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A Reader's Dialogues

Discussing Latin Literature of the First Century through Modernism

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Acknowledgements

The cover image depicts a lithograph by the Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972). The work shows two hands rising from the page and drawing each other into existence. In a sense, the lithograph can serve as a metaphor for the central idea around which this thesis has been built. Each analytical chapter of this dissertation will bring two (or more) literary works together. They will be used to shed new light upon one another and give shape to each other's meaning. Each text will help me to define the other. Each work will draw the contours of the other's interpretation.

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Introduction. A Dialogical Strategy of Reading

In the spring of 1998, Bluma Lennon, professor of literary studies at Cambridge, is hit by a car. She dies of her injuries at the hospital. A few months after her death, a package from Argentina arrives for her at her postal address at the university. Her former assistant decides to open it and sees that it contains a novel by Joseph Conrad. Intrigued by the mysterious dedication inscribed in the book, he wants to trace the sender, one Carlos Brauer, who appears to have gone lost. His journey will lead him into the world of bibliomaniacs, bizarre bookstore owners and somewhat confused literary critics.

This is, in short, the plot of *La Casa De Papel* (*The Paper House*), a novel written by the Argentine author Carlos María Domínguez.[1] The back cover describes the work as a "tribute to the power of literature" as well as a "warning of the dangers of reading". A book can change one's life, both in a good and a bad way. Literature has the ability to show the most intriguing and fascinating worlds, offer comfort and consolation, provide the bit of encouragement one needs to make an important decision, etc. But books can also become an obsession and cause readers to do silly things. In his search for Carlos Brauer, Lennon's assistant, being the novel's main character, meets someone who felt incited by a poem to leave his wife, children and family from one day to the next. He hears stories about people spending a fortune on buying books for their personal collection without having the intention to read them. Others believe that one book has brought them sublime wisdom about the world yet do not realize that their intense dedication to the study of this work has totally isolated them from the reality which they think to understand. In *The Paper House*, there is only a small boundary that separates fascination from obsession, passion from delusion, tribute from satire.

In Domínguez's novel, we encounter different types of readers, going from the 'recreative reader' over the literature student to the 'greedy reader', only living for and with his books. Along the lines, we get a somewhat comical description of the views, habits and convictions of each of these types. A type on which is quite frequently

[1] Domínguez 2002. All translations to English are my own.

commented is 'the professional, academic reader'. In *The Paper House,* literary scholars are predominantly represented as inspiring people, ardent about the books which they so eagerly desire to read and examine. But they all run the risk of losing themselves in this desire. Bluma Lennon, for instance, does not see the car, because she is completely immersed in a volume of Emily Dickinson's poems while crossing the street. Her tragic death initiates a ridiculous debate among her students and colleagues about the "semiotics of traffic" and "the cultural, urban and linguistic context of the second in which literature and the world had collapsed on the body of their beloved Bluma" (10).

A more subtle example of an academic who got a bit lost can be found halfway the novel, where the assistant visits a (fragile-looking) friend of Carlos Brauer, named Delgado.[2] The man introduces himself as a collector and specialist of historical literature, in particular of Spanish literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[3] He is allegedly well-known for his meticulous study of intertextual relationships in the oeuvre of Francisco de Quevedo, being the first to have detected a series of allusions to the work of the al-Andalusian writer Ben-Quzman (he admits that he still likes to boast about this discovery at academic conferences, making some of his colleagues green with envy).

Before talking about Brauer, Delgado wants to take the assistant round his library and show him some of the rare pieces of literature he has recently received. While admiring the extensive collection, the assistant records that there are loose pieces of paper inserted in some of the books. The collector is a bit ashamed when he is asked about them, reluctantly admitting that these are "the personal notes (...) he made as a reader" (42). They describe "associations (...) that lead him to other works", "parallels and interconnections" that the books' authors, in most cases, could impossibly have wanted him to observe. In the notes, Delgado wrote down the relationships which certain features within the historical Spanish objects of study have evoked in him during the process of reading with other literary works, predominantly with texts that were written more recently. One of the notes clarifies, for instance, why Quevedo's bird metaphor reminds him of the imagery used in the novels by Julian Barnes. Another explains what aspects in a play by Lope de Vega have triggered him to see some sort of correlation with Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Delgado claims that he usually throws these notes away after a while, since they are not productive for his academic work. Why would he write about connections which Quevedo and Lope de Vega could never have intended him to notice? Why would he take the links to Barnes' and Mann's works "as seriously as" the (author-

[2] The man is introduced as looking "pale" and having a "parchment-like skin", caused by a "lack of sunlight" (34). This introduction matches Delgado's characterisation further in the novel as someone obsessed with books, sitting inside his house and spending all his time studying the literary materials.

[3] With the term 'historical literature', this dissertation refers to literary texts written before the nineteenth century, i.e. before the romantic division of West-European literature in national literatures. Its counterpart 'modern literature' points to texts produced after 1800.

intended) references, the 'allusions', to Ben-Quzman's poetry? He cannot imagine that "any of his colleagues would be interested" in the 'anachronistic parallels' he has established as a reader (42). The only exception, perhaps, would be his friend Carlos Brauer. He used to be delighted when a play by Christopher Marlowe had led him to one of Martin Amis' novels or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had appeared to contain a remarkable affinity with Joseph Conrad's *Otago*. But Carlos, so Delgado entrusts the assistant, "always felt himself more a reader" than an academic (44).

Literary critics have often labelled *The Paper House* as a "social comedy".[4] They have praised the novel for its sharp analysis of the 'world of book-lovers' and its mildly satirist descriptions of the absurd ways in which literature-obsessed people sometimes behave. Domínguez often exaggerates, of course, and deliberately stages his characters as living clichés. Yet, as Mary Whipple remarks, there is always a "grain of truth" lying behind each of the characterisations.[5] The depiction of Delgado, for example, is clearly grounded in the observation that historical literary scholars tend to be interested in (a particular kind of) intertextuality. Domínguez playfully overemphasises this interest and turns it into a real obsession of Delgado (e.g. the latter seems a bit *too* proud of the allusions he detected in the oeuvre of Francisco de Quevedo).

Many contributions nowadays published in the field of historical literary studies are – to a lesser or greater extent – concerned with the analysis of relationships between texts.[6] They explore how the meanings of the literary objects in question are shaped in interaction with other works and explain in what ways the examination of textual interconnections can produce more layered interpretations. There is a large variety in the types of interconnections that are studied. While some research mainly concentrates on verbal parallels, other also takes alternative kinds of relationships into account, such as thematic affinities or correlations on a narrative or structural level. Like Delgado in *The Paper House*, most scholars of intertextuality choose to focus in their research on correspondences to texts of which they have strong assumptions that they were known by the author of their object of study. They look for connections to works that "pre-date" the text they tend to interpret and supposedly circulated in the literary-cultural sphere in which it originated.[7] The ('anachronistic') type of links, parallels and associations about

[4] McCall Smith 2005. See also Whipple 2011; France 2006. The latter contribution particularly focuses on the novel's engagement with the work of Jorge Luis Borges.

[5] Whipple 2011.

[6] For the following brief presentation of the views on intertextual research within the field of (historical) literary studies, I have mainly relied on the discussions of the topic by Irwin 2001; 2004 and Pieters 2014, 36-46.

[7] Pieters 2014, 39. As Irwin 2001, 289-291 remarks, this inclination may not be seen as a sign that literary scholarship per definition conceptualises intertextuality in terms of authorial intent. Since the (French) poststructuralist theorisations of the concept in the 60s and 70s, there has been an increased awareness that we

which Carlos Brauer used to be so enthusiast, by contrast, is seldomly explored in academic contributions. Scholars of historical literature rarely draw attention to thematic, narrative or structural correlations which the author of their object of study could impossibly have intended them to observe (e.g. since the works to which they observe the connections, like in Delgado's personal non-academic notes, were written more recently than the object of interpretation). In an article published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, literary philosopher William Irwin explains that this does not mean that scholars active in the domain of historical literary studies, himself included, do not understand the value of connections established "independently of authorial intention" (Irwin speaks about "accidental associations").[8] They just do not seem to believe that these "associations" should have a place in academic research.[9]

According to Jürgen Pieters, the apparent reluctance to explore the latter kind of correspondences is probably caused by the field's strong engagement with "the historically correct meaning(s) of a text".[10] Scholars of historical literature want the interpretations they propose to be compatible with the socio-political and/or literary-cultural backgrounds against which their objects of study were produced. Many seem to be "concerned" that they would run the risk of violating the historical meanings of a text, if they would read it in relation to works that did not circulate in the sphere of its author.[11] But is the 'concern' which Pieters thinks to observe justified? Is the implementation of the type of relationships that Carlos Brauer in *The Paper House* is said to cherish irreconcilable with a respectful attitude to the context in which the object of interpretation originated? Would it not be possible to develop a strategy of reading that

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should be careful with presenting a correspondence we notice to another text as something that the author would have wanted us to see. Most scholars, Irwin explains, tend to search for a middle ground between the "intentionalist view" (defining notions like allusion, reference and/or intertextual relationship in terms of authorial intent) and the "internalist view" that conceptualises these notions with regard to the internal characteristics of the literary works. The latter view maintains that we can speak of a relationship between texts "when the internal properties of one text resemble and call to mind the internal properties" of another text (289). Researchers have predominantly chosen a combination of both views: they ground their interpretations in the "properties that the texts have in common" yet leave open the option that the connections they observe *could* be intended by the author of their object of study, although this should not necessarily be the case (the connection, for example, may also be "a simple coincidence" or due to the fact that the works are "the products of the same *Zeitgeist*" (290)).

[8] Irwin 2001, 294. Most scholars would acknowledge that 'accidental associations' cause their readings to become "more aesthetically pleasing and in that way richer".

[9] Irwin 2001, 296 himself also thinks that accidental associations should be left out "the domain of science".

[10] Pieters 2014, 40.

[11] Pieters 2014, 40. Many literary scholars, Pieters remarks, would be quite sceptical about the idea that a reading, for example based on a connection between "the last act of [Shakespeare's] *The Tempest* (...) and one of the novels of the *Harry Potter* cycle", could occur with respect to the literary-cultural context in which the play originated.

takes the links and parallels made independently of authorial intent as its point of departure, while at the same time not losing sight of the literary-cultural circumstances in which the texts in question were created? And if so, in what way could these correspondences be made productive for our analysis of the historical literary works? How could they exactly enrich our readings? Why would it be valuable, to say it with a wink to Delgado's objections, to take this sort of correlations as 'seriously' as the references an author would have wanted us to see?

These questions have occupied the centre of my PhD project, of which the main results are presented in this thesis. My dissertation aims to propose a strategy of reading historical literature grounded in intertextual relationships, parallels and links which have been established independently of authorial intention.[12] The focus will deliberately be on the kind of correspondences, on a thematic, narrative or structural level, that the writer of the historical object of study could impossibly have wanted to evoke.

My project has developed this reading strategy alongside and by means of five case studies, which will cover the largest part of this thesis. Each of these case studies will analyse a historical literary work, in particular a Latin one written around the end of the first century, in relation to one or two relatively recently created 'modern' texts from the twentieth century. The choice to read these texts together will have been based on the recognition of a similar thematic, structural or narrative feature. The third chapter, for example, will revolve around Statius' epic poem *Thebaid* and a trilogy composed by the Irish author Samuel Beckett in the forties and fifties. The connection between these texts has not been set up because of an assumption of some sort of intended connection between them (e.g. there seems to be no indication that there are ties of reception between the Latin epic and the English novel). The decision to read them in interaction with one another has been grounded in the observation of a shared narrative aspect, in this concrete case the presence of a narrator who undermines the conventions of teleological storytelling and expresses the desire to take the narrative into a new direction at a moment when the end of the work is already in sight.

This dissertation seeks to explain and show how the observed correspondences to certain aspects of modern works can be transformed into productive tools of analysis that may lead towards a better understanding of particular facets of the historical objects of interpretation. Each case study will read a selection of thematic, narrative or structural phenomena from an ancient literary work 'in interaction with', 'in light of', peculiar concepts and ideas derived from the modern text(s) to which it has been connected. These modern notions will serve as dynamic points of comparison that will guide our thinking

[12] The methodological chapter of this dissertation will more deeply reflect upon the interactive process between text and reader during which these relationships, parallels and links are produced.

about and inform our interpretation of the function of the classical phenomena that we aim to explore.

This strategy of reading, as will be explained in the methodological chapter at the end of this dissertation by way of the comparative theories of Marcel Detienne and Susan Stanford Friedman, deliberately tends to 'defamiliarisation'.[13] It creates the possibility to speak, write and reason about a historical (classical) object of study in terms that are both alien to the object itself and to the academic discourse conventionally used in Latin scholarship to communicate and give form to its interpretation(s). The adoption of these alien terms, to quote Friedman, will potentially create alternative "patterns of thinking" about the text in question and provide "new and unexpected angles" through which its meaning(s) can be shaped.[14] It will, as this thesis hopes to show, enable us to throw a new light upon certain aspects within the classical works as well as draw attention to features that have remained unnoticed hitherto.

The interpretations produced by this reading strategy should not necessarily be disrespectful to the historical meaning(s) of the texts in question, as might be the concern of some scholars in the field (*supra*). This dissertation will try to motivate and illustrate that a consciously and systematically combined reading of chronologically disparate works may enable a critical reader to open up points of overlap and contrast that might deepen our understanding of the (aesthetic and other) techniques applied by the texts without losing sight of their literary-cultural contexts of origin.

1 A 'Dialogical' Strategy of Reading

The theoretical basis of this approach to historical literature will be the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). The German thinker was one of the most important representatives of the movement of modern hermeneutics. He is best known for his magnum opus *Wahrheit und Methode*, published in 1960 (in English: *Truth or Method*). Concisely said, the work can be seen as a philosophical exploration of the principles lying behind "all understanding". It reflects upon why people want to understand, how they

[13] Friedman 2013; Detienne 2008. The latter's survey is significantly titled *Comparing the Incomparable* and pleads for the juxtaposition of elements that have no direct relationship (and have, therefore, rarely been placed next to one another in scholarship).

[14] Friedman 2013, 43.

exactly understand and in what ways the experience of understanding can enrich them as human beings.[15]

Given Gadamer's background in literary studies, a type of understanding in which *Wahrheit und Methode* not surprisingly shows a peculiar interest is 'the interpretation of texts'. The German philosopher proves to be strongly concerned with the dynamics between a reader and a textual universe, being particularly fascinated with how the understanding of *historical* literary works occurs.[16] He returns several times to the question what mechanisms are set into play when we try to give meaning to a textual object that was created in a different period from ours. How does the historical distance that exists between us as interpreters and our objects of interpretation inform the process of understanding? In what way should the relationship be defined between the historical-cultural context of the text in question and the historical-cultural context of the readers?

A central concept in Gadamer's philosophy, on which later theorists have built further, is 'the dialogue'. Within the context of hermeneutics, this notion can refer to two, mutually related dynamics within the experience of understanding. The image of the dialogue or conversation has first of all been used to define the interaction between the historical text and the reader. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer proposes to conceptualise and metaphorise the process of understanding as an encounter between the self and the other. As readers, he says, we are not enabled to interpret a historical work in a neutral way, since we always bring something of ourselves with us. We arrive at the start with a whole set of assumptions, prejudices and ideas about literature and the world in general that we have formed in relation to the time and place in which we are living (Gadamer speaks about *Vorurteile*). We could call the totality of *Vorurteile* the reader's "horizon of expectations". In the act of reading, the prejudices that we carry with us are confronted with the presumptions, opinions and expectations implied in and articulated by the historical literary work (i.e. "the horizon of the text").[17] Gadamer represents this confrontation as a dialogue in which the readers should try to get to know how their 'conversation partner', the text, thinks about certain topics, while at the same time considering to what extent the work's views overlap or collide with their own. Within this dialogical process, *Wahrheit und Methode* maintains, "meanings are made".[18]

A second reason to conceptualise understanding as dialogical is because of its inter-textual nature. As several (hermeneutically inspired) theorists have remarked, the 'voice' of the historical text in question is not the only one resounding within the act of

[15] Gadamer 2004, xxvii.

[16] Grondin 2003, 4-6.

[17] Gadamer 2004, 271.

[18] Nixon 2017, 31.

interpretation.[19] Reading may not be seen as a 'monological' event. It should be considered as a 'polyphonic' process that sets an interpretative machinery into play which incites the readers to create links, parallels and correspondences with other texts, other voices. It could either be that readers think to hear the voices of works that belonged to the same (or a closely related) literary-cultural sphere as the historical object of study. In some of these cases, we may even assume that its author would have wanted us to hear them. Or readers may pick up the sound of literary works which originated in a context and/or time period entirely different from the text's which they aim to interpret.[20] This renders understanding to be a dynamic and conversational experience in which different texts, a variety of viewpoints, perspectives and opinions, come and resound together in the moment of reception.

The two sides of the hermeneutical notion of the dialogue can serve as the theoretical foundation of the strategy of reading introduced above. The concept of the conversation allows us to consider the understanding of a historical object of study as a process taking place in the 'here and now' and in constant interaction with the voices of other literary works. At the same time, it also highlights the historical dimension within the act of reading and the literary-cultural embedment, the prejudicedness, of both conversation partners. In the methodological chapter, I will more extensively reflect upon the theoretical implications behind the approach to historical (classical) literature proposed in this dissertation. The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer will be the point of departure, yet it will be combined with other theoretical frameworks, such as Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism, Jerome McGann's ideas about poly-interpretability, and Marcel Detienne's and Susan Stanford Friedman's (above-mentioned) views on comparative research.

[19] Later in this dissertation, I will rely on Pieters 2014 to explain the relationship between Gadamerian hermeneutics and the conceptualisation of the notion of intertextuality within French poststructuralism throughout the '60s and '70s. See also Juvan 2008, 49-95 for a discussion of the role of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* within the debates on intertextuality during the second half of the twentieth century.

[20] E.g. The voices of texts written many years after the object of study or within a culture with which there were no or only a few exchanges, at least on an artistic level, at the time that the object of interpretation came into being.

2 Corpus: Historical and Modern

The historical text-corpus of this dissertation consists of five Latin works written around the end of the first century. Three of them appeared during the emperorship of Domitian (81-96): Quintilian's rhetorical handbook, the *Institutio Oratoria*, and Statius' epic and collection of occasional poetry, the *Thebaid* and *Silvae*.[21] Two were – partly or entirely – created under the regime of Nerva (96-98) and/or in the beginning of Trajan's reign (98-117): Martial's *Epigrams*, a twelve-book corpus with predominantly short epigrammatic poems, and the Younger Pliny's *Epistulae*, a letter collection of nine books.[22]

The selection of these five works has been made in accordance to two recent trends in scholarship. We can first of all see that the periodical demarcation between 'Flavian' and 'Nerva-Trajanic' literature has nowadays become less strict than it once was. Recent studies have let go the "earlier insistence on 96 [the year of the assassination of the last Flavian emperor Domitian] as a watershed" in cultural history.[23] They have pointed to remarkable parallels and correspondences, both on a socio-cultural and aesthetic level, between works written before and after the death of Domitian.[24] A lately published volume on "Roman literature under Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian", edited by Alice König and Christopher Whitton, for instance, significantly opens with a section that "aims to

[21] The *Institutio* was published around 95/96 (see Kennedy 1994, 115). The *Thebaid* came out ca. 91/92 (see Vessey 1973, 14). The *Silvae* appeared in three instalments, probably within the period 93-96. The fifth and final book of the collection of occasional poetry would have been published posthumously (see Shackleton Bailey 2003, 5).

[22] The first nine books of Martial's collection of *Epigrams* appeared between 86 and 94. Book 10 (second edition), 11 and 12 were published after Domitian's assassination within the period 96-98 (see Shackleton Bailey 1993, 3-4). I will return to the special status of the tenth book in the chapter on Martial's collection. The exact publication dates of the individual books of Pliny's *Epistulae* are unclear. Scholars agree that they came out somewhere between 97 and 110. Bodel 2015, 105-108 offers an overview of the most important views regarding the chronology and sequence of publication of the nine books.

[23] König and Whitton 2018, 4.

[24] Much attention has been paid to the literary-cultural circles of Pliny, Martial and Statius. In 1975, Peter White, for example, already pointed to the partial overlaps between the networks of these three authors, though late first century literature "did not owe the spirit or shape to the exertions of one particular circle of writers, poets and patrons (...) in the Augustan sense" (300). Scholars like Ruurd Nauta (2002), Meike Rühl (2006), and Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello (2012, 136-168), rather than focusing on overlapping patrons and friends, have examined the similarities and differences in the functioning of Statius', Pliny's and Martial's literary circuits and/or their self-positioning in these circuits. Other studies have concentrated on common thematic, narrative or structural features within late first century literary works. For a partial bibliography of these studies, see Gibson and Morello 2012, 293-308 (particularly pp.301-302; 303-304).

bridge the divides", containing several contributions which read together literature from the end of the Flavian age and the beginning of Nerva-Trajanic times.[25]

Secondly, we can observe an increased inclination towards generically diverse research in the field of first-century literary studies. Publications in this area for a long time predominantly tended to be author- or genre-specific. More recently, however, attention has started to be paid to exchanges and cross-overs between (texts belonging to) different genres. Some studies have focused on the concept of generic fluidity. They have shown how authors from the Flavian and Nerva-Trajanic period ingeniously played with the notion of genre within their works, for example, by adopting a lyrical tone in epic poetry or by using an epic invocation in a rhetorical handbook.[26] Other analyses have concentrated on certain thematic, narrative or structural tendencies that seem to manifest themselves across generic boundaries. Ilaria Marchesi, for instance, has proposed some remarkable parallels between literary strategies applied in Pliny's letter collection, and previous and contemporary books of poetry.[27] Similar argumentations have been developed by contributors to König and Whitton's above-mentioned edited volume (to name just a few studies).[28]

In line with these two trends, I have compiled a diverse historical text-corpus, both in the 'imperial' and 'generic' sense. The corpus consists of a combination of late first century literary works which cover the end of the Flavian and the beginning of the Nerva-Trajanic age. With Martial's *Epigrams*, it comprises a text of which the first nine books appeared under the reign of Domitian, while the last three were published under Nerva and Trajan. The collection of epigrams itself, to use König and Whitton's expression, thus 'bridges the divides' constructed in scholarship (and sometimes suggested by the ancient authors themselves). Furthermore, the corpus shows a variety of poetic (*Thebaid*, *Silvae*, *Epigrams*) and prosaic genres (*Institutio, Epistulae*). By including Quintilian's rhetorical treatise, moreover, it contains a work that has (too?) often been ignored in debates on literature from the end of the first century. Because of its technical nature, scholars seem to have been less inclined to read it alongside works with clearer literary-artistic pretentions, such as the *Thebaid*, *Epigrams* or *Epistulae*.

Although the literary-analytical chapters of this dissertation will occasionally draw attention to thematic, narrative or structural correspondences between the five Latin

[25] König and Whitton 2018. E.g. Whitton on Quintilian, Pliny and Tacitus; Buckley on Flavian epic and Trajanic historiography; Ash on Martial, Pliny and Juvenal; Uden on Quintilian and Juvenal.

[26] See, for instance, Newlands 2002, 199-284; 2012 on generic fluidity in the oeuvre of Statius; Gunderson 2009 on Quintilian's play with genre. See also Bessone and Fucecchi's edited volume on literary genre (2017), particularly the contributions by Augoustakis and Reitz.

[27] Marchesi 2008.

[28] In König and Whitton 2018, see especially the contributions by Buckley, König and Kelly.

works, contemporary literary interactions, relationships and parallels will not be the central focus (I gladly refer readers interested in these matters to the studies mentioned above). This thesis does not intend to propose a coherent view on the aesthetics of late first century literature and will, therefore, not primarily be concerned with looking for all sorts of common features and shared properties between the texts from this period. This justifies the choice to work only with a small selection of literary works and leave several contemporary texts out of the discussion, such as Silius Italicus' *Punica* or Tacitus' early literary production (*Agricola, Germania*, *Dialogus*).[29]

As explained before, the focal point of this thesis will be the correspondences that each of the Latin texts shows to one or two more recently written works and which have been observed independently of authorial intention. This thesis will propose, to say it with a hermeneutical term, the following textual 'dialogues': Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* will be placed in a conversation with Jorge Luis Borges' collection of short stories, *Ficciones* (*Fictions*, 1944); the *Epigrams* of Martial will be read alongside James Joyce's magnum opus, *Ulysses* (1922); Pliny's *Epistulae* will find a suitable dialogue partner in Vladimir Nabokov's autobiographical memoir *Speak, Memory* (1966); Statius' *Thebaid* will be analysed in interaction with Samuel Beckett's trilogy (1955-1958), while his *Silvae* will lead us to Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities;* 1972) and the poetry by Paul Celan (1948-1970).[30]

In research on twentieth-century literary studies, there has been a lively debate on how to classify some of the above-mentioned modern works. Disagreement on this matter has partly been due to the "instability of the two categories" in which scholars have tried to situate them, modernism and postmodernism. Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan, for example, "wrote outside of the time period typically set for modernism, which is often said to have existed between 1890 and 1945". From this periodical point of view, only Borges' *Fictions* and Joyce's *Ulysses* could be labelled as examples of modernist literature. Yet, when considering *Speak, Memory*, the trilogy and Celan's poetry in relation to the "distinguishing aesthetic features" of modernism and postmodernism,[31] several scholars have argued that these texts seem to have a closer affinity with the former than with the latter or should at least be situated at the threshold between the two.[32] If we are

[29] Because of the unfinished state of the *Achilleid* and the limited influence of Silius' *Punica* on later literature, I have chosen to take Statius' *Thebaid* as the main example of late first century epic poetry. Pliny's *Epistulae* has been preferred to Tacitus' early work because of its close affinities with both the *Silvae* and *Epigrams,* and the *Institutio Oratoria*. With the former works, it shares its attention to everyday life and its self-positioning in a literary-cultural network. As Whitton 2015 has illustrated, it clearly engages in several letters with the latter (which is no surprise given the fact that Pliny was one of Quintilian's pupils).

[30] All non-English modern texts will be quoted in translation in this dissertation.

[31] MacKenzie 2019.

[32] For an overview of the debate on the classification of *Speak, Memory*, see Grabes 1995; on the trilogy, see Pattie 2004; on Celan's poetry, see Perloff 2006. As the three contributions admit, much depends in this kind of

willing to follow their arguments, we can say that the text-corpus I proposed is rather 'modernist-coloured'. The only exception seems to be Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, which has conventionally been allocated as a 'postmodernist' work.[33]

The selection of these six, predominantly modernist conversation partners will extensively be justified in the methodological chapter of this dissertation. It will be demonstrated that the compilation of the modern-text-corpus has been determined both by my background as reader and by the internal thematic, narrative and structural configurations of the five Latin works. The selection, as will be explained, offers an indication of the privileged position I hold as a reader. The above-mentioned twentieth-century texts are rarely questioned to have a place in the canon of West-European literature, even though several of them have never received a large audience and have mainly been read inside university walls. The choice of this 'exquisite collection of texts' reveals that I am an academically formed reader who has been taught to think about literature and interpret a literary work in relation to the academic frame of reference built up during my (strongly Eurocentrically orientated) university studies. Yet, the decision about which specific texts should be taken from this academic frame of reference and integrated in the literary analyses has always been based on some concrete features in the five Latin works. Each modern piece of literature has been selected 'because', 'in light' of its apparent parallels, its peculiar thematic, narrative or structural correspondences with one of the five classical texts.

I could have opted for a more periodically diverse set of interlocutors for the five Latin works. Perhaps, our reading of Statius' *Thebaid* would also have been enriched when placing the epic, for example, in dialogue with a tragedy by Jean Racine or Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudian*. The choice to focus exclusively on affinities with literature from the twentieth century has particularly been made out of pragmatic and practical considerations. By reading the works from the end of the first century alongside a series of texts from another relatively well-demarcated, literary period, I have been enabled to limit the scope of my research and prevent it from becoming an amalgam of aesthetics and cultural-historical contexts of which the variety renders it to be difficult to gain a comprehensive view. The decision to concentrate on the modernist period has been made because it has produced a type of literature about which we have been taught to think in an abstract and conceptual way. This manner of thinking has (partly) come forth from the close ties that seem to exist between modernism and literary theory/philosophy. On the one hand, modernist literary texts have often presented themselves as highly self-aware and meta-reflective art forms that have – explicitly or implicitly – engaged

discussions on how one exactly defines the 'distinguishing aesthetic features of modernism and postmodernism'.

[33] Markey 1999 convincingly conceptualises the largest part of Calvino's oeuvre, including *Invisible Cities*, as postmodernist literature.

themselves with existent literary-philosophical concepts and presented these concepts in a transformed or modified mode in their literary universe. On the other hand, many literary theorists and philosophers from the last century have developed their main views and principles alongside and by means of analyses of modernist pieces of literature. The abstract and somewhat philosophical way in which we have become used to reason about its literature makes modernism (extra) suitable for a dialogical undertaking. It has allowed us to centre the conversations with the Latin texts around some clearly defined notions borrowed from the modern works and enabled us thereby to think about the thematic, narrative and structural overlaps and contrasts that we observe on a more conceptual and abstract level.

3 State of the Art: Literature from the End of the First Century

The interest in the works of Statius, Quintilian, Pliny and Martial came up quite late in Latin scholarship. A few studies already appeared in the sixties and seventies,[34] yet research only started booming in the second half of the eighties. The rise of attention for these texts went hand in hand with an important paradigmatic shift in the domain of Latin literary studies. During the last decades of the twentieth century, several (younger) scholars, especially active in the Anglo-American world, such as John Henderson, Don Fowler, Charles Martindale and Philip Hardie,[35] held a plea for new approaches to classical literature. They proposed a way of doing research that engaged itself with modern literary theory and dared to use the terminology and concepts associated with it. At the same time, they openly questioned some of the views propagated by traditional philologists, including the latter's preference for literature from the 'Golden' Augustan period. The "movement of the New Latin", as Don Fowler called this wave of younger academics,[36] challenged the criteria by which aesthetic quality had been measured so far (e.g. 'unity', 'coherence' and 'originality'). Its critical attitude towards earlier norms and

[34] E.g. Adrian Sherwin-White's *The Letters of Pliny* (1966); David Vessey's *Statius and the* Thebaid (1973); Otto Seel's *Quintilian oder die Kunst des Redens und Schweigens* (1977); Stephen Newmyer's *The* Silvae *of Statius: Structure and Theme* (1979).

[35] See, for instance, Henderson 1998; Fowler 1991; 1994; Martindale 1993; Hardie 1993.

[36] Don Fowler spoke about the "New Latin movement" in an article that appeared in the Italian journal *Arachnion* (1995). He discussed a couple of surveys published in the late '80s or early '90s on Latin literature that had tried to break with the traditional philological research methods. Despite the many differences between these surveys and the approaches they propose, Fowler discerned some "common concerns".

standards opened the door for the appreciation of and research on later Latin literature, amongst others, Statius' and his contemporaries'.[37]

Given its embedment within the New-Latin-movement, the research field on literature from the end of the first century has, since its boom in the second half of the eighties, shown a (relatively) strong theoretical awareness. Scholars have experimented with various methodologies and usually not refrained from implementing modern concepts into their literary analyses. Over the past twenty-five years, three types of approaches in particular have become widespread. The first type can be labelled as the 'socio-cultural approach to late first-century literature'. It includes all research that somehow analyses the relationship between a text and phenomena in the extra-textual reality. A recurring topic of interest, for example, has been a literary work's (self-)embedment in the system of patronage. Scholars like Ruurd Nauta, Meike Rühl or Noelle Zeiner have examined Statius' and Martial's engagement with and self-positioning in the contemporary *patronus-cliens*-networks in their poems, often by relying on theories adopted from social sciences (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu's notions of distinction and cultural capital).[38] Another frequently explored subject has been the Latin works' representation of power and the emperors (Domitian, Nerva and Trajan). Whereas the earliest contributions in the field often proposed a rather one-sided view on these matters, recent studies, grounded sometimes in modern theoretical frames on discourses of power and ideology, have depicted a more nuanced image (e.g. Carole Newland's application of Alan Sinfield's 'Faultlines-concept'; Lisa Cordes' use of Stuart Hall's idea of 'preferred readings').[39] The second type may be referred to as the 'narrative approach to late first-century literature'. It mainly encompasses studies which are – explicitly or implicitly – based on concepts, notions and ideas which have been developed within the context of narratology. Narrative theories have predominantly been applied to interpretations of epic poetry (e.g. Statius' *Thebaid*) and have attracted scholarly attention to a diverse set of features, such as focalisation, the narrating voice and the representation of consciousness.[40] But they have also proven to be useful for the study of non-epic texts. Roy Gibson, for

[37] Fowler 1995 refers, for example, to the new attitudes towards intertextuality, which "move beyond the banality of seeing allusion as 'paying homage' or 'signalling a debt'" and consider a dense network of references as "an asset rather than a liability, a source of richness rather than a sign of lack of originality". This has in particular led to a revaluation of so-called "belated (...) Silver Latin" texts, amongst others Statius' epics. McGill 2012, 335-336 has seen several parallels between the rehabilitation of the Silver Latin period at the end of the twentieth century and the more recent reassessment of late antique literature and art.

[38] Nauta 2002; Rühl 2006; Zeiner 2005. For more contributions on this topic, see, for instance, Garthwaite 1998b; Rosati 2015; Rühl 2015.

[39] Newlands 2002; Cordes 2014. A similar research interest can, amongst others, be found in Lorenz 2004; Leberl 2004; Gibson 2015; Rebeggiani 2018.

[40] E.g. Ganiban 2007; Bernstein 2011; Lovatt 2013; Lovatt 2016; Walter 2015.

instance, has lately introduced Brian McHale's notion of "weak narrativity" to explore the mechanisms lying behind Pliny's book composition.[41] The third type is the 'intertextual approach to late first-century literature' and covers research on different sorts of literary interactions. Although most scholars have adapted a relatively conventional view on intertextuality,[42] recent contributions in the research domain, such as König and Whitton's edited volume, proposing the notion of "interactivity", have aimed to show new directions.[43]

In the analytical chapters, I will provide a more extensive overview of the scholarly work that has been done so far on each of the five Latin texts of my corpus. The methodological chapter will reflect upon what value the dialogical approach proposed in this thesis may bring to the academic field of late first century literature. For now, it suffices to remark that the analyses presented in this dissertation will mainly be affiliated with the second and third type of research. They will concentrate on literary interactions, though the kind of interactions they discuss, will differ from those that have usually been examined in scholarship. The focus in these analyses will mostly be on narrative phenomena in the broadest sense of the word in the five Latin texts (so, including structural or compositional features, recurring themes and motives, etc.). By approaching these phenomena in the unfamiliar (post)modernist terms of Beckett, Calvino, Celan, Nabokov, Joyce and Borges, I hope to be enabled to throw a new light upon them and develop an alternative view on some of their functions.

4 Outline

This dissertation will consist of five literary-analytical chapters and one methodological. The analytical section will be divided in two parts.

Part I, 'Memory', clusters three chapters exploring how a text seeks to enforce its own remembrance. They study various techniques applied by works to 'impose themselves'

[41] Gibson 2018. Hayes 2016, 6-7 provides a general discussion of the relationship between book composition and narrativity.

[42] I mean that scholars working in the field of late first century literary studies have predominantly developed a view on intertextual research that holds the middle ground between Irwin's "intentionalist" and "internalist" perspective (see footnote 7).

[43] König and Whitton 2018, 21: "Interactivity might be thought of as a superset of which intertextuality is just a part: it not only embraces those 'allusions' or 'references' that can be captured and displayed in specimen jars, but also seeks to give voice to the fuzzier echoes and dialogues between the lines of our texts, and to invoke the sociohistorical communication and exchange that went along with literary production".

on the reader, 'to make themselves unforgettable'. In chapter 1, I adapt Vladimir Nabokov's notion 'chronophobia' to examine Pliny's attempts to protect the *Epistulae* against oblivion and the transience of time. I suggest that Pliny deliberately violates the linear arrangement within his letter collection to imply immortality on a structural level. Chapter 2 analyses Quintilian's encyclopaedic ambitions in light of Jorge Luis Borges' image of the eternal library and the figure of Pierre Menard, the Author-Reader. It proposes that the *Institutio*, on a meta-level, develops a theory about how one should write an all-encompassing treatise. The work underlines that this writing is an ongoing process that should be finished by the readers. The latter are expected to dedicate themselves to the study of the treatise with the same intensity as they would have shown if they would have been its author. Chapter 3 borrows Samuel Beckett's view on repetition and his notion of the 'reading dead' to discuss the function of the Argive widows in the twelfth book of Statius' *Thebaid*. It maintains that the female plotline in the last part of the epic serves as a strategy to imply the readers' 'entrapment' in the literary universe and the 'inescapability' from the 'treadmill' of horror (to use terms derived from Maurice Blanchot's essay on *The Unnamable*), set into motion by the narration.

Part II comprises two chapters revolving around the topic of 'Representation'. They analyse literary works that have made everyday life, the real world, their focal point of attention. They discuss strategies developed by the texts to make the ordinary possible for art (and vice versa). In chapter 4, I read a poetic description of a bathhouse in the *Silvae* in interaction with Calvino's conceptualisation of (in)visibility and Celan's use of the metaphor of light. I propose that the description serves as a meta-reflection upon the appealing but eye-blinding effects of the *Silvae*. Its poems do never reveal what they pretend to display. Chapter 5 adopts James Joyce's notion of representational limits to discuss Martial's ambition to represent life in all its chaos, disorder and wealth within the *Epigrams*. It argues that Martial frequently implies the restrictions of the traditional literary styles, frames of rhetoric and discourses which he must use to portray the everyday world. By drawing attention to these restrictions, he subtly suggests, as Joyce does in his novel, that life is so rich that it exceeds a text's representational capacities.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation offers a methodological retrospective. It looks back on the literary-analytical parts to discuss the (practical) choices made in there from a theoretical point of view. There are two reasons why the methodological chapter will be saved for last. The final position of the chapter first of all renders the structure of this thesis to correspond to the principles of the conversational approach it proposes. Retrospection is inherent to the dialogical way of interpretation. Although the connections to modern literary works can already be evoked while reading the historical object of study, the exact meaning of these connections and their implications for our understanding of the historical text only become clear afterwards, in retrospect. In an analogous manner, the conceptual relationships between the five analytical chapters will be clarified in hindsight and consequently be interwoven into a larger methodological

whole. Secondly, the retrospective nature of the chapter allows for a presentation of the methodology in an explicitly self-conscious and self-critical way. By looking back on the preceding literary analyses and some of the particular choices made in there, it becomes possible to concretely reflect upon both the assets and liabilities of these choices, and highlight the potential value of the dialogical approach without losing sight of its shortcomings.

I. Memory

Chapter 1

A Persistent 'Chronophobia'
Time and Composition in Pliny the Younger's *Epistulae* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*

In 1966, the Russian-American author Vladimir Nabokov published the "autobiographical memoir" *Speak, Memory*.[1] The book consists of fifteen chapters and covers the author's life from his childhood in Russia around the beginning of the twentieth century until his emigration to the United States in 1940. From the moment it appeared, critics have considered it a masterpiece and one of the "few truly great autobiographies" in modern literary history.[2]

One of the features that makes the book so exceptional and worth reading is its fascinating structure. Contrary to most autobiographies, *Speak, Memory* does not tell the story of Nabokov's life by chronologically going through its most important and remarkable events. Nabokov offers a much more episodic picture of himself by constructing the work as a consecution of smaller episodes which give an account of the big moments in his life as well as narrating rather unobtrusive and at first sight insignificant anecdotes about himself or members of his family or household. Furthermore, the way in which these episodes are arranged within the work is not bound strictly chronological. Although the fifteen chapters over which the episodes are divided

[1] Though framed as an 'autobiographical text', Nabokov's work, as will be explained later, differs at some crucial points from what we traditionally understand under this term.

[2] Epstein 2014.

roughly follow the progress of his life (i.e. the first chapters mostly contain stories about his childhood, while later ones primarily focus on his experiences as an adult), Nabokov frequently 'violates' the linear course of time. When, for instance, something that (allegedly) happened to him as a child thematically corresponds to an event that took place during his young-adulthood, Nabokov does not refrain from postponing this childhood experience and treating it a few chapters later, together with the 'adult-incident'. Thereby, it recurrently occurs throughout the autobiography that an anecdote is inserted in the midst of a group of episodes to which it, speaking from a chronological point of view, can impossibly belong. This curiously brings distant moments in time in contact with one another and blends diverse periods from Nabokov's life.

The fundamental question that has occupied many of Nabokov's readers, namely why he exactly composes his own life in this manner,[3] somehow reminds us of the challenges with which scholars of pre-modern 'autobiographical' texts have been faced.[4] Comparable to *Speak, Memory*, many works with an 'autobiographical potential' from Antiquity, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages do not grant the reader a unified, easily comprehensible narrative about the writer's life but rather display a series of chunks of it that is assembled according to a logic which is often not immediately clear at first sight. Think, for instance, of Augustine's *Confessions*, a (seemingly) autobiographical text that is characterised by its many interruptions of the main narrative, its philosophical-theological digressions and deviations. Another obvious example are letter collections wherein an author gives insight into his life via a consecution of 'fragments', i.e. his private or public correspondence, that disclose details about himself, his addressees and particular historical circumstances. As Pliny the Younger, whose *Epistulae* will be central to this chapter, metaphorically implies in 2.5, this causes the readers of letter collections to never be enabled to see the author's 'entire statue at once';[5] instead, they successively get a 'close-up' of the different 'parts of the statue', which Pliny believes to be admirable in their own right.[6]

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[3] In *The Mystery of Literary Structures*, Leona Toker (1989) demonstrates that Nabokov plays with narrative form and literary structure throughout his entire oeuvre.

[4] For a discussion of the complex relationship between historical texts depicting someone's life and modern definitions of biography and autobiography, see Most 1989, 122; Gibson and Morello 2011, 9-19 and De Temmerman 2016, 3-25.

[5] Morello 2015, 179 has found a suitable metaphor to express what it means to read a letter collection in a thought experiment developed by Peter Elbow, "who asks us to imagine an ant crawling around on the surface of Edward Hopper's painting *Nighthawks,* unable to see the whole picture because it can take in only a little section at a time".

[6] For an analysis of this letter and its meta-poetical implications, see Whitton 2015, 131-138. It is important to remark that, for Pliny, the fragments of which the collection consists must always be considered as parts of a larger whole. He frequently emphasises (explicitly or implicitly) the totality of his project. In 2.10, for instance,

The way in which Pliny divides his 247 letters, the 'chunks of his life', over his nine books of *Epistulae* has some affinities with the structure of Nabokov's autobiography. There is a general consensus in scholarship that the composition of his collection is well-considered,[7] although Pliny himself denies in the second sentence of his first letter that there lies a preset design behind it:[8]

> Collegi non servato temporis ordine, neque enim historiam componebam, sed ut quaeque in manus venerat.

Most scholars have agreed that this statement is a rhetorical trope by which Pliny aims to indicate the opposite of what he says, namely that the order of his letters is far from arbitrary.[9] As John Bodel illustrates,[10] in the individual books Pliny adopts a scheme of varied but meaningful order, while the nine books as a collection roughly follow chronology and mimic the order of events in Pliny's adult life: the first books mostly contain letters picturing Pliny's early career; the letters in the middle and last books respectively portray his years as consul and augur, and the period after his consul- and augurship.[11] According to Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello, this chronological lead causes Pliny's *Epistulae* to be "relatively hospitable, by the standards of ancient letter collections, to readers attempting to follow the story of the author's life".[12]

Yet, this chronological mode is not consistently maintained throughout the collection, which, at several points, shows deviations that somehow resemble the 'time-related violations' of Nabokov's autobiography. Pliny repeatedly deflects from the linear course of time by sometimes incorporating in one of the later books a letter that addresses an event that, from a chronological perspective, should have been placed earlier in the

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he warns Octavius Rufus for the risks the latter is running, since some of his 'verses have broken free' and do not belong anymore to the original 'textual body' (*Enotuerunt quidam tui versus, et invito te claustra sua refregerunt. Hos nisi retrahis in corpus, quaondoque ut errones aliquem cuius dicantur invenient*).

[7] See the surveys by Sherwin-White 1966; Murgia 2016; Gibson and Morello 2012; Marchesi 2015; Gibson and Whitton 2016. A brief overview of the shifting views on the arrangement of Pliny's letter collection is offered in the conclusion of this chapter.

[8] All quotations and most of the translations incorporated in the body text are copied from the edition published by The Loeb Classical Library (Betty Radice, 1969).

[9] For an overview of the scholarly debate on the first letter and in particular the second sentence, see Gibson and Whitton 2016, 29-30.

[10] Bodel 2015 builds further upon and revises the earlier views of Mommsen 1889; Sherwin-White 1966, Syme 1985 and Murgia 2016 (originally 1985).

[11] By combining chronological order with *variatio*, Gibson and Morello 2012, 16 remarks, Pliny's *Epistulae* fuses the "large-scale linear progression of the letters of Cicero to Atticus (or Seneca to Lucilius)" with the compositional techniques of "certain books of Cicero's *Ad Familiares*". As Marchesi 2008 illustrates, Pliny's composition techniques may have been inspired by Horace' *Epistles* or Roman love elegy as well.

[12] Gibson and Morello 2012, 13.

collection.[13] Narratives of, and references to "Pliny's youth and early manhood appear", thereby, in "unpredictable places" over the course of the *Epistulae*.[14] In this way, Pliny's readers, we could say, are invited to ask similar questions as Nabokov's: why would a writer, in the literary representation of his life, deliberately cause ruptures in the 'order of time'? For what reason would he bring remote moments from his past together and in this way generate a conflict in chronology?

This chapter will explain the violations of chronology in the *Epistulae* in relation to Pliny's conceptualisation of time. With a term borrowed from Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, I will propose that Pliny shows symptoms of a disease that could be called 'chronophobia', the (alleged) anxiety of the transience of time and the fear of non-existence. The deviations from chronology seem to be part of a strategy by which Pliny wants to make his letter collection, the 'literary proof of his existence', resistant to the passing of time and capable of safeguarding his spot in the world of immortality. However, as will be suggested near the end, comparable to Nabokov, Pliny does never appear to be entirely sure that the measures he has taken to protect his work against time will ultimately be effective.

1.1 A Persistent 'Chronophobia'

A good starting point for answering the questions asked above (at least, those about *Speak, Memory*), we can find in a recently published book by Will Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time* (2015). In the beginning of his long chapter on the autobiography,[15] Norman makes clear that we may not dismiss the structure of the work as an odd, unmotivated compositional choice. Neither is it an attempt to implement the chaos and fragmentation in an autobiographical text that, according to (post)modernists, has become characteristic of our modern society. Norman suggests that the structure of *Speak, Memory* is inextricably related to Nabokov's conceptualisation of the interaction between art and life, between text and author. Therefore, in order to understand the composition of the autobiography, Norman believes that we should first try to comprehend Nabokov's view on these relationships. For what reason does he assert to

[13] Bodel 2015, 57-108 offers a quite detailed discussion of the arrangement of each individual book.
[14] Gibson and Morello 2012, 14.
[15] Norman 2015, 53-78.

have written a work centred around his own life? In what way does he explain his choice to create a piece of art, an autobiography, which is entirely constructed around himself?

In Nabokov's entire oeuvre, we can see a close connection between art and (personal) reality. Almost every novel is suggested to have an autobiographical undertone and to be grounded to a certain extent in experiences the author went through in his life. As Alfred Apple has remarked, however, we may not let ourselves "mislead" by this autobiographical posture.[16] Nabokov did not write some sort of "disguised transcription" of things that happened to him in reality.[17] He uses his art to transform elements from his life, let them go through a creative metamorphosis and embed them into an artistic/fictional space. This is not different, Apple says, in *Speak, Memory*. We may not read this work as a somewhat embellished but relatively authentic account of the events that occurred from his childhood to adulthood. We must always remember that life has been transferred and modified into art where there are other rules and laws than in reality.

Despite the clear affinities with the novelistic works in his oeuvre, Norman believes that *Speak, Memory* holds a somewhat exceptional position. The work is first of all framed as an autobiographical text in which Nabokov takes a trip down memory lane and narrates about a certain period in his life. This suggests an even tighter relationship than we usually observe between art on the one hand and the author and his personal experiences on the other. Furthermore, the autobiographical memoir is interestingly represented as having been created as a kind of "act of rebellion" against a phenomenon that has held not only the author but humanity as a whole in its grip for a long time, namely time itself.[18] As Norman explains, the "matter of time" (24) forms a recurring theme in *Speak, Memory*.[19] References to and comments upon this matter can be found everywhere in the work, from the beginning onwards. The first chapter opens with a long reflection on the topic, which immediately makes clear that Nabokov, at least so he alleges, does not seem to be very happy about the condition in which time has forced him. Nabokov states that time always seems "so boundless at first blush". Yet, in reality, it functions as "a prison (...) without exits" that entirely controls, determines and defines human life and our existence (25).

Later in the autobiography, Nabokov hints at diverse reasons why he says to feel so constrained by time. But they all seem to go back to an essential problem which he appears to have with the manner in which time has been conceptualised and experienced since Isaac Newton's treatment of it as an absolute phenomenon. Time has been represented as a mathematical, spatial and measurable matter that exists independently

[16] Apple 1991, xxi.

[17] Apple 1991, xxii. See also Diment 2006, 175-180.

[18] Norman 2015, 53-61. See also Foster 1993, 178-203.

[19] All quotations are copied from the edition published by Vintage Books, New York, 1986.

of the perceiver. It progresses in a linear way, at a consistent pace throughout our universe. This absolute conceptualisation of time, Nabokov implies, has become determinant for our view on and experience of different aspects of reality. For instance, we have gotten used to think about history as a one-dimensional story that develops itself linearly. We are inclined to divide this story in clearly demarcated timeframes in which one period builds or writes further upon the previous ones. The established conviction, however, that this story must be told in terms of constant progression, as an account of how humanity has kept on improving itself, so *Speak, Memory* suggests along the lines, has been undermined by the recent "catastrophe of the Second World War".[20]

Another and perhaps even more fundamental aspect of reality on which our view has strongly been determined by the Newton's conceptualisation of time is our personal existence. We have become used to think about our life as a strictly linear phenomenon that directly and almost mechanically proceeds from a point of beginning towards an inevitable end. We look at ourselves as growing from childhood over adulthood towards being aged (the last stage before death) and define our (daily) lives in terms of "clock- and calendar-time".[21] One of the consequences of this conception of life is that we are in a constant state of awareness of the temporariness of our existence, realizing that it is "but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (24).[22] It makes us understand that there was a time once in which we did not (yet) exist and that there will be a time in which we will not exist anymore. This understanding, so Nabokov suggests, renders many people, at some point in their lives, to be overtaken by a serious attack of the disease which he calls "chronophobia" (24), an anxiety caused by the awareness of the linear progression of time, of life (towards death), a "fear of non-existence".[23]

Nabokov not coincidentally claims to feel somewhat nostalgic for his childhood. As a child he did not yet think about time in the mathematical and spatial terms Newton proposed. He was not as occupied as he would become later with measuring the exact chronological distance between two events in his life or history. He experienced time much more personally, as a (relative) phenomenon that could not exist independently of the perceiver. He felt himself the centre of this experience during which he could rather subjectively decide how two or more events are situated and related to one another, regardless of the actual, mathematical distance between them. He did not yet conceptualize his own life in terms of mathematical "clock- and calendar-time", as a linear phenomenon that progresses from birth to death. Being a child, he remarks at some

[20] Norman 2015, 57.

[21] Toker 2002, 139.

[22] This is only one interpretation of the opening sentence of the first chapter. For other possible readings of this phrase, see Apple 1991, ix-xx.

[23] Toker 2002, 138.

point, felt like sitting in a sort of "primordial cave (...) before the beginning of history" (31).[24] Nabokov, however, at several moments indicates to realise that this experience has gone lost (at least, in real life, as will be explained later in this chapter). He has been subdued to the laws of Newtonian, mathematical time for so many years, that it has become his prison without exits.[25]

In the opening pages of the first chapter, after having complained about the imprisonment to which (the Newton-conceptualisation of) time has convicted him, Nabokov states that he has decided to "rebel against this state of affairs" and to search for ways to free himself from its constraints ("Short of suicide, I have tried everything") (26). His attempts to find an adequate "strategy of resistance", so it appears, has ultimately led to the domain which is the most familiar to him as an author: literary creation. "Armed with his writing talents", he has aimed to free his life from the chains imposed by the Newton-experience of time.[26] A literary creation, so it is suggested, seems to have been his only hope to break through "the walls of time that separate him from the free world of timelessness" (27). It would not only offer him the opportunity to transfer elements from his existence into an artistic medium in which they could be modified and thereby granted "a new life", with new ways of experience and with alternative conceptions, rules and laws.[27] It would also function, as he wrote in the form by which he applied for financial support to write *Speak, Memory*, as the "proof of his existence".[28] His work would crystallise his life, rendering it to be "frozen in art, halted in space, timeless".[29] It would "protect" his existence against the linear passing of time and undermine the idea that every life should necessarily progress towards an inevitable end, a point of non-existence. *Speak, Memory* can be seen as Nabokov's 'prison-break', which should prevent him from (further?) falling prey to the 'persistent chronophobia' by which

[24] Norman 2015, 56-57 analyses a passage in the beginning of the autobiography (32) in which Nabokov tells that as a child he used to play 'hide-and-seek'. One of his favourite hiding places was behind "a big cretonne-covered divan". According to Norman, the way in which Nabokov describes the divan turns the object and the space behind it into a sort of "figure for a gap in time" (57), a moment in which the border between past and present is blurred.

[25] The tension between a mathematical and personal conceptualisation of time can be interpreted as a literary response to the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1959-1941). Throughout his oeuvre, Bergson makes the distinction between *la durée* (also personal or pure time) and *le temps*, measured, mathematical or spatialised time. Beside Norman 2015, 56-62, also Toker 1995 and 2002 offer a discussion on Nabokov's relation to Bergon's ideas about time.

[26] Norman 2015, 53.

[27] Apple 1991, xxiii.

[28] Norman 2015, 54.

[29] Apple 1991, xxiii.

some of the members of his family and household, the 'characters' that will appear later in his work, seem to have been afflicted.[30]

Speak, Memory, so it appears, thus may not simply be seen as a realistic description of Nabokov's life but must be considered as an artistic medium, a creative transformation, that has the ambition to convey "conclusive evidence" of his existence (12).[31] This claim might seem a bit arrogant, yet for readers acquainted with pre-modern autobiographical texts, as those mentioned in the introduction, it should not necessarily sound unfamiliar. Of course, these texts lack the strong fictional embedment so typical of *Speak, Memory*, though also they offer far from authentic representations of the author's lives. But Nabokov's ambition to deliver a "proof of his existence" via his autobiography seems somehow to have affinities with an idea reverberating in many pre-modern literary (autobiographical) works, namely that a text or art piece has the potential to eternalise itself and its creator. Several indications of this idea can, for example, be found in the Latin conversation partner around which this chapter revolves. In the *Epistulae*, Pliny recurrently tells his addressees that writing a literary text is the only manner to successfully immortalise your own or someone else's image (3.10: *immortalem effigiem*).[32] Right away in the third letter of his first book, as some sort of programmatic statement, he even declares to Caninius Rufus that an artistic product is the only thing or possession that remains eternally connected to the name of its creator or the person it celebrates (1.3: *Effinge aliquid et excude, quod sit perpetuo tuum. Nam reliqua rerum tuarum post te alium atque alium dominum sortientur, hoc numquam tuum desinet esse si semel coeperit*). Although Pliny's multiple reflections upon the persistent nature of a literary work have already been recorded several times in scholarship, they have mostly been considered as a literary convention or as a strategy to emphasise the high aspirations of the collection.[33] As will be showed in this paragraph, however, it could also be argued that the statements have an even deeper function and meaning in the work and could be seen as a part of Pliny's broader (Nabokov-like) concerns about and reflections upon the linear progress of time.

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[30] In scholarship, there has been much discussion whether Nabokov presents himself as suffering from 'chronophobia' or just realises that he runs the risk, like some his characters, of falling prey to it. See Toker 2002 for an overview of this scholarly debate.

[31] In his prologue, Nabokov indicates that he considered to title his autobiography "Conclusive Evidence".

[32] Cf. Lefèvre 2009, 286: "*Plinius versucht durch seine studia – durch literarische Werke – Nachruhm zu erringen*".

[33] Auhagen 2003, 3-15 and Lefèvre 2009, 285-289 argue that the representation of his letters and poems as *nugae* or *ludi* do not necessarily collide with his claims of immortality. By deliberately and explicitly placing himself in the tradition of Cicero, Catullus and to a certain extent Ovid, Pliny seemingly wants to prove that a writer is certainly allowed to seek eternal glory, even though composing literary products that have conventionally been considered as lowbrow.

Quite recently, scholars have started paying attention to the importance of time (*tempus*) in Pliny's collection.[34] The matter of time is brought up in multiple letters over the course of the nine books. Therein, Pliny and his addressees are often suggested to be a bit troubled by this matter, as they allegedly have experienced that time is a phenomenon difficult to control. Famous in this respect is letter 3.5, in which Pliny tells his addressee Baebius Macer about the warnings he frequently received from his uncle and adoptive father, Pliny Caecilius Secundus,[35] about the slipperiness of time. His uncle, so Pliny recounts, always felt chased by time and kept on stressing how volatile and deciduous the matter is. Time, his uncle said, is an extraordinary and precious possession, that could, however, 'easily be lost without someone noticing it' (3.5: *tempus eriperet; "poteras" inquit "has horas non perdere*"). Therefore, his uncle tried to handle this possession as 'economically and frugally' as possible (3.5: *tanta erat parsimonia temporis*), and repeatedly advised his nephew to do the same (e.g. 3.5: *qua ex causa Romae quoque sella vehebatur. Repeto me correptum ab eo, cur ambularem (…). nam perire omne tempus arbitrabatur, quod studiis non impenderetur*).[36]

Though taking his uncle's advice to heart, Pliny in several letters admits that he nevertheless often feels powerless to the passing of time. He has not only noticed his impotence in daily life, where he suffers a constant lack of time to carry out the plans and projects that he has in mind.[37] More tragically, he also experiences a strong sense of helplessness when seeing friends and acquaintances passing away more prematurely than they deserved, without him being able to do something. When deploring the loss of Fundanus' daughter in letter 5.16, for example, he indicates that it was not 'death itself but the moment of its coming' that made her fate so cruel (5.16: *O triste plane acerbumque funus! O morte ipsa mortis tempus indignius*!). Tragedies like these, especially when happening to young children or adolescents, strongly remind him of the unpredictability of the mechanisms behind time and death, and of a person's disability to master his own lifeline. Once and again, they make him aware, as he pathetically exclaims in a letter bemoaning the decease of Silius Italicus, of the 'fragility of human existence' (3.7:

[34] See Gibson and Morello 2012, 248-251 and especially the third chapter of Henderson 2002, that extensively explores Pliny's relation to time.

[35] Insightful discussions of the function of Uncle Pliny in the *Epistulae* can be found in Lefèvre 2009, 123-126; Henderson 2016 and Eco 2016.

[36] For an elaborate discussion of the Elder Pliny's relation with time, see Henderson 2002, 69-102.

[37] From the first book on, Pliny complains about his dissatisfaction with his busy (urban) existence and the lack of time to work out his literary projects (1.9 and 1.10). Similar sounds, we hear in 2.8, 2.14, 3.1, 3.12, 3.21, 8.9, 9.35. For a discussion of Pliny's lack of time in the context of the Roman concept *otium*, see Johnson 2010, 32-62; Gibson and Morello 2012, 169-200; Fitzgerald 2007b.

fragilitatis humanae miseratio).[38] They let him understands, he says, 'how narrow the limits are set to life' (3.7: *angustis terminis tantae multitudinis vivacitas ipsa concluditur*), as if human existence, in a sense, is nothing more, than only 'a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness'.

It would be wrong to suppose that Pliny just wants to abide by the dominance of time and simply intends to wait until death comes. In multiple letters, he seems to be driven by a desire to 'rebel', to 'revolt', thinking over and evaluating manners that could possibly make someone else's and his own existence resistant to the impact of time. His search for 'methods of opposition' becomes most noticeable in letters dedicated to and in celebration of his closest friends and elderly models. In Pliny's view, they are not only praiseworthy because of their impeccable morals and/or political and administrative insights. What makes many of them also inspiring is their continuous fight against the transience of time and the (linear) progress of their lives towards death. When talking about and analysing their behaviour, Pliny sometimes seems to have the hope that also he may find a way (once) to free himself from time's constraints and to 'break through the walls that separate him from world of immortality'.

Significant in this respect is the opening letter of the third book (a book in which the matter of time forms a recurring theme).[39] Letter 3.1 is addressed to Calvisius Rufus, whom Pliny writes about his visits to Vetricius Spurinna, a former consul of Rome. Pliny does not try to hide his enormous admiration for Spurinna, particularly marvelling at the little influence that time seems to exert on him. Although his friend has passed his seventy-seventh year (*post septimum et septuagensimum annum*), Pliny tells that he remains 'physically agile and energetic' (*inde agile et vividum corpus*). His 'sight and hearing are unimpaired' (*aurium oculorum vigor integer*) and his old age has brought him 'nothing but wisdom' (*solaque ex senectute prudentia*). According to Pliny, this mental and physical vigour radiates directly on Spurinna's environment. When being in his company, nobody seems to be concerned anymore about the passing of time. Everything has become so pleasant and cheerful that no one cares about how long something lasts or about a 'meal prolonged into the night' (*sumit aliquid de nocte et aestate; nemini hoc longum est; tanta comitate convivium trahitur*).

[38] In the same letter, Pliny gives the rhetorical example of the Persian king Xerxes. After having lost almost his entire army in a battle against the Greeks, he 'wept to think of the end awaiting so many thousands in so short a time' (3.7: *mihi non venia solum dignae verum etiam laude videantur illae regiae lacrimae; nam ferunt Xersen, cum immensum exercitum oculis obisset, inlacrimasse, quod tot milibus tam brevis immineret occasus*).

[39] Gibson and Morello 2012, 104-136 offers an analysis of the way in which Pliny constructs Spurinna's portrait in the third book. They compare, moreover, this portrait to the one of Uncle Pliny, Corellius Rufus, Verginius Rufus and Silius Italicus, other figures that were somehow exemplary to Pliny (see also the first chapter of Lefèvre 2009). More generally, Henderson 2002; 2016 points out that Pliny, by picturing the image of others, gradually builds out his own self-portrait, his 'statue'.

By beginning his third book with a celebration of Spurinna, as a paragon of vitality, longevity and endurance, Pliny seems to counterbalance the more sombre opening and closure of the previous book. Reports on death, pain and loss, which are the topics of 2.1 and 2.20, must make space for the hope-giving story of a man on whom the passing of time appears to have no effect. If we can believe Pliny, Spurinna's secret lies in his extraordinary ability of organizing his existence in accordance to 'cyclical principles'. The way he leads his life is repeatedly defined by Pliny in a vocabulary that somehow suggests 'circularity', stating, for instance, that Spurinna orders his days *velut orbe* or *ut certus siderum cursus*. By implementing a 'circular' mode into his life, Spurinna has, at least at first sight, found an effective strategy to counterbalance the 'linearity' of time.[40]

As it appears from the remainder of Pliny's letter, in practice, Spurinna has incorporated the circularity into his existence in two ways. First, he is told to have organised his daily life in accordance to a strict routine (*senibus placida omnia et ordinate convenient (…). hanc regulam Spurinna constantissime servat*). He repeats the same actions on daily basis and rarely deviates from his habits. John Henderson speaks, therefore, of Spurinna's "monk-like" existence, in which the "cyclic rhythm secures his everyday",[41] and helps him "to fight off ageing".[42] Secondly, Spurinna's life could also be called circular in the (metaphorical) sense that he tries to 'resuscitate' or 're-live' great examples from the past. Throughout the *Epistulae*, it becomes clear that Pliny finds it important that virtues, morals and impeccable behaviour are passed on from generation to generation. In 3.3, he assures Corellia Hispulla, for instance, that he will help her find a teacher, who could stimulate her son to grow up in a way that would render him to resemble his admirable father and grandfather (3.3: *pater quoque et patruus inlustri laude conspicui. quibus omnibus ita demum similis adolescens*). In Pliny's view, good ethics and values may not become extinct when an exemplary practitioner dies but must be imitated and renewed by those who come after him. Spurinna, like no other, seems to embody this ideal: after having implemented the virtues from the past himself, as an old man he makes sure that they are handed over to younger contemporaries.[43] In his conversations with Pliny, for example, Spurinna is said to have frequently initiated him into the secrets of bygone ages and 'educated' him via the memorable stories of earlier periods (*quam pulchrum illud, quam dulce secretum. quantum ibi antiquitatis. quae facta, quos viros audias. quibus praeceptis imbuare*). This turns Spurinna into a sort of mediator between past and present, who

[40] Henderson 2002, 79: "The 'astrolabe' image removes teleology (…). At Spurinna's, time is cosmic eternity, the astrolabe's capture of time".

[41] Henderson 2002, 75.

[42] Henderson 2002, 79.

[43] Lefèvre 2009, 44: "*Spurinna hat in Plinius' Augen einen Charackter, wie er in 'ancient days' üblich war (…). In ihnen spricht die alte Zeit aus*".

prevents time and death from taking away the illustrious men from bygone ages and the morals they once stood for by keeping the memory of them alive.

This way of organising a life is said to have inspired Pliny, who admits wishing his own life to be similar to Spurinna's (*hanc ego vitam voto*). It would, however, be a mistake to think that he considers Spurinna's circularity as the ultimate or absolute method of opposition against the transience of time that could really help him to avoid, for instance, the tragic fate of those mentioned in letters 2.1 and 2.20. Despite his admiration for Spurinna, Pliny appears to comprehend that Spurinna's strategy of resistance is nothing more than a temporary solution. He suggests this most explicitly near the end of the letter. There, he expresses the desire that, as soon as the 'thought of his years permits him to sound a retreat' (*ratio aetatis receptui canere permiserit*), he may live towards his death in the same manner as Spurinna (*eundem mihi cursum, eundem terminum statuo*). In this way, he remarkably closes the letter with a reference to his own ageing as well as to Spurinna's mortality. This brief allusion to the moment of his own and Spurinna's death, as John Henderson rightly observes,[44] in the end relativises the 'huge potentials' of the circular mode of living implied earlier. Both he and Spurinna remain subdued to the linear logic of time, chained within this 'prison without exits'.

Throughout the rest of the third book (and the collection), Pliny mentions several other friends and models who, despite their efforts, cannot win their fight against time and avoid the arrival of death.[45] For some, time has provided an even more cruel destiny and induced them to fall prey to oblivion.[46] This repeatedly brings Pliny to the conclusion that the only, reliable key to the 'world of immortality', can be found in a literary creation (cf. 3.7: *(...) certe studiis proferamus, et quatenus nobis denegatur diu vivere, relinquamus aliquid, quo nos vixisse testemur*).[47] Thereby, he appears to ascribe a function to the *Epistulae* which

[44] Henderson 2002, 82.

[45] I already mentioned Uncle Pliny, who constantly felt chased by time. Although he tried to be as economically as possible, it was always clear that he would not win his fight against time. He passed away when he was fifty-six (much younger than Spurinna in 3.1). Another example is Silius Italicus, whose death, for Pliny, embodies the end of the Neronian age (Silius was Nero's last consul). As Gibson and Morello 2012, 123 indicate, Silius serves as a "negative example in book 3" by whom Pliny does not feel inspired. This is not only due to the fact that Silius opted for a rather passive and unproductive life, especially when compared to Spurinna and Uncle Pliny. Pliny significantly opens the letter by mentioning that Silius committed suicide, seemingly indicating that he gave up his fight against time. A profound comparison of the differences between Spurinna's, Uncle Pliny's and Silius' daily routines can be found in Gibson and Morello 2012, 130 and Henderson 2002, 87.

[46] Probably the most deplore example can be found in 6.10, in which Pliny tells about the tomb of Verginius Rufus, a monument completely neglected and forgotten by his heirs. I will come back to this letter in the fourth paragraph.

[47] Pliny gives a similar message in the other letters in the third book. The occasion for Pliny to elaborate upon his uncle's life is a request from his addressee, Baebius Macer. The latter is said to have intensively read (*lectitas*) his uncle's work and have asked Pliny for some extra information. At the end of 3.1, Pliny says that his letter

somehow resembles the one Vladimir Nabokov has attributed to *Speak, Memory*. As explained in the beginning of this paragraph, Nabokov frames the autobiography as an attempt to 'rebel' against the mathematical experience of time which has been imposed on humanity. He has turned to a literary medium and transferred his personal experiences into art, where they can get a new life in a modified form. This medium would be enabled to crystallise his existence and deliver 'conclusive evidence' of it, thereby subverting the idea that every life should necessarily progress towards an end, a point of non-existence (it may be sustained in art). In a somewhat related way, we could say, Pliny's statements about the eternalising potentials of a literary text may not merely be considered as a literary convention or an expression of his literary aspirations. They must be taken seriously and understood within the context of his broader search for a strategy to guard himself against the impact of time, against its 'linear progress' towards death. The way in which Pliny conceptualises time differs, of course, of Nabokov's Newtonian presentation of the phenomenon. But he similarly sees it as something one should rebel against. Since a strategy like the one of Spurinna ultimately appears to be insufficient, the letter collection, so Pliny implies, is his only hope of conveying 'a proof of his existence', rendering his life, in a sense, to be 'frozen in art, halted in space, eternal' (cf. *aliquid, quo nos vixisse testemur*). It should function as his ticket to immortality and as the medicine that must finally release him from his worries about death and oblivion, from his, to say it with a term borrowed from Nabokov, persistent 'chronophobia'.

1.2 A Resistant Literary Form

In the second half of his chapter on *Speak, Memory*, Will Norman explores how Nabokov's alleged ambition to 'rebel against time' has formed the remarkable structure of the work.[48] He argues that the many violations of chronology in the autobiography must be seen as a strategy to prevent the artistic representation of his life, which must convey

about Spurinna must be considered as a sort of contract that should remind him of Spurinna's way of living when he will be retired. Via both letters, literature thus is represented as something that sustains and induces memory. Also, the closing letter of the third book is significant in this respect. In 3.21, Pliny deplores the death of Valerius Martialis, an honourable man, whose epigrams had (perhaps) the ability to grant someone eternal glory (*tametsi, quid homini potest dari maius quam gloria et laus et aeternitas*). This letter may be interpreted as a response to 3.1: the illusion of immortality which we see in Spurinna is opposed to real *aeternitas* inherent in a literary creation.

[48] For the following analysis, I mainly rely on Norman 2015, 55-69. He builds further upon the survey by James Foster (1993).

conclusive evidence of his existence, from falling itself prey to the constraints of mathematical time.

To understand Norman's argument, it might be useful to contrast *Speak, Memory* first with traditional non-fictionalised autobiographies. With his autobiographical memoir, Nabokov has placed himself within a long literary tradition. Over the course of time, many authors felt the need to write down the story of their lives and leave posterity a carefully constructed image of themselves. This has not changed in the twentieth century in which the genre of autobiography has kept on flourishing. A remarkable tendency in this tradition, especially in modern times, is that authors have become more and more inclined to conceptualise a human lifeline in a rather linear way. Many modern autobiographical texts have followed a chronological thread and respected the order of events in the lives of the writers. Nabokov deliberately appears to reject this way of representation, seemingly understanding the risks for and inconsistencies with the 'act of rebellion' he undertakes by writing *Speak, Memory*. If he would have given form to the artistic transformation of his life in a rigorously chronological order, in terms of "clock- and calendar-time", this would have meant that he would have constructed *Speak, Memory* in accordance to the linear logic of time against which he paradoxically wants to rebel by creating the work. He would have imposed, so he (chronophobically maybe?) implies sometimes, the same constraints as those from which he claims to be suffering in reality on his literary life, which might have put his entire project, his ambition to free himself from the chains of absolute, mathematical time, "under pressure". The form, that we can find, for example, in traditional autobiographies, would not "be resistant" enough to protect the literary proof of his existence and guarantee him to break out of the prison of Newtonian time.[49]

According to Norman, this (alleged) concern seems to be one of the elements that has informed the compositional choices made in *Speak, Memory*. His understanding of the paradoxes and dangers related to linear representation is suggested to have incited him not to use a strictly chronological method of arrangement. Instead of adopting the composition technique typical of many autobiographical texts into the artistic transformation of his life, he has brought episodes together that, speaking from a chronological point of view, may not be juxtaposed. By frequently violating the chronology, Nabokov seemingly aims to undermine the traditional, linear way in which he has been taught to think about human life and avoid letting the literary proof of his existence to become subdued to the Newtonian time-laws "against which he seeks to stand up".[50] He prefers a mode of representation that does not rigorously respect the

[49] Norman 2015, 57.

[50] Norman 2015, 58.

periodical terms usually imposed on a human life (e.g. childhood, then adolescence, then young-adulthood, etc.) and allows for bringing distant moments from his existence together (like he metaphorically suggests in the following sentence: "I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another" (109)).[51]

As James Foster records,[52] this way of transforming his life seems to have affinities with his childhood experience of time. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Nabokov has portrayed his childhood as a period in which the time-relation between two or more events was rather subjectively experienced and defined by him as a young boy, not by the mathematical clock- and calendar-time. Although this experience has gone lost in 'real life', with the chronological deviations, he seems to have found a technique to implement a variant of it in the artistic medium into which he has transferred elements from his personal experience. In *Speak, Memory,* chunks of his life are grouped together because he subjectively thinks they belong together, regardless of the actual mathematical chronological distance between them.[53] By means of this analogy to his childhood, Nabokov, so it appears, does not only suggest that he, within *Speak, Memory*, has been enabled to modify and transform his initial experiences and subdue them to the laws and rules of art that could create different experiences. He also gives the impression that the autobiographical form he has developed is an "adequate strategy of resistance" that could make his life no longer susceptible to the linear passing of time, to the danger of non-existence, of which so many people in his work seem to be afraid.[54] Via the deviations from chronology, Nabokov, as Norman records, seems to indicate that he has "structurally armed the literary proof of his existence" against the impact of time and

[51] Norman 2015, 64. See also Foster1993, 186: "The very impossibility [of most events in his autobiography] as actual experience does express the autobiographer's power to move (...) through remembered time".

[52] Foster 1993, 186-195. Norman 2015, 65 picks up his ideas: "For Nabokov, the idea of prehistory corresponds more directly to his own childhood, family and acquaintances in the moments before the Russian Revolution and the death of his father. These personal memories also gesture forward and beyond the rupture of exile, but principally insofar as they anticipate their own future transposition into the aesthetic realm by the artist".

[53] As Norman 2015 argues, *Speak, Memory* may also be seen as the 'autobiographical version' of Walter Benjamin's view of history. Benjamin, who wrote through bitter historical experience, saw history as a consecution of events that over and again resulted in and linearly progressed towards destruction, tyranny and war. Therefore, he wanted to create an alternative artistic constellation that offered a new more personal, intimate and humane view of history, his *Arcade Project*. According to Benjamin, the only way to achieve this goal was by searching for alternative, thematically coherent patterns throughout history, which we would not see when we approach and think about the past from a merely chronological point of view.

[54] Nabokov 1967, 311 poetically describes the chosen structure as follows: "A family of serene clouds in miniature, an accumulation of brilliant convolutions, anachronistic in their creaminess (...), perfectly in every detail; (...) my marvelous tomorrow ready to be delivered to me".

rendered his life to become 'halted in space, timeless', preventing it from disappearing into the "abyss" of death.[55]

Given the affinities pointed out above with *Speak, Memory*, a question that can be asked is whether the composition of the *Epistulae* may be explained in a similar way. Can a relationship be observed between Pliny's conceptualisation of time and the recurrent deviations from the linear thread within the collection? Are the violations of chronology somehow interconnected with the ambition to protect his existence, via a literary medium, against the passing of time?

A good starting point for answering these questions might be the very first letter of the *Epistulae*. In the second sentence, which has already been quoted in the introduction, Pliny himself attracts the readers' attention to the notion of chronology by stating that, while composing his collection, he 'has not preserved the order of time' (*collegi non servato temporis ordine)*. Hereby, he does not only incite the curiosity of the readers, who start wondering what method of arrangement Pliny has applied instead. He simultaneously also implies that the text we are going to read could have been arranged otherwise, e.g. strictly chronologically, but that for some reason he has decided not to do so.[56]

Pliny justifies this structural choice by saying that he 'was not writing a history' (*neque enim historiam componebam*).[57] This phrase, as has been remarked by several scholars, contains the first reference to the genre of historiography on which Pliny will continue coming back throughout the collection.[58] Numerous letters explicitly praise practitioners of the genre for their admirable literary efforts. Others discuss the stylistic requirements related to historiography or celebrate its potential to preserve great deeds from past and present times for future generations. In yet other letters, Pliny even seems to have incorporated thematic or formal features conventional in historiography, thereby giving his collection a sort of historiographical flavour.[59] This strong engagement with the genre

[55] Norman 2015, 57.

[56] Pliny's rejection of historiographic linearity in the first letter has mostly been interpreted as a reference to the internal organization of each individual book, in which the letters are arranged in a varied but meaningful order. Keeping the deviations from the linear progress of time in mind that frequently appear across the work, however, the statement may also programmatically comment upon the order of the nine books as a collection.

[57] Woodman 1989, 135 observes that chronological ordering was recognised as "above all a historiographical technique in Antiquity".

[58] Marchesi 2008, 144 states: "Pliny, by programmatically declaring that his epistles are not-history in his first letter, thus allows the notion of history to surface as he discards it". The rejection of history, so to say, would reversely invite the reader to start thinking about the letters in terms of and as historiography.

[59] Traub 2016 illustrates how Pliny integrates themes typical of historiography into his letter collection and narrates them in the 'highly literary manner' of the genre. Yet, at the same time, he does not lose sight of the epistolographic context in which he incorporates them. Pliny adapts the historiographic elements in such a way that they perfectly fit within the new generic context of the letter collection. See also Newlands 2010, which

has brought Ilaria Marchesi to the conclusion that, within the *Epistulae*, historiography appears to serve as "the subconsciousness of epistolography".[60] If we ought to believe Pliny, she says, the only clear difference between his work and that of historians, as emphasised in the first letter, concerns the way they arrange, order and present the events and occasions on which they report and comment.[61]

Why does Pliny so explicitly reject, from the start, the ordering principles that he says to be characteristic of historiography? Although the ancient literary tradition brought forth some letter collections that follow a strict chronological lead,[62] in general, the composition of these kinds of works much more often depended on the (non-chronological) technique of *variatio*. There was thus no need for Pliny to justify that he has not consistently preserved the order of time. Why, then, does he underline that he has not wanted to adopt the historiographical linear manner of representation?[63] What does it imply about the compositional choices he has made in his collection (including the recurring violations of chronology)?

A letter in which Pliny extensively reflects upon historiography and the great potentials of the genre is 5.8. This letter is framed as a response to Titinius Capito, who would have encouraged him a while before to start writing historiography. Pliny feels flattered by Capito's demand and admits being tempted by the idea. Unfortunately, he says, he must decline the proposal, as he does not have enough time to engage himself in yet another literary enterprise. At this moment, Pliny writes, he is completely preoccupied with

specifically focuses upon the manner in which Pliny gives form to the account of the eruption of the Vesuvius, and Ash 2003, which explores Pliny's usage of historiographical themes, such as death-scenes.

[60] Marchesi 2008, 145.

[61] Marchesi 2008, 146. Cf. Tzounakas 2007, 47: "By drawing attention to the fact that his work differs from that of historiography only in that it lacks chronological order, Pliny is implying that in all other aspects there is not much difference".

[62] Think, for instance, of Cicero's letters to Atticus or Seneca's epistles to Lucilius.

[63] Tzounakas 2007, 48 argues that Pliny's rejection in the first letter may be considered as an intergeneric play with topoi conventional in historiography: "Such comments are frequently found in historiography, where the historian may feel the need to state that his approach to an event is unbiased. Interpreted in this light, Pliny's words could be seen in the same context as similar statements made by Sallust, Livy or Tacitus (...). At the same time, Pliny remains loyal to the principle of *verum,* which is a central axis of historiography. Thus, he seems to espouse a position that points to a conventional *topos* in the prologues of Roman historians, the so-called *persona* where the historian gives information about his person and the method he followed in the composition of his work, including a statement concerning his objectivity". Thereby, Tzounakas implies that Pliny's rejection of the genre paradoxically reveals and underlines his alliance to it. Although this interpretation is undoubtedly plausible, it does not exclude the questions raised above, coming forth from a more literal reading of the second sentence of the first letter. The sentence simultaneously guides the readers in two directions, obliging them to wonder what Pliny's (possible) affinity with historiography implies *and* why he dismisses its representation of time.

publishing his rhetorical speeches, which is such a great undertaking that it can impossibly be combined with something else (especially not with writing in a high and demanding genre as historiography) (*utrumque tam magnum est, ut abunde sit alterum efficere*).[64] It would be foolish to initiate a new literary project of which he cannot be certain whether he will have the time to complete it. For, as he said earlier in his letter, 'everything left incomplete might not have been begun' (*quidquid non est peractum, pro non incohato est*). An unfinished text, in Pliny's view, is very likely doomed to vanish into oblivion, to 'die with its author' (*mecum pariter intercidat*).

These lines may remind the readers of a similar statement he made three letters before, in 5.5, wherein the decease of Gaius Fannius is bemoaned. The letter especially commemorates Fannius' qualities as a writer. He would have been quite well-known in Rome as the author working on a piece about the times under Nero, in particularly about those who were put to death or banished by the emperor (*exitus occisorum aut relegatorum a Nerone*). According to Rhiannon Ash, the vocabulary Pliny uses to describe the work indicates that it concerned a sort of historiography.[65] Unfortunately, at the moment he died, Fannius had only completed three books (*tres libros absolverat*). Pliny therefore states that it is very unlikely that Fannius' work, in its unfinished state (*opus imperfectum reliquit*), will ever achieve eternal fame. 'Death', he complains, 'always seems to be untimely when it comes to those who have the plan to create something immortal' (*mihi autem videtur acerba semper et immatura mors eorum, qui immortale aliquid parant*).

It seems to be no coincidence that the letters regarding the decease of Gaius Fannius and Titinius Capito's proposal about writing historiography follow almost immediately on one another in the fifth book. Both letters at the same time revolve around the art of writing *historia* and reflect upon the danger of incompletion/oblivion. Pliny does nowhere explicitly claim that there would be an interconnection between these matters, in the sense that the chance to leave a work unfinished would be significantly higher when one would compose historiography than if one would practice another genre. But he, at least,

[64] Baier 2003 and Woodman 2012 explore the dynamic interrelation that Pliny develops in 5.8 between historiography and oratory. According to Woodman, the letter "gives the impression that Pliny intended to write history and to supply for his own era the literary record which Cicero had memorably failed to supply for his". See also Gibson and Whitton 2016, 30 for further references.

[65] Ash 2003, 221-225 argues that Pliny, throughout the *Epistulae*, usually categorises *exitus*-accounts in the domain of historiography: "Pliny's decision to include *exitus* letters in his collection as a significant category not only reflects the general interests of historians writing during the early principate (at least according to Seneca the Elder), but also anticipates at least on one strand of Tacitus's *Annals*, with its unusually high number of death scenes" (223). Gibson and Morello 2012, 298 similarly considers Fannius' work, as described in 5.5, as an example of historiography.

hints a couple of times in this direction in 5.5 and 5.8. He seems to suggest two reasons which both are remarkably related to the genre's linear representation of time.[66]

The first explanation, so is implied, for why there would be a correlation between composing *historia* and the *opus imperfectum* concerns the nature of the material around which a historiographical work revolves. A historiographer usually gives an account of a series of events which are well-confined in time, space and subject (e.g. a generation of emperors or the victims under Nero). His work can only be considered as finished when it has reported on all the main events that happened in the demarcated period and has reached the chosen chronological end point. In case the author would feel that death is near (like Gaius Fannius did: *accidit (...) praesensit*), the fixed amount of material causes it to be very difficult for him to bring his text hastily to a close. Furthermore, working with well-demarcated material entails that the author, before he starts writing, must make a well-considered choice which he cannot second-guess. Someone as broadly interested as Pliny could thereby be faced with unsolvable dilemmas. At the end of the letter to Capito, for example, Pliny declares that, even if he would decide to become a historiographer, he would have no idea on what topic he should focus: the recent or the more remote past (*vetera et scripta aliis? (...) intacta et nova*?)? If he would choose to be a historiographer, Pliny understands, he would not be allowed to treat both and include events from different periods in time within one work. In this way, his account of the past would almost per definition remain 'partial' or 'incomplete'.[67] The conceptualisation of historiography as a time-bound genre, offering a linear representation of the events within a certain period,

[66] In the extensive fourth chapter of her monograph on Pliny (2008, 144-206), Ilaria Marchesi argues that the letter to Titinius Capito, in which the boundaries of historiography and oratory are blurred, "previews Pliny's inclusion of material concerning historiographical writing (*Ep.*6.16) and an actual fragment of history (*Ep.*6.20)" later in the collection (149). Like Baier and Woodman (see footnote 64), she believes that Pliny via the *recusatio* of historiography paradoxically emphasises his affinity with the genre. In what follows, I do not intend to refute Marchesi's, Woodman's or Baier's interpretations. I only aim to indicate that Pliny's enthusiasm for historiography and its possibilities goes hand in hand with a certain fear of the risks related to the genre's linear representation of time. The letter itself interestingly seems to produce both readings simultaneously.

[67] Marchesi 2008, 170 offers a more optimistic reading of the end of the letter: "In a final twist of his argument, Pliny turns the impossibility of historiography into a commitment to write history. Capito should accept Pliny's challenge and pick a topic anyway. His choice will pave the way for Pliny's historical writing". Although this interpretation is certainly plausible, I believe we could also understand Pliny's demand the other way around, seeing the choice Capito must make as an unsolvable dilemma (and thus as another indication of the impossibility for Pliny to start writing history). I do not agree with Henry Traub (2016, 132-133), who suggests that Pliny himself solves the dilemma by including a remarkably high number of historiographical letters in his collection that treat topics from more recent times. As the letter on the life of Vetricius Spurinna has shown in the previous paragraph, for instance, Pliny's view on the past is definitely not that rigid. He sees the remote past as something that returns in the recent past and then in the present, and against whose background events which happened more lately must be defined and understood.

seems to exclude the possibility of creating a 'complete history', one in which the entire past is present.

The second reason for why there may be a link between historiography and uncompletion has to do with the constant state of awareness, in which the historiographer is brought by writing history, of the temporariness of his existence. In 5.5, Gaius Fannius' death is told to have been forecasted in a dream. While sleeping, Fannius saw an image of himself being ready to continue working out his history of the times under Nero. Suddenly, the ghost of the former emperor turned up and started reading the volumes Fannius had already completed (in his dream). After three volumes, Nero's ghost was tired of reading and departed as abruptly as he showed up. Fannius comprehended this dream as a sign, Pliny recounts, that his 'writing would end at the point where Nero stopped reading, and so it did' (5.5: *tamquam idem futurus esset scribendi finis, qui fuisset ill legendi; et fuit idem*).[68] Although the appearance of the haunting Nero may generate several interpretations, one way to understand Fannius' dream is by seeing it as an embodiment of the awareness of mortality that will affect every historiographer at some point. By concentrating on figures which already belong to the past, the historiographer, perhaps more than practitioners of other genres, is confronted with the fact that the course of everyone's life is linear and inevitably leads towards an end. The historiographer realises that he will once fall prey to the passing of time and become part of the past himself (like Fannius, who is overtaken by the history he was describing in his present).[69] On a more metaphorical level, and considered from the viewpoint of the historiographer himself, this turns historiography (once more) into an 'art of incompletion'. As history will continue progressing after he himself belongs to the domain of 'what was gone', he understands that there will always be 'things that will be' that he will not have been enabled to have written down. Death, so he realises, will at some point interrupt his undertaking as historiographer and render it to be impossible to compose a complete history (of all times). There will always be a future, without him, that he will not have been allowed to put into words.

Pliny, we could say, thus in several ways hints at a relationship between writing *historia* and the notion of the *opus imperfectum*. Although he undoubtedly favours the genre, the strictly linear way in which it usually treats and conceptualises the past increases the risk

[68] I have used the term 'ghost' to refer to the image of Nero, yet Felton 1999, 74 rightly observes that Pliny does technically not represent the former emperor in this way. Instead of an apparition, the appearance' of Nero is an "omen" or a "vision", which is "the product of Fannius' imagination (*visus est; imaginatus est*)". We may, as Felton does, see this as a sign of the trauma that Nero's reign had caused, and that was still tangible in Pliny's days.

[69] Felton 1999, 75 and Ash 2003 link Nero's appearance in 5.5 to other letters containing ghost-story-like narratives, such as 3.5 and 7.27. Ash 2003 also see resemblances with the appearances of ghosts and shades that are common in epic poetry.

to have written a work that, from a certain point of view, remains incomplete and thus runs the danger of vanishing into oblivion. His refusal to comply with Titinius Capito's proposal to start writing historiography in 5.8, therefore, may have a deeper 'chronophobic' reason than one might think at first sight, being grounded in the fear that the genre's linear representation of time would potentially not allow its author to finish his creation (in a literal or more metaphorical sense) and let his name survive after his own time comes.

This interpretation, I believe, allows us to develop a new hypothesis about the composition of the collection and the explicit rejection of the historiographical method of arrangement in the very first letter. Perhaps, this rejection can be seen as an indication that the 'preservation of the order of time' would have produced a literary form of which he could not be entirely certain that it would be 'resistant enough' to protect the literary proof of his existence against the linear logic of time. If he would have adopted the linear historiographical mode of representation and arranged his collection in a strictly chronological manner, he would have told the story of his life in a way that he himself associates with the danger of uncompletion and oblivion. He would have exposed the artistic representation of his life, so his chronophobia whispers, to the risk of running the same fate as he does in reality (passing away, instead of surviving), which would put his 'entire literary project under pressure'. The recurring violations of chronology over the course of his collection can maybe be seen as a strategy to help him avoid the dangers inherent to a strictly historiographical mode of composition. Bringing distant moments in his life together might be a method to 'structurally arm' the literary form by which he wants to preserve his existence against the passing of time to which he falls prey in reality and on the other hand to make sure that it will be granted access into the world of timelessness and eternity.

Pliny does nowhere explicitly point out the function of the deviations from chronology. But he seems to suggest some possibilities over the course of his collection. One of these appears to be implied in 5.8 within the context of his refusal of Titinius Capito's proposal. Instead of initiating a new literary project, he says, it would be better to finish first the undertakings, in particular his oratorical work, that he has already started up. For, as soon as he would have completed these texts and 'executed the last revisions', he would be released from the strong pressure to publish a completed literary testimony before his death (*egi magnas et graves causas. has, etiamsi mihi tenuis ex iis spes, destino retractare, ne tantus ille labor meus, nisi hoc quod reliquum est studii addidero, mecum pariter intercidat*).[70]

[70] Marchesi 2008, 163 argues that also these sentences are ambiguous, at the same time rejecting and supporting the plan to start writing a history.

Although the latter statement makes perfect sense within the context of 5.8, we may wonder whether his mentioning of 'revising old work' (*destino retractare*), as the preferred alternative of writing *historia*, might have a wider significance. As Ruth Morello has cogently argued, the verb *retractare*, like *emandare,* is a loaded term in the *Epistulae*. It is not only used in its literal meaning (i.e. doing corrections).[71] Within several letters, Pliny also uses the verb in a more metaphorical/meta-poetical sense to refer to some cyclical movements which can be observed in the collection. Since Pliny only addresses a quite limited set of subjects throughout the nine books, it frequently occurs that, for example, a letter in the middle of the work treats a topic that was already handled somewhere in the beginning and of which will be spoken again later on. This creates 'repetitive patterns' running through the work via which certain matters, as Pliny implies, are 'revised' or 'revisited' (*retractare/emendare*) over and again. The letters responsible for the deviations from chronology form an important part of this tendency. Mostly referring to Pliny's youth and early career, they keep on reminding the readers of a time period, themes and issues that were already portrayed and discussed in the first books.

These cyclical tendencies, including those caused by the letters causing deviations from chronology, have predominantly been understood as a way to guide his readers through the collection in a manner that is interesting and intellectually stimulating. By incorporating letters revisiting themes and events that have already been treated earlier in the collection, Pliny invites his readers to think over these themes once more and often offers the opportunity to approach them from a slightly different angle.[72] Another (but complementary) interpretation might be to comprehend the cyclical tendencies in response to Pliny's concerns about the linear representation of time. By stating in 5.8 that he prefers to 'revise' his earlier (oratorical) work, instead of writing historiography, he should not necessarily suggest that he favours the former genre more than the latter. But, in keeping with the metaphorical meaning of the verb *retractare*, Pliny might want to indicate that the 'cyclical way' of representing life, causing certain aspects and periods of his existence to be 'revised' over and again in his work, is more suitable than the historiographical mode of arrangement associated with the danger of incompletion and oblivion (in contrast with the state of completion that would be reached by the activity

[71] Morello 2015. See also Gibson and Morello's (2012) final chapter, titled 'The grand design. How to read the collection'. Therein, they analyse the meta-poetical statements throughout the collection, from which it becomes clear that Pliny considers reading first and foremost as a repetitive act. He encourages us "to re-read and revise" his text and to follow the threads set out by the cyclical patterns (247).

[72] Morello 2015, 184: "His persistent invitations to 'look again, read again and think again' spur on a reader's intellectual engagement not only with the world around him/herself, but with Pliny's own collection".

of '*retractare*').[73] By integrating cyclical movements in his collection, amongst others by violating chronology, so he may indicate, he would avoid to expose the literary proof of his life to the risks he would run if he would have ordered the story in his existence in a rigorously linear-historiographical way. He would thereby better prevent the 'conclusive evidence of his existence' which he wants to deliver via the *Epistulae* from being 'subdued to the laws and transience of linear time against which he aims to stand up'.

Why would the cyclical movements, in particular those generated by the deviations from chronology, decrease the danger of incompletion related to the historiographical method of arrangement? In what way would they render the letter collection to be better resistant to the passing of time? These cyclical patterns first of all help Pliny, so it seems, to make sure that his collection is at any time 'concluded' by suggesting 'multiple endings'. As several scholars have illustrated,[74] the ninth book of the *Epistulae*, for example, contains a remarkably huge number of letters that somehow refer to themes and issues from the first book. By firmly linking the opening and the ending of his collection, Pliny succeeds at 'making the circle round' and properly concluding his work. Yet, as Christopher Whitton has argued, this technique seems not to be restricted to the last book. He points, for instance, to the final letter of the seventh book (7.33), addressing a treason trial that happened in Pliny's early career. Whitton has recorded several elements within the letter that create a "sense of an ending" and which suggest that it would have made a "superb conclusion" to the collection.[75] Something similar can be observed, in his view, within some letters in the second, third and fifth book.[76] By integrating these "false endings" in the *Epistulae*, (partly) caused by the deviations from chronology,[77] it appears that Pliny seeks to guard the literary evidence of his life against the danger of incompletion. Whenever he 'would have fallen dead', so to say, his letter collection would have had an end and would have been ready to enter the world of immortality.[78]

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[73] Cf. Gibson and Morello 2012, 239: "As readers, we too should consider returning to, and refining, interpretative work already done. (...) It reflects and supports the literary mission which he has already defined for himself in 5.8, the famous letter in which he resists Titinius Capito's encouragement to turn his hand to historiography. (...) Pliny's modesty makes him revise and review even the work in which he has professional expertise, and his message to his readers to think again about everything they have learned in their earlier experience as readers of his collection reflects his attitude to his own career".

[74] Gibson 2015; Whitton 2013, 54-61.

[75] Whitton 2013, 48. The reader is pulled back to the beginning of the letter collection by the reference to the trial from Pliny's early career as well as by a "lexical and thematic ring-composition" that creates a "symmetrical reprise" with the first book(s).

[76] Whitton 2013, 46-47.

[77] Whitton 2013, whose article is significantly titled 'Trapdoors. The Falsity of Closure in Pliny's *Epistles*'.

[78] Although not explicitly referring to letter 5.8, Ash 2003, 214 draws a similar conclusion, yet from a different angle (the actual editorial practice): "Pliny, by rejecting a continuous historical narrative, not only dispenses

A second reason why the cyclical patterns produced by the violations of chronology would help him to make the literary proof of his existence resistant to the impact of time is that they render the artistic representation of his life to have affinities with Vetricius Spurinna's way of living which Pliny so admired. As explained in the previous paragraph, Pliny expresses his strong admiration for Vetricius Spurinna in letter 3.1, who fights off ageing by organising his life in a circular, almost cosmic and eternal manner. Although Pliny realises that this method of opposition will ultimately not be powerful enough, he apparently understands, as becomes clear from other letters as well, the potential of circularity.[79] The implementation of the cyclical movements via the deviations from chronology can be seen as an attempt to simulate Spurinna's techniques of resistance in his text (on the level of composition). What does not sufficiently work in 'real' life, Pliny's thought goes, can have an effect in the literary representation of his existence. The deviations from chronology in the collection, we could say, both because of their mirroring of Spurinna's way of living and the creation of multiple endings, thus seems to help Pliny to 'structurally arm the literary proof of his existence' against the passing of time of which he and many of his addressees with him seem to be so afraid in their daily lives.[80]

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with the problem of chronological order, he also allowed himself to scope letters which he had not yet written, about events which had not yet happened. The advantage was that Pliny could simply keep going on: even if he died before his project was finished, the value and standing of his literary endeavour as a whole would not be undermined as a result".

[79] In several letters, circularity is associated with the flow of nature. The final letter of the fourth book (4.33), for instance, describes how a spring three times a day is filled and emptied 'with a regular increase and decrease of water' (*ter in die statis auctibus ac diminutionibus crescit descrescitque*). In 8.20, Pliny depicts Lake Vadimon, a lake with a 'circular form' 'without a single irregular bend or curve, and so evenly proportioned that it might have been artificially shaped and hollowed out' (*lacus est in similitudinem iacentis rotae circumscriptus et undique aequalis: nullus sinus, obliquitas nulla, omnia dimensa paria, et quasi artificis manu cavata et excise*). In the lake little islands float, each with its own peculiar shape and size. Sometimes 'the islands join together to look like a continuous piece of land' (*interdum iunctae copulataeque et continenti similes*). Just like the spring in 4.33, the stream of Lake Vadimon is constant and produces every day the same sort of ripples on the water surface. Nature, so it appears, is not subjected to change and its repetitive movements are usually not disturbed. It seems as if Pliny seeks to bring a similar flow into the literary representation of his life, suggesting eternity by causing the same themes to return over and again. Not coincidently, both 4.33 and 8.20 may be read meta-poetically. Barchiesi 2005, 330 and Marchesi 2008, 248, moreover, point out that Pliny metaphorically represents the transition from the first to the ninth book as a shift from dawn to dusk, thereby framing his letter collection as a natural process. For Pliny's play with the literary tradition in letter 8.20, see Lefèvre 2009, 257-260.

[80] As Traub 2016 observes, another advantage of rejecting the strictly historiographical-chronological mode of telling is that Pliny is enabled to thematically re-group events that happened throughout Roman history (and his life), regardless of the chronological distance between them. By approaching the past in this way, and by searching for thematic threads throughout times, he goes around the difficult choice between the recent or the remote past that a 'real' historian is expected to make (5.8).

The latter sentence deliberately echoes Will Norman's conclusion of his analysis of the remarkable deviations from the linear course of time in *Speak, Memory* with which this paragraph has opened. As Norman has argued, Nabokov has rejected the linear representation form, which we can find for example in traditional autobiographies, being aware that it might have put his entire literary project under pressure. By violating chronology and bringing distant moments in his life in contact with one another, he seemingly aims to subvert the mathematical and linear experience of time to which humanity has been condemned since Newton's conceptualisation and to provide a literary form that could safeguard his life's spot into the domain of timelessness. In a similar way, we could explain the function of the many references to Pliny's youth and early manhood spread over the course of the collection. The deviations from chronology may not be seen as 'deplorable inconsistencies' (*infra*) or as an indication of the compositional flexibility of the genre. They serve as the core of Pliny's Nabokov-like method to make the literary representation of his life 'resistant' to the impact of time.[81] They help him not to be exposed to the danger of incompletion and oblivion associated with the historiographical mode of arrangement. Via the violations of chronology, so it seems, Pliny hopes to have developed a literary form that could prevent his life to disappear into 'the abyss' of death and guarantee its place in the world of eternity. He seems to have found, in other words, a resistant literary form, which is the ultimate medicine to release himself from his 'persistent chronophobia'.

1.3 Speak, Existence, through the Reader's Memory

In an article published in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Roy Gibson examines some modern and early modern editions of letter collections from Antiquity. He notices that during the last centuries, more and more editors were apparently disturbed somehow by the compositional choices made by ancient authors. Especially when recording violations of chronology, editors often felt the need to 'restore' these deviations and sometimes re-arranged the entire collection:

[81] I do not agree with Gibson 2012, 69 that suggests that the "macro-chronology" in the *Epistulae* is "perhaps not so immediately evident or important as the existence of thematic connections between adjacent letters". As I have illustrated, from the first letter on there is a constant tension between chronological and non-chronological progress.

> For eight – i.e. nearly three quarters – of our letter collections have been chronologically re-ordered in modern or early modern editions. Of these eight editorial rearrangements, seven have taken place in editions that were either authoritative or widely used in their day. In several cases, the editions, in fact, remain either authoritative or widely used.[82]

Gibson consequently points out that the chronological violations in ancient letter collections are not 'mistakes' but must be understood in a historical context wherein the "reader expectations" differed from ours.

Gibson's observation gives rise to the question to what sort of reading process Pliny's *Epistulae*, via its composition, gives form. Pliny several times indicates to understand that his ambition to eternalise the literary proof of his existence can never be fulfilled without the readers (so even despite the resistant literary form in which he has shaped his collection). Only when the readers save the *Epistulae* deep in their memories, Pliny will be granted the state of immortality he has been hoping for.[83] But whether and, if so, do Pliny's compositional choices help him to impose the artistic evidence of his life on his reader's memory? As the behaviour of the editors mentioned above shows, some (early) modern readers would probably think the frequent violations of chronology to be distractive and would rather prefer a narrative that rigorously respects the course of time. But does the form Pliny has applied really work as contra-productive as they would say?

To give an answer to these questions, it might be useful to make a detour once more via Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*. The work perhaps contains some features that can help us think about the role of the reader in the *Epistulae*.

In his analysis of the task of the reader in the autobiography, Michael Rodgers starts with a discussion of the alleged literary genesis of the work. Nabokov at several occasions represented the text as the outcome of an intense mental process, of a profound exploration and investigation of his own memory.[84] As he confided to his friend Edmund Wilson, *Speak, Memory* could be seen as "a new type of autobiography". It should be considered as "a scientific attempt" to explore and trace back "all the tangled threads of his personality".[85] He declared to have worked himself a way through his mind and the snatches of his past with the purpose of offering a "correlated assemblage of personal

[82] Gibson 2012, 62.

[83] Lefèvre 2009, 285-289. See also a series of letters in the ninth book in which Pliny boasts that his literary products find favour with many readers (9.8; 9.11; 9.20; 9.23; 9.25; 9.28; 9.31).

[84] Apple 1991, xix.

[85] Boyd 1999.

recollections" (10).[86] This strong reliance on memory during the genesis of his work, as Nabokov implies multiple times in the text, has informed almost every single aspect of the autobiography, not in the least the remarkable structure discussed in the previous paragraphs. For example, a mnemonic principle to which he frequently refers over the course of *Speak, Memory* is "association", a term which already turns up at the very first page. While making his trip down memory lane, he remarks, he has let himself lead by the associative links and connections that could be observed between different episodes in his life (in Nabokov's view, following these links was a controlled process, mastered by the one who remembered, not an *involuntary* act as for instance in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*). This mnemonic principle, so it is suggested, has (partly) helped him to set up the resistant structure described above. Via associative thinking, he has been enabled to develop the non-chronological "experiential patterns" that can be observed in the work and offer an artistic transformation that would be capable of protecting his life against the linear progress of time.[87]

The framing of his autobiography as the outcome of a mnemonic investigation has various implications (e.g. for the relationships between memory and imagination, and between past and present). One of them, Rodgers explains, is that Nabokov partly causes his text to be perceived "as functioning as a memorial object". Like "tombstones, statues or photographs", the book as an object "forever depicts, and commemorates, particular instances of life". This does not only entail that it seeks to "memorialise the real and imagined events" depicted inside of it. It also indicates that it wants these depictions never to "change regardless of the number of times we return to them".[88] By firmly linking his literary creation to memory and presenting it as a written assemblage of personal recollections, Nabokov seems to reinforce the impression that he hopes his life to become to be frozen in a piece of art which would serve as a commemorating medium and memorialise the events which he believed in his mnemonic investigation worthy to be preserved, thereby rendering his existence to be resistant to "death's caprices" (Rodger's interpretation thus is in line with what was argued in the previous paragraphs).[89]

According to Rodgers, Nabokov has developed several strategies to "allow the readers to experience his memory". His does not want his readers to simply 'registrate' the real and imagined events depicted in the work from a distance and record them in a rather indifferent way (from this point of view, Rodger's above-mentioned comparison to

[86] See Maftei 2013, 103 for a discussion of the relationship between the representation of the autobiography as a mnemonic investigation and the history of pre-published chapters Nabokov sketches in the preface.
[87] Norman 2015, 66. See also Foster 1993, 189-195.
[88] Rodgers 2018, 39.
[89] Rodgers 2018, 41.

tombstones might be less suitable). He aims to transform his memories, as he states, "into something that can be turned over to the reader[s] in printed characters" (127) and makes sure that they "remember" what they have read.[90] One of the methods he applies to bring out the readers' experience of his recollections is "his coupling of descriptive power and sensory evocation". Nabokov evokes his personal experiences in a deliberately suggestive way, using a lot of details, trying to create a "multisensory tableau".[91] Another and perhaps even more important strategy is his appeal to the readers to actively explore the many relationships and connections between the numerous episodes in *Speak, Memory*. Similar to Nabokov himself, who says to have tried to explore all the tangled threads of his personality, the readers are expected to look for possible connections between Nabokov's memories in *Speak, Memory*. They should be trying to understand why he has juxtaposed a non-chronological series of recollections, to see relations over two or more chapters, to record traces running through the mnemonic constellation of his entire life, etc. Reading the work, so is implied, can be compared to solving a "scrambled picture" (450) (of which the outcome is not immediately clear). The readers should sift through the recollections, try to find out links between them and discern broader patterns, as if they are shifting with different pieces of the scrambled puzzle in order to discover the picture. Nabokov, as he does in his entire oeuvre, constantly misleads his readers and puts them on the wrong track, yet promises them that, as soon as they will have figured out how the puzzle works, they "cannot unsee" anymore what they have seen (450).[92] By requiring such a strong participation, Nabokov compels his readers to really "experience his memories", instead of registering them indifferently. They are obliged to become "engaged in the activity of remembering", preserving and imprinting the memories and recollections of Nabokov's existence in their minds, and contribute thereby to the "negation of the efficacy of death" he seeks to achieve.[93]

If an editor would have proposed to chronologically re-order *Speak, Memory*, like has been done with ancient letter collections, Nabokov would probably have protested because the work in this way would lose all its power. The editor would not only dismantle the artistic structure which has been developed to liberate his existence from the constraints of Newtonian time. He would also have undermined Nabokov's strategy to make a strong appeal to the readers, stimulating them to explore the relationships

[90] Rodgers 2018, 39.

[91] Rodgers 2018, 40.

[92] Apple 1991, xi. For the link between the patterning in *Speak, Memory* and Nabokov's departure to the United States at the end, see Greyson 2002, 1-7. For a discussion on the relation between the idea of the text as a scrambled picture and the ethical, philosophical and moral aspects of Nabokov's literary project, see Apple 1991, xx-xxiv.

[93] Rodgers 2018, 41.

between the recollections over the course of the work and engage themselves thereby in the activity of remembering 'Nabokov'. The question this paragraph wants to ask is whether Pliny, if he would have had the chance to confront the editors Gibson has described, would have made a similar protest. Would he have indicated that the arrangement of his letters, including the deviations from chronology, somehow help him to enforce the memorialisation of the literary proof of his existence?

To explore this issue, it might be useful to first take a look at Pliny frames his collection. What does he allege to have been the 'literary genesis' of his work? If we know how he has set up the composition, it might give us an indication of what he expects with it from us. A possible starting point for this research can be found almost at the end of the collection. In 9.36, Pliny tells his addressee, Fuscus Salinator, about his daily routines when he is spending summer in his villa in Tuscany. Although Pliny is busy with many things, several hours a day are devoted to writing.[94] The letter interestingly comments upon some of the writing methods and habits which Pliny asserts to have developed:

> Evigilo cum libuit, plerumque circa horam primam, saepe ante, tardius raro. Clausae fenestrae manent; mire enim silentio et tenebris ab iis quae avocant abductus et liber et mihi relictus, non oculos animo sed animum oculis sequor, qui eadem quae mens vident, quotiens non vident alia. Cogito si quid in manibus, cogito ad verbum scribenti emendantique.

From the moment he wakes up, Pliny claims to be completely occupied by his writing tasks. Lying in the dark and feeling detached from any distraction, he totally delivers himself to and concentrates on the 'movements within his own mind' (*sed animum oculis sequor*). The things 'that are at hand', he says, he works out in his head (*cogito si quid in manibus*) and mentally searches for accurate wordings (*cogito ad verbum scribenti emendantique*). Consequently, he calls his secretary to dictate the matters that he has just before given shape (*quae formaveram dicto*).[95] What this passage makes clear is that writing, for Pliny, is first and foremost a mental activity. A literary work is not something that spontaneously flows from an author's pen. Instead, the writing process starts in the writer's head who lets himself lead by the things and paths set out in his mind and mentally gives form to the text.

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[94] Gibson and Morello 2012, 117-118 compares Pliny's daily routines to those of Vetricius Spurinna and Uncle Pliny which are described in the third book. Throughout the collection, Gibson and Morello observe a remarkable development of Pliny's persona, gradually "moving towards more of the disciplined and managed *otium* for which Spurinna's fruitful and green old age provides the model and towards which his closing letters on his own routines in *otium* clearly point (9.36 and 9.40)" (250).

[95] Gibson and Morello 2012, 95 notices in this description a "slightly Ovidian setting of closed shutters and half-light".

Pliny's general reflections upon his writing methods near the end of his collection invite us to return to and look once more at the thematically connected opening letter of the *Epistulae*.[96] Therein, he comments upon the genesis of his letter collection and particularly informs his readers about his composition techniques. Whereas 9.36 represents Pliny as an accurate and meticulous writer, 1.1 offers, at least at first sight, a more nonchalant image of him. He declares to Septicius Clarus that he has composed his letters 'with some care' (*paulo curatius*) and consequently arranged them in a collection 'as they came to his hand' (*quaeque in manus venerat*). As already pointed out in the introduction, the latter phrase has mostly been interpreted as a rhetorical trope by which Pliny wants to create the false impression that the *Epistulae* was ordered at random but in essence aims to indicate that the opposite is true.

A complementary interpretation of this phrase may come to the fore when reading 1.1 through 9.36. For, the formulation 'as they came to his hand' may remind us of a very similar expression from the letter in the ninth book (*si quid in manibus*) and variants of this expression which can be found elsewhere in the collection (cf. 5.5: *quae inter manus*; 9.1: *si quid aliud in manibus*). In all these letters, the metaphor revolving around *manus* does not refer to arbitrariness but is used in the context of mental activities and alludes to the matters that 'occupy and revolve within an author's mind'. This opens up a different interpretation of the second sentence of the first letter. Apart from functioning as a rhetorical play that falsely implies the randomness of the composition, *ut quaeque manus* may also suggest that Pliny has arranged his letters in the order 'they came up in his mind', in the consecution he 'handled' them while 'mentally' preparing the *Epistulae* (so in accordance to the process he sets out in 9.36).[97] Like his other writings, his letter collection, in particular its composition, thereby, is implied to be the outcome of a thorough mental (preparation) process.

Apart from the letters concerning the literary genesis of his writings, Pliny frequently addresses the matter of mind, how it functions and what it is capable of elsewhere in the collection. He mostly does so within the context of discussions of oratory and rhetorical

[96] Both letters are also interrelated via the name of the addressees. 9.36 and its twin letter 9.40, deliberately placed at the close of the collection, are addressed to Fuscus (Salinator). The choice of this addressee may be seen as a response to the opening letter of the collection, allegedly written to a long-standing admirer, named (Septicius) Clarus. Throughout the *Epistulae*, we move, thereby, from 'light'/'dawn' to 'dusk'. After having dived into the dark of the final letters, the reader is encouraged to return to the light and re-read the collection. See also footnote 79 for the references and for the link with the circular flows of nature.

[97] To be clear: I agree with John Henderson (2002, 21), who states that the second sentence of the collection and the first letter in its entirety is a "gesture towards informality". This gesture perfectly concurs with the status of the letter collection as a literary product that belongs to lowbrow genre, being a literary play rather than serious work (see also Gibson and Morello 2012, 259). Yet, at the same time, the second sentence seemingly frames the collection as the result of a sincere mental process, as a text that is allowed to have the ambition to convey the literary proof of Pliny's existence.

training. Pliny represents himself at several points in the *Epistulae* as a talented and experienced orator who has enjoyed a profound rhetorical education. He does not only try to convince his readers of this via the implementation of letters boasting about his *moments de gloire* in the senate and in court. He also repeatedly discusses and reflects upon various rhetorical techniques that held a key place in the Roman educational programme. He especially pays attention to the best strategies by which an orator can train his mental and mnemonic capacities. Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello, for example, have pointed to a cluster of letters in which Pliny comments upon how the orator should mentally master a huge amount of text. He advises his addressees to divide the text in smaller parts and go over these parts again and again in their minds (9.40: *memoriae frequenti emendatio proficitur*). Only by (mentally) re-reading the text, so Pliny "implicitly echoes the instructions of his teacher Quintilian", as an orator he will be enabled to get control over the textual material.[98] In other letters, Pliny goes even one step further to prove his familiarity with rhetorical and particular mnemonic principles. Instead of theorising about them, he seems to bring them into practice within the context of a letter. According to Indra McEwen, for instance, Pliny's famous letters containing the descriptions of his Tuscan and Laurentian villas (2.17; 5.6) appear to be inspired by the well-known 'house-of-memory-technique'.[99] The remarkably systematic way in which the '*dispositio*' (5.6) of the houses is set out, may remind the readers of an orator imagining the mental space (*locus*) in which he will later place the images (*imagines*) that should help him to remember the *res* or *verba* of a speech.

Although all these letters certainly contribute to Pliny's self-fashioning as a skilled and qualified orator, they might have an additional function in the collection. Especially when reading them with letters like 1.1 and 9.36 in mind, in which a strong connection has been suggested between the genesis of the *Epistulae* and the writer's mental activities, they may serve as an invitation to the readers to reflect upon the composition of the text they are reading. By recurrently drawing the readers' attention to how a rhetorically trained mind orders and processes textual material, Pliny may want to stimulate them to consider whether there might be some sort of interrelation with the structure of his work, which has been set up mentally by a rhetorically trained mind. When reading the advices about how best to master a huge amount of textual material, which entail that one should divide

[98] Gibson and Morello 2012, 247.

[99] McEwen 1995. See also Goalen 2001. A splendid introduction to the villa letters is Bettina Bergmann's article 'Visualizing Pliny's villas' (2016). She tries to reconcile two methodological approaches to the villa letters, the archaeological and the literary/textual. Other useful explorations of the villa letters can be found in Lefèvre 2009, 231-242 (the villas as multifunctional places); Chinn 2007 (the relation to the theory of ekphrasis) and Marchesi 2015 (the villas as a space in which complex interactions between literary conventions, political strategies and social attitudes are articulated).

the speech in small portions and re-read these over and again, for instance, the readers may notice a parallel with the way in which the 'story' of Pliny's life is presented to them in the *Epistulae*. Pliny has chosen to disclose the 'text of his existence' in small separate portions (a sequence of letters) in which a relatively limited number of themes are revisited again and again (the cyclical mode). The letters violating chronology, containing references to Pliny's youth and early adulthood, every time cause the story of his life, and those that are reading it, to return, in a sense, to its beginning and repeat what has already been treated before.[100] The structure of the composition, we could say, somehow corresponds to the rhetorical practices for which Pliny pleads.

Another correlation between the arrangement of the *Epistulae* and the way in which the functioning of the rhetorical mind is portrayed seems to be suggested via a remarkable series of metaphors that Pliny uses throughout the entire collection. He frequently speaks about his letters, especially of those in which he praises a living or deceased friend, in terms of portraits (*picturae*), statues (*statua*) or images (*imagines*) exhibited in private or public. As John Henderson convincingly argues, this creates the impression that the *Epistulae* is set up as a "gallery" in which the readers can admire the achievements of great men, including those of the author.[101] Therefore, when Pliny is depicted in some letters (e.g. 2.7; 8.6) as looking at the statues or monuments that are standing on the forum or a villa domain, this might be understood as a meta-literary invitation to the readers to similarly 'contemplate the exceptional memorials showed in the text, to turn back to look at them, stand at their foot and finally walk past them' (2.7: *effigiem eius subinde intueri subinde respicere, sub hac consistere praeter hanc commeare*; 8.6: *delectus est celeberrimus locus, in quo legenda praesentibus, legenda futuris proderentur*). Pliny, we could say, at least partly, thus seems to ascribe the function of 'memorial object' to his text. Like a statue or a portrait, it should 'memorialise' the persons and events depicted inside of it as well as render these depictions to be frozen in art, resistant to the 'caprices of death'.

The perception of the *Epistulae*'s function as a memorial object is further enforced when taking into account that, with the metaphorical language, a correlation is suggested with a rhetorical mnemonic technique which is (implicitly) addressed in several letters. The framing of his collection as a textual space in which one can move from one *imago, statua* or *pictura* to another may have affinities with the house-of-memory-technique with which Pliny plays in the depictions of his villas. As Bettina Bergmann has shown in an article published in the *Art Bulletin*, several pieces of art in Antiquity present themselves

[100] The link between Pliny's reflections upon the "piecemeal approach to texts' and the structure of the *Epistulae* is profoundly explored in Gibson and Morello 2012, 238-248.
[101] Henderson 2002, 84.

as a sort of artistic adaptations of this mnemonic principle. Bergmann illustrates her point by means of an analysis of a Roman living place in Pompei, which seems to have been constructed in accordance to "influential rhetorical and mnemonic models".[102] The owner of the house ordered his space and installed objects or paintings in it in such a way that it appears as if he wants his visitors to move through the 'text or memory of his life'. Similarly, we could say, Pliny, with the *Epistulae,* offers a 'walking tour' in the 'monument of his existence' (*locus*) in which he has placed a series of objects (*imagines*) that should represent him as a multifaceted figure within the complex social context of Rome. Just as the owner of the Pompei house, seemingly following the rhetorical theories, has not ordered the objects telling the story of his life chronologically but rather associatively,[103] also Pliny's method of arrangement has predominantly been based on techniques of association and patterning. The letters violating chronology and generating the cyclical movements, for instance, are never arbitrarily positioned but, like in a house of memory,[104] are somehow connected to the letters (or images/portraits/statues) in their direct environment, thereby adding an extra layer of meaning to their surroundings and bringing diverse moments in time together in a small (textual) space.[105]

The correspondences between the composition and the mnemonic techniques to which is referred in the *Epistulae*, we could conclude, do not only enforce the impression that the collection has been set up by a rhetorically trained mind, who conceptualises the story of his existence and the writing of this story in rhetorical terms. It also underlines the work's function as a 'memorial object' of which the depictions inside of it should be remembered. As said at the beginning of this paragraph, this is one of the reasons why Pliny recurrently stresses the importance of the readers. They should walk through the

[102] Bergmann 1994, 254.

[103] Bergmann 1994, 226. She adds: "The habit of disciplined recall and most importantly, of association between the recalled parts was, above all, a creative activity".

[104] Bergmann 1994, 249: "Memory collects and reconnects moving fragments from the past".

[105] Interestingly, Pliny evokes, on a small-scale, a similar experience in the two villa letters mentioned above. As Riggsby 2003 points out, 2.17 and 5.6 interestingly interweave different ways of experiencing space and time. On the one hand, Pliny conceptualises the houses as a space in which he, together with the reader, can move from one room to another. At a certain point in (linear) time, we stand in the cubiculum. At another, we walk in the garden. On the other hand, throughout the villa letters (and at other occasions in his collection), Pliny tells that several of his daily activities often take place in one and the same room (the *cubiculum*, for instance, might "be associated with the afternoon siesta or the midnight oil burnt or fine-honed orations"). This causes different moments in time to come together into a single (textual) space. We are, Riggsby says, "in cyclical time and allow overlap in that dimension". The same overlap we find in the house-of-memory-technique (see footnote 99) and while reading Pliny's collection. Although we are expected to read the collection linearly and move from one portrait to another, Pliny has set up his composition in such a way that, via the cyclical movements and deviations from chronology, associations with several moments in Pliny's life are evoked while dwelling on one (spatial) point or before one specific image in the collection.

monument of his life, admire the images, statues and pictures installed in the memorial object and save them in their memory. Pliny, not coincidently, favours the addressees who have allegedly told him that they like his work so much that they have learnt parts of it by heart (4.19: *meos libellos habet lectitat ediscit etiam*; 6.33: *tu facillime iudicabis, qui tam memoriter tenes omnes, ut conferre cum hac dum hanc legis possis*).[106]

Instead of deeply hoping that his readers will be willing to save the collection in their memory, however, Pliny, so it seems, really wants to 'impose' his work on them. Via his composition, he seeks to oblige the readers to 'engage themselves in the activity of remembering'. By partly setting up the *Epistulae* in accordance to rhetorical-mnemonic principles, he compels us to process his text in a way that somehow resembles the manner in which an orator tries to imprint his speech in his mind. We are forced to work ourselves a way through the story of his existence in small portions and, due to the cyclical patterns, re-read and re-visit parts of his life that have already been treated before.[107] We are expected to move ourselves through his textual space, looking for connections between the images, statues and portraits and trying to comprehend all the 'tangled threads of his personality'. This causes the readers of the *Epistulae*, in a sense, to fulfil a similar task as those of Nabokov's autobiography, shifting with the pieces of its author's existence in order to get a 'picture' of his existence (though Pliny does not mislead his readers, nor suggests that there would be one solution; there is not the mystery-aspect in the *Epistulae* that can be observed in *Speak, Memory*). By requiring such a strong participation of the readers, leading them through a sort of rhetorical-mnemonic trajectory, Pliny, so it seems, seeks to enforce the commemoration of his work and his existence. The structure of the letter collection is created, in other words, to let the text of his life endlessly 'speak through and within its readers' memory', obliging them to contribute to the 'negation of the efficacy of death' Pliny aims to achieve.

By way of conclusion, I would like to return, for the last time in this chapter, to the second sentence of the first letter, in which Pliny seemingly suggests the arbitrariness of his composition. The interpretation of the structure of the *Epistulae* offered in this paragraph, combined with the analyses developed before, enables us to throw a new light upon the phrase. Apart from serving as a rhetorical trope, it also, at the start, draws the readers' attention to the three concepts that will further on in the collection be presented as defining forces lying behind the composition. Pliny, we are invited to read in

[106] As Morello 2015, 150 convincingly argues, Pliny, at some points in his collection, represents himself as a teacher, who wants to 'educate' his reader: "I suggest that he is also setting up a fundamentally didactic programme to educate his readers not only in choosing proper moral positions in tricky social or emotional situations but also in acquiring one of the most important technical skills for reading the whole letter collection: the ability to reconsider one's understanding of whatever one has read or thought, and the willingness to change one's mind".

[107] Gibson and Morello 2012, 236-244 extensively discuss the concept of re-reading.

retrospect, has not 'preserved the order of time' (*non servato temporis ordine*) because he has understood the risks related to a 'historiographical-linear mode of telling' (*neque enim historiam componebam*). Therefore, he has preferred to arrange the letters as they came to his 'mental hand' (*quaeque in manus*), i.e. in accordance to the rhetorical principles by which he mentally conceptualises his life and that are strong enough to impose the collection on the readers' memory.

1.4 The Possibility of Failure

In the epilogue of his chapter on the autobiography, Will Norman points out that there are several indications in *Speak, Memory* that Nabokov, at least so it appears, sometimes seems to doubt the power of his literary creation.[108] A clear example can be found halfway the book where the Russian-American author deplores the death of his brother Sergey. Although they were very close during their childhood, they lost sight of each other when Sergey decided to leave Russia and travel across Europe. Since then, they saw each other only a few times.

> My bleakest recollections are associated with Paris, and the relief of leaving it was overwhelming, but I'm sorry he had to stutter his astonishment to an indifferent concierge. I know little of his life during the war. At one time he was employed as a translator at an office in Berlin. A frank and fearless man, he criticized the regime in front of colleagues, who denounced him. He was arrested, accused of being a "British spy" and sent to a Hamburg concentration camp where he died of inanition, on 10 January 1945 (199).

As Norman remarks, the way in which the decease of Sergey is described is somewhat atypical for *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov "deviates from his usual self-confidence" and "falls back on conventional chronology, culminating in the strange precision of the date of Sergey's death". The memories of his brother, so it seems, are too weak, too vague, to split up his life into different, clearly demarcated episodes that could be spread over the work and associatively connected to things that happened to Nabokov himself or to other members of the family or household. Sergey's appearances, being brief, dull and incidental, are, thereby, not "assimilated into the patterning of the autobiography, or found to coincide with its many thematic or symbolic structures". This makes Sergey an

[108] For the following analysis of *Speak, Memory*, I have mainly relied upon Norman 2015, 64-70.

"isolated, unreadable and therefore uncitable" figure, whose life can only be told chronologically.[109] As Nabokov suggests, this almost inevitably causes his brother to be 'inappropriate for timelessness' and 'impossible to protect against the linear progress of time' via *Speak, Memory*.

Sergey is not an exception in the autobiography. There are several figures in the work whose life cannot be integrated in the overall constellation of the text. Other characters were part of the autobiography's symbolic structures but are, at a certain point in the book, thrown out of it. An example of the latter phenomenon is Mademoiselle O., the fabulous, French speaking governess of Nabokov. She is prominently present in the first half of the autobiography in which an entire chapter is dedicated to her. Nabokov tells that she had an extravagant personality and often argued with other members of the household and even with his mother. She was, what could be called, a memorable figure who tried very hard to make herself unforgettable and indispensable. This probably explains why she is so strongly integrated in the mnemonic constellation of the first part of *Speak, Memory* and keeps on turning up in the recollections. Her presence, however, remarkably decreases in the second half of the autobiography. Mademoiselle O. gradually disappears from the commemorated events in Nabokov's life and is no longer assimilated into the patterning of the work. Though a key element in the structure in the beginning of *Speak, Memory*, being connected to several other recollections, her thread is not continued and leads to a 'dead end' in the text. This makes her, like Nabokov's brother Sergey, 'incompatible with the world of timelessness'.

According to Norman, the moments where Nabokov gives the impression of failing to rescue his family or household members from the linear progression of time are as telling as those where the author succeeds, because they openly show the "limits of his constellating method" and his literary creation. The question arises, then, how these moments should be interpreted in relation to the overall purpose of the autobiography. Does Nabokov include persons unsuitable for eternity in *Speak, Memory* to point out a contrast with himself (while they remain mortal, his existence is so memorable that it undoubtedly deserves its place in the world of timelessness)? Or does their appearance rather reveal again one of Nabokov's alleged underlying, chronophobic concerns, namely that it might be possible that his life and its literary representation, despite its structure, could be a blind alley within (literary) history (and cultural memory) as well? Both interpretations are plausible. But the uncertainty and ambiguity "place *Speak, Memory* under a constant stress" and always "leave open the possibility of failure".[110]

Over the course of the *Epistulae*, Pliny continues confirming his belief in the power of artistic creations. We do not find any explicit indication that he would doubt the potential

[109] Norman 2015, 67.

[110] Norman 2015, 68.

of his literary works to serve as his key to the world of immortality. In the final book, for example, Pliny represents himself as a celebrated writer, whose published speeches have already reached and pleased a broad audience, both inside and outside Rome. As Gibson records, he seems to be convinced that a similar success lies ahead of the *Epistulae*, and looks "very confidently into the future, willing to anticipate in letter after letter a bright time to come in terms of reception by posterity (cf. 9.2; 9.6; 9.8; 9.11; 9.14; 9.18; 9.23; 9.25; 9.31)".[111]

As already mentioned in the second paragraph, Pliny, at least so it seems, structurally underlines these optimistic statements in the ninth book by including more letters than usual that cause somehow cyclical movements in the collection. Not only do several letters contain striking thematic references to and/or verbal parallels with some letters from the opening of the collection.[112] The book also includes three, quite long letters (9.13; 9.19;9.27), deliberately positioned,[113] that violate the linear course of time and revolve around subjects that one would have expected to have been treated somewhere at the beginning of the work, i.e. events that happened under or before Nerva's reign. As explained before, these letters appear to help Pliny to make the 'circle round', while at the same time contributing to the evocation of a sphere of Spurinna-like cyclical eternity into the *Epistulae*.[114] By giving these letters a prominent place in the ninth book, it seems (at first sight) that Pliny aims, on a compositional level, to enforce and confirm the confidence in the power of literary creations he asserts to have at other points.

As several scholars have argued,[115] however, there is something strange with these three letters. Although 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27 have different addressees and do not treat the same topics, they all somehow reminisce and/or comment upon the political chaos, social uncertainties and moral confusion that follows upon the death of 'bad emperors', such as Nero or Domitian. I agree with Roy Gibson who states that the somewhat "pessimistic", sombre and dark undertone of 9.13, 9.19 and to a certain extent 9.27 collides with the

[111] Gibson 2015, 219. In 9.14, Pliny, Whitton 2013, 59 remarks, "makes a sort of final call to Tacitus to join him on the road of immortality".

[112] Gibson and Morello 2012, 260-265; Gibson 2015. This creates strong symmetrical links between the opening and the close of the collection.

[113] Gibson 2015, 199: "Together these letters are positioned with rough symmetry across the book, with 9.19 occupying a near-centre position in this forty-letter unit, and 9.13 and 9.27 positioned twelve and thirteen letters from either end of the book respectively".

[114] In his chapter on false closures in the *Epistulae* (2013, 55-59), Christopher Whitton focuses on 9.13 and considers it as a "strongly closural letter" in the collection: "9.13 is the longest letter in Book 9 and the fifth longest in the collection. It is the last of a series of letters memorializing Pliny's forensic, or better, senatorial, triumphs; more than any other, it claims monumental status with its exuberant *amplification*" (58).

[115] Gibson and Morello 2012, 27-33; Gibson 2012, 27-33; Whitton 2013.

optimistic sounds that we hear in the other letters in the final book (e.g. about the future of his literary efforts).[116]

Gibson maintains that these three, rather pessimistic letters fulfil two functions in the final book. The first one is that they serve as an encouragement to the readers to produce a revised interpretation of the beginning of the *Epistulae*. At the start of the collection, Pliny recurrently mentions politics after the assassination of Domitian, yet always pictures Nerva's reign as a period of restoration, renewed liberty and administrative order. All the (alleged) enemies of good government, who made career under Domitian, are portrayed "as broken and defeated individuals", that do not have much power anymore, like Pliny's rival Regulus (cf. 1.5).[117] The letters in the final book, however, "lift the veil on the political turbulence" that Pliny kept silent in the beginning of his work and are clearly inviting the readers to draw the conclusion that book 1 does not give a complete (or even completely accurate) picture of the author's public and private lives in 96-97".[118]

Secondly, and additionally, Gibson hypothesises that 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27 reflect an increasing degree of political pessimism, including a discontent with Trajan's reign, that would have cropped up at some point in Pliny's later career. The three letters, depicting an unhealthy political climate under the emperor's predecessor(s), may be a subtle indication of his disappointment with the contemporary situation. Although "many of the letters in Book 9 (...) show a revival of optimism of a kind that had not been seen in the collection since book 6", Gibson states, 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27 make clear that the optimism is of a very particular kind, "personal rather than public or political".[119] This possibly explains the sharp contrast between the pessimistic tone of the three letters and the positive one in letters revolving around his literary achievements. Being a domain that can be separated from the political, writing literature, at least so it seems, still offers Pliny the opportunity to excel and reach immortality, even under the (apparently frustrating) emperorship of Trajan.[120]

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[116] Gibson 2015, 186. For a critical discussion of the 'optimism', apparently typical of Pliny, see Wolff 2003, which can be read along Hoffer 1999, pointing out the anxieties.

[117] Gibson 2015, 198.

[118] Gibson 2015, 199.

[119] Gibson 2015, 219. He adds: "If the optimism of Book 9 is markedly personal, its pessimism – as displayed above all in letters 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27 (...) – is reserved for political matters and shows strong continuities with the political pessimism expressed in Book 8, above all in letter 8.14. If anything, the revived personal optimism of Book 9 throws the continuing political pessimism into higher relief. Furthermore, of the emperor there is still no trace in this final book (...). In addition, in the final five letters of Book 9 we find Pliny almost exclusively concerned with matters on his private country estate (...). This concluding retreat to his personal domain is perhaps political pessimism expressed through indirection".

[120] Also Lefèvre 2009, 66-76 observes a sense of dissatisfaction in Pliny's letters about the policy of the emperor and (especially) the senate.

A possible problem with Gibson's interpretation is that it does not take into account the structural function that the three letters, in my view, fulfil in the last book. As said before, they seem to be part of an overall strategy used in the *Epistulae* to structurally guarantee the eternalisation of the literary representation of Pliny's existence. What is the relationship between this structural function and the rather pessimistic content of the letters? In what follows, I will take a closer look at 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27. It will be proposed that these letters do not only radiate a sphere of political pessimism but also contain some hints that Pliny may hesitate sometimes about the potentials of a literary creation. These doubts appear to counterbalance the optimism about the immortalising capacities of art which resound in other letters as well as destabilise somehow the protective efficacy against the lapse of time implied by the circular modes of composition, thereby subtly putting 'Pliny's entire literary project under pressure'. The hypothesis will be formulated that there might, perhaps, be a much stronger sense of Nabokov in the *Epistulae* than Gibson seems to have thought.

The starting point for this research will be the last and, in a sense, apparently the most optimistic letter of the three, 9.27.[121] I believe that the tension between content and narrative form becomes clearer when reading the three letters in a reversed order and by allowing ourselves to be triggered by 9.27 to look back at 9.19 and 9.13 (the choice to read the letters in this reserved order corresponds to the act of re-reading to which Pliny incites his readers throughout the collection, encouraging them to look back at what came before, *supra*).

In 9.27, Pliny narrates the recently happened story of an unnamed author who was asked not to continue with a public reading of his history. The reason why he was requested to temporarily pause his reading is because he would have embarrassed a particular member of his audience if he would have continued. Pliny implies that the spectator was somehow involved in the events the historian describes, now feeling ashamed hearing "about his past crimes and conducts" (*tantus audiendi quae fecerint pudor, quibus nullus faciendi quae audire erubescunt*).[122] For Pliny, this occurrence proves the 'power of (writing) history' (*potestas … historiae*) and the *dignitas* of the '*verissimum librum*' composed by the unnamed historian. Although the latter ultimately acceded to the request, Pliny points out that the incident will only increase interest in the silenced work, since 'information withheld only sharpens men's curiosity to hear it'. The book, he assures his addressee, will soon be widespread and preserve the events it tells about for

[121] For a more extensive elaboration upon the political circumstances reflected in the letters, see Gibson 2015, 194-205; Gibson and Morello 2012, 27-35; Lefèvre 2009, 66-70.

[122] Many scholars believe that the historian may be identified as Tacitus, who would have recited a passage from his *Histories*. See Gibson 2015, 202.

future generations (*liber tamen ut factum ipsum manet manebit legeturque semper, tanto magis quia non statim. Incitatur enim homines ad noscenda quae differuntur*).

One way to interpret this letter is by seeing it, as Gibson does, as a commentary upon the "darkness of the past" and the "sensitivities" following political crises. The letter hints at the social tensions and confusions that the assassination of the emperor Domitian and the consequent regime change have caused. Another manner to understand 9.27 is by considering it as an implied reflection upon the aspirations and functioning of the *Epistulae* itself (so in line with the meta-poetical potential of other letters in the collection revolving around historiography). The claim that the work of the unnamed historian, including the events on which it reports, will be sustained echoes Pliny's ambitions with his letter collection. Every literary creation must ideally turn into a sort of textual monument 'that is and always will be' (*manet manebit legeturque*). Just like the historiographical work by the unnamed author, moreover, the *Epistulae* (partly) comments upon the deeds of men from recent times, both the *heroic* actions, such as those of his uncle, and the *hideous*, for instance those of his rival Regulus. By sharing throughout his collection his thoughts and judgments on the deeds of his contemporaries, often even in a historiographic style, Pliny, similar to the anonymous author in 9.27, frames his work as a *verissimum librum*, a 'truthful' work, that claims to imprint a 'true' image of himself and of those portrayed in the text into the memory of the readers.

Pliny's claims in 9.27 may remind the readers of a letter somewhat earlier in the final book which also revolves in a way around the matter of truth and the image that is left of someone in a literary creation. The apparently confident tone that reverberates in 9.27, showing a Pliny convinced that an author has the capacity to preserve a 'truthful picture' of a person, loses some of its credibility when thinking about it in relation to the story he has told only a little while before, in 9.19.

Letter 9.19, strategically placed at the heart of the last book, is about one of Pliny's most admired friends and his former legal guardian, Verginius Rufus, who passed away more than ten years before.[123] The readers are already familiar with Pliny's adoration of this man, as he has been commemorated in several earlier letters in the collection. Letter 2.1, for instance, gives an account of Verginius' funeral and praises him as an honourable and morally impeccable person. In 6.10, Pliny tells about a visit he has recently paid to the former house of Verginius. There, once more, he could read the tomb epitaph that Verginius composed for himself just before he died. This filled him with a sense of

[123] For an extensive analysis of the relation between Pliny and his model Verginius, see Gibson and Morello 2012, 125-135.

nostalgia, thinking back at the time his friend was still alive and impressed his contemporaries with his wisdom.[124]

9.19 is framed as a response to Cremutius Ruso, who is told to have read the letter about Verginius' self-composed epitaph. Cremutius doubts whether this practice is so praise-worthy as Pliny has suggested in 6.10 (*significis legisse te in quadam epistula mea iussisse Verginium Rufum inscribe sepulcro suo (...). Reprehendis quod iusserit*). He would have asked Pliny whether someone like Frontinus may not have shown a nobler spirit by 'forbidding any monument at all to be set up to himself' (*quod vetuerit omnino monumentum sibi fieri*).[125] In the remainder of the letter, Pliny takes up the defence for Verginius, explaining why it is honourable and not arrogant that he created his own inscription. As part of the demonstration of the modesty of his patron, Pliny recounts a remarkable incident that Verginius told him a long time ago. One day, Verginius met the historian Cluvius Rufus, who was writing an account of the rebellion against Nero and the accession of Galba in 68. Alluding to the ambiguous role Pliny's patron would have played in this rebellion, Cluvius would have said that Verginius should forgive him if there is 'anything in his histories that he does not like'. Pliny praises his guardian because he (allegedly) reacted so ingeniously to the reproach, saying that Cluvius only has the liberty to 'write what pleases him because he did what he did' (*ita secum aliquaondo Cluvium locutum: "Scis, Vergini, quae historiae fides debeatur; proinde si quid in historiis meis legis aliter ac velis rogo ignoscas." Ad hoc ille: "Tune ignores, Cluvi, ideo me fecisse quod feci, ut esset liberum vobis scribere quae libuisset*").

I agree with Gibson that the anecdote about Cluvius complicates the exclusively positive image of Verginius Rufus that was pictured in the earlier books.[126] But another manner to understand the letter could be by seeing it as a subtle commentary upon the unpredictability of reader response and the (sometimes powerless) status of a literary creation. First of all, I believe that we may consider 9.19 not only as a defence of Verginius' self-composed epitaph but also as an implicit justification of Pliny's own artistic project. With the *Epistulae*, Pliny, in a sense, has done something similar as Verginius, namely constructing a '*monumentum*' for himself, a 'literary epitaph', that must convey the proof of his existence after he will have passed away. As Cremutius' attack on Verginius, who is blamed for only writing a few lines, illustrates, however, such efforts are not generally appreciated (anymore) and in need of defence. Although ostensibly supporting Verginius,

[124] An analysis of 6.10 can be found in Lefèvre 2009, 30-36. For a discussion of 2.1, see Lefèvre 2009, 23-30; Marchesi 2008, 189-206.

[125] Köning 2013 discusses Frontinus as an ethical and moral example in ancient literature.

[126] Gibson 2015, 200-201.

9.19 may be an anticipation to the objections and criticism that Pliny expects that his own literary monument might receive.[127]

Secondly, the letter also shows how difficult it can be for an author to impose the image he wants to evoke of someone onto the mind and memory of the readers. After having read letter 6.10 about the self-composed inscription, Cremutius Ruso, for instance, did not blindly take over Pliny's admiration for his former patron. Instead, he came up with an alternative, Frontinus, whom in his opinion is much more admirable. This (painfully) illustrates the freedom of each individual reader, who can choose to read against the grain of the text and neglect the writer's suggestions. However ready for immortalisation Pliny's portrait of Verginius might be, in the end, only the reader decides whether it will be sustained or not.

Another factor that Pliny cannot control is how Verginius is preserved in other literary works. As the anecdote about Cluvius points out, it is not unlikely that alternative accounts of Verginius' deeds exist. These may differ from Pliny's and acknowledge greater complexities and controversies. Whereas 9.27 praises the potentials of historiography to transpose a 'truthful picture' of someone to posterity, the story about Cluvius, who claimed to be faithful to facts as well (*historiae fides debeantur*), suggests that there might be different and conflicting versions of this picture. The *Epistulae*, so Pliny realises, only offers one possible characterisation of Verginius that will have to compete in literary history with other accounts of his patron's life (declaredly truthful as well).

Although 9.19 certainly and maybe even convincingly defends the reputation of Pliny's guardian,[128] the letter at the same time illustrates how precarious and fragile someone's portrait may be, even when it is preserved in a literary text. Being open to doubts, suspicions and confusions, Verginius' image might be 'too bleak', 'too unclear', to be imposed on the readers' memory in the version Pliny wants it to be imposed. While 9.27 celebrates a literary creation as an object that 'is and always will be', preserving the

[127] Marchesi 2008, 160 equals the self-composed epitaph of Verginius to a phenomenon described in letter 5.8. There, Pliny mentions contemporaries who seek to gain immortality by executing exceptional deeds, worth to be told in history. According to Marchesi, Pliny, via 9.19, gives the warning that historical "subjects and writers (...) are doomed to incur their audience's criticism if they appear to have violated the rules governing the art of self-promotion, even if only in their fine print" (160). We could wonder whether Pliny, perhaps, thinks that he might be subjected to the same sort of criticism as Verginius has received.

[128] Whitton 2012, 351-354 argues that Pliny implies that Verginius' portrait in Cluvius' historiography is in accordance to his patron's own wishes. See also Lefèvre 2009, 36, that states: "*9.19 ist das Zeugnis eines geschickten Advokaten. Plinius führt Verginius' Verteidigung engagiert, mehr emotional als rational*". According to Lèfevre, Pliny truly opens the way to an "*iter ad gloriam*" (33). Marchesi 2008, 147 records a more ambiguous sense in the letter and particularly in Cluvius' story: "While in Pliny's familial historiography Verginius generously insists that his actions only served the higher cause of liberty, his answer also betrays the impatience of the misunderstood patriot". Also Gibson and Morello 2012, 131 thinks that the letter, rather than rehabilitating Verginius, subtly points out "the limits of the exemplarity".

persons and events depicted inside of it, 9.19 makes clear how complex this process can be and that not each of Pliny's friend is so easily 'compatible with immortality' as he would have wished.[129]

In 9.13, Pliny replies to Ummidius Quadratus, a young orator, who contacted him about a speech that was published ten years before, the *De Helividi ultione*. In 97, Pliny delivered this speech in the senate when "trying to force the censure of Publicius Certus". The latter had been a notorious prosecutor under Domitian. He would have been involved in the condemnation to death of Helvidius Priscus the Younger, "a prominent member of the so-called 'Stoic opposition'".[130]

Just like the letter on Verginius, 9.13 thus is represented as a response to someone who has asked more information about one of Pliny's literary creations (a speech, this time). Whereas Cremutius Ruso stands for the rebellious type of reader, Ummidius Quadratus rather embodies Pliny's ideal. Instead of questioning his judgments, Ummidius is said to have enjoyed reading and studying Pliny's work (*quanto studiosius intentiusque legisti libros*). He even felt so fascinated by the speech, that he has demanded Pliny to provide a fuller context of the events (which Pliny will do in the remainder of the letter).

By framing his letter in this way, Pliny implicitly represents himself as a model for Ummidius.[131] He serves as an exemplary figure whom the young orator admires and seeks to get to know better via literature (a speech and a letter). The productive relationship that seems to exist between them remarkably collides with the interpersonal interactions described in the rest of 9.13. While giving a more detailed account of the circumstances in which he delivered the speech against Publicius Certus, Pliny repeatedly underlines the (initial) lack of support he experienced in the senate from his elderly models. At some length, he informs us of the private warnings he received from some of his friends about the huge risks he was running and got the advice to cease his efforts. He even believed at that time that it would not be a good idea to ask Corellius Rufus for help, though this was his patron and one of the wisest men he knew (*Corellium (...) quem providentissimum aetatis nostrae sapeintissimumque cognovit*). He was afraid that Corellius would forbid him to proceed, as 'he was rather cautious and hesitant' (*fui veritus ne vetaret; erat enim cunctantior cautiorque*).[132] Pliny creates the impression that he stood completely alone in his attack

[129] In this interpretation, the focus does not lie on the figure of Verginius Rufus as such. I am much more interested in the response of Cremutius, that slightly subverts the image of unproblematic reader reception which Pliny evokes in other letters in the ninth book (9.8; 9.11; 9.20; 9.23; 9.25; 9.28; 9.31).

[130] Gibson 2015, 196. For a historical reconstruction of the incident, see Carlon 2009, 58-67. Lefèvre 2009, 67-69 analyses the letter's structure.

[131] Gibson and Morello 2012, 130 remarks that "Pliny applies the language of exemplarity to his own actions" throughout the entire letter, which enforces his self-representation in the opening.

[132] Gibson 2015, 196-198 gives a more detailed reading of the picture of Corellius Rufus that Pliny gradually builds up throughout the *Epistulae*.

and missed the support, encouragement and exemplarity of elderly friends in the early years of his career (contrary to Ummidius, so it seems).

If we ought to believe Pliny, the hesitation and reluctance of the other senators to endorse the attack can be explained as remnants of the reign of Domitian. As pointed out in 8.14, the period under Nerva's predecessor allegedly was a time of political distrust. Nobody dared to undertake actions that may inspire others, fearing that Domitian would interpret them as 'offensive'. In the second half of 9.13, Pliny assures Ummidius that it was his claim against Certus 'that freed the senate from this anxiety' (*quod denique senatum invidia liberassem*). He succeeded in 'restoring and reviving the good practices from bygone ages, long fallen into disuse' (*quod intermissum iam diu morem in publicum consulendi susceptis propriss simultatibus reduxissem*). Due to him, he claims, senators re-started their attempts to improve the public good and to set up deeds that may serve as an example to young people, like Ummidius.

Immediately after these claims, however, Pliny admits that the emperor did not approve his request and brought no motion against Certus before the senate (*et relationem quidem de eo Caesar ad senatum non remisit*). Although he mentions Nerva's decision almost in passing,[133] it inevitably throws a shadow upon the self-praise and optimism that we saw a few sentences before.[134] Apparently, it is possible again to undertake exceptional deeds in the senate, yet they are not automatically ratified and rewarded by a higher institution. At the end of the letter, this leaves the impression that, even after Pliny's attack on Certus, the practice of striving to be a model and being recognised as a model remains complex.[135]

As Pliny has made clear a few letters earlier (9.9), this complexity is not only caused by politics but seems to be a broader, cultural issue. The younger generations, for example, are barely interested anymore in the actions by the great men from the recent and remote past (Ummidius is one of the exceptions). They are not inclined to look up to elderly friends and consider them as beacons guiding them through their own lives. Exemplarity has not the same value anymore as it once had. It is no longer a certitude that one's virtues and morals would live on after one has passed away, imitated and commemorated by young people (cf. the discussion of this ideal in the first paragraph in the context of the analysis of letter 3.1 about Vetricius Spurinna). However 'memorable', 'unforgettable' and

[133] Pliny claims later that this is no problem since he has achieved his goal, namely that Certus who had been due 'to progress to a consulate, did not'. Yet, this seems a quite 'lame' excuse.

[134] According to Lefèvre 2009, 66, letter 9.19 reveals the "*Unsicherheit unter Nerva*". In the words of Gibson 2015, 198: "[The letter] carefully conveys the fear and paranoia that must have characterized much of the reign of Nerva (...). Of such an atmosphere and such events, needless to say, there is little or no hint in Book 1".

[135] Something similar is suggested by Christopher Whitton (2013, 60), who states that "the best Pliny can produce for his grand finale is an informal attack on a relatively minor player, in his absence, and ten years ago. The scene is not dignified by the presence of the emperor, indeed the lack of a *relation* or any comment from Nerva threatens bathos".

'indispensable' someone tries to make himself during his lifetime, there seems to be no guarantee anymore in post-Domitianic times that one would not simply 'fall out of (cultural) memory'.[136]

As I have tried to illustrate, 9.13, 9.19 and 9.27 do not only evoke a somewhat dark and pessimistic atmosphere by referring to the difficult and confusing circumstances following upon the reigns of bad emperors such as Nero and Domitian. Perhaps more crucially, these letters also touch upon and question some of the fundamental principles and convictions around which Pliny has constructed the *Epistulae*. 9.19, in combination with 9.27, illustrates the precariousness and fragility of a literary image. However carefully constructed someone's artistic portrait may be, an author will never be enabled to get total control over its reception by the reader and the way in which it is transposed to posterity. 9.13 problematises the ideal of having and being a 'model'. Pliny would like to be and remain an example to younger generations, a goal that the *Epistulae*, providing images, statues and portraits of his most memorable deeds, must help him to achieve. But can such an ambition, he appears to ponder, really be accomplished in the post-Domitianic era in which exemplarity has become a difficult issue?

The exact status and meaning of the letters and the questions to which they give rise are complicated by the structural function they fulfil in the final book, producing the cyclical movements by which Pliny usually suggests the work's resistance against the transience of time. There seems to be a tension between the content of the letters, partly questioning the power of a literary creation and the feasibility of an author's ambitions (e.g. to become a model), and the claims of immortality made via the circularity of the composition. This appears to create an ambiguity in the final book that has somehow affinities with the confusion and paradoxes that can be observed in *Speak, Memory*. On the one hand, the integration of the letters in the cyclical movements may be seen as a strategy that must help Pliny to 'defuse' the dangers suggested by them. Just as Sergey and Mademoiselle O. possibly do, Verginius Rufus, for instance, could serve then as a negative example, who may suffer a fate from which Pliny via the *Epistulae* will most probably escape (the literary portrait Pliny pictures of himself is 'so strong' that his memory will never become 'too bleak' or 'too unclear'). On the other hand, 9.13, 9.19 and

[136] Another letter that quite explicitly points in this direction in 8.6. There, Pliny complains that the Senate decreed a monument to someone named Pallas (*monumentum Pallantis*). Pliny, however, believes that Pallas did not deserve the monument. Pliny's senatorial contemporaries, so it appears, act quite unpredictably and not in accordance to the pre-Domitianic criteria. This might incite another factor of uncertainty: if the criteria from the good old days are not valid anymore, what should one do to be recognised? Lefèvre 2009, 80-102 discusses the letter more profoundly and connects Pallas' monument to other letters that suggest the "*Verfall des Senats*".

9.27 may also be understood as an allusion to the threats that, Pliny wants us to believe, could jeopardise his overall project. Instead of being defused by the cyclical movements, the risks addressed in the three letters would rather function in this case as Pliny's variant of *Speak, Memory*'s 'dead ends'. Just as Nabokov evokes doubts about the power of a literary creation by quite abruptly breaking off the patterns of some of his characters, the three letters possibly subvert the strength of Pliny's immortal structure by questioning its purpose from inside.[137] Similarly to *Speak, Memory*, both interpretations are plausible. Yet, the 'possibility of failure' places the letter collection 'under a constant stress' (neglected, for instance, in Gibson's reading of the final book as a celebration of the potentials of literary creation). Until the end of the *Epistulae*, Pliny, so it seems, keeps on being afflicted by attacks of 'chronophobia', always hesitating whether the literary proof of his existence will be suitable enough for immortality.

Conclusion

In 1966, Adrian Sherwin-White published the first extensive survey on the composition of Pliny's *Epistulae* (after Mommsen's outdated study from the 19th century). In *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary*, he convincingly showed that Pliny aimed for "balance and variety in the arrangement of his letters but saw little reason to believe that we should read any further meaning into the letters' placement".[138] Soon after the publication, his monograph grew into the standard survey in research on Pliny, which caused his view on the *Epistulae*'s composition to have remained authoritative until quite recently.[139] The last fifteen years, scholars like John Bodel, Roy Gibson, Christopher Whitton, Ruth Morello and Ilaria Marchesi have successfully challenged Sherwin-White's ideas, proving that the arrangement of the *Epistulae* is much more ingenious than he suggested. Current scholarship, Whitton writes, is "more likely to privilege the broader canvas, asserting (or implying) that the meaning of any one letter is subsumed into, and only explicable in terms of, its context in the 'mosaic' or 'kaleidoscope' of the

[137] Whitton 2013, 60 formulates a similar idea when suggesting that the strange atmosphere in letter 9.13 might undermine its closural status: "9.13 reveals the rifts and tensions of the accession moment in its narrative of a factionalized senate. Returning to the past in this letter perhaps opens as many doors as it closes".

[138] Whitton 2013, 44. For an extensive overview of the scholarly debate on Pliny's letter collection, see Gibson and Whitton 2016, 1-51.

[139] In the eighties, parts of Sherwin-White's ideas have already been challenged by Charles Murgia (2016/orig. 1985) and Ronald Syme (1985), though especially with regard to the dating of the individual books.

collection".[140] This new vision on Pliny's compositional technique has produced a range of studies that explore the meaningful interactions and parallels between letters (in individual books or in the collection in its entirety).[141]

In this chapter on Pliny and Nabokov, I have built further upon this recent trend in scholarship yet departed from a slightly different type of question. Instead of asking *how* the letters are ordered and *how meaningful* the order is, I have wondered *why* Pliny allegedly arranged his collection in the way he did. This has resulted in an argumentation, to say it with a wink to Stanley Hoffer's monograph, about the aesthetic 'anxieties of Pliny the Younger',[142] which seemingly dominate the *Epistulae* until the very last book. With a term which I have borrowed from Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, I have spoken of Pliny's 'chronophobia', a persistent disease from which he resolutely wants to release himself. Therefore, he undertakes a Nabokov-like search for a literary form that must protect him against the transience of time. Yet, in the end, the possibility of failure always remains.

[140] Whitton 2013, 44.

[141] For a concrete list of references, see Gibson and Whitton 2016, 26.

[142] Hoffer's *Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (1999) offers a commentary upon several letters from the first book. In his opinion, multiple phrases in Book 1 may hint at some 'real' anxieties of Pliny about (ideological) competition in the upper class of Rome.

Chapter 2

The Author of the Total Text
Writing and Reading Infinity in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and Jorge Luis Borges' *Fictions*

In 1944, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges published a collection of fourteen short stories under the title *Ficciones* ('*Fictions*'). The work was positively received and achieved worldwide literary fame, especially after its translation to English in the beginning of the sixties. Borges was praised for his innovative exploration of the possibilities of fiction and the potentials of artistic craftmanship. His stories evoke complex worlds that constantly emphasise and call attention to their fictional nature. Rather than developing a careful narrative in the traditional sense of the word, they playfully comment upon the literary devices and techniques that make up their universe, thereby remarkably investigating their own origins and creation process. This strong meta-poetical undertone has caused *Fictions* to be celebrated as a precursor of postmodern literature.[1]

One of the most memorable stories in *Fictions* is the penultimate of the collection, 'La biblioteca de Babel' ('The Library of Babel').[2] The story is told by an unnamed first-person narrator, who introduces himself as a librarian. The library in which he has worked for a long time is not an ordinary one and does not at all resemble those the reader might have visited in daily life. It concerns a "cosmic Library", an endless space, which is depicted as

[1] Gioia 2011: "When Borges wrote these works, the concept of postmodernism was unknown, not to mention undefined in particulars. Yet so many of the key elements are already laid out here with confidence and mastery".

[2] This story was originally published in *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), which was a few years later incorporated in *Fictions*. According to Butler 2010, 54, the piece would have been "inspired by Borges' time as a shelver of books at the Miguel Cané Multicipal Library" in Buenos Aires.

"an almost infinite array of hallways" with an "indefinite number of spiral staircases, spherical lamps and bookshelves" (78).[3] The Library is said to be "total", which means that it contains all the books that were ever written, that will ever be written or that could have been written (81). It is a place where "all knowledge concerning the past and future of each individual" is preserved, somewhere stored in the vast and nearly endless bunch of textual materials.[4] In the opening pages, the librarian tells that he "travelled" intensively through the enormous space and studied the understandings and insights of the books which he encountered on his journey (78). He now apparently thinks the time to be right to make a record of his findings and tell about the Library in the pages that will follow.[5]

The intention of the librarian to give an account of the Babel Library, for several reasons, seems to have faced him with a narrative challenge that appears not so easy to overcome (a challenge of which he himself is much aware, as will be explained later). One of the most important reasons concerns the apparently very huge scope of his literary undertaking. The Library undoubtedly is an impressive place to travel around. But how can an author first of all understand and comprehend the endlessness, spaciousness and totality in knowledge that is said to be characteristic of the place and then develop a representation of it in his writings? How can a text be produced that is so 'complete' that it is capable of depicting the space and encompassing all the books, insights and ideas that are stored in there? In what way would it be possible, the readers may ask, that the librarian would succeed in composing the kind of work for which colleagues of him are told to have been longing for such a long time: a "catalogue of catalogues", a "compendium of all the rest", an epitome or compilation of the numerous books and infinite knowledge of which the Library is built up (83)?

Borges was not the first author in literary history to publish a piece that somehow invites the readers to reflect upon the relationship between text and totality, between a literary creation and absolute knowledge. A similar type of questions as those evoked by the opening pages of the short story had already been induced by earlier works in the literary tradition. Several examples can be found within the modernist context in which Borges himself wrote. But we can also discover texts concerned with this matter (much) further back in time, such as the second work around which this chapter will revolve: Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.[6] The *Institutio* is a twelve-volume treatise on the theory and practice of

[3] Bell-Villada 1981, 111.

[4] Bell-Villada 1981, 112.

[5] The quotations and translations from 'The Library of Babel' are taken from the edition by Yates and Irby 1985.

[6] The quotations from the *Institutio Oratoria* are copied from the Teubner edition by Radermacher (revised by Buchheit, 1959). Most of the translations, incorporated in the body text, are derived from Butler (1922/1976).

rhetoric and education that seeks to define the learning path which leads towards the 'perfect orator' (1.pr.9: *oratorem autem instituimus illum perfectum*).[7] As scholars have recorded, Quintilian clearly frames this work as an "encyclopaedic" project.[8] In the long preface to the first book, he claims that he has decided to write the *Institutio* after he got several informal requests from some friends signalling the need for a new *ars rhetorica*. The existent rhetorical treatises were not sufficient anymore, both because they were unclear at some points and the information they provided about rhetoric mostly was only partial, just focused on one very specific rhetorical aspect or phase in the rhetorical training programme (1.pr.1-2; 1.pr.26). His friends, so Quintilian alleges, asked him to cover this gap and encouraged him to compose the *Institutio*. In this work, he does not simply aim to elaborate upon some 'small particle of the rhetorical training', as his predecessors did (1.pr.26: *nos non particulam illam*). He sees the *Institutio* as a much more daring undertaking, which is somehow comparable to the literary project set out by the librarian in the opening pages of 'The Library of Babel'. Quintilian seeks to develop a treatise that tends to "completeness", to 'totality', that encompasses all the knowledge and compiles all the previous insights which one needs to become the perfect orator.[9] This aspiration, in a sense, has affinities with the intentions of Borges' librarian, who seems to have planned to write a 'total text', a 'catalogue of catalogues', a 'compendium of all knowledge'.

The scope of the *Institutio* is, of course, humbler than the librarian's work's (with its endless Library and collection of all *possible* knowledge). Yet, it seems not so much humbler. As Michael Winterbottom has explained, we may not misunderstand Quintilian's encyclopaedic claim, stating that he will provide all the necessary insights for the formation of the perfect orator.[10] It does not entail that he just intends to bring the information together from the rhetorical treatises from his predecessors and to list up everything that one should know to become a proficient speaker in court or the senate (which would already have been a serious endeavour in itself). In Quintilian's view, the perfect orator must be a multifaceted figure, a 'complete man', who combines a proficiency in pleading with moral impeccability, political insight and a broad knowledge of art and literature (cf. 1.pr.9: *oratorem (...) instituimus (...) perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus*

[7] For an extensive summary of the rhetorical and educational principles articulated in the *Institutio*, see Kennedy 1969, 55-101; Wheelock 1974, 22-148. A discussion of the concept of the 'perfect orator' can be found in Winterbottom 1998; Seel 1977; Walzer 2003; Morgen 1998. The edited volumes by Galland e.a. 2010 and Sancha 2013 show the reception of the *Institutio* and the recuperation of the image of the perfect orator from Late Antiquity onwards.

[8] König and Woolf 2013, 48. See also Kennerly 2018, 161-162 for an overview of the encyclopaedic claims made in the preface.

[9] Kennerly 2018, 161

[10] Winterbottom 1998.

non potest).[11] The latter aspects should also be part of his 'encyclopaedic', 'total' project, which renders its range to be much wider than the field of rhetoric in the strictest sense of the word. Rather than just being a work about the art of speaking well, Quintilian thus presents the *Institutio* as an (humanistic) attempt to define the formation of the perfect man, the *vir bonus,*[12] an undertaking that has not simply required engagement with the rhetorical tradition but, as he says in the letter to his friend Trypho that precedes the first book,[13] with the works of 'innumerable authors' that he has read 'during the almost endless preparation process of his treatise' (letter to Trypho: *inquisitioni instituti operis prope infiniti et legendis auctoribus, qui sunt innumerabiles*).[14]

Although Quintilian has chosen to develop this guide to the perfect orator, the complete man, within a voluminous treatise of twelve books, he does not seem to have been enabled to circumvent the sort of narrative challenges with which the librarian in Borges' short story has been faced. The preface to his work contains several apparent inconsistencies or slightly paradoxical phrases that indicate that he must have struggled (or at least wants to create this impression) with finding a way to integrate all the information, knowledge and insights from the innumerable authors within a limited textual space, within one and the same work. Quintilian states, for instance, that he 'wants to demonstrate everything' that concerns the perfect orator but realises that he must do this in a 'very brief way' (1.pr.26: *omnia breviter demonstrari*); he aims, moreover, to include 'all the details in the *Institutio* that other treatises left out' yet understands that he should at all costs avoid 'losing himself in details' (1.pr.25). This kind of statement subtly lays bare an awareness of the complexity of his literary project, knowing that its

[11] Seel 1977 extensively elaborates upon the ethical and philosophical prescriptions that are interwoven with the rhetorical guidelines. He has cogently argued that Quintilian does not only present himself as a teacher of rhetoric but also as a moral compass, as a guide to life (15): *Er ist darüber hinaus ein Meister des Schweigens zur rechten Zeit, des Distanznehmens, des Stummbleibenkönnens vor dem Unsäglichen, des stillen Gelassenseins als eines unverrückbaren Fundamentes aller Würde, aller Demut und aller Humanität*".

[12] See Van der Poel 2010 on Quintilian's 'humanist project'.

[13] White 2009 places the letter to Trypho within the broader socio-cultural context of book production near the end of the first century. Gerbrandy (forthcoming) reads the letter as a meta-poetical statement that indicates how the readers are expected to approach the *Institutio*.

[14] Gunderson 2001, 35-36. An extensive overview of the rhetorical and non-rhetorical "sources" that Quintilian has used can be found in Jean Cousin's impressive survey, *Etudes sur Quintilien* (1967). He has observed in the *Institutio* a deliberate mixture of various influences, though has largely paid attention to the text's engagement with rhetoric and (stoic and Aristotelian) philosophy (7): "*La rhétorique de Quintilien est une rhétorique philosophique dans toutes ses démarches, qu'elle est avant tout stoïcienne par la psychologie, par la morale, par la métaphysique, par la pédagogie, par les doctrines juridiques, par les principes techniques de l'invention, de la disposition, de la confirmation, de l'argumentation qu'elle expose ou qu'elle suppose, qu'elle est aristotélicienne par sa logique et par sa théorie de l'elocution, qu'elle est stoïco-pergaminienne par ses principes de grammaire et de critique et qu'enfin, par la synthèse puissante qu'elle présente, elle est une Somme rhétorique, le fondement même du Classicisme occidental*". For an elaboration on Quintilian's view on philosophy, see Cassin 1995.

scope is huge but that the textual space is not endless. Text and totality, literary creation and absolute knowledge, so it seems, make in the *Institutio* a pair not less difficult than in Jorge Luis Borges' short story.

This chapter aims to examine how Quintilian gives form to his 'encyclopaedic', 'total' project in the remainder of the *Institutio*. It will not try to map out its 'completeness' by developing an overview of all the authors with whom he engages, the rhetorical aspects he discusses or the moral and cultural principles he integrates. The focus will be on the manner in which he conceptualises and metaphorises the totality of his work and the feasibility of his literary endeavour. This research will be carried out by placing the *Institutio* into a dialogue with Jorge Luis Borges' *Fictions*. The first two paragraphs will read the rhetorical treatise in the light of 'The Library of Babel' which has already been introduced above. The manner in which the librarian deals with the narrative challenge will help us think about Quintilian's strategy and draw our attention to some elements that suggest that he, along the lines of his treatise, proposes a sort of 'theory' or 'guidebook' in the 'art of writing a total work'. The last paragraph will turn to another story within *Fictions* which has often been considered as a part of a diptych with 'The Library of Babel, i.e. 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'. This story will be used to improve our understanding of the role Quintilian ascribes to the readers for the realisation of his complete project.

2.1 The Physical End of the Text

Before going more deeply into the librarian's account of the Babel Library, it might be useful to take a look at how he himself estimates the feasibility of his literary project. The librarian seems to be strongly aware of the huge challenge and apparent impossibility of his undertaking. In the pages immediately following his self-introduction as traveller of the Library, he tells about the enormous size of the space in which he has wandered around. The Library is said to be "the work of a god" and is presumed to "exist *ab aeterno*" (79). Although the place is "not infinite", it gives the impression to be so. The same goes for the "vast amount of literary materials" that are stored in there. These are also not endless in number yet appear to be "unending" when one sees them there all together (81). When walking around in the Library, the librarian implies, as a "human" one can only be struck by one's own smallness and mortality. The immensity of the space and the impression of endlessness have caused him to understand the temporariness of his own existence. Dwelling in the impressive Library and getting an idea of how infinity must feel and look like, the librarian says, he has become aware of his own fragility and realised that he "will be dead once" (79).

One way to interpret the contrast between the 'infinite Library' and the 'finite librarian' would be by looking at it from a more philosophical point of view. As Gene Bell-Villada has remarked, the contrast can tell us something about Borges' take on the "mysterious nature of the universe, of time, and what is most important, of ourselves".[15] Another way to understand it could be by approaching it from a narrative perspective and seeing it in the light of the tension between text and totality to which has been referred in the introduction. According to Neil Badmington, the librarian's awareness of his mortal condition cannot be separated from his understanding that also his text should have its limits.[16] As he as an author cannot live on forever, he realises that the account that he has started writing "must be ended" at some point.[17] This awareness has been increased by some symptoms of physical decline and infirmity which he has been noticing since he has begun his literary undertaking. His "eyes", the librarian states, could sometimes "hardly decipher anymore what he has been writing", while his "hand" felt more "fallible" than before (79). The more he writes down, the weaker he seems to become and the more he comprehends that the account he is giving of the Library of Babel cannot go on for ever and will need a conclusion. Within the context of the story, Badmington records, the librarian's physical limits thus serve as a signaller of the "boundaries of the text".[18]

With the emphasis on his weakening physical condition in the first pages, being a metaphor of the limitations of his textual space, the librarian from the start underlines the complexity of his literary project. The Library he wants to describe is an almost endless universe in which an innumerable number of books are stored, containing all possible knowledge about the past, present and future. As he will not be enabled to write an ever-ongoing work, the librarian, so Badmington records, has realised that he must find a way to render the completeness and infinity of the place to "be gated, imprisoned", within the "physical boundaries" of the story.[19] He should develop a strategy to represent the 'unending' within a medium of which he leaves no doubts that it, like life itself, cannot be 'endless', to "reconcile limit with infinitude".[20]

After the preface to the first book, Quintilian does not make any explicit statements anymore about his encyclopaedic ambitions. He sometimes briefly remarks that he has worked out a certain topic more extensively than has been done by his predecessors. At

[15] Bell-Villada 1981, 114.

[16] Badmington 2009, 65-66.

[17] Sasson-Henry 2007, 53.

[18] Badmington 2009, 65.

[19] Badmington 2009, 66.

[20] Aizenberg 1990, 189. She further remarks about the opening: "There is a curious paradox here. The Library of Babel offers an exhaustive catalogue of texts. The library codifies the conventions of textuality. Yet, notwithstanding the implications of *limit* inherent in any list, the narrator goes on to call the library infinite".

other points, he admits that he has treated a subject perhaps more concise than he would have hoped. But he does nowhere openly reflect upon the implications of his encyclopaedic aspirations and his wish to define a 'complete man' within the 'limited' and 'ending' space of his (voluminous) text.

Quintilian appears to have reserved the topic of 'limits and limitations' for other contexts in the *Institutio* that seem, at least at first sight, not directly to be connected to (the form of) the work itself. He often addresses this topic, for instance, within discussions of ethics and moral behaviour. A good orator should know his limits and must learn to enjoy the many pleasures life offers with moderation. Another context in which he repeatedly speaks about limits and limitations concerns his treatment of style and stylistic ornamentation. A speech, Quintilian believes, may not phrase the events around which it revolves and the arguments it wants to provide in a too technical or dry manner. An orator should present the content of his speech in such a way that it becomes pleasant for the audience to listen to him. But he may not exaggerate and must keep the stylistic embellishment of his text within the acceptable limits (he should know when to 'stop'). A third context in which Quintilian frequently mentions the notion of limits and limitations are his reflections upon human existence. At several occasions in the *Institutio*, Quintilian interrupts his discussions of rhetorical, moral or artistic phenomena to comment upon the mortal ('limited') condition in which we as humans find ourselves.

The most extensive elaboration upon the human condition can be recorded in the preface to the sixth book. Therein, Quintilian informs the readers about the death of his first son (who was named after his father), after he had already lost his wife and second child some years earlier. He deplores that the three of them have passed away prematurely, even before they could have 'reaped the full rewards of their talents and virtues' (e.g. 6.pr.10: *quod observatum fere est celerius occidere festinatam maturitatem*). These personal tragedies have made him aware of the mortality (6.pr.2: *mortalitatis*) and limitedness inherent to human existence, giving his readers a message that they may not have expected to turn up in a predominantly technical treatise like the *Institutio*: everyone, including the author, 'will be dead once'.[21]

Although the temporariness of our existence has to be a general concern, Quintilian believes that it should certainly occupy the mind of an orator. An orator, he argues, must fully understand that life has not been granted to him for eternity. This does not only mean that he must take into account that, at some point, he will not be there anymore. He should also remember that his death will be preceded by a period of 'physical decline

[21] Gunderson 2009 has pointed to the significant position of the remarks concerning the death of his wife and children in the *Institutio*. The sixth book of the *Institutio* revolves around the use and evocations of emotions. By starting this book with a pathetic account of a personal tragedy, Quintilian immediately sets the tone for the discussion that will follow.

and infirmity'. The changes in his ageing body will cause it to work differently than it did before and sometimes even lead to malfunctioning. Therefore, Quintilian, already in the second book, advises his readers to quit their practice as orator as soon as they feel that it has become a burden. They should make a *honestissimum finem* (2.12.12) to their career at the moment 'when their services are still in request' (*desinere dum desideraremur*).[22] If they refuse to do so, they will run the risk of suffering the same fate as Quintilian's own teacher, Domitius Afer, once did.[23] In the last book, Afer is said to have failed to stop his practices as an advocate at the right time (12.11.3):

> Vidi ego longe omnium quos mihi cognoscere contigit summum oratorem Domitium Afrum valde senem cotidie aliquid ex ea quam meruerat auctoritate perdentem, cum agente illo quem principem fuisse quondam fori non erat dubium alii, quod indignum videatur, riderent, alii erubescerent: quae occasio illo fuit dicendi malle eum deficere quam desinere. Neque erant illa qualiacumque mala, sed minora.

Despite his boundless admiration for Domitius Afer, Quintilian admits that his former teacher at later age 'lost much of the authority his merits had won for him' (*auctoritate perdentem*). The audience found his performances either ridiculous or awkward, spreading the rumour that Afer rather preferred to 'stutter rather than quit' (*malle eum deficere quam desinere*).[24] To avoid falling prey to the same ambush, Quintilian consults his readers to 'retreat and seek harbour as long as the ship is yet intact' (12.11.4: *receptui canet et in portum integra nave perveniet*).[25] In this way, they will be permitted to bring their activities 'to a close in a worthy manner', *finem quoque dignum et optimo viro et opere sanctissimo faciet* (12.11.1). Only when the orator fairly estimates his 'physical limits', his own 'boundaries' and 'finitude', he will be capable of ending his career as a pleader in a dignified way.

In his contribution to the edited volume *Historia y Actualidad de la Retórica* (1998), George Kennedy wonders why Quintilian has incorporated the above-cited passage on

[22] Quintilian considers himself on this point as a splendid example. He allegedly resigned after a career of more than twenty years of teaching and pleading in Rome (1.pr.1). In the final paragraph, I will extensively discuss Quintilian's elaborations upon his own retirement and the narrative function it fulfils within the *Institutio*.

[23] For the historical background of the relation between Quintilian and Domitius Afer, see Kennedy 1972, 487-489.

[24] Kennedy 1972, 487: "To Quintilian, Afer is not the informer known from Tacitus, but a great orator and wise critic (...), whose only fault was his failure to recognize his declining powers and to retire before he spoke less than his best".

[25] According to Michael Winterbottom (2005, 177), Quintilian's emphasis on physical decline "is taken not just from life but from *De Oratore*, where Crassus foresees (1.199) a time when his powers will begin to fail and also from *De Senectute*, where lungs, strength and voice are mentioned".

retirement and the necessity of being aware of one's own physical limits. He must be "the first person in history to openly recommend retirement while one will still be missed".[26] Orators, just like the heads of philosophical or rhetorical schools, usually "did not retire [in Antiquity], only soldiers retired for obvious physical reasons".[27] Why, then, does Quintilian advise his readers to stop pleading when they feel the time is right? What function do these passages have in the *Institutio* and the training programme it sets out? Kennedy formulates some hypotheses based on his research of the historical circumstances in which Quintilian worked and lived. He discerns a couple of personal and political factors that may explain why the author must have favoured the idea of retirement and stressed the importance of listening to one's body's signals.[28]

A complementary approach to Quintilian's recommendation of retirement might be to look at it from a more narrative perspective. Both the passage in the second and twelfth book, so it seems, do not only provide a useful advice about career planning and a plea for quitting at one's peak. They also appear to function somehow as a signaller of the 'physical boundaries' of the *Institutio* itself, as an indication of the 'limits of the textual space'. The example of Domitius Afer is positioned at the opening of the final paragraph of the twelfth book which contains the work's concluding remarks. This position seems to be structurally significant, since it renders the reflections upon proper career endings to coincide with the closure of the *Institutio* itself. The Afer-story, thereby, seems to be an illuminating example of what could go wrong if one waits too long to quit, as well as to function as a sort of marker, an indirect announcement, that the end of the text is there. This reading is supported by the language that Quintilian has applied to articulate his advices. The remark, which was cited above, that an orator should 'seek the harbour as long as the ship is yet intact' may remind one of a metaphorical type of vocabulary which was conventionally used in the Roman literary tradition to speak about the work itself. Roman authors, including Quintilian in the letter preceding the first book, tended to depict their literary endeavour as a daring sea journey (cf. the letter to Trypho: *sed si tanto opera efflagitantur quam tu adfirmas, permittamus vela ventis et oram solventibus bene precemur*), often claiming in the epilogue to feel relieved that they have safely reached

[26] Kennedy 1998, 152.

[27] Kennedy 1998, 154.

[28] Apart from Kennedy 1972; 1998, see, for instance, Murphy 1986 30-33; Cousin 1979, 40-42; Connolly 2005, 320-322. Although Quintilian himself gives the fear of physical decline as the main reason for his retirement, the latter assumes that apparent changes in the reign of Domitian played an important role as well (320): "Quintilian retired from his public career around 90 CE, as the emperor Domitian's rule collapsed into a reign of terror". A somewhat more nuanced view on Quintilian's relation to Domitian can be found in Roche 2009. Ussani 2003 explores Quintilian's own theories on acting for the benefit of imperial powers.

the port.[29] By integrating such a (meta-)poetically charged language in his comments on the fate of Domitius Afer, Quintilian increases the impression that the story about the physical decline and infirmity of his former teacher implicitly serves as a signaller that the limits, the end, of the text itself have been reached.[30]

A comparable reading can be developed of the other passage that revolves around the ending of the orator's career. Since this passage is embedded halfway the second book, it does obviously not function as a structural marker of the end of the *Institutio*, nor of the book in which it appears. But it interestingly turns up in a complex terminological context that, due to its linguistic ambiguity, obliges the reader to reflect for a moment upon the end(s) of the text itself. The advice to choose a *honestissimum finem* precedes three long paragraphs (2.13-15), in which Quintilian significantly wonders 'what would be a convenient *finis* of the *rhetorica* or *ars dicendi*' (the latter terms are used as synonyms). In its proper meaning, this question indicates that Quintilian wants to define as clearly as possible 'what goal (*finis*), what benefits, the art of speaking well may serve'. Taking into account, however, that the terms *rhetorica* and *ars dicendi* are often used throughout the work to refer to the *Institutio* itself (being a 'rhetorica'/'ars'), the readers, at some points, get the impression that Quintilian is also subtly reflecting upon what would be a proper *finis* of his own text (both in the sense that he might be pondering about the physical 'end' of the *Institutio* and thinking about what should be the 'aims', the 'ends', of his *rhetorica*). This causes the elaboration upon retirement in the second book, like the anecdote about Domitius Afer's bodily condition in *Institutio* 12, to be related, in a sense, to the notion of textual closure.

Although Quintilian does nowhere explicitly elaborate upon the limitations of his textual space, he thus seems to reflect upon this issue in a rather indirect manner, via the passages on retirement. Just as an orator should listen to his body's signals and make a *dignum finem* to his career as pleader, his text, so Quintilian suggests, cannot speak on for ever and its voice must be silenced at a convenient moment (cf. the above quoted phrase *finem (...) dignum (...) opere sanctissimo faciet*, which could also be understood in the sense that the *Institutio*, the *opus*, must come to a close). His comments on retirement and the physical decline and infirmity to which an orator will fall prey once, we could say, appear thereby to fulfil a similar function as Borges' librarian's indications of his weakening

[29] Winterbottom 2005, 177 sees a parallel with Cicero's *De Oratore*: "The idea of retirement as a port after the storms of one's career appears in *De Oratore* (1.255): what Crassus saw as solitude to be feared, Antonius thinks of as a quiet harbor to look forward to".

[30] Gerbrandy (forthcoming) has already pointed to the link between the navigation images at the beginning and end of the *Institutio*. He has proposed a complementary reading and suggested that the application of the sea metaphor to the life of the orator may reveal something about the scope of Quintilian's literary project. The *Institutio* does not only take its readers on a rhetorical endeavour but also on a journey through life; it gives advice about how to become a good pleader as well as about how to live a (morally) good life.

condition, in both cases signalling an awareness of the 'physical boundaries' of their writings.

By drawing the readers' attention to the limitedness of his textual space, Quintilian seems to accentuate a tension comparable to the one described above in the discussion of 'The Library of Babel'. The librarian's physical limits, being a metaphor of the limits of his text, collide with the immensity of the topic of which he wants to give an account, an almost infinite and endless space and collection of knowledge. Likewise, Quintilian has set up his treatise as an encyclopaedic project that aims to define a trajectory which should lead the readers towards the 'complete man'. He frames this undertaking as an *opera prope infiniti* (letter to Trypho), as a *prope infinitum laborem* (4.pr.7), which would require a text that progresses with an *infinitam (...) tarditatem* (5.10.103), endlessly listing up all kind of rhetorical principles, moral rules and cultural information. However, as the passages on retirement has shown, Quintilian realises that his treatise cannot go on for ever and should have its own physical limits, 'must be ended' at some point. But how, to phrase it in Borges' terms, can the 'unending' be represented within a medium of which it is known that it, like life itself, cannot be 'endless'? In what way can an author 'reconcile limit with infinitude'?

2.2 A Conceptual Theory

As becomes clear in the remainder of Borges' story, the librarian does not try to provide a detailed overview of all the Library's characteristics, nor of the books and knowledge it contains. We do not find an exact outline of the architectural structures of the place in his description. Neither does he give the readers a list of topics, dilemmas and mysteries about which they could find information, somewhere stored in the immense space. He barely reveals, moreover, the titles of books that the Library holds, just offering a few examples to assure the readers that its collection really contains everything, even the most absurd works (81). Since his writings cannot go on for ever, such an overview, so he must have realised, would have been doomed to remain incomplete and only have led to the understanding that it is impossible to "exhaust infinity".[31]

Instead, the librarian has chosen to write a more reflective piece that describes a few general principles of which he assumes that the Library functions in accordance to them (as he implies, he cannot be completely sure about these principles, because he has not been capable of travelling around the entire space and based his ideas on his explorations

[31] Maurois 1985, 13.

of the small corner in which he spent time). He (hypothetically) states, for instance, that the enormous collection in the Babel Library consists of all the books that can be formed out of "all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols". Since this set of symbols is limited, the number of books preserved in the collection is "extremely vast", yet "not infinite" (81). None of these books, he believes, is "identical" to another one (80). Furthermore, the totality of all books may seem "formless and chaotic in nature" (79). But, in reality, it corresponds to a clear organisation, "an order, the Order" (87), which, however, might be difficult to grasp and comprehend for a human mind (at least, so he presumes). The librarian frequently speaks about the Library and the books it contains in "organic" or "mechanic" terms (79), as if he wants to underline its order by drawing a parallel with the functioning of a natural organism or machine, which both work with regularity, and according to strict processes and rules.

By listing up these and other (hypothetical) principles, the librarian does not only give a general idea of what he thinks the Library is like. In a sense, he also formulates and invites the readers to reflect upon the conditions which he believes that a text should fulfil in case it would seek to encompass the space in its totality. If a work would aim to give a complete account of the Library, this would entail that it must compile all the books that come forth from 'all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols', make sure that it takes the differences between the individual books into account (none of them is identical), capture and simulate the Order which is hard to understand for a human mind, etc. The librarian, we could say, implicitly makes clear what it would mean to compose the much-desired "catalogue of catalogues" or "compendium of all the rest" (83). At the same time as giving a description of the Library in general, abstract terms, he thus also provides a sort of 'conception' or 'theory' of a total work and indicates what requirements he assumes should be met to create such a text (in a footnote at the end of the story, the librarian remarks that a certain "Letizia Alvarez de Toledo" already proposed a format for such a work: "a *single volume* (...) printed in nine or ten point type, containing an infinite number of infinitely thin leaves", 86).

There has been a lively academic debate about the exact status of the librarian's presentation of the principles of the Library/theory of the total work. Some scholars have interpreted it as a proof of the librarian's incapability and the "failure" of mankind to master and manage absolute knowledge.[32] The hypothetical condition of his statements (contradictory, by times), combined with the fact that he has not tried to apply his own theory of the total work, would indicate that he has not succeeded at understanding and representing the space in which he has travelled almost his entire life. In their opinion,

[32] Sasson-Henry 2007, 52 has argued that 'The Library of Babel' "emphasizes man's disappointing failures in the face of the overwhelming amounts of information".

'The Library of Babel' would be an expression of the "pessimistic vision [that Borges would have had] (...) of the uses of science, philosophy and literature"; it would prove the fruitlessness of "any pursuit of this kind [which] in the long run will only cause widespread discontent and frustration (...) because of the dangerous illusions as to how much is truly knowable that it encourages".[33]

Although recognizing the story's pessimistic aspects, other scholars have developed a more optimistic reading of the librarian's undertaking.[34] They have considered the very conceptual way in which the librarian has given form to his account as a less or more successful strategy to "present infinity" within the limited space of a text.[35] It is indeed true, they say, that the story does not function as a catalogue or compendium in the traditional sense of the word. But the librarian seems to have chosen an alternative method of representation, offering a set of general principles that both characterise the Library and serve as the theoretical basis to write a total text. By working on such a conceptual level, he appears to be enabled to "propose", to theorise and metaphorise, the space's endlessness and absoluteness within the physical boundaries of the short story.[36] He succeeds at organising what appears to be 'chaotic and formless', at creating a literary 'Order', by way of conceptualising, theorising and abstracting. In this sense, 'The Library of Babel' may also be considered as a celebration of the capacities of human beings and our ability to comprehend and order the world, knowledge and information by means of language, concepts, metaphors and theory. The latter, so it seems, are the only suitable instruments to reconcile limit with infinity.

An objection that has been made to this optimistic reading is that it has ignored the apparent uselessness of the librarian's undertaking.[37] Since the Babel Library is said to be complete and contain all possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols, we may assume that an exact copy of the text the librarian has written must be preserved somewhere in the collection. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that the Library includes more texts of this type, commenting upon the nature of the space and providing a theory of the total work. But some of them probably offer a totally different and even conflicting version of the functioning of the Library and the principles lying behind the

[33] Bell-Villada 1981, 115.

[34] Butler 2010, 53-55 describes the shifting tendencies in research on 'The Library of Babel' in his *Reader's Guide*. He states (53): "The story's interpreters (...) have largely over the years seen the story as either about the futility of searching for meaning in an indifferent universe or a metaphor for the decline or exhaustion of Western culture. Today, however, its vision of the possibility of the total availability of all knowledge is viewed in a more optimistic mode, thanks to the advent of the computer and the internet, and there is now a whole literature devoted to the connection between Borges' story and contemporary information technologies".

[35] Maurois 1985, 13.

[36] Maurois 1985, 14.

[37] An overview of the most important voices in this debate can be found in Butler 2010, 60.

catalogue of catalogues or compendium of all the rest. This relativity has been considered as an indication of the meaninglessness of the librarian's endeavour, as a subversion of the initial optimism we may have felt when seeing the story as a celebration of mankind's capacity to grasp infinity via language, concepts, metaphors and theory.

In his response to this criticism, Rex Butler makes clear that the relative status of the writings should not necessarily undermine the entire value of the librarian's undertaking. Despite the hypothetical nature of the principles he sets out, his piece succeeds at "permanently dividing the Library from itself".[38] Via his writings, he has been enabled to step back for a moment and look at the space and its immensity from a (mental) distance. This distance has allowed him, and the readers with him, to carry out the activity which Borges seemingly aims to induce with each of his stories: reflecting. By dividing the Library from itself through writing, the space becomes an object of study for the librarian and the readers, being incited to think about their relation to infinity and absolute knowledge, about strategies to order and systematise this knowledge, about the role of language and conceptualisation within our attempts to master the huge volume of information which we have to manage in daily life, etc.

Over the course of the twelve books, Quintilian does not provide an explicit answer to the questions asked at the end of the previous paragraph. He does not exactly explain how he has tried to reconcile the scope of his project to the limitedness of his work. He does not sum up techniques that have helped him to incorporate the insights of the 'innumerable authors' into one and the same text or strategies which have enabled him to prevent his treatise from progressing with an *infinitam (...) tarditatem*. The readers, so it seems, just have to believe that he has succeeded in doing this and take the totality, the completeness, of the *Institutio* for granted (some scholars have deliberately read against the grain of Quintilian's text and pointed to some aspects from the rhetorical and non-rhetorical tradition that, in their opinion, have unjustly been ignored in the *Institutio*; the absence of these aspects from the discussions in the treatise would undermine the self-proclaimed completeness of the work).[39]

Quintilian, however, interestingly addresses the question how to manage a huge amount of information and materials several times within another context in the *Institutio*, i.e. within his discussion of the best ways to write a speech. The fifth and the seventh book, for example, include quite extensive passages that explain to the readers, the 'orators-in-training', what elements they should take into account during the

[38] Butler 2010, 61.

[39] e.g. Kennedy 1994, 175; Murphy 1987, 54; Maier-Eichhorn 1989, 21; Schulz 2014, 153. Kennedy 1994, 181 has maintained that the criticisms that can be made of Quintilian are chiefly of two sorts. One of them is that "he flattered the emperor, shut his eyes to abuses of power, and tolerated the activities of informers". The other is that he is "not as precise as we would wish (...) for he was more a teacher than a scholar".

composition of their speeches. In both cases, Quintilian emphasises that perhaps the trickiest aspect of the writing process is getting grip on the enormous volume of information one has to process and finding a way to integrate all elements into (one of the parts of) a speech. The fifth book warns the readers that they should temper themselves when they have to deal with an *innumerabilis (...) copia* of materials (5.10.100). They must avoid starting to write down and sum up the numerous facts, arguments, anecdotes, etc. without having thought through first the structure of their text. If they do not follow this prescription, their writings will inevitably turn into an incomprehensible tangle of statements, *inexplicabiles laqueos*, which will only confuse the audience. Quintilian repeats this advice in the opening of the seventh book (7.pr.1). He states that an *abundans rerum copia* is doomed to appear as 'a confused heap' in a speech (*cumulum tantum (...) atque congestum*), unless the author-orator has properly planned the 'arrangement that can reduce it to order and give it connection and firmness of structure' (*nisi illas eadem dispositio in ordinem digestas atque inter se commissas devinxerit*). Just as construction workers building a house, Quintilian says, may 'not merely collect stones and pile them up at random' (*ut opera extruentibus satis non ext saxa atque materiam et cetera aedificinati utilia congerere*), the speech that the orator is writing should carefully gather all the necessary materials and organise them in a well-considered sequence. Thereby, the speech will be prevented from appearing as 'a statue of which the parts must still be assembled' or a 'creature whose body is made up of the limbs of humans and animals' (7.pr.3: *neque enim quamquam fusis omnibus membris statua sit nisi conlocetur, et si quam in corporibus nostris aliorumve animalium partem permutes et transferas, licet habeat eadem omnia, prodigium sit tamen*).[40]

Although these advices are meant to help the readers to improve their speeches, the compositional challenge around which they revolve, i.e. the integration of a mass of materials and information into the limited space of a text, remarkably echoes the one that lies at the heart of Quintilian's own literary project. This might invite the readers to wonder whether the passages in the fifth and seventh book indirectly articulate some principles in accordance to which *Institutio* itself has been set up. Do they implicitly comment upon the way in which Quintilian himself has tried to incorporate an *abundans rerum copia* into his encyclopaedic work? And if so, are they representative for a broader tendency in the *Institutio*, entailing that Quintilian, along the lines of the rhetorical, moral and artistic phenomena he discusses, offers a more general reflection upon the functioning of his own treatise, a sort of 'theory' of the 'total text' which he has created?

[40] Kennerly 2018, 171 sums up other places in the text where Quintilian similarly emphasises the importance of order.

A good starting point for answering these questions might be the metaphorical imagery complex around architecture and the human shape to which also the similes used in the preface to the seventh book belong. Quintilian compares the process of writing a speech to the construction of a building or the shaping of an organic form (a statue or a creature). As becomes clear from Gerhard Assfahl's study, this type of metaphorical language already turned up at earlier moments in the *Institutio*.[41] Quintilian speaks for the first time in terms of architecture and the form of an organic being in the preface to book one. There, this metaphorical vocabulary is not applied to illuminate a rhetorical principle he wants to set out, as was the case in the passages cited above, but to clarify the nature and aims of the *Institutio* itself. Maybe, the shared metaphorical vocabulary, the correspondence in language between the parts in which Quintilian speaks about his own text (preface to book 1) and those in which he consults his readers about composing a speech (e.g. book 7), can offer an indication of the exact relationship between the literary project of the *Institutio* and the rhetorical principles described in this project.

The metaphorical cluster around architecture is introduced rather briefly in the preface to the first book. It will evolve into a proper imagery complex only later in the *Institutio*. Quintilian limits himself to a concise simile that announces that the treatise will build up the rhetorical training programme from 'its very 'fundaments' (1.pr.4).[42] Much more attention is payed to the initiation of the metaphor of the organic form, the human body. In the beginning of the preface, Quintilian states that he is going to present the education programme in the *Institutio* as if 'a young boy was entrusted to him'. This entails that he will start with a discussion of the preliminary exercises for children in book one and increase the level of difficulty until 'he has reached the very summit of the art, the perfect orator' at the end (1.pr.5: *nec aliter quam si mihi tradatur educandus orator studia eius formare ab infantia incipiam,* (...) *artis ad summam eius operis perducere festinabimus*).[43] This remark subtly forces the readers into the position of the pupil who must be willing to accept the authority of the teaching narrative voice that will guide them in their 'maturing process' (1.pr.7: *crescunt*), growing from rhetorical childhood over rhetorical adulthood towards rhetorical perfection.[44]

[41] Assfahl 1932.

[42] An analysis of the metaphor of the building in the *Institutio* is provided by White 2017, 69-73. He states (70): "For Quintilian, the development of the orator is akin to the construction of a building. The studies in which the youngest child embarks form the foundations, while the eventual rhetorical training is the equivalent of the building's roof".

[43] Kennerly 2018, 167 points to a similar analogy further in the *Institutio* (2.8.3-4), where Quintilian compares his tasks to those of a trainer of athletes. The message Quintilian aims to provide is that "a good teacher quickly and accurately gauges talents and tendencies, which differ from person to person as much as body types do".

[44] Although not explicitly referring to the metaphor of growing, Gerbrandy (forthcoming) comes to a similar conclusion, implying that the readers are expected to develop themselves over the course of the twelve books.

At the end of the preface, Quintilian further develops this kind of imagery and enforces the connection between the rhetorical training programme he sets out and the notion of (bodily) growth and maturing. He complains once more that his predecessors treated the rhetorical training programme so selectively and often zoomed in on one particular part without keeping the bigger picture in mind. Their 'naked treatises', he says, may have 'laid bare some of the bones' of the *ars retorica*; these are certainly necessary and 'should be bound by ligaments', yet a 'body requires to be covered by flesh as well (1.pr.24: *nam plerumque nudae illae artes (...) ossa detegunt, quae ut esse et adstringi nervis suis debent, sic corpore operienda sunt*). He suggests that he will not make the same mistake as his predecessors and plans to work out a full-grown body, a complete account of the art of rhetoric, by which he wants to 'increase his readers' powers of speech and nourish their eloquence' (1.pr.23: *sed alere facundiam, vires augere eloquentiae possit*). By framing the *Institutio* in this way, Quintilian sets a whole imagery complex into play that invites us to think about his literary project in 'organic terms'. We are encouraged, so it seems, to conceptualise the rhetorical programme that the text covers as a human body, a natural 'organism' that will keep on evolving and growing throughout the twelve books until the *corpus eloquentiae* (12.2.9) has reached perfection at the end.[45]

As Michele Kennerly has recently shown, the correlation between treatise and body developed in the preface of *Institutio* 1 is not so exceptional. The human body, as a metaphor of the treatise itself, has informed multiple rhetorical works from the Roman tradition, "going from Cicero over Quintilian to Tacitus and Pliny".[46] Kennerly proposes that this metaphorical language is often part of a broader imagery complex that aims to express "textual care". These works often speak about a human body as something one should look after, an advice that is especially important for future orators whose appearance in court or on the forum must be neat. But it may also be considered as a meta-literary comment on the way in which the authors have treated their own treatises, their 'textual bodies', having polished them until they had a splendid and meticulous outlook.[47]

A complementary interpretation of the metaphor of the human body might be to see it as an indication of the treatise's order. It may be a way to represent the work as a strictly organised whole that has managed to process a huge mass of information and in which all the different aspects of the knowledge one needs to become a perfect orator have been

[45] Gunderson 2000, 3 notes: "The body they write is also the body they make".

[46] Kennerly 2018, i. See also Gunderson 2000.

[47] Kennerly 2018, 162: "Ovid's troublesome (for him) *Ars Amatoria* contains the fullest ancient account of grooming for men and for women, including attention to hair care, manicures (literally *cura* of the hands) and perfuming. Quintilian's work mentions many of the same treatments and implements, sometimes applied metaphorically to verbal or textual bodies, sometimes to fleshy ones". The emphasis on the splendid polishing of the work is also a strategy to create authority, see Lopez 2003.

given a place. This reading is already subtly implied in the sentences quoted above in which the body, as a metaphor of the treatise itself, is said not to consist of loose parts but to be hold together by nerves. But the interpretation gets especially form when reading the preface to book 1 in interaction with the passage in the seventh book (which is thematically connected to the one in the fifth book). By speaking at the start of his work about his literary project in organic terms and embedding it within bodily imagery, Quintilian almost explicitly invites the readers to consider the passages that appear later in the *Institutio* and make use of a related metaphorical vocabulary, such as the one in the preface to book 7, as a sort of indirect comment upon the treatise itself. He has rendered the readers to become attentive to this kind of imagery and triggered them to wonder whether the rhetorical principles expressed in a bodily vocabulary, along the lines, perhaps formulate the 'theorical background' of Quintilian's encyclopaedic undertaking, the conditions that he thinks he must have fulfilled to integrate totality within his limited textual space. Since organic imagery is often used throughout the *Institutio* in similar contexts as in the seventh book (see *infra*), stressing the importance of systematising and ordering, the readers may retrospectively interpret the bodily vocabulary in the preface to *Institutio* 1 as a way to emphasise the rigorous organization of his work. In line with what he advices to his readers, he himself implies to have dealt with the challenge of incorporating an *abudans rerum copia*, an immense mass of information, into his treatise, by imposing a strict 'literary Order' on it. To reconcile the textual limits of the *Institutio* with the apparent infinite amount of knowledge, he has had to find a way to organise and systematise what seemed 'chaotic and formless', to let his work function in a manner that resembles a natural organism in which every single aspect gets its place and is interconnected to all the other aspects.[48]

The metaphor of the human body and the organic form turns up at several other occasions in the *Institutio*. But it comes perhaps most prominently to the fore in the tenth and eleventh book.[49] This seems to be no coincidence, as these books present the principles that are fundamental for the *actio/pronuntiatio* and thus discuss the rhetorical

[48] Varwig 1976, 38-49 approaches the bodily vocabulary in the preface to the first book from a different angle and sees it as part of a broader conceptual complex that tries to define the relation between *ars* and *natura*. According to Varwig, nature and doctrine appear as complementary notions in the *Institutio*. A pupil will never become a good orator if he does not have innate talent (*natura*). Although this talent is important, he will not turn into a proficient speaker if he does not stimulate his talents via training and instructions (*ars*). This correlation of nature and doctrine is implied in the metaphor of the child who 'naturally' grows while following 'instructions'. Elaine Fantham (1995, 126) has developed a similar idea about the duality *ars-natura* in the *Institutio*, stating that, for Quintilian, "both natural eloquence and natural virtue need professional support".

[49] For an overview of the points in the *Institutio* at which Quintilian uses the metaphor of the body (apart from book 10 and 11), see Kennerly 2018, 170-174.

phase in which the orator is staged during a bodily performance.[50] To prepare themselves properly on the act of pleading, Quintilian advises the readers in the tenth book, for example, to make sure that they master first the highlights from Greek and Roman literary history. This will allow them to develop a broad vision on the world, its morals and its art. Then follows his famous overview of the literary tradition, which contains, he realises, an almost 'infinite number of works', *infiniti (...) operis* (10.1.37). Although he understands that studying all these texts will ask a lot of effort from his readers, he assures them that it will be worth it and will help them to sharpen their mind and responsive capacities.[51] The only thing to which they should be attentive, is that they read and reread all these texts very carefully, which he underlines with the following 'organic' metaphor (10.1.20):

> Repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda sed multa iteratione mollita et velut [ut] confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur.

Quintilian vividly compares the act of (re)reading with the digestion of food. Just as we do not swallow a meal 'without having chewed it and reduced it to liquid', so what we read must not be transferred to our memory while it is still in 'a crude state'. Like a stomach, we should first make sure that the materials we have read are 'softened' and become more 'digestible' for our mind.[52]

The digestion imagery returns in the first half of the next book, where Quintilian offers some tips that could make the memorisation of a rhetorical speech easier. However lengthy the speech may be, Quintilian assures his readers that they will be capable of learning the text by heart as long as they do not forget to fix it deeply in their memory 'via frequent rehearsal' (11.2.35: *ut cebra iteratione firmentur*). For, 'digested food', *digestum*

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[50] For a general discussion of Quintilian's theory on delivery, see Maier-Eichhorn 1989, 29-48; Kennedy 1969, 79-100 and Schulz 2014, 150-162. The latter contribution discusses Quintilian's ideas in the context of the rhetorical tradition, ranging from Isokrates to Alcuin.

[51] Murphy 1987, 67 explains the importance and the position of the tenth book in Quintilian's training programme: "All the precepts of invention, arrangement and style have been rehearsed in the preceding six books; these are things that children begin to learn. How does the adult acquire the deeply ingrained capacity for improvisation? Quintilian's answer is that the adult must consciously undertake a continuation of the interrelated learning activities once forced on him by the schoolmaster when he was too young to understand the process he had to undergo in the school. If the adult learner does not do this, he will not benefit from the precepts of memory and delivery which are shortly to follow. In this sense book X is an adult's commentary on Books I and II, because here Quintilian explain sin greater detail the why of the school regimen. The difference is that the adult must now know the why of what he does; as a child he needed only to follow the directions of his master".

[52] For a contextualisation of the digestion imagery within the ancient literary tradition, see Dellaneva e.a. 2007, 13-16.

cibum, Quintilian repeats his adagio from the previous book, finds more quickly its place in our mind. As soon as all the studied or digested materials will have been transported to memory, their 'organisation', *ordinem*, and the 'links' between the different parts will definitively be anchored; the text will be 'saved for eternity' and even 'in the longest pleadings the patience of the audience would flag before the memory of the speaker' (11.2.8: *non enim rerum modo sed etiam verborum ordinem praestat, nec ea pauca contexit sed durat prope in infinitum*). From this point on, the readers/future orators will be ready to proceed to the culmination of the rhetorical training programme, the actual delivery, on which is elaborated in the second half of book eleven. During the *actio*, Quintilian underlines, the orator must not only be able to recite his speech as fluently as when he would be reading his text out loud from parchment/wax tablet (11.2.32: *dicit similis legenti*). He should also reconcile the content of his speech to his physical gestures, paying attention to the pronunciation and articulation of his text as well as to the 'eloquence of his body', *eloquentiam (...) corporis* (11.3.1).[53]

As shown by these brief examples, Quintilian continues coming back on the form and mechanisms of the human body in the tenth and eleventh book. He refers to the body both in a literal sense (e.g. in his discussion of the orator's bodily performance) and a metaphorical, when giving the readers, for instance, some tips about how they should best process a huge volume of textual materials. The advices enlightened by the digestion-imagery may, perhaps, like those in the preface to the seventh book, have a wider significance, not only articulating some prescriptions for the readers/orators-in-training but also indirectly commenting upon the principles Quintilian has applied to set up his encyclopaedic project. At the beginning of the *Institutio*, he has told the readers that he has integrated the insights of 'innumerable authors' in the work, which has caused the 'preparation process to seem almost endless' (Letter to Trypho: *operis prope infiniti et legendis auctoribus, qui sunt innumerabiles*). His consult in the tenth and the eleventh book about the best way to deal with a big amount of texts might retrospectively be interpreted as a clarification of how he himself has handled the challenge to process these *innumerabiles auctores*. He implies to have kept on rereading and 'digesting' their works, which would have enabled him to get a grip on them in his mind and give them a place, a fixed order, in his memory. In this way, as Dellaneva has remarked, he would have turned the "external literary materials" into a manageable substance ("consubstantial with the person consuming it") that can quite easily be organised within a textual space.[54] Comparable to the passage from the seventh book, the impression that Quintilian in the

[53] Gunderson 2000, 77 points to the many difficulties inherent in writing about a body and constructing a body in writing: "Not only is the body carefully articulated in its parts, it is also coordinated and organized such that its elements will be orchestrated into a harmonized whole. So the body is first broken into pieces, and then it is reassembled into an ensemble that must give a unified performance".

[54] Dellaneva e.a. 2007, 15 has already hinted at the correlation with Quintilian's literary project.

tenth and eleventh book is implicitly 'theorising' his own encyclopaedic and totalising undertaking is enforced by his use of organic imagery (digestion), by which he makes once more the link to the start of the *Institutio* and the metaphorisation of the work in the preface to book 1 (wherein he also spoke about his intention to 'nourish' his readers' eloquence, to develop the *corpus eloquentiae* until it will be 'full-grown', etc.).

What function does Quintilian's theorising of his total project, strongly connected to the metaphorical imagery of the body, fulfil in the *Institutio*? Why does he invite the readers to consider some of the advices he offers as indirect comments upon the techniques he himself has applied to set up an all-encompassing treatise? One possible answer to these questions is that he, thereby, increases the impression that he has practiced what he preaches. As Erik Gunderson has recorded, Quintilian often tries to "exemplify his own theory of rhetoric". The anecdote about the death of his wife and children mentioned in the previous paragraph, for example, not coincidentally appears in the preface to the book on the evocation of pathos and emotions, as if Quintilian, by way of introduction, wants to demonstrate the principles and rules that he will describe in what follows.[55] By suggesting a link between the challenges with which the future orators will be faced (e.g. managing a huge amount of materials) and those with which he himself has been confronted while writing the *Institutio*, he encourages the readers to see the work they are reading as the result of a practical application of the advices, rules and prescriptions depicted inside of it.

Another way to answer these questions is to consider Quintilian's theorising and metaphorising as part of his plan to create a literary Order, to achieve his encyclopaedic ambitions by setting up his work as a strictly organised whole. With his implicit theory of the total text and the organic metaphorical imagery, he proposes the readers a clear conceptualisation of his own literary project. We are invited to think about his treatise as a rigorously regulated unity that functions in a similar way as a human body. This textual body, as we might be inclined to say after having read the above-cited passages from the tenth and eleventh book, gradually grows into its adulthood, being 'nourished' by all the information, knowledge and works which the author has 'digested' in his mind; it 'delivers' these digested elements within the span of twelve books, concluding before the body/text would appear so long, repetitive and enumerative that the readers would think it is 'stuttering' or 'suffering from physical discomfort' (like the old Domitius Afer at the end of the twelfth book).[56] By working on such a conceptual level, Quintilian succeeds at

[55] Gunderson 2009, 110.

[56] This reading offers a complementary explanation to Murphy's (cited in footnote 51) about the position of book 10 in the *Institutio*. When seeing the process described over the course of the tenth and eleventh book as a commentary upon the *Institutio*'s processing of numerous materials, the place of Quintilian's overview of the

making the idea of total and complete knowledge, integrated in a relatively small textual space, graspable for and imaginable to the readers.[57] He has not just gathered a bunch of rhetorical, moral and cultural principles and systematised them in a work of which he claims that it is complete.[58] But he constantly suggests the totality of his text by including theoretical passages and metaphors that render its creation to seem plausible and manageable. The reconciliation of limit and infinitude in the *Institutio* thus partly occurs by way of 'conceptualising, theorising and abstracting', by organising his text and evoking totality 'via imagery and metaphor'.

To understand the consequences of this strategy, it might be useful to return, at last, to Borges' 'The Library of Babel', which was discussed at the beginning of this paragraph. In his attempt to give an account of the eternal Library, the librarian has developed a technique that has affinities with Quintilian's to imply the totality of the *Institutio*. Comparable to the latter, the librarian has tried to transfer the immensity and vastness of the object of representation into a limited textual space by means of conceptualising and metaphorising. He has made the infinite place and the absolute knowledge it preserves graspable and imaginable within a text by proposing a theory of such a text and working out an imagery of the place (an obvious difference with the *Institutio* is that the librarian does not make any attempt to bring his theory into practice, while Quintilian does provide a self-proclaimed complete overview of all sorts of rhetorical, moral and cultural issues). By doing so, the librarian has succeeded at 'permanently dividing the Library from itself', turning it into an object of investigation that enables the readers to reflect upon matters as infinity, the ordering potentials of language, etc. Something similar seems to be induced within Quintilian's treatise. With his implicit theory of a total text and the organic imagery complex, he separates, in a sense, his treatise from the rhetorical principles depicted inside of it (despite the close relationship between them, which Gunderson has recorded, *supra*). He attracts the readers' attention to the text itself, to the notion of the encyclopaedic project. He invites them, like Borges does all the time in the short stories, to consider what it means to create such a text, to organise and systematise absolute knowledge, and reflect upon the potentials and capacities of language and rhetoric to master and manage totality, completeness and infinity. He

literary tradition before the memory- and delivery-phase seems logic. It is not a construction fault, as Kennedy 1969, 98 has implied.

[57] Kennerly 2018, 161 has, between the lines, implied a similar idea when remarking that "Quintilian aimed for generative, suggestive copiousness".

[58] For an extensive discussion on the form and structure of the *Institutio*, see Zundel 1981.

wants the readers, so it seems, to take an attitude of contemplation, of reflection, which he thinks, as he explains in the twelfth book, to be crucial for the perfect orator.[59]

2.3 The Author of the *Institutio*

Becoming a perfect orator takes time. Learning the most important rhetorical principles and techniques is one thing. A few years of intense study and inquiry probably suffice (12.11.16: *non multos poscat annos*). Maintaining this knowledge and further developing one's skills is much harder and rather a long-term project (12.11.16: *exercitatio, quae vires cito facit, cum fecit tuetur*). Internalising the almost infinite number of insights from the literary and rhetorical tradition and growing into a man who is proficient in speaking as well as morally impeccable and acquainted with art and culture, requires a life-time. This training already begins in the cradle (cf. 1.pr.6: *velut incunabilis*) and lasts until the 'pupil' has reached a high age.

Few, I think, would disagree with Quintilian on this point. One cannot become an orator, let it be a perfect one, from one day to the next. One has to put serious efforts in rhetorically exercising and show the willingness to keep on learning and improving oneself during one's entire life. A question we can ask, however, is whether the *Institutio*, as a literary project, does not give the wrong signal. By describing and conceptualising the trajectory to perfect-oratorship within the span of twelve books, it may create the impression that one can acquire all the necessary tools in a much briefer period of time, only by reading the voluminous yet limited corpus. The exertion it costs the readers to read through the *Institutio*, at least so it seems, does not at all outweigh, for instance, the 'almost infinite labour' that gathering, organising and writing down the mass of information has declaredly asked from its author.[60] How does Quintilian see the relationship between, on the one hand, the apparent limitedness of the reading process, and on the other, the efforts he says it costs to become a perfect orator, the 'complete man'? In what way does he conceptualise the tension that seems to exist between the 'relatively quick read' of his text and the framing of his work as a treatise that sets out a

[59] Cf. Seel 1977, 35ff. He sees in Quintilian's presentation of the perfect orator in the twelfth book a plea for a *"vita contemplativa"* (57) by which one should try to become an *"universale Mensch"* (37). More than about a proficiency in speaking, the *Institutio*, in Seel's view (46), "*es vielmehr darum, daß eine zeitlose Alternative menschenmöglicher Seinsform evident wird, an der wir unserer eigenen Verantwortung für uns selber innewerden können*".

[60] In *The Sense of an Ending,* Frank Kermode (2000, 78) remarks that, in case we are dealing with texts that pretend to portray something infinite, there is always a sort of tension between our limited experience of reading and the alleged boundlessness of the represented topic.

total project for the readers which will occupy their entire life and expect that they keep on 'perfecting', 'completing', themselves?

To give an answer to these questions, it might be helpful to return once more to Borges' *Fictions* and explore whether his short stories contain some elements that may elucidate our thinking about this issue in Quintilian's rhetorical treatise. When looking once more at 'The Library of Babel', we may notice a similar tension to the one observed in the *Institutio*. Borges evokes a somewhat paradoxical situation by creating a sort of pocket-version of infinity within the short story. The Library is said to be an immense and almost endless space. The librarian has spent his entire life travelling around in just one corner of it. But as a reader, we can work ourselves a way through the giant Library in no time, perhaps, in twenty minutes at the most (so long it costs to read the ten pages in which the librarian gives account of the Library). Somehow comparable to the questions formulated above about the *Institutio*, we may wonder how Borges conceptualises the relationship between the totality and infinity he wants to represent and convey to the readers, and the apparent limitedness of the reading process.

As Borges does not seem to solve this matter within 'The Library of Babel' itself, it may be useful to turn to another story in the collection to which the one about the Library has often been juxtaposed in research yet is more explicitly focused on reading and reading experience: 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'.[61] This story originally appeared in 1939 in the Argentine journal *Sur* and was later incorporated in the *Fictions*-collection. It has been seen as Borges' "first major story" that still stands among "his liveliest and best pieces". In format, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' is "a post-mortem literary appreciation" about the (fictitious) 20th-century French writer, Pierre Menard.[62] Its unnamed first-person narrator introduces himself as a minor critical reviewer, who appeals to the authority of some of his more well-known acquaintances to underline the credibility of his piece. He begins the literary appreciation with an enumeration of what he calls "Menard's visible work" (62).[63] He gives a list of twenty bibliographic items and refers, amongst others, to a "Symbolist sonnet", "a preface to the Catalogue of an exposition of lithographs by Carolus Hourcade" and "an invective against Paul Valéry" (63).[64] Although the reviewer alleges to have a boundless admiration for each of these texts, they are not the reason why Menard should be remembered. Even more than by his "visible works", we must feel impressed by "his other work: the subterranean, the

[61] For the juxtaposition, see, for instance, Butler 2010, 50-55; Maurois 1985, 11-12; Giskin 2005, 104-107.

[62] Bell-Villada 1981, 124.

[63] The quotations and translations of 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' are copied from the edition by Yates and Irby (1985).

[64] For an analysis of the visible works listed up by the reviewer and its impact on the meaning of the story, see Bell-Villada 1981, 125-127.

interminably heroic, the peerless. And – such are the capacities of man! – the unfinished" (65). This work, which the reviewer believes to be "perhaps the most significant of our time", would consist of a limited number of pages that "coincide – word for word and line for line – with (...) the ninth and thirty-eighth chapter of the first part of *Don Quixote*" (66). In the remainder of the piece, the reviewer explains that this work came forth from Menard's ambition to "compose the *Quixote*". He did not aim to write a contemporary adaptation of this text (like for instance Joyce did with the *Odyssey*). Neither did he want to identify himself with Miguel de Cervantes to such an extent that he would become the Spanish author, since "being, in the twentieth century, a popular novelist of the seventeenth seemed to him a diminution". He sought, instead, to "go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard" (67).

From its appearance onwards, the story about Pierre Menard and his plan to compose the *Quixote* have been the topic of a fierce scholarly debate and produced multiple readings.[65] One possible interpretation of the piece about the 'author of the Quixote' can be to consider it, as Jeremy Rosen has done, as a vigorous plea for an "active" manner of reading, for "a writerly mode of reader engagement".[66] Active readers, Rosen explains, do not conceptualise their task within the process of interpretation as an "ancillary activity" during which they "passively receive the imprint of the text" and are expected to deduce the one meaning the author would have planted in there. They see reading as a "dynamic process of recreation" in which they actively contribute to and participate in the "production" of the text's meaning(s). They do so by keeping on exploring the possible interpretations of what they are reading, thinking about the sense and significance of the words written down on the pages, looking for interconnections and interrelations between the different parts of the text, reflecting in a critical way upon the thoughts which the author has formulated, using the work to re-consider their own visions and convictions, etc.[67] In the view of the active readers, the process of reading thus requires a 'writerly mode of engagement', an intensity and creativity that equals the author's during the composition process.[68]

According to Rosen, Borges' Pierre Menard is a "hyperbolic" example of this type of reader.[69] His ambition to compose the *Quixote* must not be taken too literally. He did not, as the reviewer says, want to produce a "mechanical transcription of the original" (65) and make the *Quixote* one of his "visible works". His undertaking was a "subterranean" and "invisible" activity that took place in his mind, an exercise in the "rudimentary art

[65] For a useful overview of the different approaches to this piece, see Butler 2010, 48-49.

[66] Rosen 2016, 81. See also Martin 2002 for a similar interpretation.

[67] Cornis-Pope e.a. 2002, 153.

[68] Giskin 2005 compares Borges' short story on Pierre Menard to Roland Barthes' theory about reading as an act of re-writing.

[69] Rosen 2016, 81.

of reading" (71). Throughout almost his entire life, Menard, so it seems, kept on participating in the production of the meaning of (the two chapters of) the *Quixote*. He continued (re)reading the work and exploring its possible interpretations, every time thinking about and creatively producing new perspectives and views upon what he was reading ("Thinking, analysing and inventing (...) are not anomalous acts; they are the normal respiration of intelligence", 70). He wanted this engagement to be so strong that it would be as if he had really incorporated and internalised the work, as if he had become the composer, the Author, of the *Quixote*.

The view on reading which Borges articulates in the piece on Pierre Menard might be considered as an indication of how he wants the readers to approach his short stories. Within the literary universe of *Fictions*, the readers are expected to strongly collaborate in the production of the texts' meanings and to adopt a writerly mode of engagement. From this perspective, it becomes quite easy to solve the tension we believed to observe in 'The Library of Babel' between the subject of representation and the apparent limitedness of the reading process. The account the librarian gives of the Library might be concise, yet this should not necessarily imply a quick and easy read. The readers of the story are expected to participate in a dynamic and continuous process of interpretation, during which they keep on rereading, analysing, reflecting upon and thinking about the words imprinted on the pages and the enormous Library they depict. Similar to the librarian who had the feeling that he could travel endlessly throughout the giant place, they should go on exploring the textual space which they have entered, having engaged themselves in a task that will always remain "unfinished", unending. In this way, the readers remarkably seem to contribute to the 'totality' of the text.[70] By continuing the creative production and exploration of new interpretations, in a sense, they render the story, which frames itself as all-encompassing, to become even more 'complete', 'richer' (to use Borges' own term, 69). Via the adoption of this writerly mode of engagement, they continue the 'writing process' the librarian has started up and keep on working out the Library in their creative minds, wherein they are not bound to any limits or physical boundaries but are enabled to endlessly go on producing new interpretations, perspectives and views.

In the remainder of this paragraph, the question will be explored whether Quintilian has tried to solve the tension to which was pointed above in a similar way. Does he attempt to compensate the limitedness of his treatise by requiring an unlimited engagement of his readers? Does he somehow present the *Institutio* as a work with which we will never be finished, that we should keep on reading, analysing, interpreting and reflecting upon (so a work that will ask as much labour from the readers as it has demanded from its

[70] Rosen 2016, 82.

author)? And if so, does he imply that this engagement will help the readers to 'complete' and 'totalise' themselves as human beings, as perfect orators (i.e. completing themselves by 'completing' and 'enriching' the text)? Before examining some points in the *Institutio* that explicitly reflect upon the act of reading, I believe it might be helpful to return once more to the issue of retirement which was already discussed in the first paragraph. As will be illustrated, Quintilian's elaborations upon the end of the orator's career, being a metaphor for the end of his text, seem to contain some subtle indications of what he expects of the readers after they have read through the treatise (a first time) and appear to incite a metaphorical thinking that somehow resembles the one Borges induces in the piece on Pierre Menard.

The first paragraph has concentrated on passages in which Quintilian recommends retirement. An orator should take his physical limits into account and may not endlessly continue practicing and pleading. His voice must fall silent at a certain moment. At several points in the treatise, Quintilian interestingly gives some more clarifications about how he exactly sees such a retirement. As he makes clear a little after his advice in the second book to stop pleading at the right time, an orator's decision to finish his career as pleader should not be considered as the start of a long period of inactivity, during which he just waits until death is ready to take him. On the contrary, it rather serves as the beginning of something new, as a step into a new domain or discipline in which he should try to excel inasmuch as he as a pleader used to do in court or senate (2.18.3-4):

> Nam et potest aliquando ipsa per se inspectione esse contenta. Erit enim rhetorice in oratore etiam tacente, et si desierit agere uel proposito uel aliquo casu impeditus, non magis desinet esse orator quam medicus qui curandi fecerit finem. Nam est aliquis ac nescio an maximus etiam ex secretis studiis fructus, ac tum pura uoluptas litterarum cum ab actu, id est opera, recesserunt et contemplatione sui fruuntur.

Even when an orator falls silent (*oratore etiam tacente*), 'either deliberately or accidentally', Quintilian explains, he 'does not cease to be an orator, just like a doctor remains a doctor after he has made an end to his practice', *curandi fecerit finem*. This period of silence allows the orator to dedicate himself to 'private study' *(ex secretis studiis fructus*) and to enjoy the 'delights of literature' (*pura voluptas litterarum*). Although the orator has withdrawn himself from practice and the toils related to it (*cum ab actu, id est opera*), his mental occupations (*contemplatione*) continue and are carried beyond the *finis*, the closure of his career as pleader. In Quintilian's view, the end of practice thus does not serve as the beginning of a time of inactivity but as the transgression to an alternative sort of

commitment, to the exploration of the (silent) domain of reading, study and contemplation.[71]

Quintilian articulates a similar idea at two other points in the *Institutio*. The first can be found at the beginning of the treatise, where he introduces himself as a post-career, silent orator (this self-introduction is spread over the first and second book). He indicates that he retired a long time ago from 'his tasks of teaching in the schools and speaking on the forum' (2.12.12: *quando et praecipiendi munus iam pridem deprecati sumus et in foro quoque dicendi*). His decision to make a *honestissum finem* to these practices, however, has not initiated a period of boredom and inactivity. It has created, so he alleges, new challenges and possibilities. He has finally found the peace and quietness he needs to carry out the 'research he wants to do (e.g. reading the 'innumerable authors') and compose a text that may be useful to young men', i.e. the *Institutio* (1.pr.1: *post inpetratam studiis meis quietem, quae per viginti annos erudiendis iuvenibus inpenderam*; 2.12.13: *inquirendo scribendoque talia consolemur otium nostrum quae futura usui bonae mentis iuuenibus arbitramur, nobis certe sunt uoluptati*). In line with what he states in the passage quoted above, his retirement thus is "not a rest" but forms a transition to new sorts of commitments, such as reading and writing.[72] He now has the time for undertakings like the *Institutio* which he could not start up in the prime of his career as juridical-political pleader.

The second occasion at which Quintilian elaborates upon the orator's post-pleading career can be recorded near the work's close.[73] After the anecdote about Domitius Afer's physical problems, he repeats the message that a *dignum finem* (12.11.1) should not initiate a period of inactivity. The retirement of the orator, withdrawing himself from public practice and speaking, probably forms the beginning of a time of intense happiness (12.11.7: *beatissimum credi oporteat fore, cum iam secretus et consecratus*), during which he can totally dedicate himself to and 'reap the harvest of in-depth study' (12.11.4: *studiorum fructus*). The resigned orator, Quintilian suggests (11.4), can perhaps compose a 'literary monument' (*monumenta*), offer 'juridical advice' (*iura quaerentibus*), 'write down instructions that should lead to eloquence' (*eloquentiae component artem*) or 'give worthy utterance to the most sublime ideas of conduct' (*pulcherrimis vitae praeceptis dignum os dabit*).

[71] The passage on the *orator tacens* serves as one of the many indications that the *Institutio* is much more than merely a practical guide to the art of public speaking. As Gerbrandy (forthcoming) puts it: "Quintilian emphasizes the intrinsic value of a rhetoric that implies outstanding moral principles and intellectual education, a value which, consequently, does not depend on actual performance of the art". For an extensive analysis of the moral and ethical aspects of the *Institutio* and the relation to the notion of the *orator tacens*, see Seel 1977; Winterbottom 1998.

[72] Winterbottom 2005, 178 remarks that he has planned to continue his activities and to "teach by writing".

[73] Winterbottom 2005, 179-183 analyses the structure of the concluding paragraph of the *Institutio*.

Although Quintilian presents them as four separate suggestions, Winterbottom has remarked that the past six hundred pages have proven that one can also combine all these activities. The *Institutio* has been set up as the culmination of a long tradition, a monument in the field of rhetoric, that provides rhetorical-juridical advices as well as life-wisdom and prescriptions about moral behaviour. While offering some apparently open suggestions about what the orator can do after he has retired, Quintilian, so it seems, thus reminds the readers of the many-sidedness of the text they have just read.[74] This implicit allusion to his own work and the literary project he initiated after he resigned enforces the impression that he has implemented a sort of cyclical movement in the structure of the *Institutio*. The image of the retired orator dedicating himself to his 'silent tasks and study' that turns up at the end reminisces Quintilian's self-fashioning in the beginning of his work, where he presented himself as resigned from practice and introduced his 'literary monument' that he wanted to combine 'rhetorical-juridical advice' with 'the expression of the most sublime ideas of conduct'.[75] The final phase of the rhetorical training programme developed in the *Institutio* thus significantly brings the readers towards a position that resembles Quintilian's in the first books. The climax, the end point, of the 'maturing process' through which the readers are expected to go by reading the *Institutio* (*supra*) is not the 'adult-orator' who excels at the Forum and is admired for his eloquence.[76] The text, the *corpus*, obliges to readers to experience an entire life-cycle and 'grow' into an *orator tacens*, a Quintilian-like figure that concentrates on writing, study and contemplation and is advised to undertake very similar actions as the author has done. What implications does this cyclical movement have? Why has Quintilian not ended the treatise with the image of the perfect orator, a complete man, thoughtful, talented and morally impeccable? Why does the rhetorical training programme lead the readers towards a point, a position, that is very comparable to

[74] Winterbottom 2005, 177.

[75] Kennerly 2018, 185 and Gerbrandy (forthcoming) have already pointed to the cycling tendencies in Quintilian's rhetorical treatise. The latter has stated: "The *Institutio*'s structure, in sum, combines the progressive courses of human life and rhetorical endeavours with a cyclical movement. In this regard, it may be significant that the work as a whole is the fruit of retirement, as the author tells us in the proem to Book 1, for this, writing about one's experiences, is what he recommends in the last chapter of Book 12. In other words, Quintilian's advice and personal conduct correspond exactly".

[76] I do not agree with Kennedy 1969, 123 that considers the image of the perfect orator in the prime of his rhetorical career, that is articulated in the beginning of the twelfth book, as the *Institutio*'s "final picture", as the culmination of the reader's training programme. We are expected to continue 'growing' until we have reached an old age.

Quintilian's at the beginning, to the 'Author's of the *Institutio*'? What does this indicate about the expectations the text may have of the readers?[77]

According to James Murphy, Quintilian pays remarkably much attention to the act of reading in the *Institutio*.[78] He recurrently underlines the importance of having good, attentive and critical reading skills. It does not matter how many books one can process within a limited amount of time; a high number does not necessarily make one a good reader. It is much more fundamental to study the texts we are reading carefully and to pass a proper judgment, *iudicium* as it is frequently called, on them. As Quintilian implies in the preface to the first book, he is willing to help the reader-students to develop the skills they need to come to such a judgment. He declares that he has started writing the *Institutio* at the request of some of his friends. They felt confused by the comments and reflections on rhetoric that can be found in the earlier works from the Greco-Roman literary tradition, because these often expressed different and at times contradictory opinions (1.pr.2: *quod inter diversas opiniones priorum et quasdam etiam inter se contrarias difficilis esset electio*). This is one of the reasons why Quintilian allegedly has chosen to compose his treatise, in which he does not simply synthesise the works of innumerable authors but also treats them critically and imposes a judgment on his literary predecessors (1.pr.2: *iudicandi de veteribus iniungere laborem non iniuste viderentur*).[79] Since he mostly explains throughout the *Institutio* how he has come to his judgments and sets out the thought process that has led to them,[80] Murphy assumes that Quintilian seeks to sharpen and train the critical mind of the readers as well. He does not want the latter, so it seems, to consider reading as an activity during which they just 'passively receive the imprint of the text'. They should 'actively contribute to and participate in' the process of interpretation, in the sense that they must be capable of formulating their own opinions

[77] Winterbottom 2005, 183 has argued that Quintilian, by concluding the *Institutio* with an image that echoes his own at the beginning, especially seeks to reveal what he himself has planned to do after he finished writing the *Institutio*: "All this is not much to the point if Quintilian is merely encouraging the young to master moral philosophy and law; rather he has himself, and his retirement, much in mind. He distances himself from those who stop learning their own subject, and yet are content to know only that; *he*, it is implied, will go on studying rhetoric but not rhetoric alone (...). He is telling himself that work must go on; that there is a life after the *Institutio*, even if it is only devoted to reading yet more, in rhetoric and in other arts". Although this reading is not implausible, it seems unlikely to me that Quintilian would have ended the *Institutio* with a message only directed and relevant to himself. The circular movement, in my view, seems to have a broader significance and may imply a specific kind of reading process.

[78] Murphy 1987, 53-55.

[79] Surveys such as Murphy 1987; Fantham 1989, 286-291 and Russell 1981, 114-129 have characterised several passages in the *Institutio* as examples of pre-modern "literary criticism".

[80] For an analysis of some of Quintilian's judgments, see Fantham 1989, 286-288 and Gunderson 2000, 55-77. They discuss, for instance, Quintilian's readings of the speeches of Cicero, Vergil's *Aeneid* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

and ideas about a certain text, guided by the techniques and strategies of reading he teaches them and the examples he works out throughout the *Institutio*.

The critical attitude that the work encourages us to develop will not only be helpful in the future, for the texts we will read after we will have gone through the entire rhetorical treatise. As Quintilian suggests in the preface to the fourth book, the readers are also expected to apply the reading skills that he has demonstrated on the *Institutio* itself and pass a 'judgment' on his text (4.pr.1: *iudicium hominum emererer*). To stimulate the readers to do so, he seems to have implemented various (didactic) procedures that must challenge them to think carefully about the information that is provided and the manner in which it is presented in the text. At some points, for instance, he explicitly spurs his readers on to create their own ideas about a certain aspect in the rhetorical training programme, even if these would go against his own opinions. A clear example can be found near the end of the sixth book. Quintilian concludes his discussion of the use of humour with the statement that he has, between the lines, suggested his own take on this topic but that the readers must feel free to disagree and to follow the advices of the other rhetoricians that he has described (6.3.112: *Haec quae monebam dissimulanda mihi non fuerunt: in quibus ut erraverim, legentis tamen non decepi, indicata et diversa opinione, quam sequi magis probantibus liberum est*). He openly invites the readers, thereby, to (re-)read the long elaboration on humour, reflect in a critical way upon the thoughts the author has formulated, and actively develop their own impressions on the subject.

At other points, Quintilian acts more subtly and seems to oblige his readers to take on a critical and attentive reading attitude in a rather indirect way. Instead of explicitly encouraging them to carefully go through his text, he sometimes attempts to enforce their critical attention via well-considered structural procedures. As remarked in the previous paragraph, Quintilian believes that the best strategy to study a text is to re-take and re-visit the parts we have already read before (either by actually re-reading them or by going through them once more in our mind). Only by 'chewing' the text over and again, it will be 'digested' as it should be and become deeply imprinted in our memories, which will enable us to keep on consulting, re-thinking and revising the insights it contains (10.1.19). Quintilian, so it seems, does not leave his readers the choice whether to apply this reading method based on repetition and iteration on the *Institutio* or not. He structurally obliges them to re-read certain information over and again by constantly coming back on the same aspects over the course of the text. Topics that are extensively discussed in the first half of the work often return in a summarised version in the second, which forces the readers to recall what they have read earlier and connect it to the new subjects and understandings that have been introduced. The preface to the eighth book, for example, ends in an epitome, a brief overview, of all the rhetorical techniques which have been treated in book one to seven (8.pr.6-13). Instructions from the second book (2.4-6), which partly deals with the reading exercises for young children, are re-taken in

the discussion of the perfect orator's reading programme in the tenth.[81] By incorporating these cycles of information in his text,[82] Quintilian obliges his readers to 'digest' his work in the repetitive way he thinks to be the best and structurally imposes it on their minds. He compels them to keep on '(re-)exploring' the rhetorical, moral and artistic principles he has prescribed, looking for 'interconnections' between different parts of his text, re-consider judgements we made earlier in the light of new information, etc. The circular movements, we could say, oblige us to take on the attentive reading attitude that we need to make a proper judgment, forcing us to go through the *Institutio* with 'a writerly mode of reader engagement', 'with the same care and intensity we show when we are writing something' (10.1.20: *diligenter ac paene ad scribendi sollicitudinem*).

The notion of the 'writerly mode of engagement' leads us back to Jeremy Rosen's discussion of Borges' short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*'. Rosen has proposed that Menard functions as a sort of "hyperbolic" example of an "active reader". He seems to have contributed so strongly to the production of the *Quixote*'s meaning(s) that he began to incorporate it completely, that his intensity and creativity equalled that of an author. As the analysis of Quintilian's view on the act of reading has shown, the *Institutio* seems to expect an attitude of the readers comparable to the one of Menard in Borges' piece. The treatise does not characterise reading in terms of creativity or invention, which is more typical of the modernist context in which Borges wrote. But it appears to require the kind of engagement and dedication which Menard showed while reading the *Quixote*. The *Institutio*, so Quintilian implies, does not allow for quick and superficial readings. Reading the treatise must be a process of re-reading in which we keep on reflecting in a critical way upon the rhetorical, moral and cultural principles the author has articulated, re-thinking aspects that become more complex the more information we receive, re-considering and re-adapting our judgments, etc. This process seems to be one without end, an 'almost infinite labour' that demands 'the same care and intensity we show when we are writing something'.[83]

Quintilian appears to underline these high expectations of the readers by implementing the circular movement in his text that causes them in the conclusion to be led into a position that resembles his own at the beginning. In the first two books, he portrays himself as a retired scholar who, after having read the works of innumerable authors, has written a guide in becoming a perfect orator, a complete man. By making the readers grow throughout the text towards a comparable position, the one of the silent

[81] Murphy 1987, 55.

[82] Cyclical movements in the *Institutio* thus are not only generated via the opening and conclusion. They are also produced via the repetition and reiteration of rhetorical principles at other points in the work.

[83] For an in-depth discussion on the relation between speaking, writing and reading in the *Institutio*, see Murphy 1987, 95ff. that believes these three notions to be "inseparably related".

orator dedicating himself to study, he may seek to imply that they stand for a similar task. They have just gone through an intense process of reading, not of the works of innumerable authors but of one total text that encompasses all their insights and knowledge. Based on what they have read, they must now, like Quintilian, start the 'writing process'. This should not be taken too literally. Quintilian does not really want them to compose a literary monument that combines rhetorical-juridical advices with reflections upon wisdom and moral behaviour (he has already done this). The undertaking of the readers, to use Borges' terms, must rather be seen as an 'invisible' or a 'subterranean' activity. They should keep on exploring, re-visiting and re-considering, with the intensity of a writer, the rhetorical, ethical and cultural issues raised in the *Institutio*, either by actually re-reading the text or by keeping on digesting the different parts of the treatise in their minds (or a combination of both, of course). This constant engagement with Quintilian's text should help them to map out, to 'write', the trajectory that, in daily life, can lead them towards perfect orator-ship, to the state of the *vir bonus*. It will allow them to further 'complete' themselves, developing a view (a 'judgment') on the world and their own behaviour in relation to what they have read (so 'completing themselves by 'completing' the text). This process of completion, so it seems, will never come to a close (cf. a *finis*, in Quintilian's view, is not absolute but rather a transition point to something new).[84] The task of a Pierre Menard, of an Author of the *Institutio*, we could say, will always remain 'unfinished'.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how Quintilian gives form to his encyclopaedic project in the *Institutio*. It has not attempted to map out its 'completeness' by developing an overview of all the authors with whose work the treatise engages, the rhetorical aspects it discusses or the moral and cultural principles it includes. But it has examined the way in which Quintilian conceptualises, metaphorises and theorises totality over the course of his work. I have proposed that Quintilian uses these theorising and metaphorising techniques as a mode of ordering and organising by which he succeeds at making the idea of total and complete knowledge, integrated in a relatively small textual space, graspable

[84] This reading is complementary to Gunderson's (2000, 110) who has argued that Quintilian expects his readers to keep on developing themselves as 'human beings', as persons that try to improve themselves on different levels: "The student always has to be complicit and the first and most necessary lesson to be conveyed by the handbook is that an infinite task of self-mastery must begin".

for and imaginable to the readers. The final paragraph has analysed how Quintilian sees the role of the readers in this total project. They are required to adopt a writerly mode of engagement, making themselves more 'complete' by keeping on exploring, re-considering and re-thinking the principles proposed in the text.

This interpretation of the *Institutio* has been built up in dialogue with Jorge Luis Borges' *Fictions*, in particular with the short stories 'The Library of Babel' and 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'. These pieces have enabled us to approach the rhetorical treatise in a slightly different way than has usually been done in scholarship. The main focus in research on the *Institutio* has been on the basal level of the rhetorical principles and techniques which the treatise describes. Some scholars, for instance, have examined Quintilian's opinions and views on specific aspects in the rhetorical training programme. Others have rather used the rhetorical features sketched in the *Institutio* as a tool to analyse other texts (e.g. Quintilian's elaboration on ekphrasis has been cited several times in surveys on ekphrastic descriptions in epics or lyric poetry). The conversation with Borges has allowed us to take a somewhat alternative perspective and treat the *Institutio* as a 'literary work in its own right', with its own (total) poetics and clearly formulated expectations of the readers.[85]

[85] Recent surveys like those by Erik Gunderson (2000), Michele Kennerly (2018) and Piet Gerbrandy (forthcoming) have set out similar interpretative directions and focused on Quintilian's poetics, rather than on the rhetorical principles and techniques as such.

Chapter 3

The Death of the Reader

Innovation, Repetition and Memory in Statius' *Thebaid* 12 and Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*

In the first half of the fifties, the Irish author Samuel Beckett composed three novels, entitled *Molloy* (*Molloy*), *Malone Meurt* (*Malone Dies*) and *L'Innommable* (*The Unnamable*). They originally appeared in French but were adapted to English by the writer himself. Although the three novels came out separately, Beckett set them up as a trilogy and "was clear in his own mind that they formed part of a single work". This explains why the past decades *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* have mostly been published together, in one volume.[1]

According to Angela Moorjani, Beckett's "post-war trilogy has confounded many readers".[2] The three novels of which it consists, do not allow for a quick and easy read. They do not develop stories with a clear and coherent plot in which the characters are led through a logic sequence of events. They present much more fragmented narratives, full of unexpected turns, wherein the relationship between the characters and their actions does not always seem to make sense (at least, at first sight). The readers mostly cannot count on the narrators of the stories for a clarification of this relationship. The narrators of the novels are unreliable figures who contradict themselves all the time and appear to consider it a sport to mislead and confuse the readers.[3]

[1] Josipovici 2015, xxix.

[2] Moorjani 2015, 19.

[3] For a general introduction to Beckett's trilogy, see Kenner 1973, 92-116; Davies 1994; Pattie 2000, 66-73; Josipovici 2015, i-xxxvi. An overview of recent research on Beckett's oeuvre can be found in Pattie 2004; Moorjani 2015.

The most extreme deviations from the conventions of traditional fiction and storytelling can be found in the third part of the trilogy, *The Unnamable*.[4] Beckett applies several techniques that render it to be rather hard for the readers to get a grip on the novel and find out what it is actually about. One of these techniques concerns the identity of the narrator, about whom there remains much unclarity throughout the work. The stories in *The Unnamable* are told by a first-person narrator, whose name is never revealed in the text (presumably, he thus is the unnamable to which the title refers). When introducing himself in the first pages of the novel, the narrator admits that he himself is not completely certain about who he is. Neither does he have a clear indication of the location he finds himself. Nor can he say for sure where he comes from or what his purposes are. Is he "a ball without arm or legs or even sex? A giant covering the entire earth? A human being crashed into an urn?" The opening of the novel gives the impression that the narrator could be anyone and leaves thereby the readers in doubt about what they can expect.[5] A possible explanation of the unclarity about the narrator's identity could be that he has not decided yet around what topic, events or characters the story he is going to tell will revolve. As long as he has not made up his mind about these issues, he cannot determine what role he himself is going to play and define himself as a character.

One of the few things the narrator seems certain about (at least, so it appears at some points) is that he does not want the stories he is going to create to be too reliant on the past, on the plotlines developed in the first parts of the trilogy. He does not want his part to become ancillary to what happened previously, a continuation and climatic conclusion of the stories initiated before. His novel, he says, must be his "own land. Not the Molloy country (...). Not Malone's room" (330). Instead of building further upon earlier narratives, he believes the time is right for a "new start", a "new beginning",[6] a "manifestation of birth".[7] His stories must be situated in the here and now and unfold themselves in the present, without being concerned about what happened in the past (the word "now" appears six times on the opening page, 329). He pretends to be someone that has "no memory of anything (...), no knowledge of anything", a creator of stories with "no history" (333).[8]

[4] All the quotations from Samuel Beckett's trilogy are copied from the edition published by the Everyman's Library 2015.

[5] Josipovici 2015, xxx.

[6] Josipovici 2015, xxxi. Gendron 2008, 32 has counted that there are "one hundred and two references to beginning" in *The Unnamable*, which enforces the impression that the narrator does not see his novel as a conclusion to the trilogy but as a new start.

[7] Davies 1994, 75.

[8] Josipovici 2015, xxxii.

As Sarah Gendron has maintained, the aspiration to start something new, articulated in the opening pages of the novel, goes right against the conventions of "teleological storytelling". Instead of wrapping up and working towards a conclusion, the unnamable aims to take the trilogy into a new narrative direction. He wants to move away from what happened previously, sometimes even giving the impression that he seeks to erase or overwrite 'history', i.e. the earlier plotlines ("The past has clean gone from my memory", he claims, 334).[9] But will he succeed, the readers may ask at this point in the novel? It seems not so easy for a narrator to disconnect his stories from plotlines that have already been built up for more than three hundred pages. How can a narrator in the position of the unnamable, giving form to the last part of a larger work, 'undo' his narratives from any connections to the past? Can the course of the trilogy still be changed and pushed into a new direction at a moment when its end is almost there?

Readers do have a memory. They connect the work they are reading to texts they have already read before. They see similarities and differences, overlaps and contrasts, between aspects of the literary universe they are exploring and features of textual spaces which they have visited earlier. For them, a work is never newly-born but always evokes a past, has a certain place in their mnemonic history. This also goes for the claims about the new start and the desire to blaze a new narrative trail made by the unnamable narrator, though the latter would probably not have liked this. Readers may observe comparable statements in other texts from the literary tradition that induce a similar type of questions as those to which has just been pointed. They might record affinities with texts that have been written in a time-period relatively close to Beckett's (e.g. the work by Arthur Rimbaud or Gertrude Stein). But they may also discern resemblances with texts that were created within a much more distant literary-cultural context. An example of the latter is the second work around which this chapter will revolve: the *Thebaid* by Publius Papinius Statius.[10]

The epic poem, recounting the strife for Thebes between the sons of Oedipus, has received much scholarly attention since the last decades of the twentieth century. One of the issues that has struck several scholars is the somewhat unusual way in which the final book of the work opens. As Frederica Bessone has pointed out, Statius seems to go there against the conventions of teleological storytelling and gives the impression that he wants to start something new, an "*epica nuova*".[11] He suddenly ascribes a leading part to a group of (female) characters that has played, so far, a relatively marginal role in the work,

[9] Gendron 2008, 32.

[10] The quotations from Statius' *Thebaid* in this chapter follow the Teubner edition by Klotz A. and Klinnert T. 1973. Most of the translations, incorporated in the body text, are copied from Melville (1992).

[11] Bessone 2011, 205.

making them his focal point of attention. Their introduction evokes a completely different 'tone' in the epic than the readers are used to (12.145: *novo…tumultu*), an atmosphere filled with voices of love, forgiveness and tenderness (*infra*).[12] This seems for him a way to counterbalance the sphere of (male) horror, violence and extreme aggression which dominated the preceding warfare episode. The crimes described in there were so cruel that they had even filled him, as the narrator of these events, with disgust and incited him to express the hope in the eleventh book that all this *monstrum*, these monstrous deeds, would not be remembered by posterity. Instead of wishing eternal glory on his protagonists, as epic writers conventionally do, he wanted Polynices and Eteocles and the terrible events for which they were responsible to vanish into oblivion, to be gone from memory, from history (11.574-579).[13] With the initiation of the *epica nuova* and the evocation of the new atmosphere at the beginning of the twelfth book, Statius seeks to enforce these claims, seemingly having a similar kind of aspiration as Beckett's narrator in the last part of the trilogy. Comparable to the unnamable, who wishes his stories to blaze a new trail, so it appears, Statius tries to take the narrative of the *Thebaid* into a new direction and show the readers a different type of scenes and characters, as if he hopes to 'erase' or 'overwrite' the earlier narrative patterns of violence in their minds by concluding with a more tender storyline.[14] But will he succeed, the readers may also ask in this case? Will Statius be capable of undoing his narrative in the twelfth book from the connections to the horror of the past? Can the course and the sphere of the epic still be changed when its end is already in sight?[15]

The female characters responsible for the 'new tone' at the opening of *Thebaid* 12 are the widows from Argos. After the end of the war between the Argive and Theban armies,

[12] For love as the mainspring for the widows' actions in the *Thebaid*, see Korneeva 2011.

[13] Walter 2014, 143: "*Dafür markiert er das Ende des Kampfes umso nachdrücklicher mit einer wahren Anti-Musenanrufung, in der er nicht um Inspiration durch die Töchter der Mnemosyne, sondern um deren Gegenteil bittet: das Vergessen*". For the complex theme of remembrance/oblivion in Statius' epic, see also Bessone 2011, 75-80; Ganiban 2007, 199-206; Henderson 1998.

[14] Bessone 2011, 205: "*Dopo undici libri di epica del* nefas*, in cui l'eroismo maschile raramente è apparso puro dalla contaminazione di una guerra empia, e dopo il culmine di empietà del duello fratricida, lo stacco è forte: è la nobile impresa delle donne (…) a segnare per prima il ritorno della* pietas".

[15] The idea that the narrator wants to 'overwrite' the cruelty that happened during the warfare-episodes was already suggested at the end of the eleventh book, where the blinded Oedipus turns up. The old Theban king is maybe the most notorious character in Statius' epic, especially because he evokes the fury Tisiphone in the first book and demands her to punish his sons, thereby instigating the fraternal war. At the end of the eleventh book, he comes forward again, yet this time addresses *Pietas* and asks the goddess clemency for what he did. In this way, the narrative seems to be re-started, as if the narrator wants to offer us, at the end of his epic, a 'new', more 'peaceful' version of the Theban myth. For an extensive discussion of the speech dedicated to *Pietas* (and of the elements that make the speech somewhat ambiguous and uncanny), see Anzinger 2007, 286-287; Dominik 1994a, 134.

they receive the news that almost none of their husbands have survived. Led by Argia, Polynices' wife, they decide to travel to Thebes and search for their spouses' corpses (despite the prohibition ordered by Creon, the new Theban king). Being represented as the "positive, generative half of humanity", they do not seek revenge for their husbands' death.[16] They just want to grant their spouses a funeral and forgive them for what they have done, hoping that this will reconcile their spirits (e.g. 12.120-21: *sed cuncta iacenti / infelix ignoscit amor*). As Victoria Pagán has maintained, these peaceful intentions stand in sharp contrast to the ambitions of the male characters in the preceding books and seem to move the narrative away from violence and aggression. The widows' planned purification and cremation of their husbands' spirits, which should remove the hatred that dominated them before, so it seems, is thus also meant to make an end to the excesses of horror and cruelty in the epic narrative and restore its traditional functions, rendering the act of commemoration rejected by Statius in the eleventh book to become possible again.[17] Whether this apparent break with the narrative past will last and the female plotline will remain capable of overwriting the preceding narrative patterns of violence appear to be unclear at this point. The endeavour of the Argive widows is unprecedented in the literary-mythological tradition and seems to be an innovation by Statius (again, a 'new tone').[18] So not knowing the outcome yet, the readers of the *Thebaid* are at the opening of the final book as ignorant about what to expect as those of Beckett's trilogy at the start of *The Unnamable*.

This chapter aims to examine the potentials of the female storyline developed in the final book, in particular of Argia's part, to overwrite the preceding narrative patterns of violence. It will propose that this storyline, despite the new tone it initially brings, in the end, has not been enabled to change the sphere and course of the epic and to lead the narrative away from the cruelty by which it has been dominated since the start of the warfare episode in the seventh book.[19] On the contrary, Argia seems to behave herself

[16] Lovatt 2016, 279.

[17] Pagán 2000 records that the depiction of the war episode is followed by what she calls an "aftermath narrative", i.e. a "picture of the battlefield strewn with decaying corpses, weapons, horses, etc." (424). This kind of narrative is often dominated by female lament and mourning that offer a meaningful contrast to the previous instances of war. The narrator, surviving characters and readers get the opportunity to catch their breath after the manifestations of violence, recover from what just happened and make a new start.

[18] The desire to bury a beloved, fallen in war, is a common motive in the Theban cycle. But it usually concerns only Antigone, resolute to grant her brother the last rituals. Although Oedipus' daughter, later in the final book, searches for Polynices' corpse, Statius mainly concentrates in the beginning on the Argive widows, especially on Argia, Polynices' wife, whose trip has no precedent in the mythological tradition (see Anzinger 2007, 301).

[19] I will build further upon insights that have more recently been developed in Statius-scholarship, amongst others by Ahl 1986, Augoustakis 2010, Dietrich, 1999, Fantham 1999, Ganiban 2007, Hardie 1997, Henderson 1998, Hershkowitz 1998, Lovatt 2016 and McNelis 2006. They have pointed to elements in the *Thebaid* that suggest that the last book does not exclusively function as a redemption or reconciliation of the violence that occurred in

during her endeavour as a sort of 'reader in the text' who (re-)opens and (re-)activates the storylines from the past and obliges the external readers to re-read what they have already read before. To understand the implications of this behaviour, this chapter will borrow some notions, concepts and ideas from Beckett's *The Unnamable*. By forcing the external readers, via Argia, to re-visit the violent narrative patterns from the preceding books, Statius, so it seems, suggests that they are, as it is said in Beckett research, 'entrapped' in the epic's literary universe. As soon as they have entered the world of the *Thebaid*, the external readers appear to have no way out anymore from the 'treadmill' of horror, being implied, somehow comparable to the readers of *The Unnamable*, to be nothing more than powerless shades who will for ever be marked by what they have read.

3.1 Haunting Shades

To examine the capability of the unnamable narrator to take the trilogy into a new direction, I will start by analysing a scene immediately following his self-introduction. This episode, as will be explained, contains some features that slightly seem to indicate how difficult it will be to realise his literary ambitions. It appears to confront him with the narrative patterns from the past which are suggested to be more persistent than he might have expected. In the second half of this paragraph, I will propose that a similar situation seems to occur in the final book of the *Thebaid*, wherein the encounter of the Argive widows with a soldier named Ornytus subtly recalls the violence and horror from the warfare episode which Statius had hoped to be forgotten.[20]

Briefly after his claim that he wants his novel to become 'his own land', the unnamable narrator ponders what would be the best strategy to take the trilogy into a new direction. He realises that he must not wait too long to decide what elements, characters, settings, etc. will make up his plot. If he really wants his final part to overwrite the narrative patterns of the preceding novels, he should start his narration as soon as possible and use all the narrative space he has ("I have to begin"; "Things have to be said soon", 332).

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the warfare episode, as has been maintained by Vessey 1973 and to a certain extent also by Franchet D'Espèrey 1999, Braund 1996, Delarue 2000 and Pagán 2000. The final book of the epic, so it seems, is ambiguous and produces "competing endings" (Lovatt 2016), drawing the readers' attention to aspects that imply a break with the madness from the past as well as a continuation of it. I will propose that the storyline around Argia especially enforces the impression that it is difficult to bring a new sound.

[20] This paragraph (partly) copies and further elaborates upon an argument I have made before in an article that will soon be published in *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* (Noens 2019, in print).

His thoughts on the new storylines, however, are almost immediately interrupted by the sudden appearance of a male figure, slowly wandering in the same fictional universe as he does. Although he is not one hundred percent certain, he thinks to recognise the man as Malone, the chief character of the previous part of the trilogy ("Malone is there (...). I am almost sure it is he. The brimless hat seems to me conclusive", 332). The reason why he doubts a little bit is because the man does not behave himself as one would expect the protagonist of the preceding novel to do. In *Malone Dies*, Malone played the role of a chattering hospital patient who keeps on complaining about his declining physical condition.[21] The unnamable, by contrast, perceives this person as a vague and intangible image that floats around in complete silence ("without a word") and passes at "doubtless regular intervals" (332). This makes the unnamable conclude that the floating image he sees, *is* Malone, who has, however, taken the form of a shade: "of his mortal liveliness little trace remains" (333).

Although different interpretations are possible, one way to understand the appearance of the ghost of Malone may be to see it as a subtle questioning of the feasibility of the unnamable's ambitions. Malone is a character whose story is – literally – already told and that belongs to the narrative past. His presence in the first pages of the third part seems to collide with the unnamable's aspiration to take the trilogy into a new direction. The appearance of Malone brings an old element in a narrative space that aims to make a new start. Instead of being a new point of departure, the very first encounter recalls plotlines that the unnamable has hoped to be enabled to overwrite. This might be considered as a sign that the narrative past will prove to be more persistent than the narrator may have thought, an impression that is increased by the ghostly state in which Malone finds himself.[22] This condition does not only emphasise the 'pastness' surrounding him, reminding the readers at any time that he was part of a narrative trail which is – to use a Beckett metaphor – now 'over' or 'dead'. It also implies a sort of perseverance, as it causes Malone not just to be represented as a character dwelling around in the unnamable's literary universe but as a figure that is really 'haunting' his narrative space.

At this point, it is, of course, too early to draw conclusions about the unnamable's (dis)ability to overwrite the narrative past, only based on the first encounter. Nevertheless, his meeting with Malone raises further doubts about the viability of his narrative project. Even before the unnamable has had the chance to take a decision about the new direction, the past has already cast a shadow on his textual world. Will the unnamable, the readers are incited to wonder, show the ability in the remainder of the novel to keep the ghosts of the past outside of his narration? Or does the shade of Malone just serve as a forerunner of more ghosts to come?

[21] A general discussion of the figure of Malone in the trilogy can be found in Ackerley e.a. 2004, 340-348.
[22] Boulter 2013, 125.

A while after their departure, so Statius tells us, the widows bump into an Argive soldier, named Ornytus. He has survived the war in Thebes and is now on his way back to Argos. Since he is travelling via hidden roads, he has not expected to encounter someone on his journey (12.143: *secreta per avia*), certainly not a bunch of women far away from home. His meeting with them comes as a surprise (12.145-46: *isque ubi mota novo stupuit loca sola tumultu / femineumque gregem*). Ornytus is said to be 'stupefied' (*stupuit*) by the troop of lamenting widows, as a soldier not used to female presence outside the city walls. For him, the appearance of the women seems to be as 'unforeseen', as 'new' (*novo (...) tumultu*), as it is for the readers (who, as explained in the introduction, may not have expected their leading part in the first half of the twelfth book and see it as an attempt of Statius to make a new start). The encounter only lasts thirty verses and Ornytus disappears as abruptly as he showed up. This probably explains why the scholarly attention the Argive soldier has received so far is relatively low (measured against the huge number of studies dedicated to the role of the Argive women in the final book). Given that he is the first individual the widows meet, however, it may be useful to reflect upon his function within the *epica nuova* Statius appears to have initiated just before.

The appearance of Ornytus, at least at first sight, seems to enforce the impression that *Thebaid* 12 is going to take a new direction, with a new sphere and new characters. The Argive soldier is first of all unknown to the readers. He was not mentioned in one of the preceding books. Neither does he have, like the Argive women, a notorious and memorable mythological background.[23] It even seems that we only get to know him, because his path coincidently crosses that of the widows. Since he travels via hidden roads, he shows not at all the ambition to have a more prominent or heroic part in the epic. He would probably have remained unnoticed, if he would not have been caught by the gaze of the women (12.141: *ecce*). Furthermore, Ornytus quite explicitly attempts to influence the further progress of the narrative, rather concerned with the future than with the past. After hearing about the widows' plan to search the corpses of their husbands, he gives an extensive speech to warn them of the possible consequences (Theb.12.149-166). He asks them to change their minds and advises them to go to Athens. There, they can ask king Theseus for help, whom Ornytus believes to be an embodiment

[23] We do not know from which literary or mythological tradition Statius derived him. Pollmann 2004, 126 suggests that he "may have taken the name from the same sources as Plut. *Thes.* 8.3". Joyce 2008, 444 ponders that the soldier is "perhaps the father of the Ornytus of Teuthis in Arcadia, known to Pausanias (8.28.4), who will wound Athena (Minerva) in the thigh as he withdraws his troops from Aulis, where they wait to embark for the Trojan war". According to Hubbard 1998, Ornytus "may represent Statius' appropriation of the same marginal figure in Vergil [i.e. Aen.11.677-89, an Etruscan ally of Aeneas, slain by Camilla] to create his own marginal epic personality".

of humanity and clemency.[24] In this way, he thus stimulates the women to literally take a new direction and seek a narrative space, Athens, which has been unexplored hitherto in the *Thebaid* (instead of supporting their intention to go to the old setting at the Theban battlefield).[25] These features render Ornytus to appear as a figure associated with 'newness'/'futureness', which matches the new tone that seems to have been induced at the opening of *Thebaid* 12.[26]

Ornytus' apparent contribution to the evocation of the new sphere in the last book of the epic, however, seems to be complicated and perhaps even slightly subverted by his quite explicit introduction as a war victim. In the few verses preceding his speech, he is portrayed as a survivor of the battles depicted in the warfare episode, on whom the strife has left its marks (12.141-4):

> squalidus ecce genas et inani vulnere pallens
> Ornytus – hic socio desertus ab agmine, tardat
> plaga recens – timido secreta per avia furto
> debile carpit iter fractaeque innititur hastae.

Ornytus is visualised (*ecce*) to the readers via the gaze of the Argive widows. He is depicted as 'stumbling home', 'moving slowly' (*tardat; debile … iter*) and 'leaning on his broken spear' (*fractaeque innititur hastae*). The entire description radiates a sphere of loneliness (*desertus*), anxiety (*timido*) and, especially, pain. Even before we get to know his name, we record that the Argive soldier is seriously injured and suffers from a gaping wound (*inani vulnere*), caused by a recent stroke (*plaga recens*).

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[24] For a discussion of Ornytus' speech, see Vessey 1973, 131; McNelis 2006, 160 and Frings 1991, 141-3. They respectively discuss Ornytus' depiction of Creon's cruelty, Theseus' humanity and the women's response to his warnings.

[25] The speech not coincidentally contains many verbs in future simple, e.g. *dabit* (155); *licebit* (156); *rapiet* (157); *mactabit* (159).

[26] This interpretation of Ornytus, as a figure related to 'newness'/'futureness', corresponds to earlier analyses of the narrative function of the Argive soldier. Karla Pollman and Jane Wilson Joyce, for example, have compared him to a divine epic or Greek tragic messenger, whose intervention is crucial for the further events in the narrative, rather than recalling previous ones. Pollman 2004, 126: "Ornytus occupies the function of Iris, who urged Priam to go to Achilles (*Il.*24.159-87), and of Hermes who in the disguise of a young man helps Priam to get safely to Achilles (*Il.*24.339-467)". Joyce 2008, 444: "Ornytus has something about him of the Messenger of Greek drama". The possible connection to tragedy matches a broader tendency in the *Thebaid*. As Bessone (2011, 75-102; 200-25) has argued, Statius seemed highly aware that his decision to re-work an episode from the Theban mythological cycle in his epic was quite unusual. Scenes from that tradition mostly were, in classical Antiquity, the subject of tragedy. This incited him to keep at several points in his text the generic boundaries fluid, creating many occasions where epic topoi are interwoven with tragic characteristics. See also Soerink 2014 on the connections to Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, and Hulls 2016 on the "Tragic Self".

There is, of course, nothing odd about a harmed soldier after a period of war. But the portrait of Ornytus becomes particularly significant when taking into account that he is the first human being the widows see on their way to Thebes. Their attention (and that of the readers, in the first verse) is immediately diverted to his injury, an *inane vulnus*. For the women, this wound forms the first tangible proof of the cruelty that happened not long ago during the Theban war (*plaga recens*), but about which they had heard hitherto only some vague rumours (12.106). Although the Argive soldier turns up in the twelfth book for the first time in the text, his way of appearing thus links him to the cruelty that happened before. His gash recalls the horrible events from the previous books and subtly counterbalances thereby the sphere of 'futureness'/'newness' that other features in his characterisation evoke. The wounded soldier, so it seems, implicitly reminisces the violence of the narrative past which Statius had wished to be forgotten, to be 'over' or 'dead', but that has apparently permeated the beginning of the final part of the epic.

Interesting to mention in this context is the somewhat 'gloomy vocabulary' used in the four above-cited verses that introduce Ornytus. The adjective *inanis*, for example, which is attributed to the noun *vulnus*, cannot only mean 'empty' or 'gaping' (underlining the seriousness of the injury). The word also bears the connotation of 'cloudiness' or 'vanity' and is frequently used throughout the epic to portray shades and the underworld.[27] By integrating the adjective in his portrayal of Ornytus' wound, Statius, in a sense, relates his character to death. This impression is increased by the remark that the injury has caused the Argive soldier to grow pale, *pallens*, which suggests that there might be not much life left in him anymore. Ornytus' appearance, we could say, seems to be surrounded by a 'ghostly semantic mist', which renders him to become an ambiguous figure, being alive yet closely connected to the dead.[28]

A possible interpretation of the gloomy sphere can be to see it as a manner to enforce the sense of 'pastness' within the Argive soldier to which has been referred above. Though playing a significant role in the present time of the widows, the deadly semantics in which he is initially portrayed (further) dissociates him from the here and now. It relates him to 'what is over', to the (deadly) events which occurred in the narrative past. This causes Ornytus to fulfil a function in the last book of the *Thebaid* that seems to resemble (at least,

[27] The word turns up for the first time in the first book of Statius' epic, when Oedipus, fluctuating between the living and dead, hits the *inane solum* (1.55), the 'shadowy ground', just before he addresses the underworld. Evoked by his speech, the fury Tisiphone leaves the underworld and forces the *inane / vulgus* (1.93-4) to give way before her. The adjective, moreover, is also used by Ornytus himself when advising the widows to lament the *inana busta* (Theb.12.162) of their husbands at home (so again appearing within a context of death). For other occurrences, see e.g. 8.100; 9.654; 9.599 (TLL).

[28] The association of a character to death, though still alive, is not uncommon in the *Thebaid*. Dietrich 2015 has examined the characterisation of Jocasta throughout the epic. She has concluded that "the poet regularly interjects allusions to differing traditions suggesting [Jocasta's] status as both living and dead" (320).

partly) Malone's in Beckett's *The Unnamable*. The presence of Malone, as explained above, recalls old narrative patterns in the last novel of the trilogy. He serves as a ghost via whom earlier storylines intrude the present of the unnamable. In a comparable way, the appearance of Ornytus brings the horrible events that occurred in the preceding books in the new female plotline of *Thebaid* 12. He bears the madness of the past that Statius wants the widows to make the readers forget, yet with which they are immediately confronted at their first encounter. From the start of the *epica nuova* onwards, the past seems to be there, subtly 'haunting', to say it with a Beckett term, the new atmosphere via the shade-like figure of Ornytus.[29] Although this may not immediately be considered as a sign that Statius will fail to lead the narrative away from the horror of the preceding books, it gives rise to a similar kind of doubts and questions as the unnamable's encounter with the ghost of Malone. Will Statius in the remainder of the twelfth book be capable of preventing the female storyline from further being intruded by elements that reminisce the cruelty of the warfare episode? Can the 'ghosts of the violent past' be kept out?

Before giving an answer to these questions, I want to explore how far the pastness ascribed to Ornytus actually reaches. Until now, it has been argued that the wounded soldier reminds the readers of the cruelty of the warfare episode, so evoking the recent narrative past in the final book. But the interaction that has been set up since the beginning of this paragraph with Beckett's ghosts of Malone, as will be explained, might invite us to wonder whether there are indications that his appearance leads us even further back in time.

Recovered from the initial shock that the appearance of the ghost of Malone had caused, the unnamable begins to observe the shade dwelling in his universe more intensively. The better he looks at the ghost floating around, the more he starts doubting again whether he had not mistaken. Perhaps, he thinks, the one he has been watching does not resemble the chief character of *Malone Dies* as much as he initially believed: "I wonder if it is not Molloy. Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat. (...) To tell the truth I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on" (333). These statements imply that the identity of the image is not pinpointed. Each time he tries to see it more clearly, it "fades or turns into something else".[30] The shape that he initially recognised as Malone could also be the one of Molloy, who was the narrator of the first part of the trilogy (*Molloy*). But it might also be perceived as one of the main characters from Beckett's other works, those he wrote before the trilogy (Murphy is the protagonist of Beckett's first

[29] Dietrich 2015, 321 formulates a similar conclusion regarding Jocasta's function as living dead: "In the *Thebaid* Jocasta walks the line between life and death, the past and the present, reminding Statius' Flavian audience that as the present evolves, the past must constantly be appeased and assuaged, despite attempts to manipulate it, and that the final word can never be spoken".

[30] Josipovici 2015, xxx.

nouvelle). The unnamable's confusion about the identity of the shade further increases the tension between past and novelty to which was pointed above: the unnamable is not only faced with a shady narrator whose story directly precedes his. The ghost, apparently taking on the shape of all the main characters Beckett ever invented, also makes the remote past present in the unnamable's literary universe, thereby enforcing the friction in the opening pages of the last part of the trilogy: even before the unnamable knows what new trails he will explore, his narrative past, in full extension, has manifested itself.

If we keep this aspect of the unnamable's first encounter in mind while thinking about the function of Ornytus in *Thebaid* 12, we may be inclined to look deeper into the reach of the latter's pastness as it takes shape in his meeting with the widows. I do not expect the Argive women, of course, to similarly start hesitating about the identity of the soldier they are seeing before them. But we can ask whether Ornytus' arrival in the final book somehow establish a link to events occurred in the warfare episode as well as to stories that took place (long) before that. A good departing point for this analysis are the features in the characterisation of the Argive soldier that subtly remind the readers of a passage they have read earlier in the epic. Visualising the Argive soldier suffering from his 'shadowy injury' may trigger a reminiscence to a scene in the beginning of the second book, where the 'injured shadow' of Laius shows up. On demand of Jupiter, Oedipus' father is summoned by Mercury to leave the underworld and go to Thebes. There, he must incite his grandson Eteocles and convince him to start a war against his brother Polynices. The way in which Laius is presented bears some striking similarities to the manner we visualised Ornytus for the first time:[31]

(1) when we first meet them, both the old king and the Argive soldier are told to be on their way back home, respectively returning to Thebes and Argos;

(2) more importantly, like Ornytus (*inane vulnere; tardat*), Laius is 'slowed down' by a wound which he caught during a fight in his past and that still bothers him (2.8: *vulnere tardus adhuc;*) (as is well-known, he was killed by his own son (2.9: *cognatis ictibus ensis / impius*));

(3) thereby, both can only move forward by resting on a spear (*fractae innititur hastae*) or stick (2.11: *firmat vestigia virga*);

(4) their intervention, moreover, has a great impact on the further course of the narrative (both resulting in a battle). Following Ornytus' advice, the Argive widows (except Argia, Polynices wife) will join the Athenian king Theseus who will be resolute to

[31] I restrict myself here to a brief enumeration of the elements the former Theban king seems to share with Ornytus. For a more elaborate discussion of the ghost of Laius, see Vessey 1973, 230-235; Walter 2014, 181-190; Ahl 1986.

punish Creon. Laius' visit formed the incentive Eteocles needed to declare war to his own brother.

These four elements invite the readers to recognise a glimpse of Laius' shade in Ornytus(' shade-likeliness), which constitutes an intratextual relation between the beginning and end of Statius' epic. Much more than being a literary play, this relation may be read as Statius' way to produce an effect comparable to the one generated by the unnamable's confusion about the identity of the ghost in the third part of Beckett's trilogy. Although the Argive soldier appears as a victim of the recent war between Polynices and Eteocles (cf. *plaga recens*), via intratextual references the readers are encouraged to connect him to a figure that pre-dates that period in the narrative and thus to extend, in a sense, the reach of Ornytus' pastness.

But how far back, we should ask, is the intratextual relation with Laius exactly leading us? In the second book of the epic, the former king seems to fulfil a function which is complementary to Ornytus' in the final part. He does not only act as a kind of messenger who wants to instigate war (see (4)). The former ruler also serves as an emblem of the past that recalls and re-activates earlier stories, full of violence, aggression and hatred.[32] Whereas Ornytus' cut recalls the cruelty that occurred within the warfare episode, Laius' injuries lead the readers back to horrible actions that lie beyond the borders of the *Thebaid* and belong to the more remote mythological tradition. The wounded king does not simply remind the readers of the unfortunate patricide by Oedipus. As Anke Walter has maintained, the way in which Laius 'actively uses' his gash also turns him into a symbol of *furor* that has characterised the Theban family from its very origins. The king chooses a horrible way to incite Eteocles against his brother. After a short speech in which he portrays Polynices' royal ambitions as a threat, he decides to turn to a strategy much more effective and hate-inducing than words: he sprinkles his grandson with blood from his open wound (2.120-7). Thereby, he connects Eteocles to the brutal violence recently committed by his father Oedipus as well as infecting him literally with the rage from which no member of the Theban family has been able to escape. By 'baptising' him with his own blood, Laius visually pictures the passing of the "*Erbfluch*" from generation to generation in Theban history.[33] In the house of Cadmus, madness has always been hereditary, inherent to each one's blood.

The short detour via Laius and the *Erbfluch* is necessary to understand the extent of the pastness ascribed to Ornytus. By suggesting a link to the former Theban king, Statius does

[32] Dietrich 2015, 318; Walter 2015, 192-193.

[33] Walter 2015, 192. See also Taisne 1994 and Vessey 1973, 235: "Laius is an embodiment of the congenital *furor* to which he fell victim". Dietrich 2015, 319: "Statius' Laius clearly represents an inescapable past and a family curse that is doomed to repeat itself in every generation". For an extensive discussion of the heredity of madness, see Bernstein 2008 and Manioti 2016.

not only relate the Argive soldier to a figure that pre-dates him in the epic. He implicitly brings a series of crimes to mind that lie beyond the borders of the *Thebaid*. The intratextual reference to Laius sets an interpretative mechanism into play which incites the readers to go far back in the mythological tradition and recall the madness which from the start has characterised the stories in the Theban cycle. Thereby, Ornytus does not just incorporate the violence that (recently) occurred during the war between the sons of Oedipus. His appearance seems to create a moment in the narrative in which the cruelty of the complete Theban tradition is concentrated. This renders the presence of the Argive soldier to produce the same cracks in Statius' narrative aspirations as the ghost with its shifting shapes in the unnamable's. At a point where the narrators hope to take a new direction, a character comes in and brings with him the past, almost in its entirety. This underlines the difficulty of the narrators' ambitions, suggesting that the narrative patterns they want to erase will perhaps prove to be more persistent than they may have expected. Can the final part of the works, we are incited to wonder, overwrite the past if it manifests itself from the start in such an extended form?

3.2 Re-reading the Past

After the encounter with the ghost, the unnamable does not seem to be thrown off his balance ("All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me", 345). He wants to continue as planned and start developing 'his own land' as quickly as possible. There can be "no further delay" (335), he says, and falling silent must be avoided at all costs ("I cannot be silent"; "the discourse must go on", 334).[34] He, therefore, immediately takes the – in his view radical – decision that the plot of the last part of the trilogy will be made up of "people" and "things", a combination that he believes will prove to be very fruitful ("Where there are people, it is said, there are things", 334).

He then quite abruptly starts telling about a character called "Basil", whom he after a while renames "Mahood" ("Decidedly Basil is becoming important, I'll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that", 351). He later invokes another character, to whom he mainly refers

[34] This will change in the second half of the novel. As soon as the unnamable, as I will explain below, has realised that he has been doing nothing more 'than murmuring old stories, instead of inventing new ones', he starts wishing to fall silent. He hopes "to reach the end of the stories that have previously held out the promise of self-definition and final silence" (Pattie 2000, 70).

with "Worm".[35] Both characters are represented as "decrepit indigents",[36] the type of figures, the unnamable implies, one would normally not expect as the protagonists or acting characters of a narrative.[37] The unnamable mostly describes the world in which Mahood and Worm are dwelling, the few individuals they encounter and the "things" that appear, through their eyes (he switches at some point from a third-person to a first-person narration). By taking the perspective of his main characters, as David Pattie has noticed, he does not only suggest a close connection between himself and his protagonists. He also enables the readers to experience the fictional space he is constructing in a very direct way, as they are compelled to share the first impressions of Mahood and Worm.[38]

Quite soon, it becomes clear that the world which is shown to us via the main characters' eyes is not that new, that disconnected from the storylines from the preceding books, as the unnamable may have implied. Although the "people" and "things" turning up might be unknown to Mahood and Worm, they often feel quite familiar to the readers. The few persons the characters see may remind them of the figures they have encountered in the earlier parts of the trilogy or in works Beckett wrote earlier in his career. The objects on which Mahood and Worm focus, moreover, recall gadgets that have already acquired an iconic status, such as a hat and a stick (*Malone Dies*) or stones to suck on (*Molloy*).[39] The gazes of Mahood and Worm thus do not give the readers access to a fictional space that differs from what they are used to. They form a window on a narrative world that at several points seems to consist of snippets and fragments "recycled" from preceding storylines in Beckett's oeuvre, "the only novelty",

[35] Josipovici 2015, xxix notices that it is not entirely clear whether Worm is a new character or still Mahood who has received a new name.

[36] Josipovici 2015, xxxi. Worm turns up in the second half of the novel, where, as I said in footnote 34, the unnamable starts desiring to fall silent. By evoking Worm, he has chosen, as Pattie 2000, 71 remarks, a figure "as close to nothingness as a named character can possibly be".

[37] The unnamable presents them as his invention, yet they show a huge number of resemblances to characters that appeared earlier in the trilogy and Beckett's oeuvre. This is another element that may increase the hesitations about the 'newness' of the unnamable's composition.

[38] The unnamable narrator imagines the world through Mahood's and Worm's eyes. This causes the boundaries between the fictional universe in which the unnamable lives and the one of his characters to be blurred. Pattie 2000, 70 observes that "the 'I' of the Unammable becomes the 'I' of Mahood" and Worm. This first-person-perspective renders the readers to become closely involved, as direct witnesses, in the actions that take place. Josipovici 2015, xxxiii notices that, in the trilogy, "pronouns are not place-holders for proper names but rather way-stations for passers-by, temporary shelters".

[39] Davies 1994, 46 has argued that the 'people' that Mahood and Worm encounter, perfectly fit within the "chain of nearly identical characters" that appear throughout the trilogy.

as Steven Connor has phrased it, "being the variations in the forms of sameness".[40] The presence of elements from the literary past in the Mahood-/Worm-narrative (further) questions the narrator's ability to make his novel 'his own land'. After a while, the unnamable himself seems to understand this, realising that he has been doing nothing more than "just murmuring old stories, as if it were the first time" (364).[41]

The Mahood-Worm-narrative seems to be exemplary of two broader tendencies Beckett wants to establish in the trilogy. According to Pattie, it is, first of all, representative for the weak position that the narrators of the three novels seem to hold.[42] In *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, the first-person narrators sometimes indicate that it feels as if they do not have much power over the stories that they are telling. Instead of giving form to a narrative that they have invented themselves, they assert to experience their composition process as a mechanic procedure during which the texts "are almost writing themselves".[43] This explains why they recurrently represent themselves "prisoners" of fiction.[44] They feel "entrapped" in a space where they are only allowed to carry out the task for which they were predestined: narrating.[45] According to Pattie, the Mahood-Worm-story and the unnamable's failure to overwrite the narrative past forms an indication that the narrator of the last part of the trilogy is as powerless as his predecessors. Like them, the unnamable feels delivered to "the madness of having to speak" (351) yet has himself no real impact on the course of the story he is telling.[46] He is compelled to use and especially reproduce the narrative patterns already operative in the fictional space, incapable of changing the direction of the work.[47]

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[40] Connor 1985, 15. According to him, the unnamable's failure to come up with something new is no surprise. From the beginning of the trilogy, "repetition has been the dominating principle" of the fiction, that "occupies the centre of the work". The unnamable's resistance to this principle was, so it seems, from the start doomed to remain unsuccessful.

[41] Pattie 2004, 238 remarks that Beckett's work celebrates "the law of the supplement – or the contention that repetition undermines the unique status of the original, by producing indistinguishable copies of it".

[42] Pattie 2000, 66-70.

[43] Davies 1994, 44.

[44] Josipovici 2015, xxxiii.

[45] Pattie 2000, 72. He adds that the narrators' composition of tales goes hand in hand with "the desperate attempt to break free of the need to tell tales".

[46] Pattie 2000, 73: "The compulsive need to shape experience felt by Molloy, Moran and Malone is still felt by the Unnamable, even when he has decided that stories are simply a distraction".

[47] The unnamable's inability to come up with innovate narrative elements, I must remark, does not mean that there are no differences between his novel and the preceding ones. As Josipovici 2015, xxix phrases it: "With *The Unnamable*, it suddenly strikes us forcibly that something else has been going on, that at a more primitive level than that of plot and character, something much more immediate and yet much more difficult to describe has been unfolding". It is important, however, to make the distinction between the unnamable's own impressions, indicating that he has failed ("Is there really nothing new to try", 344), and the innovation we as readers think to notice.

A second tendency which the Mahood-Worm-story seems to support concerns the reader. As Smith has argued, in the trilogy, Beckett tries to imply via several literary strategies that not only the narrators but also the readers are, in a sense, 'enclosed', 'captured', in the fictional space.[48] One (basic) manner to create this impression, for example, is by letting the narrators of the three novels frequently address the readers (the "you") in a direct way, asking them questions and stimulating them to think along. This technique causes the readers to feel in a constant interaction with the work as well as to be literally inscribed in the textual universe; they are represented by the words on the pages and as parts of the fictional worlds the narrators are producing.[49] Another procedure to suggest the readers' containment in the literary space may be found in the Mahood-Worm-story. As said above, Mahood and Worm are introduced as new characters who have not turned up earlier in the trilogy. They are faced with 'people and things' that seem recycled from preceding pieces in Beckett's oeuvre, which they, however, see for the very first time. By creating this narrative situation, Beckett is enabled to re-visit facets of storylines that were already told before yet present them as if they are happening in the here and now. The readers are thereby compelled to recall, to "re-read" the plots with which they are already familiar. But being obliged to look through the eyes of Mahood and Worm, they are implied to do so with the intensity of a first-time viewer (which they were themselves not that long ago).[50] By indicating that we go through a process of reading not that different from what we experienced earlier on, Beckett creates the impression that not only the storylines in the trilogy but also our readings are repeated and reproduced.[51] We are, in this way, subtly suggested to have become subdued to the forces of the trilogy's fictional universe, a space in which the past always returns, 'the only novelty being the variations in the forms of sameness'.

The Argive widows choose to follow Ornytus' advice and go to Athens, a placed ruled by the clement king Theseus. Only Argia indicates not to accept further delay and is resolute

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[48] Smith 2002, 69 speaks in a similar context about "reader entrapment", by which he means that the readers of Beckett's fiction are "rhetorically entangled (...) in the text being read". Beckett's narrators often ascribe a particular role to the readers and have very concrete expectations of them. They mostly express these by directly addressing the readers in the text or by staging figures that behave themselves as a sort of 'readers in the text'. In this way, the narrators suggest that readers should be closely involved in the narration and present them, in a sense, as a part of their fictional universe.

[49] Smith 2002, 83 discusses the unnamable's use of the pronouns 'they' and 'you'. In many passages containing these pronouns, we get the impression that the unnamable is speaking *to* or *about* us, "finally owning up to the fact that the reader has him- or herself been the subject all along".

[50] Smith 2002, 84.

[51] Smith 2002, 85 argues that, in these kinds of occasions, the reader's "involvement is put on display, thrown into question". The readers are forced to reflect upon the role the text demands them to play, to wonder what it exactly is that the text expects them to do.

to continue the journey to the Theban battlefield on her own (she just agrees to be accompanied by her personal guard Menoetes).[52] Although her decision can be seen as another illustration of the intense love she fosters for Polynices, it has huge consequences for the narrative course in *Thebaid* 12: it means that the readers will be led back to the narrative space where not so long ago the most horrible things happened. We are not brought to the unexplored, new world of Athens, but compelled, via Argia's storyline, to return first to an old setting.[53]

This return should not necessarily imply that the readers will be obliged to recall the violence that Statius has hoped to vanish into oblivion. As stated in the introduction, the widows' intention, including Argia's, is to reconcile the spirits of their husbands and let them rest in peace. Her decision to travel right away to the Theban battlefield, therefore, does not automatically jeopardise the new narrative direction initiated in the beginning of the final book, since the option that her love-driven actions will 'overwrite', 'appease', the preceding storylines remains open.[54] That such an outcome is certainly not unthinkable may be deduced from a narrative tendency which has manifested itself since the start of the epic. As Helen Lovatt has observed, the *Thebaid* stages a series of characters that all try to surpass each other's deeds. The individuals in Statius' epic are in constant competition to undertake the most memorable actions (or more correctly: what they think to be memorable). Lovatt refers in this context to the chariot races in the sixth book, during which this competition seems to be portrayed in a metaphorical way.[55] Statius describes how the tracks made in the sand by the wheels of a chariot are systematically 'deleted' by those of its pursuers (6.415-416: *delet sulcos (…) priores / orbita*). Read as a meta-narrative, it suggests the characters' inclination throughout the *Thebaid* to cover up the traces (i.e. the deeds) left by those who came before in the narrative and "replace" them, "in the minds of the readers", by their own marks.[56] In the warfare

[52] Vessey 1973, 132: "Argia rejects the logical approach; she will not be deterred from her duty by any threat of violence".

[53] I do not intend, in what follows, to offer a detailed study of Argia's endeavour on the battlefield. This has already been done by Lovatt 2016, 277-289; Bessone 2011, 200-223; Augoustakis 2010, 75-91; Korneeva 2011, 184-192 (to name the most recent studies). I will focus, as I announced in the introduction, to those elements that contribute to Argia's representation as a 'reader in the text'. A more general discussion of the role of women in Latin epic can be found in Keith 2000.

[54] As Dietrich 1999, 49 has argued, the arrival of Argia gives the impression that she will totally overturn male epic values. Throughout the epic, Argia has been "critical of the battle for power that led Polynices to the battlefield at Thebes". In the twelfth book, Statius, at least at first sight, "brings her voice center-stage – it is not a soft protestation or unsuccessful alternative view, but a full-bodied, clear-voiced indictment of the abuses of power".

[55] Lovatt 2005, 26-29.

[56] Lovatt 2005, 27. She adds that this principle of repetition and deletion, perhaps, also informs Statius' view upon his relation to his predecessors. Similar to the characters who try to wipe out each other's deeds, Statius,

episode, this inclination mostly resulted in attempts to exceed the violent crimes about which Statius had told earlier (Tydeus' cannibalism is 'deleted' by Capaneus' assault of Jupiter, which is 'erased' by the unspeakable, *nefandum*, fratricide of the sons of Oedipus).[57] Perhaps, Argia's endeavour on the Theban battlefield in the last book will serve as the final overwriting in the epic, not replacing, however, the preceding (male) cruelty by more cruelty but by (female) love.

Being unfamiliar with the region, Argia decides to travel along the way that Ornytus had come. She is told to run through 'secret forests full of slumbering beasts', 'cross rivers that could easily have swallowed her' and 'pass the threatening dens of frightful monsters' (12.231-236). Nothing seems to frighten the widow, impelled by the power of grief and passion (12.237: *tantum animi luctusque valent*).[58] When she finally arrives in Thebes, Argia wastes no time in resting from her long trip. She immediately starts looking for the corpse of her husband. The determination with which she undertakes this search is beautifully expressed by Statius in the following simile (Theb.12.270-273):

> qualis ab Aetnaeis accensa lampade saxis
> orba Ceres magnae variabat imagine flammae
> Ausonium Siculumque latus, vestigia nigri
> raptoris vastosque legens in pulvere sulcos.

Argia is compared to Ceres, whose daughter, Proserpina, was abducted by Dis. The goddess is said to have climbed the Aetna from where she casts light upon the shores of Italy and Sicily (*Ausonium Siculuque latus*). This enables her to analyse the 'tracks in the sable of the ravisher and the ruts of his vast wheels' (*vestigia nigri / raptoris vastosque legens in pulvere sulcos*).

Although the simile serves as another allusion to the deep love for her husband, it possibly contains a subtle comment upon the relation between Argia's endeavour and the narrative past. I am not hinting in the first place to the fact that she is compared to a

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"when repeating Homer", for instance, may want to "replace Homer in the minds of his readers". An illuminating take on Statius' relation to his predecessors, in particular to Vergil, can be found in Philip Hardie's now-classic study *The epic successors of Virgil. A study in the dynamics of a tradition*. See also Delarue 2000; Ganiban 2007 and Micozzi 2015 on Statius' conceptualisation of his own "belated position" in the literary tradition.

[57] Korneeva 2011, 10-17 discusses the relationship between the different protagonists in the *Thebaid*.

[58] Lovatt 2016, 278 considers Argia's fearlessness during the trip as the first phase in the character development she will experience in the twelfth book: she will gradually become "more of a hero than her husband ever was" and will "leave her sex behind" (cf. 12.178: *sexuque immane relicto*). Bessone 2011, 206 speaks of "*dalla tradizione alla trasgressione, dal ritual ruolo femminile del lament a un eroismo che infrange le norme di genere sessuale*". See also Dietrich 1999, 46; Hershkowitz 1998, 293-294; De Gussem 2017, 171-172.

mother deprived of her child.[59] Several scholars have seen this as a potential indication in the text that Polynices' wife might fall prey later to the same despair and frenzy[60] as the women bereaved from their infants earlier in the epic.[61] Perhaps more significant in the context of the old-new-dichotomy, is the last one and a half line of the simile quoted above. There, the figure (Ceres) with whom Argia is associated is said 'to collect, to read' (*legens*) traces in the dust (*vestigia*; *vastosque … in pulvere sulcos*). Thereby, Argia's actions on the Theban battlefield are framed in a way that seems to go right against the cautious predictions about the development of her storyline which I made earlier, based on the narrative tendency described by Lovatt. Via the simile, the readers are invited to think about Argia, not as a character that deletes the marks of events that occurred before but as one that 'collects' or 'reads' them. We are incited to imagine the woman as a figure that keeps the tracks left on the battlefield by characters preceding her intact, rather than covering them up and replacing them by her own.[62] This slightly increases the readers' hesitations about the narrative role that Polynices' wife, as (part of) the new sound in the epic and the mythological tradition, will play in the rest of the final book.[63] Does the manner in which she is framed via the simile suggest her behaviour in the following scenes, trying to reconstruct the actions that happened in the warfare episode (instead of erasing them)? Will she, as a new character, not overwrite the narrative patterns from the preceding books but keeps them open, by collecting and reading them?

The tension between old and new, between past and present, between violence and reconciliation, seems to increase even further in the episode following the comparison to Ceres. Despite the warnings of Menoetes, the Argive widow sneaks deeper and deeper into the enemy's territory. She edges herself a way 'through the field slimy with gore and covered with corpses'. She pushes the swords and broken spears that hinder her in her

[59] Lovatt 2013, 256 notices that the simile "emphasizes her femininity, maternal not erotic (…) and sets Polynices up as another young man violated by epic death".

[60] For an illuminating analysis of female frenzy in the *Thebaid*, see Hershkowitz 1998, 282-296.

[61] Lovatt 2016, 284; Agri 2014, 742. For an extensive analysis of the theme of motherhood, in relation to aggression in the *Thebaid*, see the survey Antony Augoustakis (2010, 30-75). He particularly discusses the Hypsypile-narrative in the fifth book.

[62] It is important to remark that Ceres, in the simile, looks at the traces in the dust from above, from upon the Aetna, while Polynices' widow is walking around on the battlefield. This contrast gives the impression that Argia is much more closely involved in, much more connected to, the events which the comparison implies her to be reconstructing, collecting and reading.

[63] Another effect of the simile is that it suggests the marriage of Argia and Polynices to have affinities with Oedipus' and Jocaste's. It represents the wife as the mother of her husband. So, also in this sense, the past returns in the figure of Argia.

search aside, resolute to find her deceased husband (275-291). With a little help of Juno,[64] Argia after a while finally sees what she was looking for, first recognising Polynices' cloak and next 'his body half trampled in the dust' (12.292-311). Overwhelmed by her feelings, she 'falls prostrate down to his face and seeks his lost life-breath with her kisses' (12.318-320: *tum corpore toto sternitur in voltus animamque per oscula quaerit / absentem*). She then immediately starts cleaning his corpse and tries 'to wring the blood out of his clothes and hair' (12.320: *pressumque comis ac veste cruorem*).

The latter action may, at first sight, seem to enforce the impression that Argia is bringing a new sound in the final book. The purification appears to be a deed of love and to contribute to the reconciliation of the spirit of her husband. By removing the blood, she does not show the readers another act of violence. But she undertakes, so we might think, an attempt to physically dissociate Polynices from the cruelty that occurred before. This may be interpreted as a symbolical manner to free his soul from the hatred that had dominated him.[65] This impression, however, is right away questioned by the first two words on the following line, where the sentence about the cleaning continues: *servatura legit* (321). There, it is made clear that the Argive widow is not simply pressing the blood from his hair and garment. She is said to be 'gathering' (*legit*) the *cruor* in order to 'preserve' it (*servatura*). Instead of clearing the gore away and metaphorically washing out the link to the preceding horror, the Argive widow is, remarkably, told to desire to keep the *cruor* of Oedipus' son with her.[66]

John Mozley has tried to explain this desire as another illustration of the intense passion that Argia fosters for her dead spouse: since his "soul has already fled" (*animamque … / absentem*), she has to find a new "treasure" to remind her of him.[67] In my view, however, this interpretation has neglected the ominous in Argia's action, which seems to contain another indication that her endeavour will, perhaps, not as radically overwrite the narrative past as her newness has let us suppose.[68] The key of this indication seems to be situated in the double meaning of the verb *legere*: Argia does not just 'gather up' already clotted blood but also 'reads' or 'studies' it. This invites the readers to think

[64] While the other gods stay away from the battlefield they have left in the eleventh book (*infra*), Juno has returned, not coincidentally being the patron of Argos as well as a female deity.

[65] While cleaning Polynices' corpse, Argia deplores that she had convinced her father in the third book to wage war on Thebes. As Vessey 1973, 132 maintains, "it was love that prompted her then – but now she sees that she had been mistaken. (…) All who have been involved with the house of Oedipus have found that Fate has twisted every action to its own dire purposes".

[66] Vessey 1986b, 3006 sees this gathering of the blood as a "grotesquery to be found in Lucan and Senecan drama's too".

[67] Mozley 1961, 323.

[68] In the edited volume by Augoustakis (2013), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic*, several essays illustrate how acts of purification are doomed to fail in the *Thebaid*. As Nicholas Dee argues in the volume (182), "attempts to purify are consistently unsuccessful, no matter how well-meaning they are".

again about Argia as a 'reading figure', not simply of old traces this time, like in the simile with Ceres (*vestigia legens*), but of a crueller remnant from the past, Polynices' *cruor*. Statius' way of phrasing gives the impression that the Argive widow is 'reading', 'reconstructing', the acts of violence that happened (to her husband) in the warfare episode and analysing the horrible events of which the narration was already concluded ('clotted' like the blood). Although there is no reason to doubt Argia's good intentions, the manner in which her actions are described here thus renders the readers to wonder whether they will not have an opposite impact. The more her plotline proceeds, the more she is suggested to be interacting somehow with the horrible events about which the readers have already read before. While trying to appease her spouse's spirit, filled by hatred, she, as the new character, is paradoxically implied to read and preserve (*servatura legit*) the violence of which Statius had expressed the hope that the readers would forget it.

The apparent inconsistencies between Argia's intentions and the actual effects of her deeds will hold on until the end of her storyline. Shortly after the purification of her spouse's clothes and hair, her presence on the Theban battlefield is discovered by Antigone. The sister of Polynices is told to have left the city a while before. She wanted to search the corpse of her brother in the hope to grant him the funeral that their uncle Creon had forbidden. As soon as the two women have figured out each other's identity, they decide to collaborate (12.325-408).[69]

Bound in grief, they carry Polynices' body to the banks of the Ismenus and wash out the blood that Argia had not yet removed. They then begin to search for a pyre (which originally belonged to a Theban soldier) to burn it. But the ashes seem already cold and nowhere appears to be a spark of fire left. Every 'pyre is at rest, except one', in which the women gratefully place the beloved corpse. Unfortunately, Statius tells us, this is the pyre where very recently Eteocles' body was 'ordained to be cremated and it still contains some smoking remnants' (12.410-425). Without knowing, Argia and Antigone thus have reunited the hostile brothers. It does not last long before the consequences of this unlucky deed become clear (12.429-436):

> ecce iterum fratres: primos ut contigit artus
> ignis edax, tremuere rogi et novus advena busto

[69] Lovatt 2016, 277 remarks that Argia's meeting with Antigone dramatises, at least at first sight, a female principle of reconciliation and collaboration "to be set against the (male) principle of conflict". Extensive studies of their collaboration can be found in Augoustakis 2010, 75-91; Bessone 2011, 200-223; Korneeva 2011, 209-214; Manioti 2016. The latter contribution examines the endeavour of Argia and Antigone in light of other notorious female epic pairs, such as Helen and Andromache, and Dido and Anna. These recent surveys have problematised Vessey's (1973, 132-133) optimistic reading of the women's actions, predominantly seeing them as a paragon of *pietas*.

pellitur; exundant diviso vertice flammae
alternosque apices abrupta luce coruscant.
pallidus Eumenidum veluti commiserit ignis
Orcus uterque minax globus et conatur uterque
longius; ipsae etiam commoto pondere paulum
secessere trabes.

When the fire first touches Polynices' corpse, the whole pile begins to shake (*tremuere rogi*). A 'two-headed flame shoots up' (*diviso vertice flammae*) of which each end shines bright, comparable to the torches of the Furies (*Eumenidum...ignis*). The points of the flame appear to be involved in a fierce fight, 'threatening and outsoaring one another' (*minax globus et conatur uterque / longius*). Instead of freeing Polynices from the hatred, the cremation appears to stir up the anger between him and his brother again (*iterum fratres*). Their enmity is so deep that it even continues after their death.[70] The battle between the points of the flame indicates that the women have failed to bring the reconciliation as they intended to do.[71] They have 'raised, by contrast, spent wrath' (12.437: *functasque manu stimulavimus iras*).[72]

The re-start of the hostility between the sons of Oedipus in the final book can be considered as the climax of a process that has been going on for a while. The further the plotline of the new character Argia progressed, as illustrated above, the clearer it became that she was not really deleting or overwriting the old narrative patterns. Her endeavour was suggested to keep open the tracks of violence that were left by characters earlier in the epic (i.e. the horror that was already 'clotted' or 'spent', *functas*). To evoke this suggestion, Statius has recurrently represented Argia as a reading figure, who has been analysing and studying the (narrative) remnants from the preceding books. She has been suggested to have been reading, reconstructing and thereby re-activating the storylines that were developed in the warfare episode. The culmination of Argia's re-activation forms the fight between the enflamed brothers in the pyre. There, she sees the 'unspeakable hatred' that Statius in the eleventh book had wished to be obliterated. Whereas she witnesses the fraternal madness for the very first time, she brings the

[70] Lovatt 2016, 286: "When they put the body on the pyre, the spirit will not allow the shades to unite as they pray (...). It is the pyre of Eteocles and even in death the brothers' ghost continue their hatred, their fighting and their civil war".

[71] Augoustakis 2010, 85: "Argia, as her name reminds us of the peripheral city that launches the attack on Thebes, and Antigone, the famous sister of the Theban house, do not provide a closure for the epic, where the two cities are ultimately unified, and peace is imposed".

[72] When the women are caught by the guards, Statius recounts that both fall prey to frenzy, clinging themselves to Polynices' body and refuting to let it go. "The madness of war", Augoustakis 2010, 85 states, now penetrated into the hearts of women, who compete as their male counterparts have done in the previous books". See also Manioti 2016, 135-140

(external) readers back to the epic's most horrible moment and forces them to re-read it (*ecce iterum*).[73] The deep envy between the brothers does not manifest itself here again as an actual fight between two soldiers on a battlefield but is reproduced, recycled, as a strive between the ends of the flame. The horror that the final part of the epic should have made the readers forget, is thus 'repeated' in the cremation scene, 'the only difference with the warfare episode', we could say, 'being the variation in the form of sameness'.

The latter phrase deliberately echoes the conclusion of Steven Connor's discussion of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, which has been quoted above. I almost literally re-take his statement here, because it articulates the fundamental point around which the last book of the epic and the third novel of the trilogy have implicitly entangled throughout this paragraph. The unexpected sound in the twelfth book of the *Thebaid* has not enabled Statius to create an entirely new atmosphere. The development of the female plotline leads us, instead, to the same conclusion about the final part of the epic as the Mahood-Worm-story about the third novel of the trilogy: in the literary spaces of the epic and *The Unnamable*, the past is more persistent than the narrators implied; in these worlds, everything revolves around 'sameness' rather than 'difference', more around the reproduction and recycling of 'old stories' than around the creation of one's own land, one's own plot. Argia does not show the readers something new. She rather functions as a Mahood/Worm-like medium via which the readers are obliged to re-read preceding storylines. The gazes of Mahood and Worm serve as a window through which they are compelled to look at the snippets from the past. Argia is recurrently suggested to behave herself like a reader of the warfare episode. Her first-time-reading obliges the external readers, in the end, to watch again the most unspeakable scene from the preceding books.

As explained above, Pattie and Smith have argued that the Mahood-Worm-story in the last novel of the trilogy serves as a sign of the weak status that both the narrator and the readers appear to hold. On the one hand, it suggests the unnamable's inability to exercise control over the story he is composing; on the other, it implies that also the readers are subjugated to the laws of the fictional universe and have fallen prey to the same

[73] I do not fully agree with Elaine Fantham (1999, 231), who states that the women's actions "create a mise-en-abîme, a reliving of the whole epic, or rather a rival version of the epic Statius has just told, seen through women's eyes and in women's terms". I doubt whether it is correct to speak here of "a rival version". It is indeed true that the readers perceive the fraternal madness in the final book through the eyes of Argia and Antigone. But does this make a difference? The hatred manifests itself with the same intensity as it did before. Female love, mourning and lament form the basis of the new tone that resounds in the beginning of the final book. But, in the end, nothing has changed. The readers do not get a rival version, but the same version of the horror Statius has told in the preceding books, the only novelty, as I will explain further on, being the variations in the form of sameness.

reproducing and repeating tendencies as the narrator. Given the affinities with *The Unnamable*, we may wonder whether Argia's plotline in the last book of the epic offers a similar indication. What do the Argia-story and its incapability to take a new direction imply about the way in which Statius conceptualises his own position and the readers'?

In *Fighting for Rome* (1998), John Henderson has already suggested that Statius as a narrator sometimes makes a rather powerless impression. The Theban mythological tradition is known to be determined by a "law of the eternal return".[74] The city has become a symbol of continuous crime, of violence without end, of "recycled" and "repeated" cruelty. Nobody, even not a narrator-poet as skilled as Statius, can change this.[75] The Argia-storyline confirms this impression, showing that the new character Statius has invented, whose endeavour is unprecedented in the mythological tradition, has not enabled him to break this cycle. Despite his claims for oblivion and the initiation of the new sphere, his voice has not been strong enough to replace the hatred by love, only being allowed, to say it in Beckett's terms, to keep on 'murmuring old stories, old crimes, as if it were the first time'.[76]

If we keep Smith's analysis of Beckett in mind, we might be inclined to take Henderson's argument even one step further and focus on the implications the Argia-story has for the readers. Her recurrent portrayal as a figure 'reading the traces of the past or the clotted blood' does not only foreshadow the repetition of the fight between the brothers in the cremation scene. It is also meant to make the readers, be it subtly, aware of what the final part of the epic is actually compelling them to do. Instead of exploring a new narrative direction, they are obliged to go through a process of reading that strongly resembles the one through which they have already gone. They are forced to read the manifestations of Theban madness again, 'as if it is the first time'. This slightly creates the suggestion that they, like the narrator, are as well subdued to the 'law of eternal return', as Henderson called it, inherent to the Theban cycle. They are implied to have become part of or, to use Smith's term in his discussion of Beckett, even 'entrapped' in a literary universe, in which nothing really changes, the only novelty being the variations in the form of sameness (a rule that even goes for their reading process). This

[74] Henderson 1998, 238.

[75] Henderson 1998, 224. He adds: "We begin so see how powerful a scenario tragic 'Thebes' can be, (...), the very dimensions within which we can find any relations thinkable, the possibility for any story-pattern to be imagined – temporality, space, generational linearity – spin at Thebes into re-cycled repetition, glomerate in fusion. This is Statius' point of departure, the guilt of Thebes – locked into circles of revenge in which everything can only happen again".

[76] Augoustakis 2015, 378 states: "The conclusion of the Theban war is soon to be overturned by the next battle, in an endless series of civil strife. The poet opts for a closure that underscores his poetic powerlessness". Markus 1997, 59 briefly lists up the moments where the "primary narrator complains of his powerlessness and inability to change events".

argument will be further developed in the next paragraph, wherein the relationship between text and reader will be discussed into more detail.

3.3 The Death of the Reader

> 'occidimus, functasque manu stimulavimus iras.
> frater erat; quis enim accessus ferus hospitis umbrae
> pelleret? en clipei fragmen semiustaque nosco
> cingula, frater erat! cernisne, ut flamma recedat
> concurratque tamen? vivunt, odia inproba, vivunt'.
> (Theb.12.437-441)

While seeing the battle in the pyre, one of the women cries out her feelings of despair (I quote here the opening of a longer exclamation throughout which it does never become entirely clear whether Argia or Antigone is speaking).[77] She says to be shocked, 'ruined', (*occidimus*) by the consequences of their deed. She realises that they have re-incited the anger between the sons of Oedipus (*functasque manu stimulavimus iras*). Who else but Polynices' brother (*frater erat*), she asks, would 'refuse to welcome a homeless ghost' (*pelleret*)? Why would the flames otherwise alternately retreat (*recedat*) and clash again (*concurratque tamen*)? The 'wicked hatred lives, she desperately exclaims, still lives' (*vivunt, odia inproba vivunt*).

In his study of the use of rhetoric in Roman epic, Martin Helzle elaborates upon the few lines cited above. He particularly concentrates on the remarkable rhetorical tension which is created by the appearance of the word *occidimus* in the first verse and the repetition of *vivunt* in the last. The female character expresses her disturbance with a verb that literally means 'we die' and which stands in sharp contrast to the 'living' hatred of the brothers. This rhetorical opposition, as Helzle has argued, increases the dramatic effect of the exclamation. It underlines the fierceness with which the Theban madness

[77] The phrase '*clipei fragmen semiustaque nosco / cingula*' may give the impression that Antigone is speaking, as she would have known the weaponry and belt of her brother the best. Yet, further in the speech, several elements contradict this first impression and suggest that the exclamation is Argia's. The exclamation is introduced by the words *'conclamat territa virgo*', a sentence that is deliberately confusing. For, as Hershkowitz 1994, 293-294 has shown, though Antigone is the real virgin, Argia is recurrently staged in the final book as "re-virginified". The indistinctness about whom is speaking matches a broader tendency in the Argia- and Antigone-story. The women's identities, during their endeavour, become more and more blended and fused (like the brothers' in the eleventh book). See Manioti 2016; Lovatt 2016, 286.

has been 'resurrected' in the final book, as opposed to the consternation, the weakness, the 'fading away', that those who have (accidentally) stimulated it, must experience.[78]

The question this paragraph wants to ask is whether the rhetorical tension between life and death to which Helzle has pointed may perhaps have a wider significance. The exclamation follows right after the rise of the battling flame and seems thereby a spontaneous reaction to the viewing (*en; cernis*) of the hatred. Why exactly does the revival of the Theban madness incite someone (Argia/Antigone) to associate oneself to death? What does this response imply about the relation between the horror presented in the text and those who have seen/read/stimulated this horror? It will be proposed that the woman's connection to death belongs to a broader tendency in the epic, in which, at several occasions, an interrelation is suggested between reading and viewing, on the one hand, and dying or fading away, on the other.

Before exploring this interrelation within the *Thebaid* itself, it might be useful to return once more to Beckett's *The Unnamable*. Does this work contain features that may help us to think about and get a better insight in the response of the women in the final book of the epic?

In his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, Paul Davies has observed a remarkable shift in the appearance of Mahood, and to a certain extent also in Worm's, in *The Unnamable*.[79] The more the story about these two characters progresses, the more signs we receive about the decline of their physical condition. Davies has noticed the constant "weakening of musculature" and their faces "growing pale".[80] At some point, the unnamable even assumes that Mahood has passed away, though he is not entirely sure ("He [Worm] has survived them all, Mahood too, if Mahood is dead", 385). The readers do not get a clear explanation for the changes in the bodily state of the main characters. Perhaps, the latter's physical weakening is related to the behaviour of some of the individuals they observe and encounter in their literary space. A few of these persons are told to react aggressively when being caught by the gazes of Mahood and Worm. They threaten them and sometimes even attempt to "knock them down" (364). Although the

[78] Helzle 1996, 172. He sees an intertextual link to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 9.658ff., a passage revolving around the daughter of king Aeolus, Alcyone, who had lost her husband Ceyx. A general discussion of the women's rhetoric can be found in Frings 1994, 88-92; Anzinger 2007, 287-305 (that focuses on the women's meaningful silences).

[79] Davies 1994, 46-48.

[80] Davies 1994, 46. Apart from the narrative function of their weakening, to which I will return, Davies argues that their declining physical condition can also be explained from a philosophical point of view. The physical decline of Mahood and Worm, that they share with many other characters in Beckett's oeuvre, may be seen as a "reflection of the human state", an "impression" of the "consciousness of an age" (47).

unnamable does nowhere confirm that there is a link with the condition of his main characters, Mahood and Worm may have become the victims of an attack.[81]

One possible explanation of the worsening condition of Mahood and Worm could be to see it as part of a tendency of which the seeds were already planted in the first novel of the trilogy. This tendency entails that there is a connection between viewing or reading on the one hand and becoming a victim, dying, on the other. In the trilogy, the former activities are mostly represented as life-bringing. Viewers and readers are expected to visualise and give meaning to the settings, the characters and plotlines created by the narrators. They turn the 'dead letters' on the pages into a meaningful complex, thereby 'bringing life' into Beckett's fictional space. This life-producing role of the readers-viewers is most explicitly emphasised in the second part, *Malone Dies*. There, the readers seem to be metaphorically portrayed as nurses taking care of the first-person narrator Malone, who is from the start pictured as writing "in the vicinity of death" (cf. the opening sentence: "I shall soon be quite dead").[82] The nurses are said to be giving their patient food and forcing him to eat with the aim of restoring his vital functions. We may interpret this nursing as an analogy of the process of reading, during which stories are brought to life by 'feeding' them with meaning.

What is remarkable, however, is that characters who are implied in the first two parts of the trilogy to be watching or reading a certain scene (and in some cases serve as the internal focalisers through whose gaze we are looking) are several times suggested to be running the risk to die. The more they are visualising, interpreting and bringing life into the novels' narrations, the more their own vitality seems to be in danger, sometimes being threatened by the characters that are caught by their gazes. A few of them, like a couple of the nurses in *Malone Dies*, at some point appear to have fallen prey to an attack. They suddenly disappear or barely seem to be alive anymore, as if they have turned into a sort of shade and become themselves closely related to the dead.

A possible explanation of this phenomenon can be found in the renown essay on the trilogy by the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot.[83] He suggests some kind of relation between the conceptualisation of reading as dying, becoming a victim, and the readers'

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[81] General explorations of the importance of violence, aggression and death in Beckett's oeuvre can be found in Cormier 1977; Critchley 1997; Barfield e.a. 2011 (the latter discusses the narrative function of these issues, while the former two approach them from a philosophical perspective).

[82] Ricks 1993, 4. As Christopher Ricks (1993) has maintained in his wonderful monograph *Beckett's Dying Words*, the second novel continuously plays with the dynamics between life and death, the dying narrator and the living figures in his fictional space that he himself has created. *Malone Dies* is Beckett's answer to the question "how a writer should give life to dismay at life itself, to the unwelcome encroachments of death. After all, it is for the life, the vitality, of their language that we value writers" (4). Ricks has argued that a part of the answer lies in Beckett's style, his language, which is often clichéd and thus consists of words that "are dead but won't lie down" (5).

[83] Blanchot 2000, 94-98.

subjugation to the laws and forces of the fictional universe to which has already been referred in the previous paragraph. Blanchot departs from the observation that the literary universes of the trilogy frustrate conventional techniques of interpretation. The harder and longer we attempt to develop a coherent set of meanings within these narrations, the clearer it becomes that this is very hard to do within the novels. The unreliability of the narrators, the fragmentation of the stories, the narrative digressions, the series of linguistic expressions which seemingly lead to nowhere, etc. cause the application of traditional "familiarising" interpretative techniques to be doomed to fail (e.g. though some aspects seem to be realist, it is mostly difficult to interpret the fictional world in terms of the external reality in which we are living). This renders the readers, Blanchot states, to realise at some point that they are nothing more than a "victim, (...) condemned to a treadmill [of language, of an overwhelming sequence of linguistic and narrative elements], that not even death can free [them] from".[84] They are "entrapped in the same exhaustion of the infinite language" as Beckett's narrators.[85] The portrayal of some of the viewing-reading characters as being in danger or as shade-like may underline this ancillary, weak position which Beckett ascribes to the readers.[86] The more the latter put efforts in bringing life into the narrations, so it seems, the more they understand that they are nothing else than 'a victim', a 'powerless shade', a 'reading dead', undergoing the linguistic stream within the novels' literary universes, rather than actively imposing a clear and definite meaning on them.[87]

The weakening condition of Mahood and Worm perhaps serves as a sign of the inescapability of this situation (at least, this would be one possible interpretation).[88] Being the internal focalisers, they are implied to exercise less and less control over the things they are watching. The more they visualise the scenes and characters enfolding before their eyes, the more they are reduced to the state of a victim, a ghost. This seems to make clear that the relation between the text and its readers/viewers has not changed in the

[84] Blanchot 2000, 97. According to the French philosopher, the treadmill of language manifests itself most clearly in the final novel of the trilogy. Yet, as Birkett e.a. 2000, 93 has remarked, Blanchot, thereby underestimates the overtly linguistic nature of *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*.

[85] Birkett e.a. 2000, 94.

[86] Smith 2002, 69: "Reading Beckett's trilogy (...) becomes a struggle in which an ironic text threatens at any moment to turn on its readers, making us its victims".

[87] Blanchot's point, as Birkett e.a. 2000, 94 explains, is that "Beckett's prose is important (...) because it transforms the role of the 'external reader', capable of detached aesthetic sentiments, judgments and criticism, into that of a 'victim'", a figure as entrapped in the fictional universe as the narrator. See also Smith's monograph (2002) on Beckett's readers, inscribed in and subdued to the fictional universes (cf. footnote 48).

[88] Another possible approach to their weakening could be to examine it within the context of the unnamable's increasing desire for silence. The more explicit his wish to be allowed to end his narration, the worse the condition of his characters (as if he is killing them, as Malone has done at the end of *Malone Dies*). See Pattie 2000, 68.

last part of the trilogy. The latter remain as powerless, as condemned to the treadmill of language, as they were before. Comparable to the narrators who are delivered to the "madness of having to speak" (*supra*), the readers are suggested to have no way out of the trilogy's linguistic "torment".[89]

The meaningful dynamic between living and dying in Beckett's trilogy, serving as an embodiment of the interaction between text and reader, may perhaps help us to develop a better understanding of the exclamation by Argia/Antigone in the twelfth book. It might incite us even more to look beyond the direct rhetorical effect of the woman's words and wonder what it could *imply, signify*, that the one who is watching the revival of the horror in the final part of the epic associates herself and her partner in crime with death. Can this association be considered, somehow similar to Mahood's and Worm's weakening condition, as an indication of what it means to visualise the *Thebaid*'s cruelty?

To find an answer to this question, this paragraph will first of all examine whether there are other occasions in the *Thebaid* where the activation of madness is connected to the 'decease' of its activators. I am particularly interested in moments that suggest a link between death on the one hand and figures that stimulate the horror via visualisation/reading on the other.[90] As have been illustrated previously, the re-vitalisation of hatred in the final book is strongly connected to the acts of viewing/reading. Argia is portrayed as a reader, re-opening old narrative tracks, while the exclamation cited above emphasises, via words like *en* and *cernis*, the visual impact of the battling flame on the women. I aim to examine whether the woman's association to death matches a broader tendency in the *Thebaid* that correlates readers/viewers (and thereby stimulators) of hatred in some way to the non-living.[91]

I will begin by analysing a few of the many ekphrases of objects of art which the epic contains. In the Roman literary tradition, ekphrasis forms the place par excellence where a poet can try to captivate the readers' gaze. As Statius has become well-known for his preference for artful descriptions, it is rather evident to take the ekphrastic tendency in his work and the conceptualisation of viewing related to it as the starting point of my exploration. For quite a long time, vivid descriptions of statues, weapons, clothing, etc. in epic poetry were predominantly considered as forms of literary ornamentation. Poets

[89] Blanchot 2000, 97.

[90] As Bernstein 2016, 261 states, in Statius' epic, "'who sees?' is as significant a question as 'who speaks?', the point of departure for Fowler's now-classic essay on Vergil". Lovatt 2016, 267 points to the close relationship between viewing and reading in the classical epic tradition, stating that viewing the epic battlefield "is always potentially a metaphor for reading, and the battlefield in all its gore and glory can be one figurative representation of the epic poem".

[91] Recent scholarship has expanded the study of spectatorship themes in Statius' work. For a bibliographical overview, see Bernstein 2016, 260-261.

would have incorporated them in their works to show their artistic skills. The past decades, however, specialists in ancient culture have started seeing "ekphrasis as a fruitful topos for literary and political inquiry".[92] Many studies have been devoted to the possible functions these descriptions may fulfil within a narrative. Several scholars, for example, have referred to the proleptic potentials of ekphrases,[93] which provide "focal points for reflection on larger narrative or literary issues".[94] Others have portrayed the descriptions as interruptions in the text during which the process of viewing itself becomes the object of consideration. Since an author was expected to describe the object and the scenes pictured on it so "vividly that the audience or reader seems to see it with his own eyes" (*enargeia*),[95] ekphrases often encourage us to think through the relationship between the visual and the verbal, between the elements represented in the text and ourselves as viewers of these elements, appealed by the poet to visualise them.

The first ekphrastic description in the epic can be found halfway the opening book. Statius tells there about the arrival of Polynices and Tydeus in Argos, two characters that were not long ago forced into exile and obliged to leave their native cities. They are warmly welcomed by the Argive king Adrastus. He introduces the young men to his daughters and invites them to a ritual feast, dedicated to Apollo.[96] A central place in Statius' description of this feast is occupied by an ekphrasis of a libation bowl.[97] This object is embossed in gold and depicts several mythological scenes. The first episode that Statius describes, is about Perseus, flying into the air with the severed head of Medusa (1.544-547):[98]

> aureus anguicomam praesecto Gorgona collo
> ales habet, iamiamque vagas – ita visus – in auras
> exilit; illa gravis oculos languentiaque ora
> paene movet vivoque etiam pallescit in auro.

[92] Newlands 2012, 73. A pioneering study was the article by Don Fowler (1991), that pointed to the "narrating" aspects of descriptions of art.

[93] For a detailed analysis of the ancient use of the term ekphrasis, see Webb 2009. A general discussion of the possible functions of ekphrasis within epic or lyric poetry can be found in Elsner 2002; Squire 2009.

[94] Newlands 2012, 74. Harrison 2010 more generally discusses the functions of 'proleptic' ekphrases in Flavian epics.

[95] Newlands 2012, 75.

[96] For an analysis of the relationship between the two young men and the Argive king, see Vessey 1973, 92-101; Ahl 1986; McNelis 2006, 25-49.

[97] Vessey 1973, 100 sees an intertextual reference to two moments in the *Aeneid*: Dido's use of the cup of Beleus at the end of the first book and king Evander's welcoming of Aeneas in the eighth.

[98] Lovatt 2013, 353-357 remarkably leaves this ekphrasis out of her discussion of the figure of Medusa in classical and late antique epics.

Perseus is said to 'leap into the air, confident in his golden wings' (*aureus...ales*). He has just killed Medusa, whose snake-haired head (*anguicomam...Gorgona*) he is holding. The languid face (*gravis oculos languentiaque ora*) that gradually grows pale (*pallescit in auro*) indicates that she has not died yet. There still seems to be a sparkle of life left.

In her discussion of the Medusa-part of the description, Carole Newlands has pointed to the tension between "art and reality", between the "materiality" of the object and the "vividness" of the described mythological episode.[99] On the one hand, the ekphrasis underlines that the figures of Perseus and the Gorgon are engraved on the surface of an object. It starts and ends with an allusion to the material of which the bowl is made (*aureus...auro*), thereby stressing that the depicted scene is imprinted in gold. What is described is not real, but 'just' a decoration on a libation cup. On the other hand, the ekphrasis at the same time subverts its own emphasis on materiality via explicit references to the vividness that goes out from the engraved episode (*enargeia*). The scene is so skilfully designed that Perseus, 'so it seems' (*ita visus*), is on the point of jumping into the air. Medusa is that vividly etched that she 'almost', 'just not', (*paene*) moves her heavy eyes and is growing pale in the 'living gold' (*vivoque etiam pallescit in auro*). The attribution of the adjective *vivus* to the material noun *aurum*, meaning 'lifelike' as well as 'alive', "hints that the gold itself has an animate quality".[100] Although the figures of Perseus and Medusa are imprinted on a material surface, the ekphrasis of the bowl thus conveys the sense that this object of art "can barely contain the figures that the artist's skill has made so animate".[101] They are suggested to be that realistically engraved that it seems as if they have come to life (as Newlands remarks, Statius plays with "the ambiguity between the life-like and the living").[102]

Newlands several times calls the ekphrasis of Perseus and Medusa "uncanny".[103] The description does not primarily celebrate the heroic deed by the half-god, who has killed a creature that was thought to be invincible. It mainly draws the attention to the head of the Gorgon, "severed from the body but still with deadly power". Her eyes are said to be heavy and her face is termed languid. Yet, active verbs like *movet* and *pallescit* ('growing' pale rather than 'is pale') suggest that the Gorgon is still alive, seemingly "ready at any moment to raise up her petrifying stare".[104] According to Newlands, the head of Medusa, vividly depicted, is a "present, active sign of the evil that Adrastus initiates unwittingly

[99] Newlands 2012, 80.
[100] Newlands 2012, 81.
[101] Newlands 2012, 82.
[102] Newlands 2012, 81.
[103] Newlands 2012 on page 83, 83, 87.
[104] Newlands 2012, 81.

by inviting Polynices and Tydeus into his home and family".[105] The two young men will drag the Argive king into a war against Thebes where the most horrible crimes will be committed. The appearance of the Gorgon in the first ekphrasis in the *Thebaid*, therefore, can be considered as proleptic, as an announcement of the *nefas* that will follow in the remainder of the epic.[106]

It is possible to take Newlands' argument about the balefulness of the description one step further if we consider the role which Statius expects the readers/viewers to play. The energetic phrases that underline the vividness of the depicted scene, such as *ita visus* or *paene movet*, do not only compliment the artist because he succeeded in making the engravings so animated. They also function as an appeal to the readers who are stimulated to imagine the mythological episode as vividly as possible. By stressing the life-like/alive appearance of the etched figures, the ekphrasis encourages the readers not just to think about them as static decorations on a libation cup. We are incited to mentally visualise the scene as an animated whole and to vividly evoke the depicted actions into our mind. Although almost every ekphrasis from classical antiquity makes such an explicit appeal to the readers, challenging them to visualise an object only described in words, in case of the description of Perseus and Medusa, this seems, to use Newlands' term, a little bit 'uncanny'. The readers are expected to vividly imagine the Gorgon, whose gaze is potentially dangerous for those at whom she is looking; they are compelled to 'see' and mentally 'animate' a creature with whom any form of eye contact could be deadly. In the ekphrasis, Medusa is said to be pictured on the bowl as dying, with her 'heavy eyes' and 'languid face'. This possibly indicates that she has her eyes closed and does not come to us in her most deadly appearance (but we cannot be completely sure about that).[107] However, this half-asleep state of the head is only represented as temporary and can at

[105] Newlands 2012, 82. She adds: "The bowl is proleptic, evoking the prominent civil war themes of the *Thebaid*, in particular the power of the monstrous when unleashed from hell, the evil generated by acts of violence and presumably also the ultimate sacrilege and the debasement of the hero Tydeus' fascination with the severed head of his enemy Melanippus".

[106] Vessey 1973, 100 has come to a similar conclusion: "The Gorgon with her snake-tresses is reminiscent of the Fury who is similarly crowned with *angues* (...). The youth carrying this symbol of horror subtly evokes the parallel of Polynices possessed by Tisiphone. But he, unlike Perseus, is the victim not the conqueror of the power of evil". Keith 2013 examines the relation between, on the one hand, Statius "monstrous regiment" of snakes, women and snake-women (such as Medusa, Python and Poine), and, on the other, the notion of female pollution. Noens 2014 explores intra-textual links between the ekphrasis of Medusa and other passages in book 1 and 2 (with particular attention to the wedding of Polynices and Argia).

[107] Lovatt 2013, 353 remarks that there are many things in the classical Medusa-myth that remain unclear: "How exactly did Medusa kill? And how did she die? Medusa's eyes turn people to stone: but do they actively? Do they have a petrifying gaze? Or is it only passive? Is it the act of looking into Medusa's eyes that becomes the moment of death?" This uncertainty renders it to be difficult to assess how dangerous the visualisation of Medusa's head on the bowl is implied to be.

any moment be disturbed (*paene movet*). Statius even slightly suggests that we as readers could be the cause of the disturbance. The figures that the description brings before our gazes are so realistically designed that we get the impression that they are alive. The more vividly the readers imagine the dying Medusa, the more 'animated', 'alive', she thus will be evoked in their minds. This is not the same, of course, as bringing the head itself back to life. Yet, by semantically confusing the life-like and the living throughout the description, Statius subtly plays with this idea. It is as if he wants his readers to ask themselves how far their vivid imagination of the half-asleep head of the Gorgon can go, before they will have re-awakened her gaze, in all its lethality.[108]

The ekphrasis of the Medusa-scene on the libation bowl, we could say, thus brings about a remarkable interaction between an object of art and its viewers/readers.[109] The latter's visualisation animates and vivifies a terrifying creature that has a potentially deadly effect on those who dare to do so; the more 'vividly' they visualise the engraved figures, the more their own vitality, so they might think, runs the risk of ebbing away. But why would the text, halfway the first book, subtly suggest a possible link between its readers and the non-living? What impact does this have on the process of reading? At first sight none, since the readers will just continue reading in the same way as they did before. Yet, this might change, as will be proposed later, if we connect the description in the opening book to the exclamation of Argia/Antigone in the last, where the vitalisation of a horrible scene similarly seems to associate its vitalisers with death.

An objection that could possibly be made to this interpretation of the Medusa-ekphrasis is that it perhaps overestimates the impact an object of art can have on its viewers. For the description, Statius seems to have drawn from Lucan, who had already offered a few decades earlier an extensive portrayal of the Gorgon in the ninth book of his *Bellum Civile* (9.665ff.). There, the readers are obliged to visualise the monster through Perseus' eyes. The hero is said to be looking indirectly at her, via the reflecting surface of a splendid bronze shield (9.669: *clipeum…fulvo…aere nitentem*). The armour seems to transmute the power of her gaze, which implies that the internal (Perseus) and external (the readers) viewers are enabled to watch her horrific appearance without experiencing any harm.[110] Maybe, it could be argued that Statius similarly aims to cancel the deadly effect of her head by showing it via the libation bowl. The (description of the) object of art, in this

[108] In Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, the gaze of Medusa is suggested to be the most powerful "in the moment of her death, (…) too much even for the divine gaze of Pallas" (Lovatt 2013, 356).

[109] In her discussion of the figure of Medusa in classical and late antique epic, Lovatt 2013 pays little attention to the dynamics between her gaze and its viewers-readers. She rather concentrates on the relation of the Gorgon to her male conqueror Perseus, and on how her petrifying stare fits within wider epic attitudes towards monumentality (arguing that viewing can be seen as a monumentalising action).

[110] Newlands 2012, 84.

scenario, would not affect its readers-viewers in the way that has been proposed above. But it would function as a medium through which they can visualise the manifestation of evil from a 'safe distance', as if they are watching a movie and are "separated from the action by a cinema screen".[111]

This objection, however, would not only ignore the strong appeal to the readers that goes out from the description of the libation bowl (we are not expected to look at the engraved scene from a distance but are urged to come closely and imagine the figures as vividly as possible). It would also neglect the power that Statius throughout the *Thebaid* ascribes to objects of art. Art works, in the broadest sense of the word (the bowl, jewels, clothing, etc.), are usually not portrayed in the epic as innocent things that are eager to be caught by an admiring gaze. They are, by contrast, very often characterised as objects which radiate and even cause evil.

An illuminating example are the pieces of art in the *Thebaid* that are told to have been designed by the god Vulcan. In the second book, Statius recounts the wedding of Polynices and Argia, which takes place in the imperial palace in Argos. Though this should have been a joyful occasion, he mentions several elements which balefully foreshadow the disastrous war the marriage will bring forth. One of the bad omens is the necklace that Oedipus' son has given to his fiancé as a dowry (2.265-269). The jewel is crafted from the "poisons of hell",[112] such as the eyes of a Gorgon, a serpent from the black locks of Tisiphone and the gleaming crests of sea dragons. It was once made by Vulcan out of anger and jealousy for Venus' adultery with Mars. He had offered the necklace to Harmonia, the bastard daughter of his wife and the war-god, as a gift at her wedding with Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. As Charles McNelis has convincingly shown, Statius recurrently suggests throughout the epic that this ominous gift has been responsible for the doom that fell long ago on the Theban house.[113] Passed on from generation to generation, its *saeva potentia* (2.266), we are incited to believe, has been re-activated over

[111] Lovatt 2013, 165. The strong visual nature of Statius' epic and its recurrent appeals to the readers to 'see what is described' have recently led several scholars to the observation that the "text shares many preoccupations with modern cinema" (Gervais 2013, 140). Moments in the epic that are overtly marked as visual, such as ekphrastic pauses in the narrative or spectacle episodes, have, therefore, been analysed in light of concepts and insights that stem from the domain of film studies. I think, however, that the comparisons to cinema have raised implications about the dynamics between text and reader that are not totally correct. When watching a movie, we become the first-hand witnesses of the events that are happening, but they always reach us from a distance. The relation between the actions in a film and its viewers differs thereby from the interactions implied in the *Thebaid*, where, as I will explain below, visualising an object of art is suggested to require a direct involvement and to not allow us to stay on a distance.

[112] Newlands 2012, 85.

[113] McNelis 2006, 75 has argued that Statius makes "the necklace the origin of evil in the Theban household and links it with the actual origins of Thebes. (...) Vulcan's desire for revenge is the driving force behind the creation of the necklace, and his designs generate the narrative of violence".

and again (up until the day of Polynices' and Argia's marriage) and stimulated the familial hatred that will soon result in the further decay of Thebes.

The second time we encounter pieces of Vulcan's art is in the seventh book. Jupiter does not want to tolerate any more delay of the war between the Argive and Theban armies.[114] He demands Mercury, therefore, to go visit Mars and order him to start the battle immediately.[115] When arriving at the war-god's home, Mercury is right away said to be 'horrified by what he sees' (7.41: *horrescitque tuens*). He appears to have reached a hellish place, full of the most terrifying monsters. What follows is a long ekphrasis of the creatures the god meets on his way inside the house (7.40-63). He passes 'a thousand of furies', 'red-flushed Rage and pale-cheeked Fear'. He also sees 'Treachery and Strife with her two-edged blade', not to mention 'Frenzy, glad at heart'.[116] Though he is horrified by their presence, Mercury for a long time seems to feel capable of bearing the sight and functions as the focaliser through whose gaze the readers can watch these terrifying creatures. This appears to change, however, at the moment he catches a glimpse of the war-god himself, 'in all his anger' (7.60: *non usquam ore remisso*) portrayed on weaponry, 'once designed by Vulcan' (7.61-62: *divina Mulciber arte / ediderat*). At this point, the ekphrasis abruptly breaks off. The reader does not get to know how Mars' cruel image, engraved in the weapons that are all over the place (7.60: *ubique ipsum*), looks like. This creates the impression that Mercury could not hold it anymore and has turned off his gaze, just like he will do a little bit further on when the real war-god appears before his eyes (7.74-75: *deriguit visu Cullenia proles / submisitque genas*).[117] Both art and reality, so it is suggested, are so soaked through madness that even an Olympic god does not dare to visualise them.[118]

Since Vulcan's art works have been well-studied in scholarship,[119] I deliberately keep my analysis of the passages in the second and seventh book concise. But I think that the brief discussion has proven my point. Within the context of the *Thebaid*, it seems very unlikely that objects of art would be implied to function as a medium through which the readers can watch the most horrible creatures and events without being affected

[114] Narrative delay is one of the central principles in the *Thebaid*. The war, and in particular the duel between Polynices and Eteocles, is constantly postponed. An extensive study of this principle can be found in Ganiban 2007, 152-176; Ash 2015.

[115] Lovatt 2013, 38 points to the paradoxical effect of his demand: "Jupiter creates narrative momentum from uneasy energy, through a complex layered divine machine, sending Mercury to stir Mars into action; paradoxically, this narrative thrust takes us into the pause of the ekphrasis, as we view the palace of Mars, into the territory of Ovid".

[116] Taisne 1994, 68-72 discusses the palace of Mars and the terrifying creatures that it contains.

[117] Ahl 1986.

[118] Lovatt 2013, 74: "The implication is that the sight will actually be dangerous for the divine viewer".

[119] See Ahl 1986; McNelis 2006, 50-76; 97-124; Delarue 2000, 98-103.

themselves. In the epic, pieces of art are dangerous, sometimes with destructive powers, and horrifying to everyone who dares to look at them (even to gods).

Mercury's refusal to look at (the image of) the enraged Mars prefigures the behaviour of the Olympic gods in the eleventh book.[120] The penultimate part of the *Thebaid* narrates the cruellest episode depicted in Statius' epic, his 'piece of art': the duel between the sons of Oedipus. Disgusted by the idea of the imminent fight, Jupiter demands his fellow Olympians to 'avert their gazes'; the forthcoming crime 'should not be watched by the gods' (11.126-127: *auferte oculos! absentibus ausint ista deis*); the violence of the brothers must 'at all costs stay hidden from heavenly eyes' (11.133: *videant neu talia fratres*). A little bit further, the Olympians are told to obey Jupiter's order (11.405-415). Even the gods of war withdraw from the battlefield of Thebes.

According to Neil Bernstein, the gods' refusal to watch the fraternal duel "presents a contrast to the epic tradition that encodes them as authoritative observers".[121] The fight between Achilles and Hector in the *Ilias* is watched by all the Homeric gods (22.166). Vergil's Jupiter and Juno look down at the strife between Aeneas and Turnus. With the withdrawal of the gods, Statius thus removes the intermediate audience from the narrative through whose eyes the readers are used to watch epic battle scenes. He takes away the authoritative gazes which traditionally mediate our view of violent events and allow us to perceive them from a distant, Olympic perspective. Bernstein sees the gods' averted gazes, especially Jupiter's, as the culminating example of their weakness in the *Thebaid*. From the start of the epic, they have appeared as rather powerless figures, whose actions did often not turn out the way they wanted.[122] Their absence from the eleventh book forms the ultimate proof of their "failure of authority".[123]

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[120] Ahl 1986. Henderson 1991, 59 argues that the "aversion of the gaze (...) is a (...) pattern". He adds the examples of Apollo's aversion to watch the death of Amphiaraus and the reaction of the Dioscuri to the death of Alcidamas.

[121] Bernstein 2011, 64.

[122] In his pioneering study on the *Thebaid*, David Vessey (1973, 82-92) developed a positive view on the Olympic god, seeing him as a just and impartial deity that decides about life and death, about violence in one place and peace in the other. More recent scholars, however, have criticised Vessey's view and pointed to features that indicate Jupiter's weakness, his subjugation to the powers of the underworld. See Ganiban 2007, 50-57; Ahl 1986, 2861; Feeney 1991, 355; Hershkowitz 1998, 260-268; Hill 1989; Dominik 1994b, 1-76; Dominik 2015. Some of the latter contributions, especially Hill's and Dominik's, have considered the negative image of Jupiter as a form of hidden criticism on Domitian; the portrayal of Jupiter would indirectly articulate Statius' thoughts on the emperor. Hill's and Dominik's view fits within the context of the double-speak-tradition that has dominated Statius-scholarship in the '90s yet has recently received more and more criticism (see Cordes 2014 for an analysis of the shifting scholarly paradigms).

[123] Bernstein 2011, 65. See also Feeney 1991, 357; Franchet d'Espèrey 1999, 361; Henderson 1991, 59. As Ganiban 2007, 183 has maintained, the decision not to watch also "reflects the inherent nature of violence: if the war is unspeakable, it is also unwatchable".

The vacuum created by the departure of the Olympians, however, does not last long. Immediately after the withdrawal of the war-gods, Statius introduces a new intermediate audience whose gaze the readers will be compelled to share. He first mentions a public of elderly people, women and children standing on the towers and walls. But since they barely dare to watch the battlefield (e.g. 11.419: *vetant adtendere natos*), they seem a less suitable replacement of the Olympic gods. More appropriate and authoritative are the ghosts of the Theban ancestors,[124] who take place upon the hills and eagerly look at the start of the duel (11.420-421):

> ipse quoque Ogygios monstra ad gentilia manes
> Tartareus rector porta iubet ire reclusa.
> montibus insidunt patriis tristique corona
> infecere diem et vinci sua crimina gaudent.

Dis himself has opened the doors of the Tartarus and demanded the ghosts to watch their 'kinsmen's monstrous acts' (*monstra ad gentilia*). Seeing the brothers' desire to kill each other makes the ancestors happy, 'rejoicing that their own crimes are being outdone' (*vinci sua crimina gaudent*).

Bernstein is right when saying that the "ghosts' cruel pleasure in spectatorship reproduces in miniature the general failure of ancestral relationships in the Theban house".[125] From Agenor's 'unyielding' exile of his son Cadmus onwards (1.5-6: *inexorabile pactum / legis Agenoreae*), up to Oedipus' curse of Polynices and Eteocles, the ties between ancestors and descendants have been corrupted. The joy that the ghosts experience in the *Thebaid* while watching the brothers as the "antitypes of *pietas*", the *gentilia monstra*, further turns this relationship upside down.[126] But a concern that is, within the context of this paragraph, more pertinent than family relationships is what implications the replacement of the Olympic by the ghostly audience have for Statius' definition of the dynamics between his (horrible) narrative and those who are visualising and reading it. What does it indicate that the readers, at the point where the climax of evil is about to manifest itself, are compelled to look through the gazes of and identify themselves with a public of shades?[127]

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[124] As Ganiban 2007, 184 has remarked, "Jupiter's decision not to watch is especially pointed because, in effect, it represents his inability to witness the overthrow of his own cosmic domination. (...) Dis and hell have overtaken the moral world that Jupiter claimed to govern".

[125] Bernstein 2011, 77.

[126] Bernstein 2011, 78. Elaborations upon the problematic family relationships in the *Thebaid*, see most recently Bernstein 2008, 64-105; Manioti 2016; Newlands 2016; Gervais 2015.

[127] I have chosen to focus on the public of shades because they are represented as a replacement of the traditional Olympic audience. For a discussion on the other viewers of the fraternal duel, see Bernstein 2011.

Since the beginning of this paragraph, a tendency has been mapped out in the *Thebaid* which somehow suggests an interrelation between visualisation/reading and death. I departed from the exclamation in the twelfth book where a rhetoric of death falls upon two figures that have been reading and/or viewing old narrative episodes and have revived the anger between Polynices and Eteocles. Jumping then to the first ekphrasis in the epic, I have tried to explain how the readers are incited to bring the image of the dying Medusa to life and are playfully suggested to stimulate her deadly powers. Just now, it has been illustrated that the manifestation of the unspeakable hatred between the brothers in the eleventh book disturbs the traditionally authoritative gaze of the Olympic gods and demands a public of shades through whose eyes we are compelled to look. These three moments each show how the visualisation and vivification of evil – directly or indirectly – relate those who dare to do so to the non-living, including the readers.[128]

Reading Statius' art, his epic, therefore, may not be considered as an innocent activity during which manifestations of horror can be watched in complete safety. The text sets at several points an interpretative mechanism into play that compels the readers to relate themselves somehow to a sphere of death. Via identification (e.g. with the public of ghosts), association (e.g. to Argia, rhetorically being correlated as internal reader to death) or textual appeal (e.g. the ekphrasis of Medusa), they are obliged to take a position that links them to (the domain of) the dead. This brings the readers into a somewhat paradoxical state: they are frequently suggested to be connected to the spheres of the non-living but are at the same time expected to read the cruel narrative until the very end, as if nothing is troubling them. We are still actively behaving ourselves, as readers of the narrative, yet we are implied to execute this action while being associated to the dead. This ambiguity seems no constructive or interpretative error, respectively from Statius' or my part. Instead, it appears to invite us to think more and more about ourselves in terms of a type of creature that is omnipresent in the *Thebaid*, that is a shade. We get the impression that we are implied to be a sort of 'reading dead', a ghost, we could say, being still operative as readers and explorers of the text, though being associated to the deceased.

To understand what this position as a 'reading dead' exactly means, I believe it might be useful to come back to the function that shades and shade-like figures fulfil in the

[128] These are not the only moments where this relation is suggested. Another striking passage in the *Thebaid*, for example, is the description of Oedipus that follows upon the prologue. There, he evokes the fury Tisiphone and demands her to instigate a war between his sons. Throughout his curse, he recurrently links the strong ties that he feels to the underworld, to his desire to visualise the *nefas*. For a more extensive discussion of this link, see Vessey 1973, 71-82; Ahl 1986; Dominik 1994b, 88-92; Ganiban 2007, 24-44.

Thebaid.[129] Ghosts and ghost-like people have already turned up several times throughout this chapter. I have just mentioned the ancestral public eager to watch the fratricide, while the first paragraph has elaborated upon the characters of Ornytus and Laius. Although these figures show up in different narrative contexts and consequently play diverse roles, what they remarkably share is that they all 'embody', in a sense, the madness of the Theban house. They are introduced as 'marked', to use the verb of the first paragraph again, in mind and/or body, by the hatred in which they were involved during their life-time, either as perpetrators or victims. Thereby, their appearance in the epic always serves as a 'reminder' of the crimes that were committed in the past, as a 'memory' of the evil that has been reproduced over and again since the origins of Theban history. By forcing the readers at several points into a shade-like position, Statius, in a sense, seems to ascribe a similar status to them. Their correlation to death implies that they have become seriously 'affected', 'stained', by the horror they have visualised and animated. It suggests the huge impact that Statius wants this visualisation/vivification to make on them, framing it as an activity from which they will never be enabled to recover. He implies the readers, comparable to the ghosts in his epic, to have turned into the bearers of the madness by which they have been struck. The readers, so the impression is created, forever have become 'marked', incapable of setting the crimes which they have seen aside. The horror of Thebes has imprinted itself, as a sort of 'unescapable narrative', on the readers and will never let them go, forcing them, as a shade does, to carry it with them at any time. They will remember, so Statius implies.

The idea of inescapability leads us back to the fictional reality of Samuel Beckett, which was discussed in the first half of this paragraph. As explained above, the trilogy sometimes associates the act of reading-viewing to dying, to becoming a victim, to underline the (external) readers' subjugation to the laws of the literary universe. They are suggested to have no way out of the torrent of language that they encounter in the novels, no manner to exercise interpretative control over the linguistic space(s) with which they are interacting. The emphasis on language, as the material of which the fictional reality consists, is, of course, typical of the modernist context in which Beckett wrote and seems totally alien to the classical world of the *Thebaid*. However, when looking beyond this emphasis, the first-century epic essentially appears to ascribe a comparable function to its readers as the trilogy does. By correlating the readers to the non-living, Statius implies that they have no power over the narrative that they have brought to life.

[129] In his survey on the dead in classical literature (2007), Dufallo formulates the interesting idea that, whereas earlier Latin literature presents the "dead's imitation of the living", from the early imperial period onwards, literary works stage the "living's imitation of the dead" (154). In my view, Statius does not only create many shade-like characters but also obliges the readers to identify themselves, as living actors, with the domain of the non-living.

They are indicated to be marked by what they have visualised, by a cruelty that they will never be enabled to leave behind. The readers, so it seems, are condemned, to say it with Blanchot's terms, to 'a treadmill, in this case not of language but of the horrible episodes from the Theban cycle, that not even death can free them from'. They are suggested to have entered a universe that fascinates them (we enjoy, in a sense, the spectacle, just like the ghosts of the Theban ancestors)[130] but that also serves as a 'prison' in which they are 'entrapped in the same exhaustion of madness' as Statius himself as narrator (who cannot change the course of his story).

The impression that we, as a sort of shades, are enclosed in the horrible narrative is already created in the first eleven books. But our imprisonment seems to be underlined even more in the final part of the epic. The storyline of Argia and Antigone does not only undermine Statius' intention to introduce a new sound and to make his readers forget what they have seen before. The appearance of the verb *occidimus* in the exclamation, as a spontaneous response to the revival of the hatred, also indicates that the dynamics between the text and its viewers has not changed (like everything in the epic, it keeps on being reproduced). Whoever reads and/or views the horror of the *Thebaid*, they will 'pay for it with their life' and be doomed, to say it with a wink to Blanchot's analysis of Beckett, to the 'inescapable torrent' of cruelty that they never are allowed to forget.

Conclusion

Shortly after the revival of the hatred in the pyre, the setting changes in the twelfth book. Statius zooms in on the city of Athens, where the group of Argive widows asks the help of the apparently clement king Theseus. Shocked by what he has heard, the Athenian ruler decides to respond to their request. He travels with his troops to the Theban battlefield, defeats Creon and permits the women to grant their deceased husbands a funeral. Finally, there is peace. Finally, humanity and clemency have overcome the madness. This is, at least, what Theseus himself proclaims. But is it true? Several scholars have pointed to

[130] Ganiban 2007, 185 states: "We always know the subversive and criminal goal of the poem, but we do not stop reading. Rather we read more quickly. For us the experience of the thrill of *nefas* (that we always know is going to happen) is central to our aesthetic enjoyment of this narrative. The conflicting voices or focalizations that we see in book 11 are thus part of the poetics of the epic. The simultaneous repulsion at and fascination with spectacular crime are all part of the domination of Dis and his desire for subversive *nefas*, creating a world – and a poem – where moral value no longer matters, where unspeakable desires can be fulfilled; a world that we, as external audience, cannot resist watching".

signs in the narrative that undermine the king's self-fashioning as the ultimate peace-maker.[131] They have argued that Theseus' conquest of Thebes is suggested not to be the end of the horror but to be just the start of another episode in the city's history of violence. Statius deliberately produces this ambiguity about the role of the ruler of Athens. The end of the epic remains, thereby, open.

A similar ambiguity can be found in the epilogue. Now the war seems over, due to Theseus' intervention (however contradicting his image as peace-bringer may be), Statius finds the time right again for remembrance (12.810-819):

> durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
> o mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos
> Thebai? iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum
> stravit iter coepitque novam monstrare futuris.
> iam te magnanimous dignatur noscere Caesar,
> Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuventus.
> vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,
> sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.
> mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila livor,
> occident, et meriti post me referentur honores.

While Statius after the fraternal duel in the eleventh book expressed the hope of oblivion, here he wishes his *Thebaid* to survive its writer and be read (*durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes*). Fame 'has already paved a kind path' and made the work known to the emperor. Also the Italian youth has been learning and reciting the epic. These are promising signs that his *Thebaid* will 'live' (*vive, precor*) and receive the honour it deserves after its author will have passed away (*meriti post me referentur honores*).

Statius uses a kind of discourse that, at first sight, seems to match the conventions concerning epic memorialisation. As epic writers traditionally do, he wishes eternal glory to his work and hopes that it will be remembered for ever. However, as has frequently been remarked in scholarship, there are a couple of elements that make the epilogue a little bit uncanny.[132] His prayer, for instance, that his epic may live, *vive precor*, is less innocent than it seems. In the third paragraph of this chapter, we have seen that the living of the text is often suggested to go hand in hand with the death of those who are vitalising its horror as readers-viewers. The latter are recurrently obliged to associate themselves to the non-living, being implied to have become a shade, a bearer of the cruelty they have visualised. The *vive*-exclamation in the epilogue, therefore, may not

[131] Scholars as Ganiban (2007, 219-224), Hershkowitz (1998, 268-271), Fantham (1997, 112), Dominik (1994b, 77) have problematised the positive interpretation of Theseus, which has been articulated by Vessey (1973, 307-317) and to a certain extent by Delarue (2000, 416-428) and Franchet D'Espèrey (1999, 294-297).
[132] See McGuire 1997, 200; Walter 2015, 147-158.

simply be considered as a conventional request to the readers to ensure the memorialisation of the work. It might also be meant as a reminder of the horrible dynamics which already started in the first book. In this case, the epilogue would not normalise the relation between text and readers. It would rather imply that we have no other choice than to carry the cruelty that we have seen into the future, beyond the border of the text. What we have brought to life, has marked us and cannot be forgotten, Statius would suggest once more in the end.

The argumentation about the readers' inescapability from the horror of Thebes has been built up throughout this chapter in dialogue with Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*. By approaching the *Thebaid* in the alienating terms of the last part of the trilogy, we have become able to understand that not only Statius as narrator cannot offer resistance to the "law of eternal return" that dominates the mythological tradition with which he works. The readers also seem to be subjugated to this law and are absorbed into the reproducing tendencies of the Theban cycle. This becomes most clearly visible in the twelfth book of the *Thebaid*. There, the new character Argia does not lead the readers away from the violence. Behaving herself as a first-time-reader of the warfare episode, she compels them, instead, to re-read the fraternal madness that manifests itself with the same intensity as it originally did. In the literary universe of Publius Papinius Statius, there is no way out of the 'treadmill of horror'. Everything is doomed to be repeated, even our reading process, 'the only novelty being the variations in the form of sameness'.

II. Representation

Chapter 4

"Not *seeing what* is *there*"

Visibility and Invisibility in Statius' *Silvae* (1.5), Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and the Poetry of Paul Celan

Belonging to the genre of occasional poetry, Statius' *Silvae* predominantly consists of poems revolving around topics that, at first sight, do not seem to be appropriate for a literary text (especially when compared to the mythological subjects of his epics). Almost every poem in the collection is framed as originally created following a specific, often unobtrusive occasion that occurred in Statius' daily life and on which he consequently decided to write a text, declaredly in no time. The *Silvae* contains, for instance, extensive poetic descriptions of the personal possessions of patrons which Statius observed during one of his many visits (e.g. their private houses, statues decorating the dinner table, a tree); poems offering close friends condolences on the death of their wives, slaves or pets; or celebrations of joyful happenings such as a wedding or birthday. Although this kind of poetry is difficult to reconcile with the image most readers have of Statius, i.e. that of an epic writer,[1] his preference for these "everyday" themes, as Sarah Blake illustrates, corresponds to the aesthetic ideals that dominated the end of the first century.[2] Contemporary authors like Pliny the Younger and Martial, respectively in the *Epistulae*

[1] Although the *Silvae* treats topics very different from those in the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*, the distinction between Statius' occasional works and his epics is not always that sharp. See for instance Gibson 2006, 163-184; Laguna 1998, 45; Markus 2000, 163-168 and Pederzani 1993 that discuss thematic, stylistic or narrative overlaps between the *Silvae* and the epics.

[2] Blake 2016, 344-360. In the chapter, Blake "aims to identify (...) an aesthetic founded in values different from the aestheticization of imperial power. This countervailing aesthetic can be loosely grouped around the concept of the 'everyday'" (347). Only the few poems dedicated to the emperor and praising imperial buildings serve as an exception to the prevalence of the ordinary in the *Silvae* (1.1; 1.6; 2.5; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3).

and *Epigrams*, have a similar affinity with quotidian urban life and frequently comment on the ordinary events that they (allege to) have witnessed.

The subject matter of the poem central to this chapter, therefore, does not come as a surprise. Silv.1.5 treats the (semi-)private baths of one of Statius' friends,[3] named Claudius Etruscus, the son of an imperial freedman.[4] Peter White presumes that Statius originally wrote the poem as an 'expression of gratitude' or even a 'service in return' towards Etruscus, who had invited him and Martial a little while before to a dinner party in the bathhouse (as we are told in the epistolary preface to the first book).[5] Whereas Statius spends the first half of the poem on a prooemium, proportionately of exceptional length, in which he wonders what deities he should invoke (1-29), the second half is dedicated to an extensive description praising the bathhouse itself (30-65).[6] Therein, Statius, Noelle Zeiner claims, "acts as a *tour guide* who visually directs the reader-observer through the bath" and seeks in this way to "advertise the *balneum*".[7]

When looking at the descriptive part of the poem, we could say that Statius, for a 'tour guide', makes some remarkable choices. In a poem honouring a bathhouse, he decides, for instance, not to mention any bath at all. The Latin word for bath, *balneum*, turns up only once in the entire poem, when Statius in the first part introduces its subject (12-13: *dum nitidis canimus gemmantia saxis / balnea*).[8] But except for this single occurrence, in his view, it appears to be unnecessary to say anything more about the layout of Claudius Etruscus' baths, their shape or the manner they are heated. He remains, moreover, completely silent about people that are visiting the bathhouse and does not point out anyone bathing. Instead, Statius extensively comments on the decorations and marbles that embellish the building, and especially accentuates the splendour which they give off.

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[3] As Zeiner 2005, 152, points out, it is impossible to say whether the baths were exclusively private or not: "We cannot determine the exact degree to which the *balneum* functioned as a purely private bath (to be used only by Claudius and guests) or a semi-public (in which limited public access was allowed)".

[4] For a reconstruction of the socio-historical background of Claudius Etruscus and his father, see Nauta 230-232; Zeiner 2005, 150-152.

[5] White 1975, 275.

[6] See Newmyer 1979, 108-110 for a detailed discussion of the structure of the poem.

[7] Zeiner 2005, 152. Holtsmark 1973, 219, by contrast, judges 1.5 to be a "poem whose weight is consciously off balance. The structural disproportion is just short of grotesque. This perverse structure of the poem is a reflection of the physical structure of [Claudius Etruscus'] baths". Holtsmark believes that the bathhouse poem is an "*anti-laudatio*", a sort of "tongue-in-cheek" appraisal of the baths as a "thing of gross misproportion (*sic*), a thing monumentally lacking in taste". His comments must be understood within the 'double speak tradition' of which Frederik Ahl (1984; 1984b) is considered to be the main representative, whereas Zeiner's optimistic reading is in line with more recent critical tendencies.

[8] All Latin quotations and most of the English translations, incorporated in the body text, are copied from the Loeb edition by Schackleton Bailey (2003).

When comparing Silv.1.5 to a few contemporary and later descriptions of baths, it becomes clearer that Statius' portrayal is somewhat exceptional. For Martial, for example, (public) bathhouses serve as a grateful source of inspiration for a large number of his epigrams. He pictures the buildings and their clientele, coming from all layers of society, and does not hesitate to 'exhibit' his fellow citizens and their daily washing routines.[9] Of course, Martial's choice is mostly motivated by his aim to ridicule urban habits and public customs, whereas Statius' description is situated within the context of personal praise. Yet, this difference does not sufficiently justify why the *Silvae* avoids showing the readers Etruscus' baths and their visitors. Other poems revolving around (semi-)private bathhouses, for instance, such as those within the work of Sidonius Apollinaris or the *Anthologia Latina*,[10] do provide an almost systematic guide to their layout and do, in some cases, not refrain from mentioning people bathing.[11]

Why does Statius in the poetic description concentrate on the glittering decorations and stones? What can explain the choice to highlight the glancing materials and leave the other elements in the bathhouse underexposed? This chapter aims to explore the function and meaning of Statius' emphasis on sparkling, glimmering and light in the bathhouse poem. It will propose that this emphasis sets an interpretative mechanism into play that invites the readers to think about and reflect upon some general tensions that can be observed in the *Silvae*, i.e. the tension between occasion and poetry, reality and text, and the visible and the invisible.[12] The first paragraph will question the realist-materialist scholarly views on Statius' work that consider the poems in the *Silvae* as embellished but direct representations of the social reality in which they originated. The buildings, persons and scenes to which the poems are dedicated, so 1.5 seems to indicate in a metaphorical way, are given form by means of expensive and sparkling literary materials, e.g. compelling mythological scenes and references, that somehow 'exclude' everyday reality from the text. The second paragraph will take the passage on the glittering decorations and marbles in the bathhouse poem as point of departure to elaborate upon the ekphrastic qualities of Statius' work. It will maintain that the expensive and sparkling literary materials by which he constructs his poetic descriptions are presented and arranged in such a way that he causes it to be very hard for the readers to bring them together in their minds and develop a total image of the buildings, persons

[9] For an overview of the epigrams dedicated to baths, see Williams 2004, 73.

[10] AL 108; Sid. *Letters* 2.2. Newlands 2002, 202 also refers to Lucian's essay *Hippias or The Bath* which contains a detailed description of the Roman bath complex and provides useful insights into its design and layout.

[11] A similar contrast can be observed when comparing 1.5 to some letters of Pliny the Younger, wherein the author describes his own villas (e.g. 2.17; 5.6). Although Pliny, like Statius in the bathhouse poem, does not mention any other person being present in the building, he pictures in detail the multiple rooms that make up the living area, the garden and its construction, etc.

[12] On the general meta-reflective potentials of this poem, see Newlands 2002, 199-204 and Marshall 2011, 325.

and scenes which they are explicitly invited to visualise. Statius' poetry seems to be created out of individual compositional units, a series of mythological imageries, that are beautiful in their sort but difficult to interweave into a coherent picture (in contrast, for example, with the ekphrastic descriptions of Cicero or Vergil). The third paragraph will examine the implications of the impossibility to arrive at a total image for our reading experience. It will suggest that Statius renders his readers to 'desire' the world he invites them to see yet only offers them small glimpses of this world, keeping them, with his sparkling language, 'eye-blinded' for the totality.

Although the main focus will be on 1.5, this chapter will sporadically refer to other poems in the collection to illustrate the wider significance of the observations made in the analysis of the bathhouse poem. These observations, moreover, will be built up in dialogue with two texts from the second half of the twentieth century, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and the poetry by Paul Celan. These will serve as constant points of comparison that will help us to think about the function and meaning of the emphasis on splendour and light in 1.5.

4.1 Nothing Ordinary Here

As several scholars have remarked, Statius repeatedly addresses in the *Silvae* the somewhat tense relationship that seems to exist, in his view, between 'occasion' and 'poetry (volume)'. Already in the epistolary preface to the first book, he attracts the readers' attention to the complex dynamic between the occasional context in which most of his poems initially circulated and functioned, and the new context they get when being published as part of a volume of poetry.[13] Since he cannot "hark back" to an extensive literary tradition of "impromptu" poems, Statius uses the epistolary preface to explain the background, aim and concept lying behind his poetry collection.[14] He immediately confides to the addressee of the preface, his friend Stella, that he hesitated a long time (*diu multumque dubitavi*) to collect and bring out the poems we are going to read into one volume (*congregatos ipse dimitterem*), because they were originally "composed separately,

[13] The relationship between the occasional context of origin and the new context within the book of poetry has been discussed in several contributions since the seventies, such as White 1975; Saller 1982; Nauta 2002; Newlands 2002; Leberl 2005; Rühl 2006; 2015; Rosati 2015 and Dominik 2016. An overall study of Statius' prefaces has been provided by Johanssen 2006.

[14] Rosati 2015, 56. See also Hardie 1983, 37: "There is nothing like the *Silvae* in extant Latin poetry. In form and content, they mark a new literary departure, and they seem to fall outside any known tradition".

for single social occasions". Why would he take the risk, he claims to have asked himself, to become embarrassed by allowing "declaredly secondary texts to circulate with an official hallmark"[15] and 'burden them with the authority of publication' (*auctoritate editionis onerari*)?[16]

By sharing these hesitations in the epistolary preface, Statius, as Rosati has explained, makes his readers from the start sensitive to the tension between occasion and poetry that he will work out in the remainder of the collection. He triggers some questions which the readers should take with them and reflect upon during their reading process. Can poems that originated within an occasional context and claim to be the result of improvisation be made compatible with the high literary standards required by a published collection of poetry? Can texts that are "undoubtedly too ecumenical in [their] horizons and linked with the extempore occasion that inspired [them]" (be made fit to) be incorporated into a format which expresses the poet's literary aspirations?[17] In what way can poems which were written for a private audience attending a certain social occasion be compelling and interesting for a public of generic readers (including us)?[18]

The tension between occasion and poetry which Statius suggests, does probably not feel that unfamiliar to an audience of modern readers. The alike duality 'everyday life and art' can be considered as one of the most important dynamics around which the artistic production of the last century has revolved.[19] Especially since the interbellum, writers, artists and philosophers, like André Breton, Marina Abramović and Henri Lefebvre, have been fascinated by daily experiences, locations and habits of people from different classes of society.[20] This fascination has lasted until today, where we frequently see, for example, that performance artists get inspired by ordinary practices and environments, sometimes placing their installations in the midst of public spaces, such as shopping malls or train stations.[21] Although this orientation towards daily life has, throughout decades, flowed out into divergent artistic movements, theories and products, one could say that all of

[15] Rosati 2015, 57.

[16] *Diu multumque dubitavi, Stella, iuvenis optime et in studiis nostris eminentissime, qua parte voluisti, an hos libellos, qui mihi subito calore et quadum festinandi voluptate fluxerunt, cum singuli de sinu meo prodierint, congregatos ipse dimitterem. quid enim opus eo tempore hos quoque auctoritate editionis onerari (…)?*

[17] Rosati 2015, 57.

[18] For a more general discussion of Statius' self-representation as poet in the *Silvae* and his reflections upon the apparently low value and quality of his occasional poems, see Roman 2015, 444-450. An analysis of Statius' self-fashioning as an epic poet in the *Thebaid*, *Achilleid*, and *Silvae* can be found in Markus 2000, 163-167.

[19] In her chapter, Blake 2016, 348 makes the same link between the poetics of the Flavian period and aesthetics of the ordinary/everyday within modern times. For an overview of the art of the ordinary in (post)modernism, see Higmore 2008.

[20] Johnstone 2008.

[21] O'Rourke 2013.

those working with the ordinary and everyday as a subject have toiled with questions very similar to the ones Statius evokes in his *Silvae*. As T.S. Eliot ponders: how can an artist make the common, occasional and everyday world "possible for art"?[22]

A work in which the complex relationship between art and reality is recurrently thematised is *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*), published in 1972 by the Italian novelist Italo Calvino.[23] The text is framed as a conversation between a Mongolian emperor, 'Kublai Khan', and a Venetian explorer named 'Marco Polo'. Calvino found his inspiration in history, as the well-known historical figure Marco Polo, living in the thirteenth century, stayed for almost twenty years at the Mongolian court as a servant of the ruler, Kublai Kahn. In the book, Polo is hired as an ambassador who must travel to several cities in the realm. He is demanded to give the emperor an account, a "report", of the layout of the places he visited, inform him about daily practices as mining and trading, and do suggestions to solve problems with which common people have to cope (e.g. "Sent off to inspect the remote provinces, the Great Khan's envoys and tax-collectors duly returned to Kai-ping-fu and to the gardens of magnolias in whose shade Kublai strolled, listening to their report", 21).[24] The majority of *Invisible Cities* consists of fifty-five brief, consecutive descriptions of cities, sometimes interrupted by a concise dialogue between the emperor and his ambassador.

The historical frame set out at the beginning of the work, taking two historical figures as its main characters, may give the impression that *Invisible* Cities is an example of traditional "historical fiction" with the thirteenth-century Mongolian court and empire as setting.[25] The readers might expect that the book will offer them, via the descriptive "reports" of Marco Polo, historically authentic details about the everyday life in the cities the ambassador has visited in the novel, the people living there and the architecture in Mongolia typical of that period. The table of contents which Calvino incorporates just after the title page increases the feeling that *Invisible Cities* wants to be, in some way, like many other historical novels, informative to its readers (but presenting the information about historical reality in a more pleasant way than a non-fictional history book). Yet, as

[22] Eliot (1923) uses this expression in an essay on James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is important to remark that there are, of course, differences between the everyday as a concept within our (post)modern culture and within Flavian times. The everyday of Statius must be contextualised within a culture of patronage and personal praise, whereas modern artists' preference for the ordinary corresponds to a recent fascination with the city and can, in some cases, even be comprehended as a reaction against the idea that art is something standing on a *pied de stalle*. Yet, both in ancient and modern times, questions have seemingly been evoked about how aspects from daily life could/should be incorporated within pieces of art.

[23] An overview of the most important tendencies within scholarship on Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* can be found in Bloom 2002, 7-32.

[24] All translations are copied from *Invisible Cities* by William Weaver (1978).

[25] De Lauretis 2003, 229.

Carolyn Springer has remarked, there are a couple of elements in the opening pages which immediately cause the readers to doubt to what extent Calvino's book will actually offer us a trustworthy account of (historical) everyday reality under the Mongolian emperor.[26] The table of contents to which I referred, for example, is confusing and disorientating, rather than clarifying. Calvino suggests, moreover, a link between *Invisible Cities* and the old French book *Livres des Merveilles du monde* by Rustichello da Pisa, who claimed to have noted down the accounts which he had heard from Marco Polo. Since this work contains the most incredible, fabulous stories, a reader may hesitate whether the Polo of *Invisible Cities* will, by contrast, give the objective reports Kublai Kahn is demanding. In the remainder of the novel, Calvino will keep on complicating the relationship between (historical) everyday reality and textual description, between the expectations raised by the historical framing of the work and the actual depictions of the cities offered by the character Marco Polo.

The reason why it might be useful to speak about Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in a chapter on a bathhouse poem by Statius becomes clear when reading Marco Polo's description of Tamara, one of the first cities of which he gives Kublai Kahn an account. The Venetian ambassador represents himself, in a sense, like a 'tour guide' who wants to lead the emperor (and the general reader) via the description through the city and draws their attention to aspects which have struck him. What is remarkable, is that during this guided tour he barely tells about the buildings in Tamara, nor about the general layout or design of the city. He does not provide any information about the citizens and their everyday life, such as their habits and financial status, for which Kublai has asked. He finds it much more exciting to focus in his "report" on some marginal details that caught his eye or on decorative elements within the city. His description, for instance, lists up the "signboards jutting from the walls" or the "shields and statues" standing on the side of the road (13).

The way in which Marco Polo describes Tamara may somehow reminds us of the depiction of the bathhouse of Claudius Etruscus in the *Silvae*. As explained above, Statius takes his readers on a somewhat remarkable guided tour in 1.5. He remains silent in the poem about the layout of the bathhouse and the people bathing there. He appears to be only interested in the sparkling materials and decorations embellishing the space, as can be seen in the following lines:

> non limina cessant,
> effulgent camerae, vario fastigia vitro
> in species animata nitent. stupet ipse beatas
> circumplexus opes et parcius imperat ignis.
> multus ubique dies, radiis ubi culmina totis

[26] Springer 1985, 290-291.

perforat atque alio sol improbus uritur aestu.
nil ibi plebeium. nusquam Temesaea notabis
aera, sed argento felix propellitur unda
argentoque cadit, labrisque nitentibus instat
delicias mirata suas et abire recusat. (41-50)

As these verses suggest, the brilliance seems to emanate from almost every spot in the bathhouse (*effulgent; nitent*).[27] The place is covered with an overwhelming daylight (*multus ubique dies; radiis ubi culmina totis / perforat*). Wherever the water streams, it is always surrounded by the most glittering stones (*argento felix propellitur unda / argentoque cadit; labrisque nitentibus*). Statius' focus on the decorations and materials used in the bathhouse and their splendour shows affinities with Marco Polo's emphasis on the signboards, statues and shields. Both centre their descriptions around elements that belong to the 'background' of the spaces they describe. They draw the readers' attention to specific details that seem to have struck them and make them the focal point of the entire description. This causes Marco Polo's description of Tamara to evoke a similar type of questions as those mentioned above about the bathhouse poem: why does a 'tour guide' choose to highlight second-rate details and decorative elements within the place he describes and leave other aspects, such as the layout and design, underexposed?

Near the end of the description of Tamara, Marco Polo gives a somewhat mysterious explanation of his fascination with objects like signboards, statues and shields. He claims not to be interested in the message these signboards convey, the composition of the statues or the heraldic scenes depicted on the shields. He is captivated by these objects because of their explicitly linguistic or symbolic nature. When looking at them, he says, "his eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things". He perceives these and other objects in the city as meaningful "signs" or "images", which have remarkably changed his visiting experience (14). If one would decide to visit Tamara, he suggests, one should be aware that this is an activity comparable to reading, being confronted all the time with the same elements as one can find in a text, i.e. "signs", "images" or "words" (cf. "Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages", 14).

Marco Polo's explanation of his fascination with signboards, statues and shields can be interpreted from different angles and touches upon several issues that are not only important for our comprehension of *Invisible Cities* but of Calvino's conception of literature and art in general. I will limit myself here to the interpretation proposed by Letizia Modena, who has considered the description of Tamara, being one of the first cities portrayed in the work, as a programmatic reflection upon the descriptions that will

[27] As Vessey 1986, 2792 points out: "Splendour, light and movement predominate".

follow in the remainder of *Invisible Cities*.[28] By focusing upon marginal aspects within the city and emphasizing their "semiotic" character later on, she says, Marco Polo does not only tell something about Tamara itself but also reveals where his interests lay as a tour guide. What he primarily wants to share with his audience (both Kublai Kahn and the general readers) is not the layout of the city or information about its citizens but linguistic and symbolic elements. This might be read as a meta-reflective statement upon the nature of his city-descriptions which frames them as "semiotic spaces that require deep reading or interpretative penetration".[29] The description of Tamara and the foregrounding of objects with a clearly linguistic and symbolic nature let the readers comprehend that what Marco Polo will show them in his descriptions are signs, images and words. They should not expect to receive the "reports" that the emperor demanded, and which would give them a 'direct and unmediated representation' of (historical) everyday life.

The portrayals, so the description of Tamara underlines, have a semiotic and textual nature and present, in a sense, cities in words (cf. "No one, wise Kublai, knows better than you that the city must never be confused with the words that describe it", 61). The semiotic nature of the city-descriptions to which Tamara already hints in the beginning of *Invisible Cities* will be more explicitly emphasised further on. Kublai Kahn begins to assume at a certain point that the descriptions of his ambassador are not based on actual observations (cf. "I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden", 103). The descriptions appear to be created in Marco Polo's "mental space" (104) and result from his "imagination". The cities he describes are "artistic" and "imaginary" products built up in signs, images and words that do not directly rely on (historical) everyday reality and cause the latter, in a sense, to remain 'invisible' in the descriptions (which could be one possible interpretation of the work's title).[30] The semiotic and imaginary status which Calvino explicitly ascribes to the city-descriptions has given rise to an intense debate in scholarship about the purposes lying behind the work. Shortly after the publication, critics tended to see *Invisible Cities* as a postmodern celebration of the powers and possibilities of language and imagination. With the novel, Calvino would prove that an author can construct a literary universe as semiotic space that stands on its own and is completely cut off from reality, from everything "outside of the text".[31] More recent scholars, like Letizia Modena, however, have questioned this point of view. They have remarked that Calvino's choice not to offer direct representations of (historical) reality in the descriptions should not entail that there is no relationship at all with this reality.

[28] Modena 2011, 111-116.

[29] Modena 2011, 112.

[30] Modena 2011, 92. See also Springer 1985.

[31] Modena 2011, 88.

Calvino was well-known for his strong social engagement, being a visionary thinker who frequently reflected, for example in his 'Six memos for the next millennium', upon various aspects within the world and the human condition, such as the relationship between reality and language, past and present, or city and citizen. According to Modena, *Invisible Cities* must be understood in light of this social project. With the imaginary city-descriptions expressed by a historical character, Calvino, she says, wanted to propose a "new model of cognition" to think about these kinds of relationships. He aimed to create "a new language", an imaginary system, that does not directly represent reality but incited the readers to "re-vision and reimagine" the world and the urban environments outside of the text, reflecting upon the space in which they live, in which people in the past used to live, why they live in the way they do and not in a different manner, etc.[32] With *Invisible Cities*, he thus sought to change his readers' view on the historical and contemporary world and human condition.

Given the resemblances pointed out above to Marco Polo's description of Tamara, we may wonder whether Statius in the bathhouse poem similarly seems to reflect upon the relationship between text and reality. Does the emphasis on the sparkling decorations, combined with the underexposing of the bath and bathers, comment in a certain way upon the tension between the occasional everyday context of origin and the literary requirements of a published volume of poetry to which the readers' attention has already been drawn in the epistolary preface to the first book? Does the foregrounding of splendour reveal something about Statius' interests as a tour guide and the nature of his poetic descriptions?

A good starting point for answering these questions seems to be situated halfway the passage quoted above. After having described how the bathhouse wallows in the sunlight, Statius tells about the materials used by Claudius Etruscus and the splendour given off by the silver and gold. He introduces the description of these materials with the following half-verse: *nil ibi plebeium*, 'nothing ordinary here'. These words underline the high quality of the decorative stones and marbles which have been used for the construction of the bathhouse. They might be seen, as Zeiner has noticed, as an indirect celebration of the owner of the place and the financial efforts he has made (*supra*). Although the half-line certainly contributes to the sphere of praise evoked within the text, I believe that a more metaphorical interpretation could be considered as well. As remarked in the introduction, Statius declares in the epistolary preface to the first book that he improvised the poem at a bathhousewarming-party organised by Claudius Etruscus, the son of an imperial freedman. But the poem does not contain any direct references to the everyday, private occasion in which it originated and refrains from mentioning the

[32] Modena 2011, 87.

bathers and the baths in which they spent their time at the party. The half-verse *nil ibi plebeium* can perhaps be seen as a subtle hint at the silence in the poem about the occasional circumstances of origin. It might be read as an indication that Statius, for the construction of his poetic space, has not used any materials taken from the domain of 'ordinary life' (in casu, a bathhouse and a launching event of a plebeian friend). What he wants to share with his readers, so he may imply, are not direct representations of scenes from social life by which he asserts to have been inspired and that he therefore causes to remain almost completely 'invisible' within the poem itself (a similar phenomenon, as will be remarked below, can be observed in other poems in the collection with 'plebeian subjects', such as the death of a slave or pet).

As 1.5 makes clear, Statius, as a tour guide, seems to be much more interested in showing his readers expensive, non-ordinary and even glittering materials. To understand the metaphorical meaning this may have, it might be useful to take a quick look at the period of Late Antiquity, in which a remarkably high number of texts can be found that speak about their subjects and themselves in terms of glance, glimmer and splendour. Michael Roberts has explored this phenomenon in his well-known survey *The Jewelled Style. Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (1989). One of the observations from which he departs is that a significant portion of late antique poetry stands out because of the "intractability" of the topics around which they revolve.[33] Subject matter that is "dry, repetitive, or otherwise unpromising" apparently provided "a challenge that the late antique poet (...) relished".[34] Authors could expose their literary talents and creativity by showing that they were capable of presenting whatever sort of topic in a skilfully crafted and ingeniously constructed set of verses. To underline the literary aspirations that their poems, despite the subjects, have, they often incorporated references to glance, splendour, brilliance, colour, brightness, jewels, ... in their texts. This metaphorical imagery served "as a paradigm for poetic excellence" and "literary refinement". It must make the readers attentive to the literary qualities of their works ("in direct proportion to the intractability" of the topic), such as the well-considered verse construction, compelling imagery, variation in detail, mythological embellishment, etc.[35]

Statius' focus on splendour might be understood in a similar way (Roberts not coincidentally speaks about the *Silvae* "as late antique poetry before its time").[36] It can possibly be interpreted as a strategy to highlight the artistic nature of the poem and perhaps of the entire collection. The descriptive half of 1.5 forms an elongated *variatio* on

[33] Roberts 1989, 11.

[34] Roberts 1989, 12.

[35] Roberts 1989, 11.

[36] Roberts 1989, 62. See also the chapter dedicated to the bathhouse poem in Newlands' monograph (2002, 203), who briefly hints upon this metaphorical meaning of the splendour without, however, thinking it through in the remainder of her study.

the theme of light and glimmer. Elements that belong to the decorative background of the bathhouse are foregrounded in the poetic description and become the focal points of the guided tour. This may be read as an indication that his poetry particularly seeks to show the readers materials that radiate poetic excellence and literary refinement. His poetry foregrounds and is constructed of a high-literary language which is unsuitable to give shape to a direct representation, a 'report', of ordinary reality but meets the requirements associated with published volumes of poetry.

The plausibility of this interpretation becomes clear when looking beyond the borders of the descriptive part of the bathhouse poem. The invocative half of 1.5, which will be analysed in the next paragraph, for instance, offers a thirty-verse long enumeration of episodes and imagery from the literary-mythological tradition. This renders the first part of the poem, we could say, to be as 'shining' and 'glimmering' as the descriptive one. Something similar can be said of other poems in the collection. In *Untersuchungen zur lyrishen Kunst des Publius Papinius Statius* (1965), Hubert Cancik points to the overwhelming use of "*Mythologeme*" in in the *Silvae*. Many poems seem to be built up as elongated literary-mythological variations on a certain theme. Illuminating examples are 1.3 and 2.6, which respectively praise the villa of Manilius Vopiscus and lament the death of a parrot. As Cancik illustrates, both texts, rather than showing reality as it is, offer the reader a series of mythological images and comparisons to events from history that have somehow affinity with the objects of praise and lament. Statius draws, for example, a parallel between the villa's "*Wasserspiele*" and the streams of existent and mythological rivers. The deceased parrot is said to be deplored by famous mythological birds, such as Phoebus' fowl and Philomela's nightingale.[37] 'Visible' in these poems are high-quality materials, a proof of Statius' poetic excellence, taken from the literary-mythological tradition, not from ordinary-life in which the poems are said to have originated.[38]

The emphasis on splendour in the bathhouse poem, we could conclude, thus seems to fulfil a similar function as Marco Polo's focus on signboards, statues and shields in the description of Tamara. It suggests that Statius, as a tour guide, does not want to show his readers direct and unmediated representations of the everyday contexts in which he says to have improvised many of his poems (though the occasions, persons and buildings by which he has been inspired did actually exist, contrary to the imaginary cities that Marco Polo describes). He does not seem to have taken material from ordinary reality and offer

[37] Cancik 1965, 30-33. See also Szelest 1972; Verstraete 1983 and Vessey 1986, 2785-2786 on literary-mythological imagery in the *Silvae*.

[38] This reading takes the argument made by Coleman 1999, which provides an analysis of the function of mythological figures as spokespersons who help to 'blur the world of myth and reality', a bit further. It lies more in line with Vessey 1986, 2785 who argues that the 'authentically real' persons, buildings, pets, etc. almost "solely dwell in textual domains, eternized by words and words alone".

his readers a 'report' of what he has seen. The foregrounding of the glittering decorative elements and stones underlines the artistic nature of his work, being a textual space, to say it with a wink to Modena's analysis of *Invisible Cities*, that 'requires deep reading and interpretative penetration'.

This interpretation (partly) questions the materialist views in scholarship on the *Silvae* which consider the poems in the collection as unmediated portrayals of everyday reality. Noelle Zeiner, for instance, sees the second half of the bathhouse poem as a hyperbolic yet relatively authentic description of the architectural materials used in the building Statius visited. By bringing these materials to the front in his description, he would have wanted to make the social environment to which he and his friend Claudius Etruscus belonged attentive to the wealth of the place and its owner.[39] Although it is certainly possible that Statius has depicted a few elements in his poems as they really were, I believe that we should be careful with interpreting the collection in too realist terms.[40] Rather than seeking to offer a direct representation of ordinary reality, the *Silvae*, comparable to *Invisible Cities*, appears to provide an 'alternative model of cognition' to think about this reality. Statius seemingly aimed to develop a high-literary language by which he could incite his readers to 'revision and re-imagine' the world and urban environments outside of the text, obliging them to look at reality and the ordinary occasional contexts by which he frames his poems through the filter of imagery and myth.

The next paragraph will go into Statius' exact use of the shining literary-mythological materials. It will examine the relationship between the way in which he arranges these materials in his poems and the ekphrastic appeals to the readers to visualise the spaces which he depicts. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* will continue to serve as the conversation partner that guides our interpretation of the *Silvae*.

[39] Zeiner 2005, 154. For an overview of other, more realist readings of the bathhouse poem, see Zeiner 2005, 152-153; 286-287.

[40] Luke Roman 2015, 445 offers a similar warning in his chapter in the *Brill's Companion to Statius*. He criticises the sometimes too one-sided sociological approach to the *Silvae* (as, for example, applied in some of the contributions mentioned in footnote 13), which exclusively tends to analyse the poems in light of the occasional context in which they claim to have originated, not as parts of a carefully constructed poetry collection: "The one-sided sociological emphasis in the case of Flavian works has the unfortunate outcome of reinforcing received ideas about the socially embedded nature of the (...) *Silvae* as distinct from the aesthetic integrity of the Augustan classics. These ideas are derived from the self-representational tropes purveyed by the texts themselves, and then, via an often unconscious and unexamined circularity, reapplied to their interpretation".

4.2 Visibility and Invisibility

In recent scholarship, much attention has been paid to Italo Calvino's engagement with visuality and perception. Some contributions have examined his reflections upon and experiments with visual media and art forms, such as film, painting and sculpture. A particular interest, for example, has gone to the "number of introductions to art catalogues" Calvino wrote throughout his life, his "commentaries on art exhibitions" and "published newspaper travelogues in which he described visits to museums and archaeological sites".[41] Other scholars have pointed to the importance of visuality and perception within his literary work. Franco Ricci has recorded that these issues do not simply form a recurring theme and motive within his oeuvre. Much more important, in his opinion, is that Calvino considered his entire literary project as an "imagocentric" undertaking that places vision, looking and seeing at the heart of its poetics.[42] One of the main ambitions of this undertaking was to develop "pictorially evocative techniques", a "visual writing style" that could transform the words written down on the pages into images that imprinted themselves on the "so-called allegorical canvas of the [reader's] mind".[43]

As Letizia Modena has remarked, Calvino's aspiration to create this visual writing style has strongly determined the way in which he has decided to give form to *Invisible Cities*. As explained in the previous paragraph, the work ingeniously emphasises the semiotic nature of the descriptions Marco Polo offers, making clear that the cities he tells about are the products of his imagination and only consist of words. But Calvino wants these words to be chosen and arranged in such a way that they could trigger the readers' imagination. The latter must feel invited by the text to "engage with the imaginary (...) urban centres" depicted by Marco Polo and to shape a mental image of them. They should be encouraged by the language used in the descriptions to bring the different characteristics of the cities to which Marco Polo refers together in their minds and interweave them into a coherent picture. The words in his novel must incite the readers to create a mental "emblem" or "icon" of the cities it portrays,[44] obliging them to make the "*imaginary or invisible*" spaces which Marco Polo composes "*visible*" in their minds and project them onto their mental canvas (this could be another interpretation of the work's title).[45]

[41] Ricci 2001, 9.
[42] Ricci 2001, 17.
[43] Ricci 2001, 11.
[44] Ricci 2001, 61.
[45] Modena 2011, 91.

According to Modena, a strategy that Calvino uses throughout the entire novel to encourage his readers to create these mental emblems or icons is "singularity". She has observed that the descriptions of the cities imagined by Marco Polo are quite limited. They do not provide a complete and systematic overview of all the different parts of these cities, neither of the citizens living there (if that would have been Marco Polo's aim, he would have needed much more textual space than the approximately one page and a half he now uses to describe the cities). Marco Polo only mentions a few "single aspects", a couple of very concrete facets of the places which he has made up in his mind, that are immediately "recognisable", "comprehensible" and perhaps also somewhat "remarkable" or "unexpected" for everyone who reads them. The aspects stand out because of their "sharpness of boundary" and the "exactitude" of their formulation.[46]

The descriptions, as Modena proposes, make thereby a strong appeal to the readers' imagination. By only offering some striking aspects, instead of sketching the cities in their totality, they do not only incite our curiosity and trigger a desire to see the (often very strange) urban environments about which Marco Polo seems to be talking. The descriptions also oblige the readers to actively contribute to the fulfilment of this desire. By not depicting the cities in all their details, they evoke many questions in the readers, encouraging them to wonder about the exact relationship between the aspects which Marco Polo *does* mention, to think about elements which he apparently forgot to mention but must be there, to consider the similarities and differences between the urban environments portrayed in the novel and the ones we are living in, etc. While trying to find an answer to these questions, the readers will gradually fill out the 'blank spots' in the descriptions and complete the limited depictions of Marco Polo in their minds by adding elements from their own imagination. By compelling the readers to actively participate in the creation of total images of the cities, Calvino hopes that these images will more steadily be imprinted on their mental canvas.[47]

To better understand Modena's argument, it may be useful to take a quick look at one of Marco Polo's city-descriptions. His depiction of Sophronia, for example, opens as follows (63):

> There is the great roller coaster with its steep humps, the carousel with its chain spokes, the Ferris wheel of spinning cages, the death-ride with crouching motorcyclists, the big top with the clump of trapezes hanging in the middle.

The description begins with an enumeration of five single aspects which are all somehow related to the theme of circus/fair. Each aspect has the same verbal form, i.e. a noun that refers to an attraction (e.g. a roller coaster, a carousel) and a designation of a (somewhat

[46] Modena 2011, 96.

[47] Modena 2011, 98-100.

mysterious) characteristic element of the attraction introduced by the preposition 'with'. As city-description, one could remark, this is, of course, quite meagre; there must be much more to say about Sophronia. But Calvino deliberately seems to have kept the depiction rather limited. With the five well-chosen, well-defined and sharply formulated aspects, he wants to trigger the readers' fascination as well as encourage them to complete the picture of the city in their minds by including elements from their own imagination (they can, for example, decide where the five attractions are located in the city; whether or not there are other buildings apart from the attractions; how the people visiting the attractions look like, etc.). The text thus offers the readers some very concrete anchoring points, exactly formulated facets of the city, which they should bring together into one coherent mental image and interweave with the elements which they have added themselves.[48] Marco Polo, as he explains to Kublai Kahn, always leaves some "space" around his descriptions, "a void not filled with words" (38), by which he stimulates the emperor and the readers to "shape their own experience of the text".[49]

In his study of Calvino's oeuvre, *Painting with Words. Writing with Pictures* (2001), Franco Ricci has pointed to some remarkable similarities between the imagocentric project of the Italian novelist and the art of writing ekphrastic descriptions developed in classical antiquity. Calvino's ambition to develop a visual writing style, by which he could evoke mental images of what he has described in his readers' minds, seems first of all to correspond to the aspiration of classical authors to make "vividness or *energeia*" the prime quality of their ekphrases. This quality entails that they aim to describe a person, a place, an event or an object of art in such a way that it "appeals to the mind's eye" of the listener or the reader, "making him or her 'see' the subject matter, whatever it may be".[50] Just like Calvino, ancient writers have searched for 'pictorially evocative techniques' that could "pass the described subject before [the audience's] eyes" and "turn the readers into spectators".[51]

Secondly, as Ricci remarks, some of the strategies applied by Calvino to create the visual writing style seem to have affinities with those used by ancient writers to achieve the effect of visual immediacy.[52] In the *Institutio Oratoria*, for example, Quintilian remarks that the topic which an author wants to evoke in his readers' mind should not be 'described as a whole' (9.2.40: *nec universa*); a writer better refrains from depicting it in its

[48] Modena 2011, 98: "Polo has built up his 'inner city' (the city of his imagination) and now trains his interlocutor Kublai Kahn in the art of inner vision: he injects *views* (or mental images) (...) and conjures up the *phantasmata* that have become part of his mental patrimony".

[49] Springer 1985, 293.

[50] Ricci 2001, 73.

[51] Roberts 1989, 40.

[52] Ricci 2001, 74.

totality and listing up all its characteristics and qualities.[53] The description, Quintilian says, will be much more vivid if an author limits himself and only offers a 'number of significant details' (8.3.66: *ex pluribus efficitur illa quam conamur exprimere facies*) of the subject he aims to bring before the eyes of the readers. Quintilian quotes a fragment from a lost speech of Cicero, the *Pro Gallio*, a "description of an extravagant banquet" (*convivium luxuriosum*), to illustrate this principle:

> Fit clamor, fit convicium mulierum, fit symphoniae cantus. Videbar videre alios intrantis, alios autem exeuntis, quosdam ex vino vacillantis, quosdam hesterna ex potatione oscitantis.

Cicero's description consists of "enumerative sequences", each describing a single, well-demarcated aspect of the banquet. We read first about the sounds of the banquet, such as the brawling of women and the music of players. Next, we get information about the behaviour of the banqueters (going in and going out, unsteady with wine and some yawning from yesterday's drinking).[54] Instead of sketching the banquet in its totality, Cicero thus provides some talking aspects that should enable the readers to get an idea of the sphere and develop a mental image of what has been going on there. Thereby, he seems to have used a technique very similar to the one which Letizia Modena has called 'singularity' in her analysis of *Invisible Cities*, triggering the readers' imagination by means of a few single and clear aspects, which are immediately recognisable and comprehensible, and stimulating them to fill out 'the blank spots', 'the void not filled with words'. The same can be said of Vergil's (famous) description of the shield of Aeneas which appears in the eighth book of the epic (8.626-728). Within the span of one hundred verses, Vergil re-narrates the mythological and historical past of the Roman empire, which is engraved in the shield, going from the she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus over Horatius Cocles' defeat of the Etruscan king Porsenna up until August's recent victory at the battle of Actium. He mentions each episode very briefly, only referring to some telling, sharply formulated aspects, such as 'the twin brothers playfully grabbed for the nipples and fearlessly sucked the she-wolf's milk' (cf. Calvino's singularity). He leaves it to the readers to bring all these mythological and historical elements together in their minds, create a concrete picture of them and interweave them, as Calvino would say, into an 'emblem' or 'icon', a total image and coherent view of Roman history (and the new imperial regime).[55]

[53] For this discussion of Quintilian's view on ekphrasis, I have mainly relied on Roberts 1989, 39-41.
[54] Roberts 1989, 41.
[55] Ricci 2001, 74-75.

Visuality, perception and description lie at the heart of Statius' poetics of writing. He has been called the "arch-describer" on the grounds that his works "contain an extremely high proportion of descriptive passages".[56] His epics include many episodes in which he adopts an ekphrastic language and invites his readers to visualise what he depicts. The *Silvae* devotes "entire, full-length poems to the descriptions of works of art and buildings". In scholarship on the collection of occasional poetry, the focus has often been on the "major [generic] innovation" Statius has made in this way, being "the first Roman poet" who treated ekphrastic description as an independent, self-containing art form.[57] Less attention has been paid to the descriptive technique developed in the *Silvae* and to the manner in which the glancing literary materials, such as the references to mythology and literary tradition, are arranged and brought together into the ekphrastic frames of the poems. Approaching the collection in the unfamiliar terms of *Invisible Cities*, the question this paragraph wants to ask is whether Statius, similar to the Italian novelist, has built up his poems in such a way that they incite the readers to create a mental image, an 'icon' or 'emblem', of what they describe. Does he expect the readers to interweave the mythological and literary imagery he uses all the time into a coherent and unified view, not of everyday reality which remains invisible in his poems, but of a sort of mythological world that stands parallel to this reality? This is, for example, what Carole Newlands suggests along the lines of her analysis of the bathhouse poem and the description of the villa of Pollius Felix (2.2). Both poems, she says, are set up as spaces entirely "enclosed" from social and political reality.[58] At the time of their origin, they must have fulfilled a "therapeutic function" in the sense that they use "Roman myth (...) to create a delightful private world formulated in resistance to political reality" and the many "anxieties" which were present in there.[59] The poems must have provided the readers-addressees "a refuge from the pressures of public, political life"[60] and invited them to "retreat" themselves into the "safe and sophisticated" literary space of the poems to enjoy the "mythological scenes" depicted there.[61] And if Statius indeed wants to bring such a mythological parallel world before the eyes of his readers, does he apply the technique of 'singularity' which could also be observed in *Invisible Cities* as well as in Vergil's and Cicero's works? As I will try to explain, I believe that the answer to these questions is 'no'.

Before analysing some passages that are entirely built up in literary-mythological imagery, it might be useful to return once more to the second half of 1.5 and explore the quality of vividness or *energeia* within Statius' description of the decorative background

[56] Chinn 2016, 173.
[57] Newlands 2002, 38.
[58] Newlands 2002, 199.
[59] Newlands 2002, 212.
[60] Newlands 2002, 200.
[61] Newlands 2002, 207.

of the bathhouse, such as the glimmering ornamentations and construction materials, on which he focuses in the poem. The way in which these elements are presented may perhaps, as they did in the previous paragraph, have a wider significance and point to a broader tendency within the collection. If we look at Statius' treatment of the ornamentations, like frescos or mosaics, we can notice that he keeps his portrayal of them very concise. In the passage quoted in the previous paragraph, he simply remarks, for instance, that the 'topmost parts of the ceilings are alive, shining with figures in vitreous variety' (*vario fastigia vitro / in species animata nitent*). But he does not further specify what kind of glimmering figures can be seen on the ceilings. A similar phenomenon can be observed a little while before in the text, at the beginning of the descriptive part. Statius seems (at least at first sight) to lay the basis there of a mythological tableau that he will work out in the remainder of the poem. He mentions the goddess Venus as one of the visitors of the bathhouse who is guiding her husband around and 'showing him the cunning' (31-32: *ipsa manus tenuis Cytherea mariti / monstravitque artes*). But he breaks off this tableau quite abruptly and does not reveal to what exactly Vulcan is looking. Statius reserves more space for the presentation of the stones and marbles in the building. He particularly lists up the type of materials which have *not* been used for the construction of the bathhouse. Claudius Etruscus has not incorporated, for example, stones from 'Thasos' or 'wavy Carystos' (34: *non huc admissae Thasos aut undosa Carystos*). Neither has he included 'alabaster or serpentine' (35: *maeret onyx longe queriturque exclusus ophites*). Nor will one see there 'Temesean copper' (*nusquam Temesaea notabis / aera*) (to give just a few examples). Much briefer are his comments upon the sort of materials which *are present* in the bathhouse. These are often mentioned, moreover, as we can observe in the portrayal of the silver (*sed argento felix propellitur unda / argentoque cadit*), without reference to their place of origin, in contrast to the absent materials (e.g. Statius, as can be seen in the examples I have just given, speaks of *Temesean* copper or stones coming from the Greek islands *Thasos* or *Carystos*).

What does this imply about the ekphrastic technique used in 1.5? Statius does not try to be exhaustive in his presentation of the background of the bathhouse and does not portray the decorations and embellishments in their totality and all their details. He draws the readers' attention to some decorative aspects that he believes to stand out in the building, such as the figures depicted on the ceilings and the silver which is all over the place. What is remarkable, however, is that he, in general, seems to remain quite inaccurate and vague in his presentation of this limited set of aspects. Statius hints at the presence of frescos and/or mosaics but does not give any concrete examples of what kind of figures and scenes are pictured. In his treatment of the stones and marbles, he sometimes is very specific, mentioning a concrete type, yet mostly does so when referring to materials that have not been used for the construction of the bathhouse. His elaborations upon the materials that Claudius Etruscus has incorporated in the building,

by contrast, are less precise.[62] The facets of the decorative background which he accentuates in the poem, we could say, appear to lack a 'sharpness of boundary' and 'exactitude of formulation', by which I mean that Statius does not provide a series of well-demarcated and clearly defined characteristics which are immediately 'recognisable', 'comprehensible' and 'imaginable' for the readers.[63]

The unprecise presentation of the single aspects on which he concentrates seems to have consequences for the visual impact of the poetic description. I believe that the inexact formulation of the facets from the decorative background causes it to be more difficult for the readers to develop a coherent mental view, a total image, of what has been described. Statius does not offer only very few but also mostly quite vaguely expressed 'anchoring points' in the description, which renders it to be hard(er) for the readers to bring these together in their minds and build them out into a complete picture. This mental building process is even more complicated by the strong focus on materials that are not used in the construction of the building. By explicitly denying the incorporation of certain types of stone, the poem renders these types to be simultaneously present and absent within the mental image that the readers are creating. The latter are incited to evoke the stone types in their minds and think about the locations of origin to which Statius explicitly refers. But this evocation is only temporary, as the markers of negation and exclusion almost immediately oblige the readers to remove these evoked types again from their mental canvas (they only form a point of contrast, not a positively formulated grip on which the readers can build further). What we remember about the decorative background after having read the poem, is that it forms a splendid surface with the most marvellous ornamentations and materials that give off an intense glance and brightness. But it is hard to imagine what exactly lies behind this glance and brightness and how the surface could look like. Statius' very limited presentation of a very limited set of characteristics provides little hold to construct an 'emblem' or 'icon' of the background he describes, of the source of all this glitter and glimmer.

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[62] According to Zeiner (2005, 153), the exclusion of all sort of elements, this "litotes", within the descriptive part of the poem is a strategy "to ultimately emphasise what the bath is", as the many negations "require recognition and understanding of their binary, positive counterparts". This interpretation would certainly be true, if Statius, in the end, would indeed positively reveal what materials the baths contain and work towards a climax, but this barely happens (or at least in a not so precise way).

[63] The inexact formulation in Statius' poem can become clearer when comparing it to Martial's *Epigrams* 6.42, in which Oppianus is advised to visit Claudius Etruscus' bathhouse. Whereas Statius remains remarkably vague about the used materials (especially referring to those that are not there), Martial provides more concrete details and points out what sort of marbles and stones Oppianus would see if he would go there (e.g. 11-15): *illic Taygeti virent metalla / et certant vario decore saxa / quae Phryx et Libys altius cecidit, / siccos pinguis onyx anhelat aestus / et flamma tenui calent ophitae*.

Does the way in which Statius presents the ornamentations, stones and marbles in the bathhouse poem point to a wider tendency? Is it somehow representative for the manner in which he uses other kinds of decorative elements and materials, such as literary-mythological imagery, in his poetry? And if so, what does this indicate about the *Silvae*'s conception of visuality, perception and the ekphrastic quality of *energeia*?

To give an answer to these questions, I want to start by examining the first invocative half of 1.5, which is almost as long as the descriptive part. It is completely built up from literary-mythological imagery, which causes it, as remarked in the previous paragraph, to be – in a metaphorical way – as bejewelled, glimmering and shining as the second half of the poem. The first thirty lines of 1.5, revolving around the question what deities should be invoked, are not 'ekphrastic' in the strictest sense of the word. But, as Newlands has remarked, they contain a lot of imagery regarding the theme of water and bathing, thereby offering the readers a sort of mythological setting for the remainder of the poem, a framework in the light of which the actual descriptive part should be interpreted.[64] In what way has Statius given form to this framework?

When looking at the invocative half of the poem, we may notice some remarkable similarities between the way in which Statius there presents the literary-mythological materials and the manner in which he arranges the decorative elements in the descriptive part. A first resemblance is the frequent use of negation and exclusion. Statius recurrently draws the readers' attention to gods and mythological figures whom he does not think to be appropriate as sources of inspiration and that he therefore does not want to be present in the poetic space of 1.5. We may see in this a parallel to the many references in the descriptive half to certain types of stones and marbles which Claudius Etruscus has believed to be unsuitable for the construction of his bathhouse. An illuminating example of the explicit exclusion of deities and other inspirational forces can already be found at the opening of the poem (1-5):

> Non Helicona gravi pulsat chelys enthea plectro
> nec lassata voco totiens mihi numina Musas:
> et te, Phoebe, choris et te, dimittimus, Euhan;
> tu quoque muta ferae, volucer Tegeaee, sonorae
> terga premas.

In these verses, Statius names five deities that he does not deem to be valuable sources of inspiration within the context of the poem. He begins by expelling the Helicon (*Helicona…enthea*) and the Muses, whom he, though so often 'wearied in the past' (*lassata…numina Musas*), does *not* ('*non*'; '*nec*') want to be present in the literary space. Next,

[64] Newmyer 1979, 108 provides a detailed analysis of the structure of the prooemium. Hardie 1983, 133-134 attempts to place the long prooemium within the literary tradition, though must recognise at the same time its exceptionality.

he addresses three gods, Phoebus, Bacchus and Mercury, which he demands to go away (*dimittimus*) or to become mute (*muta ferae … sonorae / terga premas*). This explicit exclusion of gods and inspirational forces is not limited to the opening but continues in the remainder of the invocative half. A little while after his silencing of Mercury, he orders Thebes, the city around which his epic poem has been composed, to 'lay down its guilty arms' (8-9: *paulum arma nocentia, Thebae, / ponite*).[65] Then, he sends 'Toil and Care' away (11-12), as they collide with the relaxed atmosphere he wants to create in the poem. Somewhat later, Statius asks a couple of Greek Naiads that have become notorious in the literary tradition for their acts of (sexual) violence to leave his textual space (19-23). Salmacis, who raped Hermaphroditus, for instance, is not allowed to dwell around there. Neither does he want to grant access to the abuser of Hercules' lover Hylas. Even more than in the descriptive part, so it seems, Statius, in the first half of his poem, thus offers the readers a list of materials (in this case from the literary-mythological tradition) that have not been used for the construction of the (poetic) space to which he is giving form.

A second resemblance with the descriptive part is that the elements that are said to be *present* are treated and portrayed in a much more concise and/or unprecise way than those that Statius wants to exclude. After having demanded Mercury to become mute, he mentions, for instance, two appropriate inspirational forces for his poem, namely the water nymphs (6: *undarum dominas*) and Vulcan, to which he refers as the king of flashing fire (6-7: *reqemque corusci / ignis*). Although these are the first forces he wants to be invoked in his poetic space, Statius barely elaborates upon their presence, function or power as poetic sources of inspiration. His introduction of them only takes two lines, after which he continues listing up deities and inspirational forces, materials from the literary-mythological tradition, which he does not think to be suitable for his text (8-12: Thebes, Toil and Care). Later in the poem, Statius comes back to the water nymphs, the *deae virides* (12), this time saying a bit more about how they exactly look like. He has ordered them to 'bind their glossy hair together', so that it seems as if 'they have just come out from their deep springs' (13-14). Their positively expressed appearance, however, is almost immediately counterbalanced by the exclusion of the Greek Naiads, known for their acts of sexual violence, which I have mentioned above. The way in which Statius presents this group of sexual harassers, giving very concrete examples from the literary tradition (e.g. Salmacis), collides with the rather vague and unprecise reference, '*deae virides*', by which he marks the invoked goddesses in his poem. This contrast may remind us of the

[65] See Newlands 2002, 212-226 for a meta-poetical reading of this exclusion of Thebes. In her view, Statius, via this rejection of the topic of the *Thebaid*, tries to define a poetics of the *Silvae*, a work consisting of small poems wherein friendship, art and private meetings are preferred to the violence and great heroes that dominate the epics.

descriptive half of 1.5, where the materials that are told to be present likewise lack 'a sharpness of boundary' and 'exactitude of formulation'.[66]

The consequences of this way of presenting the literary-mythological materials are, in my view, comparable to those discussed at the end of the analysis of the visual impact of the descriptive part. Statius renders it to be rather difficult for the readers to bring all the materials to which he refers together and interweave them into a coherent mental image. He does not choose to end the *recusatio* after five verses and build up a clear and unified tableau, a mythological setting, around the first inspirational forces he wants to be there, i.e. Vulcan and the nymphs (6-7). He keeps on counterbalancing the deities that are said to be present in his poetic space by very concrete examples of gods that he has excluded. This constant and elongated alternation of suitable and unsuitable materials causes the readers to fluctuate all the time between presence and absence, between what is there and what is (said) not (to be) there. This fluctuation is also inherent to the technique of 'explicit exclusion', which, as I remarked above in the analysis of the designation of excluded stones and marbles in the descriptive part, renders a certain image, in this case of a mythological scene (e.g. the abuse by Salmacis) to be evoked in the readers' mind yet the markers of negation and exclusion almost immediately oblige them to remove it again from their mental canvas. The first half of 1.5, like the second half, offers the readers only a very few concrete and stable 'anchoring points', well-demarcated and immediately recognizable literary-mythological materials, which they could use to create and build out a complete and coherent mental picture, a mythological tableau in light of which they could interpret the description of the bathhouse. The poem gives rather form to a constantly shifting reading process in which a scene from the literary-mythological tradition to which is referred in the text can only temporary be evoked in the readers'

[66] At the end of the invocative half, Statius seems to provide a more well-demarcated and -defined characterisation of the godly forces he wants to invoke in the poem (23-27). He refers to a Roman kind of Nymphs, that dwell in Latium and the Seven Hills (*vos mihi quae Latium septenaque culmina, Nymphae*). The Nymphs raise the Tiber with fresh waters and are said to be delighted by the Anio, the Virgin and the Marcia, whose streams they guide via several aqueducts. Carole Newlands (2002, 216) sees in the Nymphs, and the explicit marking of their Romanness (*Latium*), a sign that the poem wants to offer a praise to "the masterpieces of Roman technology" (with the bathhouse of Claudius Etruscus as one of the splendid examples of this technology). Although Statius indeed seems to elaborate here upon invoked deities in a much more concrete way than before, he also introduces some features that destabilize the invocative frame. He subtly subverts, for example, the verses' celebration of Romanness and their evocation of a 'Latin' setting by using in and after the characterisation some Greek words. He chooses to refer to the Tiber with the Hellenized version of the river's name, *Thybrimque* (24), which, as Coleman (1999, 65) has recorded, had strong exotic connotations in the Latin literary tradition. Immediately following upon the characterisation, in the beginning of the descriptive part, Statius, moreover, has included numerous non-Latin words and references to non-Roman geographical areas (31-38) (e.g. *manu…Cytherea; onyx…ophites; flavis Nomadum decisa metallis*). This slightly undermines the truly authentic Roman setting, Roman frame, suggested by the characterisation of the Nymphs.

minds, immediately being replaced by another one which is somewhat later replaced, on its turn, by yet another (and so on).

For this reason, I have my doubts about the interpretation of the bathhouse poem by Newlands, who believes that Statius has composed a therapeutic literary space in which the reader-addressee could find safe refuge from social and political reality and enjoy the mythological scenes depicted in this space. I do not think that 1.5 provides a world enclosed from reality in which the readers can really withdraw themselves, wander around and admire all the beauty portrayed in there. It rather seems that Statius has created a poem of which the surface, in both parts, glitters and glimmers because of the sparkling building materials (in the literal and metaphorical sense) that have been used. But the way in which these materials are presented renders it to be difficult for the readers to bring them together into a total image, to look behind this surface of splendour and brightness and get a coherent view of the world responsible for this shining (the readers neither see the everyday reality in the poem, nor can they use the materials to construct a mythological world parallel to this reality). The bathhouse poem, we could say, thus is not like one of the descriptions in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, in which the readers are given a few single aspects, characterised by their sharpness of boundary and the exactitude of formulation, that they immediately recognise and can interweave in their minds into a unified picture by adding some elements from their imagination (similar to Cicero's and Vergil's ekphrastic descriptions). The technique of negation and exclusion, combined with the often very unprecise marking of the present elements, causes the readers to have too little concrete and stable anchoring points on which they could build further; it renders, to say it in the terms of *Invisible Cities*, the 'void' around the materials to be too large to be easily filled out, causing it to be very hard to assemble these materials into 'an emblem or icon' projected on the 'allegorical canvas of the readers' mind'.

Several scholars have already pointed to a certain degree of "indeterminacy" within the poetic space of the *Silvae*, i.e. the difficulty to "coalesce" all the aspects to which Statius refers in his poems into a "coherent and organic (visual and/or interpretative) whole".[67] Some of them have in their analyses also concentrated on the technique of exclusion and negation which appears to be applied quite often throughout the collection. Statius, similar to what he does in 1.5, frequently claims not to find the right words or imagery to express the beauty of a specific person, object or building, and has therefore decided to list up all the elements that he does not think to be suitable within the context of the poem (the effect of this has been described above). Other contributions have observed more techniques that render the poetry to appear to be somewhat indeterminate, such

[67] I quote here Marjorie Perloff's study (1989, 10) on the concept of indeterminacy in modern literary history.

as Statius' constant production of paradoxes, inconsistencies and ambiguities. The poems of the *Silvae* are full of contrasts and conflicting imagery, mostly articulated within the span of only a few verses, which undermines the readers' interpretative grip on the text. Too easily, however, I believe that these techniques of indeterminacy have been assumed to be typical of the poems in the collection that revolve around occasions in which the emperor was involved,[68] and only to a lesser extent of the non-imperial.[69] Carole Newlands, for example, recurrently portrays the former category of poems as hard to understand or difficult to grasp. She points to features of paradox, ambiguity and exclusion in the Domitian poems, which create, in her view, a sort of "faultlines", moments at which "the dominant discourse of praise is disturbed" and socio-political "tensions", "anxieties" and "uncertainties" are laid bare.[70] The non-imperial poems, by contrast, are much more often discussed in her monograph in terms of "harmony" and "unity" and presented as safe and delighting spaces of refuge for the readers in which all extremes and oppositions can be reconciled.[71] With the analysis of 1.5, I have tried to illustrate that also non-Domitian poems in the collection are, to a certain extent, indeterminate. As I said, there seems to be less Italo Calvino in the *Silvae* (as well as less Cicero and Vergil) than we may have initially expected.

As 1.5 implies, the poetry of the *Silvae*, we could conclude, consists of the most splendid and marvellous (literary) materials, which give the texts a glittering and glimmering surface. Statius renders it to be rather hard for the readers to interweave these materials into a harmonious and coherent image, making them a bit dazzled by all the brilliance and shine (as, for instance, said in the discussion of the invocative part of the bathhouse poem, the references to present and absent literary-mythological materials follow each other up so quickly that it is quite difficult for the readers to find and pin down a concrete and stable anchoring point).[72] A consequence seems to be that the overall focus in the poems, more than on the creation and evocation of a unified whole, lays on the individual

[68] See, for instance, the contributions by Holtsmark 1973; Ahl 1984a/b; Geysen 1996; Newlands 2002; Newlands 2012; McCullough 2008 which all explore the relationship between the techniques of indeterminacy and Statius' representation of the emperor and late first century politics.

[69] Important exceptions are, for instance, Vessey 1986; Marshall 2011 that consider these features as part of Statius' aesthetics.

[70] Newlands 2002, 25.

[71] She frequently uses the terms "harmony" and "unity" in her discussion of the non-imperial poems 1.3; 2.2; 1.5 (e.g. pp. 120; 132; 136; 143; 145; 147; 162; 164; 182). These terms barely appear in her analysis of the Domitian poems, where she speaks more about "disturbance" (e.g. 293; 296), "conflict" (e.g. 63; 72) and "paradox" (e.g. 241; 249).

[72] Vessey 1986, 2760, who states that Statius' text is "especially hard to possess and to inhabit. For one thing, it always moves at speed, so that what seems firm at one moment is soon proved (...) to be fundamentally unstable and prone to metamorphosis".

materials. The attention of the readers is drawn to the beauty of the individual compositional units, the literary-mythological imagery as such, not to the bigger picture.[73] Reading the *Silvae*, I believe, is like looking at a "slide projector which ejects each slide at the very instant it is lighted up".[74] What the reader remembers of the poems in the collection, is the splendidness of each of the used materials, the ingenious presentation of the literary-mythological imageries (rather than being concerned with the overall theme of the 'slideshow'). We could hypothesise that Statius' poetry, in this way, already contains some traces of aesthetic tendencies that will become dominant in the literary production of Late Antiquity. There, the focus also lies, as Roberts states, on the "brilliance of the unit in isolation", on "details" and "individual aspects", more than on totality and coherence.[75]

The next paragraph will explore the impact of the impossibility to come to a coherent mental image for our reading experience. What effect does Statius create by not showing his readers everyday reality, neither letting them see a mythological world parallel to this reality? To answer this question, a dialogue will be set up with the work of the Romanian author Paul Celan.

4.3 "*Not* seeing what *is* there"

A phrase that, in my view, beautifully catches the indeterminate of the *Silvae* can be found in Anne Carson's survey *Economy of the Unlost*. The second chapter opens with a general reflection upon the complex relationship between text and image, between reading and seeing, and between object and viewer. Although this relationship can take on divergent forms, Carson especially focuses in her discussion on two apparently related but in essence totally different types. Some texts, she says, want to let "their audience *see* what is *not* there", by which she refers to literary universes that aim to create some kind of "illusion" and build up a world that does not actually exist. Other texts make an even more "radical claim" and attempt to induce the "profoundest of poetic experiences", that of "*not* seeing what *is* there".[76] If we look back at the works we have analysed in the

[73] This idea corresponds to the findings of Chinn 2005, McNelis 2008 and Marshall 2011. They study Statius' comments upon the relation between the literary and visual arts in different poems, concluding that this relation is "in fact antagonistic or hierarchical, and particular attention is drawn to the versality and creative possibilities of the verbal form" (Marshall, 333).

[74] Perloff 1989, 54 has observed the same effect in modern poems that tend to indeterminacy.

[75] Roberts 1989, 75. See also Lobato 2012.

[76] Carson 1999, 62.

previous paragraphs, I believe we could say that Calvino's *Invisible Cities* has affinities with the former category. The descriptions of Marco Polo are represented as products of his imagination and aim to draw the readers into a world of which they know that it is not real (they *see* what is *not* there). Statius' collection of occasional poetry seems to stand closer to the latter. His poems present persons, objects and buildings within an ekphrastic frame and invite the readers to visualise what it described. But Statius does not really offer a direct representation of them, which renders this reality to remain invisible in his poetic space. Neither do the glittering materials in the poems coalesce into a sort of parallel world and evoke a coherent mythological version of these persons, objects and buildings. This causes the readers *not* to be enabled to *see* what the ekphrastic text says to *be there*. The question this paragraph seeks to answer is what form this 'profoundest of poetic experiences' exactly takes in the *Silvae*. To what kind of reading experience do Statius' poems give shape?

Carson introduces the notion of not-seeing-what-is-there in preparation of her analysis of the poetry of the twentieth-century author Paul Celan (1920-1970) that follows in the second half of her chapter. Celan was born in Romania into a German-speaking Jewish family. Like many Jews living in that region, he was not spared from the sufferings and pains from the Second World War. His parents passed away in an internment camp (his father probably died of typhus, while his mother was killed by one of the guards). Celan himself nearly escaped death during his imprisonment in a labour camp in Romania (another one than the camp his parents were hold) from which he was freed in February 1944. The loss of his parents and the experience of the Holocaust form defining forces in his poetry, not only in the volumes he published briefly after the war but also in those that appeared in the late fifties and sixties. Although Carson extensively elaborates in her analysis upon this aspect of Celan's work, she also aims to examine other facets of his poetry, such as the symbolic or mystical undertone of many of his poems (though also this facet, she realises, is strongly interwoven with the Holocaust-aspects of his work). Within the context of her discussion of these symbolic or mystical features of his poetry, she comes back to the notion of not-seeing-what-is-there introduced at the beginning of the chapter.[77]

To understand the meaning of this notion in connection to Celan's poetry, we should first try to comprehend the status of the 'you' (*du*) in his work.[78] This 'you' serves as the

[77] Carson 1992, 62-72. She also makes a link to the poetry of Simonides.

[78] For the general presentation of the poetry of Paul Celan in the remainder of this paragraph, I will rely on Carson 1999; Franke 2007, 377-393; Naaijkens 2003, 821-833 and Perloff 2006, 177-202. Of course, Celan's poetry is much richer and more multifarious than will be set out. I will exclusively focus upon the few aspects that might be interesting within the context of my analysis of the *Silvae*. The English translations of Celan's poem are copied from Franke 2007, 394-406.

first-person-narrator's (the persona's) "over-against" which he addresses several times within one and the same poem, as for instance in 'Psalm':

> (...)
> Praised be your name, no one.
> For your sake
> we shall flower.
> Towards
> you.

Many poems of Celan picture the persona attempting to approach his addressee ('Towards / you'; '*Dir / entgegen*') and communicate with the 'you' on different levels. As the somewhat religious (mystical) atmosphere of 'Psalm' suggests, this 'you' appears to inhabit an extraordinary, almost sacred place. This means that the persona, if he (ever) wants to come closer to the 'you', must try to reach an "Other universe" that, as Franke has recorded, seems to be disposed of its direct link with everyday reality and wherein the structures with which we are used to interpret our everyday environment do not work anymore.[79] To emphasise the exceptional, non-ordinary nature of this world, Celan often refers to it, as he also does in the last strophe of 'Psalm', with metaphors related to light and brightness ('bright').

As Celan illustrates in almost every poem, it appears to be extremely difficult to find the right words, the accurate poetic expressions, to describe the 'you' and the enlightened space it inhabits. It is recurrently emphasised that the 'you' is situated "beyond the possibilities of language". It concerns, as William Franke records, a "radically inexpressible and unknowable figure that no word can name" (cf. 'It is no longer': 'Like you, it has no name').[80] The 'you' and its illuminated world remain, per definition, "unsayable" within the (German) language. This explains why Celan frequently speaks about the 'you' via negative statements. In 'Psalm', for example, his *du* is talked to as a 'No one' ('*Niemand*') as its identity cannot positively be expressed. On the one hand, these negative statements, making the present absent and the absent present, one could say,

[79] Franke 2007, 389. Several poems, for instance, aim to dismantle common time-categories as past, present and future (e.g. in the poem 'Once').

[80] Franke 2007, 389. The unknowability of the identity of 'you' does not rule out that several scholars have given multiple suggestions about what or whom Celan may want to designate with the Other in his poetry: many have seen in this you "an index of contextual historical circumstances unsayable in their concreteness", i.e. the Holocaust experience through which the Romanian writer went, losing his parents in a Nazi concentration camp; others have opposed to such a reduction of Celan to a 'post-Auschwitz poet' and argued that the Other may also be read as a more "mystical" being, like God or a Beloved one (e.g. his Wife or Mother). In my view, the 'you' in Celan can take on all these identities at the same time. For a critical overview of the tendencies in scholarship, see Perloff 2006, 177-186.

bring the persona and the readers as closely as possible to the 'inexpressible' world of the addressee. On the other hand, they also cause them to become further removed from the 'you', as these negative statements always reminds them of the impossibility to reach the addressee through language and to the unlikeliness that they will ever really 'see' and 'visualise' the space it inhabits within a poetic medium. In 'White und Light', Celan expresses this paradox as follows: the persona feels strongly attracted towards the 'you' to whom the poem several times refers in terms of a bright fierce light. Yet, the more the text proceeds, the more it becomes clear that this light works 'eye-blinding' ('bright / in our eyes') and that the readers will not be enabled to see the 'you' to which the persona feels attracted within a linguistic context.[81]

The reading experience to which the poetry gives form has Celan himself characterised with the term *unterwegs*. The readers are expected to let themselves drag along by the persona and, together with him, to keep on trying "to approach the you" (*Dir / entgegen*). While reading the text, they must continue "moving towards" the Other (mystical) universe of the addressee, thereby gradually resolving themselves from the tights of their everyday environment (cf. 'Before your Late Face': 'Before your late face / a loner / wandering between nights / that change me too').[82] However, since this 'you' remains per definition unsayable within a poetic medium, the readers will never arrive and thus *not* see, to refer to Carson's notion, what *is* there within the space of a poem. The text, Franke argues, seems to bring the readers in a condition of "being underway" (*unterwegs*), which refers to a state of going on progressing without ever reaching the source of attraction within the context of the poem (this notion has much more implications within Celan's oeuvre than the one I give here).[83] This 'between-two-worlds-state' induces, what Carson has called, "the profoundest of poetic experiences".

The notion of Anne Carson offers a conceptual point around which the work of Paul Celan and Statius, despite the numerous differences, seem to entangle. Both evoke a world that appears to remain invisible within the poetic medium, which renders the readers not to see what is said to be there (though Celan more radically underlines this invisibility). They share, moreover, a metaphorical imagery related to light and splendour to characterise this world and/or the language they use to speak about it. Statius, as explained above, does not choose a language that directly represents the everyday occasion by which he has been inspired. He opts for more 'expensive' literary materials to which he himself metaphorically refers in terms of glance and splendour. The way in which these materials are presented do not allow the readers to coalesce them into a

[81] For a more extensive discussion of Celan's usage of metaphors concerning blindness-sight, see Perloff 2006, 192-194, that concentrates on the poem 'Sprachgitter' ('Speech-grille').
[82] I copied this translation from Joris 1995, 62.
[83] Franke 2007, 390-391.

coherent image but rather has a dazzling effect (as if we have been looking to a projector which ejects each slide at the very instant it is lighted up). This causes the readers, in the end, to understand that the person, object or place Statius has been talking about must be exceptional, beautiful and ravishing yet they have not really seen it/him within the space of the poem. The 'brightness in our eyes', given off by the materials which Statius thinks he needs to underline the extraordinariness of what he wants to describe, is so fierce that, comparable to the readers of Celan's poetry, we have become, in a sense, 'eye-blinded' (for the whole). A question that still should be answered is what kind of reading process Statius has exactly implied in this way. Does the *Silvae*, with its glancing but eye-blinding literary materials, also have, in this regard, affinities with the poetry of Paul Celan (and his idea of the underway-reader)?

To examine the experience of reading produced by the *Silvae*, it might be useful to return (for the last time) to the bathhouse poem. I want to explore two brief passages that show us, as will be explained, the responses of (mythological) figures within the poetic space to the beauty of what is depicted. These may perhaps offer an indication of the poetic effects which Statius thinks/wants what he describes to have.

> quales emergitis altis
> fontibus et visu Satyros torquetis amantes. (17-18)
>
> hoc mallet nasci Cytherea profundo,
> hic te perspicuum melius, Narcisse, videres,
> hic velox Hecate velit et deprensa lavari. (53-55)

The first two lines are taken from the invocative part of the poem. They accentuate the beauty of the water nymphs, the *deae virides*, whom Statius, as said in the previous paragraph, believes to be suitable inspirational forces within his poetic space. The last three verses are derived from the descriptive half. They turn up near the end of the poem, just after Statius' treatment of the decorative background, and suggest that even notorious mythological figures as Venus, Narcissus and Hecate would be amazed by the bathhouse.

Though belonging to different parts of the poem, these passages seem to have two important features in common. First of all, there appears to be a joint feeling resuscitating within the five lines, that is, desire. Venus, Narcissus and Hecate are suggested to feel attracted to the space Statius has just described and 'wish' (*mallet*; *velit*) that they would have spent a part of their mythological life there. The water nymphs must appear in the poem in a way that would resemble the moment they have just come out of the springs and trigger the 'craving' of the satyrs (*Satyros...amantes*). The latter, just like Venus, Narcissus and Hecate, thus are characterised as having a strong inclination 'to move towards', to approach', what they are said to have seen (*visu*). The desire to which the mythological figures have fallen prey, however, seems to be a feeling that cannot easily

be fulfilled. The verb *torquetis* suggests that the sight of the nymphs causes a harsh torment within the loving satyrs, as if they know (from earlier experiences in the literary tradition) that the chance they will ever catch one of the nymphs is rather low (cf. Silv. 2.3 that tells about the satyr-like Pan's fruitless attempts to capture the nymph Pholoë). The conditional aspect of the verbs *mallet, videres* and *velit* implies the unreality of Venus', Narcissus' and Hecate's wishes and the impossibility to change their literary past. The figures in these passages, so it seems, cannot 'reach the source of attraction'.

A second resemblance between the passages is that the desire of the mythological figures is implied to have been triggered, at least partly, by shine and glimmer. The lines about Venus, Narcissus and Hecate come directly after Statius' depiction of the decorative background of the bathhouse in which the accent lays on the glance and brightness of the ornamentations, stones and marbles. One of the elements that makes the nymphs invoked in the poem so seductive is that they walk around with their 'glossy' or 'gleaming' hair bound together, as if it is still wet (14: *vitreum...crinem*). By making 'glance' a characteristic of the source of attraction in both passages, Statius subtly suggests the appealing effect that sparkling and glittering surfaces have to those who are looking at them.

Since the entire collection consists of materials to which is metaphorically referred in terms of glance and splendour, we may perhaps consider the reactions of Venus, Narcissus, Hecate and the satyrs as an indication of the general (reader) response Statius hopes to evoke. By using the most exquisite and sparkling literary materials, he might want to incite a strong desire within his readers, similar to the mythological figures', to visualise the persons, objects and buildings around which the poems revolve. With his language, he seemingly aims to appeal the readers and trigger their wish to see the subjects of the poetic descriptions (comparable to Venus, Hecate and Narcissus, they would almost wish, for example, to really be in one of the spaces Statius is depicting). However, as the way in which the materials are presented in the poems works so dazzling and eye-blinding, the readers' desire, so it seems, like the mythological figures', cannot be fulfilled. At the end of each poem, they can only record that they have not seen what the text says to be there, knowing nothing more than that the subject of the description is probably the most marvellous and splendid being or thing on earth.[84] This causes the reading experience to which Statius gives form to be a sort of variant of Celan's notion of

[84] This interpretation corresponds in a way to the observations made by other scholars, who have pointed out that 'unfulfilled desire' serves as a recurring theme throughout the *Silvae*. See, for example, Marshall 2011, 321-326 on the desire to see and describe Domitian. Hardie 2006 analyses poem 2.3 and the "eternal bachelordom" (210) to which Pan in the poem is condemned.

'being underway'.[85] The readers of the *Silvae* are at all times kept in a state of 'moving' towards' or 'reaching to' something or someone that does not never get a clear shape within the poetic medium. They continue 'progressing' through the text, hoping to visualise what gives off such a sparkle and glance, yet are never allowed to see what lies behind this splendour. It is always 'bright in the eyes' of the readers of the *Silvae*.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the function and meaning of Statius' emphasis on light and splendour in the poem about the bathhouse of Claudius Etruscus. It has especially explored the metaphorical potential of this emphasis, as it sets an interpretative mechanism into play that invites us to think about and reflect upon some broader tendencies and tensions within the *Silvae*. By means of the glitter and glance, Statius seems to make clear that the poems in his collection do not offer a direct representation of the everyday occasional context in which they are said to have originated. They are entirely constructed of much more expensive and sparkling materials which accentuate the refinement and poetic excellence of his poetry. Dazzled by so much brilliance and glimmer, the readers cannot develop a clear mental image, a coherent emblem or icon, of what has been described. Their desire to see and visualise always remains, thereby, in a sense, unfulfilled.

To build up this argument, the *Silvae* has been confronted with Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and the poetry of Paul Celan. The choice to approach the collection in the unfamiliar terms of the two twentieth-century authors has particularly been useful as a strategy to question some of the familiar concepts with which we are used to speak, write and think about Statius' poetry. Via this strategy, we have been incited, for example, to reflect upon the notion of 'occasional poetry' and think through the paradoxes and tensions that seem inherent to it. We have also been enabled to linger over the idea of ekphrasis and the relation between Statius' conception of it and the conceptualisation of previous authors in the literary tradition, such as Vergil and Cicero. The *Silvae*, we have hypothesised, seems to contain some traces of the aesthetic that will become dominant in Late Antiquity in which the readers' attention is no longer drawn to the organic unity and the coherence

[85] Desire seems to be one of the many aspects of Celan's notion of 'being underway'. In his poetry, there can be a desire for a sort of mystical re-union with a God, with a Beloved and even with a Holocaust experience. Horror and the sublime, darkness and lightness, etc. do not exclude one another in his work.

of the image, but to the individual compositional units, beautiful and splendid in their isolation.

Chapter 5

An Encyclopaedia of Styles
Life and Textual Representation in Martial's *Epigrams* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*

In the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), the American writer Henry James explains from where he got his inspiration for the novel. Many years before, he was celebrating Christmas Eve at a friend's place. During dinner, he became involved in a conversation with the lady sitting beside him. The conversation was not very engaging and would certainly have petered out, if the lady would not have made one of those "allusions that [he has] always found [himself] recognizing on the spot as the germ of a story".[1] James does not specify what the germ was but continues by saying that an author, certainly a realist one, should at any time be attentive, ready to grasp the seeds of a new novel when they crop up. Life as such is "all about confusion" and "persistently blunders and deviates, loses itself in the sand". It requires a careful, intent and vigilant eye to see in this chaos the "speck of truth, of beauty, of reality" that can lay the basis of a narrative.[2] Only the really good authors, to which James counts himself, are capable of saving those few elements in life for the sake of a story.

According to Karen Lawrence, the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* articulates a central axiom around which the English novelistic tradition revolved for a long time.[3] From Henry Fielding on,[4] writing was seen as a process of selection and reduction during which

[1] James 1897, v.

[2] James 1897, vi.

[3] Lawrence 1981, 77-80.

[4] In the first chapter of the second book of *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding states the following: "We intend in the novel rather to pursue the method of those writers who profess to disclose the revolutions of countries than to

an author was expected to transform the "splendid waste of life" into the "sublime economy of art".[5] This principle only started being questioned in the beginning of the twentieth century by writers as Virginia Woolf and Edward Morgan Foster. But it would last until the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922 before it was really overthrown.

Ulysses might at first sight seem to meet the demands formulated by Henry James and appear to be framed as a traditional, realist English novel. The work zooms in on the lives of three characters, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and his wife Molly. The setting is an ordinary day in Dublin, the 16th of June 1904 (which is, among the Joyce fans, nowadays better known as Bloomsday). But the crucial difference with the novelistic English tradition is that *Ulysses* does not want to give air, as Henry James stated, to just one of those "rare, precious particles in life".[6] Joyce believed that all of life was meaningful, including the chaos and apparently insignificant details that were ignored or even despised by his predecessors. He wanted *Ulysses* to be a novel exhibiting the enormous wealth of life and the richness of reality. Instead of overemphasizing one or two aspects in the lives of his main characters, Joyce had the ambition to show Stephen, Leopold, Molly and their daily worlds in their entirety. In his eyes, a novel could only be called 'truly realist' when it displayed all of life and preferred an "ethic of inclusiveness" above an "ethic of economy".[7]

This ambition confronted Joyce with a huge challenge concerning literary form and representation. As he thoroughly realised, it would not be easy to go around the processes of selection and reduction celebrated by his predecessors. A book was (and still is) a carefully made construct that categorises, systematises and, thereby, almost inevitably also excludes aspects from the reality evoked in the text. A work of art could never serve as a perfect copy of reality but only develop a particular, well-considered representation of it that was expected to be organized in accordance to certain laws and rules. If he wanted to achieve his goals, Joyce had to find a way to turn the highly ordered universe that a literary work is into an appropriate medium of representation for the immense but meaningful chaos of life. Whereas his predecessors tried to transform reality in order to make it suitable for art, *Ulysses* thus became an attempt to do the reverse: re-thinking the

imitate the painful and voluminous historian, to preserve the regularity of his series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much paper with the details of months and years in which nothing remarkable happened as he employs upon those notable eras when the greatest scenes have been transacted on the human stage".

[5] James 1987, vii.

[6] James 1897, v.

[7] Lawrence 1981, 77. See also Latham 2014, 13-15; Kiberd 2009, 11-15.

literary novelistic form in such a manner that it becomes compatible with the confusion, turmoil and excesses inherent to reality.[8]

Near the end of the first century, Marcus Valerius Martialis saw himself faced with a literary challenge that may somehow remind us of Joyce's search for a narrative form that could encompass life. Martial is well-known for his twelve books of epigrams, which John Sullivan once characterised as a work with remarkably explicit "realist pretentions".[9] Martial has indeed a strong interest in quotidian urban life, which he eagerly celebrates in his literary creations. Although he shares this interest with contemporaries like the Younger Pliny and Statius,[10] he seemingly pushes his affinity with the everyday somewhat further than they do. Whereas Pliny and Statius modify the ordinary in order to make it possible for art, Martial, so he claims, seemingly aims to show 'life' in the collection of epigrams as it really is (10.4): *hoc lege, quod possit dicere vita 'meum est', / (...) hominem pagina nostra sapit*. Central in his work stand life (*vita*) and human beings (*hominem*), which Martial allegedly finds so fascinating that his pages do not need anything else.[11]

Martial's focus on the real world goes hand in hand with an ambition of inclusiveness that strongly resembles Joyce's. As Victoria Rimell has convincingly illustrated, the *Epigrams* recurrently expresses "encyclopaedic" aspirations, by which she means that Martial aims to incorporate every single aspect of life, of the world that Rome is, into his work. Martial just wants to "cram *everything* in" and let "all reality be in there and nothing be left out".[12] The *Epigrams* must encompass the philosophies on life and death as well as reflections upon the stinginess of patrons. Physical deformities and sexual affairs must be as significant as military victories or financial transactions. For Martial, like for Joyce, life becomes only meaningful when showed in its immense variety and colourfulness.

Martial thoroughly realises that this variety and colourfulness cannot exist without chaos and disorder. He sees Rome as a melting pot where all aspects of life come together

[8] For discussions of Joyce's struggles with the novelistic form, see Lawrence 1981; Staten 2004 and Groden 2014. Levine 2004, 122-146 elaborates upon how the book's form may be perceived and conceptualised by a reader: is it a 'novel', a 'poem', a 'Barthian text' or something completely else?

[9] Sullivan 1991, 15.

[10] For a general discussion of Martial's relation to his literary predecessors and contemporaries, see Fitzgerald 2007, 25-38; Sullivan 1991, 78-100; Nisbet 2003, which studies Martial's "forgotten Greek rivals" (14).

[11] I agree with Sullivan 1991, 23 who remarks that Martial's poems may not be seen as direct representations of events happened in the poet's daily environment. Martial rather "transmutes personal, social, historical or literary materials into art, but art which embodies life and experience". Similar ideas have been formulated by Holzberg 2012, 15; Sapsford 2012, 40; Rimell 2008 and Fitzgerald 2007. Rubenstein 2014 and Latham 2014 have described the reality displayed in *Ulysses* in similar terms.

[12] Rimell 2008, 8. She especially concentrates on the tension between Martial's inclusive aspirations and the tidiness of the epigrammatic form.

in an intriguing mix. Martial declaredly thrives very well in this miscellany and thinks that this is precisely what makes the world worth living for. Yet, at the same time, the irregularities in life appear to face him, as an author with realist pretentions, with a formal problem that seems not so easy to overcome. As it becomes clear from several epigrams, Martial is well aware that his decision to collect his poems in twelve books evokes certain expectations concerning structure, formal organisation and literary representation (cf. 7.85: *facile est epigrammata belle / scribere, sed librum scribere difficile est*). Disorder, the *turba*, may dominate real life, but it definitively cannot rule in a work with explicitly formulated literary pretensions (4.29.1: *obstat (…) nostris sua turba libellis*).[13] Thereby, Martial had to find an answer to similar questions as Joyce when thinking out *Ulysses*: how can a writer express the multifariousness and chaos of reality in a literary medium? In what ways can he make a literary universe, bound to certain laws and rules, suitable for the representation of reality? How can an author reconcile the meaningful disorder of the real world to the order of the textual one?

This chapter will start with a discussion of the relationship between the wealth of life and the creation of stylistic variety in Joyce's novel. It proposes that *Ulysses*' remarkable way of adopting a diverse range of rhetorical-discursive and symbolic frames from the literary tradition contributes to its simulation of reality, suggesting that the world is so rich that it cannot be grasped in all its facets by any of the conventional modes of representation. With this idea in mind, I will turn to the *Epigrams* and argue that it seems to use a similar technique. Only by showing that literary representation has its limits, Martial appears to be able to evoke the richness of life in his work. The second and third paragraph will explore the broader implications of this technique, respectively examining its relation to Martial's (and Joyce's) rhetoric of resuscitation and to the reading experience to which the collection claims to give form.[14]

5.1 The Encyclopaedia of Styles

A thought-provoking view on how Joyce tries to solve his representational problem has been offered by Karen Lawrence in her book *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. The work was published in 1981 and has grown into a standard survey in Joyce studies. In the

[13] Rimell 2008, 20-22 analyses Martial's use of the term *turba* in relation to both his characterisation of everyday reality and his conceptualisation of his book composition.

[14] All the *Ulysses* citations are copied from the Wordsworth Classics edition (1978). For the *Epigrams*, I have relied on the Loeb edition and translations by Shackleton Bailey (1993).

introduction, Lawrence explains that it would be a mistake to analyse the novel's inclusive aspirations exclusively in terms of character and setting. The very detailed way in which the behaviour of Stephen, Leopold, Molly and their Dublin surroundings are described certainly helps creating the impression that Joyce wants to integrate everything in the novel. *Ulysses* lends so much weight and significance to the most trivial everyday objects, places, emotions and experiences that at some points it even seems as if these have become the main subjects of the work.[15] But the incorporation of this huge number of aspects from ordinary life only forms one part of Joyce's strategy to pull the wealth, chaos and arbitrariness of reality into his text. At least as fundamental, according to Lawrence, are the striking experiments with style.

Lawrence uses the notion of 'style' in a broad sense and refers with it to the extensive set of "rhetorical-discursive" as well as "symbolical" frames and modes of which authors make use "to order and give meaning to experience in a literary work".[16] When a writer wants to tell a story, he cannot do so in an objective or neutral way. He always has to opt for a certain type of discourse/rhetoric and/or symbolic structure that strongly determines the manner in which the events from the story are presented to the readers. A text written in a journalistic rhetoric, as we find in newspapers, would evoke a different perception of a certain event, e.g. a bank robbery, than one written in a novelistic type of discourse (for instance, a thriller of which the author based himself on the robbery). A contemporary novel would get a different meaning if it would somehow invite its readers to read the events it portrays in relation to and through the symbolic lens of the Bible than if it would encourage us to interpret them in connection to the *Harry Potter* cycle. The choice of style, Lawrence says, is a choice of literary representation, of a specific organization of the reality that gets form in a work.

Although many texts play with stylistic variation, mostly we can discern one 'dominant' mode of ordering experience. *Ulysses*, however, forms a remarkable exception. Instead of selecting a primary discourse, Joyce offers in his novel a whole "set of possible stylistic representations" to display the events that allegedly happened in Dublin on the 16th of June 1904.[17] We could, for example, see that he uses a remarkably diverse range of rhetorical-discursive frames over the course of his work. At one moment, the story about Stephen, Leopold and Molly reads like a realist novel, while other chapters describe their

[15] An extensive discussion of everyday life scenes and objects in *Ulysses* can be found in Kiberd 2009.

[16] Lawrence makes a distinction between symbolic frames on the one hand, and rhetorical-discursive frames on the other. With the latter, she refers to schemes that manifest themselves "at the verbal surface of the text" and order the experience of reality via a specific type of "phrasing" (e.g. the phrasing of events in a journalistic way). The former should not necessarily influence the manner in which an experience is phrased but give first and foremost a wider significance to it by suggesting a link to an external narrative structure (e.g. myth). The term 'style' is applied as a collective noun for both sorts of schemes.

[17] Lawrence 1981, 10.

lives in a discourse that resembles the rhetoric used in newspapers or by means of the lofty expressions that we may recognise from old Irish myths. In other episodes, he gives form to his characters' experiences in a series of romantic clichés or in a way that recalls medieval mystical works. Furthermore, Joyce also brings variety in the symbolic schemes that add an extra layer of meaning to the reality evoked in the novel. Via several strategies, he suggests, for instance, a constant parallel between the world and the characters he describes and the universe and the figures which got shape in Homer's *Odyssey*. *Ulysses* invites its readers to look at, think about and interpret the events that Leopold, Molly and Stephen experience 'in relation to' and 'through the lens of' the ancient Greek epic.[18] Another recurring symbolic scheme is shaped by the tragic worlds of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Joyce especially encourages his readers, via explicit and implicit references, to read the behaviour of Stephen Dedalus in the novel in connection to the actions of the plays' protagonists. Yet another is formed by the universe of Dante's *Comedia* which serves as a filter through which the readers are recurrently stimulated to visualise the city-descriptions of Dublin.[19] And so on. *Ulysses*, we could say, thus continuously confronts its readers with new stylistic situations, be it a new rhetorical-discursive scheme or symbolic structure, of which each represents and gives meaning to reality in a different way than the others. Lawrence characterises *Ulysses*, therefore, as an "encyclopaedia of possible styles", seeing the novel as "a compendium of rhetorical-discursive and symbolic organizations of the world".[20]

For a long time, this mixture of styles was simply considered as a form of aesthetic experiment typical of the modernist period in which Joyce wrote. Although Lawrence recognises the importance of this cultural context, she cogently argues that the stylistic variations can also be seen as Joyce's manner to "express and imitate the wealth of life". By making use of a diverse set of rhetorical and symbolical frames, Joyce illustrates that there can be no absolute "way of filtering and ordering experience", no ultimate manner "to represent reality".[21] Life – the topic around which the entire novel revolves – is so pluri-significant, so varied in meanings, he suggests, that it is impossible for a writer to fit it into just one, specific frame of representation; the topic has that many sides and aspects that there is not one stylistic scheme that is open and flexible enough to encompass it in its totality. To display the wealth of life within a literary work, an author thus needs a large compendium of stylistic possibilities, a combination of frames that

[18] Levine 2004, 123 remarks that the suggestion that each episode has a Homeric counterpart sets "a whole interpretative machinery into play".

[19] Lawrence 1981, 109; 158. A general overview of Joyce's engagement with mythology and the literary tradition is offered by Goldberg 1961 and Knowlton 1998.

[20] Lawrence 1981, 11.

[21] Lawrence 1981, 23.

would as individual and separate schemes have been "insufficient" to comprise the world in all its diversity. Rather than a modernist experiment, the stylistic variety, Lawrence states, simulates the richness of life and the multifariousness of experiences in reality.[22]

Joyce ingeniously underlines the "insufficiency" of the individual frames, as such, by questioning and destabilizing them all the time as appropriate "modes of representation". One of the examples Lawrence gives of this phenomenon is *Ulysses*' remarkable way of applying the Homeric symbolic scheme mentioned above. In her analysis of this frame, she seems to react implicitly against the claims T.S. Eliot made in his essay 'Ulysses, Order and Myth'. Eliot considered the correspondences to the *Odyssey* which Joyce evokes "as a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy" inherent to life.[23] Homer's epic recounts a story about a hero searching his way back home, which might – on a metaphorical level – be interpreted in terms of an identity quest. It may be seen as a poem about a man trying to look for order and stability in his life (like so many others), though not being afraid of the multiple challenges he has to face on the path leading there. By implying that Leopold, Molly and Stephen have an affinity with the heroes in the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, as Kiberd has stated, would want to suggest that also the lives of ordinary (wo)men, despite its chaos and banality, make sense, being a journey progressing towards a destination.[24]

Although she does not reject this line of thinking, Lawrence wonders whether the Homeric symbolic scheme exclusively has the "transcendent function" Kiberd ascribed to it (transcendent in the sense that it would cause the world and figures depicted in the novel to exceed the everyday banality). She agrees that the characterisation of Leopold, Molly and Stephen is 'Homerically coloured' and that they are implied to play a sort of epically and heroically charged role in modern Dublin. But she points to the continuous tension between the actions these three characters undertake and the Homeric scheme through which we are invited to look at them. Molly Bloom is, from the start, framed as a Penelope-like figure. The setting of her plotline is her house, where she is said to spend most of the time in bed (cf. the important function of this piece of furniture in the last book of the *Odyssey*). Yet, she is not waiting there for her husband Leopold, eagerly hoping for his quick return. In the bedroom, she receives her lover with whom she is having an affair. Leopold is represented as a second Odysseus, who behaves himself, however, far

[22] Lawrence 1981, 59. Staten 2004, 178 states that Joyce "moves beyond the referential function of language to the level of imitative form (...). Whereas literary mimesis predominantly exploits the semantic and referential functions of language, which call into play the arbitrary relations among signifier, signified and referent, imitative form attempts to embody or mime what is represented".

[23] Eliot 1923. See also Kershner 2014, 175 on this essay.

[24] Kiberd 2009, 280 that has built further on Eliot's ideas.

from heroically. He has fled his house because he knows his wife is going to have a visit from her lover. His journey through Dublin, moreover, often leads him to quite pitiful figures about whom he feels rather indifferently (not being challenged or enriched by the people whom he encounters, like Odysseus). Stephen lacks the decisiveness of the Homeric Telemachus, who was resolute to find his father. He wanders around the city without a clear goal or destination. This causes Lawrence to conclude that there is, at several points in the novel, a "parodic discrepancy" between the suggested Homeric filter and the characterisation of Leopold, Molly and Stephen.[25] Their behaviour does not match the morals and virtues of their ancient counterparts, which often has a somewhat absurd but comic effect. By producing this "discrepancy", Lawrence argues, Joyce questions, to a certain extent, the Homeric scheme as an appropriate mode of representation. The parallels with the characters from the *Odyssey* do not give an unequivocal, wider significance to Leopold's, Molly's and Stephen's experiences, but rather create a state of "friction" and "disruption". The clear trajectory that Homer's epic sets out for its heroes, the route to stability, cannot be reconciled with or harmoniously projected onto the paths taken by Joyce's characters, in a world full of randomness, triviality, unexpected turns and lack of destiny. The (mythological) order and regularity that Homer imposed on a man's life, so Joyce recurrently suggests, cannot be adopted to the chaotic, modern and everyday space and its three protagonists evoked by his novel.[26]

Something similar goes for the various set of rhetorical-discursive frames used in *Ulysses*. According to Lawrence, Joyce deliberately creates throughout the chapters strong "discrepancies between language and the reality it seeks to describe",[27] between the discursive schemes and the experience to which they give shape. Near the end of the Sirens-episode, for instance, he adopts a style that recalls "nineteenth century lyricism" and the "pretensions" ascribed to "fine writing" typical of that period.[28] But he applies this style to depict the actions and paraphrase the stories from a 'bunch of drunken lads' in the pub, so using it in an unsuitable narrative context. The Cyclops-episode stages several characters telling about and celebrating Irish society and the country's notorious historical past. Yet, it does this via a range of clichés about Ireland, via "a parody of the various forms of Irish propaganda – a language that romanticises and simplifies the Irish past and present".[29] In 'Aeolus', Joyce presents the events occurring in Dublin at the 16th

[25] Lawrence 1981, 132.

[26] Lawrence 1981, 133.

[27] Lawrence 1981, 171. Lawrence's analysis is, of course, only one way to look at Joyce's engagement with the *Odyssey*. An overview of other possible interpretations of the Homeric filter can be found in Iser 1998 and Kershner 2014, 171-178.

[28] Lawrence 1981, 99.

[29] Lawrence 1981, 103.

of June in a form that resembles a newspaper's. But he seems to mock the one-sidedness in subject and rhetoric that can be observed in this type of publications, day-to-day reporting on the same kinds of events and adopting the same sorts of phrasings. 'Aeolus' describes actions that appear to be very similar to one another and wittingly uses the same expressions over and over again, thereby gradually reducing them to "clichés", to 'empty rhetorical shells' without actual meaning.[30] Whatever discursive scheme Joyce implements, Lawrence states, the result is, in a sense, almost always "a gap between language and reality", a tension between the form of display and what the novel displays.[31]

Ulysses thus provides a compendium of possible rhetorical and symbolic modes of ordering experience in a literary work, yet none of them seems to 'function as it should be'. Joyce constantly produces discrepancies between his styles and the world to which they give form and meaning. According to Lawrence, he underlines thereby the insufficiency of the individual modes of representation to evoke life in all its wealth. Reality is so many-sided that there is not one style able to encompass all its aspects without risking a "disruption of its conventions" and "natural functioning".[32] The multiple stylistically parodic and clichéd passages in *Ulysses* suggest that every frame of representation has its "limits". None of the traditional schemes can embrace and impose an unequivocal order on the chaotic whole that life is.[33] By drawing the attention to the styles' 'restrictions', the novel accentuates the pluri-significance and diversity of reality. The "wealth of life", *Ulysses* makes clear, "exceeds literature's representation of it".[34]

In his extensive study of Martial's work, *The World of the Epigram*, William Fitzgerald remarks that the literary form of the epigram collection lends itself relatively well to the author's encyclopaedic ambitions. It allows for a "diversity" and "heterogeneity" which can barely be evoked within other literary genres.[35] The sequence of brief poetic fragments enables Martial to give snapshots of reality and treat a wide range of subjects in the space of a few codex pages. An epigram on the heroic victories of the emperor appears alongside a poem mourning the death of a young boy. A complaint on his lack of sexual activity is placed next to a reflection upon what it means to be a writer in Rome

[30] Lawrence 1981, 68.

[31] Lawrence 1981, 99.

[32] Lawrence 1981, 131.

[33] Lawrence 1981, 144. When she speaks about stylistic 'limitations', she does not do so in a pejorative sense. She especially means that the stylistic frames have lost their original connotations and functions, and do not work in the same way as they once did. She shows that the world Joyce wants the frames to describe is different from and collides with the reality they usually portrayed, which results in parodic discrepancies in the novel.

[34] Lawrence 1981, 198.

[35] Fitzgerald 2007, 5.

within the second half of the first century. A report on a doctor's visit stands near a handful of verses in which a man's contacts with a prostitute are depicted. And so on. The constant variation of topics, Fitzgerald convincingly argues, seemingly mimics the miscellany of the real Roman word that Martial pretends to portray in the *Epigrams*.[36] It mirrors the many-sidedness of life and the diverse impulses one can get when walking through the streets of the city, full of chaos and unexpected encounters.

Fitzgerald's analysis only defines the *Epigrams*' 'diversity and heterogeneity' in terms of subject matter (i.e. the representation of the wealth of life is only examined in light of the variation of topics). His study does not take into account other types of variation for which the literary form of the epigram collection allows as well. Some scholars, for example, have pointed to the metrical variety within Martial's work, not only containing poems in elegiac distich and hendecasyllables but also in choliambics, hexameters, iambic senarii and sotadics.[37] Others have indicated that the collection exhibits a remarkably large diversity on a 'stylistic level' and provides the readers with a heterogeneous set of 'rhetorical-discursive' and 'symbolic frames'.[38] Martial recurrently applies strategies to suggest parallels between scenes he describes and episodes from other works of the literary tradition. Thereby, he invites us to read, evaluate and give meaning to the behaviour of his characters, the setting he evokes, etc. in some kind of relationship with another text (serving as a sort of filter, a symbolic frame, that potentially adds an extra layer of meaning). Rimell, for instance, has cogently illustrated how Martial encourages his readers to interpret his move from Rome to Spain which he describes in the last book and to which he dedicates a large epigrammatic cycle in connection to Ovid's notion of exile and exile-poetry.[39] At other occasions, the collection does not evoke parallels with concrete texts of the literary traditions but rather recalls certain types of discourse and rhetoric. As Niklas Holzberg has maintained, some (cycles of) poems in Martial's work seem to be very epic in tone, while others use words and expressions typical of Roman panegyric or declamation (to give just a few examples).[40]

A question that may be asked is how the variety on a stylistic level fits within Martial's broader literary project. What is the relationship between the heterogeneity of rhetorical and symbolic frames and the remarkable diversity in subject matter to which Fitzgerald

[36] Fitzgerald 2007, 2-8. In these pages, he introduces the idea of "juxtaposition" that he will keep on exploring (explicitly or implicitly) in the remainder of his monograph. By placing a diverse set of scenes next to one another, Martial "compresses what is heterogeneous into a close proximity" (5).

[37] See Sullivan 1991, 227 for a brief overview and further bibliography on this topic.

[38] I use here the terms style, rhetorical-discursive and symbolic frame in the same sense as Karen Lawrence in her analysis of *Ulysses*.

[39] Rimell 2008, 190-200.

[40] Holzberg 2012, 86-109.

has pointed? Is there an indication that the stylistic variation in the *Epigrams* fulfils a complementary function to the variation in topic? Does it, in other words, also help Martial somehow to find a way to represent the wealth of life within the strictly regulated universe that a text is? Holzberg remarks that much (descriptive) research still needs to be done with regard to the variety of rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes in the *Epigrams*. Although a few studies have appeared on this topic, they mostly either discuss stylistic variety within one individual book or concentrate on a specific type of rhetoric or symbolic frame that turns up over the entire collection.[41] We still "need a commentary" ("*benötigen (…) einen Kommentar*") that gives a complete overview of the heterogeneity on a rhetorical and symbolic level.[42] This paragraph will obviously not be able to fill this gap and does not claim to be exhaustive in its treatment of stylistic variety. It will only briefly discuss three different schemes, of which some have already (preliminarily) been analysed in scholarship: the 'epic/Vergilian', the 'sacral' and the 'exemplary' frame. Instead of examining these three frames into detail, I particularly aim to look for some general characteristics in Martial's adoption of these schemes in the formation of the experiences he wants to describe in his work and consequently reflect upon the function of the stylistic variety within his all-inclusive epigrammatic project.

The Epic/Vergilian Frame (Book 1-12)

A frame which has recently received much attention can be labelled as the 'Vergilian' scheme. Scholars as Niklas Holzberg, Sam Hayes and Francesca Sapsford have indicated that, at several points, the stylistic representation in Martial's collection seems to be coloured by the *Aeneid*.[43] This does not only mean that some poems in the *Epigrams* give form to an everyday life scene in a rhetoric, a discourse, that somehow resembles Vergil's epic's. It also entails that Martial uses the *Aeneid* as an overall symbolic scheme within his work. The epigram collection consists of twelve books, not coincidentally an 'epic number'. Martial uses several strategies to invite his readers to interpret each of his books in relation to the corresponding book in the *Aeneid*. As I will illustrate below, an epigrammatic cycle in the fourth book, for example, recounts a love story between a man and a woman of which the development runs parallel with the Dido-and-Aeneas-episode

[41] E.g. Sullivan 1991, 107-110; Sapsford 2012, 240-248; Hinds 2007; Williams 2006; Merli 2006.

[42] Holzberg 2012, 97.

[43] Hayes 2016, 38 and especially Sapsford 2012 and Holzberg 2004; 2012 offer a reading of the *Epigrams* as an epic in 12 books akin to Vergil's *Aeneid*. Holzberg 2012, 135-150 has suggested that Martial's collection is composed as an epic *Dodekalog* and can be divided in four structural units of three books. Another approach to Martial's interaction with the *Aeneid* has been developed by Peruccio e.a. 2007, 138-147, and Neger 2012, 281-292, who analyse the epigrams that explicitly reflect upon the work's relation to Vergil.

in Vergil's epic (the woman, in the end, even considers to commit suicide). The sixth book contains multiple poems revolving around death and playing with the notion of *katabasis*, which corresponds to Aeneas' journey to the underworld. Two important cycles in book 8 are respectively dedicated to hospitality and rituality, which brings to mind the scenes about king Evander. A recurring theme in book 9 is about 'boys growing into men' (or failing to do so) and recalls the storyline about Nisus and Euryalus.[44] By creating these kinds of parallels, Martial suggests a close entanglement of his twelve-book volume of epigrams and Vergil's twelve-book epic. He encourages his readers, thereby, to think about, interpret and give meaning to the everyday world he depicts in the *Epigrams* in relation to and through the symbolic lens of the *Aeneid*.

What does the choice of Vergil's epic as an overall symbolic scheme imply about Martial's epigrammatic project? A possible answer to this question has been provided by Rimell. She proposes that the collection's engagement with the *Aeneid* might be a strategy to express its high literary aspirations. Martial is "fond of stressing that many tiny poems can make a big book (...) and that his main twelve-book corpus (...) can rival the *Aeneid*". Another explanation for this choice might be that it underlines the inclusive ambitions of the *Epigrams* and the challenge to find a way "to cram everything" in this work. As several scholars have remarked, the *Aeneid* is a text that tends to totality. The epic seeks to encompass the entire cosmos and the Roman imperium that it comprises.[45] Within the span of twelve books, it ingeniously interweaves the heavenly and earthly realms, the mythological and the historical, the past and the present.[46] The *Aeneid* proposes an apparently coherent and balanced order in which all aspects of cosmos and empire are (allegedly) included. With the correspondences to Vergil's epic, Martial suggests a resemblance with its programme. His collection of epigrams similarly wants to offer a literary representation of Rome, both the 'city' and the 'world' (*urbs* and *orbs*), that encompasses its (everyday) reality in all its richness, many-sidedness and diversity.

What is the exact relationship between the reality described in the *Epigrams* and the Vergilian filter through which we are invited to look at it? What does Martial imply with the symbolic scheme about the world he represents? In what follows, this issue will be discussed by means of a concise analysis of the fourth and fifth book. In *Aeneid* 5, the

[44] A thorough study of the correspondences between the *Aeneid* and the *Epigrams* is still missing. Sapsford 2012, 241-248 offers a detailed study of *Aeneid* 9 and *Epigrams* 9, while Hayes 2016, 111-117 provides some suggestions on the seventh book. In the appendix to this chapter, I will briefly list some other parallels that could be noticed between both works.

[45] Cf. Hardie 1986; Lovatt 2005, 84-87.

[46] Hardie 1986, 362 gives the example of the ekphrasis of Vergil's Shield: "Virgil, in his Shield, presents the universe in its most complete, quadripartite anatomy but in a form that closely integrates the schematic sketch of the universe with the events and inhabitants that occupy the several divisions of it".

Trojans return to Sicily, where Aeneas organises funeral games in honour of his deceased father, Anchises. He sets up a boat race, a foot race, a boxing match and an archery contest. Helen Lovatt considers the *ludi*-episode in the epic as a metaphorical reflection upon how Roman society should be ordered. In Antiquity, games served as a "paradigm of the functioning of society" and as a "micro-cosmos" in which the mutual relationship between citizen and ruler, and between the citizens themselves could be negotiated and (re)defined.[47] Vergil adopts this social function of the games by representing the spectacles in honour of Anchises as an expression of the relationship between Aeneas and the people he is leading to Italy. Vergil turns the Trojan hero into the master of ceremonies who "keeps firm control of the proceedings". The audience watching the games is portrayed "as rigorously ordered", "disciplined" and "standing united behind their leader".[48] Vergil, so Lovatt maintains, sends thereby a strong message to his readers and encourages them to interpret and give shape to the relations within Augustan society in the terms formulated in the epic.[49]

The games in the *Aeneid* inform the representation of the world in the *Epigrams*. Martial chooses in the fifth book to reflect upon the organization of Roman society in a way that brings Vergil's epic to mind. An important cycle in book 5 is dedicated to the behaviour of the audience watching a performance or spectacle (5.14: *ludos*) in the theatre. In these epigrams, the emperor Domitian is staged as a sort of non-mythological version of a master of ceremonies.[50] He is suggested to use the context of the theatre to delineate the relationship between the different social layers in Roman society (5.8):

> Edictum domini deique nostri,
> quo subsellia certiora fiunt
> et puros eques ordines recepit.

The edict to which the epigram refers, is the Roscian Law, which was already introduced in 67 BC but brought back into operation by Domitian around 90 AD. The Law assigned fourteen rows in Roman theatres to members of the Equestrian class, right behind the four rows of the senators.[51] By re-installing it, Domitian provides a better definition of the

[47] Lovatt 2005, 86.

[48] Lovatt 2005, 88.

[49] Lovatt 2005, 87 remarks, for instance, about the ship race: "The audience on the shore are not only united in their response to the events of the ship race but they also identify with the participants in the boats, and the readers identify with the internal audiences. Underlying this presentation of the spectacle of the ship race as inclusive and including, transforming the watching Sicilians into Romans, the reading Romans into Augustans, is the assumption that Virgil's audience are unanimous in their response. This is the ultimate vision of poetic control".

[50] For a recent discussion of the role of Domitian in the epigram collection, see Nauta 2002, 327-412; Spisak 2007, 61-68; Holzberg 2012, 63-71; Howell 2009, 60-70; Henriksén 2002; and Lorenz 2002.

[51] Shackleton Bailey 1993, 361.

rights and privileges of each part of Roman society and a clearer demarcation of the equestrian order (*puros eques ordines recepit*). In the following lines of the poem, the emperor is told to be praised for the edict by a man named Phasis, who alleges to be grateful because it is now not about to happen anymore that he would be forced to sit in the midst of the crowd (*turba non premimur, nec inquinamur*). Phasis claims that the measures taken by Domitian do not only allow him to sit more comfortably (*commodius licet sedere*) but also impose a social organization that causes the 'dignity of the knights' to be restored (*nunc est reddita dignitas equestris*).

Until line 10, the poem, and in particular Phasis' intervention, reads like a celebration and confirmation of the social order installed by the edict. Yet, as usual in the *Epigrams*, the sting is in the tail:

> haec et talia dum refert supinus,
> illas purpureas et arrogantes
> iussit surgere Leitus lacernas.

Leitus, one of the other spectators in the equestrian section, demands Phasis to get up and to go sit somewhere else. The final verses of the poem imply that Phasis only pretended to be a knight (e.g. by wearing a *purpureas lacernas*) and could, therefore, not rightly claim a seat in one of the fourteen equestrian rows. His praise of the edict is false and only meant to circumvent the more rigorous social organization which it enforces.

The other spectacle poems in the fifth book revolve around the same issue and give an account of the tricks of men trying to take a place in the theatre to which their social status gives them no right.[52] The audience members seem not to accept the hierarchy installed by the Roscian law and attempt to find a manner to disobey the order imposed by Domitian, the master of ceremony. The public's behaviour causes a remarkable 'discrepancy' between Martial's representation of the world and the Vergilian symbolic scheme through which we are invited to look at this representation. The opportunism of the audience does not match the loyalty, harmony and discipline ascribed to the Trojan and Sicilian people watching the spectacles in *Aeneid* 5. The artificial environment of the theatre in Martial's collection does, despite Domitian's edict, not produce the social unity that we do find in the epic counterpart in relation to which we are encouraged to read the epigrammatic cycle (in the *Epigrams*, the disorder, the *turba*, seems to persist).[53]

A similar discrepancy between the representation of the world in the *Epigrams* and the Vergilian symbolic scheme can be observed in the fourth book.[54] *Epigrams* 4 contains

[52] Cf. *Epigrams* 5.8; 5.14; 5.23; 5.27; 5.35. 5.38; 5.41. For a general discussion of the fifth book, see Garthwaite 1998 and Holzberg 2012, 68-70.

[53] I already mentioned the term *turba* as an indicator of chaos in the introduction.

[54] For elaborations upon the compositional structure of the fourth book, see Greenwood 1998; Lorenz 2004.

several cycles that correspond to important themes and plotlines in the Dido-and-Aeneas-episode in the *Aeneid*. One cycle, for example, revolves around Carthage and the Punic army, while another is about Cleopatra and Marc Antony with whom Vergil often implicitly compares and/or contrasts the protagonists of his fourth book.[55] Yet another cycle – on which the focus will lay in the following analysis – concerns love, marriage and the multiple challenges a relationship brings with. The development in this cycle, going from romance to troubled marriage, runs parallel with the love drama between the Trojan hero and the Carthage queen in the *Aeneid*.

The first epigram in the book dedicated to love is 4.13. There, Martial tells about the marriage of Pudens, one of his dearest friends:

> Claudia, Rufe, meo nubit Peregrina Pudenti:
> macte esto taedis, o Hymenaee, tuis.
> tam bene rara suo miscentur cinnama nardo,
> Massica Theseis tam bene vina favis.
> nec melius teneris iunguntur vitibus ulmi,
> nec plus lotos aquas, litora myrtus amat.

As these opening verses suggest, the tone of the poem is quite hymnal. Martial uses a series of comparisons to indicate that Pudens and his bride are a pair so well-matched. No more apt, he says, 'is the joining of elms with tender vines', nor does the 'lotus more love the waters or the myrtle the shore'. He asks Concordia therefore to bless the newly-wed couple and, naughty as he is, demands her to 'dwell always around in their bed' as well (*candida, perpetuo reside, Concordia, lecto*). Overall, the epigram reads like a celebration of the love between Pudens and Claudia Peregrina (whose *cognomen* means 'foreign' or 'exotic', which is perhaps no coincidence in a book that seems to exhibit several correspondences to Vergil's episode on the queen of Carthage).

The optimistic sounds about love and marriage in 4.13, however, do not last. Other poems in the cycle recount relational problems between couples. The love pairs are told to quarrel about a wide range of issues, going from financial concerns to the lack of sex.[56] Although these objects of dispute are much more banal than the matters on which Aeneas and Dido disagree, we may notice a development in the fourth book of the *Epigrams* that somehow resembles the progression of the love affair in the *Aeneid*. The love cycle, not surprisingly, ends with a poem revolving around the suicidal plans of a recently married woman.

In *Epigrams* 4.75, we encounter a woman called Nigrina, a name that pertains both to exoticism and death. She is told to have been wondering about what the best manner

[55] For more information about these cycles and their relation to the *Aeneid*, see the appendix to this chapter.
[56] E.g. 4.25; 4.38.

would be to prove her husband her unconditional love. Martial ends the epigram with the following advice:

> arserit Euhadne flammis iniecta mariti,
> nec minor Alcestin fama sub astra ferat:
> tu melius: certo meruisti pignore vitae
> ut tibi non esset morte probandus amor.

Martial recognises the courage of women like Evadne or Alcestis, yet there is no need, he says, for Nigrina to demonstrate her love by suicide (*ut tibi non esset morte probandus amor*). The 'pledge she gave in lifetime', *certo...pignore vitae*, is more than sufficient. The latter phrase points to her wedding vows, but the financially connotated term *pignus* also refers to the wealth of her father, which she was previously said to have brought in the marriage (*te patrios miscere iuvat cum coniuge census*).[57]

By discouraging Nigrina to commit suicide, Martial, in the end, deviates from the *Aeneid*-like development he initiated at the beginning of the love cycle. He implicitly dissuades his character to play and conform herself to the role that the Vergilian symbolic scheme through which the readers have been invited to read the fourth book would let them expect her to take up. In the world of *Epigrams* 4, behaviour that in other stories, like in the *Aeneid* or the Greek tragedies, has been considered as meaningful seems to have lost its value. Love should not be demonstrated by death. A dowry and a rich father, Martial implies, suffice to prove your dedication to your husband.[58] The deviation from the course of the Dido-episode produces a kind of 'friction' in the fourth book that resembles the tension in the fifth. In both cases, Martial creates a 'gap' between the reality represented in the *Epigrams* and the symbolic scheme that lays over it as a filter through which we are obliged to interpret it.[59]

In his brief analysis of the use of symbolic frames in the *Epigrams,* in particular in the seventh book, Hayes suggests that these kinds of schemes may be seen as a strategy to pull the ordinary into the transcendent structure of a literary work. By implying correspondences to a text like the *Aeneid*, Martial would give the world he describes a mythological glance and render everyday life as a topic to be compatible with the high

[57] Martial often defines the social world that he constructs in the *Epigrams* in financial terms. More than on friendship, the relations between people depend on their capital and property. See Rimell 2008, 94-139; Fitzgerald 2007, 139-145.

[58] This corresponds to the interpretation offered by Neger 2012, that has analysed the poems in which Martial explicitly reflects upon his relation to Vergil. She has shown that Martial often alleges to be incapable of writing an 'epic like the *Aeneid*' because of financial reasons (there is no Maecenas anymore). In book 4, the deviation from the Vergilian story-development is caused by the economic reality lying behind marriage.

[59] Sapsford 2012, 247 comes to a similar conclusion in her analysis of *Epigrams* 9, also seeing a contrast between the behaviour of Martial's characters and their counterparts in *Aeneid* 9.

literary pretensions of a volume of poetry.[60] Given the tensions described above, however, I wonder whether we should not also consider approaching this issue the other way around. The discrepancies between reality and symbolic frame might be a technique to question both the necessity to transcend ordinary life and the Vergilian scheme's capacity to do so. The characters in *Epigrams* 4 and 5 do not (want to) play the part that the correspondences to figures in the *Aeneid* imply them to play, refusing to obey the social hierarchy imposed by a master of ceremony or to demonstrate love by death. They do not seem to aspire that their behaviour gets a 'wider significance' which would turn them into heroes in ordinary reality. Martial's characters live from day to day in a chaotic world that does not conform itself to the order of the cosmos and empire proposed by Vergil. Every time we are invited to look at the reality depicted in the *Epigrams* through the lens of the *Aeneid*, we appear to become more aware of its (intriguing) triviality and ugliness, seeing the (parodic) gap between the represented world and the symbolic scheme through which we are somehow expected to give meaning to it.

The Sacral, Exalted Frame of Discourse (Book 8 and 9)

A rhetorical scheme to which Martial himself draws attention is the sacral, exalted frame of discourse. He explicitly announces the adoption of a lofty and somewhat religiously coloured rhetoric in the prose preface to and opening poem of *Epigrams* 8. He wants this book to revolve around devotion (*occasione pietatis*) and to be so exalted in nature that it can only be entered by readers 'purified by religious lustration' (*non nisi religiosa purificatione lustratos accedere*).[61] In the poem immediately following the preface, he claims that this ambition requires a loftier style than he is used to. He demands his book, therefore, to learn to speak with a more 'venerable tongue' (8.1: *disce verecundo sanctius ore loqui*).[62]

Epigrams 8 contains multiple poems celebrating the protection of Rome by gods, praising the measures taken by the (god-like) Domitian or describing religious

[60] Hayes 2016, 122-123. His analysis especially concentrates on the symbolic schemes through which Martial encourages his readers to interpret some poems dedicated to the emperor Domitian in the beginning of book 7. The panegyric tone of these epigrams may explain why Hayes sees a natural fusion between myth and reality in the *Epigrams.*

[61] Hayes 2016, 163: "The preface thus outlines the general aim of the book: to act as a sacred space in which the epigram's lascivious voice (so triumphantly and brazenly announced in the first two prefaces) is restrained to fit the grand majesty of the emperor to whom the book is dedicated". For an extensive discussion of the relation between the preface and the entire book, see Hayes 2016, 163-172; Johannsen 2006, 87-98.

[62] Schöffel 2002, 79 sees this poem as an imitation of inscriptions at religious sites.

festivities.[63] These subjects perfectly lend themselves to the '*sanctius*' manner of speaking announced in the preface and 8.1. The second poem, for instance, is dedicated to Janus, who is asked to keep on prolonging Domitian's life into eternity.[64] It takes a solemn tone which is compatible with its exalted topic. Janus is addressed in the first verse as the '*fastorum genitor parensque*'. He should, moreover, 'promise the Lord and God of the world four times the Pylian [the old Greek king Nestor's] length of days' (*terrarum domino deoque rerum / promisit Pyliam quarter senectam*). A similar example is the third last epigram of the book (8.80):

> Sanctorum nobis miracula reddis avorum
> nec pateris, Caesar, saecula cana mori,
> cum veteres Latiae ritus renovantur harenae
> et pugnat virtus simpliciore manu.
> sic priscis servatur honos te praeside templis
> et Casa tam culto sub Iove numen habet;
> sic nova dum condis, revocas, Auguste, priora:
> debenture quae sunt quaeque fuere tibi.

Martial pictures Domitian as a figure reconciling past and present. The emperor is declaredly capable of bringing back the 'wonders of the venerable forebears', not allowing the ancient epochs to die. He revokes the old while founding the new and makes sure that the antique temples keep their honours.[65] Once more, Martial uses a quite exalted and religiously inspired vocabulary which strongly contrasts with the rude terms he sometimes applied in earlier books (the poem speaks about the *sanctorum miracula avorum*, the *veteres Latiae ritus harenae*; the *honos* and *culto*, etc.). The equilibrium between past and present times that Domitian has declaredly created, moreover, is implied and mirrored by a strikingly well-balanced poetic form (e.g. the embracing *hyperbata* in lines 1 and 5; the golden verse structure in 3; the parallelisms in the two final lines).[66]

Although the devotionally charged poems make up a large part of *Epigrams* 8, the book also includes other, less exalted types of epigrams. In the prose preface, Martial admits that he could not resist the temptation to create some variation by 'the admixture of jest' (*iocorum mixtura variare*). He has incorporated poems that are more in line with those

[63] Given the correspondences to Vergil's *Aeneid*, this thematic choice is, of course, hardly surprising. The eighth book of the *Aeneid* revolves around the rituals executed by the Greek king Evander. For more information, see the appendix to this chapter.

[64] Schöffel 2002, 78 has argued that this poem seems to be the 'real' opening poem of the book (instead of 8.1 that thematically corresponds to the preface). He has pointed out Martial's deliberate blurring of the boundaries between preface and poetry book.

[65] Henriksén 2002 discusses the image of Domitian as a new 'August' (*Auguste*), who fluctuates between past and present.

[66] Other examples of this type of poems are 8.4; 8.8; 8.11; 8.15; 8.21; 8.36; 8.39; 8.49; 8.65; 8.78; 8.82.

offered in the previous books, revolving around topics such as ugliness, physical deformities, jealousy, revenge and financial problems. The combination of these kinds of poems and the more exalted ones causes the eighth book to be a strange mix which constantly obliges the readers to jump from high religious spheres to the lowest levels of society and back again.

Interestingly, Martial also mixes sometimes the lofty rhetoric he uses in epigrams like 8.2 and 8.80 with the lowbrow subjects treated in the poems he integrates by way of jest (or vice versa: mixing a highbrow topic with a lowbrow discourse). *Epigrams* 8.55, for example, opens with the following lines: *Temporibus nostris aetas cum cedat avorum / creverit et maior cum duce Roma suo*. We recognise in these verses the exalted discourse that we already know from other poems in the book, like 8.2 and 8.80, speaking about the *temporibus nostris* and the *aetas avorum*. We expect to get another celebration of Domitian and the godly inspired measures he has taken to improve life in Rome. Martial, however, adopts the lofty rhetoric in the remainder of 8.55 to complain about the stinginess of the patron addressed in the poem. His patron declaredly deplores all the time that 'sacred Maro's genius is lacking and that no man sounds of wars with so mighty a trumpet' (*ingenium sacri miraris desse Maronis / nec quemquam tanta bella sonare tuba*). But he does not seem to understand that the solution is simple: if his patron 'wants him to be a new Vergil', Martial states, 'he should offer the gifts of a Maecenas' (*ergo ero Vergilius, si munera Maecenatis / des mihi*). Expressions like *ingenium sacri Maronis* and *munera dare* recall the venerable manner of speaking announced in the prose preface and applied elsewhere in the book. But they make a strange combination with the rather lowbrow subject of the epigram, i.e. Martial's demand of more money.[67]

A complementary example can be found at the start of *Epigrams* 9. This book, at least in the beginning, continues to evoke the religious, venerable sphere that dominated the eighth. It contains several panegyric poems celebrating the emperor Domitian and the support of the Olympic gods on which his reign has been built. One of the poems (9.3) praises the temples and monuments in honour of the gods Domitian has demanded to construct to thank them for their favours:

> Quantum iam superis, Caesar, caeloque dedisti
> si repetas et si creditor esse velis,
> grandis in aetherio licet auctio fiat Olympo
> coganturque dei vendere quidquid habent,
> conturbabit Atlans et non erit uncia tota
> decidat tecum qua pater ipse deum.
> pro Capitolinis quid enim tibi solvere templis,
> quid pro Tarpeiae frondis honore potest?

[67] Similar examples can be found in 8.3; 8.6; 8.14; 8.28; 8.33; 8.45; 8.49; 8.50; 8.64; 8.81.

(...)
expectes et sustineas, Auguste, necesse est:
nam tibi quo solvat non habet arca Iovis.

It is not the first time in the collection that Martial pays tribute to religious architectural projects initiated by Domitian. What makes this epigram so remarkable is the choice of discourse. It does not apply the *sanctius* way of speaking he has developed in the eighth book (and also used, for instance, in 9.1). It adopts a financially coloured rhetoric that does normally not turn up in this type of poems. Martial wonders what would happen if Domitian would decide to be the *creditor* of the Olympians. They would be obliged to hold a *grandis auctio,* a grand auction, and sell everything what they possess, *vendere quidquid habent*. Jupiter would not have a full twelfth, the *tota uncia*, anymore and would not know how to pay his debts, *solvere*, since the supplies preserved in his *arca* would be inadequate. This economic phrasing does not match the venerable and exalted topic of the poem, thereby producing a parodic state of friction between rhetoric and what it should express.

In the eighth and the beginning of the ninth book, we could say, Martial deliberately mixes sometimes highbrow rhetoric with lowbrow topics and vice versa. The sacral and exalted discursive scheme announced in the prose preface and 8.1 may work very well within the context of panegyric poems in honour of Domitian and the gods. Yet, the incorporation of epigrams in which rhetoric and subject are in harmony renders the readers extra sensitive to those where they can see a tension between what is displayed and the form of display. In epigrams like 8.55 and 9.3, Martial creates a sort of 'disruption of the natural functioning' of the discourses he applies by adopting them within contexts that seem rather unfit for their use. This causes there to be, at several points in *Epigrams* 8 and 9, a discrepancy, 'a gap between language and the reality' to which it gives form.

The Exemplary Frame of Discourse (Book 11)

> Rome had its own domestic wonders, however, in the form of its great exemplary individuals, stories about whom were transmitted through successive generations as didactic clichés, neatly packaged in retellable story patterns. These depended for their effectiveness not only upon the memorability of the feats they recorded, but also upon the familiarity generated by repeated contemplation and by the creative application of the tales in each new generation.[68]

The third and last discursive frame discussed in this paragraph can be labelled as the 'exemplary scheme'. It refers to a rhetoric that makes use of examples from the past (*exempla*), which belong to collective memory, to enforce the views it seeks to articulate.

[68] Morello 2018, 302.

As Ruth Morello has recorded, writers like Cicero and Pliny the Younger recurrently mention "domestic wonders", "didactic clichés", while commenting upon a contemporary situation or debate. They – explicitly or implicitly – encourage their readers or listeners to reflect upon the topic of discussion from this exemplary perspective, question their own behaviour or thoughts, and "adapt to emulate or improve upon models of the past".[69] More than just adding an extra argument to the discussion, these *exempla* seem to serve as a strategy to authorise Cicero's and Pliny's opinions and increase the credibility of their statements.

Martial uses this exemplary rhetoric several times throughout the epigram collection yet does so most frequently in the eleventh book. *Epigrams* 11 was Martial's "first post-Domitianic publication, probably appearing in December 96". The opening sequence marks it as a Nerva-book, containing several poems celebrating the new emperor. His reign allegedly feels like a relief after the tense political times under Domitian. It has brought back the freedom and gaiety typical of the (pre-)Augustan period and restored the norms, values and virtues from the past that had gone lost under Domitian's rule. To underline this restoration, Martial recurrently applies a discourse in these epigrams that relates Nerva to "great exemplary individuals" from the past. In 11.5, for instance, he takes us to pre-imperial times, since "the poet imagines summoning up a 'catalogue' of Republican heroes (...) in an epigrammatic *nekuia*, in order to observe their responses to the new emperor":[70]

> Tanta tibi est recti reverentia, Caesar, et aequi
> quanta Numae fuerat: sed Numa pauper erat.
> ardua res haec est, opibus non tradere mores
> et, cum tot Croesos viceris, esse Numam.
> si redeant veteres, ingentia nomina, patres,
> Elysium liceat si vacuare nemus,
> te colet Invictus pro libertate Camillus,
> aurom Fabricius te tribuente volet,
> te duce gaudebit Brutus, tibi Sulla cruentus
> imperium tradet, cum positurus erit,
> et te private cum Caesare Magnus amabit,
> donabit totas et tibi Crassus opes.
> ipse quoque infernis revocatus Ditis ab umbris
> si Cato redddatur, Caesarianus erit.

Nerva's reverence is said to be as great as Numa's, the second king of Rome. If the ancient fathers were allowed to return and empty the Elysian groves, they would, inspired by

[69] Morello 2018, 305.

[70] Morello 2018, 303.

Nerva, handle some things differently. Brutus, for example, would no longer challenge but rejoice in an emperor's leadership, while Cato would become a 'Caesarian'. Sulla would hand over his imperium. Fabricius would even accept the presents he once refused to receive from Pyrrhus during the peace negotiations at Herclea if they would be offered by Nerva.[71]

Although Martial engages himself in this poem with a sort of exemplary discourse with which the readers probably recognise from other works, the way in which he applies this familiar rhetoric is rather unconventional. As Morello has illustrated, the summoning of the exemplary dead in the epigram first of all becomes a sort of "necromantic cartoon, as he empties out the Elysian grove" (*Elysium liceat si vacuare nemus*).[72] Secondly, she says, Martial "sabotages the normal mechanisms of exemplarity". He does not mention, like Pliny and Cicero, the Republican heroes as great examples to which Nerva should adapt in order to emulate and improve these models. The ghosts are said to be willing to change their behaviour in view of Nerva's existence. They "will no longer be the men they once were". The poem, thereby, significantly undermines the traditional conceptualisation of *exempla* as "ethical models perfectly balanced between singularity and repeatability, (...) as they cede to Nerva and thus not only cease to be marvels but simultaneously lose their value as didactic clichés".[73]

Martial continues adopting an exemplary rhetoric after the opening sequence. Multiple poems refer to exemplary figures and stories, apparently as part of a strategy to authorise their claims. One of them, 11.15, goes as follows:

> hic totus volo rideat libellus
> et sit nequior omnibus libellis,
> qui vino madeat nec erubescat
> pingui sordidus esse Cosmiano,
> ludat cum pueris, amet puellas,
> nec per circuitus loquatur illam,
> ex qua nascimur, omnium parentem,
> quam sanctus Numa mentulam vocabat.

[71] Rimell 2008, 162 captures the sphere the poem evokes as follows: "This will be the Republic all over again, with all the celebrity fathers of the old days (Camillus, Fabricius, Brutus, Sulla)".

[72] Morello 2018, 305.

[73] Morello 2018, 306. She does not intend to reject the positive readings of the poem by Nauta 2002, 437 and Nordh 1954, 231 that consider its exemplary catalogue as an affirmation of Nerva's republican spirit. According to her, "the most recent transfer of power is elided in this fantasy tale [i.e. catalogue of Republican heroes willing to adapt themselves] in which one is never quite sure where one is on the historical timeline, and the new emperor is not, after all, the old man who came to power after a murderous end to the previous regime, but the virtuous man of destiny, formed by nature to be a natural recipient of power willingly handed on. So far, then, this epigram does indeed work as a creatively bizarre panegyric" (317).

Martial expresses the ambition to make *Epigrams* 11 naughtier than all his previous books (under Nerva, he is allegedly permitted to really go crazy). Not only should it be soaked in wine and freely play with boys and girls. It must also 'name outright that from which we are born, the universal parent, which holy Numa used to call cock'. Like in 11.5, the mentioning of the second king of Rome can be seen as an application of an exemplary discourse which is conventionally used to validate certain claims. Yet, also here, the 'normal mechanisms of exemplarity' seem to be subverted. The appeal to the 'holy Numa' does not turn up in the respectable context we would expect but serves as a vindication of the adoption of scabrous language and humour. Its appearance before the bathetic punchline *mentulam vocabat*, "suggesting that his blunt word has the best and most moral of precedents", causes the invocation of venerable authority to sound quite hollow.[74] The example of Numa has become nothing more than an 'empty rhetorical shell' that reminds the readers of a certain type of discourse that they know from other works, but which has completely lost its traditional value and meaning.[75]

Epigrams 11 thus adopts an exemplary discursive scheme to represent the new era initiated by Nerva's reign (a period of renewed freedom and gaiety). But Martial, in several ways, disrupts its 'conventions and natural functioning'. There are many poems like 11.15 in this book that recall the exemplary rhetoric with which the readers are familiar from literature of authors like Pliny and Cicero yet render the didactic clichés, the domestic wonder, to have become empty and meaningless. The *exempla* appear within the most scabrous contexts totally unfit for their use, thereby being reduced to nothing more than 'rhetorical topoi', remnants of a discourse that is not working as it should be within Martial's world (of epigrams). Once again, we see a kind of (parodic) discrepancy between language and the reality to which it gives form.

A Saturnalian Encyclopaedia of Styles

This paragraph has illustrated the stylistic variation of the *Epigrams* by means of a brief analysis of three rhetorical-discursive or symbolic schemes: the epic/Vergilian, the sacral-exalted and the exemplary frame. Although there are differences in the way these schemes are applied in the work, a shared feature is that their adoptions have resulted in somewhat parodic discrepancies with the reality to which they give shape and meaning. Several poems in the collection stage characters that do not conform themselves to the role that the Vergilian symbolic filter, through which we are invited to interpret them,

[74] Morello 2018, 312. She also discusses the reminiscences to Lucretius' *De rerum natura* that the line '*ex qua nascimur, omnium parentem*' could bring to mind.

[75] For a discussion of similar disruptions of the conventions of exemplary rhetoric in the eleventh book, see Morello 2018, 307-313.

would let us expect them to take up. Others seem to undermine the natural functioning of the sacral-exalted and exemplary frame of discourse, using them in inappropriate contexts. Because of these discrepancies, the readers' attention in the *Epigrams* is constantly drawn to the level of style, to the state of friction caused by the application of the various discursive and symbolic schemes on the everyday world the work aims to depict.[76]

Ruth Morello suggests a link between Martial's way of adopting styles, in casu the exemplary frame of discourse, and the "Saturnalian" nature he recurrently ascribes to his literary project.[77] The Saturnalia was an ancient religious festival in honour of the god Saturn. It took place "in mid-December, lasting at least three days in imperial times, and was celebrated by a public sacrifice and *convivium* before the temple of Saturn". The festival was "a blast of liberation, abundance and role-play or inversion". Traditional values and social hierarchies were no longer valid.[78] Even slaves "were 'freed' for these few days, allowed to dine and joke with their masters". Martial defines his epigrammatic project several times in terms of this festival. In his view, the everyday world was a chaotic place in which there are many irregularities and violations of rules and social traditions (cf. the theatre cycle in *Epigrams* 5 in which some characters are said to pretend to belong to a higher class than they actually do); whether the festival is taking place or not, Rome always seems to wallow in a sort of Saturnalian sphere. A text that aims to represent everyday reality must, therefore, attempt to incorporate this sphere, for example, by turning a whole set of moral, cultural and literary conventions upside down. Morello presumes that the disruptions of the normal functioning of the (exemplary) stylistic schemes can be seen as a part of the "mischievous [Saturnalian] vibe (...) drumming throughout the corpus of epigrams, not just in the books that declare themselves Saturnalian" (i.e. *Epigrams* 4, 5, 7 and 11).[79]

I believe we can deepen and further complicate Morello's reading of the stylistic variation if we would try to define more exactly what Martial precisely implies about his epigrammatic project when describing it in Saturnalian terms. The inversion of moral, cultural and literary conventions to which Morello refers only touches upon one important part of the Saturnalian nature of the *Epigrams*. Another significant aspect of it

[76] This observation corresponds to Don Fowler's argumentation about the explicitly textual nature of the *Epigrams*. Fowler 1995b reacts against Peter White's (1974) rather historicist interpretation of the collection. He argues that the individual poems "are not a log of 'real' social situations, but texts which simulate and construct a social world whose textual existence is brought before the reader at every turn" (51). On the same matter, see also Roman 2001.

[77] Morello 2018, 303.

[78] Rimell 2008, 140.

[79] Rimell 2008, 141.

pertains to the notion of 'mixture'. This notion has often been addressed in descriptions of the Saturnalia that has come to us from antiquity.[80] Roman authors characterised the festival as an occasion in which traditional boundaries and demarcations should no longer be respected. 'Purity' and 'order' did not exist anymore during the festivities. If we ought to believe these writers, everything, going from wines to social classes, was blended and mixed throughout these three days in December. As Rimell has recorded, Martial, likewise, frequently speaks about blending and mixture within his depiction of the Saturnalia. His introduction of the festival in the eleventh book, for instance, goes as follows (11.6):

> Unctis falciferi senis diebus,
> regnator quibus imperat fritillus,
> versu ludere non laborioso
> permittis, puto, pilleata Roma.
> risisti; licet ergo, non vetamur.
> pallentes procul hinc abite curae;
> quidquid venerit obvium loquamur
> morosa sine cogitatione.
> misce dimidios, puer, trientes,
> quales Pythagoras dabat Neroni,
> misce, Dindyme, sed frequentiores:
> possum nil ego sobrius.

Martial playfully asks permission to 'cap-clad Rome' (*pilleata Roma*), referring to the cap of liberty worn at the Saturnalia, to write 'toil-free verse' (*versu ludere non laborioso / permittis*). He sends all cares away and intends to mock in his poems everything that crosses his path. To do so, he wants to get drunk and therefore demands his boy to 'mix him halves and thirds, mix them, but keep them coming' (*misce dimidios, puer, trientes*; *misce, Dindyme, sed frequentiores*).[81] With the repetition of the imperative *misce*, Martial, from the start of the explicitly Saturnalian-marked eleventh book, enforces the conventional association between the festival and mixture.

Interestingly, Martial, at several points, integrates the principle of mixing in the Saturnalian conceptualisation of his poetry of the eleventh book and, by extension, of the entire collection. A slight indication of this could already be observed in 11.6, in which he states that he will describe 'everything that comes his way'. He will not meditate (*morosa sine cogitatione*) about making any distinctions between what crosses his path, nor bother about respecting the traditional boundaries and demarcations. His poetry, so he suggests,

[80] Goldhill 2003, 46.

[81] Rimell 2008, 169-170 has discussed the poem's intertextual relationship with Catullus.

will be as blended as the aspects of everyday life during the Saturnalia.[82] A similar idea is formulated a little bit further, in 11.8, that seeks to describe the smell of his young boy's kisses:

> Lassa quod hesterni spirant opobalsama dracti,
> ultima quod curvo quae cadit aura croco;
> poma quod hiberna maturescentia capsa,
> arbore quod verna luxuriosus ager;
> de Palatinis dominae quod Serica prelis,
> sucina virginea quod regelata manu;
> amphora quod nigri, sed longe, fracta Falerni,
> quod qui Sicanias detinet hortus apes;
> quod Cosmi redolent alabastra focique deorum
> quod modo divitibus lapsa corona comis –
> singula quid dicam? non sunt satis; omnia misce:
> hoc fragrant pueri basia mane mei.

Inasmuch as about the boy, this poem seems to be about (poetic) expression and the question how to give shape to a certain feature from reality in a (literary) medium.[83] It offers a long catalogue of odours, going from 'perfume of faded balsam in yesterday's vases' to 'a garland just fallen from richly pomaded locks'. Martial believes that none of the allegories he offers are individually sufficient to grasp the scent of his boy's kisses. Why, he asks, should he speak of this or that odour, if not one of them can properly grasp the richness of the smell (*singula quid dicam? non sunt satis*). Only a 'mixture of them all' (*omnia misce*) would accurately capture the sweetness he wants to articulate. This statement corresponds to the Saturnalian context in which he has embedded his poetry, for example, in 11.6, since it connects the notion of mixture to literary expression. The epigram appeals to the "assemblage of lots of ones, then mixing them together to make a single whole".[84]

Rimell has examined the relationship between the (Saturnalian) notion of mixing, which Martial frequently mentions in conceptualisations of his poetry, and the poetic techniques he has used over the course of the collection. She has particularly observed a strong affinity between the ideas of mixing and the work's remarkable use of the principle of *variatio*. Each of the books contains a huge number of epigrams that treat a diverse range of topics. Martial suggests a constant interplay between these epigrams and the

[82] It is important to emphasise that blending, for Martial, may not occur in an arbitrary or nonchalant way. As his clear instructions to his boy indicate, demanding him to mix halves and thirds of wine, every mixing should be a controlled, well-considered and measured action.

[83] Rimell 2008, 170-171 explores Martial's intertextual dialogue with Catullus and Ovid.

[84] Rimell 2008, 172.

ideas, imagery and vocabulary developed in them. "Experimenting in a radical way with the chemistry of interconnection", he is enabled to represent his work as an amalgam in which all poems seem to be correlated somehow and thus blend together within the space of a book.[85] The manner in which Martial causes his individual poems to interact and interrelate, Rimell suggests, corresponds in a way to the conceptualisations of his collection in epigrams like 11.6 and 11.8 as a mixed whole and evoke, within his work, the Saturnalian sphere in which Rome, being a melting pot of classes, cultures and customs, wallows (not only, as stated above, during the days of the festival in December but at any time).

Another affinity between the Saturnalian conceptualisation of his poetry in 11.6 and 11.8 and the actual poetic techniques used in the collection can perhaps be observed on the level of style. As explained in this paragraph, Martial does not restrict himself to one or two discursive-rhetorical and/or symbolic frames to represent everyday life. His work does not allow for stylistic singularity and uses a broad variety of rhetorical and symbolic schemes. It exhibits, to phrase it with a wink to 11.8, a 'large compendium of stylistic odours and scents' which are applied next to and through another in the *Epigrams*. The rhetorical-discursive and symbolic heterogeneity may be seen as another strategy to implement the notion of mixture in his collection as well as to evoke the Saturnalian vibe, drumming throughout the everyday world, within his literary work.

To better understand the exact relationship between the stylistic heterogeneity and the evocation of this Saturnalian sphere of Rome, it might be useful to return to Karen Lawrence's analysis of *Ulysses* presented at the beginning of this paragraph, which has explored a similar dynamic in Joyce's novel. Joyce had to find a strategy to realise his encyclopaedic ambitions and write a novel that represents life in all its many-sidedness and pluri-significance. The only solution to this seemed to create a literary work which is as rich as life itself, not only in the sense of theme or narrative but also in terms of style. *Ulysses* contains an extensive range of rhetorical and symbolic modes of ordering experience, which should mirror the wealth of the world the novel aspires to represent and implies that life is so multifaceted that it cannot be exhibited in one absolute way. As already explained, Martial seems to have developed a similar view as Joyce on the everyday world, seeing Rome as a kind of Saturnalian, chaotic and multi-sided space in which all sorts of people, cultures, customs and habits come together in one big blend. The variety in themes (cf. Rimell, Fitzgerald) as well as in styles may be seen as an attempt to translate the multifariousness of this space to his collection, as if Martial has tried to create a literary work that is, at every level, as heterogeneous and diverse as reality itself. Life, in all its 'Saturnalianness', is so wealthy, so Martial gives the impression, that it can

[85] Rimell 2008, 50.

only be evoked by means of a rich compendium of themes and stylistic modes of representation.

Thinking about the *Epigrams* in terms of *Ulysses*, we can take this interpretation even one step further and link it to Martial's particular manner of applying the rhetorical and symbolic schemes. In his novel, Joyce underlines the richness of life by illustrating that not one of the stylistic modes is individually sufficient to represent it. Reality is so wealthy, he suggests, that every attempt to organise it by means of a discursive or symbolic frame is doomed to fail and can only result in parodic discrepancies. Reading the *Epigrams* with this idea in mind, we may wonder whether Martial's disruption of the styles' natural functioning also serves other purposes than Morello has suggested, who has seen it as a sign of the collection's Saturnalian inclination to turn literary conventions upside down. The schemes with which ancient authors traditionally ordered the universe, the cosmos and the imperium, do not work in the way we would expect them to do in the *Epigrams*. The all-encompassing organisation of the world Vergil proposed in the *Aeneid* cannot unequivocally be adopted onto the reality Martial wants to represent. The sacral type of discourse with which the meaningful relationships between god, emperor and men have normally been expressed is destabilised by Martial and applied in contexts that has caused it to lose its venerable function. The rhetorical frame that makes use of *exempla* from the past to authorise statements about the present has turned into a set of hollow clichés. This constant disruption of traditional stylistic schemes, of conventional modes of ordering reality, might be understood as a technique to emphasise the poetic principle Martial has also articulated in 11.8: *singula quid dicam? non sunt satis*. The deliberate discrepancies are a way to indicate that none of the traditional discursive and symbolic frames are individually sufficient to properly express (the Saturnalian view on) everyday reality. They attract the readers' attention to the 'representational limits' of the individual modes, being deprived from their usual values, connotations and significance as soon as they are adopted to give shape to the many-sided, miscellaneous world of the *Epigrams* (they do not suffice, *non sunt satis*). The wealth of life, so Martial in a sense suggests, seems to exceed, to say it in the terms Karen Lawrence in her discussion of *Ulysses*, literature's representation of it. Only by mixing everything (*omnia misce*), by exhibiting an encyclopaedia of 'failed' stylistic applications, his collection of epigrams appears to be enabled to fully grasp the richness of the world he seeks to express.

The following paragraphs will elaborate upon the implications of the choice of this compendium of restricted stylistic modes of representation. The next one will explain how Martial, at some points, seems to conceptualise his bathetic use of rhetorical and symbolic schemes from the literary tradition in terms of life. The last one will maintain that the stylistic disruptions do not simply imply the wealth of reality but are part of a strategy by which Martial wants to let his readers really 'experience' this wealth while reading the collection.

5.2 The Life of Language

In the Circe-episode, Leopold Bloom gets involved in a conversation with a writer named Philip Beaufoy. When Bloom is asked about his current profession, he answers that he, like his interlocutor, holds a "literary occupation" and is active as "an author and a journalist". He brags that he is about to publish "a collection of prize stories of which [he is] the inventor, something that is an entirely new departure" (461). Beaufois reacts quite sceptically on Bloom's snobbish claim and does not take him very seriously. Somewhat later, the writer even accuses Bloom of "daring to pose as an author, despite his limited capabilities".[86] In Beaufois' view, there is nothing innovate in Bloom's writings. They only imitate the texts of other authors and add nothing new to the literary tradition. Therefore, Beaufois calls Bloom a "cribber", "a plagiarist", "a soapy sneak masquerading as a litterateur", whose work is little original, dull and uninteresting to read (466).

This scene touches upon an artistic principle that lies at the heart of Joyce's novel. *Ulysses* is famous for its strong engagement with the literary and cultural tradition. The work is not only full of allusions and references to other texts (cf. its title). As illustrated before, it also constantly relies on rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes developed in previous literary-cultural periods, going from Homer's *Odyssey* over medieval mysticism to nineteenth-century lyricism. A number of scholars has argued, therefore, that "Joyce's method and conception of literature" is predominantly based on "indebtedness, citation and plagiarism".[87] Richard Ellmann has even characterised him as a "cribber", "a bricoleur", whose writings mainly consisted of borrowed styles, sentences and words.[88] With the conversation between Bloom and Beaufois, Joyce draws his readers' attention to the creative strategy of "plagiarism, citation and indebtedness" which he himself has applied in the entire work as well as encouraging them to reflect upon the implications of it. How can this writing technique be reconciled with the criterium of originality and innovation that authors, especially since the nineteenth century, were expected to meet (Bloom not coincidentally introduces himself as an inventor and his collection of stories as a new departure)? How can the method of borrowing and recycling be in harmony with his ambition to represent life in his literary work, a material full of surprises, unexpected turns and meaningful chaos which is anything but 'dull and uninteresting' (and thus may not be portrayed in this way in a literary work)?

[86] Latham 2003, 167.

[87] Howes 2014, 130.

[88] Ellmann 1958, xix.

In her chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, Marjorie Howes has attempted to formulate an answer to these sorts of questions by means of an analysis of the Sirens-episode. 'Sirens' is "arguably the first chapter to embody the parasite principles in a systematic way".[89] Bloom sits in a café and listens to the singing of the other guests and the barmaids (the 'sirens' of the chapter). Their jazzy compositions are almost totally constructed from brief linguistic expressions that both recall earlier moments in the novel and reminisce strophes and refrains from popular, old Irish songs.[90] The sirens in the episode thus do not compose *ex nihilo*, but from memory, from material they have revoked from the (narrative or literary-cultural) past. Contrary to Beaufois in 'Circe', the audience members in the bar do not bother about the derivate status of the compositions and feel fascinated by the music. Even the somewhat indifferent Bloom admits that he is intrigued.

As Howes remarks, however, it is not the recycling of old materials that renders the singing to be so enchanting. The songs become appealing because they speak via the past, while at the same time never hiding that "what they really embody is the present".[91] The phrases derived from earlier in the narrative and the literary tradition appear in a reconfigured form in the songs, being mentioned in a (sometimes parodically charged) context completely different from the one in which they originally functioned. This causes the audience members, including the readers, to be aware that, though the music's language has been taken from the past, they are perceiving them in the present, in a different shape than they are used to.[92] Joyce, in this way, reverses, in a sense, the effects which have traditionally been ascribed to sirens-songs. The singing in his chapter does not evoke a sphere of nostalgia and sentimentality in which the public may lose itself, being drawn into the past, into 'what is over or dead'.[93] By giving the old linguistic expressions a new meaning and function, it seeks to hold the reader in the here and now.

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[89] Howes 2014, 129.

[90] As Howes 2014, 130 explains, this inevitably has consequences for the process of reading. The repeated use of "a kind of shorthand to recall moments that were originally narrated more fully (...) suggests a model of reading *Ulysses* that is non-linear and always in process. Reading the novel can only be rereading, a returning to the text armed with the memories of earlier readings".

[91] Howes 2014, 132.

[92] An object that is recurrently mentioned in the Sirens-episode is, not coincidently, a "lovely sea shell". The shell echoes the sound of the sea but there will be "souse in the ear sometimes". We may read this as a metaphor for the strategy by which Joyce adopts elements from the past: we recognise the frames and narratives from earlier in the novel and the literary tradition, but in a reconfigured form.

[93] As Howes 2014, 132 remarks, some of the audience members, however, do feel triggered by the language of the past. They start wandering in their memories, which, the text implies, strongly damages them. They lack the analytical capacities of a Bloom, who can stay in the present because he understands that the sirens' songs fundamentally embody the here and now.

According to Howes, Joyce has adopted the dynamics she has observed in the Sirens-episode also in the other chapters of the novel. His writing method was indeed based on principles of borrowing and indebtedness.[94] Yet, he always "re-configured and re-arranged" the elements he repeated "from his own work(s) and from the history of Western culture", giving them, in a sense, a "new life".[95] Karen Lawrence has similarly characterised Joyce's creative technique in terms of "resuscitation" and "revitalisation".[96] The application of rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes in inappropriate contexts, causing discrepancies with the reality to which they give shape, must not only be seen as a strategy to emphasise literature's representational limits. It is also a way to reinvigorate old stylistic modes and imbue them with new life and vitality. *Ulysses* does not allow its readers to dwell in the past from where it derived its schemes, but, via the re-configurations, always keeps them in the present (i.e. the 16th of June 1904), in the moment that life is happening in his novel. A part of "Joyce's great originality", we could conclude, thus "may have been to flaunt his lack of originality and his dependence on his various sources" and stylistic inspirations.[97]

A large epigrammatic cycle in *Epigrams* 1 is devoted to the spectacle of the lion and the hare. These animals are celebrated seven times in the first book, not seldom in poems relatively long in length.[98] In epigram 1.44, Martial addresses a potential complaint from a reader (Stella) who could perhaps find the cycle too long and repetitive:

> Lascivos leporum cursus lususque leonum
> quod maior nobis charta minorque gerit
> et bis idem facimus, nimium si Stella, videtur
> hoc tibi, bis leporem tu quoque pone mihi.

If Stella, Martial says, thinks the cycle to be too excessive and gets the impression that he 'has been doing the same thing twice' (*bis idem facimus*), Stella must feel free to serve him twice with hare (as a sort of revenge yet hare is an expensive dish).

According to Fitzgerald, poems like 1.44 playfully draw attention to an important principle in the epigrammatic project, that is, repetition, recycling and imitation.[99] Martial constantly re-uses material that was developed earlier, either by himself or by other authors. He frequently re-visits subjects on which he has already elaborated somewhere else in his collection, as the above-mentioned epigram records. But he also

[94] Howes 2014, 138. For a more elaborate discussion of Joyce's 'intertextual strategies', see Kershner 2014.
[95] Howes 2014, 131.
[96] Lawrence 1981, 108.
[97] Howes 2014, 130. See also Senn 2004, 33: "Joyce kept reshaping the same material in more complex ways – he never repeated himself".
[98] 1.6; 1.14; 1.22; 1.48; 1.51; 1.60; 1.104. A general discussion of this cycle can be found in Holzberg 2012, 64-69.
[99] Fitzgerald 2007, 88-89.

takes storylines and styles from the literary tradition which he re-activates in his work. As explained in the previous paragraph, for example, the readers are invited to think about the *Epigrams*' characters in terms of a sort of re-enactment of the heroes in Vergil's *Aeneid* (however difficult to reconcile). Epigram 11.5 imitates the exemplary discourse of authors like Cicero by integrating king Numa and other Republican heroes (a technique which is repeated in many other poems in the eleventh book, e.g. 11.15 in which Numa turns up again). In more ways than one, we may say, Martial 'does over what he or others have already done' (*bis idem facimus*).

In 1.44 (and elsewhere in the *Epigrams*), Martial mentions a possible criticism which readers may have of this principle of repetition, recycling and imitation. They might get the impression that they are reading something they have already read before, being a little bit bored by the repetitiousness of the work.[100] A question to which this gives rise is how Martial conceptualises this principle as part of his broader literary project. What is the relationship between this principle and his ambition to give shape to everyday life in his work, in all its chaos, vigour and energy? How can the argument made in the previous paragraph, i.e. that the recycling of a diverse range of traditional stylistic schemes contributes to the representation of the wealth of the everyday world, be reconciled with Martial's (comical) allegation that some readers may think that this technique of recycling results in a repetitive and somewhat tedious work (so declaredly removing, in a sense, the spirit and intensity typical of life from the text)? To answer these questions, this paragraph will take the tenth book of the *Epigrams* as its point of departure. Martial, as will be shown, explicitly reflects herein upon the relationship between his work and, as he calls it, the re-use of 'language of earlier days'.

Epigrams 10 frames itself as a revised edition of a book that had already been published and circulated in Rome (as individual book). The original edition, Martial claims, had 'too hastily been issued'. It needed to be re-worked into a new version, the one that he later incorporated into the twelve-book collection (10.2: *Festinata prius, decimi mihi cura libelli / elapsum manibus nunc revocavit opus*). Why the original edition had too hastily been issued, he explains in a poem near the end of the book. In 10.72, Martial asserts that the first edition appeared just before the assassination of Domitian. It contained poems celebrating the last Flavian emperor and was written in a way that would certainly have pleased him. The end of Flavian emperorship and the consequent beginning of the Nerva-Trajan reign obliged him, however, to withdraw the original version from circulation and necessitated a second edition, dedicated to the new ruler and adapted to his literary preferences. Since the new regime, it is not appropriate anymore to apply the 'language of the earlier days', the expressions and tone he used to adopt under Domitian (*caveto /*

[100] Hayes 2016, 24-25 offers an overview and discussion of the epigrams in the collection in which Martial playfully suggests that some readers may think his work to be boring.

verbis, Roma, prioribus loquaris). It would, for instance, be improper 'to speak of Lord and God' (*dicturus dominum deumque non sum*), which the Flavian emperor would have liked. The new emperor wants to be addressed as the *imperator* or the *iustissimus omnium senator*. According to Martial, the second edition, which we are reading, has taken these new preferences into account and meets the literary requirements of the new regime.

Niklas Holzberg has maintained that the story about the second edition, narrated over several epigrams, may not exclusively be interpreted from a socio-cultural perspective. The remarks about revision, pre-publication and circulation can indeed improve our understanding of ancient book production as well as of the impact of the regime change on cultural life.[101] But they also fulfil a narrative function within the collection itself. With the story, Holzberg argues, Martial explicitly marks the tenth book as a point of transition in his work.[102] *Epigram* 10 signals that the Domitian part of the collection has come to an end and announces the beginning of the Nerva-Trajan part. In poems like 10.72, it suggests that this imperial shift has gone hand in hand with a change in rhetoric and discourse. The 'language of the earlier days', i.e. the language used in the original edition of the tenth book as well as in the first nine Domitian books, may not be applied anymore. Martial evokes thereby the expectation that he will come up with a new type of language and create 'a sort of new departure' in his collection (many poems not coincidentally revolve around new beginnings and the notion of a re-start).[103]

At several occasions in *Epigrams* 10, however, Martial raises some doubts about the changes and newness announced in epigrams like 10.72 (which is in itself quite paradoxical, as it claims to reject the language of earlier days, while at the same time giving explicit examples of this language). 10.2, for instance, informs the readers that they are reading a second edition, adapted, as they will learn later, to the preferences of the new regime. But Martial remarks that they will encounter in this edition 'some pieces

[101] For an analysis of *Epigrams* 10 in relation to book culture or the political changes around the end of the first century, see, amongst others, Grewing 2003; Nauta 2002, 280-285; Lorenz 2002; Spisak 2007, 66-68; Rimell 2018. For Martial's play with the notion of *damnatio memoriae*, see Rimell 2008, 65-67; Fitzgerald 2007, 157-159.

[102] Holzberg 2012, 144-145. In these pages, he also reacts against a tendency in Martial-scholarship to change the sequence of the three final books (10/11/12 > 11/10/12). Since book 10 revolves around Trajan and 11 around Nerva, the *communis opinio* goes, Martial probably wrote the eleventh book before he revised his tenth; *Epigrams* 10, moreover, ends with Martial's return to Spain, which corresponds to the setting of book 12 and not to the one of book 11. These factors have encouraged some scholars to read the end of the epigram collection in a twisted order. I agree with Holzberg who states that we should read the books in the original arrangement, that is, as they have been delivered to us in the collection. The Vergilian symbolic schemes, which I introduced in the previous paragraph, supports this claim: the three books, in the order we have them, follow the developments in the Aeneadic narrative (see appendix). For a more extensive overview of the pro-and-contra-arguments about the twisted order, see Barié e.a. 1999; Lorenz 2002, 228-235; Grewing 2003.

[103] Rimell 2008, 62-68 analyses the idea of "(re)beginning", as opposed to the multiple "endings" articulated in the book. See also Henderson 2001.

that are already known' (*nota leges quaedam*), a claim that slightly collides with the impression of the new beginning he evokes in other poems. A similar collision can be observed in 10.6 and 10.7, which are the first epigrams in the collection dedicated to the new emperor Trajan. When Nerva died in January 98, Trajan did not immediately come back to Rome but first inspected the Rhine and Danube frontiers. 10.6 revolves around the pain Martial feels because Trajan is not in town, while 10.7 pathetically addresses the Rhine, demanding the river to let the new emperor return to Rome (*Nympharum pater amniumque, Rhene, / (...) Traianum populis suis et urbi, / Thybris te dominus rogat, remittas*). As Sven Lorenz has maintained, both poems deserve the readers' attention, not because they are the first celebrations of Trajan, but since they recall and resemble a series of poems that appeared earlier in the collection and addressed Domitian.[104] In the seventh and eighth book, Martial repeatedly hopes that Domitian will soon come back from his campaign against the Sarmatians. He complains about the many delays the emperor encounters on his way back home and even makes an appeal to the Rhine, like in 10.7, to release Domitian from his duties as quickly as possible (8.11). The similarities between these poems and 10.6 and 10.7 have caused Lorenz to conclude that there is an "*unverkennbare Kontinuität*" between the representation of the last Flavian emperor and the ruler of the new regime in the tenth book.[105]

Something similar goes for many other poems in *Epigrams* 10. Martial continuously recycles themes, imagery, discursive and symbolic schemes – the 'language of earlier days' – from the Domitian part of the collection. Even the epigrams that revolve around the notion of a new beginning ironically appear to be imitations of poems which we have already read before.[106] The 'language of the earlier days' keeps on cropping up in the tenth book, 'cribbed' into the poems of an edition that is at some points represented as a new start, a new departure.

Interestingly, Martial himself seems to offer a way out of this apparently paradoxical situation, suggesting several times that the choice to recycle elements from earlier in his collection should not necessarily exclude the possibility of innovation. An indication of this can, for example, be found in 10.2, which has already been mentioned above. The poem states that the second edition contains some 'pieces that are already known', yet immediately adds that these 'have been polished with a recent file' (*sed limi rasa recenti*). This may be interpreted as a sign that the tenth book, as we have it, re-takes certain aspects from the earlier days (the previous books). However, they are presented in a

[104] See especially 7.1 to 7.12 and 8.11 to 8.20. Coleman 1998 discusses these series of poems from a socio-historical angle.

[105] Lorenz 2002, 210.

[106] Look, for instance, at the close affinities between 10.6 and 8.2; 10.9 and 1.1; 10.61 and 5.34. Rimell 2008, 70-71 analyses the resemblances between 10.2 and 8.3.

revised and reconfigured form that causes them to be different from before (less old, more new, we could say). The few lines I quoted from epigram 10.7 seem to illustrate this idea. They clearly recall a discourse and setting from earlier on in the collection, from poems praising Domitian. At the same time, however, they somehow disturb the familiarity of this discourse and setting via the explicit mentioning of the name of Trajan (*Traianum*) and the remarkable application of the word *dominus*, a title with which Domitian used to be addressed. In the last verse of the poem, this term significantly congruences with the subject *Thybris*, not with the object *te*, referring to Trajan. This causes the readers to understand that Martial re-uses 'the language of earlier days' but in a somewhat different way, in a new (imperial) context and with alternative accents, values and meanings. Past themes, imagery, rhetorical and symbolic schemes are unmistakably present in *Epigrams* 10 yet appear in a re-configured and re-arranged form, which renders the 'major part of the book', despite its reliance on *priora verba*, to have a new outlook (10.2: *pars nova maior erit*).

Rimell has illustrated that some poems express a sense of nostalgia, which matches the book's broader tendency to return to themes, imagery and styles from earlier in the collection.[107] But it is important to emphasise that Martial, so it seems, does not want to incite his readers via these recycled elements to give themselves over to this nostalgia and start dwelling in what is gone or dead (literally, in the case of Domitian). *Epigrams* 10 may recall the language of earlier days, yet, 'what it really embodies', where the focus actually lies, is the present. A poem in which this is implied is 10.23, which celebrates the seventy-fifth birthday of Antonius Pius. Martial's friend is said to have lived, so far, a good and tranquil life at which he can look back (*meminisse*) without any regrets. He is, therefore, encouraged in the epigram not to stop recalling the earlier days, since 'to be able to enjoy former life is to live twice over' (*vivere bis, vita posse priore frui*). Although Martial stimulates his friend to dig in his memory and return to his past, he makes clear that this should be an act of re-living, not a sentimental longing for what is over. Likewise, we could say that *Epigrams* 10 is recalling the themes, imagery and styles that lived in the preceding books (*vita priore*). By reconfiguring them and using them in a new context, they are lived twice over and have been granted a second life (*vivere bis*), which might even be more enjoyable (*frui*). A similar suggestion can be found in a line from 10.2, which I have already quoted above: '*elapsum manibus nunc opus revocavit*'. One way to understand this verse is by reading it as an indication that 'Martial has withdrawn a work that had too hastily slipped from his hands' (*supra*). But the semantic ambiguity of the word *manibus* also allows us to comprehend the line in the sense that the poet has evoked artistic material from the 'shades' and brought it up in the here and now (*nunc*).[108] Once

[107] Rimell 2008, 67.

[108] Rimell 2008, 65-82 repeatedly illustrates that *Epigrams* 10 is full of these kinds of linguistic plays.

more, Martial plays with the idea that the tenth book of his collection recalls old elements and imbues them with a new, or at least, 'less-dead', life. In his view, the recycling of the 'language of earlier days' in *Epigrams* 10 must be seen as a technique of 'resuscitation' and 're-vitalisation', re-arranging the former themes, imagery and styles and giving them new meanings and functions in the present, the now, of the book.

The way in which Martial presents his engagement with the 'language of the earlier days' in *Epigrams* 10 might be read as a reflection upon a broader poetic principle in the collection, i.e. repetition, imitation and recycling. As I said above, Martial constantly re-uses elements from the past in his work, both re-visiting materials developed in preceding books and from the literary tradition. With the notion of the 'language of earlier days' and the story about the second/revised edition, *Epigrams* 10 seems to explicitly thematise and reflect upon this principle. The book makes clear that a writing method based on repetition, imitation and recycling does not necessarily produce a work that is repetitious, boring and dull to read, as Stella in 1.45 is suggested to think. For Martial, the recycling of old elements goes hand in hand with their reconfiguration into a new form, within a new context and with new meaning. An illustration of this has also been offered in the previous paragraph, which has discussed how traditional rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes are applied in an unconventional way in the *Epigrams*. They are deprived from their original function and value as soon as they are adopted to represent the everyday world (the conventional modes of ordering experience are suggested to have their limits, as I explained), yet they get a new function and value within the for them unusual environment of the *Epigrams*, full of obscenity, banality and triviality.

Martial, we could say, acts in the *Epigrams* like a 'cribber', 'a plagiarist' or 'a soapy sneak masquerading as a litterateur'. But he plays this role in a fantastic way and continuously 'flaunts his apparent lack of originality'. He reconfigures, revises and contaminates the elements he plagiarises, thereby granting the themes, imagery, rhetorical-discursive and symbolic frames a second life.[109] In his view, the principle of repetition, imitation and recycling is a 'technique of resuscitation' that 're-vitalises' the traditional language by which he seeks to represent life, in all its wealth, vigour and energy in his work.[110] This renders the principle to be perfectly compatible with the broader ambitions of the

[109] A recurring topic in the *Epigrams* is plagiarism and the cribbing of someone else's literary material. As Rimell 2008, 42-43 has shown, for Martial, plagiarism always goes hand in hand with contamination, the reconfiguration of the original. For a general discussion of the theme of plagiarism in Latin literature, see McGill 2012b.

[110] The terms in which Martial describes his implementation of discourses of the earlier days collide with the vocabulary with which Fitzgerald 2007, 77-79 elaborates upon the relationship between "past and present". Fitzgerald recurrently talks about Martial's "downgrading" (77) or "banalizing" (79) of elements of the past. Martial would rather say that he evokes them from death and gives them a second life.

Epigrams, causing the text not only to embody life on a thematic level but also on a linguistic and stylistic one. There is, in other words, to recall the passage with which this paragraph started, more Leopold Bloom than Philip Beaufois in the collection, more Joyce than a reader like Stella is suggested to have believed.

5.3 The Experience of Life

> hoc lege, quod possit dicere vita 'meum est'. (10.4)

Several times Martial conveys a close affinity between the *Epigrams* and life. His work can be seen as a celebration of life in all its aspects, chaos and wealth. It stages people from different classes of society, comments upon their (mis)behaviour, norms and values, and shows the places they are used to go. In the previous paragraphs, I have explained how Martial implies the richness of life in his work via a deliberate reconfiguration of rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes 'from the earlier days'. The parodic discrepancies caused within the applications of the traditional styles suggest their limits as modes of representation and their individual incapability to grasp the world in its many-sidedness. At the same time, the disruptions of the frames' conventional functions and contexts can be understood in terms of resuscitation and re-vitalisation, granting a second life to discourses and symbolic structures from the past.

The last question this chapter seeks to answer is how the relationship between life and reading experience is defined and shaped in the collection. Martial, so it seems, does not merely aim to offer in the *Epigrams* a representation or description of the everyday world in the strictest sense of the word. As he implies in 10.4, he also wants his readers to get the impression that the text they are reading is a 'part' or even a 'possession' of life itself. His work should not be like a painting on which several scenes from the everyday world are depicted and that the readers can admire and enjoy from a distance. Reading the *Epigrams* must feel like standing in the midst of life, like experiencing the world as it really is. What techniques should a text use to give form to this kind of reading experience?

Before analysing this issue in light of some notions within the epigram collection itself, it might be useful to turn once more to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Given the similarities between the novel and Martial's text pointed out above, we may wonder whether the former work also contains some features which can help us think about the latter's conception of the relationship between life and reading experience.

In the concluding chapter of *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, Karen Lawrence discusses the implied interaction between the novel and its readers.[111] She departs from a remarkable passage in the Ithaca-episode, the penultimate of the work. 'Ithaca' is written in the form of a rigidly organised catechism of three hundred and nine questions and answers formulated in ostensibly precise mathematical and scientific terms. These questions pertain to a broad range of topics, going from astronomy over social care systems in Dublin to urination. Some of the questions interestingly revolve around the novel itself and address interpretative issues about which the readers might have been bothering for a while. A recurrent motive in *Ulysses*, for instance, is Bloom's fascination with water, who mentions it many times in conversations and goes to places where he expects to find it. One of the questions 'Ithaca' asks, concerns this attraction to water, thereby explicitly touching upon a subject about which the readers may already have pondered a couple of times (578): "What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier returning to the range, admire?" The answer takes the form of a (ridiculously) long catalogue that runs over two pages. The catalogue contains thirty-six possible explanations and interpretations of Bloom's obsession with water, of which some seem to be very likely, while others tend to the absurd.

Lawrence sees this passage as an indication of the "interpretative instability" of *Ulysses*. Joyce has constructed his novel as a work that is not easy to understand. It is built up as an amalgam of topics, narrative principles and techniques, and reflections upon previous and contemporary aesthetic and socio-historical matters. As many have experienced, it is difficult to get a clear overview of all these different aspects and layers, and even more to bring them together into a harmonious and restricted set of meaning(s). The above-mentioned passage from the Ithaca-episode seems to accentuate this apparent impossibility to come to "a final or conclusive interpretation" of (certain features within) the novel.[112] Water appears to be a recurring theme in *Ulysses*, predominantly associated with the figure of Leopold Bloom. But this motive can be explored from so many different angels and on such a variety of levels, as the long catalogue of explanations emphasises, that a definitive, coherent and well-delineated reading of it and of the implications it has for the character associated with it cannot clearly be articulated (with the list, Joyce suggests that the motive produces a multitude of meanings, as if there is always yet another reading that can be ascribed to it). *Ulysses* provides a strong "heterogeneity" of meanings, often mutually contradictory and conflicting, and subverts thereby the

[111] For the discussion of the implied relationship between text and reader in *Ulysses*, I have mainly relied on Lawrence 1981, 197-201.

[112] Lawrence 1981, 200.

readers' (usual) attempts to impose a consistent and limited set of interpretations on a literary work.[113]

According to Lawrence, the stylistic variety on which she concentrates in her analysis of *Ulysses* contributes to the interpretative instability. Rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes, like motives and themes, normally serve as recognition points in a literary work that help the readers to give form to their interpretations. The style(s) of a text can offer the readers an indication of the purposes lying behind it, the sort of audience its author has wanted to reach and the type of content it conveys. The remarkable application of the styles in *Ulysses,* however, slightly subverts the interpretative grip they usually provide. The rhetorical-discursive and symbolic frames are often difficult to reconcile with the context in which they are used, which raises doubts about their exact function and meaning. Rather than helping the readers in their search for a final or conclusive interpretation, the styles thus increase the internal tensions and apparent inconsistencies in the novel which strongly "frustrate" a coherent, clearly-contoured reading.[114]

In Lawrence's opinion, the interpretative instability must be considered as a part of Joyce's strategy to achieve his inclusive ambitions. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, Joyce conceptualised the real world as a space full of chaos, contradictions, banality and arbitrariness. It does not allow for any kind of order and is, in its totality, impossible to grasp into a coherent and comprehensive view. The deliberate creation of a heterogeneity of meanings in the novel may be seen as a way to convey the ungraspable of life to the readers. Just as reality cannot unequivocally be organised and understood, *Ulysses*, amongst others by its usage of styles, frustrates every attempt to impose order on the text and arrive at a final or conclusive meaning. The wealth of the text, Lawrence says, similar to the richness of life, "exceeds the readers' interpretation of it".[115]

The parallel Joyce suggests between reading his novel and experiencing life leads us back to the *Epigrams* and the questions asked about it at the beginning of this paragraph. We

[113] Lawrence 1981, 201. Senn 2004, 38 not coincidently speaks of *Ulysses* as the "book of many turns", always compelling the readers to adapt their interpretations to new, often contradicting, information.

[114] Lawrence 1981, 6. Iser 1998, 109 has come to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the detailed nature of *Ulysses*: "In a realistic novel, one was confronted with a wealth of details which the reader could see reflected in his/her own world of experience. Their appearance in the novel served mainly to authenticate the view of life offered. But in *Ulysses* they are, to a great extent, deprived of this function. When details no longer serve to reinforce probability or to stabilize the illusion of reality, they must become a sort of end in themselves, such as one finds in the art-form of the collage".

[115] Lawrence 1981, 198. One could remark that every text is, to a certain extent, undecidable and open to more than one interpretation. Yet, Joyce frequently thematises the indeterminacy and the interpretative heterogeneity of his work, and uses, moreover, several techniques that cause it to be difficult for the readers to arrive at a conclusive interpretation.

may wonder whether Martial similarly tries to give form to a reading experience that feels like life itself by relying on techniques causing interpretative instability. And if so, how does he exactly produce this instability? What role does the adoption of the stylistic modes discussed previously play within this process?

A good starting point for this research might be Martial's representation of the readers-addressees to which the poems in the collection are dedicated and the responses they are said to give to the epigrams, the individual books and the entire work. How do the readers staged in the *Epigrams* experience their interaction with the text? William Fitzgerald has remarked that this internal reading audience is not easy to map out.[116] It seemingly concerns a very diverse range of people with different backgrounds, interests and reading habits. A first indication of this diversity can be observed when looking at the identity of the people addressed in the epigrams. Some poems do not address any person in particular and speak to the general reader, often using the term *lector*. Others address concrete and actually existent persons which are called by their names (many of them are known to us from other sources). Together, they form "a very numerous and heterogeneous group", going from "the emperor himself to a centurion".[117] Another significant portion of the epigrams addresses readers by a generic name or a pseudonym, of which it is very hard to say whether or not it refers to a person that really existed. This latter group, just as the one with addressees of whom we do know that they were real, is internally remarkably varied, both regarding class and gender.[118] A second reason why the readership of the *Epigrams* seems diverse pertains to the "fiction (which may sometimes coincide with the reality) of different contexts of production".[119] Martial creates the impression that many individual poems within his collection were originally composed in response to certain social occasions and with a specific reading audience in mind. Some epigrams are presented as having been sent originally to one of Martial's patrons, in exchange for their (financial) support; some are said to have been improvised at dinners or other social events; others are framed as having been written for inscriptions or other particular goals. A part of this material, as Fitzgerald remarks, was probably indeed created within the context in which it pretends to have originated and later "integrated in the books we read, possibly modified in the process". But we cannot with any confidence tell "which poems belong to this category and which were in fact composed for the book but pose as having other contexts originally".[120] By implying these various production backgrounds, Martial seemingly differentiates within his reading

[116] The following presentation of Martial's readership has predominantly been based on Fitzgerald 2007, 140-166.

[117] Fitzgerald 2007, 141.

[118] Fitzgerald 2007, 142.

[119] Fitzgerald 2007, 143.

[120] Fitzgerald 2007, 142.

audience, raising the suggestion that some of his readers have come across his poetry for the first time while reading his work, while others have already been acquainted with particular epigrams from earlier, often more privileged, occasions. A third factor that renders the collection's readership to seem heterogeneous is that Martial gives no indication that his "addressees, or a significant subset of them, belong to a coterie with its own distinctive values, common enemies and language". They are, for the most part, presented as "individuals" of whom each appears to have his/her own reasons to read Martial's epigrams and his/her own opinions about his work. The reactions of these individuals to his poetry are presented as very diverse, ranging from blind admiration to feelings of aversion because of the obscenities within some of the epigrams.[121]

Fitzgerald has mapped out the internal readership of the *Epigrams* within the context of his analysis of "the society of the book".[122] He has argued that Martial creates an "imagined reading community", a "virtual society of readers" within his work.[123] The evocation of this virtual society contributes to the realist impression the collection wants to make and anchors it more deeply into the heterogeneous everyday world it aims to represent. As (external) readers of the twelve-book volume, we get the idea that many of the poems we come across originated within very particular social contexts and thus were initially themselves part of the socio-cultural spheres which they claim to describe and reflect upon. Martial thereby suggests a close entanglement of the work itself and its object of representation. Another way to understand the heterogeneity of the readership created in the *Epigrams*, complementary to Fitzgerald's reading, could be by seeing it as a strategy to undermine the possibility of coherence and unity on an interpretative level. The strong variety within the internal reading audience causes there to be no clear and authoritative perspective through which the external readers are expected and obliged to give meaning to the collection. By representing his reading community as an amalgam of individuals, each with his/her own interests and opinions, Martial does not provide a well-demarcated, internal point of view that guides our responses to and interpretation of the poems. He denies the external readers the sort of interpretative grip which the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, as explained in the first paragraph, for instance, does offer, staging a unified internal audience with whom we are invited to identify ourselves and through whose gazes we are compelled to look at and read the Sicilian games organised in honour of Anchises. The external readers of the *Epigrams* are confronted with a diverse range of perspectives, often mutually contradictory and very hard to reconcile, and leading the readers in conflicting interpretative directions. This might be considered as an indication that Martial, perhaps, wants his collection to be 'heterogeneous in

[121] Fitzgerald 2007, 141.
[122] Fitzgerald 2007, 140.
[123] Fitzgerald 2007, 166.

meaning'. It may imply that there is not one, absolute way to interpret the *Epigrams*, nor a particular angle from where we should read the work. The fragmentation of readership could suggest the dissolution of meanings, the impossibility to arrive at a single, 'final or conclusive interpretation' of the text.

This reading of the work, as a literary object producing a diversity of meanings, partly corresponds to Victoria Rimell's analysis of book composition and techniques of *variatio*. Like critics before her, she has proposed that Martial's poems can be grouped together into, what could be called, "cycles", "thematic structures" or "patterns" running through the individual books and the entire collection.[124] This grouping should be based on the many interconnections, on the level of theme, idea, vocabulary or imagery, which can be observed between the epigrams. Yet, she does not believe that the clustering always and automatically leads us towards a coherent, unambiguous interpretation of the books and the work as a whole. This argument goes against the conceptualisation of Martial, developed by some critics during the nineties, as a "post-Augustan poet, able to craft his books as sophisticated and unified architectural pieces".[125] As Rimell points out, Martial articulates many conflicting views within one and the same cycle as well as across cycles, thereby constantly undermining his own claims and statements.[126] Readers are all the time forced to move forward and backward between the contradictory visions formulated within the individual books and the collection, and change the interpretations at which they have arrived at some point in their reading process in light of new and often irreconcilable information conveyed later in the work. This causes, Rimell states, "the interplay of ideas, poems, imagery and vocabulary in Martial often [to] fail to add up to a comforting sense of wholeness and artistic rationale". Martial has taken "the difference-in-sameness of *variatio*" and pushed it "to its most jagged and muddling extremes". In Rimell's eyes, the book composition in the *Epigrams* thus 'frustrates', in a sense, every attempt to formulate a single, conclusive interpretation, and produces a set of conflicting meanings which are difficult to bring together into a harmonious view on the books and collection (so, having a similar effect as the contradictory representations of the internal readers-addressees which were discussed above).[127]

The interpretative frustration which Rimell has conceptualised in her study of Martial's *variatio*, we could say, seems to be enforced by the constant variation of stylistic

[124] Rimell 2008, 48 has borrowed these closely related terms, all referring to the idea that many of the poems in the collection are somehow interrelated, from Garthwaite 2001.

[125] Rimell 2008, 50. For an overview of the different positions within the debate on Martial's book composition, techniques of *variatio* and the notion of interpretative coherence and unity, see Watson 2006; Sapsford 2012, 21-31; Hayes 2016, 6-17.

[126] A discussion of the notion of contradiction in Martial's work, see Fowler 1995b, Roman 2001 and Fitzgerald 2007, 1-8.

[127] Rimell 2008, 51.

modes explored in the previous paragraphs. The different rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes offer the readers points of recognition that enable them to connect the text to and read it in light of earlier works and tendencies from the literary tradition (e.g. Vergil's *Aeneid* or Cicero's exemplary rhetoric). Yet, the remarkable way in which the stylistic frames are applied in the collection slightly undermines the interpretative grip they usually provide. Martial has adopted the rhetorical and symbolic modes in a manner that most readers would not have expected. He subverts their conventional functioning and reconfigures them to such an extent that they do not have the same values, connotations and meanings as they once had. Martial, thereby, further increases the internal tensions and apparent inconsistencies within the collection, that render it to be very hard to develop a unified and cohesive view of the world he depicts, one in which all the aspects, ideas, imageries and styles would be in harmony.

To understand the function of the 'interpretative instability' of the *Epigrams*, it might be useful to return to *Ulysses*, in which a similar phenomenon can be observed. As Lawrence has explained, the heterogeneity of meanings in Joyce's novel may be considered as a method to convey the ungraspable of life to the readers. In the same sense, we can, perhaps, see Martial's production of conflicting interpretative perspectives, contradictory views and discrepancies on a stylistic level as a strategy to integrate the disorder and incomprehensibility of reality into the process of reading. For Martial, Rome was a miscellaneous place, an amalgam of people, cultures, habits, opinions and ideas. It formed a world of chaos, tensions and trivialities which could impossibly be fit within any kind of organization or order, however streamlined and ingenious it might be. By using techniques to frustrate a unified, coherent reading of the individual books and the collection, Martial maybe aims to give form to a reading experience that imitates the experience of real life. Just as the everyday world is too many-sided and inconsistent to allow for an unequivocal representation and understanding of all its aspects, the epigram collection, with its implied heterogeneity of meanings, we might say, does not lead the readers to a final or conclusive interpretation of the world to which it gives form. The wealth of the *Epigrams*, so it seems, similar to the richness of life, to conclude in the terms Lawrence has used in her *Ulysses*-analysis, 'exceeds the reader's interpretation of it'.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the literary strategies by which Martial has tried to represent the wealth of life in his literary work. The focus has mainly been upon the remarkable stylistic variety within the collection which in several ways contributes to the realisation of the *Epigrams'* inclusive aspirations. Martial continuously causes discrepancies between

the rhetorical-discursive and symbolic schemes and the reality to which they give form, often applying them in contexts that are totally inappropriate for their use. He deprives the traditional modes of representation from their original function, which at the same time must be seen as an indication of their representational limits and as an attempt to resuscitate and revitalise them within a new context. The styles cannot keep their conventional value when adopted to the world to which Martial wants to give form, yet get a new one (a 'second life'), in a reconfigured form and within the for them unusual environment of the *Epigrams*, with all its obscenity, banality and triviality. The last paragraph has proposed that the disruptions of the styles' conventional functioning also enforces the 'interpretative instability' of the collection, by which Martial has transferred the ungraspable of life into our reading experience. Just as the richness of life exceeds the work's representation of it, so the heterogeneity of meanings in the text exceeds the reader's interpretation of it.

To build up this argument, the *Epigrams* has been placed into a dialogue with (Karen Lawrence's analysis of) James Joyce's *Ulysses*. With notions such as 'encyclopaedia of styles', 'representational limits' and 'interpretative instability', it has enabled me to throw a new light upon questions concerning Martial's realism. Furthermore, the interaction with the novel has also allowed me to come to an approach to the *Epigrams* slightly different from and complementary to the dominant paradigm in recent scholarship. The past few years, much attention has been paid to the composition and arrangement of the twelve books and the collection as a whole. Many critics have searched for overarching structures and larger thematic clusters, a sense of unity, we could say, within the work and its parts.[128] By approaching the *Epigrams* from the unfamiliar perspective of Joyce's *Ulysses*, I have been incited to look for coherence on a conceptual level, rather than on the level of arrangement. The main goal of this chapter has not been to explore the different styles as another mode of structuring and grouping the individual epigrams but to analyse their function within and conceptual contribution to the representation of life, as it is.

Appendix: The Vergilian Frame in the *Epigrams*

The following scheme only gives a few suggestions of how Martial implies a continuous parallel between the twelve books in his collection and the twelve books of the *Aeneid*.

[128] E.g. Scherf 1998; Merli 1998; Greenwood 1998; Holzberg 2004; Lorenz 2004; Sapsford 2012; Hayes 2016.

Book	*Aeneid*	*Epigrams*
1	The beginning of an epic journey.	Martial's reader (1.2) and work (1.3) are represented as starting an (epic) journey.
	The storm incited by Juno and Aeolus.	References to *naumachia* (1.5) and to overloads of water (1.23; 1.59).
2	The 'Iliadic' book, retelling the fall of Troy.	Evocation of an Iliadic context via references to Priamus, Nestor, Philoctetes, Paris, Hecuba and Andromache (2.41; 2.64; 2.65). Their names often appear in a sexual context.
	Aeneas' loss of his wife Creusa in the Trojan city at the end of the book.	Martial's goodbye to his wife at the end of the book (2.91; 2.92: *valebis, uxor*). He does not need her anymore, due to a financial windfall.
3	Aeneas' story about the departure from Troy and his search for a place to build a new city.	Martial's complaints about his visit to Cisalpine Gaul (3.1; 3.3), which he believes to be too far away from his hometown.
	The Trojans sail around the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea looking for a place to live.	*Epigrams* 3 is the 'wettest' of all the books. It does not only picture several bath scenes (3.2; 3.25; 3.51; 3.72; 3.87). It also ends with an epigram stating that the book must have been wet when Rufus, the addressee, received it. The courier ran through an immense rain shower (notice the epic language in 3.100: *imbribus immodicis caelum nam forte ruebat*).
	Vergil stages Andromache and Palinurus.	References to their names in playful, scabrous contexts (3.76; 3.78).

4	Romance between Aeneas and Dido.	Love-and-marriage-cycle: see *supra*.
	The setting of the book: Carthage, a symbolically charged place in Roman history.	*Epigrams* 4 alludes several times to Carthage and the Punic war (4.1; 4.10; 4.14).
	Vergil suggests a parallel/contrast between Aeneas and Dido, and Marc Antony and Cleopatra.	The book contains a couple of references to the Egyptian queen and her lover (4.11; 4.22; 4.59).
	An important theme in the book is 'fire'. Dido will ultimately succumb to the 'hidden fire within her' (4.2: *caeco carpitur igni*).	As a sort of reversal, Martial thematises the deadly power of water and ice (4.3; 4.18; 4.60; 4.63; 4.73).
5	The Sicilian games.	The *ludi*-cycle: see *supra*.
6	Aeneas' journey to the underworld.	The theme of death is omnipresent in the book (6.15; 6.18; 6.28; 6.29; 6.32; 6.52; 6.53; 6.58; 6.62; 6.68; 6.76; 6.85). In 6.58, Martial playfully suggests that he himself almost saw the underworld (*o quam paene tibi Stygias ego raptus ad undas / Elysiae vidi nubile fusca plagae*). While Aeneas encounters great heroes during his *katabasis*, *Epigrams* 6 especially tells about the death of ordinary people.
	Aeneas meets his father, who speaks about his son's future and posterity.	Domitian is presented as the heir of the Dardanian and Julian offspring (6.3; 6.4; 6.7; 6.13; 6.38).
7	Arrival in Italy and start of the war episode of the epic.	Report on Domitian's campaign against the Sarmatians (7.1 to 7.8). *Epigrams* 7, however, does not

		picture great battle scenes. The book rather laments Domitian's absence and hopes for his return.
	One of the causes of the war between the Trojans and Italians is Lavinia, the pious and peaceful daughter of king Latinus.	Story about a woman who does not succeed at finding a good husband. She always chooses effeminate men, though she wishes to have a rough one. She strongly deplores the *imbelles thalamos* (7.58).
8	Aeneas travels to the Greek king Evander. When he arrives, Evander is carrying out a ritual in honour of Hercules.	The religious atmosphere in *Epigrams* 8 (praef.; 8.1; 8.2; 8.4; 8.8; 8.11; 8.15; 8.21; 8.36; 8.39; 9.49; 8.65).
	Collapse of mythological past and historical present. Overlap between Aeneas and August.	Link between Domitian and August (8.80).
	Evander is presented as a good 'host', who lays the basis for a strong friendship.	Complaints about bad hosts and friends who only want personal gain (8.14; 8.18; 8.70).
9	Nisus-and-Euryalus-episode. Story about two young boys' failed transition to manhood.	A large series of poems revolves around castration of and sex with young boys (9.2; 9.11; 9.12; 9.16; 9.17; 9.25; 9.36; 9.56; 9.79; 9.86; 9.103). An extensive discussion of this parallel can be found in Sapsford 2012, 241-248.
10	Aeneas has returned. Clash between the Trojan and Italian army. Death of the young warriors Pallas and Lausus.	Premature death of Scorpus, gladiator and charioteer, who passed away as *iuventa* (10.50; 10.53). Instead of deploring the death of great heroes and their sons, Martial laments a more ordinary figure (though famous in everyday Rome).

		References (personal and place names) to an Aeneadic context (10.6; 10.26; 10.73).
11	The book opens with the burial of Pallas.	In the beginning of the book, Martial includes an epitaph for a young boy (11.13).
	Vergil tells about the Amazon Camilla, who rages over the battlefield.	Martial complains all the time about women who have become too dominant and take up male roles in sexual contexts (11.7; 11.22. 11.46; 11.70; 11.71; 11.104).
12	Agreement between Jupiter and Juno about the fusion of the Trojan and Italian people.	*Epigrams* 12 revolves around mixture and the crossing of boundaries: Martial claims to have sex with 'exotic wives'; he is in Spain, but it feels as if he is in Rome; he presents this book as the mixture of book 10 and 11; etc. (12.2; 12.4; 12.5; 12.6; 12.8; 12.21; 12.34; 12.57; 12.60; 12.68; 12.98). An extensive discussion of the process of mixing in this book can be found in Rimell 2008, 190-200.

III. Methodology

Chapter 6

Five Chapters. Five Conversations
A methodological Retrospective

The concluding chapter of this dissertation will not present another dialogical analysis of an ancient and a modern text. It will make the conversational approach itself the object of study and, by looking back on the preceding chapters, reflect upon the theoretical and practical implications. It aims to answer the following questions: what view on reading historical literature lies behind the conversational strategy of reading? How does the dialogical reader define his relation to the historical object of interpretation? To what practical considerations and choices has this view led in the analyses presented in chapter one to five of this dissertation? In what ways can a dialogical conceptualisation of reading and a conversational research practice contribute to and deepen our understanding of historical literature?

This chapter will consist of three paragraphs. The first one will provide a brief outline of the theories developed by the literary-critical movement of modern hermeneutics. During the last century, this movement strongly debated on conceptual questions regarding reading and understanding historical literature. I will particularly focus on the work of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of hermeneutics' most prominent representatives. The second paragraph aims to clarify why Gadamer's ideas have proven to be relevant within the context of this project. It will explain the paths via which I came to his philosophy and clarify in what manners it has informed the choices made in analytical practice. The final paragraph will offer a general reflection upon the added value the dialogical approach presented and applied in this PhD thesis may bring to scholarship on historical literature, in particular on the literary production from the end of the first century.

6.1 Reading as a Conversation

What is the exact relationship between a text and its reader? How important is the reader for the interpretation of a text? To what extent does the meaning of a text depend on its reader? Questions about the role of the reader are probably as old as literature itself. We already find comments on the interaction between text and reader in Aristotle's *Poetics*, one of the earliest surviving literary-theoretical works in European history. In the classical and late antique period, authors like Horace, Cicero, Quintilian, Sidonius Apollinaris and Augustine (to name just a few) prove to be highly reflective about the dynamics between a text and its readers. This does not change in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Early Modern Times, during which the function of the reader is often discussed in rhetorical treatises, explanatory prefaces and epilogues, exegetical surveys, etc. Wherever there is literature, so it seems, the reader becomes a focal point of attention.[1]

In the domain of modern literary theory, the rise of interest in the role of the reader was inextricably connected to a literary-philosophical movement that came up in Germany, in the first half of the nineteenth century: hermeneutics.[2] This movement was, from the start, concerned with the type of questions mentioned above. It sought to explore the mechanisms behind interpretation, behind the interaction between a text and its readers. With a cliché, it is sometimes said that hermeneutics tried to 'understand' the fundamental principles of 'understanding a text'.[3] In the earliest phases, representatives of the hermeneutical movement considered the role of the reader in the process of interpretation to be quite limited.[4] A text, in their view, was a sort of box that contained one single meaning, which the author had intentionally placed in there. The only task of the readers was to find a way to get access to this box and to the meaning

[1] Pieters 2007, 210.

[2] In this chapter, I will always use the term hermeneutics to refer to the literary-philosophical movement that has developed itself as a modern literary theory since its origins in the nineteenth century. It will not be applied in the broader sense that, amongst others, Brun 1992, 2 has proposed, seeing hermeneutics "not merely as a contemporary theory but an extended family of questions about understanding and interpretation that have multiple and conflicting histories going back to before the beginning of writing".

[3] Nixon 2017, 28. He adds that the term hermeneutics is "derived from the figure of Hermes. In Greek mythology, Hermes was the son of Zeus and the god of transitions and boundaries. He acted as the messenger and emissary of Zeus, traversing the space between the mortal and the divine, the human world and the Mount Olympus. (...) The figure of Hermes thus highlights the inextricable bond between language and understanding. (...) This is also the space of hermeneutics".

[4] For the following brief overview of the history of the hermeneutical movement, I have mainly relied on Pieters 2007, 205-228 and Van Stralen 2012, 87-113.

that it was hiding.[5] While deciphering this one meaning, they were expected to correct the apparent 'mistakes, faults and misinterpretations' made by other readers.[6]

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, hermeneutical philosophers started to question the ideas of their predecessors. They gradually rejected the theory that readers merely are the passive decoders of the text's meaning. They began to wonder whether readers, perhaps, play a more active and creative role in the process of interpretation. An important figure in this development was the German historian-sociologist, Willhelm Dilthey. Dilthey still thought that the primary task of the readers was to derive the meaning which the author had intended from the text. But, in his opinion, doing this was not as easy as most of his predecessors had suggested. He remarked that the mind of a reader is not a blank spot or a *tabula rasa*. Each reader is bound to a certain time and place. We have a particular historical, cultural and political background knowledge that we inevitably bring with us when we start interpreting a text (*Vorverständnis*).[7] Since this background mostly differs from the text's author's, Dilthey argued, we should be very careful not to project an interpretation on our object of study that is incompatible with the cultural and historical background against which it was originally written. To discover the text's intended meaning, Dilthey believed that the readers should empathise as hardly as possible with its author, imagine themselves to be part of his world and mentally put themselves in his position (*Einfühlung*). Only then, they would be enabled to overcome their *Vorverständnis* and reconstruct the original meaning of the text.[8]

Dilthey's theory was further developed, criticised and adjusted by hermeneutical scholars that came after him. Their most important innovation was that they let go the fixation of the 'original' meaning of the text. In their view, a text does not contain or possess one single meaning that had been planted in there by its author (as Dilthey and his predecessors had argued). But "its meaning comes into being in the confrontation

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[5] An important figure within the earliest phases of the hermeneutical movement was the German theologist Friedrich Schleiermacher. He believed that the true meaning of a text could be found by means of the method of the hermeneutic circle. See Van Stralen, 2012, 90-91.

[6] As Pieters 2007, 212 remarks, the initial preoccupation within the hermeneutical movement with the 'right meaning' of the text can partly be explained by the religious background of many of its earliest representatives. As theologist, Schleiermacher, for example, was used to study the Bible and other religious works, in which he tried to find the one meaning lying behind the words of God. His activities as theologist very likely influenced his conceptualisation of the understanding of non-religious texts. For an extensive discussion of the Christian heritage of the hermeneutical movement, see Bruns 1992, 139-158; Van Stralen 2012, 35-54.

[7] According to Nixon 2017, 46, Dilthey "had been instrumental not only in establishing the human sciences as a distinct mode of understanding but also what might be seen as a 'historical turn' in interpretative theory".

[8] As Nixon 2017, 47 observes, "by generalising the historically located perspective of the interpreter into a universal principle, (...) Dilthey had, as it were, smuggled in a principle of 'objectivity' via a notion of transcendental subjectivism".

with its readers." This entails that the meaning of a text has not yet been determined before the act of interpretation. Instead, it is given form during the process of reading, in the here and now, "in interaction with the interpreters of the text".[9] The latter are never capable of overcoming the *Vorverständnis* that they have at the start of the process of interpretation. Their background knowledge inevitably informs the way in which they understand the text (which, however, as we will see, does not necessarily imply that the readers can project whatever interpretation they want on it).

The conceptualisation of the reader as a fundamental actor in the process of understanding was especially consolidated in the work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and his pupil Hans-Georg Gadamer.[10] In what follows, I will particularly elaborate upon the latter's ideas, since he, more than his master, reflected upon the ways in which a distance in time may influence our understanding of a text. At multiple occasions in his magnum opus *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), he showed himself concerned with the conceptualisation of reading historical literature, seeking to grasp how we can comprehend a text which was composed long before we were born, sometimes even centuries ago.

Gadamer opens *Wahrheit und Methode* with explaining what has incited him to start writing his survey on understanding. His stimulus has been his deeply-rooted dissatisfaction with the 'scientification' of the Humanities, including the fields of literary studies and philosophy. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, so he indicates, scholars working in these areas have tried to give their research a more 'scientific outlook'. Under the impulse of the natural sciences, they have started grounding their insights, ideas and analyses in extensive methodological apparatus, consisting of the most complex terminological frameworks, technical tools and other jargon. Gadamer claims to be not against the use of these apparatus as such (on the contrary, he often finds the understandings that these bring forth illuminating). But he wants to react against the reduction of the Humanities "to a purely methodological enterprise".[11] He aims to challenge the positivist assumption, proclaimed by some contemporary theorists, that a method can be developed which is "universally applicable and gives access to certainty".[12]

[9] Pieters 2007, 213 (my translation from Dutch).

[10] Pieters 2007, 214.

[11] Grondin 2003, 3. The first chapter of *Wahrheit und Methode* significantly opens with a section called "the problem of method". Gadamer 2004, 3 states: "Human science is too concerned with establishing similarities, regularities, and conformities to law which would make it possible to predict individual phenomena and processes".

[12] Nixon 2017, 44.

It is an illusion to think that knowledge is a sort of hidden substance that "a pre-ordained methodology of enquiry across disciplines and fields of study" would be able to lay bare.[13]

According to Gadamer, the search for the ultimate method has caused the positivist theorists to ignore one of the most fundamental principles of understanding. The obsession with methodological apparatus may create the impression that the process of understanding comes to an end as soon as one has succeeded in giving the (literary, philosophical, socio-cultural, ...) phenomenon that one tends to understand a place in some kind of theoretical framework.[14] But nothing, Gadamer states, could be further from the truth. Understanding must be considered as a matter of event, as an "experience (...) that strikes us and becomes part of us, more deeply than any syllogism or analytical argument".[15] If we take understanding seriously, we can never have the feeling that we are finished and that we have grasped the phenomenon in all its complexity. Our comprehension keeps on changing over the course of time.

Wahrheit und Methode is entirely dedicated to exploring the issues raised in its introduction. Gadamer tries to explain how the 'experience of understanding' exactly works, why this experience can never come to an end and in what ways his conceptualisation of understanding differs from the definitions by other theorists (e.g. the positivists). It is important to remark that his project does not exclusively pertain to the interpretation of texts. Gadamer does not just want to determine what our understanding of a textual object entails. Like Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927), *Wahrheit und Methode* is a "phenomenological and ontological effort"[16] that attempts to delineate the mechanisms that lie behind "all understanding" (i.e. the interpretation of texts inasmuch as the comprehension of socio-cultural phenomena inasmuch as the insights in ideology inasmuch as...).[17]

As Jean Grondin has remarked, however, Gadamer can never really hide that he has a strong fascination with the understanding of (literary) texts. *Wahrheit und Methode* contains multiple references to works written throughout the literary history of Europe,

[13] Nixon 2017, 45.

[14] Gadamer 2004, 4: "But the specific problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity. The experience of the sociohistorical world cannot be raised to science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. Whatever 'science' may mean here, and even if all historical knowledge includes the application of experiential universals to the particular object of investigation, historical research does not endeavour to grasp the concrete phenomenon as an instance of a universal rule. The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made".

[15] Grondin 2003, 42.

[16] Dostal 2002, 3.

[17] Gadamer 2004, xxviii. He adds: "My real concern is not what we do or ought to do but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing".

going from the Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, to German poets like Hölderlin and Schiller.[18] These texts have not simply offered him insights that could help him to think about his own theory. But reading them, so he implies, has made him more aware of the complexity of his philosophical undertaking. As soon as he enters their literary space, something declaredly 'happens to him'. The German philosopher suddenly feels 'captured' by and 'absorbed' into the textual realities which he has just started exploring (Grondin states that Gadamer felt "mysteriously apostrophised" by the texts).[19] While reading the literary works, Gadamer says to become highly self-aware that he is going through some kind of process, in which forces and powers are at work that are not easy to pin down (i.e. the process of understanding). Although many occasions in life trigger a similar experience, the interaction with the texts seems to bring him into the process at the moment that it manifests itself in its utmost intensity, that its powers and forces act on him in their purest form.[20]

Gadamer is particularly interested in the dynamics between a reader and a historical text. Every literary work, he claims, 'does' something to us.[21] But in case it was written a longer time ago, the experience of understanding potentially gets an extra dimension. *Wahrheit und Methode* depicts reading as an encounter between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the self and the other, the common and the strange.[22] When we start reading a text, Gadamer says, we inevitably bring something of ourselves with us. The readers do not enter a literary universe with an empty mind but come with prior assumptions, preconceptions and prejudices (in German, *Vorurteile*). They arrive, for example, with a particular aesthetic taste, ideas about good moral behaviour, an ideal image of love, etc.

[18] Grondin 2003, 4-6 discusses the importance of literature in Gadamer's philosophical thinking. He even remarks that the German philosopher "entered philosophy through poetry. He was attracted by literature, poetry and drama, and in April 1919 he enrolled at the University of Breslau (...) to study (...) German literature. Almost immediately he was disappointed in his German studies, thinking that his lecturers were perhaps too preoccupied by issues in formal linguistics. Gadamer realized that what interested him was not so much the formal structure of language, but whether language was a means of understanding". The latter issue would become one of the focal points of his later philosophical thinking. See also the edited volume by Richard Palmer (2001) that has collected several interviews with Hans-Georg Gadamer addressing the importance of historical literature and art (particularly pp. 61-77; 89-102).

[19] Grondin 2003, 39.

[20] Grondin 2003, 40. Gadamer 2004, xxi already makes this point in the introduction to *Wahrheit und Methode*: "The scholarly research pursued by the 'science of art' is aware from the start that it can neither replace nor surpass the experience of art. The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away".

[21] For Gadamer, as Grondin 2003, 43 observes, "to appreciate an architectural monument, a piece of literature, a poem, a sculpture, or a painting, is to let it act on me".

[22] Pieters 2007, 213.

that they have formed in relation to the time and place in which they are living. The German philosopher calls the totality of prejudices that the interpreters carry with them their "horizon of expectations".[23] Contrary to Willhelm Dilthey, Gadamer does not believe that we can go around this horizon, which unavoidably colours and informs our understanding of the text.[24] In the act of reading, the prejudices that make up the horizon of the reader are confronted with the assumptions, concepts, expectations and ideologies implied in and articulated by the literary work, i.e. the horizon of the text. The assumptions expressed by the text at some points somehow correspond to those of the readers, while they collide at others. Both the points of correspondence and collision, in Gadamer's view, may enrich the interpretative confrontation. Since reading historical literary works brings prejudices and ideas into this confrontation that originated in a time period that was not ours, the German philosopher implies, it may potentially deepen the process of understanding, perhaps causing the correspondences to our own preconceptions to be more unexpected and the contrasts to be sharper.[25]

Wahrheit und Methode frequently uses the metaphor "fusion of horizons" to refer to the confrontation between the *Vorurteile* of the (historical) text and the reader in the act of reading. Gadamer realises that this metaphor, in particular the word 'fusion', might be misleading, because it could give the impression that the horizon of the text easily blends into or is smoothly appropriated by the horizon of the reader. But this is not what he intends to indicate. On the contrary, he sees the confrontation between the horizons as a complex and tense process in which there is a continuous friction between the prejudices, assumptions and expectations of the reader and those of the text, at some points seemingly overlapping with one another yet at others appearing to be entirely irreconcilable.[26]

To explain what he exactly means with the image of 'fusion', Gadamer draws an analogy with a situation that is familiar to many of us. He asks us to imagine ourselves getting involved in a conversation with a stranger, someone we have never met before, possibly with different cultural roots.[27] Such a conversation seldomly goes smoothly from

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[23] Gadamer 2004, 271.

[24] Nixon 2017, 19: "Gadamer is in effect inviting us – and encouraging us – to acknowledge ourselves in that which we seek to understand. He refuses to accept that we need to bracket ourselves out of the process of understanding in order to achieve 'objectivity'. We are – he maintains – positioned *within* the field of our own understanding and need to acknowledge our own 'positionality' rather than deny it".

[25] As Grondin 2003, 58 remarks, Gadamer maintains that the "meaning that is transmitted to me from the past is one which challenges me, and which I always interpret in the light of my own possibilities, of my categories or better, of my language (...). I always understand the past from the perspective of my own horizon, but the latter has itself been formed by the past as much as by the possibilities of the language of actual understanding".

[26] Pieters 2007, 212.

[27] Palmer 2001, 11-13.

the start. First, we have to find out whether we have shared interests with our conversation partner. As soon as we have figured out what they are, we can try to get to know his vision on them, which sometimes deviates from what we considered to be the *communis opinio*. By hearing his views, we are almost automatically incited to think about where we stand on these topics, and, in some cases, even begin to question our own ideas.[28] Towards the end of the conversation, we should have a better understanding of where the stranger's and our own points of view overlap and collide, why he has similar or different opinions than we have and what this tells about his and our own historical-cultural background.[29] The process of reading a (historical) text can be conceptualised in an analogous way. While exploring a textual universe, the readers usually find at least one element in it that triggers them, and can serve as the 'topic for further conversation' (e.g. a moral view, a narrative device, etc.). During their reading, they gradually gain insight in how this element is further developed in the text. At the same time, they should consider to what extent this development matches the way in which they expected the text would/should develop the element. In some cases, it could be that the text goes right against the readers' expectations and say something else than they assumed. This could incite them to adjust the prejudices and assumptions they had about this particular text and perhaps even about literature in general. The examination of the text thus simultaneously implies a sort of self-examination, an increased awareness of the prejudices that we have brought into the process of interpretation. Within this "to-and-fro-movement" between our own perspective and the text's, within this 'fusion of horizons',[30] so Gadamer believes, we begin to comprehend in what ways we can find our (textual) conversation partner, in what sense we agree and disagree.[31] This dynamic interaction between text and reader forms, in the eyes of the German philosopher, the

[28] Gadamer recurrently emphasises that a conversation revolves around balance and equality. We may not at all costs try to convince our conversation partner of our views, neither accept everything he is saying. We should be willing to listen very carefully to his arguments and weigh his ideas against our own. As Nixon 2017, 31 notices, for Gadamer, "any attempt at mutual understanding involves the constant mediation and readjustment of our perceptual field".

[29] Gadamer 2004, 271: "All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person (...). But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it".

[30] Nixon 2017, 33.

[31] It is important to underline that the German philosopher considered the exploration of the horizon of the text and one's own horizon as two sides of one and the same event. The understanding of the text always goes hand in hand with the interpreters' exploration of their own prejudices and assumptions. Grondin 2003, 91 paraphrases Gadamer's thoughts as follows: "But, Gadamer wonders, is there some such thing as a horizon of the past which is radically cut off from the horizon of the present? Does not the construction of the horizon of the past always operate on our terms (...)? And does not the horizon of the present, its constellation of questions and research, remain carved by the past?"

basis, the fundament, of understanding; it is at "the points of intersection, where the horizons overlap", that "meanings are made".[32]

In summary, Gadamer does not conceptualise reading as an activity during which the interpreters should decipher the 'original meaning' of a historical text. The object of interpretation may not be seen as an expression of authorial intention that the readers, via some kind of ingenious methodological tool, can lay bare. We always understand the text "in relation to what we bring to it by way of prior assumptions, preconceptions and prejudices".[33] The historical distance to the object that we tend to comprehend does not serve as an obstacle that we should try to overcome (e.g. by seeking to empathise with its author, as Willhelm Dilthey proposed). In Gadamer's view, the distance in time may enrich our experience of understanding and give the confrontation between the horizon of the text and horizon of the reader an extra dimension.[34] In *Wahrheit und Methode*, "meaning is never self-evident". It is "always the result of an interpretative act whereby the interpreter and the interpreted meet halfway".[35]

The influence of *Wahrheit und Methode* on later movements may not be underestimated. As Robert Dostal has remarked, Gadamer's work became "a commonplace (...) in literary theory, sociology and social theory, as well as in theology and biblical commentary".[36] In the former research domain, the German philosopher's ideas were particularly invoked in the development of reception and reader-response theory. They proved, for instance, to be fundamental for the work of the Romance expert Hans-Robert Jauss, whose essay 'Literaturgeschichte as Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft' has been seen as the manifesto of reception studies.

From the '70s onwards, Gadamer's theory also frequently stood in the crossfire of criticism. His conceptualisation of understanding was challenged by different philosophical movements. It provoked various and often mutually contradictory responses. Some theorists considered *Wahrheit und Methode* as a plea for relativism and subjectivism, while others called it essentialist and saw no clear rejection in it of the earlier hermeneutical obsession with authorial intention.[37] In his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Richard Bernstein argues that these contradictory

[32] Nixon 2017, 31.

[33] Nixon 2017, 18.

[34] Pieters 2014, 38.

[35] Nixon 2017, 31.

[36] Dostal 2002, 5.

[37] Dostal 2002, 5-7 provides a brief overview of the various criticisms that Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* has received. For an analysis of the objections made by Jürgen Habermas, who was the first to present an in-depth discussion of Gadamer's work in his inaugural lecture 'Knowledge and Human Interests' (1965), see Mendelson 1979; Bernstein 2002, 267-275.

reactions probably came forth from apparent, internal ambiguities, paradoxes and unclarities in the philosopher's thinking.[38] On the one hand, *Wahrheit und Methode* proposes that the meaning of a literary work has not yet been determined before the act of interpretation. It is produced in the interaction with the readers, who interpret the text in light of the prior assumptions they have brought with them. On the other hand, Gadamer sometimes suggests that a text *does* have something of its own, something it possesses independently of and prior to its confrontation with the readers. It contains its own horizon, its own perspective, from where it confronts the readers with their prejudices. The text is represented as playing an active role, as having a voice of its own, that questions the readers inasmuch as it is questioned itself.[39] According to Bernstein, this confusion about the exact relation between text and reader, about who of the conversation partners is the dominant force, laid at the basis of the conflicting criticisms Gadamer's work received.[40]

The criticism that *Wahrheit und Methode* would be essentialist was most fiercely articulated by representatives of a literary-theoretical movement that originated in France, in the last decades of the twentieth century, deconstructionism. The figurehead of the movement, Jacques Derrida, did never conceal his aversion to the work. He was not only quite sceptical about the speaking voice that Gadamer ascribed to the text and the idea that it would possess something stable, a horizon, of its own.[41] In his view, the German philosopher also overemphasised the importance of 'agreement', 'fusion', 'coherence', 'reconciliation', 'dialogical achievement', etc. in his conceptualisation of understanding. According to Derrida, every attempt to interpret is inevitably informed by "irreducible undecidable tensions and aporias (...); our thinking and language are pervaded by apparent binary oppositions, which are always deconstructing

[38] Bernstein 2002, 277-278.

[39] Bernstein 2002, 278: "On the one hand, Gadamer insists that texts do *not* have meaning *in themselves*; meaning arises only in the happening of understanding. But at the other hand, Gadamer also insists that a text is sufficiently resistant to arbitrary meanings so that it can question our [prejudices, assumptions and interpretations]".

[40] According to Dostal 2002, 5, the initial confusion about some of Gadamer's points of view was not exclusively raised by apparent inconsistencies in his thinking. The reception of his philosophy was also complicated by the fact that *Wahrheit und Methode* "was first published in English in 1975 and that this first English edition was marred by numerous errors and omissions".

[41] Palmer 2001, 8-12. He suggests that Derrida's public aversion to Gadamer's work may have been part of a broader strategy to put the deconstructionist movement on the map. Deconstructionism as such also had its roots in the hermeneutical developments from the first half of the twentieth century and was particularly inspired by the work of Martin Heidegger. While representing himself as the latter's true heir, Derrida tended to portray Gadamer as a "betrayer of the legacy" of his master (13). For a discussion of the relation between deconstructionism and hermeneutics, see Van Stralen 2012, 155-165.

themselves".[42] He blamed Gadamer, with his pacifistic metaphorical imagery, for remaining too unsensitive to the ruptures and breaks in our understanding, to the contradicting and irreconcilable voices that intrude the process of interpretation.[43]

The criticism that Gadamer's theory would be subjectivist is more difficult to pin down on one particular literary-philosophical movement. Across the field of literary theory, several scholars complained that *Wahrheit und Methode* gave too much credit to the reader, the subject. Its "insistence on the importance of the historical situation of the interpreter and the applied character of any understanding" would have opened the door for relativism and legitimated the omnipotence of the reader in the process of interpretation.[44] An interesting voice in this debate was the American cultural historicist Jerome McGann, who published his main ideas in the '80s. McGann agreed with Gadamer and later hermeneutically inspired movements, such as reception theory and reader-response criticism that a text does not simply form an expression of authorial intention. It is perfectly legitimate that different readers come to a different interpretation of one and the same text. But he fundamentally disagreed with them about the main cause of the poly-interpretability. Reader-centred movements tended to explain this phenomenon as an indication that the meaning of a text can differ, depending on where, when and by whom it has been read; readers with a different horizon of expectations would produce different meanings of the text. McGann, by contrast, considered the poly-interpretability as the result of the semantic instability that is inherent to the textual universe itself. All literary works, he says, "contain within themselves, as it were, multiple versions of themselves".[45] They display a dynamic textual field that includes all possible readings, every interpretative scenario that could be produced during the act of reading. By representing poly-interpretability as a "function of the operations" within the text itself, rather than "of the perceiver",[46] McGann aimed to counterbalance the interpretative power that the modern hermeneutical movement, with Gadamer as one of its main representatives, had ascribed to the readers, the subjects.[47]

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[42] Bernstein 2012, 277.

[43] Although Gadamer is certainly sensitive to frictions in the process of understanding, he sees them as "challenges to be met; they set the task for hermeneutics" (Bernstein 2002, 276). Unlike Derrida, Gadamer supposes that, despite the collisions, breaks and ruptures, one will always "be able to find a common ground" (Palmer 2001, 11).

[44] Dostal 2002, 4.

[45] McGann 2001, 217.

[46] McGann 2001, 218. He considered the text as an "autopoetic system" that brings forth and produces its own readings. In McGann's view, our response to the text we are reading is generated by the internal dynamics of the text itself.

[47] A comprehensive discussion of McGann's thinking and of his response to hermeneutically orientated theories can be found in Pieters 2011, 120-130.

This paragraph does not seek to offer an exhaustive overview of the critical reception of Gadamer's hermeneutics. This would lead us too far and falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet I believe that Derrida's and McGann's objections to his philosophy were worth to be mentioned, as they will contribute to the argumentation that will be built out in the next paragraph. There, it will not only be explained how Gadamer's ideas, including the internal contradictions Bernstein noticed, have helped me think about the dialogical reading approach to late first century Latin literature applied in this project and influenced the methodological choices that have been made. The paragraph, in the end, will also offer a self-critical reflection upon these choices, for which will partly be relied on the criticisms mentioned above (especially Derrida's).

6.2 Reviewing Five 'Gadamerian' Conversations

In his intriguing monograph *Op zoek naar Huygens* (transl. *In search for Huygens*, 2014), Jürgen Pieters offers a passionate plea for a more direct engagement with modern theory in the research field of Dutch historical literary studies. It seeks to illustrate the added value of this engagement by means of a series of analyses that read the work of the Dutch Golden Age poet Constantijn Huygens in light of a diverse set of modern theoretical frames.[48] The broad range of theoretical perspectives which the book explores also includes a brief presentation of some of the views articulated in *Wahrheit und Methode*.[49]

Near the end of his discussion of Gadamer's thinking, Pieters reflects upon potential practical applications of the theory. The German philosopher considered *Wahrheit und Methode* as a purely ontological enterprise that must not be concerned with mapping out procedures for the concrete understanding of whatever sort of phenomenon. He saw the practical implementation of his ideas as a task that must be taken up by others, who could adapt them to "their specific needs and own unique situation".[50] For the field of literary

[48] Pieters' monograph on Huygens may be seen as a sequel to a book he wrote a few years before (2011). Therein, he extensively analysed the most important trends in the field of Dutch historical literary studies. He criticised the field's quite traditional philological research attitudes and pleaded for a more direct engagement with modern literary theory. His Huygens-monograph further develops that plea and illustrates the value that the adaptation of modern theoretical concepts and perspectives can bring to research practice by means of some concrete analytical examples.

[49] Pieters 2014, 36-38.

[50] Nixon 2017, 41. He adds that Gadamer "refuses to provide us with a rule book or anything approaching a method". In the philosopher's eyes, understanding is "always a unique event". How we understand via his work must depend on the "particular circumstances within which we seek to understand".

studies, Pieters suggests that the conversational model of understanding can possibly be valuable within the context of intertextual research. Although Gadamer did nowhere explicitly refer to this phenomenon, Pieters believes that several notions within *Wahrheit und Methode* could contribute to its conceptualisation.[51]

In the field of Dutch historical literary studies, Pieters declaredly notices a quite traditional attitude towards intertextual research. Most scholars (still) think about intertextuality in terms of a one-dimensional relationship that exists between a source-text x and a target-text y. The source-text must be a work of which they have strong assumptions that it was known to the author of the target-text (the latter is often suggested to have intentionally incorporated the reference). This implies that the source-text, chronologically speaking, always pre-dates the target-text. These scholars, moreover, only consider the intertextual reference as an enrichment of the meaning of the target-text. They are not convinced that an intertextual relation may also work in the other direction and inform their reading of the source-text.[52]

Pieters does not intend to reject this rather traditional type of intertextual research and recognises that it has already produced stimulating readings, as is the case for Constantijn Huygens' poetry. But he argues for a more open attitude towards other forms of intertextual studies that are less one-dimensional and not so strongly directed towards the intentions of the author of the target-text. Pieters suggests that the theoretical underpinning of this opener attitude can be based on Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.[53] If he would be asked to respond to the traditional view on intertextual research, the German philosopher would probably depart from the observation that every text originated in a specific historical and cultural context (in the previous paragraph, we spoke about the text's horizon of expectations). This entails, amongst others, that the text came into being in a particular literary and artistic sphere, and was produced in relation to other works circulating in this sphere. Given the importance of religious devotion in the Dutch 17th century, for example, we may suppose that the Bible served as a fundamental intertext in the sphere of Huygens and his contemporaries, and somehow informed their literary productions. Some Huygens-specialists, so it appears, have agreed

[51] Pieters 2014, 45-46.

[52] Pieters 2014, 39 remarks that this traditional attitude towards intertextual research is not only characteristic of the field of Dutch historical literary studies. Within several subdomains of literary scholarship, intertextual analysis is predominantly considered as a strategy of interpretation that explores the one-dimensional relationship between a source text and a target text.

[53] In what follows, I will rely on the ideas expressed by Pieters 2014 (especially in the presentation of Huygens' poetry) yet expand them and sometimes add insights of my own, based on the presentation of Gadamer's theory in the previous paragraph.

that the opening of his famous poem on the death of his wife, 'Cupio dissolvi' (1638),[54] for instance, seemingly includes a verbal parallel to the beginning of the letter of Paul to the Philippians.[55]

But Gadamer would immediately add that this reference to Paul's letter, even if it would have been intended by Huygens, should not necessarily become meaningful in every single reading of the text. Much depends on the expectations, assumptions and prejudices which each individual reader brings with him/her in the process of interpretation (*Vorurteile*).[56] Readers who turn to 'Cupio dissolvi' because they are interested in the relation between writing and mourning will, perhaps, be more concerned with the emotional response that the text evokes to the wife's decease than with biblical references. Others will maybe interpret the Latin title of the Dutch poem in the light of Huygens' self-fashioning as a multilingual, European author, instead of looking for the intertext lying behind it. The meaning of the text, Gadamer would say, does not stand or fall with the recognition of this one, specific biblical reference (which does not alter, of course, that the Latin title and the peculiar phrasing of the first verses of the poem could strike the readers and incite them to consider whether they have to do with intertextuality).[57]

A second remark that the German philosopher would presumably make is that the intertextual machinery which the beginning of Huygens' poem sets into play is much more complex than the traditionally orientated scholars Pieters has described would suggest. It is very likely that the readers observe in the opening lines way more

[54] Huygens' wife, Suzanne van Baerle, became ill shortly after the birth of their fifth daughter. She passed away on the 10th of May 1637.

[55] Letter to Paul, first capital, 21-24. Cf. Witstein 1969, 240; Pieters 2014, 47 explains that the biblical link enforces the theme of obligingness in the poem. In the letter, Paul says that a possible way to live a meaningful life is by placing oneself in the service of others. Likewise, Huygens suggests in the poem that, despite the death of his wife, he may not lose sight of his obligations and commitments. His five children, for instance, need a dedicated father who takes care of them.

[56] According to Grondin 2003, 51, Gadamer realises that one cannot expect from every reader that (s)he goes deeply into the literary-historical circumstances in which the text originated before (s)he starts reading it. Although the reader should always keep in mind that the work was produced in relation to a certain socio-cultural and historical background, the extent to which (s)he should know all the details depends on what (s)he intends to talk about with the text, what subject (s)he would like to address. The German philosopher even maintains that it might be an advantage not to "master all the historical references". In this way, a reader almost automatically avoids taking a historicist attitude towards the object of study, which would reduce it to a merely historical artefact. The act of reading entails a fusion of horizon, which means that "we imply our world in the work of presentation" and vice versa.

[57] As explained in the previous paragraph, Gadamer conceptualises understanding as a metaphorical conversation between two equal partners. The course of the dialogue does not only depend on what the readers would like to know. The voice of the text may sometimes guide them into another interpretative direction than they would have expected.

connections than just the one reference to the Bible to which some scholars have pointed. Some would think to notice relations with "passages or textual forms" from other works that circulated in the literary-artistic sphere in which the author was active.[58] Pieters proposes that Huygens probably had Michel de Montaigne's 'Apologie de Raymond Sebond' in mind as well when writing the first lines of 'Cupio dissolvi'.[59] But it is not at all unthinkable that others would see links and associations to passages or textual forms during their process of interpretation which can impossibly have been intended by the author. In Gadamer's eyes, it would make perfect sense if a reader would detect a connection to a literary work that Huygens could not have known, for example, to a text written (many years) after the appearance of 'Cupio dissolvi'. Pieters, for instance, indicates that the beginning of the poem triggers for him a reminiscence to a passage in the work *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos* that was written by the British author John Berger in 1984.

To clarify his point of view, Gadamer would probably refer once more to the readers' incapability of going around the historical and cultural background against which they interpret a literary work. We always understand a text, even though it was composed almost four centuries ago, in the 'here and now', in the exact moment we are reading it. Whether we like it or not, the horizon of expectations with which we begin to read 'Cupio dissolvi' inevitably differs from the horizon against which the poem was produced and read in the 17th century. One of the consequences is that the vast collection of works in relation to which we interpret the poem does not completely overlap with the assortment of texts that circulated in the literary-artistic sphere of Huygens and his contemporaries. On the one hand, it is very likely that some of the works with which the author and the original reading audience must have been acquainted went lost. This causes us to remain blind for a couple of intertextual links that Dutch Golden Age readers would have made. On the other hand, we also read the opening of 'Cupio dissolvi' in relation to texts that were more recently written and can impossibly have belonged to Huygens' literary sphere yet which have entered the process of interpretation together with the rest of the *Vorurteile* that we as readers from the 21st century bring into it.[60] We inevitably give meaning to the historical text in interaction with the frame of reference with which we

[58] Pieters 2014, 40 (my translation from Dutch). Pieters notes that an intertextual relationship between two texts should not necessarily be established by way of verbal parallels. They can also be linked because of a shared narrative feature, generic play, poetic device, etc. This explains why Pieters does not exclusively speak about intertextuality in terms of references relating "passages" but also connecting "textual forms".

[59] Pieters 2014, 47. In this 'Apologie', Montaigne also refers to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, which the French philosopher, in his turn, connects to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.

[60] Even specialists in Dutch Golden Age poetry, Gadamer would say, are not enabled to read Huygens' 'Cupio dissolvi' in the same way as the original audience. Their interpretation is inevitably informed by the way in which they, as readers from the 21st century, have learned to conceptualise literature and aesthetics, and by the (modern) frame of reference against which they read a text.

as modern readers are acquainted, in "dialogue", to use Gadamer's concept in a broader way, as Pieters proposes, with a series of works that did not necessarily exist already in the Dutch Golden Age. This explains how it could be that the first lines of 'Cupio dissolvi' remind Pieters of the book by John Berger, although he realises that Huygens could never have wanted him to see this link. Traditional scholars would, perhaps, deplore the interference of a more recently composed text in a reading of a poem from the 17th century, being afraid that it would violate (what they consider to be) its 'historical meaning'. According to Pieters, Gadamer would object that the 'conversation of understanding' we have with the historical text will only benefit from our awareness of what we bring into the process of interpretation. By reading the opening of 'Cupio dissolvi' in relation, 'in dialogue', to a passage in a more modern work, e.g. Berger's, by comprehending what exactly constitutes the relationship, and by seeing the points of overlap and contrast, we would be enabled to better understand what both texts are trying to say to us. Via an explicit confrontation, via an "open conversation" between the two texts, we may become more sensible to the assumptions, prejudices and expectations that the Dutch Gulden Age poem and John Berger's book are voicing.[61]

A Conceptual Shift

The reason why this paragraph has opened with a quite extensive presentation of Pieters' Huygens-monograph is because of the central position that the ideas articulated in it have occupied in my research. My encounter with the Huygens-book, somewhere halfway my PhD project, laid the basis of a conceptual shift. The work provided an alternative kind of discourse and theorisation to think and write about the analytical experiments with classical and modern literary texts that had, from the start, formed the core of my research. It led me towards a conceptualisation of reading historical literature, based on the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and centred around the notion of the dialogue or the conversation. As has been explained above, this dialogical conceptualisation does not only entail that the act of reading as such can be considered as a conversational process in which the voice of the readers gets entangled with the voice of the text. The expansion of the notion that Pieters has proposed also allows us to adapt it to the interactions set up between two texts and see the ancient and modern works as interlocutors who have

[61] Pieters 2014, 44 explains that Berger's work serves as an illuminating point of contrast that helps him to grasp the view on death that Huygens' poem is articulating. Berger represents death as an irrevocable end. The certitude that life will be over does not scare him but works comforting. Huygens, by contrast, speaks about a life after death, looking forward to the moment he will be reunited with his beloved wife, somewhere in the near or far future. Pieters 2014, 57 states that Huygens' and Berger's words "make each other in [his] reading more pertinent and vivid" (my translation from Dutch).

their own views, assumptions and expectations. As will be clarified below, the encounter with this Gadamer-based discourse and theorisation in Pieters' monograph enabled me to go around or beyond some of the conceptual limits which my PhD research had reached in the earliest phase(s).

At the start of my project, I formulated the ambition to set up my research around a notion that could be called 'the personal library of the reader'. With this notion, I did not want to refer to a concrete, physical collection of books, somewhere stored in the house of an individual reader. It was used as a metaphor of the mental space in which all the texts which a reader reads during his/her life are preserved.[62] Whatever we read, be it a book, a poem, a chapter, a brief citation, etc., it does not disappear into thin air as soon as we have finished reading it. But it gets its place in our mind, becomes part of our memory and (at least in theory) can be evoked from there whenever we need it.[63] The totality of mentally saved texts is what can be understood under 'the personal library of a reader' (the assumption that no two readers can ever have read exactly the same assortment of texts motivated the addition of the adjective 'personal'). When asked about the principles ruling this library, I mostly remarked that the way in which all these texts are ordered is never fixed and, therefore, subjected to change. Different arrangements of the library's texts exist simultaneously in the reader's mind. In one mental arrangement, the works stored in the library are ordered in a chronological manner, in accordance to the historical period in which they were written. In another, they are grouped conform to the genre to which they belong. In yet another, texts from the library are placed together because the reader links them to a specific occasion or event (e.g. a vacation). Or since they share a particular theme or narrative feature. Or because they all remind the reader of a peculiar person, and so on. The reader's personal library, so was my idea, has numerous configurations that are in constant change, being re-arranged every time a newly read or re-read work must be given a place. The research aim which I defined in

[62] I have loosely inspired the concept of the 'personal library' on two essays, respectively written by Italo Calvino and Walter Benjamin. In 'I buoni propositi' (1952), Calvino reflects upon the figure of the 'Good Reader' preparing to leave on vacation. To decide what books he is going to take with him, Calvino says, the Good Reader should first of all get a precise overview of what works he has in his possession, at home, in his library. In 'Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus' (1931), Walter Benjamin tells about the boxes full of books, which he had to (un)pack every time he moved from one city to the next. Although Calvino's and Benjamin's essays lay different accents and give complementary definitions of the relationship which a reader has with his books, both emphasise that it is important for a reader to know what works he has in his library and why they are standing in there. I have adapted this notion and transformed it into an image referring to a mental space.

[63] Scholars working in the domain of neuro-aesthetics have recently tried to describe the biological and cognitive principles lying behind this process. They have wondered why a certain occasion activates a reminiscence to a text which we have read before. For a good introduction to this field of research, see Panagiotidou 2011; Van den Broeck e.a. 2001.

the beginning of my project was to explore what it would mean and what implications it would have if one would decide to explicitly analyse a corpus of historical texts, in this case late first century Latin works, in relation to the continuously shifting and not necessarily chronologically ordered Library preserved in one's mind.

To conceptualise the notion of the library, this project initially turned to the theories about reading and inter-textual relationships that had been formulated in France in the '60's and 70's, by a group of scholars that had united themselves around the (poststructuralist) journal *Tel Quel*. Among its famous contributors were the Bulgarian Julia Kristeva and the French essayists Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes.[64] The *Tel-Quel*-theorists strongly criticised strategies of textual analysis exclusively directed towards the intentions of an author.[65] A reading practice that aims to identify and reconstruct the single, original meaning that the writer had planted in the text, they believed, is limiting and does no justice to the richness of the work. It unjustly refuses to recognise, moreover, the creative role that the readers play in the process of interpretation and their active involvement in the production of the text's meaning.[66] Led by these convictions, the *Tel-Quel*-movement tried to cause a change in the research practices that were at that time common in the field of literary studies, including intertextual analysis.[67] Someone like Roland Barthes, for example, started to define the intertextual nature of certain textual elements in function of the reader, instead of the author. A passage or a textual form in a literary work, in his view, should not be called intertextual because it contains a reference of which we assume that it was intended by the writer. It is the reader who decides about the passage's or form's intertextual status, based on whether or not (s)he thinks to notice

[64] Allen 2000, 30: "The late 1960s in Paris can justifiably be styled (...) 'the time of theory'. The political turmoil of 1968 and its aftermath brought the process of debate to a climax and can be said to have consolidated a poststructuralist critique of methodology, traditional notions of authorship and even the criterion of meaningfulness. An attention to the role of literature and literary language was crucial to the rise of poststructuralist theory, nowhere more so than in the journal *Tel Quel*".

[65] The set of ideas articulated in *Tel Quel* was diverse. Each theorist laid his/her own accents and was free to disagree with the others as much as (s)he wanted (Allen 2000, 31). In what follows, I just aim to describe some of the general lines of thinking that served as the journal's basic principles and about which most of its contributors agreed.

[66] Cf. Barthes' famous essay 'La mort de l'Auteur' (1967). The *Tel-Quel*-representatives thus partly revisited the debates that had already been started in Germany, in the first half of the twentieth century, within the context of the hermeneutical movement.

[67] The term 'intertextuality' was not yet broadly used at that time (one mostly spoke of allusions, by which one meant references intended by the author). It was coined by Julia Kristeva in her early work. According to Allen 2000, 35, Kristeva was "concerned with establishing the manner in which a text is constructed out of already existent discourse. Authors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts, so that, as Kristeva writes, a text is 'a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text', in which 'several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another'".

a (meaningful) connection to another text that (s)he has read before.[68] According to Barthes, the work that the reader brings thereby in the process of interpretation *could* have been known to the author, yet this is not a necessary condition.[69]

The ideas of the *Tel-Quel*-movement sufficed to develop a preliminary theoretical underpinning of a reading strategy based on the notion of the personal library. The explicit reader-centred orientation made it not so difficult to justify the choice not to exclusively read a Latin-text-corpus in relation to works from the classical period. It opened the conceptual possibility to examine late first century Latin texts in the light of other meaningful configurations within my personal library and link them, for example, to (non-ancient) works with a common theme, a similar narrative device, etc. At the same time, however, the *Tel-Quel*-theories proved to have their conceptual limits. Barthes, for instance, convincingly argued that reading, per definition, is an intertextual act; it sets an associative machinery into play that brings works from different periods together in the moment of reception. But he did not fully think through what the simultaneity of all these works in the act of reading implies for their historical-cultural position and meaning. His conceptualisation of the synchronisation of texts in the process of reading remains, thereby, at some points a little bit superficial and lacks, in a sense, historical awareness.[70] A similar problem was encountered somewhat later when trying to situate the reading strategy within recent developments in the field of comparative literary studies. Although its theorists have formulated stimulating insights which will be discussed later in this chapter, they have mainly conceptualised transnational and especially transcultural approaches to literature, which have their own very specific

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[68] According to Samoyault 2008, 15, Barthes "*reste (...) très proche de Julia Kristeva et de la productivité textuelle*" for his general conceptualisation of intertextuality. But he took Kristeva's theory a step further by reflecting upon the implications it had for our view on the role of the reader. He considered reading as an act that plunges us into a network of textual relations, established and defined by the reader himself. Barthes illustrated the practical application of this intertextual view on reading in numerous contributions, all departing from the links and associations he made as reader (cf. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975); *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977)).

[69] Pieters 2014, 43.

[70] To be clear: I do not mean that Barthes himself, as a reader, lacked historical awareness. I just want to point out that the notion of historical distance did not take a central position in his theoretical reflections upon the process of reading. For a discussion of the somewhat paradoxical relationship between Barthes's theoretical conceptualisation of reading and his celebration of modernist literature on the one hand, and his frequent analytical treatment of historical pieces of literature, such as the tragedies of Racine or the oeuvre of Chateaubriand, on the other, see Culler 1983, 31-48. Neither do I want to claim that Barthes's ideas have not informed the conceptualisation of the reading strategy proposed in this thesis (Pieters' intertextual application of Gadamer's philosophy, for instance, has strongly been influenced by the theories developed by the *Tel-Quel*-representatives). But, as I will explain below, I have placed Gadamer's theory, instead of Barthes's, at the centre of this methodological retrospective, because of its emphasis on the historical dimension inherent to the act of reading.

theoretical problems and concerns, rather than a trans-periodical approach (with transcultural, I refer here to a form of research in which, for example, a West-European text is confronted with a contemporary South-African or East-Asian piece of literature).[71]

This may explain why Gadamer's philosophy and Pieters' intertextual application did become so appealing within the context of this project. They emphasise the historical dimension of the act of reading. The German philosopher would agree with Barthes that we are always reading a (historical) text in the here and now, and in relation to other works that we have read before. But he would remind us that the textual elements that trigger reminiscences to other works came into being in a time that was not ours (the horizon of the text). He would add, moreover, that the personal library, despite its possible non-chronological configurations, does not function as a timeless vacuum. What we bring from there into the conversation with our historical object of study are not the texts as such but interpretations of them that we have also been shaping against our historical and cultural background (the horizon of the reader). In what follows, this paragraph wants to clarify to what further theoretical and practical considerations this engagement with Gadamer's ideas and his historicisation of the position of both text and reader has led.

Corpus Selection

A question I was asked many times is how the selection of the modern literary works had occurred. Why exactly has Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* been integrated in the analysis of Pliny's *Epistulae*? Why has not been chosen for another modern conversation partner? How did I decide to read Martial's *Epigrams* in relation to Joyce's *Ulysses*? In what way could the choice be justified to connect Statius' *Silvae* to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and the poems by Paul Celan? And so on. In the earliest phases of this project, I kept my answer to these questions quite plain and simple. I mostly remarked that these modern texts belonged to, what could be called, 'my personal library'. This library partly made up the background knowledge, the frame of reference, through which I was obliged, as a

[71] Also here, I do not intend to indicate that there is a lack of historical awareness in the field of comparative literary studies. I only aim to remark that the focus in recent theoretical conceptualisations lays, to a lesser extent, on the issue of historical distance. As Dominguez 2015, 9-18 has observed, comparative theorists are nowadays mostly concerned with the political implications of their research project. Their main preoccupation is to theorise the "power structures" (9) within the comparative configurations (e.g. in case we are comparing a West-European to an Arabic text, to what extent do we impose the "Eurocentric (...) literary values that are both elitist and class based" (10) of the former on the interpretation of the latter?). This may explain the theoretical attention to transnational and especially transcultural approaches to literature, rather than to trans-periodical modes of reading (e.g. within 'one and the same' (?) Western European culture).

reader from the 21st century, to interpret my Latin-text-corpus. This could explain why some of the texts that had earlier been stored in my library, such as Nabokov's autobiography, Joyce's magnum opus, Calvino's city descriptions and Celan's poetry, had slipped into the process of interpretation. As such, there was nothing wrong with this answer. It parroted a simplified version of the reader-centred conceptualisation of intertextuality developed by the *Tel-Quel*-movement.[72] Yet, it failed to grasp the nuances and complexities of the mechanisms that had laid behind the selection.

Gadamer's theory can lead us towards a more challenging explanation of the modern-text-choices. His ideas have first of all rendered me more aware of what the selection reveals about my position as reader. As remarked in the previous paragraph, the German philosopher attaches much importance to self-understanding. While interpreting a text, we should not only pay attention to our object of study but also be concerned with "acknowledging ourselves in that which we seek to understand".[73] Gadamer urges us several times not to take this aspect within the process of understanding too lightly. It does not suffice to comprehend *that* we are prejudiced, neither to sum up some vague assumptions that will possibly inform our interpretation of the text. The interpreters, instead, should attempt to see the bigger picture, trying to find out how the individual *Vorurteile* are *related* to one another and *where* they come from. They may not lose sight of the greater complex, the whole horizon of expectations, against which all their prejudices have been formed and that defines 'who they are as readers'.[74]

Important to realise is that the modern works which were implemented into the process of interpretation do not form a randomly gathered bunch of texts which anyone could have picked. There is a remarkable pattern running through the selection that gives a clear indication of my position as a reader. As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, most of the modern texts discussed in the analytical chapters originated within the context of the modernist movement (an exception is, perhaps, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, that could be said to be fully affiliated to postmodernism). Literary historicists usually tend to categorise them among the best pieces of literature which modernism brought forth. Their place in the West-European literary canon is rarely questioned, even though several of these works have never received a large audience and have mainly been read inside university walls.[75] The choice to work with this 'exquisite collection' of texts immediately lays bare my academic background. It unmasks me as a

[72] Given his focus on the productive role of the reader, I especially relied on the theory by Roland Barthes.

[73] Nixon 2017, 19.

[74] Nixon 2017, 20.

[75] James Latham, editor of the *James Joyce Quarterly*, for instance, recently described *Ulysses* "as probably the most purchased and least read book in the world". Jordan Ellenberg's Hawking Index (2014) has proven that it is statistically very presumably that *Ulysses* belongs to the category "most-likely abandoned books".

very privileged reader, who had the (socio-economical) opportunity to enjoy an education in modern(ist) literary studies at a strongly Eurocentrically orientated university department.[76] The way in which these modern texts were interpreted, moreover, suggests that I have been formed as reader in the wake of, what David Pattie has called, the "poststructuralist" critical shift in modernism-scholarship.[77] The previous analytical chapters have particularly concentrated on some striking narrative or poetic features in the modernist literary works. The third chapter, for instance, highlighted the principles of repetition, reproduction and recycling in Samuel Beckett's trilogy. James Joyce's *Ulysses* was portrayed as an encyclopaedia of styles implying the novel's representational limits, while the metaphor of light in Celan's poetry became an emblem of the undecidability of his literary universe. According to Pattie, this kind of interpretations is a typical product of the "poststructuralist paradigm" that monopolised modernist studies since the second half of the eighties until the end of the nillies. It replaced the "humanist" and "philosophical" academic tendencies that had mainly elaborated, from the sixties onwards, upon the cultural moods, worldviews and ideologies expressed in these post-world-war-texts.[78] Especially Celan and Beckett had been seen as the voices of their generation, whose works respectively capture a holocaust experience and the sense of hopelessness, desperateness and uncertainty which would have been characteristic of the first decades after WWII.[79] My focus on narrative features betrays that I have been writing about them from a non-contemporary perspective, belonging to an academic generation that has evaluated the post-war-production from a certain (historical and emotional) distance. My selection of the modern works as well as my interpretation of them, in other words, has (at least, partly) been informed by my privileged academic poststructuralist readership.

More elements could be defined here that determine my position as a reader. But this would distract attention from another factor which has influenced the choice of the modern literary works: the internal narrative organisation of the Latin texts. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer represents the textual object as an equal actor in the process of understanding. Within the metaphorical setting of the conversation, the text plays the role of the stranger whom we hope to comprehend. But the way in which the dialogue proceeds and what directions it takes, does not only depend on what we desire to know.

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[76] The Department of Literary Studies at Ghent University predominantly organises courses focusing on West-European literatures (French, German, Italian, Latin, etc.). There is little attention for mutual interactions between these literatures or for exchanges with non-West-European literatures.

[77] Pattie 2004, 238. Pattie particularly focuses in his chapter on the paradigmatic shifts in research on Beckett but maintains that they are, in a sense, representative for broader developments within the field of modernism studies.

[78] Pattie 2004, 230.

[79] For a discussion of the critical reception of Celan's poetry, see Perloff 2006.

It rests as well, Gadamer remarks, on what this stranger is willing to share, what his interests are and what he would like to talk about. Translated to research practice, this entails that the modern-text-selection has also been determined by the narrative configurations of the Latin objects of study. My personal library contains much more works than the six pieces of (post)modernist literature discussed in the preceding chapters. In theory, the possible combinations that could have been made with the classical texts would almost be endless. Yet, the possibilities have strongly been limited by the internal organisation of the Latin works. Specific narrative features of the classical texts have served as the ground on which the intertextual relations to modern pieces of literature have been established. Each of the modern works has been selected because it had a concrete narrative affinity with and was therefore evoked by a particular aspect of the Latin pieces of literature. Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* has been incorporated in the analysis of the *Epistulae* because the manner in which it has arranged the story of its author's life, with the frequent deviations from the linear course of time, shows resemblances to Pliny's composition of his letter collection and its violations of chronology. The incorporation of Borges' 'Library of Babel', an essay in which a narrator is challenged to write a complete work, has been induced by the remarkable encyclopaedic and total ambitions articulated in the opening of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.

With this emphasis on the importance of the narrative configurations of the Latin works, I do not want to imply that the modern texts implemented in the analyses were the only possible conversation partners. I have considered sometimes to include other pieces from my personal library.[80] Our understanding of the classical objects of study might have benefited from some of them as well. Another reader, moreover, would have established alternative intertextual relationships. But the point I want to make here is that the modern-text-selection has not only depended on my personal, privileged position as a poststructuralist academic reader with a preference for modernism. It has also been directed by the narrative organisation of the Latin works in question, by their 'voices', to say it in Gadamer's terms, in the conversation of understanding.[81] A theorist like Jerome McGann, who was mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph, would

[80] I have considered, for example, to integrate Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* into the discussion of Statius' *Silvae*. Christopher Burney's *Solitary Confinement* might have been a suitable conversation partner for Quintilian's *Institutio*.

[81] Grondin 2003, 43 has noticed that Gadamer has developed an extensive metaphorical imagery to portray the text as a living and speaking actor in the process of understanding. The German philosopher recurrently uses, for example, the notion of the reader's "interior ear" in which the "voice of art" resounds. According to Grondin 2003, 44, this imagery would be inspired by the work of the ancient thinker Plotinus, whom Gadamer frequently mentions in *Wahrheit und Methode*.

presumably take the latter idea one step further. He would represent the intertextual response as a function of the multi-interpretable configuration of the classical texts, rather than as a function of the perceiver. In his view, the implementation of Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* would not be the outcome of a decision, a selection, I have made as a reader, as a subject. He would see it as one of the possible interpretative scenarios that Pliny's *Epistulae* already contained and has obliged me to activate.[82] Although McGann perhaps overemphasises the power of the text, his conceptualisation of reading and textuality could help us to avoid falling into the trap of subjectivism and relativism. It may serve as a reminder of the informative voice of the text, that also holds a prominent position in Gadamer's philosophy, yet which later hermeneutically inspired movements have sometimes tended to overlook.

Looking for Balance

As indicated in the previous paragraph, *Wahrheit und Methode* is not entirely free from internal contradictions and inconsistencies. These made the work from its appearance onwards susceptible to criticism from various literary-philosophical angles. Gadamer himself admitted after the publication that some of his ideas indeed needed further clarification. This explains why he continued giving lectures and interviews until the end of his life. During these public performances, he tried to solve some of the contradictions that he had unwittingly formulated in *Wahrheit und Methode*, yet at the same time recurrently urged his audience not to confuse 'inconsistency' with 'balance'.[83] It is true, he said, that his theory of understanding does not take radical philosophical positions, neither situates itself at one or the other extreme. It seeks to propose an equilibrium between all actors and elements within his thinking. Some readers may find this confounding or even see it as a sign of critical weakness. But, in fact, it has been a deliberate choice to prefer balance to polarisation, and to attempt to find a theoretical middle ground between the interpreter and his object of interpretation, between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader, etc.[84]

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[82] McGann's emphasis on the guiding role of the text thus may not be considered as a subtle way to smuggle in the notion of authorial intention. He would certainly agree that intertextual links could be established during the process of reading that cannot be intended by the author. But he would explain this by pointing to the poly-interpretability of the textual universe itself, rather than grounding his justification in the creative role of the reader.

[83] Palmer 2001, 14-15.

[84] In one of his later contributions, Gadamer 1992, 175-176 explains that striving for balance between ourselves as interpreters and the objects of interpretations is a dynamic and continuous process. "Balance", he says, "has the attribute of a certain set of oscillations which equalize each other to keep the whole in equilibrium. When

Inspired by Gadamer's philosophy, 'balance' has served as a sort of implicit criterium against which this project has measured many of its theoretical and practical considerations. The notion of balance has informed, for instance, the justification of the modern-text-choices which was offered above, wherein it was explained that the selection depended on my privileged position as a reader inasmuch as on the narrative configurations of the classical works. The notion has also determined the way in which the literary analyses have been presented in the preceding chapters. Although they aimed to acknowledge the prejudiced role I have played within the process of interpretation, I have tried to avoid using a too personal tone in my writing (my dissertation must not be set up in the form of a diary or a collection of personal notes that would have been more about me than about the textual objects of study).[85] Furthermore, balance has been a fundamental concern throughout the analytical phases of this project. A continuous topic of reflection has been how a Latin work could be examined in relation to a modernist one, without losing sight of the literary-historical contexts in which both originated. How could one make sure that the horizon of the classical text is not appropriated by and assimilated into the perspective, the horizon of the modernist piece, through which it has been read (and vice versa)?

A fruitful parallel to think about this analytical challenge was provided by Gadamer's image of the conversation. Although he used it as a general metaphor of the process of understanding, the way in which he worked out this image in his oeuvre offered some elements that proved to be helpful to reflect upon the interpretative conversations between ancient and modern texts set up in my research and upon possible strategies to keep the balance between the works' horizons. The German philosopher, as already indicated in the previous paragraph, first and foremost saw a conversation (and thus also the process of understanding) as an event that was built up around principles of equality and equilibrium. In his view, a dialogue forms a linguistic encounter in which the participants should respect each other's presence and opinions, being as regardful to the points about which they agree as about which they disagree. A conversation in which the participants only want to hear the other say what they are thinking themselves can hardly be productive. If they just wish to be confirmed in their self-righteousness and are

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the bounds are exceeded, the balance is offset (...) and must be corrected by a new expenditure or effort. Consequently, the reestablishment of equipoise is nothing more than the reintroduction of an oscillating equilibrium". The balance Gadamer is talking about, in other words, is not a stable condition but a state for which we as interpreters should aim over and again.

[85] Pieters 2014 has set up his Huygens-monograph as a vacation diary. He gives his readers a detailed account of his journey to Italy during which he (allegedly) studied the oeuvre of Constantijn Huygens. By choosing this format, Pieters, in my view, foregrounds his own voice too explicitly. He runs, thereby, at some points, the risk of overshadowing the voice of the texts.

not open to the views of the other, the dialogue, for neither of them, can become an enrichment. Something similar can be said about a conversation in which the participants exclusively focus on the points of disagreement. They run the risk of persisting in their own convictions and of starting to talk past each other, instead of with each other. The translation of this conceptualisation of the dialogue to my own research practice allowed me to define a view on the conversational strategy of reading grounded in the idea of balance. Dialogical readers, we could say, comparable to the interlocutors in Gadamer's metaphor, should be very attentive both to the overlaps and collisions between the historical and modern textual voices which have become involved in the interpretative conversation,[86] both to the aspects of agreement and disagreement.[87] They must keep an eye, as will be explained below, on the differences that might be hidden in the points of sameness, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the sameness that can be concealed in what appeared to be different.

To remain attentive to the points of agreement and disagreement between the ancient and modern texts, I worked in a systematic way and tried to carry out each literary analysis in three steps. These steps were loosely inspired by the different phases in

[86] A recent academic survey in the field of Latin literary studies that, in my opinion, sometimes overemphasises the points of agreement between two literary-historical periods is Jesús Hernández Lobato's *Vel Apolline muto* (2012). The book seeks to propose a model for a contemporary understanding of late antique art and literature. One of its central points is that the late antique period may be seen as a "*postmodernidad del mundo clásico*" (34). It explores several late antique texts in the light of a various set of (post)modern theoretical frames and literary works, arguing that the conceptualisation of literature and aesthetics in the late antique period has strong affinities to our contemporary ideas. Although Lobato convincingly shows numerous overlaps between late antique and (post)modern art, he sometimes loses sight of the collisions, the disagreements, in their aesthetics. A small example can be found in the fifth chapter in which he sees a connection between the fragmented nature of many late antique art forms and the discourses on fragmentation and dispersion in (post)modern theory. He names Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* as "*la obra-fragmento por excelencia*" (269) and considers it to be representative of the collage- and assemblage-strategies that were often used in the artistic production of the twentieth century. As one of its late antique counterparts, he mentions the arch of Constantine which is largely constructed from components that originally belonged to monuments that had earlier been built in honour of Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius. Although Lobato has rightly suggested that both the *Passagen-Werk* and the arch are the products of a technique of recycling, of the re-use of already existent materials, he has ignored a remarkable difference in the message these art works seemingly want to convey via the recycling. Whereas the arch of Constantine appears to propose a continuity with the past and "*la idea ficticia de una continuidad ideal en el gobierno de Roma*" (279), Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, by means of its fragmented nature, aims to evoke the image of rupture and discontinuity, a radical break with (the traditional view on) history and the past.

[87] Pieters 2014, 41-42, perhaps, focuses too strongly on the differences between a historical and a modern piece of literature, which are in his opinion more significant and illuminating than similarities. I do not see why this should necessarily be the case. If we record a similarity between a modern and historical text, we might be much more surprised and struck than by the observation of a difference (it is quite obvious that there will be contrasts and collisions between literatures written in a different period of time). Similarities, inasmuch as differences, may incite us to adapt and adjust our perception and conceptualisation of these texts, their aesthetics and world views.

accordance to which Gadamer believed that an (ideal) conversation occurs. As remarked in the previous paragraph, the German philosopher thought that a conversation seldomly goes smoothly from the start. The interlocutors first get to know each other and feel out what would be a suitable topic of further conversation. In an analogous manner, I have started each literary analysis with defining as exactly as possible the main narrative feature or challenge around which the ancient and the modern text, the interlocutors in the process of interpretation, seemed to entangle. This particular point of connection formed the subject around which the rest of the analysis would revolve and in relation to which the central research question got shape. As showed in the third chapter, for example, the argumentation about Statius' *Thebaid* was built up in interaction with Samuel Beckett's trilogy, in particular *The Unnamable*. Overall, these texts share very little with each other and at first sight may not seem to have much to talk about. The former work is an epic poem that stages notorious mythological characters and gives an account of a war of which the fatal outcome is already suggested by the first words (1.1: *fraternas acies*). The latter tells about a range of decrepit figures that come together in a fictional universe of which the plotlines appear to go in all directions and do not proceed towards a concrete end point. But despite the many divergences in theme, characterisation, story construction, etc., the *Thebaid* and the trilogy, so it was defined, intertwine around a concrete narrative feature, both staging a narrator that wants the narrative to which he is giving form to take a new direction, a new start, in the final part. This narrative correspondence became the focal point of attention around which the rest of the interpretative process has revolved. A same attempt to define the exact ground of entanglement was undertaken in the first phase of the other literary analyses. Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* and Pliny's *Epistulae*, for instance, so it was delineated, find each other on a structural level. They share the inclination to cause disruptions of chronology in the representation of the authors' lives and bring distant moments in time together. Martial's *Epigrams* and Joyce's *Ulysses* formulate a comparable narrative challenge, both articulating the ambition to be a text that encompasses reality, life, in its totality. Also in these cases, there could be found way more points around which the texts do not intertwine and on which they radically differ from one another. But each time there was searched for one concrete spot of entanglement that could lay the basis and plant the seeds for the remainder of the interpretative conversation.

The second phase in the course of a conversation, in Gadamer's view, concerns the exploration of each other's and one's own opinions. Once the topic of the conversation has been defined, the interlocutors begin to express their own views on it. They gradually find out to what extent their own ideas correspond to those of their conversation partner and discern in what ways their views overlap and/or collide. By understanding how the other reasons, they may become inclined to re-consider their own initial views and think them over while keeping the opinions of their interlocutor in mind. In a comparable manner, I have tried to analyse a selection of passages and facets of the classical works,

somehow related to the narrative feature which in the previous phase was defined as the main topic of conversation, in the light of a limited set of concepts derived from the modern pieces of literature. The choice of these (post)modernist notions also depended on their connection to the main topic of conversation. I used these notions as meaningful points of comparison and/or contrast that could help me think about the selected passages and/or narrative aspects in the ancient texts, about peculiar links between these individual passages and aspects, and about their possible functions within the broader context of the narrative. The adoption of *Speak, Memory*'s concept 'chronophobia', for example, allowed me to develop an alternative perspective on the structural choices made in the *Epistulae*. It invited me to explore them in connection to Pliny's conceptualisation of time and memory. The latter issues had already been discussed intensively in scholarship (e.g. Henderson's survey pays much attention to time), but not yet in relation to the work's strategies of composition. By taking Nabokov's chronophobia and its implications for the structure of the autobiography (as, for instance, discussed in the work of Will Norman) as a point of comparison, it thus became possible to reflect upon potentially new interconnections between passages and facets of Pliny's collection. In the analysis of Martial's *Epigrams*, I thought about the function of the work's stylistic variation within the context of his inclusive project by using some terms borrowed from (Karen Lawrence's research on) James Joyce's *Ulysses*. More specifically, the epigram collection was read in interaction with notions like 'representational limits' and 'interpretative instability'. By looking for points of overlap and collision with the ways in which Italo Calvino and Paul Celan built up their textual spaces and conceptualised the notion of (in)visibility, I was enabled to develop a better understanding of the indeterminate and undecidable nature of the *Silvae*'s shining, ekphrastic poems.

The third and last phase of the Gadamerian dialogue pertains to the background against which the interlocutors have formed their opinions. For the German philosopher, it does not suffice that the conversation partners simply understand *that* they have overlapping and/or conflicting points of view on a certain topic. They must also try to comprehend *why* the other exactly thinks in this way and *how* his ideas fit in the broader historical-cultural context in which they were shaped.[88] Adapted to my research, this means that I have attempted to explain the similarities and the differences observed between the modern and ancient works in relation to the literary-historical spheres in which both originated (i.e. the texts' horizons of expectations). These spheres have never been the focal point of attention in the literary analyses. The previous chapters have

[88] As Grondin has remarked (see footnote 56), this does not entail that Gadamer wants to encourage us to adopt a historicist reading attitude that tends to reduce the object of interpretation to a merely historical artefact. But the German philosopher would argue that it is not only important to understand what the ancient and modern texts are saying but also why they are doing this. Therefore, the interpreters should keep an eye on the broader literary-cultural circumstances in which the texts originally functioned.

predominantly concentrated on narrative features of the texts. Yet, they have always tried to contextualise these features, at least briefly, within the wider literary-cultural tendencies in which they came into being. Quintilian's *Institutio* as well as Borges' 'Pierre Menard', for example, evoke the image of the reader-author to imply an active manner of reading. But whereas Borges' creation of this image was informed by twentieth-century theoretical conceptualisations of reading, adaptation and translation, Quintilian's occurred against the background of ancient rhetorical theory and its particular view on the relation between reading, writing and speaking. Both Beckett's trilogy and Statius' *Thebaid* suggest via several strategies the subjugation of the reader to the laws of the literary universe. Yet, in the case of the former, this subjugation can be linked to the work's conceptualisation of language, fiction and narration that got form in relation to the broader modernist context in which Beckett wrote. In the case of the epic, the submissive position of the reader must be understood in connection to the connotations which the Theban mythological cycle had during Antiquity. By always keeping the literary-historical background of the classical and modernist works in mind, I have tried, as I phrased it above, to remain sensitive to the (cultural) differences in the points of (narrative) sameness and vice versa.

A Few Self-Critical Conclusions

In a paragraph which has recurrently emphasised the importance of self-understanding, a few self-critical reflections and considerations seem to be not out of place. One of the advantages of a methodological retrospective chapter is that it has enabled me to illustrate the theoretical and practical choices made throughout my research by means of some concrete examples from the preceding analytical part. But looking back also creates the opportunity to overthink the things that could have – and perhaps should have – been done differently in this project.

A possible criticism of the literary analyses presented in this thesis might be that they are not 'Gadamerian' enough. Despite my efforts, I have not succeeded in finding, at every interpretative level, the balance which the German philosopher so explicitly promoted. The preceding chapters, for example, have mainly explored how concepts from the modern works could illuminate our reading of the Latin texts. They have rarely applied the reading strategy the other way around and examined the modernist pieces of literature in the light of ancient narrative notions. Nabokov's 'chronophobia' and Beckett's 'reading dead' have respectively enriched our thinking about Pliny's letter composition and Statius' appeal to visualisation. Yet, I have scarcely considered in what manners the interpretation of *Speak, Memory* and *The Unnamable* could benefit from these interactions. Although this can quite easily be justified by pointing to practical reasons

(the Latin works are the objects of study of this dissertation, not the modernist), this has rendered the interpretative encounters to remain, in a sense, one-dimensional.

A second and maybe even more fundamental point of criticism might be that the literary analyses have become 'too Gadamerian'. As stated above, the German philosopher conceptualised the process of understanding in terms that tended to reconciliation. He saw understanding as a form of 'conversation', as a 'fusion of horizons', as the result of an 'open and respectful attitude', as an event in which one should be 'willing to think about and re-consider' one's own opinions and ideas in the light of the views of the other participant(s). One could remark that this project has, perhaps, too eagerly adapted this reconciling spirit in research practice. The analytical chapters have for the most part been concerned with searching for a common ground, an ultimate reconciliation, between the ancient and modern texts. Though I have always tried to recognise the differences and contrasts between the aspects of the classical and modernist pieces of literature that stood central in the analyses, I have mainly selected these aspects based on some kind of resemblance/similarity and tended to work towards a final state of agreement between the texts. This has excluded other possible scenarios in which the dialogue between a classical and a modern text could have occurred. My project could have worked out case studies, for instance, that accentuate more the frictions or aporia that may turn up in the conversation between texts (e.g. by setting up a dialogue in which texts raise confusion about each other's ideas, rather than having a clarifying effect). Or it might have given examples of conversations in which the modern and ancient works seem to agree with one another, yet, in the end, appear to have been articulating totally contradicting points of view (such a scenario could, for example, be reached by first building up towards a final state of agreement but then completely deconstructing the apparent common ground). I have partly tried to develop such an alternative scenario in the fourth chapter. Therein, I have connected a classical text, the *Silvae*, to the literary works of two modern authors, Calvino and Celan (instead of one author, as per usual). I have, moreover, in the second paragraph of that chapter, presented Calvino as a counterpart and pointed to contrasts between the way in which his city-descriptions are built up and the manner in which Statius has constructed his ekphrastic texts. Yet, Calvino has consequently been replaced by Celan's poetry in the third paragraph in which I have worked again, like in the other chapters, towards an ultimate common ground. Generally speaking, I believe that this project would have benefited from some more variation in the way in which the interpretative dialogues were developed and presented. It would have profited, to phrase it with a wink to a literary-philosophical debate from the end of the last century, from a little bit less Gadamer and a little bit more Derrida.

6.3 Comparing Apples to Oranges

What pay-off does the dialogical approach have? Why would we need a modern text to interpret a Latin piece of literature that was written around the end of the first century? What value can such an approach bring to literary scholarship on that period?

To answer these questions, I believe it might be useful to briefly recapitulate first the recent history of the research field on late first century literature which was already described in the introduction to this dissertation. As I explained there, the scholarly interest in the works of Statius, Quintilian, Pliny and Martial came up quite late. Although a few preliminary studies were published in the seventies, research on this period only started to become popular around the second half of the eighties. The rise of attention for literature from the end of the first century happened alongside some important developments within the field of Latin literary studies. During the last decades of the twentieth century, several younger scholars ('the movement of the New Latin') pleaded for new approaches to Latin literature. They argued for a research practice that strongly engaged itself with modern literary theory. At the same time, they questioned the preference of traditional philologists for literature from the 'Golden' Augustan age and promoted the study of later Latin texts, including Statius' and his contemporaries'.

Over the past twenty-five years, it seems that three types of approaches have become widespread. The first one, I labelled the 'socio-cultural approach to late first century literature'. It comprises studies that have examined the relationship between texts and phenomena in the extra-textual reality, such as the system of patronage, the manifestation and representation of imperial power and the genderedness of society. The second one has been referred to as the 'narrative approach to late first century literature' and embraces diverse forms of narratological research, focusing on features such as focalisation and the representation of consciousness. The last type is 'the intertextual approach to late first century literature'. It includes a various set of contributions that explore all sorts of literary interactions.

The recurrent application of the same type of methodologies throughout the past decades has gradually standardised particular ways of thinking about the literary production from the end of the first century. Certain interpretations have become widely accepted. A limited set of discourses has started to determine the manner in which we are expected to speak, write and reason about literature from this period. If we are ought to believe the literary theorist Stanley Fish, this authorisation of methodologies, interpretations and discourses forms a logical step in a development that occurs in almost every field of research, regardless of the discipline. In his survey *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), Fish argues that each academic domain is governed by a dynamics of collective agreement and disagreement. Scholars who belong to the same "interpretative community" steadily reach a common ground about which interpretative strategies and

meanings are valuable and which are not.[89] They collectively standardise a finite number of research methods, believing that these are the most productive, and cultivate certain ideas, assumptions and opinions about the materials they are studying.[90] To authorise the 'acceptable' interpretative strategies and meanings, an interpretative community usually relies on several institutionally powerful communication channels. One of Fish's examples is the publication of edited volumes that bundle articles or introductory chapters written by scholars who have, over the course of time, gained prestige and authority in the research field.[91] This type of publication has recently become very popular in the study domain of late first century literature. Think, for instance, of the *Brill's Companion to Statius,* the *Oxford Readings in The Epistles of Pliny,* the Blackwell-Wiley *Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome* or the *Oxford Readings in Flavian Epic*. These volumes are often framed as a retrospective to three decades of intense research on the literary production from the end of the first century. They intend to present a sort of intermediate conclusion, a provisional state of the art, which further empowers the various yet restricted set of methods, interpretations and discourses that already belong to "the canon of acceptability".[92]

What added value can the proposed conversational reading strategy bring to this academic context? In what ways can my dialogical approach contribute to a research field which has already gone through an intense process of agreement-making? My answer to these questions has been influenced by the work of two scholars, Marcel Detienne and Susan Stanford Friedman, respectively active in the domain of comparative history and comparative literature.[93] Both have recurrently pointed to the possible advantages that the "juxtaposition" of two or more historical or literary objects which are usually not placed next to one another might have for our understanding of them.[94] In his book *Comparing the Incomparable* (2008), Detienne argues that such a juxtaposition can help "a scholar to learn how to distance oneself from one's basic instincts". Before we begin to

[89] Fish 1980, 338 maintains that agreement over a certain interpretation, "rather than being a proof of the stability of the textual objects, is a testimony to the power of an interpretative community to constitute the objects upon which its members (also and simultaneously constituted) can then agree".

[90] Fish 1980, 310 remarks the state of agreement on the limited set of approaches and interpretations is always temporary. Each interpretative community is a dynamic field in which "the boundaries of the acceptable are continually being redrawn".

[91] Fish 1980, 342: "The shape of the activity [of interpretation] is determined by the literary institution which at any one time will authorize only a finite number of interpretative strategies".

[92] Fish 1980, 346.

[93] Detienne 2008; Friedman 2013.

[94] I borrow here a term from Friedman 2013 that uses the notion 'juxtaposition' to refer to a whole range of analytical practices in which two or more texts from different historical-cultural spheres are involved (e.g. comparison in the strictest sense of the word, a conversational approach like mine, etc.).

examine an object of study, in most cases, we already have some vague ideas and assumptions of what we are going to find. Throughout the actual analysis, we often tend to focus on those features that confirm, to a certain extent, the expectations with which we started.[95] By juxtaposing the object into question to something from a completely different culture (and/or historical period), Detienne believes that we potentially disturb the automatisms that have slipped into our thinking. We force ourselves to approach our research subject in terms that are both alien to the subject itself and to the discourse and the expectations through which we have been used to shape our understanding of it. This 'defamiliarisation' may not only incite us to develop an alternative perspective on the object of study but also to reflect upon and question some of the ideas and assumptions we have taken for granted and have let inform our interpretation.[96] For Detienne, the technique of juxtaposition thus might help us, to phrase it in the Gadamerian terms from the preceding paragraphs, to become aware of and even doubt the *Vorurteile* that we as scholars have brought into the process of understanding.

In her essay 'Why not compare?', Friedman takes Detienne's argument one step further, proposing that juxtaposing objects from a different historical-cultural sphere may not only teach a scholar how to distance oneself but also has the potential to "produce new insights about each" of them.[97] To explain this point of view, Friedman departs from the popular adage that we "can't compare apples and oranges". She wonders whether it is true. Apples and oranges "share the properties of fruit". They have way more in common with one another than, for example, with an electric crane. Furthermore, the properties of an apple may become more visible when juxtaposing it to an orange than to another apple. The differences with the orange are, perhaps, clearer and the overlaps more remarkable. The juxtaposition to the orange thus can possibly change our view on apples and vice versa.[98] Something similar, in Friedman's opinion, goes for the juxtaposition of objects "from different geohistorical and cultural locations". By putting them side by side and exploring them together, we deliberately create a tension which makes us extra sensitive to their individual characteristics, while at the same time opening up lines of thinking about the objects that we may not have considered before. Our attention may be drawn to aspects that have remained unnoticed hitherto. Or we might be stimulated to revisit earlier interpretations in the light of the new, unfamiliar terms that we have intentionally implemented in the process of understanding. Juxtaposition, Friedman concludes, can allow us to create "new patterns of thinking",[99]

[95] Detienne 2008, 38.

[96] Detienne 2008, 39.

[97] Friedman 2013, 42.

[98] Friedman 2013, 37.

[99] Friedman 2013, 43.

thereby emphasising that the real motivation behind these kinds of "projects is the desire and the will for new knowledge".[100]

Although Detienne and Friedman, in my view, overemphasise the innovative effects of juxtaposition,[101] I believe that their works accurately capture the value that this project has aimed to create.[102] By incorporating the modern pieces of literature into the literary analyses, it has tried to develop an alternative discourse, a new language, to speak, write and think about a corpus of Latin texts that has intensively been studied over the past twenty-five years. I have attempted to explore the ancient works, by means of the modernist notions, within an unusual and alien interpretative constellation. This has allowed me to look at certain narrative situations from an alternative perspective as well as to 'distance myself from', like Detienne said, and reflect upon some of the ideas, assumptions and opinions about which the interpretative community of late first century literature already reached agreement. The third chapter, for example, has adapted Beckett's notion of the 'reading dead' to propose a different view on the dynamics between the representation of horror in Statius' epic and its readers. In the fourth chapter, I have used Calvino's and Celan's way of constructing their literary universes to formulate some doubts about the by times rather 'classical' conceptualisation of the *Silvae*'s ekphrastic descriptions. Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* has helped me to overthink the meaning lying behind the violations of chronology in the composition of *Epistulae*. Borges' 'Pierre Menard' and Joyce's *Ulysses* have, respectively, enabled me to highlight new aspects of the *Institutio*'s notion of the *orator tacens* and the function of the stylistic and generic variations in the *Epigrams*. Therefore, I think I may conclude that, on the whole, the integration of the (post)modernist texts into the analyses of late first century Latin literature has been "worth the candle". It has offered me "the freedom and pleasure of unravelling and reassembling the constituent elements of intellectual operations" and helped me to reveal "some unnoticed aspects, some unexpected angles or concealed properties".[103]

[100] Radhakrishnan 2013, 18.

[101] I do not think that an interpretative strategy based on juxtaposition, per definition, generates new insights. Much depends on the actual combination of texts and on what sort of aspects the focus lies.

[102] Both Detienne and Friedman especially underline the trans-cultural aspects of their comparative projects, thereby adapting their works to the recent theoretical concerns in the field of comparative studies (see footnote 71). I nevertheless believe that the assets they ascribe to their trans-cultural analytical practices also go for the trans-periodical strategy of reading proposed in this thesis.

[103] Detienne 2008, xv.

Conclusion

Dialogical readers, Pieters says, are "greedy readers". They do not go straight to an end point but like to make a detour. They do not care about the principles of economy and plainness. They prefer a way of thinking and writing that tends to digression and deviation.[104] But what are the implications of such a strategy of reading? What added value can it bring to a certain field of research?

This chapter has tried to formulate an answer to these questions and has thereby served as a sort of elongated conclusion to this dissertation. By looking back on the preceding literary analyses and the project as a whole, it has clarified some of the theoretical and practical considerations I had to make during the past four years. This methodological retrospective has departed from the hermeneutical theory of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. He has depicted the process of understanding as a metaphorical conversation in which the horizon of the text is confronted with the horizon of the reader. His thinking has particularly been helpful to conceptualise the historical dimension within the process of interpretation. Although we are always reading a text in the here and now and in relation to our modern prejudices, we may not forget that the words to which we are giving meaning originated within a different literary-historical context. This chapter has used Gadamer's explicit historicisation of the position of both text and reader to think through the theoretical and practical implications lying behind the way of reading proposed in this thesis. It has discussed this project's continuous preoccupation with finding a balance between the ancient and modernist perspectives involved in the conversation and underlined the importance of recognising a (cultural) difference in a point of (narrative) sameness and vice versa.

In the end, I have reflected upon the added value of the dialogical approach within an academic context. I have pointed to the method's potential to teach "a scholar how to distance oneself from one's basic instincts" as well as to open up "new patterns of thinking". A conversational reading strategy creates the possibility to speak, write and reason about an object of study in terms that are both alien to the object itself and to the academic discourse to which we have become used. Allowing for defamiliarisation, the dialogical approach may enable a scholar to throw a new light upon certain aspects of the text in question, become attentive to features that have remained unnoticed hitherto and reconsider some assumptions and opinions that are trending within the interpretative community in which his/her research must be situated. As Susan Stanford Friedman would say, with a wink to the popular adage, conversational readers understand that they should not only concentrate on the apples lying in the fruit basket. They must also keep

[104] Pieters 2014, 57.

an eye on the oranges. These may tell us much more about an apple than one might have expected.

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