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978-1-107-07926-7 - The Closure of Space in Roman Poetics: Empire's Inward Turn

Victoria Rimell

Excerpt

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## *Introduction*

### *Interior designs*

'By Hercules' writes Seneca in *Epistles* 53.11, 'it is the mark of a great artist to enclose everything in a small space!'<sup>1</sup> He is referring to the miracle by which divinity is shrunk down into human form, but the line might also be read as an epitaph to Seneca's notoriously tight, sparkly Latin, which constantly rails against what he calls the 'narrow nooks' of the Roman tongue.<sup>2</sup> Not just in Roman imperial literature but throughout Western culture, the literary imagination so often appears to live *inside*, in confined places, murky or half-lit. It lurks in shady woods, swollen bellies, underworlds and ivory towers, in dark studies, labyrinths and prisons, in valleys, corners, caves, attics and cellars. Against and alongside competing metaphors of mobility – the walking poet-philosopher, or the epic traveller 'on the road' – this kind of writer-artist must forever escape a foul, exterior world of violence and flux.<sup>3</sup> The room of his own must be a secluded, timeless place of philosophy, pleasure and calm, a location that will visualize, inspire and force introspection. Yet at the same time, enclosures throughout antiquity also lead us *away* from 'enlightenment' and almost seem to invite acts of violence. Most famously, Plato's allegory of the cave in *Republic* 7 makes transcending the womb-like enclosure of average human existence the prime goal of all philosophical endeavour. Being chained in a cave stands not only for primitive, unevolved life but also for illusion, fiction, seduction, dreams, fantasy and metaphor: everything, in other words, that imaginative

<sup>1</sup> *At mehercules magni artificis est cluisse totum in exiguo*. Compare also the preface to book 1 of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, where we are encouraged to picture the world from a higher, divine viewpoint, and watch battle lines forming across plains, like ants 'labouring in a narrow space' (*in angusto laborantium*, 1.pref.10). See Williams (2012) on this and other references to narrowness in *Natural Questions*, especially in the preface to book 1 (index: *angustus/angustiae*).

<sup>2</sup> See *Epistles* 58.7, where Seneca writes about 'narrow Roman limits' (*angustias Romanas*) which make it so difficult, he says, to translate philosophical terms from the Greek. See also Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> On walking as a cultural, intellectual and artistic act in ancient Rome, see O'Sullivan (2011).

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literature is all about (and everything that Plato's 'good' use of metaphor must itself struggle to avoid).<sup>4</sup>

This book is about the particular kinds of literary, social, philosophical and bodily enclosures which punctuate classical Latin literature in the Augustan and early imperial periods. It is therefore also about why Roman poetry and prose still fascinate us, and how Roman ideas about the self, containment and the narrow spaces of creative production can – and do – feed into the art and literature Western culture is producing now. I am attempting to analyse the taut spatial logics of a body of work that, for us, comes to stand for the 'Roman literary imagination' in the imperial period. More broadly, this is an exercise in unfolding the trope of enclosure in empire – a trope which feels so familiar, yet remains strangely underexplored. I am interested in how imperial writers construe the relationship between identity (or literary/human bodies) and interior space, and also in how these texts continue to influence who we think we are, spatially. The ancient and modern works I consider all prod us to ask: When is a confined space a 'home', or an escapist dream come true, and when is it a (potential) prison? Is the desire for retreat a response to (or way of understanding) empire? Are retreats ever secure, and how does the niche one inhabits come to define one's political, philosophical, authorial and gendered identity? What kind of retreat – if any – fosters illuminating philosophy? Are our bodies really house-like enclosures for the soul, spaces we 'own'?

As I discuss throughout, although ancient writers of many different kinds imagine themselves studying and composing in corners, studies and a host of other inspiring enclosures,<sup>5</sup> privileging shady spots and closed-in spaces is partly about defining (small-scale) genre. From the Hellenistic period onwards, writers' 'retreats' are where fashionable, miniaturistic poetry is born.<sup>6</sup> As Phaedrus puts it, defending his 'trifling' little *Fables* and appealing to a sophisticated audience, 'it is an unusual mind

<sup>4</sup> See Plato *Republic* 7, 514–17a, with Irigaray's well-known essay 'Plato's *Hystera*' (in Irigaray 1985), which aims to show precisely what Plato must conceal and appropriate in representing philosophical learning through (this) metaphor.

<sup>5</sup> Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.3.23–6 explains the value of retreats for study, especially writing. At 10.3.25–6, he writes *ideoque lucubrantēs silentium noctis et clusum cubiculum et lumen unum velut †rectos† maxime teneat* ('So when we're up working by lamplight, may the silence of the night, the closed room and the single course of light keep us upright').

<sup>6</sup> See Horace *Ep.* 2.2.77 (*scriptorum chorus omnis amat nemus et fugit urbem*) on poets' conventional love for the natural enclosures of woods and groves (cf. Tacitus *Dial.* 12). Among the Hellenistic poets, smallness and rarity do often go hand in hand with intensity of detail and grand ambitions, but they don't tend to evoke feelings or effects of pressure or claustrophobia. I'll suggest in what follows that this emerges as a particularly Roman, imperial take on the Greek tradition.

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that perceives what the artist has hidden in an innermost corner (*interiore angulo*).<sup>7</sup> The elegiac poet Propertius would prefer to keep his Cynthia 'cloistered' in 'shallow waters' (*clausam tenui ... in unda*, 1.11.11), yet in his third book he compares his infatuation to being roasted alive in Venus' cauldron (3.24.13) – a very different take on confinement. In the second book of his elegiac *Tristia*, Ovid muses on his destined location: as a writer of erotic poetry, he has been 'confined to a narrow space', just as Virgil's not-quite-epic *Georgics* find him 'constrained by small spaces'.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Statius' unfinished epic *Achilleid* – much inspired by Ovidian poetics – sets the 'delicate', 'domestic' genres of lyric or love elegy, which belong to dens, grottoes and houses, against the aggressively open terrain of epic. We recall, too, Horace's journey towards the 'corner' of wisdom and security in the *Odes* and *Epistles*, his retreat to the quiet of his Sabine estate in the mild-mannered *Satires*, and equally, his mad poet in the quirky enclosure of the *Ars Poetica*, who throws himself down a well or volcano and perhaps doesn't want to be 'saved'.<sup>9</sup>

But when Roman literary texts from the late first century BCE to the second century CE inhabit a series of 'small worlds', those interiors are set – in highly culturally specific terms – against a backdrop of (expanding and transforming) empire. In an era which saw power concentrated in a single leader, and witnessed a burgeoning interest in cartography – the mapping and symbolic shrinking of imperial space enabled by a growing body of military knowledge – the discourse of 'retirement' is often presented as a turning away or exclusion from political life, and from the invasive gaze of imperial power. Whether exile from Rome was a luxury (as it seemed to be for the future emperor Tiberius), or a punishment (as it was for Ovid and Seneca), it offered writers fertile territory for exploring what it means to be at home, or homeless (at a distance from the epicentre of imperial power), and therefore for thinking about what it is – ontologically, politically, poetically – to dwell in an interior. Homeless Ovid's 'entrapment' in exile on the Black Sea seems almost to be a continuation of his fate as a 'powerless' yet fiercely ambitious love poet doomed to work in claustrophobic conditions, and we are more than aware that this punishment establishes his place in a robust Roman literary tradition of politically engaged writing about exile. In genres which attach themselves to

<sup>7</sup> Phaedrus 4.2.6–7.      <sup>8</sup> Ovid *Tristia* 2.531–2; Virgil *G.* 4.147.

<sup>9</sup> Hor. *AP* 457–64, 472–6. In the first passage Horace seems to be comparing his mad poet to the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales of Miletus, who is said to have fallen into a well while gazing at the stars (Plato *Theaetetus* 174a, cf. Cic. *Div.* 13.30); the second example (throwing oneself into a volcano) refers to Empedocles.

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the imagining and dissection of urbane 'retreat' – satire, lyric, epigram, fable, pastoral, love elegy, epistles – the business of empire is not so much sidelined as recast in new and tighter shapes.<sup>10</sup> Just as Rome itself grew from a tiny village, or from the modest confines of Romulus' hut, into a vast, microcosmic city, so it provided the stimulation for daring poets to chronicle 'great things' in 'small spaces' (*per exiguos magna referre modos*, Ovid *Fasti* 6.22).<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the polished, rhetorical strategies so characteristic of Augustan and imperial literature, with its emphasis on post-Hellenistic brevity and the ingenious 'cramming together' of oppositions, seem to perform the political or mythical violence and existential crises they describe. 'It is a monstrous sin', cries the character Catius in Horace *Satires* 2.4, 'to spend three thousand in the fish market, and then crowd those sprawling fishes in a narrow dish'.<sup>12</sup> But this, we recognize, is precisely the lack of decorum and metaphorical overloading that Roman satire (including this one) laps up.<sup>13</sup> Satire, that quintessentially Roman genre, frequently takes place behind closed doors, in what Emily Gowers calls 'the enclosed spaces of agoraphobic Rome'.<sup>14</sup> Gowers is referring to Horace's *Satires*, although the *Ars Poetica* hints at a similar ambience when it advises aspiring writers to subject their work to the harshest criticism and to lock it up 'indoors' for nine years before they even think about releasing it into the wilds (*Ars Poetica* 388–9).<sup>15</sup> The comment is even better suited to Persius, whose pale and sickly writer figures shut themselves in while the summer heat rages outside. Indeed the trope only intensifies in the glare of Nero's metropolis. In the dinner party of Petronius' *Satyricon*, Trimalchio imprisons his guests in an ingenious maze, and the novel's central poet-figure (like Persius' bad epic poets, 'locked up' in their libraries) appears to compose

<sup>10</sup> See Connors (1994) on this point, especially 225–9.

<sup>11</sup> See also Rimell (2008), Squire (2011, 247–302 *et passim*) and Porter (2011) on the poetics of scale, miniaturization, and the symbiotic, often paradoxical relationship between large and small in ancient literature – starting paradigmatically with Callimachus' shrunken-down intensity, and developed in exciting ways by Roman authors such as Ovid, Persius, Seneca, Martial, Statius, Pliny the Elder and Juvenal.

<sup>12</sup> *Sat.* 2.4.76–7. On this see Gowers (1993, 135–61). As Gowers puts it in her commentary on Horace *Satires* 1 (2012), Horace's 'vast web of engagement' with earlier Greek and Roman authors constitutes another means by which his conversational *libelli* swell 'into the overspill of a voracious bookworm' (1).

<sup>13</sup> Juvenal *Sat.* 4 (featuring a giant fish as an *orbis* enclosed *tenui muro*, 4.132) takes this Horatian platter and makes it monstrous.

<sup>14</sup> Gowers (2005a, 55).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hor. *Epist.* 1.20.1–8. At the same time jumping *in artum* (into a narrow space) is also the metaphor Horace uses at *AP* 134 to refer to slavish imitation (he alludes to Aesop's fable in which a cunning fox, which has fallen down a well, persuades a gullible goat to leap in too).

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a poem about civil war while trapped in the dark hull of a sinking ship.<sup>16</sup> However, texts of the mid-first century construct a zeitgeist in which there is no hiding for long under Nero's strobe-like gaze, even in pastoral poetry. Calpurnius Siculus' shepherds, like the poet of the *Aetna* peering obsessively into cracks for inspiration, yearn for a shady cave in which to sing instead of the noisy glen in *Eclogue* 6, which is already too close for comfort to the dazzling, valley-like arena described by Corydon on his return from Rome in *Eclogue* 7.<sup>17</sup> We're reminded that Roman caves – after the mythic den where Romulus and Remus were suckled by the she-wolf – are fascinating post-Platonic wombs, sites of origin which prompt as much horror as nostalgia, and prime locations *both* for minaturist pastoral *and* for the ambitious, 'big' genres of tragedy and epic.

Philosophers, too, take an inward turn in the early empire, situating the struggle for inner freedom indoors, as Foucault was among the first to observe. But as recent critiques of Foucault's *Care of the Self* have shown, the first century's focus on interiors (architectural and physical) is by no means restricted to philosophical or medical works.<sup>18</sup> What's more, the ontological questions raised by a gamut of texts in this period deal as much with the torment of 'inhabiting' the body as leaky, fragile vessel as with the crafting of hard psychophysical enclosures inspired by imperial border control.<sup>19</sup> The claustrophobic bathhouses and suburban villas in Seneca's *Letters* point the way towards Statius', Martial's and Pliny's aesthetic-architectural confines,<sup>20</sup> and even towards second-century thinkers like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, who develop new theories and strategies of 'retreat into the self'.<sup>21</sup> But they also engage, at crucial points, with the labyrinths of Petronius'

<sup>16</sup> Eumolpus, at Petronius *Sat.* 115.

<sup>17</sup> *scrutamur rimas et vertimus omne profundum* ('we peer into crannies and upturn every depth'), *Aetna* 276. Although heavily influenced by Virgilian and Lucretian epic, the *Aetna* appears distinctly Neronian in its extravagant play with images of intense confinement and fiery explosion (its true date remains uncertain). The specific identification of poetry with the expression of chthonic forces is reminiscent especially of Lucan's epic and of the *Bellum Civile* poem in Petronius' *Satyricon*, which refers to the eruption of Mt Aetna as an omen or manifestation of civil war (see *Sat. BC.* 135–6).

<sup>18</sup> Foucault's *History of Sexuality* Vol. 2 (1985). Classicists' critiques include Goldhill (1995), McGlathery (1998) and other essays in Larmour, Miller and Platter (1998), Rimell (2002), Star (2012).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Rimell (2002), Star (2012).

<sup>20</sup> The metaphor of the body as house has a long history in the ancient world: earlier Roman examples include Plautus' *Mostellaria* (1.84–156: life is a house, and parents are 'architects' who 'construct' their children), and Vitruvius' *de Architectura* (e.g. 3.1: good architecture is inspired by the symmetry of the human body).

<sup>21</sup> See especially Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 4.3, a concise expression of the Stoic attitude towards retreat which runs throughout the work, and 12.27, on famous Roman retirements which were more show than substance. On the evolution of the modern self, see especially Taylor (1989).

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*Satyricon* and with the intense enclosures of Senecan tragedy, which can no longer contain the anxiety figured by narrowness. In Seneca's *Troades*, to give just one example, the story is retold of Andromache's attempt to hide her son Astyanax from the murderous Greeks in Hector's tomb, a safe place that is also the site of death. As Andromache puts it to Astyanax, 'If fate helps the desperate, you have a refuge; if the fates deny you life, you have a tomb' (510–11). An elderly Trojan declares at line 513 that 'the enclosures conceal their secret' (*claustra commissum tegunt*), yet Andromache's fear of death (of tombs) cannot be concealed, and will inevitably reveal the boy. Seneca's famously concise style – traditionally held up to illustrate the raw intensities of 'Silver Latin' – seems to revel in the paradox of the safe/deadly enclosure, exemplifying the dazzling poetic experimentation within cramped spaces that we see in surviving texts of the early imperial period.

What's more, as Seneca reminds us (after Lucretius), anguish in Latin (*angor*) is etymologically linked to the verb *angere* ('to press tight', 'to constrain', even 'to torture'), and refers literally to the constriction of heart, diaphragm and stomach when we experience dread.<sup>22</sup> For Seneca's tragic protagonists (as for Statius' Thetis, whose joy at seeing Achilles turning into a man 'throttles' her at *Achilleid* 1.183: *angunt sua gaudia matrem*), this emotional pain is too much to bear, and threatens to burst its confines. It is difficult to forget Seneca's updated image of Oedipus not just blinding himself but reaching into the cavities of his head as if to scrape them out or crack them open,<sup>23</sup> or the indelible vision of Thyestes after he has gorged on his own flesh and blood, guts churning with the imprisoned horror that 'struggles with no way out'.<sup>24</sup> Roman distress is often a kind of claustrophobia, and the incendiary poetics of the most daring post-Augustan writers – Persius, Lucan, Petronius, Seneca and Tacitus are a good sample – show this off in ways that academic criticism is often at a loss to describe. In imperial Latin literature, amplification within a shrunken frame becomes not just the rhetorical default but an overt response and contribution to what is often perceived as a bristling, conquered, guilt-ridden world.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Lucretius 3.993, where *anxius angor* calls attention to the etymology and the physiological effects of anxiety.

<sup>23</sup> Seneca *Oed.* 967–9. The use of the words *recessus* and *sinus* here is particularly grotesque as they also belong to the vocabulary of pleasant retreat and *otium* (the *recessus* as 'retirement spot', *sinus* as 'sheltered bay'). See Segal (1983) and Rimell (2012), cf. Segal (1986) on Seneca's *Phaedra*.

<sup>24</sup> *Thy.* 1041–2 (*voluntur intus viscera, et clausum nefas | sine exitu luctatur et quaerit fugam*).

<sup>25</sup> See especially Henderson (1983) and (2004), plus Segal (1983) on Seneca; Henderson (1999b) on various authors; Gowers (1994) on Neronian decoction; Rimell (2002) on overstuffed, exploding bodies (human and literary) in Petronius' *Satyricon*.

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My aim in this book is to try to understand the poetics of this 'inward turn' – or more precisely, of the thrusting outward of an inward turn – that characterizes so much of what we know as Latin literature. The groundwork of my analysis will retrace a series of tensions that make up the sinews of many Augustan and post-Augustan texts: between a pluralistic, urbane modernity and a nostalgia for 'traditional' republican ideals set in a smaller world or worlds; between a pull to create a self-enclosed, exclusive space of personal, philosophical and aesthetic freedom and an ambitious, often competitive identification with imperial monumentality, expansionism and global fame.<sup>26</sup> This double pull, as we see in Virgil's *Aeneid*, itself mirrors and is mirrored by the reiterative process of Roman foundation, as it conceals, buries and demarcates, before pushing forward to the next horizon. It might be repacked, as I suggest throughout, in terms of the way in which a fantasy of absolute indemnification – powered by the epistemic drive of empire and fostered first in the Maecenas-shaped breathing space of key Augustan texts – is fractured (whether traumatically or therapeutically) in what is some of the most vibrant writing of the Western tradition. That is to say, Augustan and imperial Latin literature, in its response to and production of the logic of empire, is deeply engaged in working over the aporetics of security. I have chosen to approach this in one specific way, which I think gets to the core of the ontological and interpretative questions undergirding spatial thinking in ancient Rome: in terms of the movability or paradox of enclosure as secure yet terrifying, walled yet penetrable space.

My discussions may be situated generally within the so-called 'spatial turn' in the humanities and social sciences in the last thirty years or so. I'm referring to a diverse body of work spanning cultural and literary studies, sociology, philosophy, geography and architecture, which rather than treating space as a common-sense external background to human and social action, has analysed how interrelations bring space into being. Space is not just a physical entity we map, but a live, evolving thing that is created and shaped by culture, and in turn shapes us. This paradigm shift has opened the way to exploring how we construe the self spatially, and how social, economic, political and cultural phenomena are both the agents and products of spatio-temporal reality. We are aware, now, of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, of how relations of power and

<sup>26</sup> On the literature of *otium* and the Epicurean roots of the Roman 'life of contemplation', see especially Grilli (1953), André (1962) and (1966), Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1999, 81–108) and Connors (2000).



discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life. My thinking about how actual or imagined interior spaces operate metaphorically and symbolically, how they both promote and make manifest certain ways of being in the world, has been stimulated by key texts such as Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Henry Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, by Foucault's writings on prisons and security, as well as by a range of work by thinkers across the humanities (including classicists) who have contributed to unfolding theoretical debates about the nature of space and place.<sup>27</sup>

More specifically, my methodology owes much to the deconstructive tradition and defends that tradition's ongoing relevance. I am interested, especially, in investigations of philosophy's dependency on spatial and architectural figures, its situating of paternal *logos* in a pure interior which is identified implicitly or explicitly with 'being at home'.<sup>28</sup> As Kojin Karatani puts it, the 'will to architecture', that is, 'the will to construct an edifice of knowledge on a solid foundation', is itself the bedrock of Western thought.<sup>29</sup> Much of the Western philosophical tradition from Plato onwards conceives of the house (or the cave, or the walled enclosure generally) not just as its grounding metaphor but as that which determines the condition of metaphor as such. That is, to paraphrase Derrida's argument, if metaphor is defined by its detachment from a 'proper' meaning, then this sense of the 'proper' (*oîkeîos*) is seen to be inseparable from the home (*oîkos*), which stands for the guarding of the proper,

<sup>27</sup> Bachelard (1964), Foucault (1977, 1986b), Lefebvre (1991). As the editors of the volume *Thinking Space* put it more than a decade ago, 'Space is the everywhere of modern thought' (Crang and Thrift 2000, 1), to the extent that it would be impossible to offer even a digested summary of the literature here. A detailed overview of how the work of postcolonial critics such as Bhabha (e.g. 1990, 1994) and Said (1978, 1993), social theorists such as Soja (e.g. 1989, 1996) and Bourdieu (e.g. 1990), and philosophers such as Butler (1990, 1993) and Deleuze (e.g. 1988, 1994) relates to the 'spatial turn' can be found in Hubbard et al. (2004). Books and articles by classicists who pick up some of the debates summarized in Hubbard et al. (2004) include Kraus (1994a, 1994b), Jaeger (1997), Paschalis and Frangoulidis (2002), Rehm (2002), Larmour and Spencer (2007), O'Sullivan (2011), Purves (2010), Squire (2011), Willis (2011) and de Yong (2012).

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger first identifies thinking with building in *Being and Time* (1927, trans. 1962). But the motif of the edifice (which becomes the enclosure, specifically the house) is much more developed in his 'late' work, notably 'Letter on Humanism' (1947), in *Basic Writings* (trans. 1993), and '... Poetically man dwells...' (1950), published in English in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. 1971). Derrida's critical response to and development of Heidegger's 'inhabitation' of the metaphor of being as dwelling can be traced throughout his oeuvre, but key texts are *Of Grammatology* (1967), the essays in *Margins of Philosophy* (1986a), and *Specters of Marx* (1994). Wigley (1993) is still invaluable for the astute way it reassembles Derrida's fragmented analysis of the relationship between philosophy and architecture, particularly alongside Hollier (1989=1974) and Karatani (1995). Also see Rawes (2007), Sharr (2007), N. Leach (1998) and the work gathered in English in N. Leach (1997).

<sup>29</sup> Karatani (1995) xxxii–xxxv.



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of property and self-identity.<sup>30</sup> Many continental philosophers after Heidegger are engaged, explicitly and implicitly, in demonstrating the idea (one which overlaps significantly with Freud's work on the uncanny) that all enclosed spaces – not just territories, but individual and collective identities conceived spatially or architecturally – are occupied to an extent by that which they ostensibly exclude. My contention in this book is that Roman Augustan and imperial texts can also be seen to reveal and work over this concept, whether as a truth, intuition or barely repressed horror, in ways that are especially intriguing from the vantage point of twenty-first-century postmodernity.

However, while the work of Heidegger and Derrida, as of Irigaray and others, traces the 'edifice' of metaphysics back to Plato, through thinkers like Husserl, Hegel and Rousseau, it is almost entirely silent on the philosophy and poetry of ancient Rome, which more often than not appears only as an abyss between fourth-century Athens and eighteenth-century Germany. One of the things I hope will emerge from my readings in this book is an affirmation of the powerful role Roman texts play in a dynamic Western discourse of dwelling. What I am investigating, in a focused and selective way, is the extent to which Roman authors write about and push us to reflect on what it means to be at home, on why a soul 'dwells' and how we are meant to cope with being ethically coherent, changing bodies in spaces which also refuse to be still for long. My contention will be, furthermore, that the specifics of Roman history and of Roman myths of origin provide immensely fertile conditions for thinking about the uncanniness of enclosed space even as that uncanniness is necessarily concealed, often in the name of empire. The Derridean trope of autoimmunity pervades my readings of Roman authors' opening up or violent cramming of enclosures, so that pressured language is made to evoke both the basic instability in relations of inside to outside, and also what individual and state must sacrifice for the sake of protection or security.

In addition, then, I will be arguing that the ambiguousness of interior spaces, which are key locations for thinking about identity, poetry and philosophy in Rome, can be seen to stand for the way in which Augustan and imperial Latin literature continually vaunts the liveness and materiality of poetic language. From perverse textual bodies in Horace, Ovid, Seneca and Petronius to Lucan's emphasis on suffering as the torture of language, and onwards or downwards to Martial's poetics of contamination, this is

<sup>30</sup> Derrida (1978b) cf. (1986b, 134). Cf. Hardt and Negri (2000, 186–7) *et passim* on the 'spatial configuration of inside and outside' as a 'general foundational characteristic of Western thought'.

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a literary culture which shows us repeatedly how the desire for purity and total security is a desire for non-being. As such, even at its most courtly and imperial, it stands as a significant historical point of resistance to fundamentalism, which as Terry Eagleton hammers home in *After Theory*, is 'always a textual affair', a belief in the deadness of letters.<sup>31</sup> This is one of the main reasons why I spend my life reading, teaching and writing about this chunk of a tradition that is such an important part of what makes us *us*, and why I think these texts still demand to be studied.

We might also note that the Roman literary fascination with the fecundity of written language is one aspect that the ingrained opposition of blind Roman tyranny to far-sighted Greek democracy in much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy is motivated to suppress. In particular, the 'lower' genres of antiquity developed in new directions in Rome – erotic elegy, satire, epigram, prose fiction, the letter – put the stomach (that is, the *body*, or *decay over time*) back into the privileged, architectural interior, and in doing so they in different ways introduce disorder into communication. These texts, in their different ways, might be decadent, allusive, cerebral and self-conscious, and critics (myself included) have certainly revelled in this in recent years. But they can also be messy, violent, flawed, disturbing and confusing. Among other things, they push us to reassert how often the sexy, socially constructed cyberbody beloved of postmodern thought has avoided actual bodies – porous enclosures annoyingly prone to sickness and dying – which are, we must admit, so hard to live with. One of the broader points I am trying to make throughout this book is that philology should be fully engaged in analysing these difficult aspects, which are, crucially, so often inseparable from the minuscule appreciation of syntax, grammar and learned reference.

In short, my discussions of enclosure in these and other texts point to the necessity of re-evaluating Latin literature as fertile terrain in highly political debates about the vitality of language and about the possibility of resisting philosophical authority in or with words. There is an urgent need, especially within a field which has long struggled with and rebelled against postmodern and post-structuralist thought, to be very exact about this. What is perceived to be at stake in classics is the very existence of a subject that already totters on the margins of a humanities-in-crisis and whose cultural capital is running out, fast. It must defend its

<sup>31</sup> Eagleton (2003, 202). Note that to say that these texts 'resist fundamentalism' in this sense is not to claim that all or any of them are anti-imperialist in a straightforward way.