Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I ‘haunt.’ I must admit that this last word is misleading, tending to establish between certain beings and myself relations that are stranger, more inescapable, more disturbing than I intended. Such a word means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be who I am.

– Breton, *Nadja* (1960 [1928]), 11

**Introducing ownness: personification and *Oikeiôsis* in Roman philosophy**

In this chapter, I argue that there is a general association between women and dependency in Roman philosophy, and that this association comes to expression at the point where philosophical treatments of ownness intersect with the personification of abstract nouns. In the next chapter, I discuss the complex varieties of personification available for the expression of ownness and its relation to real women in Roman rhetorical theory. Here, as further introduction to the background necessary for the rest of the book, I define ownness, introduce the major players of the study, and provide examples of the kinds of personification to which their imagination of ownness gives rise. By including Lucretius, the famous, irreligious, individualist Epicurean, along with Cicero and Seneca, the ostensibly conservative “company men” of Roman philosophy, I suggest that the concept of ownness, associated in the specific form of *oikeiôsis* with Stoics and some Peripatetic philosophers, is a broader part of Roman philosophy than its usual identification with a single school suggests.

To illustrate this, I first consider specific instances of figurative language in Cicero and Augustine’s descriptions of friendship. By comparing the classical and Christian philosophers, I demonstrate the ubiquity of the conceptualization of ownness in temporally and cultural distinct contexts. I next demonstrate the same thing through a discussion of figurative language in treatments of social cohesion in the main thinkers of the study. In the section immediately following this, however, I lay the groundwork for the substantive illustrations of the matter of ownness from Cicero to Augustine by defining Roman philosophy in terms of the intellectual historical idea of “eclecticism.” For the purposes of understanding Roman philosophy as an autonomous discourse, I argue that “eclecticism” denotes not the production of philosophical gallimaufries of only doxographical interest. Rather, like the property of texts and other cultural phenomena that, in the Introduction, I described as deconstruction, “eclecticism” denotes a tendency to do philosophy in literary ways, juxtaposing terms and concepts in a way that resembles metaphor more than argument and keeps those modes distinct, even as it assimilates them.

“Eclecticism” and the deconstruction of ownness: criteria of Roman philosophy

In the dynamic relations of literary and philosophical interpretations set in motion by the individual text, I find the full significance of Roman philosophy of the classical period and the radical and even feminist promise of its primary authors: the poet Lucretius (c. 99 – c. 55 BCE), the politician and rhetorical theorist, Cicero (106–34 BCE), both writing at the end of the Roman Republic, and finally the politician and poet, Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BCE – 65 CE), writing near the beginning of the early Empire. In each instance, I will argue that, while Martha Nussbaum in particular has been right to maintain that ancient philosophy fundamentally stints the conditions of vulnerability, embodiment, and dependency ascribed to women and children, the form of stinting has not been neglect but denigration, misogyny, and contempt. Thus, as we’ll see in the next section, Cicero develops two models of passionate attachment: one model uses images of parental love and values reciprocity
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and difference, based in the corporeal condition of parturition and being born, while the other is based on the image, in a notion that Aristotle first memorably articulates, that each good man (sic) sees, in the other, of himself. In a paean to the founder of the school, one Greek Stoic made the virtue of Aristotelian self-sufficiency that such self-reflecting other-regard envisions expressly virile: “You founded self-sufficiency (ἐκτίσας αὐτόποιευ), dismissing vainglorious riches/ reverend Zeno with your hoary glower!/ for you discovered a male theory (ἄρσενα γὰρ λόγον ἔφεξ).” As often, Latin, whose word for “excellence” is simply “masculinity,” intensifies Greek assertions of this kind: “Virtue (virtus) is derived from the word ‘man’ (vir).”

As a result of more than just etymology, however, women in Roman philosophy prove, if not absolutely incapable of true friendship, then at least extraordinarily under-qualified. More often than not, writes Cicero with a diminutive of denigration, the object of their affections is not the abstract quality of the male other, let alone the other at all, but rather the protection of their own vulnerability: “And so it happens that little ladies (mulierculae) seek out the protections of friendships more than men do (amicitiarum praesidia quaerant quam viri).” Affection based on dependency is thus rendered simply feminine. With this relegation of vulnerability and affection based on the body, as suggested by the original reference to procreation, Cicero and company offer a gender-differential division of affective and representational labor in which women, necessary but frequently contemptible – necessary but in need themselves – become a kind of local, often literally domestic, constitutive outside.
On the other side of this arrangement, certain forms of affection, associated with pleasure and protection from hardship, are the kind that women provide. Though elsewhere willing to accord women a literal place in philosophy – he addresses works from exile to both his mother and the eminent daughter of the historian Cremutius Cordus – Seneca writes (Prov. 2.5):

Non uides quanto alter patres, alter matres indulgeant? illi excitari iubent liberos ad studia obeunda mature, feriatis quoque diebus non patiuntur esse otiosos, et sudorem illis et interdum lacrimas excutient; at matres fouere in sinu, continere in umbra volunt, numquam contristari, numquam flere, numquam laborare.

Don’t you see how different the indulgence of fathers and mothers is? The men order their children to stir themselves to undergoing ambitious pursuits when the time is right, don’t suffer their idling on holidays, and shake the sweat from them, and sometimes tears; mothers, on the other hand, want to hold them in their laps, keep them in the shade, want them never to experience grief, never to weep, and never toil.

This is the considered opinion of the Roman who owed his career to a powerful woman and warmly acknowledges, as we’ll soon see, the philosophical significance of his wife’s doting. Not so, evidently, in the abstract. In the abstract, she – mother, daughter, wife – is devoted to pampering what needs to be toughened up. At the same time, as we see when Seneca addresses his actual mother, Helvia, he may also express a recognition of the limitation of the stereotypes that he adopts, maybe even a – disavowed – longing to transcend them: “Where are the conversations,” Seneca imagines his mother asking in his exile, “of which I never got enough? Where are the intellectual pursuits in which I participated more happily than a woman and with the closeness more of a friend [familiarius] than a mother?” The comparatives mingle piety and progressivism, the recognition and validation of traditional roles and the desire to transcend them, on the part of the son on the part of the woman;
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“she,” for her part, feels happiness in the prospect of intimacy to the extent that it exceeds her traditional “familial” role.¹³

In the same Stoic, an instance of ambiguity expresses a similar ambivalence and suggests the extent to which Romans were sometimes willing to admit that the figural evasion of specificity pertained to actual women. At the beginning of one of the later Moral Epistles, Seneca recounts that, in response to his young wife Paulina, he has left the city for the country for the sake of his health (Ep. 104.2):

Hoc ego Paulinae meae dixi, quae mihi valetudinem mean commendat. Nam cum sciam spiritum illius in meo verti, incipio, ut illi consulam, mihi consulere. Et cum me fortiorem senectus ad multa reddiderit, hoc beneficium aetatis amitto; venit enim mihi in mentem in hoc sene et adulescentem esse cui parcitur. Itaque quoniam ego ab illa non impetro ut me fortius amet, <a me> inpetrat illa ut me diligentius amem.

I said this to my Paulina, when she was endearing my health to me. For when I know that her breath is involved in mine, I begin to take thought for myself in order to take thought for her. And although old age has made me braver in the face of many things, I give up this one asset of maturity, because I realize that inside of this old man is also a youth who is spared. So it happens that, because I can’t get her to love me more bravely, she gets me to love myself more affectionately.

The passage signposts itself as relating to ownness in several ways, not least with the “oikeioteic” language that I will discuss below: first, in the name of Paulina’s action, commendatio, which we’ll see ascribed to feminine personifications in Roman social theory; second, the exchange of love frankly bypasses the more typical Roman and Stoic aim of bravery (fortitudo); third, after starting with the ownness-word commendat, the passage ends with an other Latin ownness-word diligentius, while the relation to the feminine other ends, in the man, in a passionate attachment to himself (me … amem). Additionally instructive is the combination (possibly gnomic) of senex and adulescens with the mysterious referent of the latter: who is this youth inside the elder Seneca the Younger? Adulescens is, technically, common in gender, so while “the youth inside this old man” may be some younger version of Seneca, it may be Paulina, who was considerably younger than his husband and far more likely to be described as “spared” in Seneca’s perspective.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. familiares at Cic. Amic. 2.
¹⁴ Bourgery 1936, 91; on Seneca’s adulescens, see Harich 1994, 356f. with background in Hemelrijk 1999, 31–6, 52f., cf. Ep. 70.1 with Ker 2009a, 153f., also August Conf. 9.4.29.
Far from presenting ownness within a problematic of egoism and altruism, Seneca uses an apparent evasion in figurative language to demonstrate, not that one can sacrifice oneself for another, but that one can 
*preserve* oneself for another, and that it is precisely others who keep one in life.15 Because of the social conditions of Roman marriage, this happens through the introjection of an acceptably vulnerable subject: Paulina *adulescens* bears the burden of the self-sufficient male’s own past and continued vulnerability in a strange but literally familiar division of labor.16

The result of this strange division is that it becomes philosophically safe and psychologically accurate to say that there is a twenty-year old girl inside the elder Seneca the Younger.17 That a distinguishing factor such as gender might not matter in the strictest understanding of the old Stoic underscores, in view of Seneca’s careful rhetorical presentation, the radicalism that the Roman Stoic would, in a movement whose unity is deconstruction, both maintain and erase. Difference is necessary to feel ownness, even as ownness aims to erase difference.

In terms of the usual approach to Roman philosophy, I propose considering the site of deconstruction that these texts provide as a form of “eclecticism,” a characteristic of these texts thought to distinguish them from their Greek models.18 This is not unrelated to metaphor and the difference between literature and philosophy to the extent that metaphor is by definition both disjunctive and connective. Likewise, affirming and denying likeness with the implicit assertion that this is *like* that because it is *not* that,19 the language of eclecticism is metaphorical: it asserts and denies eclecticism in its implicit assertion of identity and difference. Put another way, eclecticism is a *figurative* mode of philosophy: it depends on a background from which it varies in a *felt* dialectic of proper and improper, appropriation and defamiliarization.20

Thus, for instance, the very concept of *oikeiôsis* is thought to be originally Stoic. And yet, as we’ll see, by the time we get to Cicero, most of

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16 Harich 1994, 356 n. 5 describes Seneca’s attitude as *officium* (cf. Pociña 2003, 336); for a more generous view of Roman marriage, see Treggiari 1991, 232f., 236f., 241–53; for further bibliography on Seneca and women, Ker 2009a, 91 n. 21.
the philosophical schools claimed that some form of this concept originated with them. In Plato’s Symposium, for example, while vetting various explanations for love and desire, Diotima says: “I don’t suppose that each person cherishes that which belongs to himself, unless someone calls the good one’s own [oikeion] … and the bad the alien [allotrion].” In what will become the most “Platonic” part of Plato’s Symposium, the elaboration of the theory of Platonic Ideas, in the form of a kind of negation of a negation (“I don’t suppose … unless …”), Diotima introduces oikeiosis. What adjustments to the theory of “Platonism,” such as it is or will become, suffice to make the concept of “one’s own” that will issue in Stoic oikeiosis officially, originally “Platonic?” At what precise point, in other words, does a variation in phrasing in a context of philosophical elaboration constitute an innovation, and an innovation a foundation? This is especially pressing when, as here, the concept is doubly negated, not not that of the “original” philosopher.

As I’ll discuss below, the idea that one naturally knows his or her “own” even appears in the Epicurean – or at any rate, Lucretian – account of the constitutions of self and society. With that observation, it will turn out that the “Stoic” idea of “ownness” is somehow “like” the Epicurean one, except that, like a metaphor, it is also not like it, but rather a marker of what the different accounts all share in spite of their differences; it is thus both like and unlike, own and other. As a term, the concept takes on a figurative quality, in excess of its content, asserted in like terms, in unlike systems – exactly the dynamic ascribed to metaphor in ancient literary criticism (Demetr. Eloc. 86f., trans. Innes, modified):

Custom is the teacher of all things, especially metaphors; making a metaphor of everything, it escapes notice through its making metaphors so safely … The metaphors are so inspired that they seem like the authoritative words … Custom has made some metaphors so well that we no longer want the originals, but the metaphor remains and holds the place of the original.


22 Cf. Burnyeat 1982, 7f., 13 on whatever philosophical artifact (italics mine): “This … is nothing but a last etiolated remnant of our ordinary assumptions … left over when these have been whittled down to a series of distinct momentary occurrences. Plato’s dialectical construction is not seriously concerned with … .” For the deconstruction of the “etiolation” that arises when the “seriousness” of the philosopher’s recourse to ordinary language features in the literary, see Derrida 1972, 326 on Austin 1975, 21, with further documentation and discussion in Dressler 2012, 167–9.
Replace “custom” with “philosophical practice” and “metaphor” with “new philosophical concept,” and the theory of “eclecticism” is complete: “Philosophical practice has made some new philosophical concepts so well that we no longer want the original (Platonic, Aristotelian), but the new (Stoic) philosophical concept holds its place.” This happens when “old” or “stolen” terms and concepts enter a new system, including the “system” of eclecticism, and, on entry, derive their novelty or originality not from their definition in themselves but from the background that, again on entry, or recombination, they renovate and authorize.

The tropic character of eclecticism is the source of a productive evasion in Roman philosophy, leaving unanswerable two questions that usually concern the history of ideas. First: is the appearance of a given theory or philosopheme a matter of substitution? In other words, did someone trade the Stoic conception of feeling and loving one’s own for the Peripatetic one, which is similar, but also different, since it “changes” the concept with the suggestion that ownness sets in after birth, so that the “eclectic” Piso, in Book 5 of Cicero’s *On Ends*, renders *oikeiôsis* “originally” Peripatetic, and the Stoics thieves? Second: was there ever an “original” form of *oikeiôsis* such that, on reception, or “use” (Demetrius’ *sunêtheia*, Lat. *consuetudo*), this philosopheme eventually became a norm, and in the tendentious progress of philosophical debate, one now feels only the deviations when ownness is claimed, for instance, as exclusively Stoic or Peripatetic property? By evading these two questions, “eclecticism” describes the dynamic of variation that intellectual history shares with the history of language: both exhibit a figurative quality that makes the determination of the “original” ground dependent on the figure and ultimately indistinct from it except as a felt “move,” a “deviation” (*tropos*, “turn”) on the level of thought, as much as a substitution (Aristotle’s “this is that”).

The “eclectic” Roman philosopher thus does not pick and choose between preexisting philosophical positions, as the etymology of the word “eclectic” suggests. Rather, eclecticism constitutes “preexisting” philosophical positions in the establishment of “new” positions, confounding the history of ideas as a deconstructive mode *par excellence* even as it

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24 Cf. Lévy 1992a, 386.

25 This applies, *a fortiori*, to more “proper” systems of philosophy, such as Stoicism, *pace* the position of Fin. 4.78.

26 See n. 19 above; cf. *mutuare* at Quint. Inst. 8.6.1.
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enables it. In terms of originality, the eclectic organization of philosophy differs from other forms primarily by the signposts of its movements that it provides: “Archesilaus,” “Carneades,” “Antiochus.” Eclecticism describes, more specifically than the usual attribution of “pragmatism,” the constant series of variations whose cumulative effect forms the ground against which any philosophical utterance forms the figure.

With this reconstruction of the dynamic of eclecticism, I claim that there is something called Roman philosophy, and that it is not just something Latin speakers did less well than the Greeks. Building on the criteria implied by Michael Trapp, I define the Roman philosophers of the classical period, Lucretius, Cicero, and Seneca, by five criteria: (1) “eclecticism” of the kind just described, (2) self-conscious “Latinization” of the kind that Trapp suggests was a feature of those Roman philosophers who did not work in Greek, (3) a structural privileging of ethics (and eventually religion), affirmed even when the philosophers elaborate other branches of philosophy (physics and logic, but also rhetoric, aesthetics, and doxography), (4) self-identification of philosophical activity as the negative term in the binary of active and contemplative, that is, political and intellectual (and later religious) life; finally (5), in the matter in which Roman philosophy most intersects with the rest of Roman culture both in the classical period and in later Christianity, it is committed to gender dimorphism as the fundamental background of ethical and aesthetic evaluation, of “Latinization” (so, e.g., virtue from vir, “man”), and so on.

Of course, there are in Roman philosophy itself authors who wrote in Greek, such as the philosophers extant after early Imperial, specifically Neronian Seneca: the slave Epictetus (50s – 135 CE), the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), to say nothing of lesser known figures.

37 See Lévy 1992a, 374; Baraz 2012, 19–21; more generally, Trapp 2007, 113f. See also, pace Inwood 2005, 13 on “primary” and “secondary” philosophy, Derrida 1974, 24 (italics mine): “The movements of deconstruction [read: eclecticism] do not destroy structures from the outside … Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.” That Roman “eclectics” are deconstructive in this way explains the modern tendency to depend on them to reconstruct the “originals” even as it misprizes them.

38 Lévy 1992a, 76–96.
39 Cf. Lévy 1996b, 8; Trapp 2007, 10–13, 16f.
Figurations of ambivalent affection: Cicero and Augustine on friendship

As an example of the above, I proceed to a comparison of the theoretical reflections on friendship, as a species of attachment, in the work of Cicero and Augustine (354–430 CE). In discussing particular friendships in ostensibly different ways, the classical and Christian authors each reveal their commitment, as men, to the disavowal of dependency and the assertion of self-sufficiency. At the same time, the form and value of their commitment becomes visible not exclusively on the level of argument or explicit claim, but rather in the “literary” matter of diction, choice of examples, connotation, and “eclecticism.” In the contradiction between these modes of discourse and the context to which they refer, Cicero and Augustine reveal the extent to which even their ambivalence about embodiment, dependency, and vulnerability is itself ambivalent. In this profound ambivalence, combined with the strength of their commitments to masculinism, is the space of play that deconstruction opens for the feminine.

Beginning the second book of his Confessions, Augustine describes the passage in his life that he lamented was filled with “abject lust.” Experienced once in infancy (see Chapter 2 below), he sees it again in his misguided straining after friendship as a young adult (Conf. 2.2.2):

Et quid erat, quod me delectebat, nisi amare et amari? sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usuque ad animum, quatenus est luminosus limes amicitiae, sed exhalabantur nebulae de limosa concupiscentia carnis … ut non discernetur serenitas dilectionis a caligine libidinis.

32 See Chapter 2.
33 See Derrida 1997, 179–82.