to develop certain skills. We learned to cook when we noticed that the warmth of the sun softened many foods and made them easier and more tempting to eat (Lucr. 5.1102–4). Metallurgy was discovered when, after a forest fire, early human beings saw streams of molten metal harden on the ground (Lucr. 5.1252–68). Similarly it was mimicking the singing of birds and the sound of the wind blowing through reeds that we first made music (Lucr. 5.1379–91) and by watching the movements of the sun and the moon that we learned astronomy and a knowledge of the seasons (Lucr. 5.1436–9).

51 Cf. Lucr. 4.222; 4.259–62; 4.265–8; 6.928.
It was similarly by following the examples provided by nature that the human race developed agriculture:

\[\text{at specimen sationis et insitionis origo}
\text{ipsa fuit rerum primum natura creatrix,}
\text{arboribus quoniam baceae glande}
\text{et insitionis origo
\text{ipsa fuit rerum primum natura creatrix,}
\text{arboribus quoniam baceae glande}
\text{et insitionis origo
\text{ipsa fuit rerum primum natura creatrix,}
\text{arboribus quoniam baceae glande}
\text{et insitionis origo
\text{ipsa fuit rerum primum natura creatrix,}
\text{arboribus quoniam baceae glande}
\text{et insitionis origo
\text{ipsa fuit rerum primum natura creatrix,}}\]

(Lucr. 5.1361–6)\(^52\)

In attributing the discovery of agriculture to *natura creatrix* (Lucr. 5.1362), Lucretius plays on mythological accounts which celebrate Demeter/Ceres for her gift of grain.\(^53\) It was not a goddess, Lucretius asserts, but the natural processes of the earth which provided the human race’s first lessons in planting. By emphasizing the human beings’ ability to mimic the processes which take place in nature, Lucretius shows that cultivation, like other human skills, can be explained without resorting to stories of divine intervention.

Yet it might be argued that Lucretius does in fact suggest that there was an active force behind our early lessons in agriculture. Indeed throughout the poem, Lucretius’ *natura* appears as a vital and almost conscious force;\(^54\) in attributing our knowledge of agriculture to *natura creatrix*, Lucretius suggests that it was a deliberate and benevolent power which encouraged the human race to cultivate the soil and propagate plants. Lucretius similarly claims that the ideas for cooking, making music and other human skills came from watching the natural processes of the earth; but he also implies that nature was actively involved in teaching the human race these skills. The sun showed (*docuit*, Lucr. 5.1103) us how to cook, the breezes taught (*docuere*, Lucr. 5.1383) us to make music and the sun and moon instructed (*perdocuere*, Lucr. 5.1438) us to predict the changes of the seasons. In all of these cases, while Lucretius replaces a god or mortal *heuretes* with a natural occurrence, he does not completely distance himself from mythical

\(^52\) Cf. Lucr. 5.186.
explanations; indeed he retains traces of mythical accounts in suggesting that there was an active, conscious force which taught the human race these skills.

What does this mean for Lucretius’ view of agriculture? In tracing agriculture to *natura creatrix* (Lucr. 5.1362), Lucretius links the practice of ploughing and planting to the natural processes of the earth and so suggests that agriculture involves simply mimicking processes which take place in nature.55 Lucretius also expresses this idea in terms which are compatible with his atomic view of the universe. As farmers dig and plough, they stir up the atoms which are within the soil and so encourage the earth to be fruitful:

```
postremo quoniam incultis praestare videmus
culta loca et manibus meliores reddere fetus,
esse videlicet in terris primordia rerum
quae nos fecundas vertentes vomere glebas
terraque solum subigentes cimus ad ortus.
quod si nulla forent, nostro sine quaque labore
sponte sua multo fieri meliora videres.
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(Lucr. 1.208–14)

The farmer’s work can be described in terms of its effects on the movements and interaction of the atoms; what is significant here is Lucretius’ suggestion that even human activities can become part of the atomic cycle and so part of nature.

For Lucretius, then, agriculture can be seen as a part of the natural processes of the earth. The elder Pliny writes similarly about nature’s role in agriculture. The *Naturalis Historia* is not just a dry catalogue of places and natural products, but an account of human beings’ varied uses of natural things.56 Indeed according to Pliny (and this is a view which he seems to share with other Roman writers), the distinction between *ars* and *natura* is often hazy.57 Book 17 of the *Naturalis Historia*, for example, opens with a discussion of the differences between forest trees (which Pliny defines as those which grow *terra marique sponte sua*, Plin. *Nat.* 7.1) and cultivated ones (those which grow *cura hominum atque arte*, *Nat.* 17.58). But the distinction between these two types of tree is not necessarily clear.

56 See Wallace-Hadrill (1990) on the *Naturalis Historia* as a source of both natural and cultural history.
57 See further Chapter IV, 125–8.
This is because most methods of propagating trees, according to Pliny, were taught by nature itself (Nat. 17.59). *Natura* taught (*docuit*) that plants could be grown from seeds by showing that seeds which fall from a tree on to the ground often sprout (Nat. 17.59). Similarly *Natura* showed (*demonstravit*) how to make tree-nurseries (*plantaria*) by producing dense clusters of shoots from the roots of certain trees which could then be planted out into the ground (Nat. 17.65). It was *Natura* too who taught (*monstravit, Nat. 17.66; docuit, Nat. 17.96; docuit, Nat. 17.99*) the methods of growing trees from cuttings (*stolones, Nat. 17.66*) and slips (*surculos, Nat. 17.67*), propagating trees from layers (*propagines, Nat. 17.96*) and grafting by means of a seed (Nat. 17.99).\(^{58}\) Here Pliny again remarks upon just how much we can learn much by observing and then imitating natural processes:

*raptim avium fame devorato solidoque et alvi tepore madido cum fecundo fimi medicamine abiecto in mollibus arborum lecticis aut ventis saepe translato in aliquas corticum rimas; unde vidimus cerasum in salice, platanum in lauru, laurum in ceroso et bacas simul discolores.*

*(Plin. Nat. 17.99)*

Another discovery was made as a result of the rivalry which can exist between man and nature. Pliny describes how *Natura* mocked the efforts of the Salassi to destroy the harvests of the farmers of Italy by seeing to it that the crops sprang up with a new abundance (Nat. 18.182). In this way, Nature taught (*illeae messes multiplicatae docuere, Nat. 18.182*) the technique of ploughing in (*aratrare, Nat. 18.182*).

The relationship between farmers and nature is not, however, one-sided. While *natura* helps farmers by providing farming lessons and advice, farmers also help nature. Pliny sees cultivation as a way for farmers to repay *Terra Mater* for her kindness to the human race.\(^{59}\) This comes across clearly in a number of passages where Pliny imagines a kind of reciprocal relationship between farmers and nature. At the opening of *Naturalis Historia* 16, for example, Pliny claims

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\(^{58}\) Other lessons Pliny attributes to *casus* (cf. Plin. *Nat.* 17.101, 17.123), but this too is part of nature (*Nat.* 27.8).

that the fruits which trees produce are as much the result of human cultivation as of natural processes:

Pomiferæ arbores quaequæ mitioribus sucis voluptatem primæ cibis attulerunt et necessario alimento delicias miscere docuerunt, sive illæ ultro sive ab homine didicere blandos saporeis adoptione et conubio\(^{60}\) — idque munus etiam feris volucribusque dedimus — intra praedictas constant.

(Plin. *Nat.* 16.1)

Pliny similarly claims that human art has created almost as many varieties of tree as *Natura* herself (*Nat.* 17.58; cf. 14.1, 15.35, 15.42, 15.49, 15.104, 15.122, 16.1, 17.1).\(^{61}\) In propagating trees, just as in cultivating fruits, Pliny believes that we mimic nature’s handiwork and so become helpful participants in natural processes. Pliny further believes that not just people, but also nature benefits from cultivation. At *Nat.* 15.104, for example, he writes of the cherry tree’s ‘reward’ to the farmer: *inter prima hoc e pomis colono gratiam annuam reffert* (*Nat.* 15.104).\(^{62}\) The human race’s ability to rival nature’s creativity is not always cause for praise; Pliny is often critical of human beings’ attempts to vie with nature and laments that we always want to challenge nature’s perfection.\(^{63}\) But it is a belief in the co-operation (rather than the competition) between farmers and nature which Pliny emphasizes in his agricultural books and which he shares with other Roman writers.

Farming, then, often appears as a kind of co-operative effort between farmers and nature. Farmers help nature by clearing the earth of wild growth, while nature helps farmers by ‘teaching’ certain agricultural methods. Similar ideas are sometimes put forward with respect to other human skills. Vitruvius, for example, describes how the idea for constructing huts from mud and twigs came from watching birds building their nests, but adds that human beings used their

\(^{60}\) That is, by grafting and inoculation.

\(^{61}\) Cultivation expands the variety not only of individual natural products, but also of the landscapes which cover the earth’s surface (*Nat.* 12.25, 16.77). For variety as an attribute of nature, see Plin. *Nat.* 16.137–8, 18.170. There is variety in flowers (*Nat.* 21.2), grapes (*Nat.* 14.15), shell-fish (*Nat.* 9.102) and even animals’ horns (*Nat.* 11.123).

\(^{62}\) Pliny once likens grafting to a kind of ‘adultery’ between trees (*Nat.* 17.8), but his condemnation is not of the practice itself, but of the needlessly expensive products which it yields: *ut nec poma pauperibus nascrentur* (*Nat.* 17.8).

innate inventiveness to improve on these first rough dwellings (Vitr. 2.1.2; cf. 10.1.4). According to the account of his theories given by Seneca, Posidonius taught that the early sapientes learned to grind grain and make bread by using stones to replicate the process of chewing (Sen. Ep. 90.22–3) and modelled their first ships on fish (Sen. Ep. 90.24). In agriculture too, many farming processes are thought to have been closely modelled on natural ones, so that the farm itself becomes part of nature.

Agriculture, then, can be seen to involve mimicking natural processes and working with nature. According to this view, the farmer’s work does not distort nature, but rather reproduces it, so that the shaped landscapes of agriculture are part of the unshaped areas of nature. Indeed this process can be seen to work both ways: just as human beings replicate nature, on occasion nature seems to replicate human activities. Nature appears not only as a teacher (both of agriculture and of other human skills), but also as an architect (Cic. N.D. 2.90), an opifex (Cic. N.D. 2.142), an artifex (Cic. N.D. 2.57; Plin. Nat. 31.1), a builder (aedificator, Cic. N.D. 1.18), a planter (seminator, sator, Cic. N.D. 2.86), a doctor (Plin. Nat. 26.10) and a gardener (Plin. Nat. 4.29, 12.22, 16.242). Individual natural features can also be seen to simulate human skills. Pliny describes how the Nile acts as a farmer (Nilus ... coloni vice) by irrigating the fields on its banks (Plin. Nat. 18.167).

4. **Fieldwork: observatio and experientia in farming**

So far, this chapter has been concerned with just what kind of relationship exists between farmers and nature. While it is true that at times the relationship is depicted as a hostile one, in a number of Latin texts it is farmers’ capacity to improve nature which is emphasized. The idea that nature and agriculture are in
fact compatible is reinforced in those texts where nature is imagined to have ‘taught’ the human race many agricultural techniques.

Farmers can continue this process of learning through observation and practical experience. The need for a working knowledge of farming — and not just knowledge acquired from books — is a regular theme of Roman agricultural manuals. This ‘hands-on’ approach is a defining characteristic of the soldier-farmers of Roman legend. Figures such as Curius, Cincinnatus, Fabricius and Regulus were thought to have combined their duties in the senate with more practical tasks such as ploughing fields and going to war. Roman agricultural writers also recommend personal engagement with agriculture and farm work. Cato, for example, expects that landowners will take a personal interest in running the farm: they should examine the farm’s situation, soil and equipment (Cato Agr. 1.1–5), know about feeding animals, harvesting, planting, grafting and fertilizing (Agr. 32–52), familiarize themselves with everyday farm work (Agr. 2.1) and decide what to buy (building materials, slaves, and tools) and what to sell (oil, wine, grain; a rickety cart or a sickly slave, Agr. 2.5–7).

Later agricultural writers maintain this interest in a personal involvement with farming and the countryside. Varro and his friends in the Res Rusticae regularly emphasize the importance of observation and personal experience for success in farming. While they value certain scientific knowledge (such as an understanding of astronomy, weather patterns and soil science), they also see the need for more ‘applied’ knowledge. Varro himself brings to his work his personal experience of farming, and expects that his readers will follow his example by finding out about farm work for themselves. In fact Varro includes a number of instructions which read more like country lore than agricultural science: that when a pear tree comes into flower, this is a message to the farmer to close off meadows from grazing (R. 1.37.5); that the leaves of other trees reveal the seasons (R. 1.46.1) and that some flowers follow the course of the sun (R. 1.46.1). This is the type of folk knowledge which farmers have learned from a close acquaintance with the countryside, rather than at second hand from books.

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64 E.g. Var. R. 1.7.8, 1.8.1, 2. pref. 6, 2.2.9. See too Tilly (1973), 6.
Varro further suggests that this process of observation and experiment should be a continuing one. Scrofa explains that *Natura* gave us two routes to farming: experiment and imitation (*temptando, Var. R. 1.18.7*). The farmers of today, he adds, should use both imitation and experiment; they should imitate the useful agricultural practices discovered by their ancestors, but experiment to develop new and improved techniques. While Scrofa respects the works of earlier thinkers (*R. 1.1.7–11*), he also believes in the importance of personal experience and observation.

Pliny too claims that observation is important in farming. Although Pliny, like Varro, cites a number of earlier agriculture authorities, he is at times openly critical of theoretical approaches to agriculture (*Plin. Nat. 3.123, 11.8, 17.9, 18.205, 22.1*) and tries instead to provide simple and practical advice (*Nat. pref. 6, 18.24, 18.323*). He does this by moving away from scientific and technical material towards more popular knowledge, to show that even those who know nothing of the theory of agriculture can compensate for this by observing the country around them (*Nat. 18.225–6, 18.251–3, 18.265–7, 19.1*). Pliny illustrates this idea by likening the behaviour of common insects to the movements of the stars. Realizing that a knowledge of astronomy may be out of the reach of humble rustics, Pliny claims that *Natura* created glow-worms (*cincindelae, Nat. 18.250*) to mimic the movements of the stars and so provide *signa* for the people of the countryside.

Pliny here emphasizes nature’s kindness towards the human race (*incredibili benignitate naturae, Nat. 18.251*) by imagining a personified *Natura* who encourages the farmer to take advantage of her gifts:

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'cur caelum intuearis, agricola? cur sidera quaeras, rustice? iam te breviore somno fessum premunt noctes. ecce tibi inter herbas tuas spargo peculiares stellas easque vespera et ab opere disiungenti ostendo ac ne possis praeterire miraculo sollicito:
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65 Cf. *Var. R. 1.40.2* where Stolo explains that while the *primigenia semina* were shown to the human race by *Natura*, other types of seeds were discovered by farmers.

66 Cf. *Var. R. 1.8.1; 1.17.5; 1.52.1; 1.57.3; 2 pref. 6; 2.2.1; 2.2.20; 2.5.10; 2.9.5; 2.11.8; 3.12.7. See too Tilly (1973), 6.

67 On the place of *observatio* in Pliny’s agricultural book, see Beagon (1992), 63–8.

68 Frederiksen (1980), 85.

69 Cf. *Nat. pref. 6* where Pliny claims that he writes for all, even for the lowly masses and the crowds of artisans and farmers. See, e.g., *Nat. 18.323–5* where Pliny gives a description of the phases of the moon such that ‘even rustics’ (*vel rustici*) can understand.

70 Cf. *Plin. Nat. 11.98 on lampyrides.*
videsne ut fulgor igni similis alarum conpressu obtegatur secumque lucem habeant et nocte? … cur etiamnum altius spectes ipsumque caelum scrutere? habes ante pedes tuos ecce vergilias.’

(Plin. Nat. 18.251–3)\textsuperscript{71}

Moreover many of the changes which we observe in the countryside can be attributed to \textit{Natura}'s willingness to help the farmer: \textit{adeo minima quaeque in agro naturalibus trahuntur argumentis} (Nat. 18.249; cf. 17.32).

The natural lessons which Pliny describes rely partly on human beings’ ability to observe and then reproduce natural processes. It takes human beings to notice that fallen seeds sprout and grow into trees, that the roots of certain trees produce clusters of new growth, that cuttings and slips can be made to grow into trees and that a seed from one tree can be grafted on to another. In \textit{Naturalis Historia} 17.66–7, for example, Pliny explains that it was \textit{Natura} who demonstrated the practice of growing plants from suckers (\textit{stolones}), but adds that a knowledge of this procedure led to the discovery of another technique (\textit{ex eodem inventum est, Nat.} 17.67). Similarly he records that a strange kind of cucumber first sprang up by chance (\textit{forte, Nat.} 19.67), but that it was propagated and developed into a new variety by those who collected its seeds (\textit{Nat.} 19.67). Underlying each of these examples is the idea that human ingenuity can improve on the rudimentary lessons provided by nature.\textsuperscript{72}

It has been suggested that Columella differs from Pliny in that he favours formal learning over skills learned through practice.\textsuperscript{73} Even Columella, however, maintains a characteristically ‘Roman’ respect for action over words. He believes, for example, that it is better for landowners to till the soil with their own hands (\textit{per se, Col.} 1.7.3) than to rely on the labour of slaves (Col. 1.7.3): \textit{Ita certe mea fert opinio rem malam esse frequentem locationem fundi, peiorem tamen urbanum colonum, qui per familiar quam per se colere (Col.} 1.7.3). But, in

\textsuperscript{71} Cf. Plin. \textit{Nat.} 23.2 where Pomona similarly encourages human beings to enjoy the fruits of the trees. See too \textit{Nat.} 18.266.

\textsuperscript{72} Even this, however, sometimes entails mimicking nature. See, e.g., Lucr. 5.5.837–44 (on nature’s experiments in making animals); Plin. \textit{Nat.} 21.23 (on a certain type of flower as an early attempt by nature to produce lilies).

\textsuperscript{73} Frederiksen (1980), 85. See too René Martin (1971), 377–8, 398 on the contrasting approaches of Columella and Pliny, and Beagon (1992), 163–4 for a slightly different view.
a more practical tone, suggests that where this is not possible, landowners should at least personally supervise the work of the farm (Col. 1.2.2).

The same ideas are reflected in these writers’ respect for both old farming practices and rural lore. Columella often refers to the elder Cato (cf. Col. 1.4.8, 1.2.2, 1.8.7, 2.2.6, 2.4.5) and regrets that many choose to ignore tried but true agricultural maxims (Col. 1.8.12). Pliny similarly draws on earlier agricultural writings (including Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Cato’s *de Agri Cultura* and Vergil’s *Georgics*), and scatters his work with old country sayings (‘the master’s face is more useful than the back of his head’, Plin. *Nat.* 18.31; ‘the best fertilizer is a master’s eye’, *Nat.* 18.43; ‘good ploughing makes for good farming’, *Nat.* 18.174; cf. Cato *Agr.* 61).

This interest in a personal involvement with nature seems at odds with the practice of Roman agriculture. Even when the elder Cato was writing his farmer’s handbook, most agricultural production was undertaken by slaves for an absentee landowner. In spite of this, Roman writers insist that it is personal engagement with farm work and natural processes which makes for success in farming. In particular, they believe that farmers can continue to learn about farming by watching natural processes and, wherever possible, getting their hands dirty. This is both the best way of learning about nature and a means of following in the steps of the early farmers of Rome’s myth-history: Greeks read, but Romans do.

5. *Divini gloria ruris*: the ideal Roman farm

In the previous section, I argued that in many Latin texts, agricultural landscapes are seen as part of nature. This is because many farming techniques were

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74 On Pliny’s attitude to Vergil’s work, see Bruère (1956).
76 Miles (1980), 40
77 Verg. *G.* 1.168.
imagined as having been directly derived from natural processes. Roman depictions of the landscape of the farm also often suggest a co-operative and harmonious link between the farmer and nature. Many of the farms of Latin literature seem removed from the physical world, and become places where the familiar processes of nature no longer operate, or are even reversed. The farm also becomes a place of retreat and contemplation where Romans can discuss learned philosophical subjects which they imagine the everyday work of their idealized farm — threshing grain, pruning vines, milking cows, crushing grapes and collecting honey from oozing hives — taking place all about them. This is certainly not to say that there is anything peculiarly Roman about the idealization of the countryside; this is a prominent theme of Hellenistic poetry, and Roman writers inherited this tradition of praising the countryside (and condemning the city) to the point that comparisons between country and city life became a standard rhetorical exercise (Quint. Inst. 2.4.24). But the ideal Roman countryside is often one where traditional elements of ideal places are combined with more workaday — and indeed more realistic — aspects of Roman farm life.

(i) Utilitas or voluptas?

The correlation between profit (utilitas) and pleasure (voluptas) is a recurring theme of Varro’s Res Rusticae. Despite Varro and his friends’ business know-how, they make clear that these two aims are not incompatible; the ideal farm is in fact one on which profit and pleasure work together. In fact they argue that a pleasant appearance actually contributes to a farm’s productiveness (cf. Var. R. 1.7.2), and give a number of illustrations of how this can work. A grove of fruit- and olive-trees planted in rows (in ordinem) not only makes a farmer’s land more profitable, but also improves its appearance (R. 1.4.2); a pond not only provides a place for cattle to drink and pigs to bathe, but can also, especially if surrounded by

78 See further Cairns (1979), 14, 17–19, 21, 37, 135, 137.
79 On this genre, see Cairns (1975). See too Geytenbeek (1963), 129–30, 133.
80 Var. R. 1.2.12, 1.4.1–2, 1.53. Cf. 3.3.1 (fructui ac delectationi).
columns (*intra stylobatas, cum velit*), be an attractive addition to the farmyard (*R.* 1.13.3); a display of ripe fruits (*oporotheca*) not only promises a good sale, but is just as pleasant to look at as a gallery of paintings (*pinacotheca*, *R.* 1.2.10; cf. 1.59.2). This theme is also taken up at the opening of Book 3, where Axius contrasts P. Clodius’ elaborate villa with his own (slightly) more modest one: *Tua enim oblita tabulis pictis nec minus signis; at mea, vestigium ubi sitnullum Lysippi aut Antiphilu, at crebra sartoris et pastoris* (*R.* 3.2.5). Axius’ villa is not without artificial decoration; as Clodius has already pointed out, it is embellished by parquetry, metal work, paintings and mosaics (*R.* 3.2.4). But it is also adorned by pigs (*R.* 3.2.12), horses (*R.* 3.2.4), donkeys (*R.* 3.2.4), planters (*R.* 3.2.5) and shepherds (*R.* 3.2.5). As this anecdote suggests, realistic farm work and agricultural produce are themselves ornaments to a farm.  

Varro does not, however, completely discount purely decorative features. He describes at length his own elaborate aviary with its running streams, fishponds, artificial forest, revolving dining-table and water clock (*clepsydra*) (*R.* 3.5.9–17). It is clear, however, that pleasure should never come at too much of a cost. Aviaries, fishponds and flower-gardens should all provide enough goods for the landholder to take to market; if they are also pleasing to look at, then so much the better. Adornments such as those which Varro describes only become cause for moral censure when their owners overstep certain boundaries. These boundaries are frequently (as we shall see in the following chapter) characterized as ‘natural’ ones, but more often than not are in fact ‘cultural’ ones.  

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81 Cf. Purcell (1995), 152, 153 and *passim.*  
83 See below, Chapter IV, 125ff.
This insistence on both *utilitas* and *voluptas* also affects Roman representations of more idealized landscapes, as elements of everyday Roman agriculture appear in otherwise quite stylized settings. In the *Eclogues*, for example, Vergil effectively combines elements of Theocritus’ landscapes with recognizably Italian ones to create what has been called ‘a Roman design for nature’.\(^84\) As Eleanor Winsor Leach points out, in *Eclogue* 1, Tityrus’ farm is ‘a miniature of the well-balanced *latifundium*’ where the farmer grows apples and nuts, but also raises sheep and cattle and keeps bee-hives. Tityrus himself resembles an older type of Italian farmer in that he combines horticulture with animal husbandry.\(^85\) Meliboeus similarly remembers a farm where he grew crops, vines and fruit-trees and also kept goats.\(^86\) Likewise in *Eclogue* 7, Meliboeus not only grows myrtle, but also raises sheep and cattle. The appearance of self-sufficiency which Tityrus achieves on his farm adds to the atmosphere of unreality, and further suggests that the landscape of the farm is highly idealized. In better circumstances, away from the turmoil of civil war and land confiscations, farmers such as Tityrus would be able to achieve a comfortable self-sufficiency reminiscent of the golden age. That such a happy life is impossible (in the *Eclogues* crops fail and land is confiscated) only adds to the impression that each of these farms is an ideal one where realistic pictures of fields and farm animals are interposed with glimpses of a more idyllic rural world.

A similar picture of the Roman farm appears in Cicero’s *de Senectute* (Cic. *Sen.* 51–60). Here Cicero juxtaposes realistic (and sometimes just mundane) elements of farm life with more fantastic ones. The main theme of Cato’s speech is the joys which farming can bring to an old man (*voluptates agricolarum*, *Sen.* 51; *requietem oblectamentumque*, 15.52; *permulta oblectamenta rerum*

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\(^84\) For a detailed study of the landscapes of the *Eclogues*, see Leach (1974). Leach divides Vergil’s landscapes into four main types: the farm scene, the rustic countryside, the wilderness and the *locus amoenus* (*ibid.*, 96). Of the farm scene Leach writes: ‘The farm landscape places the bucolic life within a pattern of agricultural organization. If they are not roughly realistic, still Vergil’s images of the farm world contain many elements that identify them as typically Italian.’ (*ibid.*, 96).

\(^85\) Leach (1974), 96.

\(^86\) Cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 2 where vines, crops and sheep share the same farm.
Cato does not overlook the farmer’s everyday chores. He speaks of grafting, irrigating, ditching, hoeing, fertilizing and pruning (Sen. 53). He also uses specialized (and apparently quite accurate)\(^87\) terms from agriculture and horticulture (for example *occatio*, Sen. 51; *malleoli*, 52; *plantae*, 52; *sarmenta*, 52; *viviradices*, 52; *propagines*, 52; *iugatio*, 53; *repastinationes*, 53).

Yet despite its tone of farmerly know-how, when Cato comes to describe the produce of his farm, his account seems too good to be true:

Semper enim boni assidui domini referta cella vinaria, olearia, etiam penaria est, villaque tota locuples est, abundat porco haedo agno gallina lacte caseo melle. Iam hortum ipsi agricolae ‘succidam alteram’ appellant. Conditiora facit haec supervacuaneis etiam operis aucupium atque venatio.

(Cic. *Sen.* 56)

Here, as throughout his speech, Cato clearly speaks of a real farm in the Italian countryside. All of the products which he mentions — wine, olives, meat, milk, cheese and honey — are unremarkable ones, which could readily produced on a small mixed farm.\(^88\) But Cato also suggests that the farmer can achieve a kind of golden-age abundance from his land. This is reflected in Cicero’s use of words such as *locuples*, *abundat* and *supervacuaneis*. The farmer enjoys not only the products of modern agriculture, such as wine, oil and meat, but also milk and honey. Cato also reminds us that these blessings do not come spontaneously, and that only hard-working farmers (*boni assiduique domini*) enjoy these benefits of the *vita rustica*. Cato also expects that the farmer will engage in activities such as fowling and hunting (Sen. 56). Similarly while Cato looks forward to relaxing in a kind of *locus amoenus* of shade and splashing streams (Sen. 57), he also evokes a realistic picture of the cultivated landscape of rural Italy (Sen. 54).

Despite the idealizing element in his speech, Cicero’s Cato speaks as a real farmer. It is easy to imagine him, like the ideal farmer of Roman legend, digging

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\(^{88}\) Cf. Cic. *Sen.* 15.54 where Cato evokes a similar picture: *Nec vero segetibus solum et pratis et vineis et arbuscis res rusticae laetae sunt, sed hortis etiam et pomariis, tum pecudum pastu, apium examinibus, florum omnium varietate.*
his garden and pruning his vines. The story of Cyrus and Lysander, which Cicero adapts from Xenophon (*Oecon.* 4.20ff.), underlines the importance of personal engagement with nature in defining the ideal Roman farmer as one who works with his own hands. According to Cicero’s version, when Cyrus showed Lysander his garden with its rows of neatly planted trees (which here are conveniently arranged in the Roman *quincunx* pattern, *Sen.* 59) and beds of fragrant flowers, Lysander is said to have wondered at the care and skill of the man who planted them (*Sen.* 59). The point of the story is that it was Cyrus himself who tended the garden (*Sen.* 59). Cicero’s imaginative picture of Cato’s farm shows the joys of rural life, while placing them in a roughly realistic setting. In fact, the realistic touches which Cicero includes in Cato’s speech not only help to characterize Cato as a real farmer, but also help to represent his farm as an ideal Roman one in that it is both pleasant to look at and usefully productive.

Like Cicero’s Cato, Horace also imposes aspects of certain fabulous places and landscapes on to the real Italian countryside. Horace gives a detailed description of his farm in *Epistulae* 1.16. As Richard F. Thomas has shown, Horace describes his farm by using the established categories of ancient ethnography: he writes of its situation and aspect (*forma ... et situs agri*, Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.4–7), its climate (*Ep.* 1.16.8), and finally of its agricultural produce (*Ep.* 1.16.1–4, 8–11). Into each of these traditional categories, Horace introduces certain fantastic elements, and so presents his farm as an ideal landscape. Like the ideal farms recommended by Cato (*Agr.* 1.3) and Varro (*R.* 1.7.1) Horace’s farm has a southerly aspect (*veniens dextrum latus aspiciat sol, | laevum discedens, Epist.* 1.16.6–7). In the simple sentence *temperiem laudes* (1.16.8) Horace also attributes to his farm an ideal climate. *Temperies* appears commonly in Roman ethnographic writings and descriptions of ideal places (such as Caes. *Gal.* 5.12.6;

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89 See Powell (1988), 224–6 on Cicero’s adaptation of Xenophon’s original story.

90 For a detailed discussion of this aspect of Horace’s landscapes, on which this one is based, see Richard F. Thomas (1982), 8–34.


92 Richard F. Thomas (1982), 11–12: “[T]he presence or absence of *temperies* is important; in claiming it for his environment ..., Horace does more than merely suggest a balance between heat and cold. For implied in that balance is an environment which is totally at harmony and ideal, free from disease and endowed with a natural and spontaneous fertility” (*loc. cit.*, 12).
FARMS

Ov. *Met.* 1.50–1; 1.430; 15.211; *Pont.* 2.7.71; Tac. *Ann.* 4.55.4; 4.67.2; Plin. *Nat.* 3.41; 37.201), where it suggests not just a pleasant climate, but a perfect balance between heat and cold resulting in an almost miraculous fertility. But Horace’s farm grows none of the products which we might have expected from a small farm (such as olives, grapes, and common vegetables), but rather cornel-berries (*corna, Ep.* 1.16.8–9), wild plums (*pruna, Ep.* 1.16.8–9), and acorns (*Ep.* 1.16.9–10). All of these natural products have clear associations with certain idealized landscapes. *Corna* and *pruna*, like *arbuta* (wild strawberries), *mora* (mulberries), and other fruits, appear in both pastoral poetry and accounts of the lives of the earliest human beings. Horace’s image of fruits ripening amid thorns and brambles (*quid si rubicunda benigni | corna vepres et pruna ferant? Ep.* 1.16.8–9) reinforces the unreality of his farm, by attributing to it a miraculous fertility. Acorns too, while they often provided feed for pigs and other farmyard animals, commonly appear in accounts of the Golden Age (*Ov. Met.* 1.106), Arcadia (*Hdt.* 1.66; Apollonius Rhodius 4.264) and the earliest stage of human life (*Lucr.* 5.939–40; *Var. R.* 2.1.4; *Verg.* G. 1.148; Serv. ad *Verg.* G. 1.8; *Juv.* 13.57; Plin. *Nat.* 16.1).

Horace also writes of his farm’s shade (*Ep.* 1.16.10) and water (*Ep.* 1.16.12–14). Each of these natural features is commonly associated with both the *locus amoenus* and other ideal places. On Horace’s farm, shade comes from the oak and ilex trees which help to feed his animals:

*... si quercus et ilex multa fruge pecus, multa dominum iuvet umbra? dicas adductum propius frondere Tarentum. (Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.9–11)*

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94 Cf. *Verg. Ecl.* 4.29; *G.* 2.34, 4.145 where thorny plants again bear fruit (*pruna*). On these passages, see further Pease (1933); Ross (1980); *idem* (1987), 104–9.
95 *Verg.* G. 2.72, 2.520; *Col.* 12.10
96 Lovejoy and Boas (1935), 344–5
Invective against both shade and shade-producing trees appears commonly in Latin literature. The basis of these criticisms is twofold: firstly, shade is often associated with excessive luxury and laziness (cf. Col. 1.2.1); secondly, the trees which produce this shade are generally unproductive (cf. Verg. G. 2.70: *steriles platani*), and so, it is argued, have no place on a genuine farm. But on Horace’s farm, shade comes from the same trees which produce the acorns for his pigs; thus Horace has combined the ideal with the realistic, as his trees provide both cooling shade and pig-feed. Horace further distances his farm from an actual place in his mention of the garden of Vergil’s old man of Tarentum (*dicas adductum propius frondere Tarentum*, Hor. Ep. 1.16.11; cf. Verg. G. 4.116–48). Like Horace, the old man seems uninterested in conventional Roman agriculture (*nec fertilis illa iuvenis | nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho*, Verg. G. 4.128–9), and instead grows lilies and poppies, roses, limes, laurestines, plums and plane-trees in a garden of marvellous fertility (G. 4.131, 141–6).

Horace completes the description of his farm by writing of its *amoenitas*:

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hae latebrae dulces, etiam, si credis, amoenae,
incolumem tibi me praestant Septembribus horis.
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(Hor. Ep. 1.16.15–16; cf. Carm. 1.17.1–2)

Here, as in many other Latin texts, *amoenus* suggests both peaceful tranquillity and usefulness. Horace has attributed both an ideal climate and a remarkable natural fruitfulness to his plot of land, and so suggests that while in some respects his farm is a physical place in the real Italian countryside, it is also an idealized and in a sense unreal landscape. Horace’s aside ‘if you can believe it’ (*si credis*, 1.16.15) provides a further hint that he has given Quintus a highly idealized impression of his farm. Richard F. Thomas summarizes the significance of these lines: ‘Having established his farm as the ideal setting, Horace concludes by claiming for it *amoenitas*. The *locus amoenus* implicitly possesses great fertility,

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100 See below, Chapter IV, 128ff.
often verging on the marvellous. At the same time, there are suggestions of the secluded world of the poet; hence latebrae… The farm’s balanced climate, its unusual productivity, and the coolness and clarity of its health-giving spring are all to be seen as ethnographical thaumasia.101

What is notable about all of these texts is not so much that they present an idealized (and in some respects unrealistic) picture of country life, but that they mingle features of certain idealized places with those of real farms. Writers turn the farm from a functional, productive landscape to one where sophisticated Roman citizens could enjoy playing the part of a rustic, while they present an idealized picture of farm life in their writings. An ideal Roman landscape need not be utterly removed from reality. On the contrary, elements of realism (pigs, donkeys and farm labourers) contribute to the perceived perfection of these landscapes and, it might be said, add a down-to-earth ‘Roman’ touch.

6. Conclusion

The ideal Roman farm, then, is one which is not only usefully productive, but also effectively blended into the natural world. Even when the farm is a highly idealized one (such as Horace’s estate and Cato’s farm in Cicero’s de Senectute), it retains elements of a real farm. Here the Roman farmer can sit in the restful shade by a plashing stream amid fruit trees and flowers, but also remind himself that the shade comes from the trees which feed his pigs, that the stream is also a watering-place for the farm’s animals, that the fruit from his trees can be sold at market and that the flowers provide nectar for his bees. This ideal Roman farm is not just attractive to look at, but is also a real working farm.

This rosy view of farming was of course influenced by Rome’s rural origins and Romans’ continuing reverence for the figure of the hardy rustic. It is

important to remember, then, that when Romans are writing about farmers and farms, they are also often writing about Rome’s myth-history and ideas of Roman national identity. Not all areas of cultivated nature, however, merit such admiration. The following chapter turns to some of the gardens of Latin literature and considers how — and why — these often evoke quite different responses.
IV

Gardens

Papirius Fabianus ap. Sen. Con. 2.1.13

1. Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, in many Latin texts farms are places where natural processes are encouraged and even improved by the farmer’s work. According to this view agriculture, which is sometimes imagined as having been taught by nature itself, is not a war between farmers and nature but a kind of co-operative effort. Yet despite the favourable view of cultivation which Roman writers often present, they also express the idea that it is possible to take this cultivation too far.

This idea can be seen in some Roman representations of gardens (and other, similar cultivated landscapes), which are the subject of the present chapter. I begin by examining ideas surrounding concepts of nature and artifice. Like nature itself, artificiality is a difficult concept to define and one which is in many ways culturally determined. It is nonetheless an important one to consider. Attitudes
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towards gardens need to be read in the context of beliefs as to where the line between nature and artifice should be drawn. Responses to other types of natural environment also provide an important context in which to examine gardens. I approach this idea by considering some uses of *amoenus* and *amoenitas* in Latin literature. While many areas described as *amoena* are peaceful and inviting, others are regarded as dangerous and corrupting. Indeed with respect to natural spots (as with some other aspects of Roman culture),¹ there is only a smudgy distinction between what is pleasant and what is just plain immoral. A similar ambivalence underlies Roman attitudes towards gardens. The remainder of the chapter looks at the contrasts between the traditional Roman *hortus* and the pleasure-garden, and at the quite different associations of these in Latin literature. Like farms, small productive gardens are mostly associated with the praiseworthy habits of the early Romans; by contrast, large and elaborate pleasure-gardens are associated with decadence, sluggishness and other supposedly ‘un-Roman’ characteristics. But, as I show in this chapter’s final section, pleasure-gardens can also provide opportunities for the display of an individual’s ownership of and control over an area of nature.

Gardens of course have a broader significance outside Roman culture. Since at least the early modern period, gardens have been seen primarily as places of pleasure and relaxation where we can enjoy aspects of nature in a safe and enclosed environment.² Unlike farms, contemporary gardens are for the most part ornamental; productive plants such as fruit and nut trees are often grown as much for their appearance as for their produce, and only a patch of ground is set aside for growing vegetables. In literature, an enclosed and highly cultivated garden can suggest repose and philosophical contemplation, or symbolize ‘ideals of beauty’.³ A weed-choked garden, on the other hand, can suggest danger or vice. These images can also be overturned. In the *Metamorphoses*, for example, the

¹ Excessive cultivation of the body, for example, is often viewed with a similar suspicion. See Catharine Edwards (1993), 68–97.
³ Mark Morford (1987), 154.
peacefulness of Ovid’s gardens and other landscapes is sometimes misleading, so that a seemingly safe and tranquil place becomes a setting for violence.  

2. Nature and artifice

As I have already mentioned, artificiality is not something which can be readily defined. (Ideas of what is natural and what is artificial will also vary from individual to individual, but it is worth repeating that I am here talking about broad cultural views rather than with the thoughts of particular individuals.) This is largely because there is no sharp and clear line between nature and artifice. For example, what is a source of moral outrage for an ancient Roman writer can often cause mere bemusement in a modern reader. Seneca, for example, is vehement in his disapproval of the use of snow to cool food and drinks (Sen. Nat. 4B.13.1ff.). The elder Pliny expresses a similar disgust at this practice (Plin. Nat. 19.55). In a society where refrigeration is commonplace, such outrage seems misplaced, but Seneca’s unmistakeable hostility towards this practice is based in part on social arguments: what Seneca objects to is the misguided use of excessive wealth; Pliny similarly objects that water — which should be freely available to all — is traded in a way which prohibits it to the poor (Nat. 19.55). Yet these writers express their objections in terms of what they regard as ‘natural’ behaviour.

Appeals to nature are a feature of ancient Roman — particularly Stoic — rhetoric, as in the passage from the works of Papirius Fabianus (ap. Sen. Con. 2.1.13) quoted at the opening of this chapter. As Fabianus’ catalogue of apparently unnatural behaviours suggests, however, ‘naturalness’ is very often a matter either of context or degree. There is nothing unnatural about mountains, forests, fields, seas and rivers (to take some of Fabianus’ examples) in themselves; on the contrary, these would generally be regarded as wholly ‘natural’ things.

They become unnatural only when they are moved out of their usual context and placed in an environment where they do not belong: that is, inside the houses and gardens of the rich. Fabianus himself makes the nature of his complaint quite clear: *sed adversum naturam alieno loco aut terra aut mare mentita aegris oblectamenta sunt.*

Often such references to nature are intended simply to provide support for a writer’s point of view; ‘nature’ provides the rhetorical bolster to some other, usually culturally based, argument. Moreover Roman writers are not above adjusting their concept of what is natural when necessary. One example is the elder Pliny’s somewhat wavering view of plane-trees. Pliny (like many other Roman writers) is generally outspoken in his hostility towards these. At one point, however, he openly admires a shady plane-tree, contrasting the natural enjoyment which it provides with the artificial pleasures of marble and gold (Plin. *Nat.* 12.9). Here an object which has elsewhere been condemned as unnatural has suddenly become natural again in the context of what Pliny regards as far more contemptible luxuries.

Other kinds of behaviour are condemned as unnatural or ‘against nature’ only when they seem to have been taken too far. Vitruvius speaks out against overly realistic trompe l’œil paintings. While he generally approves of decorative murals (Vitr. 7.5.2), he disapproves when interior decoration is taken to extremes: when painters depict plants with the heads of men or animals (Vitr. 7.5.3), for example. *Haec autem nec sunt nec fieri possunt nec fuerunt,* Vitruvius justifiably concludes (Vitr. 7.5.4). Paintings such as these are in a sense unnatural; they have become (to use Vitruvius’ word) *monstra* (Vitr. 7.5.3). Fish-ponds are another favourite example for Roman writers. These are generally recommended in Roman agricultural texts as a useful source of extra income for farmers (cf. Var. *R.* 3.17.2; Col. 8.16.5). If it is taken too far, however, breeding fish can become a

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5 Writing about Roman diatribe against luxurious building, Catharine Edwards notes that this is often expressed in terms of a perceived disruption to the ‘natural’ order: ‘The luxurious, accused of disrupting nature, are implicitly held responsible for a social disruption at once characterised as undesirable by its alignment with the disordering of nature itself’ (Catharine Edwards [1993], 140).


7 See further Beagon (1992), 82.

8 Pavlovskis (1973), 7–8, n. 22.
vice. To build ponds and breed fish to sell is prudent farm management; to make fish into special pets — to adorn them with earrings and feed them on dainty fish caught specially for the purpose (Plin. *Nat.* 9.172; Var. *R.* 3.17.5–9) — has overstepped what could be regarded as ‘natural’. The motives behind some behaviour are, then, also relevant in determining moral responses to it.

Finally it is worth noting that ideas of the natural and the unnatural are not governed only by social or cultural norms. There is no clear division between nature and artifice: art can exist in nature and, conversely, nature can exist in art. This was one of the themes of the previous chapter, where I discussed the idea that human skills (particularly in the area of agriculture) can be seen to work in conjunction with nature to augment and sometimes even improve on natural things.

This was also the aim of much ancient art: to reproduce the creations of nature as accurately as possible.9 The artists of the past whom Pliny claims are most worthy of admiration are those who could accurately replicate nature. One of the anecdotes which he records concerns the artist Apelles who painted a horse with such accuracy that even other horses (brought in expressly to judge the painting, according to Pliny’s story) considered it real (Plin. *Nat.* 35.95).10 Another of Apelles’ paintings, this time of a naked hero, was said to be so lifelike that it challenged nature itself (*et heroa nudum eaque pictura naturam ipsam provocavit*, *Nat.* 35.94). Just how close human and natural creations can actually be is reinforced when Pliny claims that examples of art also appear spontaneously in nature.11 He describes a remarkable ring owned by Pyrrhus which held an agate engraved with a picture of Apollo and the Muses (*Nat.* 37.5). What made the ring so remarkable is that this picture was created not by any human artist, but by nature (*non arte, sed naturae sponte ita discurrentibus maculis, ut Musis quoque singulis sua redderentur insignia*, *Nat.* 37.5).

The division between nature and artifice is, then, far from clear, and their moral implications are likewise flexible. In fact Roman responses to human
intervention in the natural world often depend in large part on the motives behind the action. Moreover, what determines whether or not something is regarded as ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ often has little to do with how close it is to its original state, but rather with some other argument. As we shall see in the following section, some of the same ideas can be discerned in Roman responses to nature and place more broadly.

3. **Amoenitas in Roman landscapes**

Up to this point, I have been discussing some general ideas around concepts of nature and artificiality, arguing that Roman attitudes towards these are uneven and sometimes quite contradictory. Responses to different forms of artifice are often shaped by the uses to which they are put or their perceived effects on human beings. Roman attitudes towards landscapes reveal some similar ideas. Roman writers often suggest that an excessively cultivated landscape (and once again, it is worth pointing out that just how much is ‘excessively’ is open to question) is inferior to one in its more ‘natural’ form. This is not necessarily because of the possible distortion of natural things which cultivation can entail, but rather because of the detrimental effects such landscapes were believed to have on their human inhabitants.12

*Amoenitas* is sometimes identified as a feature of the ideal Roman landscape. Mary Beagon, for example, suggests that *amoenus* ‘denoted the kind of scenery which most appealed to Greeks and Romans’.13 That is, not ‘the wild beauty of mountains or sea’, but a kind of ‘quiet pleasantness’.14 Nicholas Purcell similarly comments that while some Romans ‘do like the outer wild … it is a very

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12 For a general discussion of this idea, see Balsdon (1979), 9–12.
14 Beagon (1992), 194.
perverted taste. The *amoenum* is a more normal and quite distinct taste.\(^{15}\) Objects as varied as villas (Plin. *Ep. 5.6.3*), beaches (Cic. *N.D. 2.100*; Liv. *28.18.10*), rivers (Cic. *Q. fr.3.1.1*), gardens (Tac. *Ann. 14.52*), the walls of a city (Plaut. *Truc. prol. 2*), islands (Cic. *Leg. 2.6*), springs (Lucr. *4.1024*) and temples (Liv. *45.27.10*), as well as particular places (Plin. *Nat. 6.44* on Choara; Tac. *Hist. 1.67* on Baden; Plin. *Nat. 3.40* on Campania; Cic. *Att. 4.8.1* on Antium) can all be described as *amoenus*.\(^{16}\) Just what *amoenitas* is, however, is not necessarily clear. According to Servius, places which are *amoenus* are pleasant (‘full of pleasure’ in fact), but unproductive: ‘*amoena* sunt loca solius voluptatis plena, quasi *amunia*, unde nullus fructus exsolvitur’ (Serv. *A. 5.734*).\(^{17}\) Certainly in some instances, *amoenus* and *amoenitas* are used with the sense which Servius suggests;\(^{18}\) more often, however, these words seem to refer to places which are not just pleasant and cultivated, but also in some way useful to human beings.\(^{19}\)

This is suggested in a passage in which the elder Pliny identifies *amoenitas* as a characteristic of Roman landscape painting:

\[\text{Non fraudando et Studio divi Augusti aetate, qui primus instituit amoenissimam parietum picturam, villas et portus ac topiaria opera, lucos, nemora, colles, piscinas, euripos, amnes, litora, qualia quis optaret, varias ibi obambulantium species aut navigantium terraque villas adeuntium asellis aut vehiculis, iam piscantes, auctupantes aut venantes aut etiam vindemiantes.... Idem subdialibus maritimas urbes pingere instituit, blandissimo aspectu minimoque inpendio.}\]

(Plin. *Nat. 35.116–17*)\(^{20}\)

\(^{15}\) Purcell (1987), 202.


\(^{17}\) Cf. Serv. *A. 6.638*: *hoc est sine fructu.*

\(^{18}\) Cf. Liv. *22.15.2* on the ager Falernus: *consita omnia magis amoenis quam necessariis fructibus.*

\(^{19}\) See *T.L.L.*, s.v. which gives as synonyms *fructuosus, fecundus* and *dives*. See too Beagon (1992), 195 n. 58. Cf. Plin. *Ep. 2.17.25* where *utilitas and amoenitas* are shared features of Pliny’s villa.

\(^{20}\) Cf. Vitr. *5.6.9, 7.5.2*. On these and other examples of Roman painting, see Leach (1988), 272–6; Isager (1991), 131–4; Ling (1977). Ling *loc. cit.*, 11 notes: ‘There is not, as in many modern landscapes, a desire to represent natural features for their own sake, to show the loneliness and vastness of the wilds. As in virtually all Roman landscapes, it is man and his works which form the focus of interest.’
The paintings which Pliny describes represent broad and pleasant scenes, in which human works seem to blend into the natural landscape: villas, harbours and fishponds merge with groves, hills and rivers. Pliny further notes that paintings in this style often incorporate images of human beings making use of the products of nature: people fishing, catching birds, hunting or picking grapes. This type of painting, which is not just *amoenus* but *amoenissima*, shows human beings making use of a kindly and fertile nature. The scenes which they represent are humanized, productive and useful.

It is significant that *amoenitas* rarely refers to wild landscapes.\(^{21}\) None of the natural features which Pliny mentions, for example, is especially wild: the paintings which he describes feature groves rather than forests, and rivers and beaches rather than the ocean. The contrast between a landscape which is *amoenus* and one which is wild again appears in a passage in the *de Tranquillitate Animi* where Seneca criticizes those who blame their discontent on their environment and so rush from place to place in search of happiness (*Dial. 9.2.13*).\(^{22}\) Having travelled to the wilderness (*deserta*), however, they find themselves longing for a more familiar and ‘humanized’ landscape (*fa*liquid ... *amoeni ... in quo luxuriosi oculi longo locorum horrentium squalore releventur*). Seneca here sets up a contrast between land which is wild and land which is *amoenus*. As he suggests, *amoenus* refers to a landscape which, unlike *deserta*, is both cultivated and productive.

The same attributes appear in water described as *amoenus*.\(^{23}\) The elder Pliny often uses *amoenus* or *amoenitas* in his descriptions of watery spots. Rivers, lakes and other waterways are all by Pliny described as *amoenus* (*Nat. 3.20, 3.109, 5.88*). So is the river Jordan: *[Iordanes] amnis amoenus et quatenus locorum situs patitur ambitiosus accolisque se praebens velut invitus Asphaltiten lacum dirum natura petit, a quo postremo eebitur aquasqu e laudatus perdit pestilentibus mixtas* (*Nat. 5.71*). Here it becomes clear that *amoenitas* refers not just to

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\(^{21}\) Beagon (1992), 194 n. 54 makes a similar point. Nepos (*Att. 13.2*) says Atticus’ house *amoenus* because of the woods around it, but even these are planted woods.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Purcell (1987), 201–2.

\(^{23}\) Cf. Lucr. 4.1024; Cic. *Q. fr. 3.1.1*; Verg. *A. 7.30, 8.31, 9.677*; Hor. *Carm. 3.4.7, Ep. 1.106*; *Liv. 45.27.10*; Ovid *Met. 14.331*; Sen. *B. 6.7.3, 6.8.2*; Plin. *Ep. 8.8.6*; Col. 1.5.4, 11.1.16; Vell. 2.81.2; Apul. *Met. 4.17*. Water is also a common feature of the *locus amoenus*. See Beagon (1992), 194 n. 55.
pleasantness, but also to usefulness. The Jordan (like the Tiber itself, *Nat.* 3.54–5) helps those who live on its banks and so contributes to the workings of the human world; nature and human culture are not necessarily separate, but can be seen to work together. Significantly, it is inland waters more than the ocean which are described by Pliny as *amoenus*. This is in part because Pliny consistently represents the ocean not just as wild and destructive (it wears away coasts, engulfs islands, tosses ships and sometimes washes away whole mountains), but also as producing nothing useful. By contrast, rivers, lakes, streams and other forms of fresh water aid the human race by providing transport and irrigation, facilitating commerce and offering pleasing views to the owners of country villas. Just as land which is *amoenus* is productive and appealing to the eye, waterways which are described in this way are both useful and pleasant to look at.

A number of texts which refer to the *amoenitas* of a natural waterway refer also to its healthiness. This may be because of the common link between flowing water and health (and conversely between stagnant water and disease). So while the Pomptine Marshes, according to Cicero, are neither pleasant (*amoenus*) nor healthy (*Pomptinum ... neque amoenum neque salubrem locum*, Cic. *Orat.* 2.290), the countryside around the flowing waters of the river Fibrenus is both (*et amoenitatem ... et salubritatem*, Cic. *Leg.* 2.1.3).

The presence of water can also contribute to the *amoenitas* of a place on land. Livy writes of a temple which was *amoenus* because of the springs and streams around it (Livy. 45.27.10). Columella writes that the presence of bubbling streams (*salientes rivi*) not only reduces the temperature of a place, but also increases its *amoenitas* (Col. 1.5.4). The elder Pliny describes the sea of Gennesareth (*lacum Genesaram*) as ‘fringed by pleasant towns’ (*amoenis

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25 Beagon (1992), 194
29 See above, 35.
Here again the *amoenitas* of water has been transferred to an unnatural feature. Furthermore where a natural waterway is lacking, an artificial one can sometimes fulfil the same function. The younger Pliny, for example, suggests that the building of an aqueduct would enhance both the healthiness and the *amoenitas* (here perhaps convenience as well as pleasantness) of Sinope (Plin. *Ep.* 10.90.2).

So far, *amoenitas* has been seen to be a positive attribute: landscapes which are *amoenus* display natural features which are both pleasing and productive. But *amoenitas* can also be a negative thing. Livy uses *amoenitas* to refer to the dangers and temptations which await Romans in lands outside Italy. In Book 38, his Manlius worries that the pleasures of Asia — defined as a pleasant climate, an ‘abundance of all things’ (*copia omnium rerum*) and a fertile soil (Liv. 38.17.17) — will weaken and corrupt the men of Rome: ‘*Vobis mehercule, Martiis viris, cavenda ac fugienda quam primum amoenitas est Asiae*’ (Liv. 38.17.18).

Tacitus uses similar ideas in his account of Tiberius’ retreat on Capreae (Tac. *Ann.* 4.67.1–3). This passage has been shown to include many of the elements of traditional ethnographic writing: Tacitus describes the island’s location (*Capreas se in insulam abdidit, trium milium freto ab extremis Surrentini promunturii diiunctam*, Ann. 4.67.1), its climate (*caeli temperies, hieme mitis obiectu montis, quo saeva ventorum arcentur; aestas in favonium obversa*, Tac. *Ann.* 4.67.1–3) and the origins of its inhabitants (*Graecos ea tenuisse Capreasque Telebois habitatas fama tradit*, Tac. *Ann.* 4.67.1–3). Tacitus writes also of the island’s *amoenitas*: *aestas in favonium obversa et aperto circum pelago peramoena* (Tac. *Ann.* 4.67.1–3). The unique word *peramoena* immediately sees the island become a kind of *locus amoenus*. Finally Tacitus relates the landscape of the island to the emperor’s behaviour: *Sed tum Tiberius duodecim villarum nominibus et molibus insederat, quanto intentus olim publicas ad curas, tanto occultior<es> in luxus et malum otium resolutus* (Tac. *Ann.* 4.67.1–3). Like Livy,

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Tacitus suggests that a comfortable environment can be corrupting, and that even the Roman ideal of *amoenitas* can be taken too far.\(^{34}\)

4. The ideal Roman garden

The same ambivalence appears in Roman accounts of gardens and gardening. Most of the material evidence for Roman gardens comes from Pompeii where a variety of gardens — including ornamental gardens, public parks, commercial orchards, vineyards and market-gardens — have been uncovered. The most common type of garden, however, was the small kitchen-garden.\(^{35}\) Here vegetables and herbs were planted amid large fruit or nut trees in an entirely informal, and quite ‘natural’, manner. Even ornamental gardens generally included some common but useful plants and areas of informal growth; indeed there was not always a clear distinction between the formal, ornamental garden and the more informal, utilitarian garden.\(^{36}\)

(i) *The Roman* hortus and *amoenitas*

One of the most detailed accounts of the Roman *hortus* appears in Book 19 of the elder Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* (Nat. 19.49–189).\(^{37}\) Here Pliny writes not only about the technical aspects of horticulture (methods of propagating, grafting, planting, irrigating and fertilizing), but also about what he considers the ideal

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\(^{35}\) See Jashemski (1979) and (1993). See too Grimal (1984); Littlewood (1987); Purcell (1987); Conan (1986); Gleason (1994).

\(^{36}\) See Jashemski (1979), 32 on the House of the Centenary (IX.viii.6).

\(^{37}\) On Pliny’s view of gardens, see Beagon (1992), 79–91.
Roman garden. For Pliny, the most important characteristic of the Roman *hortus*
is its usefulness. A garden, Pliny writes, should be able to provide a household with simple foods and natural cures (Nat. 19.60). In this respect, the ideal Roman *hortus* is a kind of miniature farm (cf. Plin. Nat. 19.51: *Romae quidem per se hortus ager pauperis erat*). Among the plants which Pliny recommends growing in this garden are common vegetables (such as lettuces, cabbages, carrots, onions, garlic, cucumbers and radishes), herbs (basil, parsley, rue, mint, thyme), and medicinal flowers (poppies, Nat. 19.169, roses, lilies and violets). In other words, plants which are not merely decorative, but also clearly useful.

It is important to note that the Roman *hortus* was not overly cultivated and was therefore not always clearly distinguished from wild nature. The gardens which Pliny describes, for example, combine beds of cultivated plants with areas of natural and seemingly wild growth. While gardens (and even kitchen-gardens) were often divided into beds, this was not for decorative purposes, but to enable the gardener to tend and water the garden without treading on its plants (cf. Col. 11.3.13). Not just the layout of the garden, but also the plants which were grown in it contributed to its wild appearance. In his books on gardens and garden plants, Pliny includes both cultivated plants (usually referred to as *sativus*; cf. Nat. 19.184) and wild ones (*silvestris* or *erraticus*; cf. Nat. 19.169, 19.184). Both types are suitable to grow in household gardens. Pliny further observes that some people collect wild plants to sow in their gardens (Plin. Nat. 19.172). Wild mint (*sisymbrium*), for example, can be grown around ponds and over wells (Nat. 19.172). Pliny also likes the impression of wildness which even cultivated plants can bring. He admires, for example, the appearance of vines growing over a house which, despite their natural and unruly appearance, had in

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38 Pliny writes that in the Twelve Tables, the word *villa* (‘farm’) never appears, but only the word *hortus* (Nat. 19.50).
39 See too Plin. Nat. 19.61, 19.90–2, 19.117 and passim. A number of the vegetables which Pliny lists were useful both as foods and medicines: e.g. Nat. 19.85–7 (on radishes), 111 (garlic), 127–8 (lettuce) and 19.136–8, 20.78–91 (cabbage). On herbal medicine, see Nat. 20, 22, 23 and 24. See too Beagon (1992), 202–40; Nutton (1986); Stannard (1965), (1982) and (1986).
fact been planted (Nat. 14.11). Pliny can admire this display with the knowledge that the vines had been purposefully arranged in this way by the gardener.

The wild appearance of the Roman hortus seems also to have been influenced in part by ancient theories of companion planting. Pliny advises growing rocket (eruca) with lettuce, poppies with cabbages and purslane (porcillaca), (Pliny NH 19.167) and garlic and onions between the rows of certain trees (NH 13.133). He also tells us that rue (ruta) enjoys such a great ‘friendship’ with the fig-tree that it grows best when planted at its foot (NH 19.156). Other plants — such as radishes or laurels and grape-vines — should not be grown together (NH 17.239–40, 19.87). These ideas shaped the appearance of the garden, in that different plants were often grown side by side, and not restricted to particular areas.

The Roman hortus, then, seems to have shared some characteristics with areas of more wild nature. Wild plants were allowed to grow beside cultivated varieties, and plants were not necessarily restricted to neatly-ordered beds, but planted in varied and scattered clumps and to some extent allowed to run wild. At the same time, the Roman hortus fulfilled certain useful functions by providing simple foods and plant-based medicines. In this respect, the Roman hortus fulfils the positive ideal of amoenitas; it is an area of nature which is both pleasant and useful, but not excessively cultivated.

(ii) The Roman hortus and ‘good’ Romans

In Latin literature, this type of garden often symbolizes a simple and admirably ‘Roman’ way of life. Pliny himself, for example, uses references to the Roman
hortus to suggest the virtue and simple tastes of earlier generations of Romans. Pliny begins by pointing to the ancient respect for gardens (Nat. 19.49): the gardens of the Hesperides, the orchards of Adonis and Alcinous and the hanging gardens of Semiramis and Cyrus all remind us that gardens and gardening were once highly esteemed (Nat. 19.49).\textsuperscript{44} Pliny points out that the Roman people shared this respect, and that even the Roman kings cultivated their gardens with their own hands (Nat. 19.50). Indeed traditional Roman heroes appear in Pliny’s work not just as soldiers and statesmen, but also as gardeners (Nat. 18.19–20, 20.2, 22.5).\textsuperscript{45} Serranus, for example, worked in his garden (Nat. 18.20); Cato ate cabbages grown in his own vegetable patch and treated members of his household with homemade herbal medicines (Nat. 20.7ff., 29.15);\textsuperscript{46} Augustus used a cure made from common lettuce (Nat. 19.128). Even Tarquinius Superbus was not too proud to tend a bed of flowers (Nat. 19.50, 19.169).\textsuperscript{47} Pliny drives the message of these anecdotes home by recording an old Roman belief that people were once judged according to the appearance and productivity of their gardens: Hortorum Cato praedicat caules: hinc primum agricolas aestumabant prisci, et sic statim faciebant iudicium, nequam esse in domo matrem familias — etenim haec cura feminae dicebatur — ubi indiligens esset extra hortus (Nat. 19.57).

The moral value of the garden is especially important to Pliny. Here, as elsewhere in the Naturalis Historia, Pliny criticizes luxurious practices as both unnatural and un-Roman. Pliny repeatedly draws attention to the contrast between the habits of the early Roman kings and their green-fingered subjects with those of his contemporaries. Now, Pliny complains, people give the name of hortus to luxurious pleasure-gardens (iam quidem hortorum nomine in ipsa urbe delicias agros villasque possident, Plin. Nat. 19.50). Furthermore, they reject the simple garden foods once grown in these gardens and prefer to eat oysters, wild birds, hothouse fruits and fancy cakes (Nat. 19.52–3). Pliny also objects to the ways in

\textsuperscript{44} For the gardens of Alcinous, see Hom. Od. 7.82–102, 112–30. For the hanging gardens, see Diod. Sic. 2.10; Plin. Nat. 36.94.

\textsuperscript{45} Seneca similarly praises the Roman hero Fabricius, who was not ashamed to work in his vegetable garden and to cook up the roots and grasses which he grew there (Sen. Dial. 1.3.6). See Mark Morford (1987), 158.

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Cato Agr. 156, 157.

\textsuperscript{47} By contrast, other ‘bad’ Romans spurn simple garden products. Cf. Plin. Nat. 19.137 on Apicius and Drusus who disliked cabbages.
which some plants have been turned into luxury products. Asparagus (*corruda*), for example, was created by Nature to grow wild and so be freely available to everyone; but, Pliny complains, it has now been cultivated and so turned into an expensive luxury good (*Nat.* 19.54).

The Roman *hortus* can also be used to suggest an affinity with nature. The garden of Vergil’s old man of Tarentum (*Verg.* G. 4.116–46), for example, closely resembles Pliny’s ideal.48 In the old man’s garden, there are no orderly plots, but utilitarian plants such as endive (*intiba*, G. 4.120), parsley (*apium*, 4.121) and cucumber (*cucumis*, 4.122) grow beside more ornamental ones such as roses (4.119), ivy (4.124) and myrtle (4.124). Likewise he scatters decorative lilies (4.130–1) beside the more utilitarian verbena and poppy (*G.* 4.131), while roses (*G.* 4.134) and hyacinths (4.137) grow amid apples (4.134), pears (4.145) and plums (4.145). Moreover, here plants grow in a random and seemingly natural way. Although the old man tends the garden with his own hands, he imitates nature by arranging his plants not in tidy beds, but in scattered clumps. The plants themselves grow in a seemingly uncontrolled and quite ‘natural’ way (*hic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum | lilia verbenasque premens vescumque papaver*, G. 4.130–1). The old man also combines different types of plants, setting cultivated kitchen plants (*olor*, G. 4.130) among naturally growing shrubs and bushes (*in dumis*, G. 4.130).49 There is even a place for the luxurious plane-tree in his tangled garden (*G.* 4.146). The overall impression is of a garden which in some ways resembles the disorder and variety of nature itself.

The old man also seems to enjoy a kind of golden-age existence in his fertile garden. Vergil begins by remarking that the old man’s plot is unsuitable for conventional agriculture: *nec fertilis illa iuvencis | nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho* (*G.* 4.128–9). Despite this, the old man is clearly interested in making his garden productive: he is the first to pick roses and apples (*primus...carpere*, G. 4.134) and to gather honey (*primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis | mella favis*, G. 4.140–1); he grows spring flowers in the midst of winter (4.137–8); and his fruit trees are *uberrima* (4.141) and *fertilis* (4.142). The

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old man is also able to disregard the conventions of gardening by planting out full-grown trees and cultivating plums on thorny plants (*spinos*) (*G.* 4.144–6). In this respect, his garden becomes an idealized landscape where the regular patterns of nature no longer apply. Indeed although his land is poor (*pauca relict iugera ruris erant, nec fertilis ...| nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho, G.* 4.127–9), the old man achieves a perfect self-sufficiency:

\[
\text{regum aequabat opes animis, seraque revertens}
\]
\[
\text{nocte domum dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis.}
\]

(*Verg.* G. 4.132–3)

But the old man’s garden is not all fantasy. His aims are both practical — he produces honey, fruits and flowers for the market as well as medicinal flowers such as poppies — and aesthetic, as he cultivates more ornamental flowers such as roses and hyacinths.51

5. Pleasure-gardens

Whereas the traditional Roman *hortus*52 — like the farm — is mostly praised as a useful and distinctively ‘Roman’ area of nature, pleasure-gardens are often referred to with a strong note of disapproval. For many Romans, pleasure-gardens are places where the rustic ideals of the earliest Romans are rejected, and nature itself overturned. In many ways, the pleasure-garden is just the opposite type of landscape to the Roman *hortus*: whereas the *hortus* is small and modest, the pleasure-garden is vast and extravagant; whereas the *hortus* contains common but useable herbs and vegetables, the pleasure-garden is adorned with decorative but

\[50\] On the flower-growing industry, see Jashemski (1979), ch. 15.
\[52\] I am here using *hortus* in the sense of ‘kitchen-garden’. It can also refer to the much larger pleasure-garden. Cf. Plin. *Nat.* 19.50.
often fruitless plants; whereas the *hortus* is a part of Roman tradition, the pleasure-garden is an imported affectation.\(^{53}\)

(i) Contra naturam: *pleasure-gardens and ‘bad Romans’*

The associations of pleasure-gardens are likewise quite different. If small, useful gardens are associated with admirable Roman behaviour, large and extravagant pleasure-gardens are often associated with bad Romans and ‘un-Roman’ (and indeed unnatural) behaviour. Perhaps the most extreme example is Nero’s Golden House. As the ancient sources make clear, this was not just a place for the emperor to grow flowers or enjoy a snooze in the Roman sun; it was also a highly effective symbol of his power. Suetonius, for example, notes that Nero’s new palace (built to replace the unfinished *Domus Transitoria* which was destroyed in the fire of AD 64) was to be adorned not only with gems and gold, but with a lake (*maris instar*, according to Suetonius),\(^{54}\) vineyards, fields, woods and animals both wild and tame; in other words, the spectacle of nature itself would provide its decoration.\(^{55}\) According to Tacitus, the designers and builders of the Golden House sought to transcend *Natura* herself in their efforts to bring the countryside into the centre of Rome. The grounds of the *Domus Aurea* allowed the emperor to witness the interaction between people and nature on the farm, but also to experience nature’s more wild aspects. Even more than this, Nero sought to

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\(^{53}\) The elder Pliny claims that they were introduced to Athens by Epicurus, and from there to Rome (Plin. *Nat.* 19.51). See J. M. C. Toynbee (1946), 210.

\(^{54}\) Suet. *Nero* 31.1. Suetonius further claims that grounds of the Golden House included buildings constructed to resemble cities (*circum saeptum aedificiis ad urbiam speciem*).

\(^{55}\) Tac. *Ann.* 15.42; Suet. *Nero* 31.1–2. The palace also included such luxuries as a dining-room with a sliding roof, which enabled the guests to be showered with flowers; sea- and sulphur-water on tap in the baths; and, in the main dining-room, a revolving ceiling which followed the movements of the heavens themselves (Suet. *Nero* 31.2). Nero was not the only ruler with a taste for the impossible and the unnatural. Cf. Suet. *Jul.* 37; Str. 12.2.8 (538–9).
replicate the world as a whole; in other words, to create a miniature of the earth in the middle of a city.\textsuperscript{56}

It comes as no surprise that Romans were on the whole hostile towards the Golden House. Some criticized Nero for spending money on lavish private buildings rather than on public works; others for taking over land which had once belonged to the Roman people.\textsuperscript{57} The elder Pliny, for example, contrasts the tiny plots of land of the earliest Romans to the enormous estates of his contemporaries: \textit{bina tunc iugera p. R. satis erat, nullique maiorem modum attribuit, quo servorum paulo ante principis Neronis contento huius spatii viridariis? piscinas iuvat maiores habere, gratumque si non aliquem culinas} (\textit{Nat.} 18.7).\textsuperscript{58} They also criticize the fact that Nero and the designers of the \textit{Domus Aurea} sought to outdo Nature herself. Tacitus, for example, chooses to tell us not only that the Golden House was luxurious and ornate, but that its designers wanted ‘to create what Nature had denied’ (\textit{quae natura denegavisset}, Tac. \textit{Ann.} 15.42; cf. Suet. \textit{Nero} 31). Not even nature, Tacitus suggests, was safe from the emperor’s whims.\textsuperscript{59}

Objections to the Golden House were, then, twofold. Firstly, to build the Golden House was such an ‘un-Roman’ thing to do. Not only did it close off parts of the city once open to the Roman people, it was also an affront to the ancient ideals of the early Roman soldier-farmer. The inclusion of vineyards and wheat-fields only heightened the insult to Roman mores, by making the serious work of farming a form of entertainment. But the Golden House was not just un-Roman; it was also unnatural. Its makers brought together many different landscapes — fields, lakes, wetlands and wilderness — in a way which occurred nowhere in nature; moreover it brought them together in the midst of a city. In so doing, Nero vied with nature itself.

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Purcell (1987), 199 n. 34. Hadrian’s villa similarly had its own Lyceum, Academy, Prytaneum, Canopus, Poecile and Tempe. See Grimal (1984), 316–18.
\textsuperscript{57} Miriam T. Griffin (1984), 130
\textsuperscript{59} Griffin, (1984), 139. Other wealthy Romans also tried to mould the natural world in this way. The emperor was following a trend which began when affluent Romans (perhaps most famously that \textit{Xerxes togatus} Lucullus) watched over massive changes to the land on their estates. On Lucullus, see Plu. \textit{Luc.} 39.3; Plin. \textit{Nat.} 9.170. See too Littlewood (1987) and Purcell (1987).
Pleasure-gardens need not have been as extravagant as Nero’s to incite such moral indignation. The same criticisms are also directed towards less ambitious gardens and gardening practices. Varro mocks Lucullus for attempting to set up a dining-table in his aviary (he was deterred from using it, Varro writes, by the smell of his feathery dinner companions, Var. R. 3.4.3); Cicero writes scathingly of ‘fish-pond fanciers’ (piscinarii); 60 Horace complains that fish-ponds will soon be bigger than the Lucrine Lake (Hor. Carm. 2.15.1–5). The elder Pliny complains that plane-trees were brought to Rome simply for the sake of their shade (Plin. Nat. 12.6), 61 that ornamental gardens (viridaria) are now bigger than many farms (Nat. 18.7) and that some even build porticoes simply to keep the sun from their plantings of moss (Nat. 19.24).

Underlying many of these criticisms is the idea that pleasure-gardens, like Nero’s Golden House, were both unnatural and ‘un-Roman’. Seneca, for example, gives a whole catalogue of behaviours which he classes as ‘against nature’:

\[
\text{Non vivunt contra naturam qui hieme concupiscunt rosam fomentoque aquarum calentium et calorum apta mutatione bruma lilium, florem vernum, exprimunt? Non vivunt contra naturam qui pomaria in summis turribus serunt? Quorum silvae in tectis domuum ac fastigiis nutant, inde ortis radicibus quo inprobe cacumina egissent? Non vivunt contra naturam qui fundamenta thermarum in mari iaciunt et delictae natare ipsi sibi non videntur, nisi calentia stagna fluctu ac tempestate feriantur?}
\]

\[(Sen. Ep. 122.8)\] 62

Seneca includes here a number of ornamental gardening techniques. These include flowers grown out of season, hothouse fruits and vegetables, and gardens planted in unexpected places, such as on rooftops. Seneca’s main objection to these practices is that they infringe what he sees as the ‘natural’ order. 63 In nature, flowers bloom in spring and trees grow from the earth; ‘technological’ developments which enable human beings to grow flowers out of season, plant

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60 Cic. Att. 1.18.6 (no. 18 Shackleton Bailey), 1.19.6 (no. 19 Shackleton Bailey), 1.20.3 (no. 20 Shackleton Bailey), 2.1.7 (no. 21 Shackleton Bailey). Purcell (1987), 192.

61 Pliny reinforces the ‘un-Roman’ character of the trees by stating that they come ex alieno orbe (Plin. Nat. 12.6).

62 Cf. Papirius Fabianus ap. Sen. Con. 2.1.13, quoted at the opening of this chapter.

63 On ‘nature’ as a standard for judging human behaviour, see Catharine Edwards (1993), 87–90. See too Beagon (1992), 80–6 on Roman ideas of artificiality.
trees on rooftops and construct baths out into the sea are condemned by Seneca because they bring about a distortion of the earth’s natural state. While it is true that there may be some other idea underlying Seneca’s protests (for example that land used for such luxuries could be better utilized in producing crops), what is significant is that he expresses them in the context of what is natural. Seneca might in fact just as easily have objected that while rich Romans spend so much money on such luxuries, poorer citizens go without food and shelter, and it is this type of ‘social’ argument which is perhaps more familiar to us today. But for Seneca it is nature against which human (and perhaps especially Roman) behaviour is judged.

Similar ideas appear in the elder Pliny’s chapters on gardens and gardening. While Pliny generally approves of human beings’ efforts to cultivate the earth and propagate plants, he also speaks out against certain gardening practices. He condemns miniature plants (Nat. 12.13) and refers to grafting as a kind of adulteria between trees (Nat. 17.8). This is not to say that Pliny opposes all kinds of ornamental gardening. Just as he speaks highly of agriculture, he also on occasion writes with admiration of human beings’ capacity ability to cleverly transform nature. He describes how cucumbers and gourds can be forced to grow into curious shapes (Nat. 19.65, 19.70) and their vines trained to grow over walls and on roofs and trellises (Nat. 19.69; cf. 12.112). He describes quite impartially how gardeners have trained a variety of box to grow into the form of a pillar (Nat. 16.70). He records that the pitch-pine (picea) was often used as an indoor plant because it could easily be clipped into various shapes (Nat. 16.40) and that the cupressus was useful for hedges and ornate topiary work: trahitur etiam in picturas operis topiarii, venatus classesve et imaginès rerum tenui folio brevique et virente semper vestiens (Nat. 16.140). At other times, Pliny describes without comment human beings’ ability to alter plants. At Nat. 17.120, for example, Pliny refers to a marvellous tree at Tivoli which produced fruits of all kinds on its branches: tot modis insitam arborem vidimus iuxta Tiburtès tullios omni genere

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64 See Beagon (1992), 83 on the ‘uneven tone’ of Pliny’s chapters on gardening and, more generally, ibid., 79–91.
65 Cf. Nat. 17.241–2 where Pliny describes a number of portents which resemble the grafter’s work. He also points out that certain religious prohibitions affected grafting (Nat. 15.57).
66 Also on topiaria opera see Plin. Nat. 15.130, 16.76. See too Grimal (1984), 90–7.
Once again it seems that responses to human beings’ interference with nature depends either on context or degree. Pliny criticizes those who reject nature’s simple gift of vegetables and instead prefer rare and expensive products such as asparagus (Nat. 19.54) and cultivated ‘thistles’ (cardui, or artichokes, Nat. 19.152). At one point, he condemns grafting as a kind of ‘adultery’ between trees (Nat. 17.8), but again it seems that his real objection is not to the process itself but to the end product. Pliny objects to grafting only when it used to produce expensive fruits which the poor cannot afford to buy (ut nec poma pauperibus nascendarunt, Nat. 17.8).

It is not just techniques in ornamental gardening which are treated with such disdain. Among plants themselves there is a kind of moral hierarchy. Some plants are regarded as respectably Roman, while others are seen to be luxurious and so un-Roman. As we have seen, the traditional Roman hortus was a functional garden where vegetables, fruits, herbs and other useful plants were grown. Even flowers were usually grown for their medicinal qualities. By contrast, the plants grown in pleasure-gardens were often chosen primarily for their decorative effect. Among the most criticized of these plants are plane-trees. According to Pliny, these were imported to Italy merely for the sake of their shade (umbrae gratia tantum, Nat. 12.6). So valued are plane-trees, Pliny further claims, that some even water them with wine (Nat. 12.8). Pliny is especially outspoken against the evergreen plane, which he regards as a defect (vitium) of nature, propagated by human beings to fulfil a desire for luxury (Nat. 12.11–12). Like other Roman writers, Pliny refers often to the luxurious associations of plane-trees. The pleasant and cooling shade which they produce is not conducive to hard work, but only to sluggishness and decadence. Another common objection to these trees is that they are unproductive. Horace attacks those who take up plough-land with their houses (regiae), whose fish-ponds are larger than the Lucrine Lake and who

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67 The elder Pliny further believes that flowers also have a didactic purpose, as he explains at the opening of Nat. 21: flores vero odoresque in diem gignit, magna, ut palam est, admonitione hominum, quae spectatissime florent celerrime marcescere (Nat. 21.2).
plant the barren plane (*platanus ... caelebs*) instead of the elm68 (Hor. *Carm.* 2.15.1–5).69 Underlying these condemnations of ornamental, rather than productive, plants is the idea that they exist in opposition to the common vegetables of the ideal Roman farm: garden plants can be decorative, but they should also have some other function.

Fish-ponds — another common feature of Roman pleasure-gardens — are also widely condemned.70 Like many other features of Roman pleasure-gardens, these are often criticized as unnecessary luxuries. Varro’s objections to fish-ponds are typical. Varro and his friends admit that fish can be a useful source of income to the farmer (*R.* 3.2.17). Some, however, take their fondness for fish too far and transform their fish-ponds from a source of income into a display of luxury. In particular, Varro’s friend Axius distinguishes between fresh-water ponds, which are freely available and run at a profit, and salt-water ponds, which are favoured by the Roman nobility. As Axius remarks, the latter ‘appeal to the eye more than to the purse’ (*magis ad oculos pertinent, quam ad vesicam*, *R.* 3.17.2). Axius goes on to give the example of Q. Hortensius who owned so many ponds that he spent more on feeding his fish than other farmers spent on feeding their mules (*R.* 3.17.6). Yet despite owning so many well-stocked ponds, he preferred to buy fish at the market than to eat his scaly pets (*R.* 3.17.5).

Others see fish-ponds not just as luxurious, but also unnatural. Columella doubts whether farmers should concern themselves at all with keeping fish (Col. 8.16.1; cf. 8.11.1), but concedes that fish can be sold for high prices and recommends that those who find that they have bought barren and unproductive land should consider building fish-ponds (Col. 8.16.1; cf. 8.16.6). He even finds some justification for keeping fish in the habits of the earliest Romans: both Romulus and Numa kept fish and built pools in which to keep them (Col. 8.16.2). Later Romans, however, have abandoned these simple, functional ponds in favour of more expensive and extravagant pools; thus they have turned keeping fish into a vice (Col. 8.16.3ff.). Columella expresses his objections to these in terms of

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68 Elm-trees were used as supports for grape vines and their leaves as fodder so, unlike plane-trees, had a practical use. Cf. Verg. *G.* 1.2, 2.446; Hor. *Epist.* 1.16.3; Plin. *Nat.* 18.266.
70 See Littlewood (1987), 14.
their opposition to nature: *quid enim tam contrarium est, quam terrenum fluido?*, Col. 8.16.1). In other words, fish-ponds overstep the boundaries of nature by bringing water on to land. Some even build salt-water ponds and so subvert the natural order still further, by confusing the boundary between land and sea (Col. 8.16.3). This is the reasoning behind Columella’s objections to exotic fish and decorative ponds; the desire for these brings about a subversion of the natural world: *Mox istam curam sequens aetas abolevit, et lautitiae locupletum maria ipsa Neptunumque clauserunt* (Col. 8.16.3). Fish-ponds, then, like decorative plants and ornamental gardening, were another feature of the pleasure-garden which subverted the patterns of nature.

The very same ideas which were used to criticize luxurious gardens could also be used to praise them. To overturn nature — whether by constructing salt-water fish-ponds or cultivating purely decorative plants — was often a cause for moral outrage, but the capacity to outwit nature could also be a source of admiration; a remarkable demonstration of the human race’s power over nature. So while Roman writers condemn this impression of nature turned upside-down, others openly celebrate it.

(ii) Nec servat natura vices: gardens and Roman power over nature

The Roman people’s ability to modify nature through building and engineering is a recurring theme of Statius’ *Silvae*. Statius writes of baths (*Silv. 1.3, 1.5), statues (4.6), temples (*Silv. 3.1), roads (*Silv. 4.3) and even of trained animals, such as a chattering parrot (*Silv. 2.4) and a tamed lion (*Silv. 2.5). But it is in his descriptions of some Roman villas and their gardens that we can best see Statius’ attraction to the *contra naturam* theme.

One of the most remarkable features of the villas and gardens which Statius describes is their seeming separation from the ‘natural’ world. In describing one

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72 See Pavlovskis (1973), 6–21.
luxurious villa, Statius delights in the system of heating and cooling which allows its inhabitants to ignore the natural pattern of the seasons:

excludunt radios silvis demissa vetustis
frigora, perspicui vivunt in marmore fontes.
nec servat natura vices: hic Sirius alget,
bruma tepet versumque domus sibi temperat annum.

(Stat. Silv. 1.2.154–7)

Statius’ picture of nature abandoning its familiar order is often, in more moralizing texts, a cause of moral indignation; here, however, it is a source of wonder. Other villa owners similarly achieved the impression of having overcome the limitations of nature. Pollius Felix’s villa was built in such a way that its owner could enjoy the rays of the sun one moment and cooling shade the next; listen to the sounds of the ocean in one room and enjoy the silence of the land in another (Stat. Silv. 2.2.45–51).

Other poems focus on changes to the landscape itself. Again in Silvae 2.2, Statius records how Pollius has managed to transform the natural setting of his villa:

mons erat hic, ubi plana vides; et lustra fuerunt,
quae nunc tecta subis; ubi nunc nemora ardua cernis,
hic nec terra fuit: domuit possessor, et illum
formantem rupes expugnantemque secuta
gaudet humus, nunc cerne iugum dissentia saxa
intrantesque domos iussumque recedere montem.

(Stat. Silv. 2.2.54–9)

Here, as in a number of other poems, Statius uses the language of war and domination to describe nature’s transformation (domat, 2.2.31; domuit, 2.2.56; expugnantemque, 2.2.57; iussum, 2.2.59; recedere, 2.2.59). While Nature has provided the setting for Pollius’ villa (dat natura locum, Silv. 2.2.15), human

73 The younger Pliny similarly writes that his villa at Laurentum was built to take advantage of various natural features; to enable him to admire the surrounding countryside, to enjoy the warmth of the afternoon sun and to make use of sunlight reflected from the sea (cf. Plin. Ep. 2.17.4, 7).

74 See especially Stat. Silv. 4.3 on the building of the Via Domitiana.
beings have added to and improved on Nature’s efforts. Statius particularly admires the transformation of the place from its former wild and inhospitable state: *qua prius obscuro permixti pulvere soles | et feritas inamoena viae, nunc ire voluptas* (*Silv.* 2.2.32–3). This impression of having outwitted nature was just what the builders of Roman villas and their gardens most desired to achieve.

Not all gardens involved such extensive changes to the landscape. In some of the gardens which Statius describes, natural features have been incorporated into the villas and their grounds. In Pollius’ villa, for example, the salt-water of the baths mingles with the fresh-water of a nearby creek (*Silv.* 2.2.18–19). Manlius Vopiscus’ villa has been built on either side of a natural stream, so that the water becomes part of the building itself (*Silv.* 1.3.2–4, 24–6). It has also been built around an old and venerable tree (*Silv.* 1.3.56–63) so that nature itself provides part of the decoration. Even here, however, Statius seems unwilling to admire natural objects for their own sake. The owners chose to maintain these natural areas not for their own sake, but rather because they added to the constructed amenities of their villas and surrounding gardens. To Statius himself, these natural adornments are only curiosities; they fail to live up to the more lavish decorations of marble and mosaic (cf. *Silv.* 1.3.34–56). Even when he writes of these more natural decorations, Statius illustrates Manlius’ power over nature: Manlius has retained the stream and the tree simply because he has chosen to do so.

In a similar way, when Statius writes in praise of some natural feature, such as a tree (*Silv.* 2.3) or the countryside of Naples (*Silv.* 3.5), he tends to pick out some artificial aspect as the focus of his praise. In *Silvae* 2.3, he describes a tree growing on his patron Atedius Melior’s estate. Statius admires not its shade, its leafy greenness, or its ancient sanctity, but its crooked shape:

Stat, quae perspicuas nitidi Melioris opacet
arbor aquas complexa lacus, quae robore ab imo
incurvata vadis reedit inde cacumine recto

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75 Note that here Statius describes wild nature specifically as *inamoena*. Cf. Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.52: *his favit natura locis, hic victa colenti | cessit et ignotos docilis mansuetit in usus*.

76 Pavlovskis (1973), 14 notes that Statius’ descriptions of a nature turned upside-down sometimes read like catalogues of *adynata* which, in other circumstances, would have quite different and more ominous connotations. See, e.g., Stat. *Silv.* 1.3.43–6.
ardua, ceu mediis iterum nascatur ab undis
atque habitet vitreum tacitis radicibus amnem.

(Stat. Silv. 2.3.2–5)

In other words, Statius most admires ‘those of its features in which it least resembled a tree.’\(^{77}\) Similarly in writing about the beauties of Naples, Statius mentions not just its natural features (mild winters and cool summers, its peaceful seas, its beaches, hills, vineyards and lakes, \textit{Silv.} 3.5.81–4, 93–104), but also the ‘magnificent sights and adornments to places’ (\textit{magnificas species cultusque locorum, Silv.} 3.5.89): temples, halls, columns and theatres (\textit{Silv.} 3.5.90–91). For Statius, then, it is human beings’ capacity to alter and even overturn nature which merits his praise.

The younger Pliny expresses similar ideas. Pliny repeatedly praises the human ability to improve on nature.\(^{78}\) Indeed he is particularly impressed by natural things which resemble works of human art: a plain which resembles an amphitheatre (\textit{Plin. Ep.} 5.6.7), scenery which looks more painted than real (\textit{Ep.} 5.6.13), a lake so regular and round that it resembles a wheel lying on its side (\textit{Ep.} 8.20.4).\(^{79}\) In writing of his villas, Pliny also maintains that their appeal comes not just from the surrounding countryside (which he admits is appealing), but from the ingenuity of their designers and builders (\textit{Ep.} 2.17.4, 2.17.7, 2.17.38–40, 4.30.3, 9.7.4; cf. 6.31). Far from detracting from the natural advantages of the region, these additions actually improve them.

Pliny’s descriptions of his gardens single out many of the features which Statius also describes.\(^{80}\) In common with the gardens and villas described by Statius, Pliny’s gardens often seem cut off from the world outside.\(^{81}\) At one point,

\[^{77}\text{Pavlovskis (1973), 10.}\]
\[^{78}\text{See Pavlovskis (1973), 25–33. Pavlovskis \textit{loc. cit.}, 26 n. 79 notes that an exception seems to be in \textit{Ep.} 5.6.7 where Pliny admires the appearance of the countryside (\textit{Regionis forma pulcherrima}); however Pliny also goes on to liken the area to an immense amphitheatre.}\]
\[^{79}\text{Cf. Plin. \textit{Nat.} 4.29 where Pliny likens a mountain to a landscaped garden (\textit{topiario naturae opere spectabilis}).}\]
\[^{80}\text{On Statius’ possible influence on the younger Pliny, see Sherwin-White (1966), 2. For detailed discussions of the younger Pliny’s gardens, see \textit{ibid.}, 186–99, 321–30; Littlewood (1987), 23–4.}\]
\[^{81}\text{Although Pliny occasionally refers to the way in which a villa can merge with both its garden and the landscape outside. He can, e.g., sit in a dining-room which is washed by the waves of the ocean (Plin. \textit{Ep.} 2.17.5), walk along a portico and smell the violets which}\]
Pliny tells his friend Domitius that his Tuscan villa is so removed from everyday Roman life that visitors might imagine themselves transported to a former, idyllic age (Plin. Ep. 5.6.4). Elsewhere Pliny writes that the countryside around his villa is so pleasing that he imagines himself in a landscape not real, but painted (Neque enim terras tibi, sed formam aliquam ad eximiam pulchritudinem pictam videberis cernere, Plin. Ep. 5.6.13). The regularity and predictability which this suggests earns Pliny’s approval. The attitudes of Pliny and Statius can in one sense be seen as a continuation of those expressed by those earlier Roman writers, who admire human beings’ ability to overcome natural obstacles and shape natural environments. Where they differ is in their admiration of human intervention in nature for the sake of pleasure alone. It is notable that all of these landscapes are described without the tone of moral censure which appears in other, and mainly earlier, Roman texts.

While the writings of Statius and the younger Pliny would seem to represent a real shift in attitudes towards human beings’ capacity to reshape nature, their views did not replace the more traditional Roman distaste for tampering with natural things. Other writers continue to express a traditional Roman respect for farms and simple but useful gardens, and at times to ridicule (if not to strongly condemn) large and ostentatious pleasure-gardens. Martial, for example, generally stresses rustic simplicity over stylish luxury (Mart. 4.64, 10.51, 12.31, 12.50, 8.68, 6.42). However impressive Roman pleasure-gardens may have become, the traditional Roman hortus remained an important image of both the ideal Roman landscape and, more broadly, of a life spent in accord with nature.

grow nearby (Plin. Ep. 2.17.16) and enjoy another dining-room where the vineyards outside seemed to stretch into the room itself (Plin. Ep. 5.6.29).

82 Pavlovskis (1973), 21–5.
A passage in the *Naturalis Historia* brings together many of the ideas discussed in this chapter. In Book 12, Pliny describes an enormous plane-tree which has grown to form a natural bower:

\[\text{nunc est clara in Lycia fontis gelidi socia amoenitate, itineri adposita domicilii modo, cava octoginta et unius pedum specu, nemorosa vertice et se vastis protegens ramis arborum instar, agros longis obtinens umbris, ac ne quid desit speluncae imaginii saxea intus crepidinis corona muscosos complexa pumices.}\]

(Plin. *Nat.* 12.9)\(^83\)

Here a tree which usually causes Pliny’s rage (cf. Plin. *Nat.* 12.6, 12.11–12) meets with his approval. Once again, it is *amoenitas* which makes a natural feature worthy of admiration. Pliny goes on to tell how the governor of Lycia, Licinius Mucianus, was so impressed by this tree that he held a banquet under its branches (*Nat.* 12.9). Far from condemning such behaviour, Pliny admires Licinius’ ability to enjoy the tree’s natural pleasures which far outweigh more luxurious comforts (*Nat.* 12.9). Pliny’s comment that the tree grows beside the road (*itineri adposita, Nat.* 12.9) suggests that it is a wild tree, but it is also ‘like a house’ (*domicilii modo, Nat.* 12.9). Here, then, it seems that wild nature mimics human art.\(^84\) Pliny’s description of the tree also recalls the literary *locus amoenus*: the tree encloses a kind of a grotto, complete with a cool spring and mossy rocks. It allows Licinius to enjoy nature in a secure and pleasant — but not too ‘natural’ — setting.

Roman responses to gardens were often, it seems, a matter of degree. To own a modest fish-pond or a shady tree was acceptable, but to take this too far (and just how far was ‘too far’ seems to have been a matter of opinion) was to upset both Roman custom and natural order. The perceived purpose of any alterations to nature also played an important role in determining common Roman responses to them. Those who chose to meddle with nature simply to satisfy a desire for luxury — by building large and ostentatious fish-ponds or planting

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\(^{83}\) On this passage, see too Beagon (1992), 82.

shady but unproductive trees — could expect to be ridiculed and condemned. By contrast, to alter nature for more practical purposes — for example to pave a road, construct a bridge or produce a crop — often met with quite a different set of responses.

There was, however, a clear shift in Roman responses to gardens and more generally to human beings’ capacity to reshape the natural world. With the writings of Statius and the younger Pliny, some Romans began to admire the types of extravagant gardens and constructed, ‘artificial’ landscapes which their forebears had so loudly condemned. Indeed the ‘glorification of technical achievement’ has been identified as a defining characteristic of Silver Age Latin literature.85 This is not to say, however, that the earlier, more traditional views disappeared completely. Together with these awe-struck accounts of human beings’ ability to alter nature (and even to overturn it completely) there remained a traditional Roman distaste for pleasure-gardens and for the distortions of nature which they were often seen to entail.

These responses to gardens are consistent with common Roman responses to other types of landscape. The traditional Roman hortus also for example fulfils the common Roman ideal of amoenitas. Like many other places described as amoenus, the old-fashioned Roman garden is both pleasant to look at and usefully productive. Pleasure-gardens, on the other hand, the subvert this Roman ideal; by being excessively cultivated, comfortable and enticing. When it is taken too far, then, the ideal of amoenitas becomes a cause for moral censure.

85 Pavlovskis (1973), 5.
Forests

The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by the wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigour from a similar wild source. It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were.

Henry David Thoreau, ‘Walking’

1. Introduction

This chapter turns from the highly cultivated landscape of the garden to some of the wild landscapes beyond and considers how, in a selection of Latin texts, Roman writers use wild landscapes (primarily forests, but also swamps and other areas of uncultivated nature) to write about events from Roman history and reflect on aspects of Romanness. In particular, I argue that the opposition between Rome and wild nature — which was part of the city’s earliest history — continued, and that similar battles (again primarily against water and wood) occurred in Gaul, Germany and other wild places. Firstly I consider one of the recurring themes of Roman texts: the distance — both geographical and cultural — between Rome and the wilderness. Wild places often appear in Latin literature

1 Thoreau (1991), 95.
2 ‘Wilderness’ often refers to a barren, deserted area. It can also refer to a dense, forested place, and it is in this sense that I primarily use it. See further Nash (1967), 1–4; Tuan (1974), 109–12; Oelschlaeger (1991), 3 n. 10. On both forest symbolism and human beings’
as ‘not-Romes’;³ that is, places where many of the familiar characteristics of Roman society and topography have been overturned.⁴ I approach this idea by looking at Roman accounts of two wild places: Germany and Scythia. Next, I discuss the idea that wild places are often seen to be not just different from but also hostile towards Rome and Romans. Just as the earliest Romans had battled the water and woods of Latium in their efforts to build the early city, their descendants continued to battle trees, forests, rivers, swamps and other wild places in their efforts to Romanize the world beyond. Consequently Roman accounts of building and engineering often emphasize not the technical achievements, but the victories over nature which were also involved. The conflict between Rome and nature becomes still more apparent in accounts of Roman battles in Gaul and Germany. In the final section, I examine the accounts of Livy, Caesar and Tacitus, and argue that for all of these writers, nature and place have a role not just as ‘natural theatres’⁵ for Roman battles, but as obstacles to Rome and Romanness.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, the urban landscape with which Romans were familiar took much of its meaning from its associations with events in the human — and more specifically the Roman — world. Places outside the city, however, often lacked the associations with Roman characters and events which were so important in helping Romans to make sense of their natural surroundings.⁶ This perhaps helps to explain why descriptions of wild landscapes are rare in Latin literature,⁷ and why those which we do have tend to be based more on their writers’ knowledge of the landscapes of earlier literature than on

³ Responses to wild landscapes, see Ellis (1909); Frazer (1912); Frazer (1917), Part 1, ii, 7–96; Porteous (1928); Henrichs (1979); Attenborough (1987), 117–18; Keith Thomas (1983), 192–7, 212–23; Perlin (1989); Bechmann (1990); Oelschlaeger (1991); Pogue Harrison (1992); Saunders (1993); Schama (1996), 23–242. Especially relevant to Roman culture are Phillips (1968); Segal (1969); Chevallier (1986); Mark Edwards (1987); Nisbet (1987); Perlin (1989), 103–29; Delano Smith (1996).

⁴ This expression is used by Schama (1996), 81, 86.

⁵ On the concept of self-definition through writing about the ‘other’, see Hartog (1988); Hall (1989).


⁷ Cf. Purcell (1990a), 11 on the non-Roman world as ‘vast, indescribable and undifferentiated.’

⁸ At least in comparison with descriptions of cultivated, agricultural landscapes.
their observations of actual places. Livy’s description of the Caudine Forks (Liv. 9.2.6–10), for example, brings to mind a number of other wild landscapes, from both Livy’s own history and the works of other writers. Vergil’s description of the place where Turnus plans to ambush Aeneas, like Livy’s Caudine Forks, includes a track through a narrow, wooded valley overlooked by a desolate plateau (Verg. A. 11.515–16, 11.522–31). Likewise Vergil’s descriptions of other wooded spots, such as the cave at the entrance to the Underworld (A. 6.237–41), the grove of Faunus (A. 7.81–4) and the valley of Ampsanctus (A. 7.563–71) all include shadowy woods, gushing water and mephitic vapours.

What these similarities suggest is that the descriptions of wild places which we find in Latin literature are often intended not to provide accurate geographical information, but rather to fulfil some other function: to create a particular atmosphere, to bring about certain expectations in readers’ minds or to recall some of the wild landscapes of earlier literature. More particularly, Roman writers use these wild landscapes (just as they use other common types of landscape) to reveal aspects of Roman national identity and to comment on the characters and actions of individual Romans.

2. ‘Not-Romes’: Germany and Scythia

The laudes Italiae which appear throughout Latin literature represent Italy as a land of fruitful fields, contended herds and honest, hard-working country-folk. Rome itself is described as the most fortunate of all cities, which benefits from both its ideal geographical position and the skills and the ingenuity of its

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8 For a detailed discussion of this aspect of Roman topographical writing, see Horsfall (1985). Cf. idem (1982), 50–2.
inhabitants. But Rome is also often imagined as the centre of the inhabited world.\textsuperscript{11} The frequent appearance in Latin literature of the expression \textit{urbs et orbis} (where \textit{urbs} refers specifically to the city of Rome) suggests that Romans commonly identified the city with the world as a whole.\textsuperscript{12} Rome appears at the centre of the world, with places outside the city becoming — to Roman eyes at least — increasingly unlike Rome and Italy.\textsuperscript{13}

In imagining their city in this way, Roman writers also reveal their relationship to other places and peoples. Not only did Rome occupy the physical centre of the world, it also provided the standards by which all other places could be judged. Indeed lands beyond the cultured and civilized city of Rome often appear as mirror images of the Roman world, where many of the familiar characteristics of Rome and Romans have been reversed. This section looks at Roman representations of two lands in particular: Germany and Scythia.\textsuperscript{14} These appear in Latin literature not only as wild and uncivilized places, but also as cultural and environmental opposites to Rome and Italy. Moreover the inhabitants of these places differ tellingly from Romans in their ways of responding to the natural world. Whereas Romans liked to characterize themselves as able to overcome nature, they often see other races as constrained by the limitations of their natural environments.


\textsuperscript{12} E.g. Cic. \textit{Catil.} 1.4.9, Mur. 10.22, \textit{Fam.} 4.1.2; Ov. \textit{Am.} 1.174, \textit{Fast.} 2.684.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Vasaly (1992), 133: ‘For each culture, the world outside the home ground is viewed as a series of concentric rings in which one’s own habitation occupies the center, while people and places lose reality (or, at least, everyday reality) as one travels outward from the center. Those areas on the outermost fringes become the setting of mythological and legendary events in which the normal rules governing life in the central community are suspended.’

\textsuperscript{14} Other places too are represented in this way. Cf. Luc. 9.424–30 (on Libya); Tac. \textit{Ann.} 4.67.1–3, 6.1.1, 6.15.3 on (Capreae). See too Richard F. Thomas (1982), 108–23, 124–32.
Germany generally appears in Latin literature as a land of bristling forests and stagnant marshes, inhabited by wild animals and savage tribes. It also appears as a place strange and almost incomprehensible to Roman eyes. This section considers two Roman descriptions of Germany: Tacitus’ *Germania* and the elder Pliny’s account of the Chauci (*Nat.* 16.1–6). It focuses on the German landscape and on the German people’s supposed responses to this landscape. Much of Tacitus’ work is taken up with describing the habits and customs of the different German tribes. Like a number of other Roman commentators, Tacitus admires the hardy toughness of the German people and points to a number of contrasts between simple German habits and decadent Roman ones. Tacitus’ Germans are unaffected by cold and hunger (*Tac. Ger.* 4.3), they disdain precious metals such as gold and silver (*Ger.* 5.3–5), they reject temples and idols (*Ger.* 9.3), they have no cities (*Ger.* 16.1; cf. *Tac. Hist.* 4.64), their buildings are simple and unadorned (*Ger.* 16.3), they wear plain clothes (*Ger.* 17.1–2), they enjoy simple foods without the need for luscious sauces (*Ger.* 23.1), they are faithful in marriage (*Ger.* 18.1), they know nothing of adultery (*Ger.* 19.1–5) and they care nothing for Roman luxuries such as amber (*Ger.* 45.5).

In writing about the habits of the Germans, Tacitus also writes about the habits of the Romans. All of the features which he picks out to praise in the Germans’ way of life suggest a contrast with that of the Roman people. In other words, by pointing to what Germans do, Tacitus also suggests what Romans do not do. Only occasionally does Tacitus make explicit some contrast with Roman

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16 E.g. Caes. *Gal.* 6.21-3; Sen. *Dial.* 1.4.14–16. Tacitus’ admiration here can in part be explained by the genre in which he is writing. The ethnographical approach of the *Germania* allows for a more impartial voice than is found in Tacitus’ accounts of the German wars in the *Annales*. See Saddington (1961), 99.
17 Elsewhere, however, Tacitus seems to contradict this claim. Cf. *Tac. Ger.* 15.3.
18 In this respect, Tacitus’ Germans resemble the early Romans. See Anderson (1961), 77.
19 Cf. Anderson (1961), ix: ‘in almost every line there is a comparison, direct or implicit, between Germany and Rome ... the laudable features of German social customs and institutions are emphasized and pointedly contrasted with Roman ways, the contrast often taking the negative form that this or that Roman practice is not to be found beyond the Rhine.’ See too O’Gorman (1993).
habits (with phrases such as non in nostrum morem, Ger. 16.2; quae miramur, Ger. 20.1; or simply illic, Ger. 19.1); more often, it is left up to the reader to discern the contrast between German and Roman ways. Writing about German customs in marriage, for example, Tacitus notes with approval that the Germans are chaste before marriage, that most do not indulge in flirting, that adultery is rare and that children are never murdered for the sake of securing an inheritance (Ger. 18–19). Tacitus’ cutting conclusion, made with a glance towards Roman laws such as the lex Papia Poppaea, is that in Germany at least good character has more force than good laws (plusque ibi boni mores valent quam alibi bonae leges, Ger. 19.5).

The same contrasts appear in Tacitus’ references to the German topography. At the beginning of the Germania, Tacitus writes of the barriers which separate Germany from the Roman provinces of Gaul, Raetia and Pannonia: rivers (the Rhine and the Danube), mountains and the ocean (Ger. 1.1; cf. 2.1–2). But it is not only nature which separates Germany from the familiar Roman world. Tacitus also mentions the shared fear of venturing into unfamiliar lands (mutuo metu, Ger. 1.1) and marvels that anyone would leave Asia, Africa or Italy to seek out a land as strange and unappealing as Germany: quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relicta Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu aspectuque, nisi si patria sit? (Ger. 2.2). Tacitus here concedes that familiarity or patriotic feeling might accustom some to Germany’s landscapes and climate; but the combination of natural barriers and unfamiliar landscapes places Germany beyond the understanding and appreciation of Tacitus and his Roman readers.

In particular, it is the uniformity of the German landscape which Tacitus stresses. Large stretches of the country, he claims, are covered by forests and swamps: Terra etsi aliquanto specie differt, in universum tamen aut silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda (Ger. 5.1). Descriptions of the pre-Roman landscape of Latium similarly mention forests and swamps as the main characteristics of the region but, unlike in Italy, where the land has been shaped by farming and building, in Germany it remains formless and bleak. Whereas in Italy, farmers
grow a variety of fruits, grains and vegetables, in Germany there are neither orchards, meadows nor gardens (Ger. 26.2–3). Indeed Tacitus claims that although their soil is fertile (Ger. 5.1–2, 26.1–3), most of the German tribes are too lazy to practise agriculture (Ger. 15.1, 45.4) and eat only wild fruits, meat and curdled milk (Ger. 23.1). Neither have the Germans learned to add to their environment by building (Ger. 16.3). Here, then, Tacitus suggests a contrast between the industrious farmers of Italy, who work to cultivate the landscape of Italy, and the tribes of Germany, who are content to live among trees and mud.

Similar ideas appear in the elder Pliny’s account of the country and habits of the Chauci (Plin. Nat. 16.1–6; cf. Tac. Ger. 35). Whereas Tacitus praises the Chauci (Tac. Ger. 35), Pliny is contemptuous of their primitive and uncomfortable lives. He describes them as a misera gens (Nat. 16.3) who are forced to live on the swampy regions at the shores of the ocean, in houses on platforms, deprived of fields (and so of grain and bread) and forests (and so of the opportunity to hunt), who use lumps of dried mud as fuel, drink only rain-water (since fresh-water rivers and springs are also lacking) and eat only fish (Nat. 16.3–4). Pliny concludes his account of the Chauci by expressing his surprise that such a wretched race would regard Roman rule as slavery: et hae gentes, si vincantur hodie a populo Romano, servire se dicunt! ita est profecto: multis fortuna parcit in poenam (Plin. Nat. 16.4).

Pliny’s disdain for the Chauci is surprising. Throughout the Naturalis Historia, Pliny admires those who value the earth’s products in their natural form; while he rails against luxuries such as amber, oysters, gold, pearls and purple (which to many minds would seem quite natural), he admires the use of natural things to improve human life. Herbal medicines, healthy vegetables and simple works of art are causes for praise in Pliny’s philosophy. The Chauci, however, fail to make use of natural resources in the ways that Pliny most admires. In this respect, the relationship between the Chauci and their natural

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20 The variety of Italy’s agricultural products is a standard theme of laudes Italiae. Cf. Var. R. 1.2.6; Verg. G. 2.143–4; Plin. Nat. 37.201.
21 The Aestii, Tacitus claims, work the land to grow grains and crops (Tac. Ger. 45.4), but these are an exception among Tacitus’ Germans.
surroundings is a reversal of the relationship between the Roman people and Italy as it is depicted throughout the *Naturalis Historia*. The land of the Chauci is constantly threatened by the ocean (*Nat.* 16.2), while Italy rushes out into the sea to meet it (*Nat.* 3.41); the Chauci live in huts on stilts to avoid hostile tidal waters (*Nat.* 16.3), while the Roman people build their villas on the banks of the friendly Tiber (*Nat.* 3.54); the Chauci live on fish and water (*Nat.* 16.4), while the Italian race enjoys the diverse crops which their fertile fields produce (*Nat.* 3.41, 37.201–3). The Chauci lack even trees (*Nat.* 16.3) which, according to Pliny, are Nature’s greatest gift to the human race (*Nat.* 12.1, 16.1). The advantages which the Roman people enjoy are the result of a co-operative effort between themselves and nature. The people of Italy encourage the processes of nature by clearing forests, ploughing fields, planting crops and raising animals; in return, Pliny believes, *Natura* helps the Italian people by providing fruitful soil, useful plants and docile animals.

The Chauci, however, are prevented from enjoying the active and co-operative relationship with the natural world which Pliny most admires and which he believes the Roman people enjoy. What Pliny fails to appreciate, however, is the capacity of the Chauci to put to good use whatever resources are to hand and to adapt their habits to their environment. They burn peat (which Pliny disdainfully refers to as *lutum, Nat.* 16.1), they elevate their houses to avoid the muddy plains and they make the most of whatever foods nature provides. Pliny is here contemptuous of the Chauci for their acceptance of nature’s limitations but, as Klaus Sallmann convincingly argues, this is more likely a political point of view than a philosophical or ethnographic one, especially in light of Pliny’s more usual admiration for such plain living. But what is significant here is that the Chauci settle for what Pliny regards as a miserable existence instead of finding ways to overcome nature’s limits.

The tribes of Germany differ from the people of Rome in part because of their ways of responding to natural environments. Unlike the practical Romans,

23 Cf. Col. 3.8.5 on Italy as the land which has learned to produce the fruits of almost the entire world.

who were able to overcome the natural barriers of water and wood in Latium, the German tribes seem to accept the limitations of their natural surroundings.

(ii) *Scythia*

Similar assumptions underlie Roman accounts of Scythia. Like Germany, Scythia is often described in Latin literature as a kind of ‘not-Rome’. Vergil’s picture of Scythia (Verg. *G.* 3.349–83), for example, enables him to highlight certain aspects of Rome and Italy; in writing about Scythia and Scythians, Vergil also writes about Rome and Romans. This passage has been shown to be a typical piece of ethnographical writing. Vergil describes the location (*At non qua Scythiae gentes Maeotiaque unda, | turbidus et torquens flauentis Hister harenas, G.* 3.349–51) and climate (*semper hiems, 354–9*) of the Scythians’ land, as well as their agricultural products (*illic clausa tenent stabulis armenta, neque ullae | aut herbae campo apparent aut arbores frondes, G.* 3.352–3), their character (*gens effrena uirum, G.* 3.382) and their customs (they keep cattle, they hunt deer, they live in caves and they dress in skins). In this respect, Vergil’s description of Scythia resembles his praises of Italy (*G.* 2.136–76). There too, Vergil describes the country’s geographical position (*G.* 2.136–9), its produce (*G.* 2.140–8), climate (*G.* 2.149), peoples (*G.* 2.167–72) and social features (*G.* 2.150–66).

Although these passages are similar in form, they are very different in their details. Unlike Italy, Scythia is unmarked by the signs of modern agriculture:

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sed iacet aggeribus niueis informis et alto
terra gelu late septemque adsurgit in ulnas.
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*Verg. G.* 3.354–5

*Informis* here suggests not just formless, but also in a sense primordial. The absence of agriculture is partly a result of the bleak iciness of the Scythian

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climate. While Vergil’s Italian farmers live through the varied weathers of the four seasons (cf. Verg. G. 1.311, 2.521 (autumn); 1.312 (summer); 1.313 (spring); 1.302, 2.519 (winter); 1.258 (temporibus parem diversis quattuor annum), the Scythians experience a perpetual winter:

semper hiems, semper spirantes frigora Cauri;
tum Sol pallentis haud umquam discutit umbras,
nec cum inuectus equis altum petit aethera, nec cum praeciptem Oceani rubro lauit aequore currum.

(Verg. G. 3.356–9)

Vergil’s Scythia, then, serves to highlight some of the features of Italy itself; the very features which it lacks are just the ones for which Italy is praised.

The contrast between Rome and Scythia also appears in Ovid’s exile poems.\(^{27}\) Throughout both the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid emphasizes the physical distance between Rome and Tomis/Scythia: ships from Italy arrive only rarely (*Tr.* 3.12.37–44); a letter takes a whole year to come from Rome (*Pont.* 4.11.15–16; cf. *Tr.* 5.13.15–16); and Greek and Latin are almost never heard (*Tr.* 3.12.39–40, *Tr.* 4.1.89-90).\(^{28}\) At *Tristia* 2.197–200, Tomis is at the very limit of the Roman world. Ovid’s frequent references to Tomis’ position at the farthest edge of the world (e.g. *Tr.* 1.1.127–8, 2.187–200, 3.3.3, 3.4v.52, 3.13.27) further identify it as a kind of ‘not-Rome’. Whereas Rome seems able to look out over almost the entire world from its site on the seven hills (*Tr.* 1.5.67–70, 3.7.51–2), Tomis clings to the very edge of the known world. Ovid’s use of phrases such as *orbis ultimus* (*Tr.* 1.1.127–8), *ultima tellus* (*Tr.* 1.3.83), *ultima terra* (*Tr.* 3.4v.52) and *extremum ... orbem* (*Tr.* 4.9.9) serves not only to show the

\(^{27}\) Although the place of Ovid’s exile was Tomis, Ovid persistently refers to it as ‘Scythia’ See, among others, Ov. *Tr.* 1.3.61, 3.2.1, 3.4v.49, 3.11.55, 3.12.51, 3.14.47, 4.1.45, 4.6.47, 5.1.21, 5.10.48; *Pont.* 2.1.65, 2.2.110, 3.8.17–20. See too Gareth D. Williams (1994), 8. Even where he does not refer so directly to Scythia, Ovid describes the place of his exile in language and images clearly intended to remind us of the Scythias of earlier literature, in particular Vergil’s Scythia. See Martin (1966), 295–6; Claassen (1990), 78–9. See too Gareth D. Williams (1994), 10–12, 8–25. Williams argues that Ovid also draws on literary representations of other wild and desolate places, so that his Tomis becomes ‘[a]n alternative underworld, a negation of the Golden Age and a recreation of familiar Scythian extremes’ (*loc. cit.*, 16).

\(^{28}\) Ovid further emphasizes the distance he has travelled by describing his journey to Tomis in epic terms. See Claassen (1990), 66.
remoteness of Scythia, but also to reinforce the centrality of Rome. Ovid writes not only about the distance, but also about the differences between both Rome and Scythia, and Romans and Scythians. Scythia is distanced from Rome not only by space, but also by its rough and hairy inhabitants, its wintry climate, its bleak and sterile landscapes and its lack of Roman culture.

Ovid shows not just Tomis’ distance, but also its differences from Rome and Italy. Ovid’s Tomitans, for example, clearly differ from the people of Rome: they are *crudi* (*Tr*. 5.3.8), *duri* (*Pont*. 3.2.102), *feri* (*Pont*. 3.9.32) and *saevi* (*Pont*. 4.8.84); they have long hair (*Pont*. 1.5.74) and shaggy beards (*Pont*. 4.2.2; *Tr*. 5.7.18);29 and they dress in skins and trousers (*Tr*. 3.10.19, *Tr*. 5.10.33–4, *Pont*. 4.10.2). The women of Tomis do not practise the womanly Roman chores of spinning and weaving, but rather grind wheat and fetch water in buckets carried on their heads (*Pont*. 3.8.6–12).30

The topography of Ovid’s Tomis also differs tellingly from that of Rome and Italy. Ovid’s many references to the rough and unappealing topography of Tomis would have suggested to his readers a contrast to the familiar characteristics of Italy which appear in many other Roman texts. Whereas in Italy there are fresh bubbling springs (*Verg*. *G*. 2.165; *Prop*. 3.22.23–6; *Plin*. *Nat*. 37.201), in Tomis there are none (*Pont*. 3.1.17–18); in Italy there are fast-flowing rivers and gently plashing streams (*Verg*. *G*. 2.159–60; *Prop*. 3.22.23–6; *Plin*. *Nat*. 37.201), in Tomis rivers and streams are frozen solid (*Tr*. 3.10.31–2) so that fish swim beneath a ‘roof’ of ice (*Pont*. 3.1.15–16); in Italy the soil is rich and fertile (*Var*. *R*. 1.2.6–7; *Plin*. *Nat*. 37.201), in Tomis it is barren (*Tr*. 3.10.71–6; *Pont*. 1.3.51–2; cf. *Met*. 8.788–91); Italy enjoys a seemingly never-ending springtime (*Verg*. *G*. 2.149), while Tomis suffers a perpetual winter (*Pont*. 1.2.24, 3.1.14); in Italy there is a wondrous variety of plants and animals (*Var*. *R*. 1.2.6–7; *Verg*. *G*. 2.143–4; *Plin*. *Nat*. 37.201), in Tomis there are few birds and trees (*Pont*. 3.1.19–20, 3.1.21–2) and the only plant which thrives is wormwood (*Pont*. 3.1.23–4, 3.8.13–16).31

29 In Rome, short, neat beards were the fashion. Cf. Ov. *Am*. 1.518; Balsdon (1979), 215–16.
30 Claassen (1990), 74.
31 Wormwood is elsewhere associated with the Underworld. See Gareth D. Williams (1994), 13.
These ideas are worked out more fully in *Tristia* 3.10. Here Ovid begins by describing the bleak winters which he now must endure (*Tr.* 3.10.9–50). In Tomis there is continual snow (*Tr.* 3.10.13–16) and the south wind blows away towers and buildings (*Tr.* 3.10.17–18). So cold is it, that the Tomitans’ beards glisten with frost (*Tr.* 3.10.21–2), jars of wine freeze solid (*Tr.* 3.10.23–4) and rivers and streams turn to ice, so that it is possible to walk where once only boats could go (*Tr.* 3.10.31–2). Added to the rigours of winter are the terrors of war. When the rivers are frozen, Ovid explains, they provide a passage for warlike neighbouring tribes (*dum tamen aura tepet, medio defendimur Histro: | ille suis liquidis bella repellit aquis, *Tr.* 3.10.7–8; cf. 3.10.51–56). In winter time, then, Tomis also lacks the benefits of Augustan peace (*Tr.* 3.10.67; cf. *Pont.* 1.8.5–6, 2.5.17–18, 3.1.25–8). Not only does this produce a constant fear among its people, it also prevents the peaceful (and very Roman) pursuit of farming (*Tr.* 3.10.68–70). One result of this absence of agriculture (which is mentioned in accounts of Scythia itself)\(^32\) is that the land appears as a contrast to the cultivated and fertile countryside of Italy:\(^33\)

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\begin{align*}
\text{non hic pampinea dulcis latet uva sub umbra,} \\
\text{nec cumulant altos fervida musta lacus.} \\
\text{poma negat regio, nec haberet Acontius, in quo} \\
\text{scriberet hic dominae verba legenda suae.} \\
\text{aspiceres nudos sine fronde, sine arbore, campos:} \\
\text{heu loca felici non adeunda viro!} \\
\text{ergo tam late pateat cum maximus orbis,} \\
\text{haec est in poenam terra reperta meam!}
\end{align*}
\]


When Ovid says that sweet grapes, shady vines, fruits and foaming must are not to be found here (*non hic, *Tr.* 3.10.71) in Tomis, he implies that they are to be found in Italy. Even without mentioning it, then, Ovid can prompt us to think of Italy. When he tells us what Tomis/Scythia lacks, he prompts us to imagine that another place — that is, Italy — enjoys these things.


Ovid seems to realize that those reading his poems will find his description of Tomis incredible. In *Pont. 4.7*, for example, he imagines his friend Vestalis’ astonished reactions at seeing it for himself:

\[
\text{ipse vides certe glacie concrescere Pontum,}
\text{ipse vides rigido stantia vina gelu;}
\text{ipse vides, onerata ferox ut ducat laxyx}
\text{per medias Histri plaustra bubulcus aquas.}
\text{aspicis et mitti sub adunco toxica ferro,}
\text{et telum causas mortis habere duas.}
\]

(Ov. *Pont. 4.7.7–12*)

The repetition of the phrase *ipse vides* (*Pont. 4.7.7–9*) reinforces the fact that the features which Ovid mentions are difficult to believe unless you have indeed seen them with your own eyes. The same idea appears in *Pont. 4.9*. This time Ovid urges his friend Graecinus to have their friend Flaccus tell him about the miseries of life in Tomis:

\[
\text{quaere loci faciem Scythicique incommoda caeli,}
\text{et quam vicino terrear hoste roga:}
\text{sintne litae tenues serpentis felle sagittae,}
\text{fuit an humanum victima dira caput:}
\text{mentiar, an coeat duratus frigore Pontus,}
\text{et teneat glacies iugera multa freti.}
\]

(Ov. *Pont. 4.9.81–6*)

As in the earlier poem, Ovid here seeks some verification for his account of frosty Tomis/Scythia and hopes that another eye-witness to its ice-bound landscapes will be able to support his own account. In *Pont. 4.10*, this verification comes not from another visitor to Tomis, but from a more impartial source. Anticipating his friend’s disbelief (*qui veniunt istinc, vix vos ea credere dicunt, Pont. 4.10.35*), Ovid gives the poet Albinovanus a scientific account of the freezing of the Black Sea (*Pont. 4.10.35–64*). Tomis’ geographical position — namely its proximity to the icy north pole — explains how it is possible for the sea to freeze over. If the complaints of Ovid himself, even when supported by the experiences of others,

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34 Gahan (1978), 200–1.
are unconvincing, then surely this scientific account will persuade his friends that his account of life in Tomis is true.

It seems, then, that Ovid realizes that many will find his description of Tomis incredible. This is not surprising, since he seems purposely to shape many of his descriptions in the form of *thaumata*. Here in Scythia, he tells us, things really do seem to go against nature: people walk on water (*Tr.* 3.10.31–4, *Tr.* 3.10.39–40, *Pont.* 3.1.20, *Pont.* 4.7.9–10); fish ‘swim’ in solid ice (*Tr.* 3.10.49–50, *Pont.* 3.1.15–16); land becomes sea (*Pont.* 3.1.20) and sea becomes land (*Tr.* 3.10.25–50, *Pont.* 3.1.20, *Pont.* 4.10.32–4). Wine is no longer liquid, but solid (*Tr.* 3.10.23–4, *Pont.* 4.7.8); there is neither spring nor summer, but all seasons are fused into a perpetual icy winter (*Tr.* 3.10.9–18, *Pont.* 1.2.24, *Pont.* 3.1.11–14). At *Tr.* 5.10.5–6, Ovid writes that time itself seems to have stopped in Tomis:

\[
\text{stare putes, adeo procedunt tempora tarde,} \\
\text{et peragit lentis passibus annus iter.} \\
\text{ne mihi solstitium quicquam de noctibus aufert,} \\
\text{efficit angustos nec mihi bruma dies.}
\]

*(Ov. *Tr.* 5.10.5–8)*

It is not just that Ovid’s misery prevents time from flying; rather, Tomis’ position at the edges of the world deprives Ovid of the familiar signs of passing time which he was accustomed to observe in Italy. So topsy-turvy is life in Tomis, that Ovid — a Roman — has become a barbarian (*barbarus hic ego sum*, *Tr.* 5.10.37)\(^{35}\) who finds himself forgetting Roman ways and Roman language (*Pont*. 1.5.49–50, *Tr.* 5.7.53–64) and using gestures and shakes of the head to communicate (*Tr.* 5.10.35–6, 41–2). Ovid again realizes that his description of Tomis may be beyond belief (*vix equidem credar*, *Tr.* 3.10.35), but the appearance of so many *thaumata* in Ovid’s Tomis serves to distant it still further from the kindly and predictable land of Italy. The absence of unnatural marvels is another common theme of *laudes Italiae* (cf. Verg. *G.* 2.140–2; Prop. 3.22.5–18, 27–38). Ovid, however, applies just the opposite observation to Tomis; here, he claims, everything goes against nature.

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\(^{35}\) See Saddlington (1961) for a discussion of the full connotations of the word *barbarus*. 
Ovid’s picture of the harsh and unfriendly landscape of Tomis might be explained by his hope to evoke sympathy for his miserable circumstances; Ovid finds himself far from Rome and Italy, in a land where he is deprived of books, Latin conversation and even of the simple pleasure of tending a garden or working a small farm (Pont. 1.8.39–62; cf. Tr. 4.8.27, Pont. 4.2.43–4). Yet, even if this is the case, what is telling is that Ovid chooses to show the misery of his circumstances by contrasting them with his old Roman life. It is not just because Tomis is cold, desolate and isolated that Ovid finds himself miserable, but also because it is so different from the familiar landscapes of Rome and Italy. In writing about Tomis in this way, Ovid is also continuing a tradition of representing Rome as the normative centre of the world and other places as occupying the fringe. Although Ovid finds himself stammering words of Getic (Tr. 5.12.53–8, Pont. 3.7.37) (and claims to have written a poem in the Getic language, Pont. 4.13.18–22), his transformation from toga-wearing Roman to bearded, trousered Getic is never complete; for Ovid, as for many other Romans, the city Rome still occupies the centre of the world and provides the standards against which all other places can be judged.

3.  *Natura melior potentiorque*: bridges and roads

Up to this point, this chapter has been concerned with the differences — cultural, but also natural — between wild places and Rome. In the final two sections, I will show that wild landscapes are also presented in Latin texts as hostile (and sometimes almost actively inimical) towards both Romans and ideas of Romanness. Roman military achievements, for example, are often seen as victories over not just people, but also over the wild lands which they inhabit. In

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36 Cf. Claassen (1990), 81.
37 Stat. Silv. 4.3.135.
his description of Aeneas’ shield, for example, Vergil writes that the Cyclopes shaped not just the peoples (the Numidians and the Africans; the Lelegeians and Carians of Asia; and the Gelonians of Scythia, Verg. A. 8.724–6), but also the rivers which Augustus had conquered:

… Euphrates ibat iam mollior undis, extremique hominum Morini, Rhenusque bicornis, indomitique Dahae, et pontem indignatus Araxes.

(Verg. A. 8.726–8; cf. 6.791–807)\(^{38}\)

The conquests of the Euphrates, the Rhine and the Araxes are here just as important as the overthrow of the peoples who inhabited their banks. Roman triumphal processions also often celebrated just such victories over the natural world. According to Tacitus, Germanicus’ triumph (celebrating his victory over the tribes of Germany) included not only booty and prisoners, but also replicas of mountains and rivers (\textit{simulacra montium, fluminum}, Tac. \textit{Ann}. 2.41).\(^{39}\) Suetonius records that Claudius included a naval crown in his triumph and that this represented ‘the crossing and, in a sense, conquest of the ocean’ (\textit{traiecti et quasi domiti Oceani insignis}, Suet. \textit{Cl}. 17.3).\(^{40}\) These examples remind us that in their battles against the wild races outside their city, Romans also engaged in physical battles against forests, rivers, mountains and swamps.\(^{41}\)

This picture of the ancient Romans appears even in popular culture. In Goscinny and Uderzo’s comic \textit{The Mansions of the Gods}, Julius Caesar plans to

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\(^{38}\) Also cf. Tac. \textit{Ann}. 2.22 where Germanicus declares that the Romans have conquered all the nations between the Rhine and the Elbe.

\(^{39}\) Cf. Ov. \textit{Tr}. 4.2.37–8, describing the floats of a triumphal procession: \textit{hic lacus, hi montes, haec tot castella, tot amnes | plena ferae caedis, plena cruoris erant}. Also Ov. \textit{Pont}. 2.1.3.37–9; \textit{protinus argento versos imitantia muros | barbarum cum pictis oppida lata viris, | fluminaque et montes et in altis proelia silvis}. Plin. \textit{Nat}. 12.20, 12.111 notes that exotic trees were also sometimes displayed in triumphs.

\(^{40}\) Beagon (1992), 187. For some useful observations on the links between landscape and power, particularly in Roman culture, see Purcell (1990). Purcell notes: ‘the display of the power of the conqueror to grasp the landscape, human and physical, and change it, is what is essential to Roman imperialism’ (\textit{loc. cit.}, 23).

\(^{41}\) Pliny records the curious story that Roman fleets often found themselves under attack from floating trees off the shores of Germany: \textit{ingentium ramorum armamentis saeppe territis classibus nostris, cum velut ex industria fluctibus aegerentur in proras stantium noctu inopesque remedii illae proelium navale adversus arbores intrem} (Plin. \textit{Nat}. 16.5). See too Sallmann (1987), 118–19.
build a vast ‘natural park’ and block of flats (‘The Mansions of the Gods’) in the midst of a Gallic forest. The Gauls, and in particular Asterix and Obelix, discover the Romans’ plans and determine to save their forest and the wild boars which roam there. They visit the Druid Getafix who gives them acorns, treated with a magic potion, to plant in the cleared areas of forest. However much they try, the Romans cannot clear the Gauls’ forest, as the magical acorns quickly grow into enormous oak-trees. Goscinny and Uderzo here present a familiar picture of the ancient Romans as enemies of wild nature. Whereas the Gauls protect and nurture the woods of Gaul (Caesar himself remarks that the Gauls are protected by their forest), the Romans see them as an obstacle to both their ambitious building projects and the spread of Romanness. Indeed in characterizing the ancient Romans in this way, Goscinny and Uderzo reflect Roman beliefs about the role of the Roman people in the world and the conflict between Roman culture and wild nature; in their efforts to increase their empire and spread Roman culture, Romans battled not only people, but even nature.

In Goscinny and Uderzo’s story, the Romans are outwitted by the wily Gaul Asterix; but in fact Romans were particularly successful in their encounters with wild landscapes. As in Latium itself, these battles were often against water (swamps, rains and rivers) and wood (trees, forests and thickets). Romans generally set about overcoming these natural obstacles in much the same ways as they had overcome them in the wilds of Latium. They used roads to open up forests, bridges to provide passage across rivers, drains to carry away water, causeways to cut across swamps. Descriptions of these works, and in particular of roads and bridges, often represent their building as a kind of contest against the natural environment; often it is not the technical aspects of their construction

42 Goscinny and Uderzo (1973).
44 Goscinny and Uderzo (1973), 5.
45 Cf. Goscinny and Uderzo (1973), 5 where Julius Caesar remarks that once the forest has been replaced with a Roman settlement, the people of Gaul will be forced to adopt the customs of Rome.
46 In what may be another allusion to ancient Roman literature, Asterix remarks to Obelix: ‘It’s not normal for Romans to brave the dangers of the forest, especially when the dangers are us!’ (Goscinny and Uderzo loc. cit., 8). Cf. Liv. 9.36.6 on the Ciminian Forest.
47 On Rome’s battles against the salty waters of the North Sea and the North Atlantic, see Romm (1992), 140–9.
which most interest Roman writers and their readers, but rather the tussle between people and nature which their building seemed to entail.

One example is Julius Caesar’s bridge over the Rhine (Caes. *Gal.* 4.16–19). For Caesar, the ability to cross the river — by bridge rather than by boat (*Gal.* 4.17) — is an effective symbol of Roman power (*Gal.* 4.16). Caesar himself admits that he intended to show that the Roman army both was able and had the daring to cross the river (*cum intellegenter et posse et audere populi Romani exercitum Rhenum transire, Gal.* 4.16). Caesar uses the bridge, then, not simply to overcome the natural barrier of the river, but also to intimidate the German tribes (*Gal.* 4.19). When Caesar comes to explain the construction of the bridge, he writes not only of its technical aspects (which he does in some detail, *Gal.* 4.17), but also of the ways in which the bridge checked the power of the Rhine’s waters and wild banks (*Gal.* 4.17). Indeed Caesar represents the river as an inimical force which, like the people of Germany themselves, might try to destroy his bridge (*Gal.* 4.17). He constructs beams (*tigna*) against the power and violence of the river (*contra vim atque impetum fluminis, Gal.* 4.17); he constructs piles (*sublicae*) to function as a buttress (*pro ariete, Gal.* 4.17) against the force of the running stream (*vim fluminis, Gal.* 4.17). Caesar also turns the natural power of the river against itself and builds the bridge in such a way that the very violence of its waters holds it together (*tanta erat operis firmitudo atque ea rerum natura, ut, quo maior vis aquae se incitavisset, hoc artius illigata tenerentur, Gal.* 4.17).

It is difficult to say whether Caesar intended to personify the Rhine, but the language which he uses to describe it encourages us to see the river as another of his enemies. When, for example, he makes *vis aquae* the subject of *incitavisset* (*Gal.* 4.17), he seems to suggest that the river has a mind of its own; that it is purposefully hostile towards the Romans. Similarly, when he fears that the river may become an ally in the Germans’ war against the Romans (*Gal.* 4.17), he almost attributes to it the capacity to think. For Caesar, then, the building of the bridge is not just a feat of Roman engineering and military organization, but a demonstration of his — and Rome’s — superiority over both the peoples and the wild lands of Gaul.
The value of the bridge as Roman propaganda becomes clear when Caesar, having proudly described his achievement of building the bridge, writes of his activities across the Rhine in the land of the Sugambri: *Caesar paucos dies in eorum finibus moratus omnibus vicis aedificisque incensis frumentisque succisis...diebus omnino decem et octo trans Rhenum consumptis satis et ad laudem at ad utilitatem profectum arbitratus se in Galliam recepit pontemque rescidit* (Gal. 4.19). The actions which Caesar describes — burning villages and hewing crops — seem only an afterthought; ways of filling in time while he lingered (*moratus*, Gal. 4.19) in the Rhineland.48 So why did Caesar bother to build the bridge? The Rhine was important to Romans not only as a natural boundary, but also as a cultural one.49 Before Caesar’s crossing, the river separated the Romans from the wild lands and peoples of Gaul; once the river has been crossed, there is no need for a major military confrontation, since Caesar has shown that Romans can cross the river whenever they please.50

Caesar’s bridge would have had a particular symbolic value for his Roman readers; in reading of Caesar’s triumph over the Rhine, they would have been reminded of other famous and powerful bridge-builders such as Darius (Plin. *Nat.* 4.76; D.C. 59.17.11), Xerxes (Plin. *Nat.* 4.75; Suet. *Cal.* 19.3; D.C. 59.17.11) and Seleucus I Nicator (Plin. *Nat.* 5.86).51 In choosing to build a bridge — and in writing about it in these terms — Caesar places himself among these other great conquerors of nature.52 Trajan similarly boasted of his role as a builder of bridges and conqueror of rivers. On Trajan’s Column there are scenes of Roman soldiers crossing rivers and building bridges, as well as clearing woods and constructing roads through forests and over mountains.53 Likewise an inscription

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49 Cf. the Germans’ taunt that the river formed the boundary of the Roman people’s empire, and as such was beyond the reach of Caesar’s power (*Caes. Gal.* 4.16). See too Romm (1992), 121–71 on the English Channel, the North Sea, the Nile and other ‘horizon[s] for conquest’ (141).


commemorating the rebuilding of a bridge over the Anio (by the sixth-century general Narses) uses the same triumphant language to describe the conquering of nature (C.I.L. 6.1199).\footnote{Purcell (1992), 431; \textit{idem} (1996), 199.} Not just bridges, but other constructions too could be used to demonstrate Roman power. The straight roads of Rome are perhaps the most remarkable example of the Romans’ ability to shape the topography of the regions which they settled.\footnote{Cf. D.H. 3.67.5. See too Plu. \textit{C.G.} 7.1 on the beauty, straightness and symmetry of Gaius’ roads.} Roads not only facilitated travel between the city and major Roman settlements, they also demonstrated the extent of the ever-increasing empire.\footnote{Purcell (1990), 12–14 on the use of roads as symbols of Roman power in Cisalpine Gaul. Milestones too were important in this respect, in that they worked as stony reminders of the vastness of the Roman world.} Roads also enabled Romans to assert the ‘Romanness’ of their new settlements. Perhaps most obviously, they helped to transport aspects of Romanness (in the form of language, dress, food, religion and other products and customs) to Roman towns; but they also ensured that Roman towns and settlements resembled the layout of the capital itself. In building their roads, Romans showed their capacity not only for reshaping the physical world, but also for imprinting it with symbols of Romanness. Roads, like aqueducts and bridges, were not simply useful Roman amenities, they were also monuments to Roman power over the physical world; all showed that the rough and wild landscape of nature had been conquered and replaced by the straight and stony landscape of Roman civilization.

Roman writers were themselves clearly aware of the importance of roads as symbols of Roman power.\footnote{See Purcell (1990), 12–14 and \textit{passim}.} Statius expresses this idea in his description of the Via Domitiana (Stat. \textit{Silv.} 4.3).\footnote{This was the road between Sinuessa and Puteoli, completed in AD 95. On this road, and Statius’ praises of it, see Kleiner (1991), 184; Coleman (1988), 102–35.} In the preface to \textit{Silvae} 4, Statius refers only to the road’s utilitarian aspects: \textit{tertio [opusculo] viam Domitianam miratus sum, qua gravissimam harenarum moram [imperator] exemit}.\footnote{Cf. Pavlovskis (1973), 20. Also cf. Stat. \textit{Silv.} 4.4.1–5, 6–7, 99.} But his tone changes in the poem itself. In the opening lines, Statius wonders at the fearful sound (\textit{immanis sonus}) coming from the Appian Way:
The sound comes not from any hostile tribe attacking the fields of Campania, but from the builders of Domitian’s road, waging a war of a different kind against the Italian soil. The reasons for the new road are firstly functional: the new road will ensure a speedier trip and replace the twisty old tracks of sand with a straight and solid road (Silv. 4.3.20–35). But the road has another function too. Statius transforms a work of engineering into a triumph over the earth itself, as forests are felled, mountains stripped and streams diverted (Silv. 4.3.40–58). Statius’ allusions to a number of mythological figures (Helle, Silv. 4.3.57; Ino, Silv. 4.3.60; Hercules, Silv. 4.3.155; Bacchus (Euhan), Silv. 4.3.155) and events also give to the road a kind of epic grandeur. At Silv. 4.3.56–60, for example, the road-builders’ work appears in a mythic context:

hae possent et Athon cavare dextrae
et maestum pelagus gementis Helles
intercludere ponte non natanti.
his parvus, nisi di viam vetarent,
Inous freta miscuisset Isthmos.

(Stat. Silv. 4.3.56–60)

Statius combines purely realistic elements (the practical advantages of the road, details of its construction) with more fabulous ones (references to characters and places from myth) to praise the road in two ways: firstly as a wonder of Roman engineering, but also as an achievement worthy of legend.

Statius goes on to describe the bridging of the river Volturnus and imagines the river himself rejoicing to have been conquered by the emperor of Rome:

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60 Statius imagines that, before the building of the road, the land was foedum (Stat. Silv. 4.3.126) and putres (Silv. 4.3.126). Cf. Pavlovskis (1973), 21. Purcell (1996), 199 draws attention to a third-century milestone from Spain describing the repair of a road: solo pacato et perdomito averso flamine (C.I.L. 2.4911).
It requires the controlling influence of Domitian’s road-builders, Statius here suggests, to make the Volturnus a true river (‘amnis esse coepi,’ the watery god exclaims, Silv. 4.3.80). Indeed the river claims to be ashamed of his former wild self (‘pudet!’) and to take pride in his new role as a peaceful channel of water. Statius also imagines that the Sibyl of Cumae herself appears to praise Domitian as more generous and more powerful than Nature herself:61

The Sibyl’s speech makes clear an idea which is suggested throughout the poem: that a road is not just a means of transport, but an affirmation of both Roman and personal power. In other words, while the road allows the Roman people to enjoy a smoother and speedier trip to Baiae (Silv. 4.3.9–26, 27–39, 124–63);63 it is also a physical symbol of Domitian’s power: it carries Romanness into a previously wild

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61 This is reinforced when the Sibyl attributes to Domitian certain miraculous powers: under his rule, India would be drenched by rain-clouds, Libya would flow with water and Haemus would be warm (Stat. Silv. 4.3.137–8).
63 Pavlovskis (1973), 20–1.
landscape and remains as a reminder of the Roman people’s ability to exert their civilizing power over the wilds of nature.\textsuperscript{64}

Statius also describes the triumphal arch which stands at the entrance to the bridge over the Volturnus:

\begin{verbatim}
Haec amnis pariterque se levarat
ingenti plaga marmorata dorso.
huius ianua prosperumque limen
arcus, belligeris ducis tropaeis
et totis Ligurum nitens metallis,
quantus nubila qui coronat imbri.
\end{verbatim}

(Stat. \textit{Silv.} 4.3.95–100)

Fred S. Kleiner comments on the significance of such a monument being erected in an area which was already an established part of the Roman empire:

[\textit{W}hen arches were erected within the secure frontiers of the empire and their stated purpose was not to celebrate the defeat of Rome’s enemies but rather the paving of roads and bridging of rivers, as … on the Via Domitiana at the Volturnus river, tropaic statuary carried another message, namely that Roman victories could be won not only against men but against Nature herself.\textsuperscript{65}]

In writing of Domitian’s road, bridge and triumphal arch, Statius shows that the emperor had subjugated both people and nature, and suggests that this latter achievement was the more impressive.\textsuperscript{66}

The battlefield was perhaps an obvious source of imagery for those writing about Roman achievements in building and engineering. The physical effort of clearing forests, levelling hills and digging trenches could readily be likened to the work of war itself. Perhaps more surprising is that Rome’s battles against other peoples were also seen as battles against wild lands. In a letter written to Caninius Rufus, the younger Pliny praises his friend’s plan to write a poem about the

\textsuperscript{64} Statius also suggests that the road facilitates other changes to the landscape such as the building of canals (Stat. \textit{Silv.} 4.3.7–8) and the cultivation of grain (11–12). Cf. Pavlovskis (1973), 20.

\textsuperscript{65} Kleiner (1991), 192.

\textsuperscript{66} Human beings’ ability to alter the physical world is a recurring theme of Statius’ \textit{Silvae}. See, e.g., \textit{Silvae} 1.2 and 2.2 (on luxurious villas), 2.3 (on a marvellous tree), 3.1 (on a temple of Hercules), 1.3 (on Manilius Vopiscus’ splendid baths). See too Pavlovskis (1973), 6–21.
Dacian Wars (Plin. *Ep.* 8.4). Pliny delights that the poem will allow Caninius to describe not only the Romans’ battles against other peoples, but also their triumphs over nature:67

> optime facis, quod bellum Dacium scribere paras. nam quae tam recens, tam copiosa, tam lata, quae denique tam poetica et quamquam in verissimis rebus tam fabulosa materia? dices immissa terris nova flumina, novos pontes fluminibus injectos, insessa castris montium abrupta, pulsum regia, pulsum etiam vita regem nihil desperantem; super haec, actos bis triumphos, quorum alter ex invicta gente primus, alter novissimus fuit.

(Plin. *Ep.* 8.4.1–2)

For Pliny, it is these struggles against rivers and mountains which will provide the most exciting episodes of Rufus’ poem: rivers will be diverted, bridges built and camps set up on jagged mountains.68 When Pliny imagines the Roman soldiers’ battles against rivers and mountains, he turns to what were already conventional means of describing power and military success.69 But this imagery has a more particular Roman significance. Trajan’s battles against wild nature were in a sense a continuation of those which had begun in Latium itself. In Gaul and Germany, Romans again find themselves contending with wild nature and in particular with water and wood.

### 4. Forest wars

As we saw in an earlier chapter, battles between Trojans and trees occur at a number of points in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, as the Trojans battle not just the inhabitants

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of Italy, but also its trees and forests. Lucan too uses images of trees and their destruction to reveal the characters of Caesar and Pompey. 70

The forests of Italy again appear as obstacles to Rome and Romanness in Livy’s history. 71 In Book 9, for example, Livy’s Romans encounter the natural barrier of the Ciminian Forest. At this time, the forest was ‘more impenetrable and fearful than the woods of Germany’ (Silua erat Ciminia magis tum inuia atque horrenda quam nuper fuere Germanici saltus, Liv. 9.36.1), and not even traders had yet ventured into it (Liv. 9.36.1). When the consul’s brother, a certain Marcus Fabius, offered to venture into the forest to gather information (against the orders of the senate, which feared that he would fail, Liv. 9.36.14), he was protected during his journey not only by his knowledge of the Etruscan language, his shepherd’s dress and the rustic weapons which he carried, but also by the fact that nobody believed that a stranger — and particularly a Roman — would dare to enter such a wild place: Sed neque commercium linguae nec uestis armorumue habitus sic eos texit quam quod abhorrebat ab fide quemquam externum Ciminius saltus intraturum (Liv. 9.36.6). Livy’s story is suggestive because it reminds us that wild landscapes such as the Ciminian Forest were commonly seen as outside the Roman world and so outside the experience and understanding of most Roman citizens. Marcus Fabius’ journey into the forest was successful because he entered it not as a Roman, but as a shepherd (Liv. 9.36.6). Once they have conquered the forest, the Romans reinforce their possession of it by using it as a source of timber, acorns, pitch and other forest products (Liv. 10.24.5; cf. Strabo 5.3.7, 5.2.5, 5.1.12).

Rome’s battles against the forest were not always so successful. At the time of Marcus Fabius’ journey into the Ciminian Forest, the Romans were still demoralized by the memory of their defeat at the Caudine Forks (Furculae Caudinae, Liv. 9.36.1, 9.2.6–10). Livy’s description of this area suggests the danger which awaits the Roman army. Two routes are available to the Romans for

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70 See above, Chapter I, 49–51.
71 See too Liv. 11.54.1 (where Hannibal orders his brother Mago and the Carthaginian troops to hide in a swampy place), 21.25.9–13, 22.41.1–3 (Hannibal uses topography to trap Romans between a lake and some mountains), 23.24.7–10 (the Gauls chop down trees and push them over on to the Romans).
their march to Luceria: one, the coastal path, is long but relatively safe; the other, which is shorter, passes through the dangerous terrain of the Caudine Forks:

saltus duo alti angusti siluosique sunt montibus circa perpetuis inter se iuncti; iacet inter eos satis patens clausus in medio campus herbidus aquosusque, per quem medium iter est; sed antequam venias ad eum, intrandae primae angustiae sunt, et aut eadem qua te insinuaueris retro via repetenda aut, si ire porro pergas, per alium saltum artiorum impeditioremque, euadendum.

(Liv. 9.2.7–8)

Although the Romans manage to pass through the first gorge (*saltus*), they find the second blocked by a barrier of rocks and felled trees (Liv. 9.2.9). When they try to turn back, they find that the first gorge too is blocked. The Romans themselves realize that it is the landscape, as much as their human enemy, which has trapped them. One argues that they should cross the mountains, push through the forests and confront the enemy (Liv. 9.3.1–2); another reminds them that their position is impossible: *quo aut qua eamus? num montes moliri sede sua paramus? dum haec imminebant iuga, qua tu ad hostem uenias? armati inermes, fortis ignai, pariter omnes capti atque uicti sumus*’ (Liv. 9.3.3). The Romans are at a disadvantage here because they are unfamiliar with the wild landscape and its risks. The Samnites, on the other hand, know how to make use of the trees, rocks and mountains to trap and so defeat their Roman enemies.

Elsewhere Livy effectively reproduces the terrain of the Caudine Forks to suggest the dangers which await Romans in other wild places (cf. Liv. 7.34.1–2, 28.5.8, 31.39.7–15, 38.40.6–15). Livy’s repetition of certain landscape elements — difficult forests, rocky gorges and narrow tracks — might be seen as a want of literary creativity; but Livy deliberately uses these to evoke the Caudine Forks themselves and to enable us to share the Romans’ own recollection of the Caudine

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73 Here, as Horsfall (1985), 200, 203 remarks, Livy perhaps exaggerates the wildness of the region to enhance the Romans’ courage and heighten the tragedy of their defeat. See too Oakley (1997), 141–2 for the correlation between the structure of this passage and the geography which it describes.
74 For some comparable episodes, where Rome’s enemies again use nature to their advantage, see Liv. 11.54.1, 21.25.9–13, 21.54.7ff; 22.41.1–3, 23.24.7–10, 41.2.1, 41.14.2.
75 Cf. Liv. 9.6.5 where Livy notes that the Samnites will not always be able to rely on topography to help them in war.
76 Horsfall (1982), 50.
In Book 35, the Romans travel through a narrow wood (*per saltum angustum*, Liv. 35.11.1), but find the exit blocked by the Ligurians. Although they try to retrace their steps, they again find their way blocked (Liv. 35.11.3). Like the Romans, we cannot help but remember the disaster of the Caudine Forks; but the memory is all the more chilling to the Romans themselves: *Caudinaeque cladis memoria non animis modo, sed prope oculis obruersabatur* (Liv. 35.11.3). The situation here is not just a reminder of the disaster at Caudium, but a repetition of it; Livy’s Romans do not just recall the story of the Caudine Forks, but see it played out once again before their eyes.\(^\text{78}\)

Rome’s battles against nature were not restricted to the mythical times of Livy’s history. Nature again appears as an enemy to Rome in Julius Caesar’s *de Bello Gallico*. In Gaul, Germany and Britain, the Romans repeatedly find themselves hindered by natural forces: storms (*Gal. 3.28*), rains (*7.27*), tides (*4.29, 5.1, 5.8*), snow (*7.8*) and rivers (*8.55*). Often their problems are caused simply by their armoury and equipment, which is unsuitable for fighting in wild terrain: their ships cannot withstand Gallic storms and tides (*Gal. 3.12-13*), nor run ashore except in deep water (*Gal. 4.24*) and their weapons are heavy and unwieldy on wet and swampy ground (*Gal. 4.24*). On occasion, however, Caesar gives the clear impression that nature itself is to blame for the Romans’ setbacks as natural features can become participants in human battles.

Unlike the Romans, the native inhabitants of Gaul, Germany and Britain can make use of wild landscapes. They do this in two main ways. Firstly they use natural features to protect themselves against Roman attack. Repeatedly Caesar records that the enemy retreated into a forest (*Gal. 6.5, 6.8, 6.29, 6.31*), remained hiding in woodland (*Gal. 1.12, 2.18, 2.19, 4.32, 4.38, 5.9, 5.19, 5.32, 6.5, 6.37*) or took refuge over a river or swamp (*Gal. 2.9, 3.28, 6.5, 6.31, 6.34, 7.16, 7.35*). The Gallic tribes of the Morini and the Menapii, for example, make particularly effective use of the wooded landscape of Gaul. Here, as in early Latium, the land

\(^\text{77}\) Cf. Horsfall (1982), 50–1: ‘the formalisation of topographical detail … made it easy for Livy to represent a situation of roughly similar dimensions to the Caudine Forks as a kind of recurrent nightmare to the Romans.’ Cf. Liv. 9.38.4.

\(^\text{78}\) On another occasion, Rome’s enemies gleefully recall the disaster of the Caudine Forks as an example of Roman audacity: *eaedem temeritate avidam ulteriorem semper gentem in saltus iniios deductam, saeptam non hostium magis armis quam locorum iniquitatibus esse* (Liv. 9.38.4).
is dominated by forests and swamps (continentesque silvas ac paludes, Gal. 3.28). The Gauls realize that this landscape can provide useful buffer between themselves and the Romans (Gal. 3.28) and help them to make a surprise attack against Caesar and his men (Gal. 3.28; cf. 5.19). Although the Romans manage to chase the Gauls into the forest, some press too far into the woody snare and are killed (Gal. 3.28). Other tribes similarly make use of their natural surroundings by retreating into places Romans cannot reach (cf. Caes. Gal. 1.12, 2.19, 4.32, 4.38, 5.9, 6.23, 6.29, 6.31). Here, then, natural features are not just incidental obstacles to the Romans; rather they become forceful weapons against which the Romans’ own arms and stratagems are all too often useless.

Natural features can also be used more offensively. A number of tribes rely on their knowledge of local topography (and the Romans’ corresponding ignorance of it) to trap Caesar and his legions (Gal. 3.9, 4.24–6, 8.15). The Veneti, for example, knowing that the Romans have no knowledge of the local topography and that they will be at a disadvantage in a place with few harbours, lure them into a place where they will be unable to fight (Gal. 3.9). They also take up positions in places Romans cannot reach either on foot or by ship (Gal. 3.12). Vercingetorix, for example, uses swamps and forests as natural defences (locum castris deligit paludibus silvisque munitum, Gal. 7.16), in contrast to Caesar who chooses to pitch his camp on a plain, in a spot intermissa [a] flumine et a paludibus aditum, (Gal. 7.17). The Gallic leader knows that if the Romans try to cross the swamp, they will become trapped in its mud, giving him the opportunity to attack (Gal. 7.19). Here natural features are used not just for defence, but also for attack, as nature itself becomes a part of the Gauls’ armoury.

Caesar’s enemies, then, make use of topographical features in their natural forms. Forests are used as fortresses, rivers as barricades and swamps as traps; as Caesar himself notes, they rely on natura loci (Gal. 3.9, 8.15). Caesar even

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79 For some similarly wet and woody landscapes, cf. Caes. Gal. 2.16 (paludes), 3.28 (continentesque silvas ac paludes), 5.21 (silvis paludibusque), 5.52 (silvae paludessque), 6.5 (silvas paludessque), 6.31 (silvam ... continentes paludes), 6.35 (palus ... silvae), 7.15 (flumine et palude), 7.16 (paludibus silvisque), 7.32 (paludibus silvisque).
80 Cf. Caes. Gal. 5.21 where Caesar finds the Britons’ stronghold well fortified by both nature and human workmanship: Oppidum autem Britannii vocant, cum silvas impeditas vallo atque fossa munierunt, quo incursionibus hostisitae causa convenire consuerunt. Eo
expresses some admiration for those who are able to face nature in this way: *ut non nequiquam tantae virtutis homines iudicari deberet ausos esse transire latissimum flumen, ascendere altissimas ripas, subire iniquissimum locum; quae facilia ex difficillimis animi magnitudo redegerat*, *Gal. 2.27*. By contrast, the Romans rarely turn nature to their advantage, but rather struggle against the wild landscapes which they encounter. When the Gauls retreat into their forests, for example, the Romans cut down the trees in which they hide:

 Reliquis deinceps diebus Caesar silvas caedere instituit, et ne quis inermibus imprudentibusque milibus ab latere impetus fieri posset, omnem eam materiam quae erat caesa conversam ad hostem collocabat et pro vallo ad utrumque latus extruebat.  

(Caes. *Gal. 3.28*)

Here, Caesar’s battle is as much against the natural environment as against its human inhabitants. He learns to make use of the forest, but only by cutting it down and transforming it into a neatly-constructed rampart. On other occasions, the Romans try to fill in a marsh and build a road (*Gal. 7.58*), divert a river (*Gal. 7.72*) and build gangways (*Gal. 8.14*) and bridges (*Gal. 1.13, 4.16–19, 7.35*). These are, in a sense, very ‘Roman’ responses to natural obstacles. As in Latium itself, Romans here choose not to adapt to natural features, but rather to try to overcome them. When they cannot match their enemies’ woodland tactics, they are forced to do battle against nature itself, chopping their way through forests and transforming trees into characteristically Roman structures such as bridges, causeways and fortresses.

A defeat greater than any of Caesar’s occurred in AD 9 when almost the entire Roman army was killed by the Cheruscan leader Arminius and his troops in the Teutoburg Forest. Velleius Paterculus attributes the Romans’ defeat to a combination of Roman laziness (*marcore ducis*), Cheruscan trickery (*perfidia hostis*) and simple bad luck (*iniquitate fortunae*) (*Vell. 2.117–19*). Moreover

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81 But cf. Caes. *Gal. 2.5, 2.10, 2.23.*
82 While the Romans often struggle in wet and woody landscapes, they fight effectively on dry and open land (Caes. *Gal. 3.26, 4.26*; cf. Liv. *21.25.11–13*).
Quintilius Varus himself was no match for the wild races of Germany: he had been softened by his years in Syria (Vell. 2.117.2), he had little experience of the hardships of military service (Vell. 2.117.2), he was too quick to believe the Germans’ lies (Vell. 2.118.1) and too slow to listen to the warnings of his German ally Segestes (Vell. 2.118.4).\(^8^4\) But the natural weapons of forests and swamps also play a part: … *quia Romanis et armis et animis usi fuissent, inclusus silvis, paludibus, insidiis ab eo hoste ad internecionem trucidatus est, quem ita semper more pecudum trucidaverat, ut vitam aut mortem eius nunc ira nunc venia temperaret* (Vell. 2.119.2).\(^8^5\) Conventional Roman tactics, Velleius suggests, are ineffective against the far greater weapons available to Arminius and the Cheruscii: the grasping trees of the German forests and the clinging mud of the German swamps.

The German landscape also figures prominently in Tacitus’ account of the German wars.\(^8^6\) This — just as much as the Germans themselves — frustrates Germanicus and his troops and so becomes another enemy which the Romans have to fight. Forests, swamps, trees, rain, rivers and mud do not merely provide the backdrop for the German wars, but in a sense become participants in many of the battles between Germans and Romans. As in Latium, the Romans again find themselves battling water and wood. They build a bridge to cross the waters of the Rhine (*Ann.* 1.49), they cut through forests (*Ann.* 1.50), they use felled trees to barricade their camp (*Ann.* 1.50), they construct roads and bridges (*munitiones viarum et fluminum*, *Ann.* 1.56), they build causeways over the German swamps (*Ann.* 1.61) and they cut down the trees in which the Germans try to hide (*Ann.* 2.17).\(^8^7\) All of these activities are not just part of Germanicus’ military campaign, but another aspect of Rome’s continuing attempts to assert itself over wild lands.

\(^{8^4}\) Cf. Vell. 2.119.2, 2.120.5: *Ex quo apparet Varum, sane gravem et bonae voluntatis virum, magis imperatoris defectum consilio quam virtute destitutum militum se magnificentissimumque perdidisse exercitum*.

\(^{8^5}\) Dio Cassius pays still more attention to the role of forests, rain, winds and mud in ensuring the Romans’ defeat (D.C. 56.18–22).

\(^{8^6}\) The same wooded and muddy landscape also appears in Tacitus’ *Germania* and *Agricola*. See, e.g., *Germ* 5.1 (*in universis tamen silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda*); *Ag*. 25.1 (*silvarum ac montium profunda*), 26.2 (*paludes et silvae*), 31.1 (*silvis ac paludibus*), 32.2 (*silvas*), 33.4 (*paludes montesve et fluminia*), 33.5 (*silvas*), 34.2 (*silvas salutisque*).

\(^{8^7}\) They also come across reminders of Rome’s earlier battles against the German landscape. Cf. *Tac. Ann.* 1.63.
and peoples. Similarly the Romans’ first victory over the Germans (who lie sleeping after a drunken religious festival) takes place in a sacred grove (Ann. 1.50). Afterwards the Romans devastate the surrounding countryside, destroying places both profane and sacred (profana simul et sacra et celeberrimum illis gentibus templum\textsuperscript{88} quod Tanfanae vocabant solo aequantur, Ann. 1.51).

Despite this early victory, the Romans are more often at a disadvantage in the wild landscape of Germany.\textsuperscript{89} Although they can overcome many natural obstacles — by building bridges, roads and causeways — they cannot match the German tribes’ skill in fighting amid trees and mud. The war begins when Germanicus leads his troops across the Rhine and into a dark forest (Ann. 1.49–50). Here they must choose between two paths: one is short, easy and well-trodden (breve et solitum, Ann. 1.50), but the other — which the Romans choose to follow — is longer, more difficult and unexplored (inpetitus et intemptatum, Ann. 1.50).\textsuperscript{90} This episode sets the pattern for the Romans’ battles with the wild tribes of Germany; just as the Romans travel along a difficult and untried woodland path, they are also forced to battle the Germans in a landscape which is largely strange and unknown.\textsuperscript{91} In repeated battles, the Romans must either retreat, or else risk becoming bogged in mud or entangled in the trees (Ann. 1.51, 1.63, 1.64, 1.65, 2.11). It is revealing that the Romans can defeat the tribes of Germany only when they are drowsy and dulled by wine (Ann. 1.50–1), or when they force them out of the forests and on to open land. At the close of Book 1, for example, Tacitus describes how while the German leaders squabbled about military tactics (Ann. 1.68), the Romans attack the Cherusci on the open plain, shouting: non hic silvas nec paludes, sed aequis locis aequos deos (Tac. Ann. 1.68). Another victory is achieved during an unseasonable drought, when the

\textsuperscript{88} Goodyear (1972), 319 (ad Tac. Ann. 1.51.1) notes that this templum was ‘a “sacred area”, probably a wood.’ Cf. Tac. Ger. 9.3, 39.2.

\textsuperscript{89} Tacitus makes clear that even this victory was possible only because the night was bright and starry, and the Germans drunk, sleepy and unable to defend themselves (Tac. Ann. 1.50).

\textsuperscript{90} Cf. Liv. 9.2.7–8 where the Romans must similarly choose between two routes, and where their fateful choice leads them to the Caudine Forks.

\textsuperscript{91} Baxter (1972), 254–5 notes that Tacitus’ German landscape includes echoes of the Vergilian Underworld, and that this creates an ‘impressionistic, other-worldly atmosphere’.
Romans can take advantage of the unusually dry land; they know, however, that on their return journey they are likely to hampered by rain (*Ann. 1.56*).

Unlike the Romans, the German tribes are accustomed to fighting amid swamps and forests (*Ann. 1.64*). They repeatedly attack the Romans from the natural refuge of the forest, where they believe that they themselves will be safe from Roman attack (*Ann. 1.51, 1.63, 2.11*). They also know how to make the landscape itself one of their weapons. The most hazardous time for the Romans comes when Arminius and the Cherusci charge the Romans and push them towards an area of swampy ground:

\[\text{Et cuncta pariter Romanis adversa: locus uligine profunda; idem ad gradum instabilis, procedentibus lubricus; corpora gravia loricis; neque librare pila inter undas poterant.}\]

\[\text{(Tac. *Ann.* 1.64)}\]

The Germans contribute to the natural trap by diverting streams to flood the plain and contribute to the already swampy ground (*Ann. 1.64*). Seeing the Roman troops trapped in the swamp, their horses sliding about in blood and dirt and even their rations wet and bloody, the Cheruscan leader Arminius orders his men to attack (*Ann. 1.65*). The Romans, with their heavy weapons and unwieldy standards, find themselves unable to fight and return to the open and stable (and in a sense ‘Roman’) space of the plain (*in aperta et solida, Ann. 1.65*). Tacitus here makes clear that the Romans’ difficulties were caused not so much by the Cherusci themselves, as by the muddy lands which they inhabited. Water and woods, Rome’s natural opponents since the founding of the city, again challenge Roman efforts to overcome wild places. It is not only the difficulties of fighting in mud, but also the slippery uncertainty of the German landscape which unsettles the Roman legions, as the familiar distinctions between land and water are lost: *Et*

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92 Cf. Ger. 12.1 where Tacitus notes that the Germans also use the swamps and forests to punish criminals among their own people.

93 Woodman (1979), 149–51 shows that this episode (Tac. *Ann.* 1.64.1–3, 1.65.1) derives largely from Tacitus’ own account of another battle between Romans and Germans at *Hist.* 5.14.2–5.15.2.
opplebantur terrae: eadem freto, litori, campis facies, neque discerni poterant incerta ab solidis, brevia a profundis (Ann. 1.70).94

The Romans learn to fight effectively in Germany only when they learn that they too can fight amid trees and mud. At the beginning of the second book of the Annales, Tacitus writes that Germanicus had already begun to rethink his strategies for fighting in Germany. Germanicus realizes that his legions can easily defeat the Germans in a battle on open land (cf. Ann. 1.65, 1.68) and that it is the German tribes’ effective use of the landscape that gives them the upper hand (Fundi Germanos acie et iustis locis, iuvari silvis, paludibus, Ann. 2.5).95 But, encouraged by a dream (Ann. 2.14) and a lucky omen (Ann. 2.17), Germanicus comes to believe that Romans can defeat Germans even among woods and swamps and leads the Romans to a number of victories (Ann. 2.17, 2.18, 2.21, 2.25). In a lucky dream, Germanicus sees that Romans can learn to mimic the Germans’ forest-fighting tactics:

Non campos modo militi Romano ad proelium bonos, sed si ratio adsit, silvas et saltus; nec enim inmensa barbarorum scuta, enormis hastas inter truncos arborum et enata humo virgulta perinde haberi quam pilae et gladios et haerentia corpori tegmina.

(Tac. Ann. 2.14)

Germanicus sees that Germans, just as much as Romans, might be hampered by the trees of the German forest, trapped by the mud of the German swamps and hemmed in by the waters of the German rivers. Whereas in previous battles the Roman legions had been forced to struggle against sticking mud and clinging branches, now it is the Germans who will be thwarted by natural obstacles. In the first battle, the Romans push the Cherusci into an area where they find themselves trapped by forest on one side, swamp and hills on the other (Ann. 2.16, 2.19).96 Some try to swim to safety, but are either killed by Roman spears or drowned; others hide in trees which the Romans then cut down (Ann. 2.17). In the final

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94 This disorder in nature is accompanied by confusion in the human world: nihil strenuus ab ignavo, sapiens ab inprudenti, consilia a casu differre: cuncta pari violentia involvebantur (Ann. 1.70).

95 Cf. Tac. Ann. 1.63 where the Romans are forced into a swampy region, which Tacitus describes as [paludem] gnaram vincentibus, iniquam nesciis.

battle (which again takes place amid mud and trees, Ann. 2.19), Germanicus again decides to use the Germans’ own tactics against them (consilia, locos, prompta, occulta noverat astusque hostium in perniciem ipsis vertebat, Ann. 2.20). Whereas in many previous battles the Romans had avoided venturing into the woods, this time they charge into the woods. Each side finds itself trapped — the Germans by wetland, the Romans by river and mountains — and left with no alternative but to fight: utrisque necessitas in loco, spes in virtute, salus ex victoria (Ann. 2.20).

Taken by surprise, the Germans find themselves unable to fight amid the close trees of the German forests. Their long spears become entangled in the branches, while the Romans make good use of their short stabbing swords (Ann. 21). After the battle, Germanicus congratulates his troops and builds a monument to their victory. Here too Tacitus uses the language of the Roman triumph over nature to describe their achievement: debellatis inter Rhenum Albimque nationibus exercitum Tiberii Caesaris ea monimenta Marti et Iovi et Augusto sacravisse (Ann. 2.22).

Despite Germanicus’ victories in Germany, his battles against nature were to continue. During the voyage back to Rome, Germanicus and his men are attacked by storms and squally seas (Ann. 2.23–4). Tacitus here represents the North Sea waters as yet another of Rome’s natural enemies. This image of Ocean also appears in other of Tacitus’ works (cf. Tac. Ger. 34.3; Ag. 25.1), where it similarly suggests that Rome has encountered a natural enemy which even it cannot conquer. Throughout his account of the storm, Tacitus refers to the North Sea as ‘Oceanus’, emphasizing its ‘finality and limitlessness’. Like a human enemy, Oceanus seizes and scatters its enemies (rapuit disiecitque, Ann. 2.23), so that not just individual soldiers but entire ships are tossed out to sea or abandoned on distant islands. The other-worldly atmosphere continues as Tacitus describes the experiences of the shipwrecked Roman soldiers who find themselves

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97 See further Romm (1992), 144–7. Tacitus suggests that Oceanus is a watery equivalent to the German forests when he writes that its violence is derived from the wild land of Germany itself: Omne dehinc caelum et mare omne in austrum cessit, qui tumidis Germaniae terris, profundis amnibus, immenso nubium tractu validus et rigore vicini septentrioris horridior rapuit disiecitque navis in aperta Oceani aut insulas saxis abruptis vel per occulta vada infestas (Tac. Ann. 2.23). See too Anderson (1961), 38 (ad Tac. Ger. 2.1) on Tacitus’ ‘bold personification of Ocean as an enemy which resists the investigation of men and over whom victories are won’.

stranded at the edges of the earth (Ann. 2.24). Just as in Germany, many again find themselves confronted by unfamiliar landscapes and creatures: *Ut quis ex longinquo revenerat, miracula narrabunt, vim turbinum et inauditas volucris, monstra maris, ambiguas hominum et beluarum formas, visa sive metu credita* (Ann. 2.24). Tacitus here provides an unsettling conclusion to the story of Germanicus’ German wars; just when it seems that Germanicus has managed to subdue the wild Cherusci and come to terms with their wild lands, Tacitus reminds us that Rome’s battles against nature were to continue and that Rome could never completely overcome the wilderness.  

Why might these writers have paid such attention to natural features? Perhaps the most obvious answer is that the features which they most often mention — specifically forests and swamps — were prominent aspects of the landscapes which Romans encountered. Caesar at least shows some interest in topography; an element of curiosity comes across clearly in his digression into the Hercynian forest (*Gal. 6.24–5*) and he often begins an account of a particular confrontation with a careful description of the surrounding landscape. Moreover his first expedition to Britain was undertaken in part to learn about its geography (*tamen magno sibi usui fore arbitrabatur, si modo insulam adisset et genus hominum perspexisset, loca, portus, aditus cognovisset; quae omnia fere Gallis erant incognita, *Gal. 4.20.2–3*). Natural features can also help to mitigate Roman defeats. Caesar, for example, cites natural features as hindering the efforts of the Roman legions (cf. *Gal. 5.49.5–6: erat magni periculi res tantulis copiis iniquo loco dimicare, *Gal. 5.52: [Caesar] Longius prosequi veritus, quod silvae paludesque intercedebant*). Finally, the wet and woody landscapes which Romans repeatedly encounter also bring to mind the landscapes of early Latium.

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99 Cf. Romm (1992), 145: ‘The Romans, though victorious across the rest of the globe, are continually denied access to the waters of the North Sea and the North Atlantic … Tacitus sees this region as the seat of a divinely centered [sic], retributive scheme of justice, where the Romanitas that had forged a world-spanning Empire is destined at last to receive its come-uppance.’

100 Cf. Caes. *Gal. 2.18, 7.19, 7.69*. Leach (1988), 112 notes that these often give some clue as to the outcome of the battle. Cf. Caes. *Gal. 3.1.5–6* where Caesar’s description of a camp hemmed in by mountains and a river anticipates trouble for the Romans.

101 Leach (1988), 90.

102 Also cf. Caes. *Gal. 1.39* where some of the Roman soldiers, to avoid appearing cowardly, claim that they fear not the enemy, but the narrow tracks and vast forests (*angustias itineris et magnitudinem silvarum*) through which they must pass.
The emphasis on forests and swamps which we find in these texts suggests that these wild places, like Latium itself, could be transformed by Roman efforts. Wild places, then, often appear not just as ‘not-Romes’, but also as replicas of wild, early Rome: places where the efforts of the earliest Romans and their battles against nature could be played out once again.

5. Conclusion

One of the main themes of his chapter has been that wild landscapes — especially forests — had an important role in helping Romans to define what Rome and Romanness were not. This appears perhaps most obviously in descriptions of wild lands such as Germany and Scythia, which are often seen to lack (or even subvert) many typical elements of Roman society. Whereas the landscapes of the Roman world are cultivated, fruitful and symmetrical, those of the non-Roman world are often wild, barren and chaotic. Likewise whereas Romans are cultured, restrained and disciplined, the inhabitants of these wild places seem to Roman eyes brutish, violent and unpredictable. It is important to remember here that we are considering common cultural perceptions of forests and other wild places, and that Roman depictions of these are almost always based on common ideas of what they should look like (a forest is shadowy and verdant; a swamp foul and damp; a mountain rocky and treacherous), rather than on a writer’s careful observation of a forest, a swamp or a mountain pass.

Accounts of Roman exploits in the wild similarly contain a number of common ideas. In the works of Caesar, Livy, Vergil and Tacitus, the enemies of Rome are not only the ferocious tribes of Germany and Gaul, but also trees, rivers, mud and rain. These wet and woody enemies not only battled the armies of Rome during military campaigns, but also resisted Romans’ efforts to settle, and so ‘Romanize’, the world. Laying a road or building a bridge was not simply a work
of engineering, but also a military campaign against a wild nature. This might be seen simply as an attempt to enhance Roman achievements in building and engineering: Greeks could claim that they had disclosed the workings of nature, but Romans could boast that they alone had conquered it. But it was also a way of describing the development of the Roman world which could be traced back to Romulus and Remus and the earliest Roman citizens: just as these early Romans had struggled to build their settlement in the midst of the water and woods of Latium, Romans continued to assert themselves over wild landscapes and to seek to transform the trees, mountains, swamps and rivers of the wilderness into tidy Roman structures such as roads, bridges, causeways and aqueducts. Rome’s battles against nature were not, however, always successful. Stories such as those of the Romans trapped at the Caudine Forks and of Varus and his troops defeated in Teutoburg Forest reinforced the belief that the wilderness always stood in opposition to Roman civilization.

Rome’s repeated defeats at the hands of the Germans (and at the branches of the German forests) was just one of nature’s victories over Rome. Indeed for many later writers, the theme of nature’s reappearance in the pagan capital was a compelling and highly suggestive one. Later writers often imagined the decline of the Roman world as a process of nature repossessing the city. This idea appears in the writings of Cassiodorus and Rutilius Namatianus, as well as in the Sibylline oracles. But it was during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the Romantic interest in ruins came into its own. While many of those who travelled to Rome in this period marvelled at the ruins of the Forum, the Colosseum and other Roman sites, it was often the juxtaposition of marble and weeds which inspired the greatest admiration. It is to some of these later texts that the following chapter turns.

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103 As noted by Purcell (1996), 206. See, e.g., Cassiodorus Variae 2.21, 2.32 in Barnish (1992), 31; Rutilius Namatianus de Reditu Suo 1.35–40.
VI

Weeds on the Capitol

NATURE’S VICTORY OVER ROME

We visited the Forum & the ruins of the Forum & the ruins of the Coliseum every day. The Coliseum is unlike any work of human hands I ever saw before. It is of enormous height & circuit & the arches built of massy stones are piled on one another, & jut into the blue air shattered into the forms of overhanging rocks. It has been changed by time into the image of an amphitheatre of rocky hills overgrown by the wild-olive the myrtle & the fig tree, & threaded by little paths which wind among its ruined stairs & immeasurable galleries; the copse-wood overshadows you as you wander through its labyrinths & the wild weeds of this climate of flowers bloom under your feet. The arena is covered with grass, & pierces like the skirts of a natural plain the chasms of broken arches around.

Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 17 or 18 December, 1818

Rome — and this was true for ancient Romans themselves — is often regarded as the eternal city; the one city whose monuments survive the eroding passage of time. Its remains stand as both a lasting reminder of the city’s ancient grandeur and a testament to its survival into the present. This is not, however, the only meaning which the city and its monuments can hold. This chapter briefly considers ideas about the relationship between Rome and nature in the works of some later writers. It also continues some of the themes of an earlier chapter in looking at how allusions to nature’s presence in the city can be used to

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1 Jones ed. (1964), 59.
2 On Rome as the eternal city, see Catharine Edwards (1996), 86–8.
comment on its fate; the weeds on the Capitol show that even mighty Rome is not immune to time’s incursions. My reasons for looking beyond ancient writers are twofold: firstly, the works of these later writers reveal just how much their understanding and impressions of Rome were shaped by their reading of Latin literature, as their descriptions of the city often take the form of the words and phrases of classical literature. In fact the sight of the ruins of Rome, overcome by weeds, thickets and other wild growth, was for many visitors to Rome all the more impressive precisely because it reminded them of the visions of the early city which they had first seen in the works of Livy, Vergil and Propertius. Secondly, these writers reinforce the interconnections between Rome and nature, and underline that the history of the city is tied up with its changing relationship to the natural environment. Whereas ancient writers imagined wild nature withdrawing as the city grew, these later writers see just the opposite process, as nature began to reclaim the site of the city.

One of the earliest texts to describe Rome in these terms is Poggio Bracciolini’s *de Varietate Fortunae*. Poggio Bracciolini composed his work in the 1430s and 1440s when he travelled to Rome as a papal legate. For Poggio Bracciolini, the ruins of Rome provide a lesson in the changeability of Fortune. His companion, contemplating the overgrown ruins of the Capitol, recalls Vergil’s description of the hill in the time of Evander and Aeneas (*hinc ad Tarpeium sedem et Capitolia ducit | aurea nunc, olim silvestribus horrida dumis, Verg. A. 8.347–8*) and observes that the line could now easily be reversed: *Vt quod is versus merito possit converti. Aurea quondam, nunc squalida, spinetis u epribusque referta.* Poggio Bracciolini shows clearly that when he looked at the city, his view was shaped by the evocations of the city to be found in ancient Roman literature. It is

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3 Lyne (2001), 90 rightly notes the paradox of ‘the creation of an apparently timeless culture from worldly materials so patently subject to time’.
4 Cf. Shelley’s reference to the Mare Morto, ‘the spot on which Virgil places the scenery of the 6th *Aeneid*’ (Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 17 or 18 December, 1818 in Jones ed. [1964], 61).
5 Other examples (not discussed here) include Dickens (1957), 366–7; James (1908), vol. ii, 339–40.
7 The sixteenth-century French poet Joachim Du Bellay similarly uses the words of ancient poetry to describe the ruined city: *ille ego sum Thybris toto notissimus orbe, | quemque vides campum, maxima Roma fuit. | nunc deserta iacet sylvestribus horrida dumis.*
a memorable lesson in the changeability of fortune that the city has now returned to its pre-Roman wilderness, and this lesson shapes itself in his mind in the familiar words of Vergil.8

Writing about ruins reached its height during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the period of the ‘Grand Tour’.9 For many travellers to Rome in this period — and especially to those familiar with the evocations of the city to be found in ancient literature —,10 nature’s return to the city was especially striking. Indeed the city which they saw was in places closer to the pre-Roman wilderness (familiar from texts such as Aeneid 8) than to the marbled capital familiar to citizens of Augustus’ Rome. As William L. Vance suggests, this response to the city may in part have been shaped by the emerging romantic preference for wild over cultivated nature, as the rough and irregular forms of Gothic architecture came increasingly to be admired over the clean straight lines of Classical design.11 But these impressions of the city are also shaped by ancient descriptions of the pre-Roman landscape.

Writing to his friend Thomas Love Peacock, Percy Bysshe Shelley (in the passage quoted at the opening of this chapter) describes his first impressions of the Colosseum. While he is clearly impressed by the building itself (‘The Coliseum is unlike any work of human hands I ever saw before’, he writes), it is not this which is the main theme of Shelley’s letter. Indeed Shelley says little about the glory of ancient Rome, and instead focuses on some of the smallest and apparently most insignificant features of the present city: cracks between stones, ivy leaves, twisted roots, wild flowers. Far from regretting the site of the city’s once gleaming monuments entwined with weeds, Shelley openly admires the softening effect of nature amid the rubble.12

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9 In the final chapter of his history, Edward Gibbon recreates Poggio Bracciolini’s visit to Rome and quotes his description of the ruined city (Gibbon [1855], viii, 267–8).
10 Tucker (1991), 58 notes that early guide-books often included quotations from ancient authors, ‘with a view to providing information about the ancient City, but also in order to influence the reader/visitor’s [sic] sensibility before the ruined spectacle.’
11 Vance (1984), 111.
12 Shelley writes in a similar way about the Baths of Caracalla: ‘These consist of six enormous chambers, above 200 feet in height, and each enclosing a vast space like that of a field. There are in addition a number of towers & labyrinthine recesses hidden & woven over by
Also in this letter, Shelley likens Roman-built ruins to natural objects. The Colosseum is ‘an amphitheatre of rocky hills’ and the arena itself ‘like the skirts of a natural plain’; the palaces of the city are ‘like wild woods of cedar & cypress & pine’. The walls of the Baths of Caracalla enclose an area ‘like that of a field’ and are ‘themselves like mountains’. An amphitheatre in Pozzuoli (Dicaearchia) is ‘changed like the Coliseum [sic] into a natural hill of [by] the overteeming vegetation’. In his prose story ‘The Coliseum: A Fragment’, Shelley makes the comparison between Roman ruins and natural objects (and the implications of this) more explicit, as he has one of his characters describe the Colosseum as ‘“A nursling of man’s art, abandoned by his care, and transformed by the enchantment of Nature into a likeness of her own creations, and destined to partake their immortality!”’ Shelley here points out that there is a lesson in the Roman ruins: that while man-made things crumble, nature thrives. It is only when the buildings of Rome are covered by natural things that they resist decay and are ‘destined to partake their immortality!’ Passages such as these suggest that the appeal of Rome’s ruins lies in their dissimilarity from their original splendour. Indeed it is the contrast between the wild and lonely ruins of his present and the splendid, crowded buildings of the past that most appeals to Shelley.

The ruins also have a personal significance for Shelley. In the course of describing the Baths of Caracalla, he writes that their walls remind him of a cliff in England where he once used to walk:

> The perpendicular walls resemble nothing more than that cliff in Bisham wood which is overgrown with wood, & yet is stony & precipitous — you know the one I mean, — not the chalk-pit, but the spot which has that pretty copse of fir trees & privet bushes at its base....

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13 Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 17 or 18 December, 1818 in Jones ed. (1964), 59.
14 Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 23 March, 1819 in Jones ed. (1964), 84–5.
15 Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 17 or 18 December, 1818 in Jones ed. (1964), 59.
17 Cf. Shelley on the Baths of Caracalla: ‘the deformity of their vast desolation [is] softened down by the undecaying investiture of nature’ (Jones ed. [1964], 85).
18 Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 23 March, 1819 in Jones ed. (1964), 84.
Once again, Shelley likens an artificial structure (‘the perpendicular walls’) to a natural one (‘that cliff in Bisham wood’). But here, nature has a more personal meaning in that it provides a link to Shelley’s own life. The fragmented buildings of Rome represent a culture which clearly inspires awe and admiration, but which is also largely incomprehensible; it is nature which provides the link between ancient Roman society and Shelley’s contemporary English society. So while he confesses himself overwhelmed by the ruin itself (‘It is a scene by which expression is overpowered: which words cannot convey’, he writes to Peacock), he finds something familiar and pleasing in nature’s additions to it. Rome itself is strange and sometimes discomfiting; nature is recognizable and pleasingly familiar.

Others too saw a lesson in the ruins of Rome. The English poet John Dyer uses the image of the fallen capital to comment on England’s imperial aspirations.19 Rome was once the capital of a great Empire, but now lies in ruins. England, which aspired to an empire at least as great as that of Rome, might also eventually crumble. For Dyer, the ruins of Rome provide are a graphic warning to England that even the greatest of empires will one day fall. Like Poggio Bracciolini, Dyer refers specifically to the scenes of *Aeneid* 8:

> And the rough reliquies of Carinae’s street,  
> Where now the shepherd to his nibbling sheep  
> Sits piping with his oaten reed; as erst  
> There piped the shepherd to his nibbling sheep,  
> When the humble roof of Anchises’ son explored  
> Of good Evander, wealth-despising king,  
> Amid the thickets: so revolves the scene …

(‘The ruins of Rome’, 325–31)

Dyer’s references to Vergil’s poem — for example, ‘Carinae’s street’ (cf. Verg. A. 8.361), ‘the humble roof’ (cf. A. 8.359–60, 366–7), ‘wealth-despising king’ (cf. A. 8.359–60, 364–5) and ‘amid the thickets’ (cf. A. 8.348) — enable him effectively to illustrate the cycles of time. To Evander and Aeneas, the glory of the city lies in the future; to Dyer and his readers, it has become a remnant of the past, as the site of the city has returned to its pre-Roman state.

Dyer relies on just a few references to Vergil’s poem to produce a picture of the crumbling city; others, however, present a more vivid view. In his poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Byron describes the travels of a jaded and world-weary pilgrim. In canto IV of the poem, (by this stage the character of the pilgrim has been cast aside), Byron comes to Rome. Here Byron describes the weedy ruins of the Palatine:

Cypress and ivy, weed and wallflower grown  
Matted and mass’d together, hillocks heap’d  
On what were chambers, arch crush’d, column strown  
In fragments, chok’d up vaults, and frescoes steep’d  
In subterranean dams, where the owl peep’d,  
Deeming it midnight: — Temples, baths, or halls?  
Pronounce who can; for all that Learning reap’d  
From her research hath been, that these are walls —  
Behold the Imperial Mount! ’tis thus the mighty falls.

Like Poggio Bracciolini, Byron uses the ruined aspect of the city to comment on the changes to the physical city and so on the changeability of fortune (‘’tis thus the mighty falls’). Even more than this, however, Byron uses the weedy ruins of the Palatine to illustrate his personal thoughts; he has become ‘a ruin amidst ruins’ (canto IV, stanza 25, 217–18). Byron also uses Rome to stand for the remoteness of the past. The column of Phocas, for instance, which had recently been excavated and its history uncovered, is for Byron a ‘nameless column’.24

Finally, in describing the city in these terms Byron, again like Poggio Bracciolini, meaningfully reverses the imagery of Vergil, Propertius and other ancient writers to show that nature — ‘cypress and ivy, weed and wallflower’ — has crept over the monuments of the city, and so taken back the land which the early Romans had cleared, cultivated and transformed into a city. For Byron, then, as for many ancient writers, the processes of nature provided a vivid way of describing the history of the city.

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Nature’s reappearance in the city was not always regarded so grimly. For some, the weeded ruins of Rome were a source of literary inspiration. Verses of Byron’s *Manfred*, for example, were inspired by his visits to Roman ruins, and especially to the Colosseum. Shelley was inspired to write Acts II and III of his verse play *Prometheus Unbound* as he sat among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla. ‘This Poem’, he writes in his preface, ‘was chiefly written ... among the flowering glades and thickets of odiferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever-winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air.’ The setting inspired Shelley not so much in its details, as in its symbolic associations: ‘together with the new season, the astonishing overgrowth of vegetation among the Roman ruins expressed the power of regeneration over the vestiges of civilized life.’ More than the ruins themselves, then, it was the juxtaposition of nature’s weeds and Roman rubble that appealed to Shelley and provided settings and images for his works.

For others too, nature’s presence in the city was a picturesque addition to its ruins. The Colosseum in particular was believed by many writers to have been improved by its covering of weeds and wild flowers. A number of botanical works detailing the flowers of the Colosseum were produced in the eighteenth century, suggesting an interest in the small and the commonplace, rather than in the splendour of the Roman monument. But it was among painters and writers that the Colosseum found its most enthusiastic admirers. As for Shelley, it was not just the ruins themselves but the combination of stone and greenery which made the Colosseum such an impressive and moving monument. The American artist Thomas Cole (who painted a number of views of the city and

26 See Weinberg (1991), 107–8. Shelley again writes about the weedy ruins of Rome in his poem *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* and his prose story ‘The Coliseum: A Fragment’. His description of the ‘lone dwelling’ on an Ionian island in *Epipsychidion* (lines 483–512) also seems to have been inspired by his visits to the Baths of Caracalla. See Jones ed. (1964), 84 n. 2.
its surrounds in which the effects of nature appear clearly), \(^{31}\) writes of his admiration for the ruined monument:

> It is stupendous, yet beautiful in its destruction. From the broad arena within, it rises around you, arch above arch, broken and desolate, and mantled in many parts with laurustinus, the acanthus, and numerous other plants and flowers, exquisite both for their color and fragrance. It looks more like a work of nature than of man; for the regularity of art is lost, in a great measure, in dilapidation, and the luxuriant herbage, clinging to its ruins as if to ‘mouth its distress,’ completes the illusion. Crag rises over crag, green and breezy summits mount into the sky. \(^{32}\)

For Cole, as for many others, the beauty of the Colosseum came not from its architectural splendour or historical associations, but from the unexpected appearance of natural things and the simple beauty of the monument adorned with plant-life. \(^{33}\) While the ruin is itself astonishing (‘It is stupendous, yet beautiful in its destruction’), its beauty comes from its ruinous quality, and Cole’s perception of just how much it has changed from its original form as ‘the regularity of art is lost’. Here the Colosseum has not simply been altered by nature, but even become part of it; ‘It looks more like a work of nature than of man’, Cole writes.

The same idea appears in a number of texts which liken the Colosseum to a mountain. Indeed it was the mountain-like quality of the Colosseum which many visitors most admired. Henry James, for example, sees ‘the roughly mountainous quality’ of the Colosseum as ‘its chief interest’. \(^{34}\) The American traveller and writer Bayard Taylor also sees similarities between the rough and stony aspect of the Colosseum and the natural form of a mountain: ‘A majesty like that of nature clothes this wonderful edifice. Walls rise above walls and arches above arches from every side of the grand arena like a sweep of craggy, pinnacled mountains around an oval lake’. \(^{35}\) These passages, like those which refer to the flowers and other plants covering the ancient ruins, reflect an interest in the relationship between Rome and nature, and suggest an awareness that the history of Rome has

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\(^{31}\) Harvey (1998), 115.

\(^{32}\) LeGrand Noble (1964), 115–16.

\(^{33}\) Cf. Vance (1984), 108: ‘By virtue of becoming a ruin, a building is improved: it becomes a part of Nature.’

\(^{34}\) James (1968), 201–2. See too Vance (1984), 110.

\(^{35}\) Taylor (1848), 327.
come full circle. A monument which was once the antithesis of a natural thing has now come to resemble one.

The process which Shelley and others admire — of nature gradually reclaiming the city — is just the reverse of that observed and described by ancient Roman writers. Whereas these later travellers to the city saw weeds sprouting between stones, wild flowers springing up amid columns and thickets bristling among ancient palaces, Romans had seen (or at least imagined) nature’s retreat in the face of roads, bridges, temples and fora. These later writers were in fact responding to ancient ideas, as Romans themselves often wrote about the history of their society in terms of the changing relationship between Rome and nature. What all of these texts have in common is an awareness of the symbolic value of nature’s incursions into the city. Some writers, such as Poggio Bracciolini and Joachim Du Bellay, reproduce lines of ancient verse, applying them not to the pre-Roman wilderness, but to contemporary ruins. Others refer only indirectly to the Romes of ancient literature, yet similarly see a link between Rome and nature. While nature had provided many of the advantages for the original founding of the city, it eventually reclaimed the site, as weeds, ivy and flowers began to creep over the ancient rubble.
Conclusion

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.

Simon Schama *Landscape and Memory*¹

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to draw attention to some selected aspects of the relationship between nature, place and ‘Romanness’. While it has not been my intention to identify a single, identifiably ‘Roman’ view of nature, nonetheless some common themes emerge.

The foremost of these is that there was often perceived to be an opposition between Rome and (wild) nature. As Nicholas Purcell rightly comments:

The Romans constructed their place in the world through a picture of their relationship to the environment that involved constant struggle against very considerable odds. This can be seen in the pastoral tradition of the foundation, in the exaggeration of the wooded wilderness where the city later arose, and in the persistent harping on the relative unproductiveness of the soil in the area.²

Many of the later writers discussed in the previous chapter were in fact responding to ancient ideas, as Romans themselves imagined the history and continuing development of their city as a difficult contest between Rome and nature. The contest was thought to have begun with Rome’s earliest history; Vergil’s Trojans, for example, fight both people and trees. Moreover the forests of Italy are more than sources of timber for barricades or funeral pyres; they also represent a way of life which the coming of the Trojans is destined to end.

¹ Schama (1996), 61.
² Purcell (1996), 189.
CONCLUSION

Trees and other natural things are not, however, just of symbolic value. Natural features also become participants in Rome’s early battles, sometimes on the side of the Romans (as, for example, when the Veientes are carried away by the waters of the Tiber, Liv. 4.33.10–11), but at other times on the side of Rome’s enemies (when the desperate Romans try to leap for safety into the river Allia, but are drowned, Liv. 5.33.8). The opposition between Rome and wild nature becomes still more apparent in accounts of Roman battles in Gaul and Germany. Here, Romans find themselves confronting the same landscapes which the earliest Romans had encountered in Latium itself. Forests and swamps dominate the terrain of these wild places and often become ‘enemies’ against which the armies of Rome are helpless. In evoking the same type of environment which faced the builders of Rome and the earliest Roman citizens, Roman writers suggest two things: firstly, that these later generations of Romans are in some ways inferior to the founders of the city who had successfully overcome the water and wood of Latium. But these battles in wet and woody spots might also be read as continuations of the early Romans’ battles against nature which can therefore expect the same outcome; in other words, that these wild places — like early Latium itself — will be conquered and ‘Romanized’.

Another theme of the preceding chapters is that nature and place can become meaningful because of the actions of human beings. Writing about the history of the city, Roman writers often prefer a ‘topographical’ to a ‘chronological’ approach. Rather than telling us simply when something happened, they tell us where it happened, knowing that the ‘where’ brings with it meanings more complex than the ‘when’. The history of the city could be read not only in written accounts and marble monuments, but also in its natural features, as hills, rocks, lakes and woods came to be associated with important Roman events. Indeed the landscape of Rome, which was once a meaningless wilderness, came to be seen as a kind of natural text which helped Romans to remember events from their city’s myth-history. Writers encouraged this way of looking at the city and its natural features. Texts such as Varro’s Antiquitates rerum divinarum and de

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3 E.g. Verg. Aen. 8.306–69; Livy 1–5; Prop. 4.1A.1–38. Even in the Fasti, Ovid uses places to tell the story of Roman time.
CONCLUSION

*Lingua Latina* (especially *L. 5.41–6*, 144–59), Livy’s history, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Propertius 4 and Ovid’s *Fasti* recorded the significance of natural spots in the city and ensured that their readers saw not just a tree, a hill or a rock, but rather the place where the she-wolf suckled the twins, Manlius fought off the invading Gauls or the traitress Tarpeia was thrown to her death.

The meanings attached to places are not, however, always clear. Some places were associated with a number of events,⁴ while some events were thought to have occurred in more than one place.⁵ Tacitus shows the twofold meaning of a place — this time outside the city — in his account of the battles between Germanicus and Arminius. To the people of Germany, forests and swamps were places where they had asserted their power (and their national identity) over the armies of Rome; to the Romans, the forests of Germany were forever associated with a shameful Roman defeat.⁶ This is reinforced when Germanicus and his troops come upon the place of Varus’ death (*Tac. Ann. 1.60–1*). Here they find terrible reminders of the Romans’ helplessness in the German forest: bones, broken spears, horses’ limbs and even human skulls fastened to trees (*Ann. 1.61*). So powerful are the associations of the place that Germanicus and his legions are incited to renew their attacks against the Germans. The same place, however, also inspires the Cherusci, and convinces them that they can once again defeat the armies of Rome (*Ann. 1.59*; cf. *2.15*). In pointing to these different responses to the same area, Tacitus reminds us that human perceptions of a place are not necessarily fixed, but can change according to our knowledge of the events which have taken place there.

References to nature and place can also be used to comment on the character and behaviour of individuals. In fact Romans are often judged according to their responses to both specific places and to nature more generally. When, during his trial, Manlius Capitolinus repeatedly draws attention to the Capitol, he also refers to the many associations of the place (including his own role in protecting it) and trusts that his fellow-Romans will remember the same events (*Liv. 5.47.4–8*, 6.11–20). Romans’ responses to nature more generally can also be a revealing

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⁴ E.g. the *lacus Curtius* (see above, Chapter II, 70).
⁵ E.g. the *casa Romuli* and the *ficus Ruminalis* (Chapter II, 71).
gauge of their characters. Roman heroes such as Manius Curius and Cincinnatus are praised as farmers and gardeners who use nature for admirably practical ends: namely, to grow food crops, vegetables and medicinal herbs. It often becomes clear that the motive behind human beings’ intervention in nature can play a large part in determining responses to it: to use nature as a source of wholesome foods or herbal medicines is more likely to meet with approval than to intervene in natural processes for some more ‘indulgent’ end. Consequently fish-ponds and pleasantly shady trees are often causes for moral outrage in Latin texts. It is important to note, however, that there is a clear shift in responses to human beings’ capacity to reshape nature and intervene in natural processes. With the writings of Statius and the younger Pliny, we find enthusiastic praises of ‘artificial landscapes’ which are elsewhere so forcefully condemned.

A secondary, but still important, theme has been the ways in which ancient Roman authors shaped the perceptions of many later writers. Literary tradition is an important factor when considering Roman attitudes to the natural world, since it was often literature that shaped both written accounts of nature and place, and more common responses to the non-human world. Ancient Roman writers influenced not only the works of their near contemporaries (as the similarities between many Roman descriptions of places and natural occurrences show), but also much later writers. As I have argued in my final chapter, the perceptions of Rome which we find in the works of writers such as Byron and Shelley were coloured by their readings of classical literature. What makes this especially interesting, however, is that many writers purposefully subvert descriptions of the pre-Roman wilderness and apply them to the city’s contemporary ruins. These writers themselves have a role in reinforcing the connections between Rome and natural environments. Like their ancient models, they see that nature and place provide a ready means of reflecting on the history of the city.

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In the Introduction, I noted that one of my aims would be to test two of the assumptions which are often made about Rome and nature. The first of these was that Romans shared a particular love of nature. This is difficult to gauge, as most of the writings which we have from ancient Rome tell us little about the personal opinions of their writers. When Roman writers refer to some aspect of nature, they are often also writing about something else. Moreover writers represent only a very small fraction of Roman society, and their views (even in so far as we can gauge them) cannot be taken to represent the views of ‘the Romans’ more broadly.

The second assumption was that Romans were ‘practical’ rather than ‘theoretical’ in their responses to natural environments. This, I think, is an idea which was promoted by Romans themselves. It comes across, for example, in accounts of the building of the city, where the natural obstacles which lay in the way of the earliest citizens are emphasized, even though in other respects Rome and Italy are often said to have been especially favoured by nature. It also appears in Roman agricultural manuals and other farming texts, where an active involvement with farm work and a practical knowledge of nature are regularly emphasized. There is, however, more to Roman nature than this.

This thesis has taken a broad approach and attempted to bring to light some common patterns in Roman ways of writing about nature and place. There are, however, many opportunities for further research in this area. Literature is just one source available to us, and is naturally limited in the type of information it can provide. Further analysis of material evidence such as maps and painting would augment the information available from literary sources. In the field of Latin literature too there is scope for further work. Although Roman descriptions of nature and place are often criticized for their lack of variety or their geographical inaccuracies, this (as a number of writers have shown) is to misjudge them. Closer analysis of passages such as Livy’s Caudine forks (Liv. 9.2.6–10) or

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9 Introduction, 14.
10 Shipley (1996), 8–9 makes a similar point. Also Rackham (1990), 96 and passim on the limits as to what kind of information can be derived from literary sources.
Lucan’s Massilian grove (Luc. 3.394–425) shows that these often have quite complex literary functions.

Analysis of more ‘theoretical’ texts (such as Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*) might also be revealing. I have argued that Roman writers use nature and place to write about Rome and Romanness but, as I mentioned in the Introduction, Rome and Romanness can also be used to write about nature; for example, by having bees and atoms behave in familiarly Roman ways. Further study of Roman writings from this perspective might also help us to understand more about how Romans perceived their place in the world and so provide further insight into the relationship between Rome — and Romans — and nature.

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12 See Introduction, 2.
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