The Wound and The Word

Tracing Trauma in Rutilius Namatianus' *De Reditu Suo* and Sidonius Apollinaris' *Epistulae*

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Bibliographical Note

The text of Rutilius' *De Reditu Suo* is from Martha Malamud's edition in the Routledge *Later Latin Poetry* Series (Malamud 2016). All translations of Rutilius are my own. Texts and translations of Sidonius' *Epistulae* are from W.B. Anderson's Loeb edition, volume I (Anderson 1936) and volume II (Anderson 1965), published posthumously with the assistance of E.H. Warmington and W.H. Semple. I have acknowledged where I adjust Anderson's translation to sharpen my interpretation of the sense.

All abbreviations of Latin texts follow those used in the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* with two exceptions:

DRS	*De Reditu Suo* in Malamud 2016.
Ep.	*Epistulae* in Anderson 1936 and Anderson 1965.

Other abbreviations are as follows:

OCD	Hornblower, S., A. Spawforth and E. Eidinow, eds. 2012. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 4th ed. Oxford. https://oxfordre.com/classics/.
ODLA	Nicholson, O., ed. 2018. *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*. Oxford.
OLD	Glare, P.G.W., ed. 2012. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford.
SAxxi	*The 'Sidonius Apollinaris for the Twenty-First Century' Project.* https://sidonapol.org/saxxi/.
TLL	*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. 1900–. Berlin.

Introduction

Two Gallo-Roman writers, both alike in dignity, in the fifth-century empire, where we lay our scene. Rutilius Namatianus and Sidonius Apollinaris respectively witnessed two catastrophic moments in Late Antiquity: the Gothic sack of Rome in 410 and the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476. They recorded their reactions accordingly: Rutilius in a poem which frames his homecoming to Gaul as an exile from the Eternal City and Sidonius in a collection of angsty letters to fellow anxious aristocrats. The aim of this thesis is to consider whether and how these texts reveal traces of psychological trauma. I do not propose to speculate on Rutilius and Sidonius' mental states.[1] Rather, I adopt modern trauma theory as an interpretive framework to demonstrate the impact of Roman decline on the authors' literary personae, cultures and communities.

Trauma Theory

The word 'trauma' derives from the Greek τιτρώσκω ('to injure') and can describe any physical wound. However, the concept of psychological trauma has proved harder to articulate, especially as it applies to literature. Any general definition, such as 'an emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts an individual's sense of self,'[2] belies intense debate between scholars and psychiatrists alike. The central question is whether trauma victims subconsciously suppress their experiences or can recall and describe them accurately.[3] These competing models delineate the first and second waves of literary trauma theory.

The first wave, spearheaded by Cathy Caruth, developed in the 1990s as a reappraisal of Holocaust and Vietnam War narratives.[4] Caruth drew on the research of psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk, who theorised that trauma 'engraves' itself upon the mind. As a coping mechanism, sufferers forget their memories of traumatic incidents until a similar situation triggers an involuntary flashback.[5] This phenomenon is called traumatic amnesia. Hence, Caruth defines trauma as an 'event whose force is marked by its lack of registration.'[6] Trauma is so shocking that individuals cannot grasp the significance of their ordeal in real time. The belated return of the trauma is the source of their pain.[7] This temporal gap between experience and understanding manifests in literature through a character's dissociation from reality, repression of truth, obsessive repetitions and awkward

[1] Oliensis (2012: 5) notes that 'psychobiographical speculations seem not just profitless, but presumptuous.'
[2] Balaev 2008: 150.
[3] For an in-depth summary, see Meretoja 2020: 24–5, Pederson 2020: 220–1, Pederson 2014: 333.
[4] Foundational texts include Feldman and Laub 1992, Hartman 1995, Caruth 1995, Caruth 1996.
[5] van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 163, 170–1, 178–9. See also van der Kolk 1987.
[6] Caruth 1995: 6, 153.
[7] Caruth 1996: 91–2, Ramadanovic 2001: 84–90

omissions, all of which 'point towards the unsayable.'[8] Since the trauma is not assimilated into the character's identity, they have neither the language nor the mental capacity to express it.[9]

A second wave of trauma theory emerged after psychologist Richard McNally criticised the empirical basis for Caruth's approach.[10] McNally disputes the existence of traumatic amnesia and argues that traumatic memories remain accessible and effable; an unwillingness to discuss trauma does not indicate an inability to remember it.[11] Stress actually intensifies one's memory, although it can induce experiential mutations, like the feeling of time slowing down.[12] Following McNally's lead, Joshua Pederson suggested that literary critics should focus not on textual absence, but textual overflow, including enhanced detail, temporal and spatial distortion, out-of-body experiences and moments of confusion.[13] This thesis will not resolve the scientific conflict between the first and second wave theories. Rather, it employs both of them as productive hermeneutic models for Latin literature. Conscious that trauma is an intensely personal affair with many manifestations, I apply Caruth's theory to Rutilius and Pederson's theory to Sidonius, examining how their texts portray their unique traumas in different ways. Inevitably, neither theory is a perfect fit. Yet the trauma framework provides a new perspective on thematic nuances and textual idiosyncrasies hitherto underappreciated.

One further dimension of trauma theory functions as a through-line between the authors and texts. 'Cultural trauma' occurs where a society endures a horrendous event that permanently damages its consciousness and identity, often across generations.[14] This large-scale trauma spawns micro-communities drawn together by their estrangement from a world radically changed; their shared suffering becomes a 'common culture, a common language.'[15] These groups may develop hostility towards the rest of humanity and become sceptical of the status quo.[16] Victims foster their new community by working through trauma together. 'Working through' is the process of coming to terms with a traumatic event, often by thinking about it or describing it.[17] Writing is essential to that process, whether fictional or factual. Imaginative forms, like poetry, offer a medium for the representation of the wound, allowing the author to recreate a traumatic experience for their reader

[8] Meretoja 2020: 24. See Barnaby 2018: 31–2, Balaev 2014: 5.
[9] See van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 172–6, Caruth 1996: 4, Ramadanovic 2001: 83–4.
[10] McNally 2003: 182.
[11] Ibid 186–228, 275–6.
[12] Ibid 48–62, 182.
[13] Pederson 2014: 338–40. See Balaev 2014: 7.
[14] E.g. the Holocaust. See Alexander 2004: 1, Preuss 2013: 246, Davis and Meretoja 2020: 4.
[15] Erikson 1991: 459–61. See also Erikson 1976: 154, Balaev 2008: 152.
[16] Erikson 1991: 466–7.
[17] On 'working through,' see Ganteau 2020: 132, LaCapra 2014: 1–42.

as opposed to recounting it objectively.[18] Life-writing genres, like epistolography, permit the author to 'speak' their trauma and reconstruct their fractured selfhood.[19] This literary culture produces a unified sense of identity at individual and collective levels. The centrality of literary production to Roman life, especially in Late Antiquity, makes these theories especially fertile.[20]

Trauma Theory and Latin Literature

Over the past thirty years, scholars have experimented increasingly with psychoanalytic approaches to Latin texts. Prominent examples include Janan's Lacanian reading of Catullus, Gowers' notion of 'textual amnesia' in Horace's *Satires* and Oliensis' influential monograph *Freud's Rome*.[21] Karanika and Panoussi's edited volume *Emotional Trauma in Greece and Rome: Representations and Reactions* reflects a burgeoning interest in trauma theory.[22] The collection examines texts ranging from 800 BCE to 1 CE, adopting a predominantly Caruthian outlook on the trauma of war, rape, exile and loss in authors such as Virgil and Ovid.[23] Combat trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder have also stimulated interest among scholars of epic poetry.[24] In particular, Walde and Thorne have interpreted Lucan's *Bellum Civile* as an exercise in representing and comprehending the traumatic memory of civil war.[25] Most recently, Johnson has analysed the process of 'writing trauma' in Catullus 68, highlighting its fragmentary nature.[26]

This thesis makes two original contributions to the extant scholarship. First, it takes a broader theoretical approach, considering not only Caruth's model of trauma but also Pederson's rival theory, as well as the related concepts of 'cultural trauma' and 'working through.' Second, it covers uncharted historical territory in its application of trauma theory to the culturally distinct Latin literature of the fifth century, an era replete with political instability, sacks, barbarian immigration and civil conflict.[27]

As with any contemporary theoretical paradigm, particularly a psychological one, the standard objections arise: using trauma theory is anachronistic, speculative and 'un-textual.'[28] However,

[18] Rodi-Risberg 2018: 110, Caruth 1996: 18–24, Alexander 2004: 9. Cf. Pederson 2014: 349–50.
[19] Kurvet-Käosaar 2020: 307–8. On autobiography and trauma, see Jensen 2019, Cardell 2014.
[20] On literature, education and community in Late Antiquity, see Stenger 2022: 17–56.
[21] Janan 1994, Gowers 2002, Oliensis 2012.
[22] Karanika and Panoussi 2019a.
[23] See, respectively, Panoussi 2019, Wise 2019, Thakur 2019, Karanika 2019.
[24] E.g. Shay 1994, Melchior 2011, Meineck and Konstan 2014. For an overview, see Cowan and Parkin 2023: 10.
[25] See Walde 2011, Thorne 2016.
[26] Johnson 2021: 138–9.
[27] For an overview, see Merrony 2017: 127–185.
[28] Reviewers of Oliensis 2012 also note these concerns. See Zagórski 2010, James 2011, Caston 2013.

since the 'New Latin' movement of the 1990s, the discipline has recognised that interpreting ancient texts with modern concepts promotes a dialogue between past and present which ensures its continued relevance.[29] Classicists are venturing into new territory more and more frequently, with some claiming that interaction with other disciplines is the key to progress.[30] My thesis is consistent with this trend. As Schmitz explains, 'if…modern methodologies had no business looking into [ancient] texts, they would be dead for our time, and their existence would have to be considered a mere museum of leftovers from a long defunct culture.'[31] On the issue of speculation, Oliensis' notion of the 'textual unconscious' asserts that there are 'linguistic, discursive, ideological and psychological forces at work' in any text which exceed authorial control.[32] These forces lend themselves to a wholistic analysis of how trauma arises not only in Rutilius and Sidonius' literature but also the world around them. Although this analysis necessarily admits of some biographical criticism, locating an author within their historical context is neither new nor widely controversial.[33] Rutilius and Sidonius were political participants in and thus privileged eye-witnesses to the catastrophes they describe. Divorcing them from those events would overlook the driving force behind their work.

Rutilius

Rutilius Namatianus (*c.* 370 – post 417) was a Gallo-Roman aristocrat and politician, probably from Toulouse, who held high office at Rome, including the ranks of *magister officiorum* (412) and *praefectus urbi* (414).[34] His limited biography comes from an elegiac poem, written in 417,[35] which narrates a return voyage to his homeland in Gaul, ransacked by Goths.[36] *De Reditu Suo* ('*DRS*') is the contemporary title given to the surviving text: 644 lines of Book 1, 68 lines of an incomplete Book 2 and two largely indecipherable fragments.[37] Although *DRS* was and is still mined for historical insight,[38] its literary qualities have inspired much recent work. Common topics include

[29] Fowler 1995: 'Do not fear the charge of anachronism.'
[30] Pratt and Sampson 2018: 1, Sullivan 1993: 2.
[31] Schmitz 2007: 7.
[32] Oliensis 2012: 5–6.
[33] Geue (2017: 11) argues that 'deep discomfort with the idea of the inaccessible historical author…has softened to the point that many have saluted her return.'
[34] The birth year of 370 presumes that Rutilius was 42 when he took office, as was customary. See Wolff et al. 2007: x. For general biography, see Doblhofer 1972: 17–27, Malamud 2016: 8–9, *OCD* and *ODLA* s.v. 'Rutilius Namatianus.'
[35] On the date, see Cameron 1967: 39, Malamud 2016: 9. Wolff et al. (2007: xii) argue for 418 on the basis that Rutilius could not have written the poem during his voyage in late October 417. This view is not widely shared.
[36] Sivan (1986: 529) speculates that Rutilius was returning for the provincial assembly at Arles in 418, which was an important step towards restoring Roman order in Gaul.
[37] Ferrari (1973) published the fragments after discovering them in an Italian monastery.
[38] E.g. Pryor 1989, Bedon 2020.

the reception of Ovid in Late Antiquity,[39] the relationship between paganism and Christianity[40] and allegorical or metaphorical readings of the poem.[41]

The strand of scholarship most relevant to this thesis is Rutilius' attitude to the sack of Rome in 410. After years of unsuccessful negotiations with the Roman administration, the Gothic king Alaric entered the city and plundered it. Many describe this moment as one of intense psychological shock, on par with the September 11 attacks.[42] *Roma Aeterna* was no more. Rutilius undoubtedly was involved in the restoration efforts through his political positions. Yet *DRS* presents an optimistic, borderline delusional portrait of Roman grandeur and resurgence, consistently undermined by the degraded towns Rutilius visits on his journey. This paradox has generated conflicting interpretations of his literary persona.[43] Kahlos believes that Rutilius oscillates between confidence in Roman might and fear of its demise, with the poem's positivity functioning as a self-soothing consolation.[44] By contrast, Papadopoulos argues that the sack was a 'distant memory' and Rutilius wanted to promote a new wave of Roman patriotism.[45] Hernández Lobato applies Lacanian psychoanalysis, framing *DRS* as a poem about 'lack' where Rutilius searches for substitute 'Romes' to fill the haunting void caused by the sack.[46] Similarly, Formisano notes how *DRS*' discontinuities indicate Rutilius' reluctance to farewell Rome, deferring his destination by clinging to a city that was never truly his home.[47]

Following Hernández Lobato and Formisano's lead, my thesis considers the sack of Rome and Rutilius' subsequent 'exile' as a traumatic event. This approach is somewhat controversial. Certain historians assert that 410 was neither a damaging nor impactful year, but rather an opportunity for societal renewal or extended aristocratic influence.[48] Nonetheless, I am not concerned with a panoramic appraisal of Roman cultural history. My use of literary trauma theory is necessarily more refined. Importantly, *DRS* provides overwhelming textual evidence that the sack had an effect on Rutilius and his circle of literati. Rutilius displays several symptoms which align him with Caruth's theory of traumatic amnesia, including repression, dissociation, repetition and hostility towards the

[39] Tissol 2002, Trappes-Lomax 2005, Furbetta 2018, Hardie 2020.
[40] Coster 1968, Verbaal 2006, Cameron 2010: 206–30. Rutilius was probably a pagan but not an ardent one. Cameron (1967) provides evidence that he was familiar with Christian texts. The newly discovered fragments of Book 2 contain praise for the devout Christian Constantius, on which see Cameron 2010: 208.
[41] Clarke 2014, Formisano 2017, Devecka 2019, van Waarden 2020b, Parker 2021.
[42] O'Donnell 2004: 207–8, Conybeare 2016: 212, Malamud 2016: 7, Cullhed 2018: 12, Hernández Lobato 2021: 321.
[43] For convenience, in this thesis I refer to Rutilius' persona as 'Rutilius.'
[44] Kahlos 2020: 82. See Roberts 2001: 539.
[45] Papadopoulos 2021: 56–7.
[46] Hernández Lobato 2021: 331–5. See also Hernández Lobato 2017: 304–5.
[47] Formisano 2024: 255–6.
[48] Salzman 2021: 145–7, Heather 2005: 227–8, Heather 2009: 197. See also Brown 2012.

'Other.' He appears to live in a fantasy where Rome is still the powerhouse she once was, wilfully blind to, or forgetful of, the reality staring him in the face. He even lacks the language to describe the sack in concrete terms. *DRS* serves as a record of Rutilius' trauma, but also of his 'working through,' as he reflects fondly upon the accomplishments of his friends and revels in their shared connection to classical tradition. One generation later, however, another writer took a very different approach to the chaos of his times.

Sidonius

Born of high Gallo-Roman nobility, Sidonius Apollinaris (*c.* 432 – *c.* 486) is one of the most influential literary voices of Late Antiquity.[49] He left behind an extensive oeuvre: 24 poems, including panegyrics to three Gothic emperors, and 146 letters spread over nine books in conscious imitation of Pliny the Younger. His career was enigmatic.[50] Like Rutilius, he served as *praefectus urbi* (468), but shortly after he refused to adjudicate a treason case against his friend Arvandus, his political life came to an unexplained end.[51] In 471, Sidonius unexpectedly became bishop of Clermont-Ferrand.[52] Between 471–5, he coordinated the resistance against the annual Visigothic raids led by Euric, until finally the city fell and Sidonius was exiled to Carcassone (475–6).[53] Sidonius' writings provide privileged insight into the end of Roman power in the West, as he strove to protect Latin language and culture from the influx of 'barbarians.' Stevens dubs him 'the last of the Romans in Gaul.'[54]

Sidonian scholarship has flourished in the past fifteen years largely through the 'Sidonius Apollinaris for the Twenty-First Century' project directed by Kelly and van Waarden.[55] There are several recent commentaries on the letters,[56] a volume of 'New Approaches' to Sidonius[57] and an Edinburgh Companion.[58] Key trends include Sidonius' use of intertextual models,[59] his

[49] On his years of birth and death, see Stevens 1933: 1, Harries 1994: 36, van Waarden 2020c: 26–8.
[50] For a comprehensive biography, see Harries 1994, van Waarden 2020c: 13–28, *OCD* s.v. 'Sidonius Apollinaris.'
[51] On the so-called 'Arvandus affair,' see Teitler 1992: 309–15. Harries (1994: 16) speculates that the two events were connected. Since Sidonius provides no comment on his change of career it is impossible to reach a firm conclusion.
[52] See van Waarden 2010: 7, n 11: 'It was unprecedented in Gaul for a prefect and patrician suddenly to abandon his high office and become a bishop in a relatively unimportant provincial town.' See also Ungvary 2024: 163.
[53] On his exile, see Harries 1994: 238–42.
[54] Stevens 1933: 18.
[55] The *SAxxi Project*: https://sidonapol.org/saxxi/.
[56] Amherdt 2001 (Book 4), van Waarden 2010 (Book 7, Part 1), van Waarden 2016 (Book 7, Part 2), Hindermann 2022 (Book 2), Marolla 2023 (Book 5, Part 1).
[57] van Waarden and Kelly 2013.
[58] Kelly and van Waarden 2020.
[59] Among them Virgil, Horace, Pliny and Claudian. See Montone 2013, Kelly 2013, Stoehr-Monjou 2013, Pelttari 2016, Hanaghan 2017a, Gualandri 2020, van Waarden 2022.

relationship with contemporary emperors[60] and how his letters depict fifth-century aristocratic *otium*.[61] My interest lies in Sidonius' epistolary self-presentation, particularly how he represents his social world and Roman culture in an era where *Romanitas* was under siege.[62] Earlier studies have understood Sidonius' notoriously complex style and dense allusivity as part of a long-term project of self-fashioning, which reaffirmed his status as a highly educated aristocrat.[63] Epistolography was a 'survival strategy' for the late antique elite, creating 'oases of *Romanitas*' which insulated them from the reality of foreign threats.[64] A shared affection for classical culture was the foundation of the 'endangered Roman identity'[65] and a source of solidarity among Sidonius' family and friends.[66] Sidonius' constancy in times of societal upheaval won him much scholarly admiration.[67]

Motivated by the Edinburgh Companion's suggestion to apply cognitive lenses to Sidonius,[68] my thesis takes a new perspective on his self-construction, particularly in his later letters (Books 7–9). I argue that the Visigothic attacks on Clermont, his subsequent exile and the fall of the empire in 476 were traumatic for Sidonius. As above with Rutilius, I abstain from the historical debate as to whether Rome 'fell' or gradually 'transformed.'[69] Sidonius' text speaks for itself. However, the way Sidonius expresses his trauma accords far more with Pederson's theory than Caruth's. The *Epistulae*, carefully cultivated for publication, contain overblown detail, mental turmoil, a broken chronology and sensory disturbances. Sidonius does not 'forget' his trauma: he uses the letters to voice it. Complaints about Euric, barbarians, Goths and Burgundians are frequent, frank and bitter. Sidonius does not shy away from political controversy and repeatedly bemoans the degradation of Roman culture. Yet the common thread between Sidonius and Rutilius, apart from several textual echoes spotted by Kelly,[70] is that Sidonius also works through trauma by anchoring himself to *Romanitas*, as embodied by his friends and literary output. He praises his addressees for their linguistic skill and exhorts them to preserve it as a hallmark of their superiority. Rutilius and Sidonius find in literary community the power to heal their fractured identities and recover from their traumas.

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[60] Kulikowski 2008, Hanaghan 2017b.
[61] van Waarden 2020a, Hindermann 2020, Harich-Schwarzbauer and Hindermann 2020.
[62] Although *Romanitas* was not a classical word, it is in use by the fifth century. The term first occurs in Tert. *De Pallio* 4 (*c.* 209 – 211 CE). On the manifestation of Roman identity in Barbarian Gaul, see Mathisen 2018.
[63] Hanaghan 2019: 56, Denecker 2015: 410.
[64] Mratschek 2016: 309. See also Mratschek 2013: 253–4, Mratschek 2020: 217.
[65] Styka 2019: 82.
[66] Mathisen 1981: 107, Mathisen 1993: 105–18, Wood 2001: 435. See also Hanaghan 2019: 13.
[67] E.g. van Waarden 2010: 66, van Waarden 2011: 561, Gibson 2013b: 218.
[68] Kelly and van Waarden 2020: 735.
[69] For the decline and fall thesis, see Gibbon 1776–1788/2000, Heather 2005: 431–459. For the transformation thesis, see Bowersock, Brown and Grabar 2001: ix, O'Donnell 2004: 210–2, Cameron 2011: 41, Salzman 2021: 197–242.
[70] Kelly 2020: 153–9.

Outline of Chapters

Thus far I have introduced three literary theories of trauma (Caruth, Pederson and 'working through' cultural trauma), as well as two Gallo-Roman writers (Rutilius and Sidonius). I have also explained how my thesis fits into the context of psychoanalytic approaches to Latin literature. Each theory of trauma receives its own chapter. Chapter One applies Caruth's theory to Rutilius' *De Reditu Suo*. I discuss four motifs in the poem, each of which illuminates novel aspects of Rutilius' traumatic amnesia for 410. Those motifs are Rutilius' epistemic doubt, excessive optimism, perplexing descriptions of nature and hostility towards anything 'un-Roman.' Chapter Two applies Pederson's theory to Sidonius' *Epistulae*. I undertake a close reading of several letters from Books 7 and 8 which describe the agony of Sidonius' exile, the Clermont sieges and his hatred for barbarians, before zooming out to consider the arc and stylistic qualities of the entire collection. I propose that Sidonius uses epistolography to 'speak' his trauma. Finally, Chapter Three applies the theory of 'working through' to both authors. In the wake of cultural trauma, Rutilius and Sidonius use literature to reconstruct their *Romanitas* and provide a blueprint for the future of Roman values. Friends and family play a prominent role in their healing. Though their personal trauma responses may differ, Rutilius and Sidonius demonstrate a characteristically late antique devotion to tradition that provided solace and support as the Roman world teetered on the brink of collapse.

Chapter One

Traumatic Amnesia in Rutilius' *De Reditu Suo*

Introduction

In 417 CE, the patriotic Gallo-Roman statesman and aristocrat Rutilius Namatianus wrote a poem about going home. His *De Reditu Suo* is often labelled as an 'itinerary' or 'travel poem.'[1] After an explanatory prologue and sorrowful farewell to Rome, Rutilius narrates his sea voyage to Gaul, describing with learned precision the sights along the way. Among them are Castrum Novum, Centumcellae, Cosa, Igilium, Populonia, Capri, Triturrita, Spelunca, Pisa and Luna.[2] Eager to show off his *doctrina*,[3] Rutilius explores at each location a self-contained historical, religious or mythological digression. Yet a common narrative arc connects Rutilius' seemingly disparate vignettes. A web of intertextual allusions characterises the journey as a *nostos* to Gaul and simultaneously an exile from Rome. The opening elegiac couplets metrically and linguistically evoke Ovid's exile poetry,[4] contrasting later epic references to Aeneas and Odysseus.[5] The likely catalyst for Rutilius' 'exile' was Alaric's sack of Rome in 410, a devastating blow to believers in the myth of *Roma Aeterna*.[6] Even seven years after the sack, Rutilius appears unable to accept that Rome has lost its lustre, promising its resurgence in an encomium that takes up over one fifth of Book 1. Although interpretations of Rutilius' optimism vary, twenty-first-century readers have understood him as 'shocked and traumatised.'[7]

The purpose of this chapter is to give textual and theoretical backing to that claim. In my Introduction, I identified four motifs in *DRS* which illuminate unique facets of Rutilius' trauma response: epistemic doubt, excessive optimism, natural imagery and hostility towards the 'un-Roman.' These motifs serve as the structural pillars of the chapter. They support the argument that Rutilius exhibits the symptoms of 'traumatic amnesia' articulated by Caruth, including dissociation, repression, repetition, hallucinations and flashbacks.[8] The trauma of 410 is so painful to Rutilius that his mind does not process it normally. He struggles to describe anything to do with

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[1] Maynes 2010: 71–2, Devecka 2019: 243.
[2] For the complete itinerary, see Malamud 2016: 14–6.
[3] Often expressed in literary texts through classical allusions and aetiologies, *doctrina* ('learning') was a marker of aristocratic identity and cultural superiority. See Mathisen 1988: 50, Miles 1999: 4–5.
[4] *DRS* 1.1–6. On these lines, see Fo 1989: 51, Tissol 2002: 436, Fielding 2017: 53–4, Hardie 2020: 125.
[5] *DRS* 1.179–82 (Aeneas), 1.193–6 (Odysseus).
[6] On *Roma Aeterna*, see Paschoud 1967, Isaac 2017: 33–44.
[7] Cullhed 2018: 133. Italian director Claudio Bondì's film adaptation, *De Reditu*: *Il Ritorno* (2004), portrays the sack as a 'traumatic and unbelievable event, something like the tragedy of the Twin Towers, that is, a direct attack at the core of the world's greatest power.' See his interview included in Fo, Pozzato and Rodrighiero 2011: 115. See also Butler 2016: 10, Conybeare 2016: 224, Malamud 2016: 6–8.
[8] See Introduction, Caruth 1995: 152–4, Caruth 1996: 4, 11.

the sack, often tangling himself in ambiguity and paradox. In psychoanalytical terms, Rutilius' memory of 410 is not 'fully assimilated into conscious recall or understanding.'[9] Only through the imaginative qualities of poetry does he express his anxiety for Rome's future. *DRS* allows us to 'read the wound' of Rutilius' trauma, which ordinary language cannot communicate.[10]

Epistemic Doubt

DRS is a poem about knowledge. As Devecka argues, Rutilius' literary and intertextual techniques flow from a conscious self-representation as 'One Who Knows.'[11] However, this characterisation conceals what Rutilius knows not: whether he will ever see Rome again and what will happen to his adoptive homeland as the aftershocks of 410 continue. This lingering uncertainty pervades the text and reveals traces of his traumatic amnesia. We begin with the climax of Rutilius' epistemic crisis, as he stands on the threshold of his journey, looking back at Rome from the port at Ostia:

> Respectare iuvat vicinam saepius urbem
> et montes visu deficiente sequi;
> quaque duces oculi grata regione fruuntur,
> dum se quod **c**upiunt **c**ernere **p**osse **p**utant.
>
> *DRS* 1.189–92

> It delights me to look back more often at the neighbouring city
> and to trace the mountains with failing vision;
> where my eyes, as leaders, enjoy the pleasant landscape,
> while they think that they can perceive what they wish.

Rutilius' language is cryptic. The joyous portrayal of Rome in the hexameters is undercut by the sense of unreality in the pentameters.[12] *deficiente* evokes a sense of 'death' (*OLD* 6) that jars with *iuvat*. Led by his eyes rather than reason, Rutilius strains (alliteratively) to see a Rome that no longer exists in the way he imagines it. While van Waarden, applying the cognitive framework of 'vividness,' takes these lines as stimulating the reader's imagination,[13] Caruthian trauma theorists would diagnose Rutilius with sensory dissociation. Dissociation is a traumatic phenomenon which describes a disconnect between the victim's perception and reality.[14] Rutilius' eyes deceive him,

[9] Barnaby 2018: 33. See Balaev 2008: 151.
[10] Hartman 1995: 537. See Caruth and Hartman 1996: 641, Pederson 2014: 334.
[11] Devecka 2019: 252.
[12] Cf. Morgan (2010: 346–59) on the thematic dimensions of Ovid's pentameters.
[13] van Waarden 2020b: 219.
[14] van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 160, Ramadanovic 2001: 2, Pederson 2018: 223.

partly because Rome is on the horizon, but more significantly because he has blocked out the trauma of 410. The 'pleasant landscape' Rutilius sees is an illusion of Rome shaped by his desire: the pagan, eternal Rome which he venerated in his encomium.[15] For all his self-assured *doctrina*, Rutilius fixates on the limits of his knowledge and constantly doubts his senses, especially his sight. Later, as he sails past Corsica (1.431–4), the shadows and mountains blend together and the moon hides away from his 'tired eyes' (*defessis oculis* (1.434) echoing *visu deficiente*). Hernández Lobato ties this sense of blurring to a Lacanian 'lack/absence of Rome': without Rome's stabilising force, nothing is recognisable amidst the 'dimness and turmoil' that dominated the empire after Alaric's sack.[16] Yet from a trauma perspective, Rutilius' fallibility of perception indicates an unwillingness, or even inability, to process the loss of Rome in the first place.

Although Rome is twenty-five kilometres away, Rutilius hallucinates the sounds of daily life:[17]

> Saepius attonitae resonant circensibus aures;
> nuntiat accensus plena theatra favor;
> pulsato notae redduntur ab aethere voces,
> vel quia perveniunt vel quia fingit amor.
>
> *DRS* 1.201–4

> My astonished ears resonate more frequently with the circus games;
> fiery applause announces a full theatre;
> known voices are echoed back from the shaken aether,
> either because they reach us or because love makes it so.

Hallucination is perhaps the most typical symptom of trauma.[18] This particular hallucination is unusual because Rutilius remembers not the traumatic event itself (i.e. the sack), but a pleasurable moment before that event. Nonetheless, as Erikson notes, 'trauma involves a continual reliving of the original experience,'[19] which includes the memory of what was lost.[20] Hence, although Rutilius' flashback is more daydream than nightmare, his rosy recall demonstrates amnesia for the damage caused in 410. Rutilius cannot tell whether his cherished Rome exists in reality or only as a figment

[15] *DRS* 1.47–165, discussed below. See Clarke 2014: 96–7.
[16] Hernández Lobato 2021: 334–5, Hernández Lobato 2017: 304–5.
[17] Wolff et al. (2007: 65, n 92) write, 'la vision et l'audition se muent en hallucination.' From Ostia, Rutilius would struggle to see Rome, let alone hear it.
[18] Caruth 1995: 4, Caruth 1996: 11, Meretoja 2020: 24.
[19] Erikson 1991: 457–8.
[20] On the relationship between memory and trauma, see King 2000: 11, Simine 2018: 140.

of his imagination (*fingit*, *OLD* 9). His *amor* dominates his psychology to the point of excluding any traumatic memory.[21] He lives in the glorious Roman past, blind to the decaying Roman present. The chronology of *DRS* lends weight to this interpretation. Roberts observes how the voyage in Book 1 occurs over seven days,[22] yet Rutilius spends fifteen days sitting at Ostia before he leaves, waiting for calm weather (1.205–6). This significant temporal imbalance mirrors the structural imbalance created by the vast encomium. Textually and symbolically, Rome is the traumatic weight on Rutilius' back, from which he cannot separate himself. Even when Rutilius departs for Gaul, Rome remains the centre of the poem, with Formisano noting its 'centripetal force.'[23] For Parker, Rutilius' focus on Rome is 'dystopian,' since his intended *telos* 'pales in insignificance.'[24] Ultimately, Rutilius' hallucination comforts him because it is recognisable and familiar (*notae*). It serves as a distraction from his uncertain future, which explains why he dwells in it for so long.

Despite Rutilius' apparent obliviousness to 410, there is one prominent imaginative device that communicates the substance of his trauma: intertextuality. This accords with the observation of many trauma theorists that literary language has a special power to access traumatic experience.[25] The examples above evoke the genre of elegiac love poetry. At 1.189–92, the lover Rutilius watches his beloved Rome until she fades from view, which is an Ovidian trope.[26] The hallucination of Rome at 1.201–4 borrows from a moment in the *Tristia* where Ovid imagines the noise of Roman theatres while in exile.[27] Rutilius' heightened sensory perception of his beloved adapts a Lucretian theme[28] and the diction in 1.203–4 references Virgilian and Ovidian longing for deceased loved ones.[29] Returning to 1.431–4, Clarke notes a parallel with the ghost of Dido from *Aeneid* 6: Rome is as 'evanescent as the ghost of a lover.'[30] Contrary to a prominent view of late antique intertextuality as 'formal as opposed to substantive,'[31] Rutilius' intertexts are essential because they allow us to read his trauma within the discursive narrative of *DRS*. By aligning his journey with Ovid's exile, a recognisably traumatic event,[32] Rutilius subtly signals his suffering. Rutilius' poetic

[21] Charlet (2008: 163) notes that Rutilius plays on the *Roma*/*Amor* palindrome, intensifying this effect. Another latent wordplay is *mora*, which connects to Rutilius' obsession with delay, as discussed below. Cf. Reed 2016 on *Roma* and *mora* in the *Aeneid*.
[22] Roberts 1988: 185.
[23] Formisano 2017: 228–9. See Formisano 2024: 249–50.
[24] Parker 2021: 188.
[25] Felman and Laub 1992: 103, Hartman 1995: 541, Caruth and Hartman 1996: 641–2, LaCapra 2014: 7.
[26] Roberts (2001: 550, n 41) notes several examples, including Ov. *Her.* 2.91–100, 5.53–58, 6.65–72, 10.25–36, 13.15–24 and *Met.* 11.463–73. Rutilius' twist on the trope is that he must leave Rome, not the other way around.
[27] Ov. *Tr.* 3.12.23–4. On this intertext, see Hardie 2020: 125, Fielding 2017: 87.
[28] Specifically, Lucr. *DRN*. 4. See Wolff et al. 2007: 65–6, n 92.
[29] Verg. *Ecl.* 8.108, *Aen.* 6.668–9, Ov. *Pont.* 1.9.7.
[30] Clarke 2014: 98, Verg. *Aen.* 6.452–4.
[31] Elsner and Hernández Lobato 2017: 11. See Kaufmann 2017.
[32] On the representation of trauma in Ovid's exile letters, see Thakur 2019.

echoes of the longing for a lost beloved suggest his own mourning for the 'death' of Rome post 410, which does not penetrate the text's surface-level meaning. His sophisticated knowledge of classical literature communicates the unknowable and unspeakable dimensions of his trauma.

However, Rutilius' psychology is even more complex, because some of his intertextual allusions actually foster his traumatic amnesia:

> Nec locus ille mihi cognoscitur indice fumo,
> qui dominas arces et caput orbis habet
> (quamquam signa levis fumi commendat Homerus
> dilecto quotiens surgit in astra solo),
> sed caeli plaga candidior tractusque serenus
> signat septenis culmina clara iugis.
>
> *DRS* 1.193–8
>
> Nor is that place known to me by its revealing smoke,
> which holds the looming citadels and the head of the world
> (although Homer praises signs of light smoke
> as often as they rise into the stars from the beloved earth),
> but a brighter expanse of the sky and the calm region
> indicate the distinguished peaks of the seven hills.

This passage is an example of 'window reference.'[33] The Homeric precedents are *Od.* 1.57–9 and 10.29–30, where Odysseus recognises civilisation by the signs of smoke. Yet Rutilius, whose Greek language skills are unknown,[34] probably has Ov. *Pont.* 1.3.33–4 in mind: *non dubia est Ithaci prudentia, sed tamen optat | fumum de patriis posse uidere focis*.[35] Fo frames Ovid as a mediating force in Rutilius' work, since he is 'the nearest in the gallery of exiles.'[36] However, that argument is problematic here because Rutilius expressly denies the applicability of Homer/Ovid's imagery to Rome (*nec locus*). Although Rutilius sees no smoke above the city, this unrealistic observation is another manifestation of his trauma: identifying Rome by its smoke would evoke the destruction of 410.[37]

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[33] This is Thomas' term (1999: 130–2). The technique has several other names. See Tissol 2002: 441, n 13.
[34] Doblhofer 1972: 49–51.
[35] 'The wisdom of Odysseus is not in doubt, but he still longs to see smoke from his native hearths.'
[36] Fo 1989: 52, commenting on these lines. See also Tissol 2002: 442.
[37] See Squillante 2005: 174, Fielding 2017: 81, Clarke 2014: 97. Devecka (2019: 245–6) notes that 'beneath the portrait of Rome is the echo of burning Ilium.'

As Roberts illustrates, Rutilius contradicts Prudentius' description of Rome's polluted air, which normally obscures the seven hills.[38] Rutilius can see nothing other than a bright and tranquil Rome because he has not mentally processed the trauma of Alaric's sack. The rejection of the Ovidian intertext promotes Rutilius' fantasies and adds to his ignorance. Nonetheless, the exilic connection remains strong. One might argue that the decision to discuss smoke at all testifies to Rutilius' underlying angst, which his dismissiveness attempts to quell. Therefore, Rutilius' relationship with Ovid is more nuanced than it initially appears. Rutilius communicates trauma with Ovidian subtext, yet simultaneously spurns the parts of that subtext which damage his idealised image of Rome, the site of his trauma.

The three extracts above from Ostia reveal a profound tension between what Rutilius narrates as his reality and the subversive traces of trauma lurking beneath. Rutilius' dissociation, hallucination and problematic relationship with intertexts form part of a self-rationalising project prompted by his epistemic doubt. His traumatic amnesia for 410 causes him to manipulate any observations incongruent with Roman superiority into a shape that fits his worldview. The epitome of this tension and subsequent self-rationalisation occurs when Rutilius confronts the most jarring contradiction of all: if Rome is still the pinnacle of the world, why must he leave?

Excessive Optimism

Rutilius addresses his departure in the prologue (1.1–46) before embarking on his encomium to Rome (1.47–165). The tenor of these sections is relentlessly optimistic in spite of Rutilius' political context. However, to maintain that optimism, Rutilius must find rhetorical workarounds for the empirical evidence that challenges his self-fulfilling narrative of Roman resurgence. Rutilius' spin is skilful, but not perfect. There are several awkward moments where traumatic traits cause cracks in Rutilius' logic and self-presentation, indicating a latent psychological struggle between 'confident Roman universalism and desperate escapism.'[39] The first of these moments opens the poem:

> Velocem potius reditum mirabere, lector,
> tam cito Romuleis posse carere bonis.
> Quid longum toto Romam venerantibus aevo!
> Nil umquam longum est, quod sine fine placet.
>
> *DRS* 1.1–4

[38] Prudent. *C. Symm.* 1.413–4 (*turbidus aer*). See Roberts 2001: 550, Hardie 2020: 128.
[39] Kahlos 2020: 82. See also Conybeare 2016: 220. On a similar dynamic in Lucan, see Mulhern 2020: 209–10.

Rather you will marvel, reader, at the fact that my swift return
can be so swiftly without Romulean blessings.
What is long for those who have venerated Rome their whole lives!
Nothing is ever long which pleases without end.

Rutilius responds to an interlocutor who has asked him why his return to Gaul took so long; the initial couplet is likely lost.[40] Despite Rutilius' upbeat tone, a sense of belatedness pervades this beginning, enhanced by temporal references to swiftness (*velocem, cito*) and length (*longum, aevo*).[41] Belatedness is an essential component of trauma theory. Traumatic experiences are 'belated' because they are not understood at the time they occur and take 'too long' to register in the victim's mind.[42] As Caruth writes, 'it is not only the moment of the event, but the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself can be a crisis.'[43] Hence, although Rutilius presents the timeless pleasure of worshipping Rome (*sine fine*) as a positive justification for his tardiness,[44] that worship serves to defer the impact of his trauma. Rutilius' tarrying is less about Rome's glory and more about a psychological impulse to postpone his departure. The act of departing acknowledges that Rome is no longer the centre of Rutilius' world. His arrival in Gaul will force him to observe the destruction caused by the Gothic raids.[45] Both of those events are themselves traumatic because they pierce the veil of amnesia shrouding the master-trauma of 410. Rutilius understandably wants to put them off. Hence, he describes his return paradoxically as 'swift,' despite *DRS*' choppy and digressive structure utterly failing to sustain that claim.[46]

This pathology explains Rutilius' obsession with delays: he admits that he ignored the crisis in Gaul and his slow response worsened the situation (1.27–8);[47] he describes himself as 'dallying' (*cessantem*, 1.33); and he can hardly tolerate a journey deferred so late (1.36). Elsewhere, the weather creates delays (1.185–6, 1.465–6), but so does Rutilius himself when he visits natural wonders (1.250–70, 1.475–90) and friends (1.541–2). Rutilius even wants to stop more frequently than his sailors (1.341–2). Formisano argues that these usually cheerful detours delay the end of the poem, which is literally and generically 'unattainable.'[48] However, trauma theorists would prefer the term

[40] Malamud 2016: 63, n 1. See also Doblhofer 1972, Fo 1992 and Wolff et al. 2007. Only Squillante (2005: 189–91) argues that *potius* is deliberately abrupt, which Formisano (2024: 247) queries.
[41] See Formisano 2024: 242, 247–8.
[42] Caruth 1995: 6, Caruth 1996: 4–10, Pederson 2018: 100. See also Karanika and Panoussi 2019b: 2.
[43] Caruth 1995: 9.
[44] Rutilius adapts Verg. *Aen.* 1.279: *imperium sine fine dedi*. See Conybeare 2016: 212, 218.
[45] Described at *DRS* 1.21–2, 29–30.
[46] Formisano 2024: 247.
[47] See Parker 2021: 185.
[48] Formisano 2024: 242–3, 254. It is literally unattainable because nearly all of Book 2 is lost. Cf. Bedon 2020.

'unclaimed.'[49] Rutilius' destination represents the realisation of his trauma. Thus, his amnesia manufactures an optimistic yet distracted psyche which conceals that troubling fact and prevents him from accepting the truth of his journey.

Another characteristic of an 'unclaimed' trauma is an inability to articulate that trauma in plain speech.[50] Rutilius, as a rhetorically educated aristocrat, was inculcated from birth with the idea of *Roma Aeterna*.[51] As Conybeare demonstrates, neither Rutilius nor his contemporary Augustine can bring themselves to utter a lament for Rome after the sack because there is 'no language in which to do so.'[52] Roman supremacy is so fundamental to Rutilius' psychology that he cannot describe a world without it. However, this does not mean that Rutilius' *laudes Romae* are unreservedly positive, as some scholars suggest.[53] Rather, Rutilius expresses the sack in riddles and paradoxes, contorting history, science and myth into a revisionist account which triumphantly promotes Rome's revival, yet with ominously ambiguous undertones. The trauma of 410 produces in Rutilius a cognitive dissonance that resembles 'doublethink':

> Abscondat tristem deleta iniuria casum;
> contemptus solidet vulnera clausa dolor.
> Adversis solemne tuis sperare secunda:
> Exemplo caeli ditia damna subis.
> Astrorum flammae renovant occasibus ortus;
> Lunam finiri cernis, ut incipiat.
>
> *DRS* 1.119–24
>
> Let erased injury conceal sad fortune;
> let disregarded pain heal closed wounds.
> It is your [Roma's] custom to hope for favourable things in bad times
> You suffer enriching losses by heaven's example.
> The brightness of the stars renew their rising after they set;
> You see that the moon wanes, so that it may wax.

[49] The title of Caruth 1996 is *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and Memory*.
[50] See Herman 1992: 177, van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth 1996: 287, Caruth 1996: 21. For a useful summary of the phenomenon, see Pederson 2014: 335–6.
[51] See Conybeare 2016: 212–4, Paschoud 1967: 11, John 2022: 262.
[52] Conybeare 2016: 223.
[53] See Cameron 1967: 31, Devecka 2019: 259–60, Papadopoulos 2021: 61, 195.

Rutilius' oxymoronic metaphors are perplexing because they seem to acknowledge and deny the impact of the sack simultaneously. A 'closed wound' is no wound at all, just as an 'enriching loss' is no loss at all. For Rutilius, the natural cyclicality of the stars and moon proves that setbacks are merely opportunities for renewal.[54] However, his language has a psychological dimension that points to his traumatic amnesia. *abscondat* has the sense of 'forget,' as does *contemptus…dolor*; *deleta iniuria* implies the expunging of the past.[55] In a way, although he addresses Rome, Rutilius foreshadows the trauma response which he exhibited at Ostia (1.189–204). He urges Rome to forget the sack, just as he has done.[56] Yet paradoxically, by providing that advice Rutilius shows that he has not forgotten. As Hernández Lobato argues, 'the poet is continually betrayed by his subconscious. He does not really believe what he is saying, even if he fervently wishes for it.'[57] This analysis complicates my argument that Rutilius suffers amnesia for 410, because it appears that he knows more about his trauma than I suggest. Most scholars prefer the idea that Rutilius' optimism represses an anxiety which he fully understands, but does not want to confront.[58]

Admittedly, Rutilius does refer to the Goths elsewhere, but the idiosyncrasies of those references support the case for traumatic amnesia as opposed to knowing silence. Rutilius refuses to describe the Goths with the word *Gothi*, exclusively calling them *Getae* or *Geticas*,[59] which indicates an inability to portray them in their literal reality. Similarly to the extract above, Rutilius can only express the chaos they cause through the prism of paradox. When he describes the damage to the Via Appia that forced him to travel by boat, Rutilius notes that the Gothic conquest prevents the road from 'controlling' the woods with houses, or rivers with a bridge.[60] As a literary device, paradox allows Rutilius to represent a trauma which he otherwise has no capacity to voice. Rutilius' vagueness in the encomium, coupled with the repeated jussive subjunctives, focusses his attention on a timeless vision of Rome rather than the traumatic past, or the turbulent present.[61] His encouragement to slay the Goths is temporally and contextually divorced from 410: the reader must fill in the gap.[62] Moreover, Rutilius' narrative is remarkably depersonalised for an elegiac

[54] Rutilius raises various other metaphors and historical precedents at *DRS* 1.125–30. Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 4.4.65.
[55] See Doblhofer 1977: 74, Roberts 2001: 541.
[56] See Hernández Lobato 2021: 332, n 33. I do not agree with his translation of 1.120 because it weakens the deliberate paradox *vulnera clausa.*
[57] Hernández Lobato 2021: 333.
[58] Hernández Lobato 2021: 330, n 32. See Kahlos 2020: 79–81, Conybeare 2016: 219–220.
[59] *DRS* 1.40, 142, 336. Malamud (2016: 17) notes how this choice strengthens Rutilius' connection to Ovid.
[60] *DRS* 1.41: *non silvas domibus, non flumina ponte coercet.*
[61] Formisano (2024: 249) writes, 'Every reason for Rome to be praised is a timeless abstraction, without any specific historical reference or concreteness.'
[62] *DRS* 1.141–2: *Ergo age, sacrilegae tandem cadat hostia gentis | submittant trepidi perfida colla Getae.*

poem.[63] Wolff et al. highlight the 'effacement du je' throughout *DRS*,[64] suggesting that Rutilius does not consciously suppress his trauma, but rather experiences an amnestic fog which lacks markers of certainty and selfhood. Overall, even when Rutilius appears to acknowledge the Goths or 410 indirectly, his outward optimism and fragmentary perspective prevent him from seeing the full picture. Rutilius' traumatic memory is inaccessible and exists only in his subconscious.[65] Its ineffability and lack of integration into his identity is the root cause of his amnesia.

However, an important exception to the 'impersonality' identified by Wolff et al. arises at the end of the encomium, where Rutilius asks a favour from Rome:

> Sive datur patriis vitam componere terris,
> sive oculis umquam restituere meis,
> fortunatus agam votoque beatior omni,
> semper digneris si meminisse mei.
>
> *DRS* 1.161–4

> Whether it is granted to me to complete my life in my ancestral lands,
> or whether you will ever be restored to my eyes,
> I will live a fortunate man and more blessed than all my vows,
> if you will always consider it worthy to remember me.

Scholars have seen in '*meminisse mei*' an allusion to Ov. *Pont.* 2.4.5–6, where Ovid insists that his friend Atticus could not have forgotten him.[66] Yet the context here is very different. Rutilius previously insisted that no one could safely forget Rome.[67] Now, having constructed a narrative of Roman rebirth, he asks Rome to reciprocate. This is not a simple request for the endurance of a friendship, or poetic immortality, which Rutilius undoubtedly achieved.[68] Rather, it is another component of Rutilius' delusion. Rutilius presumes that Rome, as he knows it, will outlive him. That presumption is bolder than it looks. *semper* modifies *digneris*, which raises an underlying concern regarding Rome's values. With Christianity on the rise, paganism in decline and Gothic migrants flooding in, there is no guarantee that the classical tradition which Rutilius embodies will

[63] Depersonalisation is a symptom of trauma. See Frewen and Lanius 2015, Pederson 2020: 223.
[64] Wolff et al. 2007: 62, n 75. See Formisano 2024: 247.
[65] van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 168.
[66] See also Ov. *Tr.* 5.13.18: *non meminisse mei*. See Malamud 2016: 66, Tissol 2002: 438.
[67] *DRS* 1.52: *Sospes nemo potest immemor esse tui.*
[68] See Cullhed 2018.

last.[69] What Rutilius wants from Rome is validation of his fragile ego.[70] If Rome always thinks him worthy, then he need not confront his traumatic memory of 410, the event which precipitated the upheaval of the world around him. While absent from Rome, he can console himself with the delusion of *Roma Aeterna* into which he has written himself.

The prologue and encomium show how Rutilius' traumatic amnesia invents fictions of Roman permanence which belie a poetic language that points to dormant turmoil. So far, Rutilius has mostly succeeded at smoothing over the cracks that emerge from his ambiguities and paradoxes. However, the natural decay which he encounters on his voyage drastically undermines his efforts, as his trauma seeps into the landscape.

Natural Imagery

In her seminal study of nature in *DRS*, Clarke concludes that the landscape which Rutilius observes constantly threatens to slip out of control, symbolising a battle for the human soul.[71] Following Clarke's lead, this section argues that Rutilius' trauma lives in the rugged and weather-beaten Italian countryside. Literary depictions of nature have a unique ability to represent trauma through pathetic fallacy. The natural world demonstrates the 'internal struggle of the self' as a protagonist seeks to 'understand, incorporate and explain' their traumatic experience.[72] Nature provides an external medium to test the boundaries of identity, allowing differentiation between 'contemporary reality and traumatic past.'[73] However, Rutilius cannot recognise the parallels between rural degradation and Roman degradation. Take, for example, these jaw-dropping remarks at the fortress of Populonia:

> Sola manent interceptis vestigia muris,
> ruderibus latis tecta sepulta iacent.
> Non indignemur mortalia corpora solvi:
> Cernimus exemplis oppida posse mori.
>
> *DRS* 1.411–4

[69] See Coster 1968: 214–5, Kelly 2021: 157. Cf. Duckett 1930: 42, 44. I discuss this point further in Chapter Three.
[70] Cf. Hernández Lobato 2021: 354–5.
[71] Clarke 2014: 105–6.
[72] Balaev 2008: 161.
[73] Ibid.

Only traces of its interrupted walls remain,
    the submerged buildings lie under widespread clumps.
Let us not complain that mortal bodies disintegrate:
    We see from examples that even towns can die.

Interpretations of this passage vary. Clarke detects Rutilius' sense of hopelessness for the inevitable aging of the fortress,[74] which Roberts, discussing ruins generally, frames as a metaphor for the 'desolation of the soul.'[75] Hernández Lobato goes one step further, arguing that this scenery is nightmarish for Rutilius because it recalls the death of 'individuals, empires, names and monuments.'[76] Rutilius' reader undoubtedly perceives the link between 1.414 and the decline of Roman civilisation after 410,[77] but whether Rutilius does is unclear. Almost in the same breath, Rutilius nearly decides to return to Rome because he hears that his friend Volusianus was appointed *praefectus urbi* (1.415–8).[78] This jarring juxtaposition between evidence of Rome's downfall and its vigour shows Rutilius' traumatic amnesia at work.[79] He cannot see or articulate any symmetry between the harsh realities of his environment and his perception of Rome. They are distinct entities in his mind, just as they form distinct components of *DRS*' structure.

Rather, Rutilius' trauma is projected onto the landscape, manifesting in his interpretation of that landscape, while remaining inaccessible to his conscious reflection and understanding. This phenomenon arose earlier when Rutilius told the humourous story of how Cosa became deserted: the residents abandoned their homes due to a plague of mice (1.285–90). Rutilius' joviality conceals the symbolic implications of the anecdote. The Cosans left behind their *lares*,[80] a word which became a metonymy for 'house' (*OLD* 2), but whose primary meaning connotes the larder gods.[81] Rutilius does not expressly acknowledge that the abandonment of the town subtly parallels the abandonment of paganism,[82] represented by the advancing wilderness. Moreover, Rutilius treats the legends connected to natural landmarks with cynicism, suggesting an equal degree of cultural decay.[83] Yet Rutilius never doubts the mythology of *Roma Aeterna*, which is arguably just as fragile.

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[74] Clarke 2014: 101. Cf. Soler (2005: 259) who reads scenes of decay as indications of what must be rebuilt.
[75] Roberts 1992: 104.
[76] Hernández Lobato 2021: 337–8.
[77] On natural decay in fifth-century Rome, see Christie 1996: 254–83, especially 256–8.
[78] See especially *DRS* 1.416: *Consilium Romam paene redire fuit.*
[79] Cf. Hernández Lobato (2021: 338) who argues that the good news 'alleviates' Rutilius' sad reflections.
[80] *DRS* 1.290: *muribus infestos deseruisse lares.*
[81] On the *lares* in Roman religion, see Flower 2018. On the usage of the word, see *TLL* vii² 964.42–967.62.
[82] On religion in *DRS*, see Cameron 2010: 217, Verbaal 2006: 159, 170–1.
[83] Clarke (2014: 100) provides several examples: 1.255 (*credere…famae*), 1.265 (*credamus*), 1.289 (*dicuntur…quondam*), 1.309 (*credam*), 1.435 (*mendacia famae*).

These gaps testify to an unspeakable trauma.[84] Thus, the poem's natural imagery externalises Rutilius' traumatic blind spots, signalling them to the reader while Rutilius persists in ignorance.

The doubleness of the scenery provides further proof that the landscape encapsulates Rutilius' trauma. Nature abides by the 'rule of twos' in *DRS*, mirroring the poem's foundational dichotomies: Rome vs Gaul, exile vs *nostos*, ruin vs recovery, Book 1 vs Book 2.[85] For trauma theorists, repetition and duplication express the 'ceaseless and obsessive return' of a trauma that 'forever elude[s] the mind's grasp.'[86] The poem acquires a regressive quality from its repetitiveness, which Paolucci ties to the prominence of the prefix '*re-*.'[87] Rutilius, torn between two 'homes' after 410, constantly 'turns back' to the issue of his split self, which plays out metaphorically in front of him. This explains the frequency of the prefix '*bi-*' and the word *geminus*: the Tiber divides with its twin horn (*bicorni*, 1.180); the harbour at Centumcellae bears twin towers in two-fold channels (*geminas*…*bifido*, 1.241); the Corinthian Isthmus, washed by two seas, cleaves through twin waves (*geminos*…*bimari*, 1.319–20); Volaterra has twin trees (*gemina*, 1.457) and Pisa has twin waters (*geminis*, 1.566).[88] Similarly, Mount Argentarius extends with a double ridge (*ancipiti*, 1.316) and the salt-marshes have a sub-divided basin (*multifidos*, 1.478). These examples illustrate symbolically that Rutilius' identity lacks unity and direction.[89] He is preoccupied with describing natural precedents for his failure to commit to Rome or Gaul, geographies that are navigable in more than one way. The repetition of those precedents creates the illusion that he still has a choice post 410. Similarly, Formisano argues that, despite the linearity of the voyage, the poem moves allegorically in two directions, towards and away from Rome.[90] However, according to Caruth, leaving a site of trauma can itself be traumatic.[91] Rutilius' repetitions therefore allow him to stave off the impact of trauma because he always has one eye on Rome; the divisions in the natural world justify his divided attention. In a sense, Rutilius would rather not decide between Rome and Gaul. His traumatic amnesia prefers to live in liminality.[92]

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[84] Simine 2018: 141.
[85] On these binaries, see Clarke 2014: 93, Hernández Lobato 2021: 329–31.
[86] Barnaby 2018: 32. On repetition as a trauma symptom, see Caruth 1995: 10, Caruth 1996: 4, Ramadanovic 2001: 85, Whitehead 2004: 3, Meretoja 2020: 26.
[87] Paolucci 2020: 290–3. See also Hernández Lobato 2021: 340, Formisano 2024: 255–6. Cf. Quint (1993: 51–2) on the concept of 'regressive repetition' in the *Aeneid*, although his analysis focusses more on the teleology of epic.
[88] Two other uses of *geminus* are less relevant, but worth noting: see *DRS* 1.407, 1.427.
[89] Cf. Masters 1992 on similar symbolic effects of natural 'doubling' in Lucan.
[90] Formisano 2017: 227–33.
[91] Caruth 1995: 10.
[92] Formisano (2024: 253–4) makes a similar point in support of a different argument.

The corollary of this mindset is that time and natural processes appear corrupted from Rutilius' perspective, with the prevailing mood being one of stagnancy.[93] As Rutilius comments after reaching the Umbro:

> Sic festinantem ventusque diesque reliquit;
> nec proferre pedem nec revocare licet.
>
> *DRS* 1.343–4
>
> So the wind and the day left me as I was hurrying;
> my step was allowed neither to go forward nor back.

It is odd that Rutilius portrays himself as 'hurrying' (*festinantem*) given that he was previously tarrying to leave Rome (*cessantem*, 1.33) and the sailors recently rejected his request to stop (1.341–2). Additionally, Rutilius' reference to moving his foot (*pedem*) is an unusual way to say that his ship is stranded by unfavourable weather. The abstract language suggests that Rutilius' sense of stasis applies cognitively as well as physically. Rutilius both hurries and delays, making no ground forwards or backwards, because his perception of time is warped. He is mentally trapped in a slice of history where Rome is still eternal, which occurs asynchronously to the progress of his journey and regress of Rome. This disrupted temporality is a trauma response, since the unconscious residue of trauma lacks time signifiers.[94] The following day, Rutilius experiences a motion illusion which captures his atemporality in nature: his ship seems to stand still even though his men press on the oars.[95] He likely suffers from spatial disorientation due to the inertia of the boat, just as passengers aboard an aircraft feel stationary despite the speed at which they travel.[96] Rutilius feels spatially, temporally and psychologically motionless. Other natural phenomena in *DRS* are similarly 'in-between': at the salt marshes, the same sun which melts ice paradoxically 'solidifies' water.[97] Any disturbance to Rutilius' liminal stillness serves as a reminder of his trauma, to which he responds vitriolically. However, it is not the landscape itself which provokes Rutilius' wrath, but the people within it who shun his cherished Roman customs.

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[93] Parker (2021: 188) notes that places in *DRS* give 'the mood of the times.'
[94] See King 2000: 13, Meretoja 2020: 26.
[95] *DRS* 1.349: *Lux aderat: Tonsis progressi stare videmur.*
[96] Cf. Malamud 2016: 69, n 59.
[97] *DRS* 1.490: *rursus liquidae sole gelantur aquae.* On the theme of water in *DRS*, see Wolff et al. 2007: xliv–xlv, Formisano 2024: 254.

Religion and The 'Other'

Throughout *DRS*, Rutilius cultivates a 'religion of Roma.'[98] He imagines the city as a powerful goddess and faithfully worships her eternity.[99] Such is Rutilius' loyalty that he displays hostility towards anyone who has abandoned her cult. The diatribes against the Jewish innkeeper, the monks of Capraria and the hermit of Gorgon are tonally incongruous with Rutilius' optimistic, happy-go-lucky outlook. This conflict is consistent with a trauma response. Rutilius sees these men as outsiders, unable to accept that the cultural fabric of Rome has fundamentally changed. Yet ironically, Rutilius' anger reveals his own feelings of estrangement. Despite his best efforts to give the contrary impression, Rutilius' religion was being marginalised as Christianity gained prominence.[100] As Erikson argues, victims of traumatic events often believe that the laws of nature and the 'decencies' which govern the human world are suspended.[101] Thus, Rutilius characterises the Jew, monks and hermit as extremist, inhuman 'Others.' This is perhaps the clearest indication that Rutilius' traumatic amnesia cannot comprehend the consequences of 410 for Rome's future.

Rutilius meets the querulous Jew in Faleria, after enjoying the sights of his *locus amoenus* (1.377–80). The Jew overcharges him for his stay and Rutilius returns serve with a swathe of insults. First he calls the Jew an 'animal, estranged from human food' (*animal…cibis*, 1.384). Rutilius presumably alludes to the Jewish aversion to pork, which was a staple of the Roman diet.[102] However, as Clarke illustrates, the natural setting also contributes to framing the Jew as a beast.[103] The Jew's very existence undermines the universality of Roma which Rutilius espoused in the encomium.[104] Rutilius ridicules and minimises Jewish tradition as uncivilised savagery in order to uphold his amnestic belief in the superiority of pagan Rome. He criticises the practice of circumcision, dubbing it the 'root of [Jewish] stupidity' (*radix stultitiae*, 1.389). Scholars debate whether Rutilius here intends a subtle attack on Christianity, given that Judaism was its progenitor religion. Verbaal argues that Rutilius is deliberately ambiguous because an overt attack would be politically unpalatable.[105] Cameron contends that it would be 'improbably antiquarian' for Rutilius to attack Christianity via Judaism given the former's rejection of the latter.[106]

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[98] Verbaal 2006: 159.
[99] E.g. *DRS* 1.47–50, 79. See Roberts 2001: 539–40.
[100] See Verbaal 2006: 160, Coster 1968: 213.
[101] Erikson 1991: 466.
[102] Verbaal 2006: 168, Malamud 2016: 70, n 65. For Roman stereotypes of Jews, see Malamud 2016: 24–6.
[103] Clarke 2014: 102–3.
[104] See Wolff et al. 2007: liv.
[105] Verbaal 2006: 167–8.
[106] Cameron 2010: 878. Malamud (2016: 70, n 67) agrees, citing the Book 2 fragment on Constantius.

Yet the analysis need not be so general. If we accept that *radix* provides at least a nod to Christianity, what Rutilius dislikes is not the religions themselves, but the mindsets they foster. The Jew's crime is to catastrophise over a few broken shrubs and some water. In the wake of the sack, Christian authors like Jerome bemoaned the end of the entire world.[107] Since Rutilius has not yet psychologically processed 410, he does not understand what all the fuss is about. The Jew charges for 'great losses' (*damna…grandia*, 1.386), echoing the phrase *ditia damna* (1.122) from the encomium. Rutilius' Roma does not quarrel about losses; rather, she turns them into gains. The Jewish god, like its people, is weary (1.391–2), whereas Roma is youthful and vigorous (1.116–7). Rutilius frames the Jew's *stultitia* as a disease of the mind (*deliramenta* (1.393), *contagia* (1.397)) because he cannot understand such pathetic negativity. This challenge to Rutilius' positive viewpoint is the cause of his irritation.

Interestingly, several lexical parallels emerge between the Falerian Jew and the monks of Capraria which strengthen the link between defeatism and Christianity.[108] Rutilius indignantly remarks:

> Munera fortunae metuunt, dum damna verentur.
> Quisquam sponte miser, ne miser esse queat?
> Quaenam pervasi rabies tam stulta cerebri,
> dum mala formides, nec bona posse.
>
> *DRS* 1.443–6

> They fear the gifts of fortune, while they fear her setbacks.
> Would anyone willingly live miserably, lest they be miserable?
> What foolish madness of a scattered mind this is,
> while you fear bad things, you cannot suffer good ones?

Again, Rutilius refers to setbacks (*damna*), stupidity (*stulta*) and mental disorder (*rabies*). He later notes the monks' disease of excessive bile (*morbum*, 1.449). Scholars posit that Rutilius scorns the *monachoi* for their insular lifestyle, akin to exile, which is antithetical to his involvement in the social and political life of Rome.[109] Above all, however, Rutilius despises their worldview. Whereas Rutilius exhibits a psychology of self-fulfilling positivity in the encomium, the monks exhibit a psychology of self-fulfilling doom and gloom. They live in hopeless squalor to avoid the risk that

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[107] *Commentary on Ezekiel I, Preface*: *in una urbe totus orbis interiit*. Rutilius was irrefutably aware of Jerome's work. Cf. *DRS* 1.66: *Urbem fecisti, quod prius orbis erat*. See Pelikan 1982: 85–7.
[108] Cf. Malamud 2016: 71, n 80.
[109] Verbaal 2006: 169, Cameron 2010: 213, Malamud 2016: 26–7.

the tribulations of fortune might put them in the same place. Rutilius finds this intensely paradoxical, stylistically emphasised through juxtaposition (*munera…damna, mala…bona*) and chiastic word order (1.444). He takes offence at their pessimistic ways because they contradict the hope and confidence that his traumatic amnesia compels him to adopt.[110] He describes the monks as *lucifugi* (1.440), aligning them with the cockroaches of Virgil's *Georgics*.[111] This descriptor takes on symbolic significance when one recalls that Rutilius' Roma radiates light (1.55, 1.95, 1.117–8, 1.199–200).[112] The *monachoi* have abandoned their belief in Roma, which Rutilius would never do.

Rutilius develops this notion of abandonment in his recount of the nameless Hermit, a critique made more poignant because he was formerly a Roman citizen (*civis*, 1.518). He came from a noble, wealthy family and married well (1.519–20), all of which might have made him a worthy companion to Rutilius.[113] Yet, after leaving Rome and converting to Christianity, he experiences 'living death' in Rutilius' patriotic eyes (*vivo funere*, 1.518). The linguistic connections with the other diatribes remain. Rutilius still uses the word *damnum* (*damni*, 1.517), but this time he frames the hermit's conversion as a loss to himself and Rome. The hermit is foolish (*credulus,* 1.522),[114] insane (*furiis* (1.521), 1.526) and light-avoidant like the insectile monks (1.522). Rutilius sees that the hermit's countercultural way of being has eroded the foundations that Roman civilisation provided him.[115] Just as the nature around him has reverted to wildness, so too has his mind.[116] In a sense, though, the hermit is an ideological and psychological foil for Rutilius. Both men are noble exiles from Rome (*exul*, 1.522), yet their emotional responses sit on opposite ends of the spectrum. The hermit withdraws into himself, living in filth and self-loathing (1.523–4), whereas Rutilius exuberantly proclaims that Rome is as beautiful and powerful as it ever was. The poem provides no middle ground between these extremes. As Verbaal insightfully argues, Rutilius' main problem with Christianity (and arguably Judaism) is that it prevents people from facing up to their responsibilities as Roman citizens.[117] For Rutilius, those responsibilities include a positive outlook and a reverence for Roma. Yet by the same token, Rutilius' religion prevents him from facing up to reality. He crafts his narrative of Roma such that neither the sack, nor the decaying natural world, nor its multicultural inhabitants can burst his bubble and unleash his repressed trauma.

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[110] This perhaps explains Rutilius' 'sharp eye for cultural difference,' as Parker (2021: 189) notes.
[111] Verg. *G.* 4.243. See Malamud 2016: 71, n 78.
[112] E.g. *DRS* 1.199–200: *Illic perpetui soles atque ipse videtur | quem sibi Roma facit, purior esse dies.*
[113] Verbaal 2006: 169.
[114] Wolff et al. (2007: 93, n 214) suggests that Rutilius deliberately chose this term because, for Christians, it denoted the 'true faithful.'
[115] See Hernández Lobato 2021: 355.
[116] Clarke (2014: 103–4) notes Rutilius' allusion to Circe's poison (1.525). The poison turned men into pigs.
[117] Verbaal 2006: 170.

However, Rutilius' trauma story does not end there. The outsiders whom Rutilius abhors are outnumbered two-to-one by his aristocratic Roman friends. It is with these men that Rutilius kindles his cherished *Romanitas*, even while outside of Rome. Slowly, Rutilius starts the process of working through his trauma, situating himself and his identity in the post-410 world. We will return to Rutilius' efforts in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how Rutilius' psychological presentation in *DRS* aligns with Caruth's theory of traumatic amnesia. It has demonstrated that Rutilius' perception of reality in the wake of 410 was inherently skewed towards gilded visions of Roman glory, to the extent that he can neither express nor tolerate any evidence to the contrary. As Conybeare quips, 'for stretches of the poem, one would scarcely guess that [Rome] had suffered an ignominious sack only a few years before.'[118] Yet the prevalence of trauma symptoms indicates that Rutilius is more than the naïve fool Gibbon once dismissed him as.[119] The poem reveals his tendency to dissociate from reality, hallucinate, defer his destination, self-rationalise, seek validation for his identity and maintain a zealous, albeit hollow, optimism. Rutilius can only communicate his trauma vaguely and indirectly, using devices of literary representation. Intertextuality allows Rutilius to signal his participation in a tradition of traumatised literary exiles. The use of paradox marks his repressed internal conflict, the natural landscape externalises it and the religious 'Others' irritate him because of it. Yet Rutilius cannot put his trauma into words.

Unfortunately for Rutilius, Rome did not experience the regeneration he wished for. Within fifty years, the city suffered another devastating sack at the hands of the Vandals. After a further twenty years, the empire in the West came to an end. Although Rutilius was long dead by that time, there was another loyal Gallo-Roman aristocrat alive to witness it: Sidonius Apollinaris. However, his literary response to the trauma of 476 was entirely different.

[118] Conybeare 2016: 218.
[119] See Duckett 1930: 42, Cullhed 2018: 122–4, 133.

Chapter Two

Speaking Trauma in Sidonius' *Epistulae*

Introduction

mens pateat in libro velut vultus in speculo.

Ep. 7.18.2

The mind is as fully exposed in a book as the face in a mirror.

Sidonius Apollinaris lived in chaotic times. Power structures in Rome were disintegrating, Germanic kingdoms were expanding, barbarian immigration was soaring and the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was divided.[1] Sidonius witnessed the Vandal sack of Rome, another of its 'great traumas,'[2] staunchly defended his episcopate at Clermont against the Visigothic king Euric, spent two years in exile after Clermont fell and came back to an empire that was no longer Roman.[3] After his early career as a panegyrical poet, Sidonius devoted himself to writing what became a nine-book collection of letters. Upon his return from exile in 477, he published Books 1–7, followed by Book 8 in *c.* 480 and Book 9 in *c.* 482.[4] The letters fall broadly into five categories, as outlined by Fernández López: commentaries on literary works, friendly greetings, official greetings, letters of recommendation and descriptive letters.[5] Yet this schema belies the unified architecture of the collection. With Symmachus and Pliny as his models, Sidonius' letters are an exercise in aristocratic self-fashioning, aimed at preserving Roman cultural identity in a 'kaleidoscopic' world.[6]

Although several scholars have tackled the issue of Sidonius' selfhood,[7] my focus is on his later letters, which deal with the mental turmoil of exile, his hatred for the Visigoths, his concern for decaying traditions and the significance of his literary output. I argue that Sidonius uses epistolography to communicate trauma. Unlike Rutilius, Sidonius is remarkably candid about his contemporary political instability and its effect on his psychology. His letters are sites of rebellion, crafted to garner perennial recognition of his trauma and his cause. As van Waarden notes, Sidonius is 'writing to survive.'[8] Consequently, Caruth's theory is difficult to apply. Sidonius exhibits neither traumatic amnesia nor repression. However, Sidonius' ability to provide narrative

[1] See Harries 1994: 1–19.
[2] Kelly 2020: 157.
[3] See van Waarden 2020: 26–8.
[4] It is possible that either Book 1 or Book 2 was independently published prior to 477, but such a conclusion is difficult to reconcile with the letters themselves. See Gibson 2020: 189–193, van Waarden 2020c: 28, Mathisen 2013: 231–2.
[5] Fernández López 1994: 29–31. See Amherdt 2001: 35–7, van Waarden 2010: 37.
[6] Hanaghan 2019: 56–7.
[7] See van Waarden 2011, Mratschek 2013, Hanaghan 2019: 18–57, Mratschek 2020.
[8] van Waarden 2010: 66.

description of his trauma aligns him with the second-wave theorists, spearheaded by McNally. An outspoken critic of van der Kolk and Caruth, McNally argues that traumatic memories are assimilated and accessible, even though victims may not wish to discuss them.[9] This chapter examines how Pederson's model of literary trauma theory, inspired by McNally, maps on to Sidonius' letters. The theory is founded on three pillars: text-centred analysis rather than interpreting textual lacunae; evidence of augmented narrative detail; and examples of temporal, physical or ontological distortion.[10]

Epistolography is a particularly fruitful genre for trauma analysis. As an introspective and flexible form, letters offer 'alternative possibilities for the mediation of traumatic experience.'[11] The world of correspondence is a textual space that operates in parallel to a traumatic reality but at a distance from it. Letters demand a conscious self-reflection and selective self-representation which empirical autobiography does not.[12] To 'put oneself on the page' in a controlled narrative has healing power for trauma victims.[13] This phenomenon is known as 'speaking trauma,' which 'pulls it from the realm of obscurity and hastens the process of rehabilitation.'[14] Late Antiquity was the most productive era of letter collections in Roman history.[15] Elite aristocrats like Sidonius used them to cultivate literary personae, display their *doctrina*, ensure literary permanence, maintain intellectual friendships and strengthen family ties.[16] I will return to the benefits of this literary productivity amidst the collapse of Roman culture in Chapter Three. However, at present, I frame these objects of epistolography as integral to Sidonius' trauma response. It is precisely because Sidonius suffers trauma that he anchors his epistolary self-image to *Romanitas* and abhors any threats to it.[17] Sidonius' resolute Roman patriotism in spite of his surroundings indicates his resilience, far-flung from Rutilius' amnestic optimism, as he grapples with his trauma in real time. Although Sidonius' epistolary corpus is sizeable, I have chosen to examine four select letters from Books 7 and 8 because they are the clearest examples of traumatic content in the collection. My analysis is structured around the event precipitating the particular trauma, namely Sidonius' exile in 476 (Book 8) and the Clermont sieges (Book 7). After these close readings, I step back to

[9] See McNally 2003: 182, 275–6.
[10] Pederson 2014: 338–40.
[11] Kervet-Käosaar 2020: 307.
[12] Ibid. On the limits of autobiography, see Gilmore 2001. On fictional textual spaces that serve a similar purpose, see Henke 1999, Schönfelder 2013.
[13] See Brison 2002: 71, Pederson 2014: 338–9, Pederson 2018: 97.
[14] Pederson 2014: 338.
[15] Sogno and Watts 2018: 390. On late antique epistolography, see Sogno, Storin and Watts 2016: 1–10, Sogno and Watts 2018, Allen and Neil 2020.
[16] See Mathisen 1981, Mratschek 2016, Schwitter 2020: 86.
[17] Cf. Mratschek 2013: 255.

consider how Sidonius' collection communicates trauma through its overarching textual, structural and thematic qualities, including how the darker content of Books 7 and 8 functions as the climax of Sidonius' trauma narrative.

Book 8: The Trauma of Exile and the Fall of the Empire

Book 8 offers Sidonius' 'most revealing comments yet on personal traumas,'[18] interwoven with his perspective on the crumbling civic frameworks of fifth-century Rome. By the time of its publication, Sidonius had lived through four years of sieges in Clermont, seen the city fall and suffered exile. The last emperor had been deposed and Italy was under the rule of Odoacer, a barbarian king.[19] I will analyse two letters which provide graphic detail of Sidonius' exile at Liviana, near Carcassone, at the hands of Euric. The cause of his exile is unknown, although Hanaghan posits that Sidonius' staunch criticism of Euric in *Ep.* 7.6 and 7.7 made him a target after Clermont fell.[20] If Hanaghan is correct, then Sidonius' personal ordeal exists within a broader political trauma, which unlocks metaphorical readings of the letters. Just as Sidonius must adjust to the barbaric conditions of exile, so too must he adjust to his new (impliedly barbaric) political situation.[21] Hence, Harries claims that Sidonius' understanding of the fall of the Roman Empire is a 'central theme' of Book 8.[22] Sidonius tackles that trauma by expressing it in words. However, as we shall see, he still suffers from its symptoms.

Letter 8.3

Sidonius writes to Leo, the minister in Euric's court responsible for his release in 477, responding to a request for a transcription of Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*.[23] Sidonius apologises for his tardy workmanship, which forces him to reconfront a traumatic memory:

> quam, dum parere festino, celeriter eiecit in tumultuarium exemplar turbida et praeceps et Opica[24] translatio…nam dum me tenuit inclusum **m**ora **m**oenium Livianorum…non valebat curis **a**nimus **a**eger **s**altim **s**altuatim tradenda percurrere, nunc per nocturna suspiria, nunc per diurna officia distractus.
>
> *Ep.* 8.3.1

[18] Gibson 2013b: 214.
[19] John 2022: 261.
[20] Hanaghan 2018: 263–4. See *Ep.* 7.6 and 7.7 below.
[21] On Sidonius' 'coded communication,' see van Waarden 2010: 39, Mratschek 2013: 250.
[22] Harries 1994: 16. Some fictional reworkings of Sidonius also adopt this interpretation. See Giannotti 2020: 714.
[23] Harries (1994: 239) notes that Sidonius maintained a friendship with Leo from the 460s as part of a 'southern Gallic literary coterie.' For a complete index of Sidonius' addressees, see Mathisen 2020.
[24] The Opici were a primitive tribe from Campania. See Anderson 1965: 406, n 2.

> In my haste to obey your wish, I hurriedly flung the work into a haphazard copy, making a wild precipitate barbarian transcription. So long as arrest within the walls of Livia kept me a prisoner, my heart was sick with anxieties and harassed by sighs at night and by obligations during the day, so that it was unable, even with occasional spurts, to get quickly through the work I had to consign to you.

The correlation between Sidonius' literary productivity and his environment invites several interpretations. Most obviously, the trauma of exile saps his motivation to write. Sidonius has no difficulty recalling this turmoil and openly admits it.[25] The letter is 'realist' in how it passes straightforwardly through a 'landscape of pain,' with its narrative neither disrupted by Sidonius' trauma nor forced to avoid it.[26] As van Waarden explains, anxiety was so widespread in Sidonius' age that he made it into 'an essential component of his self-presentation.'[27] Hence, Sidonius not only 'speaks' his trauma but deploys it as a mechanism of his self-fashioning. Elsewhere, in *Ep.* 9.3, he works psychological torment into a philosophical framework, pithily remarking that 'to combine pleasant discourse and a mind distressed is a sort of moral barbarism.'[28] Similarly here, the incongruity between Sidonius' traumatic surroundings and the 'high culture' of the transcription prevents him from completing the work quickly. He is caught between two worlds.[29] Taking the passage more metaphorically, the trauma of exile represents a cultural displacement from Roman values and a reversion to uncivilised behaviour.[30] The transcription is wild and barbaric because it reflects the backward conditions under which it was produced, a polarising contrast to the aristocratic *otium* that pervades many of Sidonius' other works.[31]

It is therefore highly ironic that Sidonius tells a trauma narrative about shoddy writing with such literary polish.[32] His Latin is carefully crafted, featuring alliteration and sound devices (bolded above), tricolon (*turbida*…*Opica*), wordplay (*saltim saltuatim*) and anaphora (*nunc*…*nunc*). One might argue that these techniques are mannered ornaments of the 'jewelled style', or that Sidonius' criticism of the transcription is a modest affectation.[33] However, as Hanaghan illustrates, Sidonius

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[25] Cf. Rutilius' experience of exile as discussed in Chapter One.
[26] Craps 2014: 57, Pederson 2018: 107.
[27] van Waarden 2011: 561, n 13. See also Gibson 2013b: 201. Cf. Hoffer 1999 on Pliny the Younger's anxieties.
[28] *Ep.* 9.3.3: *porro autem quidam barbarismus est morum sermo iucundus et animus afflictus.*
[29] See Hanaghan 2019: 50.
[30] Formisano (2017) has applied this idea to several other late antique texts, including *DRS*.
[31] Especially Book 2 of the *Epistulae* (e.g. *Ep.* 2.2, 2.6, 2.12). See Hindermann 2020, Hindermann 2022a.
[32] Cf. Ov. *Tr.* 5.7, 5.10, 5.12 on Ovid's experience of living among the Getic languages at Tomi. At 5.12.57, Ovid ironically bemoans that he has lost the ability to speak proper Latin. See also Williams 1994.
[33] On the 'jewelled style,' see Roberts 2018. On Sidonius' style, see Wolff 2020. On Sidonius' technique of *diminutio*, see Furbetta 2024: 46.

published his exile letters as a political statement to Euric, proof that he would ardently maintain Roman literary culture no matter what.[34] He emerged from exile as 'both a victim and a victor,'[35] having crafted a persona that accepts his suffering yet fights against his oppressor. This tension plays out in *Ep.* 8.3, as Sidonius flips between conventionally 'Roman' pursuits (e.g. literature) and 'un-Roman' conduct (e.g. exile). By voicing his culturally traumatic experience through the stable traditions of classical literature, Sidonius can test that trauma against his self-perception and assimilate it into his identity.[36] He defines himself by critiquing the cultural 'Other' which exile compels him to tolerate.[37] In fact, Sidonius' trauma makes him who he is, because his suffering provides an opportunity for his self-development.

There are few things in Sidonius' corpus more culturally abhorrent than the Gothic women who tormented his nights at Liviana. The letter continues:

> ad hoc, et cum me defetigatum ab excubiis ad devorsorium crepusculascens hora revocaverat, vix dabatur luminibus inflexes parvula quies; nam fragor ilico, quem movebant vicinantes impluvio cubiculi mei duae quaepiam Getides anus, quibus nil umquam litigiosius bibacius vomacius erit.
>
> *Ep.* 8.3.2
>
> To make matters worse, when the approach of the twilight hour had recalled me from my post of duty to my living quarters, my drooping eyelids scarcely got a wink of sleep; for a din would immediately arise from the two old Gothic women near the skylight of my bedroom, the most quarrelsome, drunken, vomiting creatures the world will ever see.

Despite the breadth afforded to epistolary subject matter in Late Antiquity,[38] Sidonius' condemnation of the *Getides* is irrefutably low-brow and surprisingly vivid. In accordance with Pederson's theory, Sidonius conveys his trauma through augmented narrative detail.[39] The stress of the experience enhances his recall, resulting in textual overflow.[40] That overflow, like many traumatic memories, is multi-sensory.[41] Sidonius' trauma has visual cues (the *Getides* themselves), aural cues (their din) and olfactory cues (*vomacius*). Paradoxically, however, Sidonius packages this

[34] Hanaghan 2018: 259–60.
[35] Ibid 261.
[36] Similarly, Balaev (2008: 161) discusses the importance of place for dealing with trauma.
[37] Cf. Giannotti 2023: 227.
[38] On the development of late antique epistolography, see Sogno 2014, White 2018, Allen and Neil 2020: 5.
[39] Pederson 2014: 339.
[40] See McNally 2003: 62.
[41] Pederson 2014: 339.

coarse content in the language of epic. *luminibus* (*OLD* 9)*, quies* (*OLD* 1) and *fragor* (*OLD* 2) are all common in Virgil, an author with whom Sidonius was intensely familiar.[42] The patronymic *Getides* is also a feature of high style. Mratschek argues that Sidonius invokes the 'idealised cultural tradition' of classical literature to 'generate an alternative world to safeguard his independence and provide refuge from the victorious Visigoths.'[43] Yet here, by framing his Gothic trauma in Virgilian terms, Sidonius maintains his cultural superiority while simultaneously acknowledging the ongoing societal transformation. This is not an 'alternative world,' but a deliberate hybridity aimed at Sidonius' psychological readjustment to living under a barbarian king.[44] He is self-reflexively aware that his writing operates both within and outside classical traditions and hierarchies.[45]

Hence, Sidonius provides tongue-in-cheek praise of Euric, as the 'famous King' who 'terrifies the hearts of nations far across the sea,'[46] notwithstanding the harsh conditions Euric imposed upon him. Yet that praise features within a larger sequence where Sidonius insists that Leo devote his entire attention to the transcription. He must lay aside poetry (*sepone*, 8.3.3), suspend his oratory (*suspende*, 8.3.3) and put aside the declamations on which Euric's eminence depends (*sepone*, 8.3.3). He must also rid himself of the cares and commotions of court (*curis*, 8.3.4), a clear parallel to the disturbances Sidonius suffered in exile (*curis*, 8.3.1). Sidonius' implication, consistent with Hernández Lobato's observations on the 'poetics of silence' in Late Antiquity,[47] is that literary appreciation has become a dying art under Euric. Such is its precarity that Leo must maintain a singular focus on the transcription to the exclusion of all else. In so doing, however, Leo is invited to witness Sidonius' trauma in light of both the transcription's production and its content, which advocates modesty and perseverance amidst cultural barbarity (8.3.6). Thus, Sidonius communicates his trauma not only through the literal epistle, but through the metatext of the enclosed transcription,[48] creating an account of his experience and demanding its recognition.

Letter 8.9

Further details of Sidonius' exile emerge in *Ep.* 8.9, where he responds to a request for poetry made by Lampridius, another of his literary associates now in Euric's court. Sidonius writes from

[42] On Sidonius' intertextual relationship with Virgil, see Montone 2013, Hanaghan 2017. *lumina* or *luminibus* appear 22 times in Verg. *Aen*., *quies* 10 times and *fragor* 8 times. On Sidonius' intertextuality generally, see Gualandri 2020.
[43] Mratschek 2020: 257.
[44] See Harries 1994: 239, Gibson 2013b: 215. Hybridity is a characteristic of late antique literature. See Schwitter 2020: 87, Elsner and Hernández Lobato 2017: 15.
[45] Elsner and Hernández Lobato 2017: 4. Cf. Harich-Schwarzbauer and Hindermann 2020: 3.
[46] *Ep.* 8.3.3: *rex inclitus modo corda terrificat gentium transmarinarum.*
[47] See Hernández Lobato 2017: 282–4, discussing Sidonius' *Carmen* 9.
[48] On literary form and the representation of trauma, see Rodi-Risberg 2018.

Bordeaux, freed from captivity at Liviana, but prohibited from returning to Clermont. Lampridius was formerly out of favour with Euric, but had his estates returned to him and became an influential nobleman (8.9.1).[49] Sidonius muses on the fact that he was not so lucky. He again takes a philosophical approach to trauma and its relationship with his work:

> et si quid asperum aut triste, non statim sese poetica teneritudo a vinculo incursi angoris elaqueat…me tamen nequaquam sollicitudo permittit aliud nunc habere in actione, aliud in carmine…ago laboriosum, agis ipse felicem; ago adhuc exulem, agis ipse iam civem: et ob hoc inaequalia cano, quia similia posco et paria non impetro.
>
> *Ep.* 8.9.2–3
>
> If anything harsh or distressing occurs, the poetic sensibility does not free itself from the agonising entanglement…as for me, my anxiety forbids me to make the content of my poetry different from the life I lead…the parts we play are different; I am afflicted, you fortunate; I still an exile, you are now a citizen; and the reason why my verses are not on an equality with yours is just this – I claim similar privileges but do not get the same treatment.

As second-wave trauma theorist Michelle Balaev argues, modern approaches to trauma acknowledge that 'social, semantic, political and economic factors' are present in its experience and recollection.[50] Trauma is not necessarily lost to the subconscious; rather, it is a lived experience locatable in an intersectional tapestry. Sidonius' trauma exists in several spheres. His exile creates social distance between himself and Lampridius, emphasised by the contrasting verb forms *ago* and *agis*. He is embroiled in a legal battle over his mother-in-law's estate (8.9.2). He would prefer to perform his poem before Euric as a political ploy to secure his unconditional release (8.9.5).[51] His literature correspondingly suffers in quality (8.9.4). Yet significantly, and in striking contrast to Rutilius, Sidonius insists that his poetry remains authentic to his distressing circumstances.[52] He can express his trauma both discursively and figuratively in all its facets. The enclosed poem provides proof. Amidst a deluge of mythological and geographical references,[53] Sidonius asks why Lampridius urges him to write (1–10), describes his imprisonment (17–20) and refers to the need for Roman 'salvation' from a lengthy list of barbarian tribespeople (21–44).[54] Sidonius analogises

[49] On Lampridius, see Harries 1994: 240.
[50] Balaev 2014: 7–8.
[51] See Hanaghan 2018: 267.
[52] Cf. Catull. 16.5–8, Ov. *Tr.* 2.353–4, Mart. 1.4.8, 1.45.10–11 who believe that literary production should be separate from a poet's personal life.
[53] Including references to Apollo, Persia, Scythia, Arcadia, Parthia, Constantinople, Persia and Bordeaux.
[54] This is likely an allusion to Odoacer, whose domination of Italy marked the end of the empire from 476. See Anderson 1965: 448, n 5.

his relationship with Lampridius to that of Meliboeus and Tityrus (12, 56–59),[55] a poetic parallel for the turmoil of his displacement and dispossession.

However, despite his composition, the letter's ending alludes to the end of poetry itself. Sidonius no longer has the mental space to 'dream' of poems among his myriad misfortunes.[56] This resonates with an earlier moment where Sidonius questions Lampridius' reception of the poem:

> quod si quopiam casu ineptias istas, quas inter animi supplicia conscripsimus, nutu indulgentiore susceperis, persuadebis mihi, quia cantuum similes fuerint olorinorum, quorum est modulatior clangor in poenis: similes etiam chordae lyricae violentus tensae, quae quo plus torta, plus musica est.
>
> *Ep.* 8.9.4
>
> But if by chance you do accept with a measure of indulgent approval these silly trifles of mine, written amid mental tortures, then you will convince me that they were like the songs of swans, whose cry is more tuneful in moments of agony, and like a lyre-string strung more forcibly than is wont, which is the more musical the more it is tensed.

As Schlapbach notes, the conventional interpretation of such self-deprecating comments is that they 'betray a self-confident pose.'[57] However, since Sidonius' self-confidence was 'constantly threatened' by his context,[58] a more nuanced approach is necessary. For Sidonius, literature is a means of speaking trauma and itself a site of trauma.[59] The decay of Roman literary culture makes Sidonius' compositional process emotionally taxing and politically risky, yet simultaneously productive of high art.[60] His resilience emanates from a desire to confront the irreversible deterioration of his identity markers both through the content of his writing and in the very act of writing.[61] Hence, the swan and lyre-string similes play on the juxtaposition between the agony of the traumatised 'composer' and the corresponding beauty of their sound.[62] Similarly to the transcription of *Ep.* 8.3, Sidonius minimises the quality of his poem (*ineptias*), yet he indirectly

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[55] The shepherds from Verg. *Ecl.* 1. See n 42 above. Meliboeus lost his farm during Octavian's confiscations.
[56] *Ep.* 8.9.6: *nisi prius ipse destiterim vaticinari magis damna quam carmina*. See Gibson 2013b: 215–6.
[57] Schlapbach 2020: 50. For the topos of modesty in Sidonius, see Condorelli 2013: 115–6. Cf. Sowers 2016 on late antique *nugae* in Ausonius.
[58] van Waarden 2011: 561, n 13.
[59] In a different theoretical context, Caruth (1996: 19–21) argues that the process of writing can itself be traumatic, citing Freud 1939 as an example.
[60] Cf. *Ep.* 8.10.2: *horum omnium famam praecedentia pericula extollunt*. See Hanaghan 2017: 259.
[61] Cf. Giannotti 2023: 224, discussing *Ep.* 8.6.
[62] The swan is a famous symbol of poetry. Mratschek (2016: 316–9) explains that Sidonius adapts Hor. *Carm.* 2.20.1–8 to construct a 'lyrical self.' On the intertextual relationship between Sidonius and Horace, see Stoehr-Monjou 2013, Pelttari 2016.

contradicts himself by emphasising the ordeal of its creation (*supplicia*). Sidonius' 'mental torture' also jars with his claim to write poetry freely for Lampridius (8.9.2).[63] The import of these contradictions is that Sidonius cannot pitch his works higher than *nugae*, despite the effort he puts into them. This is because he understands their diminishing value, which is itself a traumatic fact. Significantly, it is Lampridius' approval (*nutu…mihi*) upon which Sidonius pegs the worth of his work. Lampridius' unexpected death, miserably reported in *Ep.* 8.11, symbolically obliterates it.[64] With his addressee dead, Sidonius loses a witness to and validator of the trauma of his writing.

The cascading personal, political, social and literary traumas of *Ep.* 8.9 form a narrative around Sidonius 'master' trauma: the fall of Rome and the deterioration of its traditions. This trauma is a constant undercurrent of Book 8, but does not flow chronologically. Like the other books of Sidonius' letters, Book 8 has a 'jagged' chronology, flashing forwards and backwards in time between life pre- and post-476, such that there is 'no overall internal cohesiveness.'[65] This temporal distortion is a typical means of representing trauma, indicative of a warped or altered memory.[66] The letter immediately preceding *Ep.* 8.9 occurs over ten years earlier, likely in 467, where Sidonius encourages his friend Syagrius to run for office.[67] Naturally, when Book 8 circulated in *c.* 480, Euric and other Germanic kings had long destroyed those hallmarks of empire.[68] So much is recognised in *Ep* 8.2, where Sidonius confesses that, with Latin arms 'shipwrecked' and official ranks swept away, the only remaining marker of traditional nobility is one's literary ability.[69] This candid comment on the collapse of Roman rule illuminates the motivation for Sidonius' epistolary project. Notwithstanding the trauma of exile and cultural degradation, Sidonius clings to what Euric cannot take from him: his art and *doctrina*. Sidonius' self-assured claims to intellectual superiority are coping mechanisms for managing the trauma of 476,[70] which kept him sane while confined at Liviana. However, this is not Sidonius' only coping mechanism. As Book 7 demonstrates, his Christian religion and Roman patriotism also play a role in how his letters speak trauma.

[63] See Hanaghan 2018: 267.
[64] *Ep.* 8.11.3: *Lampridius orator modum primum mihi occisus agnoscitur.* Lampridius was murdered by his slaves.
[65] See Hanaghan 2019: 183–4, citing Ricœur 1985: 81.
[66] See Pederson 2014: 339–40, McNally 2003: 182
[67] *Ep.* 8.8.2: *redde te patri, redde te patriae, redde te etiam fidelibus amicis.*
[68] Harries 1994: 17–8. See Gibson 2013b: 216. Cf. Salzman 2021: 197–242.
[69] See *Ep.* 8.2.1: *cum pertulerint arma naufragium*, *Ep.* 8.2.2: *solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium litteras nosse.*
[70] Mratschek 2020: 257. See the discussion of Sidonius in Chapter Three.

Book 7: The Trauma of the Clermont Sieges

As bishop of Clermont, Sidonius was a pivotal figure in repelling Euric's attempts to conquer the town between 471 and 474.[71] His defence was as spiritual and socio-cultural as it was military. Euric was an uncompromising Arian and an opponent of Roman orthodoxy.[72] *Ep.* 7.6 and 7.7 thematise the threats Euric posed to Catholicism and *Romanitas* respectively, forming the 'core' of Book 7.[73] Both letters are highly political in light of the settlement negotiations commenced with Euric in late 474 when Southern Gaul was on the brink of collapse.[74] Yet they also reflect painfully on what has been lost. Sidonius spares no details of the devastation within his adoptive episcopate, displaying characteristic vitriol and defiance. He equates the fall of Clermont with the death of his value system and his emotions outpour accordingly.

Letter 7.6

Sidonius writes to Basilius, the bishop of Aquae Sextiae, exhorting him to protect the consecration of Catholic bishops in the ongoing treaty negotiations with Euric.[75] By 475,[76] Euric had for some time refused to replace religious leaders in the region who had died. Consequently, Catholic reverence waned, which deeply troubled Sidonius. The structure of the letter, as van Waarden highlights, is lopsided: the introductory *exordium* occupies over half the text.[77] This choice flags not only the desperation of Sidonius' diplomacy, but also the textual excess common to trauma narratives.[78] Within the *exordium*, Sidonius voices his religious trauma by vilifying Euric:

> …lupus, qui peccatis pereuntium saginatur animarum, clandestino morsu necdum intellecti dentis arrodat. Namque hostis antiquus, quo facilius insultet balatibus ovium destituarum, dormitantum prius incipit cervicibus imminere pastorum.
>
> *Ep.* 7.6.2–3
>
> The wolf that battens on the sins of perishing souls is preying on the sheep-folds of the church in this age, biting by stealth and as yet unnoticed. For the old Enemy, in order the more easily to pounce upon the bleating undefended sheep, is first threatening the necks of the sleeping shepherds.

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[71] For an historical overview, see Harries 1994: 222–38, van Waarden 2010: 13–4.
[72] On Arianism and Euric's attitude to Catholicism, see Wolfram 1988: 199, Mathisen and Sivan 1998: 38.
[73] van Waarden 2010: 335.
[74] Harries 1994: 234.
[75] Ibid.
[76] For the date of the letter, see Stevens 1933: 108, Loyen 1943: 214. Cf. Harries 1994: 233–7.
[77] van Waarden 2010: 272.
[78] Pederson 2014: 339.

The extended metaphor of the wolf and the sheepfold is both epic and biblical,[79] providing yet another example of how Sidonius deploys the language of the oppressed to critique his oppressor.[80] The wolf is a typical symbol of the heretic,[81] which Sidonius combines with imagery of the devil (*hostis antiquus*).[82] Although Euric is not yet named, the comparison is self-evident. Sidonius frames Euric's refusal to appoint bishops as an insidious and depraved strategy to deprive the Catholic faithful of their leaders, destroying Catholicism at its root. There is historical debate as to whether Euric's decisions were more political tactics than ideological persecutions, since it was advantageous for his regime to damage the connection between Roman aristocrats and ecclesiastical leaders.[83] Nonetheless, the emotional effect of Euric's religious suppression is tangible. The underlying trauma which Sidonius addresses is the loss of religious community. As Erikson explains, where the ties that bind communities are damaged, the gradual realisation that community no longer offers a source of support is psychologically harmful.[84] The relationship between Sidonius and his addressee Basilius is one of physical and spiritual separation. Sidonius emphasises his spiritual inferiority to Basilius on several occasions (7.6.1, 7.6.2), stressing his comparatively tainted conscience.[85] Even if these remarks are partly obsequious, they indicate the broader trend that, under Euric, the Catholic Church does not operate as a communal body.[86] Sidonius later notes the 'wide tract of spiritual devastation' which leaves the faithful 'sunk in a gloomy despair.'[87]

To reinforce this religious turmoil, Sidonius describes the decaying churches in rural Gaul and continues the motif of animal imagery in the letter:

> nulla in desolatis cura dioecesibus. Videas in ecclesiis aut putres culminum lapsus aut valvarum cardinibus avulses basilicarum aditus hispidorum veprium fruticibus obstructos. Ipsa, pro dolor, videas armenta non modo semipatentibus iacere vestibulis sed etiam herbosa viridantium altarium latera depasci.
>
> *Ep.* 7.6.8

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[79] See Verg. *Aen.* 9.59–66, where Turnus prowls outside the Trojan camp. See also Fo 2002: 158, van Waarden 2010: 288. There is another Virgilian wolf simile in Sidonius' famous *Panegyric ad Avitum*, on which see Montone 2013. On the biblical intertext, see *Ezech.* 34.5, *Ioh.* 10.1–17.
[80] See *Ep.* 8.3 above, Styka 2019: 88–9. Sidonius' aim is to preserve that language.
[81] See Ambr. *In Luc.* 7.1.477: *nonne lupis istis haeretici comparandi sunt*.
[82] See Hanaghan 2018: 263.
[83] For this view, see Heather 1996: 212, Mathisen and Sivan 1998: 38.
[84] Erikson 1976: 154.
[85] *Ep.* 7.6.3: *ut nequaquam me hunc esse reminiscar, quem longis adhuc abluenda fletibus conscientia premat*. Sidonius likely alludes to his formerly pagan beliefs. On his conversion, see Harries 1994: 169–86.
[86] See Erikson 1991.
[87] *Ep.* 7.6.7: *latum spiritalis ruinae limitem traxit…orbatos tristis intercisae fidei desperatio premit.*

> In the desolate dioceses there is no one to exercise oversight; you can see in the churches roofs crumbling and falling or door-hinges torn away, and the entrances to the basilicas blocked by thickets of rough briers; sadder still, one can see cattle not only lying in the vestibules half-open to the sky but actually cropping the sides of grass-grown altars.

This passage is highly emotive. The repetition of *videas* and the *non solum…sed etiam* construction reinforce the overwhelming degradation of the church. Sidonius reserves the phrase *pro dolor* for moments of intense grief.[88] The reversion of 'civilised' structures to nature symbolises the regressing influence of Catholicism.[89] The disintegrating buildings, brier trees and cattle are both witnesses to and reflections of the religious trauma Euric has inflicted.[90] Sidonius' representation of traumatic decay through nature creates an interesting parallel with Rutilius' depictions of the Italian countryside.[91] However, there is an important distinction. Whereas with Rutilius the natural world operated in ironic counterpoint to his myopic optimism, Sidonius has at this point already articulated the loss of several bishops (7.6.7). Rather than the landscape creating an inference of trauma, Sidonius' landscapes provide additional sentimental detail. This contrast epitomises the tension between first- and second-wave trauma theory. Sidonius demonstrates remarkable situational awareness and is able to tie his stylistic choices to his self-knowledge. Hence, he can liberally bemoan the metaphorical 'death' of the priesthood and the 'end' of religion caused by the literal death of a bishop.[92] In a sense, Sidonius' trauma is *in mediis rebus*: his requests to Basilius are directed at remedying the trauma of the past,[93] yet he has the mental fortitude to demand the future endurance of Catholicism in defiance of Euric. The letter's conclusion is obstinate. Even those in territories lost to Euric under the treaty (*ex foedere*) should be unified by shared religious belief (*ex fide*).[94] Unfortunately for Sidonius, however, the results of the treaty negotiations were more emotionally shocking than he could have imagined.

Letter 7.7

Sidonius writes to Graecus, another bishop involved in the settlement with Euric, furious that Clermont has been surrendered to the Goths in exchange for the safety of Provence.[95] The letter

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[88] Cf. *Ep.* 3.12 (concerning the violation of his father's grave) and *Ep.* 7.7 below.
[89] See van Waarden 2010: 320.
[90] See Balaev 2008: 161.
[91] Cf. Chapter One and the overgrown cities in Luc. 1.24–32, 9.950–99, reflecting the trauma of civil war.
[92] *Ep.* 7.6.9: *in illa ecclesia sacerdotium moritur, non sacerdos…ubi facit terminus hominis finem religionis?*
[93] Sidonius uses this corporeal metaphor expressly at *Ep.* 7.6.7: *discite cito catholici status valetudinem occultam, ut apertam festinetis adhibere medicinam.*
[94] See *Ep.* 7.6.10.
[95] See Harries 1994: 235, van Waarden 2010: 336.

captures his devastation at losing a city which he vehemently defended for so long; it functions, in Stevens' words, as an 'epitaph of the Roman Empire.'[96] *Ep.* 7.7 is unique for its lack of Christian references amongst an otherwise densely religious book,[97] in addition to its direct attacks on the addressee. Sidonius' style is uncharacteristically blunt and unadorned.[98] His tone is patriotic and vigorously Roman. Such is the trauma of Clermont's betrayal that Sidonius must tell it as it is, with his bitterness pushing the limits of polite epistolary communication in the process. After a brief introduction, Sidonius invokes the ideals of *Romanitas* that the treaty has 'butchered':[99]

> facta est servitus nostra pretium securitatis alienae. Arvernorum, pro dolor, servitus, qui, si Prisca replicarentur, audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere et sanguine ab Iliaco populos computare…[hi sunt] cui saepe populo Gothus non fuit clauso intra moenia formidini, cum vicissim ipse fieret oppugnatoribus positis intra castra terrori.
>
> *Ep.* 7.7.2
>
> Our freedom has been bartered for the security of others, the freedom of the Arvernians (O the pity of it!) who, if ancient story be recalled, dared once to call themselves 'brothers to Latium' and counted themselves 'a people sprung from Trojan blood'…these are the people who many a time, though besieged within their walls, felt no fear of the Goth, but in their turn struck terror into their assailants even when these were in their own camp.

Sidonius' allusion to the mythical foundations of Rome serves two purposes. Since the Arvernians believed that they originated from Troy,[100] Sidonius appeals to he and Graecus' common Gallo-Roman identity to emphasise Graecus' disloyalty. It is especially appropriate that Sidonius uses the language of Lucan,[101] because it equates that disloyalty with civil war. Moreover, the very mention of Troy evokes the cultural trauma that birthed the Roman people,[102] which is on par, Sidonius implies, with the plight of Clermont. Cultural trauma connotes 'a claim to some fundamental injury…a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.'[103] The 'injury' that Sidonius laments is how the surrender of Clermont disregards the Roman tenacity of the Arvernians, which he lists in

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[96] Stevens 1933: 160.
[97] On Sidonius' project in Book 7 as a whole, see van Waarden 2010.
[98] See van Waarden 2010: 338. Cf. Gualandri 1979: 29, Kaufmann 1995: 210.
[99] van Waarden 2010: 42–3. See Harries 1992: 303.
[100] See Gualandri 1979: 20, n 69.
[101] Cf. Luc. 1.427–8: *Arvernique ausi Latio se fingere fratres | sanguine ab Iliaco populi.*
[102] On Troy and trauma, see Karanika 2019. On Sidonius' reframing of Troy and other literary sources in this letter, see Mratschek 2013.
[103] See Alexander 2012: 16, Sremac and Van Liere 2024: 14.

tripartite form as a *res gestae* of his people (7.7.2).[104] The treaty makes the suffering of his episcopate practically worthless, indignantly expressed through three parallel rhetorical questions (7.7.3). The most vivid question describes how the Arvernians' hands are as green from starvation as the noxious grasses they pluck to eat.[105] van Waarden argues that Sidonius here marshals 'reasoned artistry…to master a repulsive reality.'[106] This is not a metaphor which hints at trauma, but a hyperbole that sharpens it. Sidonius communicates his distress through the intensity of his imagery. However, Sidonius does not shy away from overt anger either. His trauma fuels his vitriolic abuse: he prays that Graecus and his colleagues 'may be ashamed' of the treaty, concocted for personal gain rather than the common good (7.7.4), with the catastrophic result that intergenerationally transmitted Gallo-Roman cultural traditions will swiftly end. There will no longer be ancestors as models when there are no descendants to emulate them (7.7.5). With Euric in control of Clermont, *Romanitas* will die. Sidonius concludes with a demand for reparation:

> sed cur dolori nimio frena laxamus? Quin potius ignoscite afflictis nec imputate maerentibus. namque alia regio tradita servitium sperat, Arverna supplicium…parate exulibus terram, capiendis redemptionem, viaticum peregrinaturis. Si murus noster aperitur hostibus, non sit clausus vester hospitibus.
>
> *Ep.* 7.7.6
>
> But why do I give free rein to my excessive grief? Nay, pardon the afflicted and do not blame the mourner; for any other surrendered region expects servitude, but Auvergne is faced with torture…provide land for the exiles, ransom for the captives-to-be, and aid for the refugees on their way. If our walls are opened to admit our foes, let not yours be closed to exclude your friends.

Here Sidonius expressly acknowledges that his trauma response has overtaken his self-presentation. Although the metaphor of giving free rein to one's emotions is common,[107] it is especially pertinent given the outbursts, criticisms and sorrow of the previous five sections. However, despite the torture (*supplicium*) awaiting Auvergne, Sidonius perseveres in trying to secure the safety of his people. This is ironically the most 'Roman' thing he can do, notwithstanding the proclaimed end of *Romanitas*. Sidonius' perseverance is aimed not just at demanding Graecus' short-term assistance, but at creating a cultural blueprint for his wider audience, who read the letter

[104] Sidonius uses the phrase *res publica* for 'state' twice in this section, continuing the Roman diction.
[105] *Ep.* 7.7.3: *crebro per ignorantiam venenatis graminibus infecti quae…manus fame concolor legit?*
[106] van Waarden 2010: 363.
[107] Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 5.21.6, Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 3.179–81, Sid. *Ep.* 4.11.7. See van Waarden 2010: 375.

at least two years after it was written.[108] The letter is a 'medium of identity creation' for Sidonius' circle and for posterity,[109] disseminating Rome's legacy even at its lowest ebb. His reference to exiles (*exulibus*) and refugees (*peregrinaturis*) ties Clermont to the earlier Troy allusion (7.7.2), since 'Romans' have always needed to relocate and fight to ensure their survival. Sidonius' own exile provides proof.[110] Consistent with Roman ethics, Sidonius would prefer to resist and starve in Clermont than surrender and live.[111] Thus, Sidonius harnesses and interweaves the trauma of Clermont, the historical trauma of Troy and the trauma of displacement to galvanise a contemporary collective psyche.[112] Trauma, at least in Sidonius' literature, provides an opportunity for renewal.[113] It has defined Rome and always will. Hence, Stevens' description of *Ep.* 7.7 as an 'epitaph' is only half-accurate.[114] While it may be an epitaph in so far as it relates to the Western Roman Empire, it is a powerful call to arms for the continuance of traditional Roman values amidst new political and social circumstances. This forward-thinking attitude is what makes Book 7 a 'manifesto of mental resilience and consistency.'[115] *Ep.* 7.7 is a paradigm of how Sidonius speaks and harnesses trauma within a single letter. However, the arc and macrostructure of Sidonius' entire epistolary collection also contribute to the record of his trauma narrative.

The Architecture of the *Epistulae*

Thus far, we have seen how Sidonius grapples with several discrete yet interconnected traumas in individual letters: the turmoil of exile, the decay of literary culture, the downfall of Christianity, the surrender of Clermont, the disintegration of *Romanitas* and the fall of the empire. On personal, collective and cultural levels, he grapples with those traumas and integrates them into his reality. However, if we take a panoptic view of the collection, Sidonius' relationship with speaking trauma is not so simple. As mentioned above, Sidonius' major epistolary model is Pliny, whose nine-book collection of letters he consciously emulates.[116] Gibson persuasively argues that Sidonius mirrors Pliny not only structurally, but also in content and tone: both authors reserve their darker, more traumatic content for the closing three books.[117] Yet in contrast to Pliny, there is an undercurrent

[108] On the date of the letter, see Loyen 1943: 214. Cf. Harries 1994: 235.
[109] Mratschek 2013: 269.
[110] Mathisen 1984: 167. Sidonius' placement of the exile letters in Book 8 strengthens his argument.
[111] *Ep.* 7.7.5: *adhuc, si necesse est, obsideri, adhuc pugnare, adhuc esurire delectat.*
[112] On the trauma of displacement, see Hron 2018.
[113] See Mratschek 2020: 238–9, 259. One might argue that Rutilius makes a very similar point. However, Rutilius uses this logic to repress the fact that his traumatic experience occurred in the first place. By contrast, Sidonius actively engages with trauma and uses it to craft a new identity.
[114] For criticism of Stevens' reading, see van Waarden 2010: 334–5, Mratschek 2013: 267–8.
[115] van Waarden 2010: 41.
[116] Sidonius expressly refers to Pliny in many of his programmatic letters, including *Ep.* 1.1 (the opening letter), *Ep.* 9.1 and *Ep.* 9.16 (the closing letter).
[117] Gibson 2013b: 206. See also Gibson 2020: 378.

of trauma in Sidonius' collection that begins far earlier. That undercurrent contributes to an overarching narrative of surpassing obstacles and navigating trauma through literary tradition.

Sidonius first diverges from Pliny's book-based chronology in Book 4, where he includes two letters written after his exile, *Ep.* 4.10 and 4.22.[118] Yet, unlike in Books 7 and 8, at this point Sidonius is reluctant to provide any details of events in 475–7. The letters merely hint at the trauma to come. In *Ep.* 4.10, Sidonius tells Felix that he was 'broken with the hardships of a sojourn in an alien land,'[119] but nothing more. In *Ep.* 4.22, he rejects Leo's request to write a contemporary history,[120] citing the dangers of telling the truth.[121] Gibson concludes that Sidonius is 'not yet ready to discuss the fate of Clermont and his own sufferings in exile.'[122] However, that conclusion is slightly misleading. *Ep.* 4.10 and 4.22 were likely written in 476–7,[123] after the vitriolic *Ep.* 7.7,[124] and in the same period as the expressive *Ep.* 8.3 and 8.9.[125] Sidonius has deliberately displaced *Ep.* 4.10 and 4.22 earlier to give the impression that he has not mentally processed the chaos of Clermont and his exile.[126] This displacement embeds a point about trauma and literature into the collection. Only in imitation of Pliny's gloominess in Books 7–9 can Sidonius find a medium to process his trauma. This connection to classical culture gives him the freedom to express it. The angst of Book 4 pours out in Books 7 and 8, and consequently a glimmer of hope emerges in Book 9. Unlike the arc of Pliny's collection, which moves from optimism to pessimism, as symbolised by the names of the opening and closing addressees (Clarus and Fuscus),[127] Sidonius' arc is one of persistence through adversity. The names of his opening and closing addressees (Constantius and Firminus) underline his resilience.[128] By comparing and contrasting himself with Pliny, Sidonius tells a story of 'working through' trauma with epistolography.[129] The collection concludes positively in *Ep.* 9.16, with an eye on spring, the future and rebirth.[130]

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[118] On Pliny's chronology, see Gibson 2013b: 207.
[119] *Ep.* 4.10.1: *postquam me soli patrii finibus eliminatum peregrinationis adversa fregerunt.*
[120] This is the same Leo of *Ep.* 8.3 who secured Sidonius' release from exile.
[121] *Ep.* 4.22.5: *turpiter falsa, periculosae vera dicuntur.* Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 5.8.12.
[122] Gibson 2013b: 210–3. There are no references to Sidonius' personal and political chaos in Book 5 and only one in Book 6 (*Ep.* 6.10.1). Gibson believes that Sidonius may have been 'anxious to avoid stirring up dark emotions and to refrain from discussing recent traumatic events.'
[123] On the dates of the letters, see Amherdt 2001: 270, 451.
[124] van Waarden (2010: 339) dates the letter to June 475, following Loyen 1943.
[125] In fact, given that Sidonius locates himself at Bordeaux in *Ep.* 8.9, whereas in *Ep.* 4.10 and 4.22 Sidonius is free from exile, the Book 4 letters almost certainly post-date *Ep.* 8.9 as well.
[126] On trauma and temporal distortion, see n 66 above.
[127] Pliny's collection travels metaphorically from 'dawn' to 'dusk.' See Gibson 2013b: 217–8.
[128] See Gibson 2011, Gibson 2013a for the discovery of the intertextual parallel.
[129] On 'working through,' see Ganteau 2020. This idea underpins Chapter Three.
[130] *Ep.* 9.16.2: *sic quoque tamen compotem officii prius agere curavi, quam duodecimum nostrum, quem Numae mensem vos nuncupatis, Favonius flatu teporo pluviisque natalibus maritaret.*

Ep. 9.16 exemplifies Sidonius' tendency to thematise literary endings and beginnings. This motif has structural significance in light of Sidonius' focus on the 'end' of so many pillars of his culture, as described above. As Gibson has shown, Sidonius borrows from Pliny the idea of the epistolary 'false ending.'[131] *Ep.* 7.18 appears to close the collection with the same addressee to whom Sidonius wrote in *Ep.* 1.1 (Constantius).[132] *Ep.* 8.1 reopens it, *Ep.* 8.16 (also addressed to Constantius) closes it again, *Ep.* 9.1 (to Firminus) reopens it again and *Ep.* 9.16 (to Firminus) is the final coda. Underpinning these oscillating starts and stops are two sea journeys, inspired by Plin. *Ep.* 9.26. The first commences in *Ep.* 1.1 and ends in *Ep.* 7.18.[133] The second begins in *Ep.* 8.1 and crosses the 'mere pond' to *Ep.* 9.16.[134] Although scholars generally read these programmatic letters as performative declarations of artistic intent,[135] interpreting them against the content of the collection produces additional symbolic readings. By highlighting the new epistolary beginnings in Books 8 and 9, both of which involve requests for Sidonius to publish more work, he proves that, despite the prevalence of trauma in his personal and political worlds, sources of *Romanitas* are constantly popping up. Sidonius' friends and his projects reinvigorate a culture that has supposedly ended.[136] Sidonius actively pioneers the preservation of *Romanitas* which he so desires. When he lays down his oars in *Ep.* 9.16,[137] Sidonius has worked through the traumatic perils of the 'sea,' a metaphor for his tumultuous context.[138] However, Sidonius could not have done so without his aristocratic community and his firm belief in the superiority of Latin language and literature, to which we turn our attention in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Sidonius uses his epistolary form, style, language and structure to speak the trauma of the 470s. Consistent with the second-wave approach to trauma theory, Sidonius has no difficulty remembering trauma; he expresses it with sharp detail, textual overflow and chronological distortion. More importantly, however, Sidonius harnesses his trauma as a means of identity creation, honing his self-presentation as a marginalised yet rebellious figure in a world irrevocably changed. Whether in exile or in Clermont, Sidonius always has an opinion. He

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131 Gibson 2013b: 212. See also Hanaghan 2017: 258, Stoehr-Monjou 2024: 53–4. On false closure in Latin literature, see Grewing, Acosta-Hughes and Kirichenko 2013.
132 *Ep.* 7.18 begins by directly quoting Verg. *Ecl.* 8.11: *A te principium, tibi desinet.*
133 *Ep.* 1.1.3: *quam ob rem nos nunc perquam haesitabundos in hoc deinceps famae pelagus impellis*. Cf. van Waarden 2022.
134 *Ep.* 8.1.3: *sed quia hortaris, repetitis laxemus vela turbinibus et qui veluti maria transmissimus, hoc quasi stagnum pernavigemus.* Cf. *Ep.* 9.16.3.
135 For example, Hanaghan (2017: 255–60) explains how Sidonius uses his intertextual relationship with Pliny to send a message to his critics.
136 Stoehr-Monjou (2024: 56) makes the point that Constantius and Firminus belong to different generations, with the younger Firminus rounding out the collection with a nod to the future.
137 *Ep.* 9.16.3: *pamulam ponit manus*.
138 See Hanaghan 2017: 259, discussing *Ep.* 8.10.2.

also provides cultural models for his religious and ethnic communities, aimed at galvanising the damaged Gallo-Roman identity and recording the achievements of his people for posterity. Sidonius' resolute *Romanitas* has earned him the title of 'the Last Roman,' a man who trusted in elite literary culture even if all else should fail.[139] His ability to voice and traverse the traumatic fall of the empire has ensured his survival and enduring literary interest.

The past two chapters have shown that Rutilius and Sidonius experience and represent their respective traumas in very different ways. However, there is an important point of overlap. As Gallo-Roman aristocrats, the traumas suffered by the Roman Empire affected the self-definition of their entire communities. In response, Rutilius and Sidonius both use literature, literary community and classical tradition to cultivate their *Romanitas* and 'work through' cultural trauma.

[139] See *OCD* s.v. 'Sidonius Apollinaris,' van Waarden 2011: 561.

Chapter Three

Reconstructing *Romanitas* – A Response to Cultural Trauma?

Introduction

Ordo renascendi est crescere posse malis

DRS 1.140

cui [Romae] fixus… | ordo fuit crevisse malis

Sid. *Carm.* 7.7

Rutilius and Sidonius wrote in the aftermath not only of significant personal trauma, but also profound trauma to the Roman Empire. The previous chapters identified several of these cultural traumas, including the sack of Rome in 410, the fall of Clermont in 476 and the decay of paganism and Catholicism respectively. 'Cultural trauma' occurs when members of a collective undergo 'a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.'[1] Restoring the collective psyche requires a universal mode of cultural representation, which promotes the expression of mourning for the past and hope for the future.[2] This chapter proposes that the Gallo-Roman literary milieu and their esteem for old-world Roman tradition provided Rutilius and Sidonius with a means of 'working through' cultural trauma. As outlined above, 'working through' is the process of coming to terms with a traumatic experience, often through literary expression.[3] Although Rutilius and Sidonius' trauma responses differ in style and substance, both men draw strength from literary community, creating 'oases of *Romanitas*'[4] that solidify social ties and promote Roman excellence in the wake of recent catastrophes.

Rutilius and Sidonius have much in common to justify this comparative analysis. Both were patriotic Gallo-Romans and former prefects of Rome, who witnessed sacks of their city, experienced exile and bemoaned foreign threats to their values and religious beliefs.[5] Most importantly, they were well-educated aristocrats. By the fifth century, classical education had become the principal marker of status in a world of cultural decline, functioning as a 'shared communicative code' among high society.[6] Elite self-definition depended upon the collegiate

[1] Alexander 2004: 1.
[2] Ibid 7. See also Sremac and Van Liere 2024: 14.
[3] See Introduction, Ganteau 2020.
[4] Mratschek 2016: 309.
[5] See Kelly 2020: 151–3 for an overview of Rutilius and Sidonius' similarities.
[6] Brown 1992: 39–40. See Stenger 2022: 17, John 2022: 256.

activities of writing, editing, publication and critique.[7] Knowledge of Latin language and texts was the one way to maintain stability when conventional class hierarchies dissolved.[8] Competitive friendships developed from literary pursuits, as the nobility aimed to outdo each other in their emulation of classical style, cultivating an ornate late antique aesthetic.[9] However, as Mathisen argues, this competition did not stem from active rivalry but rather a love for language that only the initiated could appreciate.[10] Literature also served as a binding agent for familial relationships: literary and family circles frequently overlapped, and epistolography especially bridged physical and intellectual distance within families.[11] The experience of reading, reciting and producing polished Latin became a unifying cultural nexus in a tumultuous era.

Rutilius and Sidonius are proud to show off the friends and family who participate in their literary milieux. They praise them for their talents, commend their political accolades and exhort them to write more. The attributes of their friends reflect positively on their own characters, as they position themselves as anchor points for the promulgation of Roman culture.[12] Fostering this community allows Rutilius and Sidonius to harness the power of literature to heal trauma. Nonetheless, each author retains their idiosyncratic perspective. Rutilius' admiration for his friends' *Romanitas* arises in the context of a nostalgic glimpse at what Rome once was, as he derives present comfort from past glory. By contrast, Sidonius' letters focus on the future. To ensure the survival of an eroding culture, Sidonius stresses the significance of pure Latinity amidst an onslaught of barbarism, seeking to safeguard his circle against total erasure. This chapter takes Rutilius and Sidonius' approaches in turn.

Literary Community and *Romanitas* in *De Reditu Suo*

Rutilius mentions no fewer than eight friends and family members in *DRS*, each of whom remind him of and connect him to Rome at various stages of his journey. These men are scholars, governors, poets and politicians, of noble birth and high rank, who perform their duties diligently and epitomise Roman values. They are integral to Rutilius' self-definition. Despite the sack of 410 and Rutilius' growing distance from Rome, through them he represents Rome as proximate and prosperous, stressing his membership of a virtuous, intelligent and devoted aristocratic group.[13]

[7] See Mathisen 1993: 112, Stenger 2022: 42.
[8] Stenger 2022: 49.
[9] See Schwitter 2020: 87–8. On friendship in Late Antiquity, see Konstan 1997: 170–3. On late antique style, see Roberts 2018.
[10] Mathisen 1993: 111.
[11] See Mathisen 1981: 95, Wood 2001: 435.
[12] See Kelly 2020: 153.
[13] See Malamud 2016: 20, Hernández Lobato 2021: 324–5.

These friends were probably the poem's primary audience.[14] Scholars differ as to their thematic importance. Wolff et al. contend that the portraits of Rutilius' friends serve a 'political-ideological function' because they emphasise the glory of serving the senate, an institution indispensable to the renewal of the empire after 410.[15] Similarly, Malamud highlights the juxtaposition between Rutilius' friends and the 'Others' who threaten his resolute *Romanitas*.[16] However, from the perspective of cultural trauma, Conybeare's psychological interpretation is more appropriate. She claims that Rutilius' repeated encomia create the effect of 'walking down an avenue past a set of statues.'[17] Since the city of Rome is no longer a marker of eternity, Rutilius displaces its perpetuity onto individuals who symbolise *Romanitas* through their public service.[18] Hence, Rutilius soothes the trauma concerning Rome the place by relishing in the community that endures from it. His friends become 'Romes away from Rome.'[19]

The first encomium to establish this friendship dynamic is that of young Rufius Volusianus, who accompanies Rutilius to Ostia before his departure. Rutilius praises Rufius as an illustrious credit to his father, a descendant of the Rutulian warrior Volusius,[20] an eloquent spokesperson for the emperor and an effective proconsul of Africa.[21] Rutilius continues:

> Sedula promisit summos instantia fasces:
> Si fas est meritis fidere, consul erit.
> Invitum tristis tandem remeare coegi;
> corpore divisos mens tamen una tenet.
>
> *DRS* 1.175–8

> His painstaking assiduity predicts high office:
> If it is right to trust his merits, he will be consul.
> At last I sadly compelled him, unwilling as he was, to turn back;
> our bodies may be separate, yet one mind holds us together.

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[14] Wolff et al. (2007: li) believe that Rutilius wrote *DRS* for these men first and for the pagan aristocracy second. It is plausible that Rutilius distributed the work within the literary circle of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, to which many of his friends belonged. See Malamud 2016: 9.
[15] Wolff et al. 2007: li.
[16] Malamud 2016: 23.
[17] Conybeare 2016: 222.
[18] Ibid 223.
[19] Hernández Lobato (2021: 329) makes a similar argument in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis.
[20] *DRS* 1.169–70. Volusius was a Rutulian ally of Turnus: Verg. *Aen.* 11.463. The *Aeneid* allusion is a Rutilian self-consoling strategy. Rufius' connection to Rome's glorious past proves its cultural and historical continuity.
[21] See *DRS* 1.166–74.

What Rutilius means by *mens* is broader than the seat of the soul. *mens* can connote a common purpose, attitude, inclination or resolution (*OLD* 7–10).[22] The spiritual bond linking Rutilius and Rufius is their shared devotion to the 'religion of Roma.'[23] Their rhetorical training, proud lineage, connection to Roman history and service to the state unite them as eminent exponents of *Romanitas*. In contrast to theories which present cultural trauma as a cause of fissures within communities,[24] Rutilius and Rufius' friendship remains strong in spite of 410. Rutilius' mental estrangement from the sack and passion for narratives of Roman rebirth actually intensify his communality with the extremely Roman Rufius.[25] Rufius is Rutilius' alter ego, a man destined for the highest Roman office (*fasces*, *consul*), who later follows in Rutilius' footsteps as *praefectus urbi*.[26] He is living proof that Roman discipline will survive and prosper in future generations. However, there is complex melancholy in this scene (*tristis, invitum*). By saying goodbye to Rufius, Rutilius symbolically farewells the very traditions he wishes to preserve. This paradox is a by-product of 'working through,' which requires the subject to remember and take leave of their past trauma simultaneously.[27] Rutilius' interaction with Rufius forges hope and community whilst ruefully acknowledging future separation.

This emotional tightrope was evidently difficult. Fifteen days later, still at Ostia, Rutilius farewells Rome again. This time he addresses Palladius, another eloquent young man of noble birth, who, like Rutilius, left Gaul to study at Rome for a career in politics. So sweet is their bond that Rutilius has a father's affection for him, though they are only relatives.[28] If Palladius is a younger version of Rutilius, then his biological father Exuperantius is Rutilius' double; both have missions to restore Roman order in Gaul.[29] The subtle pathos in this passage demonstrates the importance of family ties to Rutilius' working through. Palladius, Exuperantius and Rutilius are all victims of the Gothic rampages through Gaul and Italy. Rutilius uses that background to build a common cultural identity for his relatives and the entire Gallo-Roman aristocracy.[30] This is why Rutilius refers to Palladius as 'the hope and honour of [his] race.'[31] Within his social circle, Rutilius turns suffering into healing by highlighting the intergenerational transmission of identity markers (e.g. intellectual

[22] See *TLL* viii 711.59–738.36.
[23] See Roberts 2001: 541, Verbaal 2006: 159.
[24] See Erikson 1976: 154.
[25] See Erikson 1991: 459, 471. Cf. Chapter One for the intellectual workarounds which allow Rutilius to avoid confronting the trauma of 410.
[26] See Malamud 2016: 21. Rutilius writes a second encomium for Rufius (*DRS* 1.415–28) when he hears of his appointment. Their similar *cognomina* strengthen the connection between their identities.
[27] La Capra 1998: 45. See Ganteau 2020: 135–6.
[28] *DRS* 1.210–11: *Ille meae secum dulcissima vincula curae | filius affectu, stirpe propinquus habet.*
[29] *DRS* 1.213–16. Cf. *DRS* 1.19–20. See Soler 2005: 268.
[30] On trauma and identity, see Balaev 2008: 152, Preuss 2013: 250, Karanika 2019: 220.
[31] *DRS* 1.208: *Palladium, generis spemque decusque mei.*

qualities like *studium*, *doctrina* and *facundia*) that will regenerate the empire.[32] However, this purpose is also self-reflexive. By characterising himself as a mentor to a promising young man like Palladius, Rutilius affirms his own *Romanitas* and amplifies his contribution to Rome.[33] Formisano notes that Rutilius consistently lingers in breaks with his friends,[34] which reflects the challenges of his working through. He dwells upon men who bear the indicia of Rome because they represent safety, comfort and optimism in a time of intense anxiety.[35] They are the spirit of the encomium to Rome incarnate, upon whom Rutilius depends to cope with trauma. Yet the narrative of his journey impliedly admits that, eventually, he must leave them behind and overcome his wound.

Interestingly, as Rutilius ventures further from Rome and his community becomes ever more distant, the sadness that marked his earlier interactions dissipates. Instead, he rejoices in any scintilla of *Romanitas* that he finds in the landscape.[36] Despite the depictions of degradation which sandwich the episode at Thermae Taurinae,[37] Rutilius enjoys the comforting permanence of Messala's inscription on the bathhouse doors. His poem 'captures one entering and delays them departing.'[38] Messala, like the rest of Rutilius' crowd, is a prominent aristocrat and former politician of noble lineage with an eloquent tongue,[39] yet what strikes Rutilius most is the poem's timeless and transporting power. The perpetuity of the inscription and the effect on its reader symbolises the endurance of *Romanitas*, even outside of Rome. No matter what state the world is in, Rutilius can seek reassurance from the continuous transmission of Roman literature as its greatest cultural product. Rutilius alluded to his participation in this tradition at the end of the encomium to Rome, opining that he would be blessed beyond belief if Rome always remembered him.[40] Therefore, Rutilius consoles himself not only with the content of *DRS*, as Kahlos argues,[41] but also through the process of writing it.[42] The meta-literary allusion to Messala's poem signals the poetic immortality that Rutilius aims for, which will in turn enshrine his friends and their shared culture into collective memory. That logic assists Rutilius' working through. Although his friendships, practices, religion and the future of Rome are now greatly uncertain, none of them will truly vanish. At least in textual form, Rutilius' *Romanitas* will survive.

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[32] On the construction of identity in Late Antiquity, see Miles 1999.
[33] See Soler 2005: 256–7, Malamud 2016: 19.
[34] Formisano 2024: 245.
[35] See Papadopoulos 2021: 66.
[36] Cf. Clarke 2014: 96.
[37] *DRS* 1.249–76. Cf. Castrum Novum (*DRS* 1.225–36), swampy Graviscae and deserted Cosa (*DRS* 1.281–6).
[38] *DRS* 1.269–70: *intrantem capit discedentemque moratur | postibus adfixum dulce poema sacris.*
[39] See *DRS* 1.271–6, Malamud 2016: 68, nn 47–8. He was also an associate of Symmachus. This is the third time Rutilius has referred to a friend's 'eloquence' (*facundia*). Cf. *facundae linguae* (1.171), *facundus* (1.209).
[40] *DRS* 1.163–4: *fortunatus agam votoque beatior omni | semper digneris si meminisse mei.* Cf. Chapter One.
[41] Kahlos 2020: 82.
[42] On the importance of writing for healing trauma, see Pederson 2018: 97, Kervet-Käosaar 2020: 305–6.

The next two men Rutilius meets provoke a strong sense of nostalgia, an emotion that goes hand in hand with cultural trauma. Since cultural trauma involves an active comparison between the past and the present, nostalgia functions as 'a positive or negative way of bonding with that past.'[43] Rutilius' relationship with the past is irrefutably positive. His nostalgia is 'a means of direction' amid the predicaments of his era, promoting the restoration of community, continuity and identity, and the integration of past and present selves.[44] *DRS*' macrostructure makes these moments of nostalgia more impactful. Rutilius' journey away from Rome is not a linear movement away from *Romanitas*. As Formisano demonstrates in his allegorical reading of *DRS*, the poem contains centripetal and centrifugal movements that operate around Rome.[45] Hence, when Rutilius encounters a friend, he becomes psychologically 'closer' to Rome than his direction of travel or geographical location might suggest. Notably, this pathology contradicts place-based theories of cultural trauma which propose that reminders of a traumatic location can themselves perpetuate trauma.[46] Yet Rutilius finds solace in reliving the glories of Rome at any opportunity.[47]

The first of these encounters is with Albinus, the young man who took over from Rutilius as *praefectus urbi*. Albinus welcomes Rutilius and his crew into his villa to shelter them from savage rains (1.465–6). This generosity provides, both literally and figuratively, a safe space for Rutilius' *Romanitas* to re-emerge. He muses on their shared political achievements:

> Namque meus, quem Roma meo subiunxit honori,
> per quem iura meae continuata togae…
> Mutua germanos iunxit reverentia mores
> et favor alternis crevit amicitiis.
> Praetulit ille meas, cum vincere posset, habenas,
> at decessoris maior amore fuit.
>
> *DRS* 1.467–8, 471–4

[43] Sremac and Van Liere 2024: 14. On the retrospectivity of *DRS*, see Parker 2021: 190.
[44] Hook 2012: 228, Godobo-Madikizela 2012: 255, Sremac and Van Liere 2024: 19–21. Hernández Lobato (2021: 340) argues that the entirety of *DRS* is an exercise in nostalgia.
[45] Formisano 2017: 228–9. Examples of centripetal movement, which indicate proximity to Rome, include 'multiplication, cohesivity, familial terminology and repetitions.' Examples of centrifugal movement, which indicate separation from Rome, include 'dispersion, fragmentation, deformation,' water and ruins.
[46] Cf. Karanika (2019: 215) who interprets Troy as a locus of intergenerational trauma.
[47] However, this attitude could also relate to his underlying traumatic amnesia. Cf. Chapter One.

For my Albinus, whom Rome connected to my honour after me,
was the one through whom my laws of civil authority were continued…
Common reverence yoked our brotherly values
and esteem has grown with our reciprocal friendship.
He preferred my reins although he was able to overturn them,
but he was greater because of the love of his predecessor.

Rutilius' language contains an intriguing mix of individual and collective diction. Initially he focusses on the continuation of his own legacy (*meo…honori, meae…togae*). Then he emphasises the strength of he and Albinus' bond and attachment to duty (*mutua…reverentia, germanos…mores, alternis…amicitiis*). The juxtaposition *ille meas* implies a competitive relationship with Albinus, yet the deliberately ambiguous genitive *decessoris* highlights their love for one another.[48] The object of Rutilius' nostalgic gaze is the creation of a connected collective out of outstanding individuals. He 'connects' with Albinus on two levels. The first is the practical reality that Albinus succeeded him as city prefect (*subiunxit*). The second is the intellectual, social and cultural connection (*iunxit*) which their public service fosters. Rutilius' obsession with unity manifests elsewhere in *DRS* through the frequent recurrence of *iungo* and its compounds, as well as the adjective *mutuus*.[49] Here, Rutilius delights in how Roman community forms. Albinus demonstrates respect for tradition and one's elders, which earns him the praise of 'a boy in age, but a man in dignity.'[50] That respect ensures cultural continuity on a spiritual plane that is limited neither by physical location nor even the existence of Rome. Hence, rather than reflecting a mourning for the past, Rutilius' memory of Albinus reinforces his present Gallo-Roman identity, provides a blueprint of that identity to his community and facilitates his working through.[51]

Rutilius' second nostalgic interaction occurs during the same extended break from travel. The delay caused by the bitter storm allows Victurinus to visit (1.491–4). This sustained metaphorical interplay between violent weather and sources of *Romanitas* illustrates the tension between Rutilius' enthusiasm for the 'fading Roman order' and the cultural trauma it has suffered.[52] However, Victurinus' arrival prompts a different kind of nostalgia, a longing for Rutilius' 'homeland':

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[48] The ambiguity arises from whether the genitive is subjective (Rutilius' love for Albinus) or objective (Albinus' love for Rutilius). Both nuances are likely intended. See Malamud 2016: 72, n 85.
[49] *DRS* 1.489 (*iuncta*), 1.529 (*iunctis*), 1.637 (*subiungitur*), 2.25 (*iuncti*); *DRS* 1.85, 1.494, 1.588 (*mutua*).
[50] *DRS* 1.470: *vitae flore puer, sed gravitate senex*. This characterisation is a common conceit in Roman literature. See Curtius 1953: 176–80.
[51] See Sremac and Van Liere 2024: 26.
[52] See Malamud 2016: xii, Formisano 2024: 248.

Illustris nuper sacrae comes additus aulae
contempsit summos ruris amore gradus.
Hunc ego complexus ventorum adversa fefelli,
dum videor patriae iam mihi parte frui.

DRS 1.507–10

Recently added as an illustrious companion to the imperial court,
he scorned the great steps because of his love for the country.
Having embraced this man, I deceived the hostility of the winds,
while I seem to myself already to enjoy a part of my fatherland.

Victurinus is yet another foil for Rutilius. Rutilius describes him as a 'very great part' of his soul, a fellow Gallic exile displaced by the Gothic capture of Toulouse, and a vice-prefect of Britain so successful that he ruled as if in Rome.[53] Nonetheless, in light of Rutilius' overwhelming praise for bearers of Roman office like Rufius and Albinus, it seems paradoxical that he would commend Victurinus for scorning the imperial court.[54] Admittedly, Rutilius paints Victurinus with a Horatian brush: he applauds his wisdom in both hard and prosperous times, and gestures at the virtue of enjoying aristocratic *otium* in peaceful country settings.[55] Yet the paradox compounds with the word *patria*, which evokes Rome, but almost certainly means Gaul. After looking back at Rome for the previous five hundred lines of Book 1, Rutilius finally starts to look forward to Gaul as his destination. This new perspective demonstrates that he is moving on from the idea of Rome as a place. Although Rutilius formerly admired native Romans as 'blessed,'[56] that gilded view is absent here. Rather, he recognises that *Romanitas* is a system of values that transcends time and place, accepting the hybridity that he is Gallic in origin but Roman in spirit.[57] This is a key step in his working through and one which Victurinus' example helps him to achieve. Rutilius' friend Protadius, another Gallic literary associate and former city prefect, typifies this disembodied yet communal concept of *Romanitas*. The very mention of Protadius' name conjures up an image of virtue, reminding Rutilius of exemplary Romans like Cincinnatus, Serranus and Fabricius, even though Rutilius does not describe meeting him in person.[58]

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[53] *DRS* 1.493–504. Victurinus held the rank of *vicarius* of Britain. See Malamud 2016: 72, n 86. On trauma and displacement, see Hron 2018.
[54] *Contempsit* is a very strong word choice (*OLD* 2). It is also Ciceronian diction (14 times in Cicero). See *TLL* iv 635.1–645.50.
[55] *DRS* 1.497–8: *nec tantum duris nituit sapientia rebus | pectore non alio prosperiora tulit*. See Hor. *Od.* 2.3, 2.10 (the 'golden mean' Odes), Hor. *Sat.* 2.6.77–115 ('The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse'). Cf. Sid. *Ep.* 2.2.1.
[56] See *DRS* 1.5–8.
[57] Hybridity is also a stylistic feature of *DRS*. See Elsner and Hernández Lobato 2017: 15.
[58] *DRS* 1.541–8. See Wolff et al. 2007: 95, n 223, Malamud 2016: 21–2. On Protadius' background, see Malamud 2016: 73, n 96.

Therefore, despite the seemingly spontaneous quality of their appearance in *DRS*, Rutilius' friends epitomise the overarching narrative of his working through. With their assistance he progresses from clinging to Rome while at Ostia to finding and relishing *Romanitas* in the Italian countryside. Hernández Lobato describes the psychology of this arc as Rutilius searching for 'substitute Romes' to replace and regenerate the now-absent and far-off 'old' Rome.[59] That process also represents the gradual integration of the cultural trauma of 410 into his identity. By mentally reconstructing 'Rome' elsewhere, he assures himself that the city he loves will rise again. This mindset crystallises at Pisa, where Book 1 reaches its emotional climax. A tribune offers Rutilius horses and a carriage, indicia of his status as a high-ranking Roman official.[60] Then, his Gallic and Roman worlds fully fuse when he comes across a statue of his late father Lachanius:

> Hic oblata mihi sancti genitoris imago,
> Pisano proprio quam posuere foro.
> Laudibus amissi cogor lacrimare parentis;
> fluxerunt madidis gaudia maesta genis.
>
> *DRS* 1.575–8
>
> Here the image of my blessed father was shown to me,
> Which the Pisans had set up in their own forum.
> I am brought to tears by the praise for my lost father;
> sad joys flow down my wet cheeks.

As several scholars have identified, Rutilius' Virgilian allusions characterise him as *pius Aeneas*, a man displaced by the trauma of a fallen city, who must find a new origin for his people while upholding tradition and filial duty.[61] The Pisa episode recalls Aeneas' vision of Anchises when he witnesses the slaughter of Priam, as well as his underworld encounter with Anchises' ghost.[62] Both men grieve the lost presence of their fathers. However, unlike Aeneas, Rutilius simultaneously experiences a joyous epiphany (*gaudia maesta*). Lachanius' statue symbolises the trauma of loss on both personal and cultural levels, yet the Pisans' reverence indicates that Lachanius' influence lives on. The death of one's father or one's city does not equate to the death of one's culture. Rutilius appreciates firsthand the successful transmission of cultural practice in Pisa: unlike many places in

[59] Hernández Lobato 2021: 329.
[60] See Machado 2010: 306, Malamud 2016: 19.
[61] See Conybeare 2014: 222, Malamud 2016: 22, Hernández Lobato 2021: 346.
[62] See Verg. *Aen.* 2.560 (*obstipui, subiit cari genitoris imago*), 6.686, 6.695–6. For discussion of other *Aeneid* parallels in *DRS*, see Soler 2005: 297–301.

DRS, Pisa retains its original name, aetiology and values, and even has its own 'Roman' forum (*proprio…foro*).[63] Rutilius similarly recognises how he, as Lachanius' son, is a vehicle of cultural continuity. With an almost childlike vividness,[64] he describes Lachanius' decorated career as Governor of Tuscany, imperial treasurer, quaestor and prefect of Rome. Rutilius then notes the Pisans' delight that he has lived up to Lachanius' dignity and 'two-fold assiduity' in his own career.[65] The language of doubling and unification is particularly prominent in Pisa, both in the natural imagery of the connected rivers Arnus and Ausur, and the parallel father-son duo of Lucillus and Decius, who ruled Corythus in an identical manner.[66] Likewise, Rutilius and Lachanius are doubles of each other, united through their intergenerational legacy as emblems of *Romanitas*. Lachanius' statue is more than an 'affirmation of Rutilius' own hope to be remembered in Rome.'[67] It brings him to tears because it assuages his anxiety about the potential decimation of the traditions he embodies. It also proves that, despite the Gothic raids and the sack of 410, collective respect for Rome and *Romanitas* remains. While Rutilius is alive, and even after his death, there will be an educated, dignified community for him to depend on and perennially inspire.

The textual evidence for Rutilius' process of working through cultural trauma with literary community ends there. Since most of Book 2 is lost,[68] Rutilius' psychological response to arriving home in Gaul is unknown.[69] However, even in its abridged form, *DRS* illustrates how Rutilius' attachment to the past gives way to a new yet fulfilling 'normal' through his friends and family.[70] By contrast, Sidonius sets his sights firmly on the future as he exhorts his circle to preserve the remnants of their civilisation amidst a chaotic present.

Literary Community and *Romanitas* in the *Epistulae*

Sidonius' epistolography was a social, communal and familial exercise that allowed him to speak his mind on the decline of Roman influence in Gaul.[71] As the Germanic kingdoms grew in prominence, Sidonius used letters to process the traumatic avalanche of cultural change that precipitated the fall of the West in 476. Sidonius 'works through' with two distinct yet related

[63] *DRS* 1.565–74, 597–8. See Hernández Lobato 2021: 344, 346.
[64] *DRS* 1.581–2: *Narrabat, memini, multos emensus honores, | Tuscorum regimen plus placuisse sibi.* On vividness in *DRS*, see van Waarden 2020. It is significant that, of all the men to receive an encomium from Rutilius in *DRS*, only Lachanius is more senior than him.
[65] *DRS* 1.591–2: *Ipsum me gradibus non degenerasse parentis | gaudent et duplici sedulitate fovent.*
[66] See Hernández Lobato 2021: 345, *DRS* 1.565–8, *DRS* 1.599–602.
[67] Malamud 2016: 23.
[68] Only the first 68 lines and two barely decipherable fragments survive. See Sivan 1986: 523–5.
[69] Hernández Lobato (2021: 340–1) speculates that Rutilius re-encounters his fatherland at the end of Book 2, in parallel to the re-encounter with his father at the end of Book 1.
[70] This is a characteristic of working through and the elegiac form generally. See Ganteau 2020: 137.
[71] See Mratschek 2016: 316, 323.

strategies. The first is the literary construct of the 'barbarian,' over whom Sidonius asserts a self-assuring linguistic superiority complex.[72] For Sidonius, the survival of classical culture depended on one's proper Latin usage, rhetorical education and devotion to literary studies, practices to which the 'barbarians' did not subscribe.[73] He condemns them for the 'rust' (*robigo*) with which they contaminate the Latin language and, in contrast, praises the 'reading, writing, eloquence and stylistic brilliance' of his friends.[74] Consequently, Sidonius' second strategy is to develop a 'hyper-Romanity' where he presents himself and his learned associates as the last defenders of old-guard Latinate traditions.[75] Often Sidonius' strategies overlap within individual letters, whose elaborate style and intertextual references cultivate an exclusive language of the elite that distinguishes them from the barbarian *vulgus*.[76] The quotidian practice of letter-writing functions as a reminder of Gallo-Roman supremacy. Stenger argues that the volume of Sidonius and other late antique writers' literary outputs 'belies the idea of inevitable cultural decline.'[77] However, it was that very decline which motivated Sidonius to write. His letters construct a community of educated witnesses to the cultural trauma of his age,[78] whose shared *Romanitas* is a source of support, comfort and hope.[79] Like Rutilius, Sidonius shoulders the responsibility of mentoring that community. This section examines several letters which display Sidonius' tenacious attitude to overcoming the trauma of the 'barbarians' and ensuring the longevity of his culture, tethering himself to nobility and literature every step of the way.

In *Ep.* 5.5, Sidonius writes to Syagrius, great-grandson of the consul and poet Flavius Afranius Syagrius. An educated and eloquent man, Syagrius likely studied alongside Sidonius and belonged to his intellectual coterie.[80] In light of this esteemed literary pedigree, Sidonius is bemused that Syagrius has learned German very quickly while working at the Burgundian court.[81] He satirises the situation:

> …velim dicas, unde subito hauserunt pectora tua euphoniam gentis alienae…aestimari minime potest, quanto mihi ceterisque sit risui, quotiens audio, quod te praesente formidet

[72] On 'barbarians' in Late Antiquity, see Heather 1999, Cameron 2011: 39–57. On 'barbarians' in Sidonius, see Harries 1992, Egetenmeyr 2019, Egetenmeyr 2021.
[73] See Mathisen 1993: 105–18, Wolff 2020: 395–6, Marolla 2023: 149–50. Sidonius' contempt for the barbarians was more concerned with cultural issues than ethnic prejudice.
[74] See Stenger 2022: 44, Giannotti 2024: 226–7, e.g. *Ep.* 8.6.18.
[75] Brown 2012: 404, Mratschek 2020: 215. See Styka 2019: 80.
[76] See Amherdt 2001: 40, Stenger 2022: 47.
[77] Stenger (2022: 43) cites Ruricius, Avitus and Gregory of Tours. See also Mathisen 1993: 105–10.
[78] See Kaplan 2005: 20.
[79] See Woolf 1998: 164, n 2, Jones 2009: 25.
[80] For biographical details of Syagrius, see Marolla 2023: 144–5, *Ep.* 5.5.1–2.
[81] *Ep.* 5.5.1: *stupeam sermonis te Germanici notitiam tanta facilitate rapuisse.* See Mathisen 1988: 52.

> linguae suae facere barbarus barbarismum…et quamquam aeque corporibus ac sensu rigidi sint indolatilesque,[82] amplectuntur in te pariter et discunt sermonem patrium, cor Latinum.
>
> *Ep.* 5.5.2–3
>
> I should like you to tell me how you have managed to absorb so swiftly into your inner being the euphony[83] of an alien race…You have no idea what amusement it gives me, and others too, when I hear that in your presence the barbarian is afraid to perpetrate a barbarism in his own language…And although these people are stiff and uncouth in body and mind alike, they welcome in you and learn from you their native speech combined with Roman wisdom.

Sidonius' haughty disdain for the Burgundians and his belief in the excellence of Latin education is clear. Such is Syagrius' linguistic capacity that he speaks German better than the barbarians themselves. Sidonius jokes that Syagrius has a civilising effect on barbarian language,[84] while still attacking its inferiority with mocking irony. 'Euphony' (*euphoniam*) is antithetical to an alien race which cannot appreciate the beauty of language.[85] Nor can a barbarian truly commit a 'barbarism,' since that would imply the existence of a classical norm.[86] Sidonius and his group (*ceteris*) laugh that the barbarians are so intellectually unrefined as to lack any developed cultural standards except those imposed by Gallo-Romans. This 'hierarchy of cultural value'[87] is a 'compensation strategy'[88] for the trauma of Visigothic and Burgundian ascendancy in the 470s; in reality, Gallo-Roman aristocrats were a vocal but small minority. Nonetheless, Sidonius processes his trauma by characterising the barbarians as ugly, uncultivated and beneath the sophistication of Latin culture. Sidonius riffs on the juxtaposition between Syagrius' prestige and his lowly company: later, he amusingly transposes 'mythological representatives of Greco-Roman cultural values' into an incongruous context by casting Syagrius as the 'Solon' and 'Amphion' of the Burgundians.[89]

However, despite Sidonius' sardonic humour, many scholars detect genuine criticism of Syagrius' familiarity with the barbarians.[90] Denecker highlights Sidonius' concern that Syagrius' oxymoronic combination of native barbarian speech (*sermonem patrium*) and Roman thought (*cor Latinum*) will

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[82] *Indolatiles* is a *hapax legomenon*. See *TLL* vii² 1217.72–4. It is ironic that Sidonius invents a new word to describe barbarians in a letter about 'proper' Latin.
[83] Anderson 1965 has 'exact sounds,' which weakens the paradox with *gentis alienae*.
[84] See Stenger 2022: 48.
[85] Similarly, in *Ep.* 4.8, Sidonius sarcastically remarks that Queen Ragnahild of the Visigothic court would appreciate an elaborate silver basin more than the verse inscription upon it.
[86] Denecker 2015: 414.
[87] Hanaghan 2019: 34.
[88] See Becht-Jördens 2017 (discussing *Ep.* 4.8), Stenger 2022: 48.
[89] See *Ep.* 5.5.3, Denecker 2015: 414–5. Solon was a famous law-maker from ancient Athens. Amphion was a Greek mythological figure who could move stones with his lyre-playing. See Anderson 1965: 183, nn 2–3.
[90] Among them, see Becker 2014: 296, Squillante 2014: 283, Wolff 2017: 79, Hanaghan 2019: 34.

degrade his Latin skills and thereby his elite identity.[91] Sidonius hints at this excessive influence through two corporeal metaphors: Syagrius' heart 'drinks down' barbarian euphony (*hauserunt pectora*) and the barbarians 'embrace' him (*amplectuntur*). Sidonius' conclusion confirms his message:

> restat hoc unum, vir facetissime, ut nihilio segnius aliquid lectioni operis impendas custodiasque hoc, prout es elegantissimus, temperamentum, ut ista tibi lingua teneatur, ne ridearis, illa exerceatur, ut rideas.
>
> *Ep.* 5.5.4
>
> Only one thing remains, most clever of men: continue with undiminished zeal, even in your hours of ease, to devote some attention to reading; and, like the man of refinement you are, observe a just balance between the languages: retain your grasp of Latin, lest you be laughed at, and practice the other, so that you may laugh at them.

Sidonius' advice is playful but ominous. If Syagrius ceases to read, he will be no better than the barbarians he could previously laugh at. Instead, he will become the subject of Sidonius' mockery.[92] Sidonius promotes the ideology that intellectual development (or *paideia*) flows only from languages and cultures that are connected to classical tradition.[93] Syagrius' knowledge of German is only useful in so far as it allows him to denigrate barbarians. It has no independent merit in Sidonius' eyes. In fact, it is more of a liability than an asset, because the contemporary mélange with barbarians is damaging the purity of Latin.[94] To work through this existential trauma to Gallo-Roman culture, Sidonius prescribes a regular course of reading. Reading Latin ensures the requisite distance between Syagrius and the barbarians, as emphasised by the contrasting pronouns *ista* and *illa*.[95] Moreover, reading represents a constant re-assertion of classical identity, especially within an elite collective. Syagrius must read constantly to 'renew [his] membership of the club of educated gentlemen' and avoid being barbarised.[96] Literary education is the psychological crutch with which Sidonius finds solace and stability in the midst of ubiquitous linguistic and political upheaval.

As *Ep.* 5.5 indicates, barbarism had become so prevalent that the line between barbarian interaction and barbarian influence was growing increasingly thin, even within Sidonius' milieu.

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[91] Denecker 2015: 415, 417. Cf. *Ep.* 3.3.2 (on the Celtic language), 7.14.10 (on barbarians) and *Ep.* 8.6, where Sidonius' affectionate advice aims to prevent a 'barbarising process' in his addressee Namatianus. See Giannotti 2024: 227.
[92] See Ward-Perkins 2005: 80, Giuletti 2014: 97. Cf. Mratschek (2016: 242) who contends that Sidonius is merely 'teasing' Syagrius.
[93] Hanaghan 2019: 34. On *paideia*, see Elsner 2013.
[94] Literary and linguistic decline is a theme of Sidonius' epistles. See *Ep.* 2.10.1, 4.17.2, 5.10.4, 8.2.1, 8.6.3, 9.7.2, 9.9.16.
[95] Marolla 2023: 167.
[96] Stenger 2022: 48.

Hence, the 'learned practice[s] of the literati,' including reading and writing, amounted to acts of 'resistance and heroism.'[97] As Kaster argues, 'to be learned was to know that one was still Roman: the man who postponed the eclipse of Latin letters in troubled times was a heroic figure.'[98] Several of Sidonius' addressees assist his working through by maintaining their *Romanitas* and literary polish despite their unstable and unrefined surroundings. In *Ep.* 4.17, Sidonius praises Arbogastes, a former *comes* at Trier,[99] as one of the last bulwarks of the Latin language, an achievement magnified by the recent destruction of the *sermo Romanus* in Belgium.[100] Sidonius relishes the fact that Arbogastes 'speaks the true Latin of the Tiber,' propping up the cause of Roman eloquence despite the disintegration of 'Roman law.'[101] Arbogastes' persistence reinforces Sidonius' sense of superiority and underlines the noble fight for Roman culture in which they are both engaged. Sidonius continues his praise:

> …sic barbarorum familiaris, quod tamen nescius barbarismorum, par ducibus antiquis lingua manuque, sed quorum dextera solebat non stilum minus tractare quam gladium…granditer laetor saltim in inlustri pectore tuo vanescentium litterarum remansisse vestigia, quae si frequenti lectione continuas, experiere per dies, quanto antecellunt beluis homines, tanto anteferri rusticis institutos.
>
> *Ep.* 4.17.1–2
>
> You are intimate with barbarians but are innocent of barbarisms, and are equal in tongue, as also in strength of arm, to the leaders of old, I mean those who were wont to handle the pen no less than the sword…I rejoice greatly that at any rate in your illustrious breast there have remained traces of our vanishing culture. If you extend these by constant reading you will discover for yourself as each day passes that the educated are no less superior to the unlettered than men are to beasts.

Unlike the comic approach to Syagrius' linguistic proclivities in *Ep.* 5.5, here Sidonius solemnly commends Arbogastes' ability to preserve a barbarism-free discourse despite his familiarity with barbarians.[102] Part of that familiarity derives from Arbogastes' (Romanised) Frankish background, his rejection of which creates a subtle irony that undoubtedly pleased Sidonius.[103] Rather than

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[97] Ibid 52.
[98] Kaster 1988: 90.
[99] For a brief biography of Arbogastes, see Amherdt 2001: 377–8, Mratschek 2020: 233.
[100] *Ep.* 4.17.2: *quocirca sermonis pompa Romani…Belgicis olim sive Rhenanis abolita terris in te resedit.*
[101] *Ep.* 4.17.1–2, especially: *etsi…Latina iura ceciderunt, verba non titubant.*
[102] See Denecker 2015: 417. On the differing approaches in *Ep.* 4.17 and 5.5, see Laes 2013: 22, Becker 2014: 296.
[103] On the literary effect of Arbogastes' name, see Castellanos 2013: 247.

committing the faux pas of mastering German as a Gallo-Roman, Arbogastes, a man of 'barbarian' heritage, has mastered Latin. Thus, he is more than a 'living example of the vigour of classical culture,' as Amherdt frames him.[104] Not only is he a model for the Gallo-Roman collective in how he manages his engagement with barbarians,[105] but he also represents the hegemonic power of Latin beyond that collective, a crucial tenet of Sidonius' working through. Now inducted into the community of *Romanitas*-worshippers, Arbogastes heroically wields the power of Latin language like a sword.[106] Naturally, this simile reflects Sidonius' own perception of his epistolary objectives. Therefore, although Sidonius acknowledges cultural trauma (*vanescentium…litterarium*), he rejoices that Arbogastes follows his example by cultivating an unadulterated Latinate identity through literature. Sidonius' solution to cultural decline, as in *Ep.* 5.5, is frequent reading, the activity which keeps his circle 'human.' Literary community forms an impenetrable intellectual enclave which separates the Gallo-Romans from the beastly barbarians, no matter how geographically proximate or culturally damaging they are.[107] As Mratschek states, Sidonius' claim to superiority over the barbarians helps him 'to cope with the trauma inflicted by the military and political catastrophe of 476, and to formulate ways of living in the new kingdoms of Western Europe.'[108] Sidonius, at the centre of this enclave, surrounds, shields and supports himself with his intellegentsia.

Among Sidonius' addressees are many other learned men who protect the integrity of Latin.[109] The process of compiling and publishing the letters allows Sidonius to display a triumphant record of cultural endurance, underpinned by these exemplars, which serves as a focal point for the recognition and preservation of aristocratic status. In *Ep.* 8.2, Sidonius praises the grammarian and rhetor Johannes as the 'reviver, promoter and champion' of a literary culture that was 'more or less buried.'[110] In *Ep.* 3.3, he lauds Ecdicius for introducing Latin to the Celts, preventing them from becoming barbarians.[111] In *Ep.* 5.10, he compares the clear and distinguished style of the orator Sapaudus to that of Quintilian and Palladius, while lamenting the declining interest in his craft.[112] In *Ep.* 9.11, he commends the bishop Lupus for his exquisite writing, never chargeable with an 'accumulation of barbarisms.'[113] In *Ep.* 9.15, he catalogues his poet friends one by one as

[104] Amherdt 2001: 380, translated from the French.
[105] Hanaghan 2019: 33.
[106] Sidonius' military simile above likely alludes to Julius Caesar (cf. *Ep.* 8.6.1) and possibly Scipio Aemilianus, Pompey and Crassus. See Amherdt 2001: 387.
[107] See Hanaghan 2019: 33, Stenger 2022: 47.
[108] Mratschek 2020: 257.
[109] For a complete overview of Sidonius' addressees, see Mathisen 2020.
[110] *Ep.* 8.2.1: *litteras…quarum quodammodo iam sepultarum suscitator fautor assertor concelebraris*. See John 2022: 261.
[111] *Ep.* 3.3.2–3, especially: *quod, quos olim Latinos fieri exegeras, barbaros deinceps esse vetuisti.*
[112] *Ep.* 5.10.3–4, especially: *solam tibi acrimoniam Quintiliani pompamque Palladii comparari non ambigo sed potius adquiesco*. On Palladius, see Marolla 2023: 317–8.
[113] *Ep.* 9.11.6: *neque enim in his, quae tractaveris, ulla culpabitur aut distinctionum raritas aut frequentia barbarismorum.*

the tuneful 'swans' of Southern Gaul.[114] The list goes on.[115] The cumulative effect of these *laudationes* is one of reconstructing *Romanitas* within Sidonius' community.[116] Sidonius' praise promotes his friends' classical literary practices[117] and complements his self-fashioning as a pre-eminent devotee of Roman tradition, a role which brings him great psychological satisfaction.[118]

Another significant component of Sidonius' satisfaction is how literature and *Romanitas* strengthen family ties.[119] Many of Sidonius' addressees are part of his extended family.[120] He often mentions his son Apollinaris[121] and wife Papianilla.[122] Sidonius explores the intersection between literary productivity and family in *Ep.* 2.10. Written to Hesperius, a young scholar who is a 'jewel of friends and letters,'[123] *Ep.* 2.10 reiterates the cultural traumas and elements of working through discussed above: a 'multitude of sluggards' are polluting the Latin language with 'vulgar barbarisms,' and it will soon be extinct unless the 'very few' educated elite defend it;[124] thus, Hesperius must read constantly to maintain his literary prestige and reaffirm his Roman identity.[125] However, since Hesperius is soon to be married, Sidonius includes a catalogue of eleven literary 'power couples' whose female members served not as a distraction from writing, but inspiration to write:

> …sisque oppido meminens quod olim Marcia Hortensio, Terentia Tullio, Calpurnia Plinio, Pudentilla Apuleio, Rusticiana Symmacho legentibus meditantibusque candelas et candelabra tenuerunt…reminiscere quod saepe versum Corinna cum suo Nasone complevit, Lesbia cum Catullo, Caesennia cum Gaetulico, Argentaria cum Lucano, Cynthia cum Propertio, Delia cum Tibullo. proinde liquido claret studentibus discendi per nuptias occasionem tribui, desidibus excusationem.
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> *Ep.* 2.10.5–6

[114] See *Ep.* 9.15.1.15–34. Sidonius alludes to Horace, the swan of Apulia. See Mratschek 2016: 316–9, Mratschek 2020: 243. Cf. Chapter Two.
[115] See, e.g., the 'festival of letters' in *Ep.* 9.13. On this letter, see Stenger 2022: 45.
[116] Stenger (2022: 52–3): 'as compensation for the limited space available to them in the field of politics and society, the aristocrats retreated to the realm of learning, an inner exile, from which they could set out to stem the tide.'
[117] As discussed in Chapter Two, these practices were the only remaining markers of nobility. See *Ep.* 8.2.1.
[118] See *OCD* s.v. 'Sidonius Apollinaris,' Giannotti 2024: 227. Cf. Mratschek 2020: 230.
[119] On late antique epistolography and family ties, see Mathisen 1993: 116–8.
[120] For discussion of the members of Sidonius' family in his letters, see Mathisen 2020: 56–64.
[121] See *Ep.* 3.13 (addressed to him), as well as *Ep.* 5.9.4, 5.11.3, 8.6.12, 9.1.5.
[122] See *Ep.* 5.16 (addressed to her), as well as *Ep.* 2.2.3, 2.12.2. Papianilla was the daughter of the former Roman Emperor Avitus, for whom Sidonius composed the *Panegyricus ad Avitum* (*Carm.* 7). For further biography of Papianilla, see Harries 1994: 31, Mathisen 2020: 111.
[123] *Ep.* 4.22.1: *vir magnificus, gemma amicorum litterarumque*. See also *Ep.* 2.10.1: *amo in te quod litteras amas*. For biography of Hesperius, see Hindermann 2022a: 291.
[124] *Ep.* 2.10.1: *quod…defleamus interemptamque*. See Denecker 2015: 411–2.
[125] *Ep.* 2.10.5: *opus es tu sine dissimulatione lectites, sine fine lecturias*. See Mathisen 1993: 109.

> …Remember that in the old times of Marcia and Hortensius, Terentia and Tullius, Calpurnia and Pliny, Pudentilla and Apuleius, Rusticiana and Symmachus, the wives held candles and candlesticks for their husbands whilst they read or composed…remember that Corinna often helped her Naso to complete a verse, and so it was with Lesbia and Catullus, Caesennia and Gaetulicus, Argentaria and Lucan, Cynthia and Propertius, Delia and Tibullus. So it is clear as daylight that literary workers find in marriage an opportunity for study and idlers an excuse for shirking it.

Sidonius develops the trope of the *puella docta*,[126] framing the wives or love interests of these famous classical authors as both practical supports and literary muses.[127] Hindermann highlights how the candelabra symbolises Sidonius' ideal marriage as one of literary collaboration, as opposed to erotic pleasure.[128] Sidonius' model of constructing identity with classical tradition extends not just to reading the classics, but emulating them in every aspect of one's life.[129] Hesperius should cultivate a 'literary' marriage, following the practices of the greats. A marriage is the smallest and therefore the most exclusive literary community available, which contrasts with the horde of barbarian ignoramuses whom Sidonius deplores.[130] With the exception of Calpurnia and Argentaria, none of the women Sidonius mentions have their artistic abilities attested elsewhere.[131] Nevertheless, Sidonius illustrates that aristocratic edification is a collective endeavour that can and should extend to marital relationships. There is no better mode of insulation from a hostile external world, nor a better space for working through the trauma of that world, than a marriage which fosters *Romanitas* through a unified devotion to literature and status. Writing to his own wife Papianilla about the promotion of her brother Ecdicius, Sidonius comments that 'even the menace of a siege so near cannot divert your heart from the path of our common rejoicings.'[132] Like Rutilius, Sidonius revels in his family's success at upholding his cultural values: the glory of his *gens* is another feather in his cap, elevating him above the barbarians and providing him with a reassuring Gallo-Roman legacy.

Sidonius' hostility towards the uncultured masses in *Ep.* 2.10 connects to another dimension of his trauma response. Sidonius frequently condemns individuals and circumstances which obstruct

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[126] See Plin. *Ep.* 4.19.2–5. On the *puella docta* in Pliny, see Smith 2020.
[127] For a full overview of the authors and their female *Musae*, see Hindermann 2022a: 333–42.
[128] Hindermann 2022b: 216–9. As part of the topos of *lucubratio*, the source of light would more commonly illuminate an erotic scene. Sidonius has elevated wifedom to a nurturing, academic role.
[129] Stenger 2022: 51. Cf. Mratschek 2020: 242.
[130] See *Ep.* 2.10.6: *neque apud te litterariam curam turba depretiet imperitorum*. Hanaghan (2019: 29–30) argues that 'Sidonius is cultivating an audience of the "right people," the value of which is inversely proportional to their number.'
[131] For Calpurnia's literary ability, see Plin. *Ep.* 4.19.2–5. On Argentaria, see Mart. 10.64, Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.83.
[132] *Ep.* 5.16.3: *nec animum tuum a tramite communium gaudiorum vicinae quoque obsidionis terror exorbitat*. Ecdicius had obtained the rank of patriciate. Sidonius likely refers to the siege of Clermont in 474. See Harries 1994: 237.

his literary community and thereby his working through. Just as learned men like Johannes and Hesperius are Sidonius' heroes, so too are there villains. Such was the pressure of safeguarding literary *amicitia* as a means of cultural survival that any impediment to it drew Sidonius' ire. This is why van Waarden suggests that Sidonius' style is 'high-wired.'[133] Sidonius exhibits this phenomenon, albeit hyperbolically, in *Ep.* 4.12. He and his son are jocundly reading together when a servant interrupts their study. He reports that the messenger who delivered his letters to his friends Simplicius and Apollinaris has lost their replies.[134] Sidonius castigates the messenger:

> quibus agnitis serenitas laetitiae meae confestim nubilo superducti maeroris insorduit tantamque mihi bilem nuntii huiusce contrarietas excitavit, ut perplurimos dies illum ipsum hermam stolidissimum excitavit venire ante oculos meos inexoratus arcuerim…
>
> *Ep.* 4.12.3
>
> When I learned this, my sunny joy was instantly overcast by a dark cloud of grief, and the unconscionable conduct of this messenger kindled in me such a raging fury that for several days I inexorably forbade that senseless blockhead to present himself to my sight…

The humour of this passage derives from its contrasts. The meteorological metaphor juxtaposing the sun and the dark cloud is comically disproportionate to the loss of the letter.[135] The messenger's lowliness and dumbfounding stupidity (*stolidissimum*) correspondingly emphasise Sidonius' nobility and intellectual refinement.[136] Yet, like *Ep.* 5.5, beneath Sidonius' satirical playfulness there lies a sore spot. For Sidonius, the loss of a letter between friends was no trivial matter. Since letters were symbols of education,[137] tradition and aristocracy, losing one represented the destruction of an individual friendship and an entire value system. Both in this letter and elsewhere, Sidonius stresses the importance of frequent communication amongst the Gallo-Roman elite.[138] The messenger's misconduct completely undermines that object. Without the proper delivery of letters there is no literary community through which Sidonius can process his trauma. Similarly, Sidonius chastises the armchair critics who minimise his work and consequently devalue the proper usage of Latin,

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[133] van Waarden 2020: 165.
[134] See *Ep.* 4.12.1–2.
[135] Sidonius continues the meteorological motif which began the letter. See *Ep.* 4.12.1: *quasi propria tempestate confunditur*, Amherdt 2001: 315.
[136] Amherdt (2001: 307) notes a parallel with *Ep.* 4.7.2, where Sidonius describes a *rusticus* who arrives at his house.
[137] On the importance of education to Sidonius, see *Ep.* 4.1.2, addressed to his teacher Probus.
[138] *Ep.* 4.12.3: *minime frequentes maxime desiderabiles iudicabuntur*. See *Ep.* 4.10.1. Cf. *Ep.* 4.2.2, where Claudianus accuses Sidonius of falling short in this regard and *Ep.* 9.3.1–5, where Sidonius describes the contextual reasons why literary communication is now harder to maintain.

the language that holds his world together.[139] In *Ep.* 2.1,[140] he attacks the Gallo-Roman traitor Seronatus as a man who dictates and corrects letters in public despite barely knowing the alphabet.[141] Just as Rutilius attacks Stilicho in *DRS*,[142] by condemning these threats to his working through Sidonius promotes himself, his literature and his readership to an insulated space of impeccable Roman values, elevated above the contemporary chaos.

Notwithstanding the numerous logistical, literary and political obstacles Sidonius endures, the abiding message of his collection is the power of epistolary friendship to bridge distances and heal trauma. Many of Sidonius' friends are geographically separate from him, with distinct professional obligations and plights to preserve high standards of Latin language and culture. Yet epistolography strengthens their connection and cements their legacy on personal and collective levels. Notably, the majority of this sentiment appears in Sidonius' later letters, suggesting an undercurrent of working through that emerges in Books 7–9.[143] That undercurrent manifests through Sidonius' motivic contrast between physical distance and spiritual or ideological closeness. In *Ep.* 7.11, he argues that 'the custom of epistolary converse' must be maintained between parties 'removed and sundered' from one another as a duty of friendship.[144] Likewise, in *Ep.* 7.14, he lauds the 'great affection' fostered 'through the medium of the pen' between people separated by wide distances.[145] These are only two of many examples.[146] However, the most illustrative instance occurs in *Ep.* 9.8, where Sidonius notes that he and his friend Principius live 'with hearts united but in separate regions.'[147] Just as the mythology of *Roma Aeterna* unites Rutilius and his protégé Rufus,[148] epistolography unites Sidonius with his family and aristocratic community. For both authors, their communities function as witnesses to their trauma, providing a foundation and a sounding board for their working through. A consoling corollary of that process is the goal of literary immortality, since history is the ultimate witness of traumatic experience.[149] In *Ep.* 8.5,

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[139] *Ep.* 3.14.2: *atque in hunc modum scientia pompa proprietas linguae Latinae iudiciis otiosorum maximo spretui est.*
[140] Seronatus was a Gallo-Roman confidant of Euric. Sidonius paints him as a new Catiline. See *Ep.* 2.1.1, Hindermann 2022a: 59.
[141] *Ep.* 2.1.2: *epistulas, ne primis quidem apicibus sufficienter initiatus, publice a iactantia dictat, ab impudentia emendat.*
[142] See *DRS* 2.41–60.
[143] On the narrative of Sidonius' collection, see Gibson 2013b as discussed in Chapter Two.
[144] *Ep.* 7.11.1: *sed quoniam fraternae quietis voto satis obstrepit conflictantium procella regnorum, saltim inter discretos separatosque litterarii consuetudo sermonis iure retinebitur, quae iam pridem caritatis obtentu merito inducta veteribus annuit exemplis.* On this letter, see van Waarden 2010: 551–62.
[145] *Ep.* 7.14.2: *per quem saepenumero absentum dumtaxat institutorum tantus colligitur affectus, quantus nec praesentanea sedulitate conficitur.*
[146] See *Ep.* 2.11.1, 8.6.16, 8.12.1, 9.5.1. Cf. *Ep.* 9.14.1, where Sidonius laments that he and his friend Burgundio are not separated by distance but rather by illness. Sidonius similarly emphasises the unifying experience of a shared education in *Ep.* 3.1.1., 4.1.1, 5.9.3. See John 2022: 264.
[147] *Ep.* 9.8.2: *vivimus <animis> iunctis abiunctisque regionibus.* See similarly *Ep.* 5.9.4: *simis…animae duae, animus unus.*
[148] See *DRS* 1.175–8 above.
[149] On history and trauma, see Caruth 1996, LaCapra 2014.

Sidonius purports to grant his friend Fortunalis 'a degree of immortality through this letter of mine,'[150] indicating his awareness of the permanence of his work and the monument he has left.[151] Rutilius, albeit less confidently, also requests that Roma remember him.[152] Hence, Sidonius and Rutilius' quintessential form of working through is to forge a literary community in response to their cultural traumas, which offers not only present comfort through connection to Roman tradition but also the assurance of eternal reverence.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Rutilius and Sidonius' strategies for working through cultural trauma with their respective literary communities. By drawing upon family ties, common service to Rome and shared intellectual pursuits, both authors construct ideological realms of support which thrive in spite of the ever-weakening empire. They also cement themselves as models of perseverance and tradition for the Gallo-Roman collective. This is how they both rebound and regrow amidst setbacks. Their dedication to Latin literature and culture won the immortality which they desired, ensuring perennial recognition of their trauma amongst a community of sympathetic readers.

[150] *Ep.* 8.5.1: *neque enim tibi familiaritas tam parva cum litteris, ut per has ipsas de te aliquid post te superesse non deceat.*
[151] See Mathisen 1993: 109–10.
[152] See *DRS* 1.163–4 above.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined two late antique authors from successive generations whose literary works testify to the unique experience of trauma and working through in the ancient world. Rutilius' response to the sack of 410 in his *De Reditu Suo* and Sidonius' response to the fall of the empire in his *Epistulae* are fundamentally different representations of trauma set within different social, religious and political contexts. Yet each of them finds in literature and literary community a space to process trauma, connect with their history and entrench their legacy. Three modern approaches to trauma in literature underpinned the textual analysis in each chapter: Cathy Caruth's theory of 'traumatic amnesia,' Joshua Pederson's theory of 'speaking trauma' and the notion of 'cultural trauma.'

Chapter One applied Caruth's theory to *De Reditu Suo*, reframing the epistemological, ideological and environmental eccentricities of the poem as symptoms of Rutilius' inability to comprehend or articulate the trauma of 410. Only through literary devices such as paradox, intertextuality and pathetic fallacy can Rutilius express the hints of trauma that lie beneath his panegyrical praise of Rome. By projecting trauma onto the landscape and the foreign individuals Rutilius encounters, he externalises his internal turmoil concerning the future of *Roma Aeterna*.

Chapter Two applied Pederson's theory to a selection of Sidonius' later *Epistulae*, focussing on his exile at Livia and the surrender of his episcopate at Clermont. In contrast with Rutilius, Sidonius is ready and willing to grapple with traumatic experience in real time, mounting a stubborn defence against the erosion of his culture before his very eyes. Nonetheless, elements of Sidonius' style still bear the hallmarks of trauma, including his lavishly ornate prose, the chronological distortion of the collection and his tendency to hyperbolise. The arc of his letters, with their darkest content in Books 7 and 8, similarly suggests that Sidonius carves out a part of his literary project to speak the trauma of his era.

Chapter Three drew together the separate strands of Chapters One and Two by analysing Rutilius and Sidonius' response to the broader cultural traumas of 410 and the disintegration of the empire respectively. On this front their approaches align. Both authors surround themselves with an educated and dedicated aristocratic milieu, replete with *Romanitas*, to raise themselves above the barbarian 'Other' into the realm of literary immortality. These communities allow Rutilius and Sidonius to work through trauma by seeking solace in classical traditions and literary practices. Both authors also take on mentoring roles in fashioning for themselves and the Gallo-Roman

collective new ways of thinking and being as the greatness of Rome fades. No matter their geographical separation from Rome or the contemporary political situation, Rutilius and Sidonius share an undying spiritual connection to the idea of Roma and her servants, which is their ultimate balm.

The thesis as a whole has, I hope, reinforced the utility of trauma theory as an interpretive tool for Latin literature, especially the literature of Late Antiquity. One cannot underestimate how a period of such radical instability and upheaval could leave traces of trauma in the themes, motifs and tone of its texts. Yet the proliferation of literary culture in that same period testifies to its healing and unifying properties. Though Rutilius and Sidonius' works are stories of woe, they are also stories of survival.

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