

## HARMONIOUS INTRUSION: MANKIND AND NATURE IN STATIUS' *SILVAE* 1.3\*

### ABSTRACT

*There are three conventionally held views about the relationship between mankind and nature in the Roman villa: man is master over the natural landscape; villas were positioned at vantage points so that the downward gaze of a dominus reinforced his domination; gardens offered opportunities to bring order upon nature. This article argues to the contrary that Manilius Vopiscus' villa in Statius' *Silvae* 1.3 presents a harmonious relationship between key natural features, the villa architecture and the villa proprietor himself. Nature sometimes takes precedence, while the villa complements and integrates with the environment. This allows us to appreciate the nuances in Statius' overall presentation of the relationship between mankind and nature in Book 1 and in other poems in the *Silvae*.*

**Keywords:** Statius; *Silvae*; nature; villa; relationship between mankind and nature

The conventional view regarding mankind's relationship with nature in the Roman villa<sup>1</sup> is threefold. First, man is master of the natural landscape.<sup>2</sup> Statius is usually adduced to support this claim—*Silvae* 2.2 and 4.3 are the most common, but 1.3 features too—not just in literary studies<sup>3</sup> but in spatial<sup>4</sup> and environmental<sup>5</sup> ones as well. Pliny the

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<sup>1</sup> For the villa in general, see A. Marzano and G.P.R. Métraux (edd.), *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2018); for villa production, see N. Purcell, 'The Roman villa and the landscape of production', in T.J. Cornell and K. Lomas (edd.), *Urban Society in Roman Italy* (London and New York, 1995), 157–84 and A. Marzano, 'The variety of villa production: from agriculture to aquaculture', in P. Erdkamp, K. Verboven and A. Zuiderhoek (edd.), *Ownership and Exploitation of Land and Natural Resources in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2015), 187–206. For the villa as cultural symbol, see J. Bodel, 'Monumental villas and villa monuments', *JRA* 10 (1997), 5–35. And for the morality of architecture, see C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 137–72; A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The villa as cultural symbol', in A. Frazer (ed.), *The Roman Villa: Villa Urbana* (Philadelphia, 1998), 43–53; C.E. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 121–7; A. Van Oyen, 'The moral architecture of villa storage in Italy in the 1st c. B.C.', *JRA* 28 (2015), 97–123.

<sup>2</sup> For landscape defined as the environment mediated through subjective experience, see D. Spencer, *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity* (Cambridge, 2010), 1–15; J. McNerney and I. Sluiter (edd.), *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity: Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination* (Leiden, 2016), 1–9.

<sup>3</sup> Especially Newlands (n. 1). See also Z. Pavlovskis, *Man in an Artificial Landscape: The Marvels of Civilisation in Imperial Roman Literature* (Leiden, 1973), 14, 26; J. Öberg, 'Some notes on the marvels of civilisation in imperial Roman literature', *Eranos* 78 (1978), 145–55; K.M. Coleman (ed.), *Statius Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), 103–4; K.S. Myers, "'Miranda fides": poet and patrons in paradoxographical landscapes in Statius' *Silvae*', *MD* 44 (2000), 103–38; M. Rühl, *Literatur gewordener Augenblick: Die Silven des Statius im Kontext literarischer und sozialer Bedingungen von Dichtung* (Berlin, 2006), 257–62; D. Heinen, 'Poetics of elision in the *Silvae*', *JCS* 38 (2013), 159–85, 171–8. For *Silvae* 4.3 in particular, see also J.J.L. Smolenaars, 'Ideology and poetics along the Via Domitiana: Statius *Silvae* 4.3', in R.R. Nauta, H.-J. van Dam and J.J.L. Smolenaars (edd.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden, 2006), 223–44, at 229–33.

<sup>4</sup> L. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth: Modern Space Conception in Architecture* (Odense, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> L. Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 2012), 77.

Younger's villa letters (*Ep.* 2.17 and 5.6) are likewise evoked to assert the claim.<sup>6</sup> Leach is an exception when she remarks that both Statius and Pliny 'bring out the interactive adaptation of nature and architecture',<sup>7</sup> but there was a lack of detailed examination into this interactivity. Archaeological examples are also sometimes used, from Roman water management,<sup>8</sup> to physical, social and visual control in the rural landscape of Roman Gaul,<sup>9</sup> to Italian villa remains.<sup>10</sup>

Second, villas were positioned at vantage points so that the downward gaze of a *dominus* reinforced his domination. Purcell defines the conventional thinking about this when he writes that 'through the capturing of the view, indeed, the whole wider landscape was made subservient to the one villa and could be thought of as serving the purposes of its owner'.<sup>11</sup> *Silvae* 2.2 features strongly in the literary evidence for this, where it is not just the proprietorial gaze of Pollius Felix<sup>12</sup> but also the active viewing of the villa itself that reinforce the domination of man and manmade over nature.<sup>13</sup>

Third, gardens offered opportunities to bring order upon nature.<sup>14</sup> This is clearly stated by Thommen, who argues that 'villa gardens were seen as an improved version of nature, and as a statement against its uncontrollability'.<sup>15</sup> Yet this view is not universally

<sup>6</sup> See R.K. Gibson and R. Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), 200–33; C.L. Whitton (ed.), *Pliny the Younger: Epistles Book II* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> E.W. Leach, 'Otium as *luxuria*: economy of status in the Younger Pliny's Letters', *Arethusa* 36 (2003), 147–65, at 154–5.

<sup>8</sup> N. Purcell, 'Rome and the management of water: environment, culture and power', in G. Shipley and J. Salmon (edd.), *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture* (London and New York, 1996), 180–212.

<sup>9</sup> C. Courbot-Dewerd, 'Feeling like home: Romanised rural landscape from a Gallo-Roman point of view', in M. Driessen, S. Heeren, J. Hendriks, F. Kemmers and R. Visser (edd.), *TRAC 2008: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Amsterdam 2008* (Oxford, 2009), 13–24.

<sup>10</sup> H. Platts, 'Keeping up with the Joneses: competitive display within the Roman villa landscape, 100 BC–AD 200', in N. Fisher and H. van Wees (edd.), *Competition in the Ancient World* (Swansea, 2011), 239–77, at 249–50.

<sup>11</sup> N. Purcell, 'Town in country and country in town', in E.B. MacDougall (ed.), *Ancient Roman Villa Gardens* (Washington, 1987), 185–203, at 194. For further archaeological and historical examples, see also Platts (n. 10), 254; K.J. Hartswick, 'The Roman villa garden', in W.F. Jashemski, K.L. Gleason, K.J. Hartswick and A.-A. Malek (edd.), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2017), 72–86; E. Macaulay-Lewis, 'The archaeology of gardens in the Roman villa', in W.F. Jashemski, K.L. Gleason, K.J. Hartswick and A.-A. Malek (edd.), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2017), 87–120, at 100–1.

<sup>12</sup> S.E. Hinds, 'Cinna, Statius, and "immanent literary history" in the cultural economy', in *L'Histoire littéraire immanente dans la poésie latine (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique de la Fondation Hardt 47)* (Vandœuvres and Geneva, 2001), 221–57, at 244–54.

<sup>13</sup> C.E. Newlands, 'Architectural ephrasis in Roman poetry', in T.D. Papanghelis, S.J. Harrison and S. Frangoulidis (edd.), *Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature: Encounters, Interactions and Transformations* (Berlin, 2013), 55–78, at 69.

<sup>14</sup> See further Pavlovskis (n. 3), 30; J.M. Seo, 'Aesthetics of enlightenment: philosophical continuity and rhetorical innovation in the poetics of Roman architecture', in M.-C. Poo, H.A. Drake, L. Raphals (edd.), *Old Society, New Belief: Religious Transformation of China and Rome, ca. 1st–6th Centuries* (Oxford, 2017), 53–68, at 61–2; G. Rosati, 'Laudes Campaniae: myth and fantasies in Statius' *Silvae*', in A. Augoustakis and R.J. Littlewood (edd.), *Campania in the Flavian Poetic Imagination* (Oxford, 2019), 113–30, at 127–8.

<sup>15</sup> Thommen (n. 5), 130. See also Pavlovskis (n. 3), 30–3; B. Bergmann, 'Visualizing Pliny's villas', *JRA* 8 (1995), 406–20, at 412–13; K.S. Myers, 'Docta otia: garden ownership and configurations of leisure in Statius and Pliny the Younger', *Arethusa* 38 (2005), 103–29; C.E. Newlands (ed.), *Statius: Silvae Book II* (Cambridge, 2011), 12–15; Hartswick (n. 11); Macaulay-Lewis (n. 11).

held, with Myers noting with nuance that ‘as symbolically separate realms in which the relationship of human activity and the natural world is magnified and intensified, gardens may serve as a microcosm for a number of different worlds’ and viewpoints.<sup>16</sup>

Manilius Vopiscus’ villa in Statius’ *Silvae* 1.3 suggests that the three conventional views just described are too one-sided and out of step with broader environmental studies which already recognize the diverse literary formulations of the mankind–nature relationship,<sup>17</sup> especially when a broader range of sources are considered.<sup>18</sup> In this poem, man, the manmade and nature are in harmony with one another. Contrary to prevailing views, nature is neither tamed<sup>19</sup> nor merely cooperative.<sup>20</sup> Instead, it is the villa architecture which accommodates and integrates with pre-existing natural features. This results in a carefully calibrated balancing effect; there is no notion of human domination, nor does nature overwhelm the villa.

The harmony between architecture and nature is illustrated in two ways. First, through the river Anio, which is neither subjugated nor altered by men. The combative language used elsewhere in the *Silvae* to illustrate human supremacy is absent in this poem.<sup>21</sup> While the buildings vie for their master (1.3.4 *certantesque sibi dominum defendere uillas*),<sup>22</sup> they none the less keep to their respective banks and do not complain about the river running through them (1.3.25–6 *alternas seruant praetoria ripas | non externa sibi fluiorum obstare queruntur*). This harmony means that we are disinclined from reading *inserto geminos Aeniene penates* (1.3.2) as ‘as if the buildings had existed prior to the river’, which Newlands does.<sup>23</sup> Rather, *inserto*

<sup>16</sup> K.S. Myers, ‘Representations of gardens in Roman literature’, in W.F. Jashemski, K.L. Gleason, K.J. Hartswick and A.-A. Malek (edd.), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2017), 258–77, at 259.

<sup>17</sup> Early environmental work focussed on literature, such as H.R. Fairclough, *Love of Nature among the Greeks and Romans* (London, 1930). More recent ecological studies include K.W. Weeber, ‘Environment, environmental behaviour’, in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (edd.), *Brill’s New Pauly: Antiquity* (Leiden, 2004), 1002–7; Thommen (n. 5); J.D. Hughes, *Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans: Ecology in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2014<sup>2</sup>), especially 43–67.

<sup>18</sup> Pliny the Elder focusses on positive aspects between mankind and nature. See M. Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford, 1992), 26–91; M. Beagon, ‘Nature and views of her landscapes in Pliny the Elder’, in G. Shipley and J. Salmon (edd.), *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture* (London and New York, 1996), 284–309, at 292. Cicero’s Balbus the Stoic sees men as *cultores terrae* (Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.99), but Lucretius at 5.206–9 describes the relationship more antagonistically.

<sup>19</sup> Noted by L. Håkanson, *Statius’ Silvae: Critical and Exegetical Remarks with Some Notes on the Thebaid* (Lund, 1969), 37 and B. Reitz, ‘Nature’s helping hand: cooperation between builder and nature as a rhetorical strategy in Vitruvius, Statius and Pliny the Younger’, in J. Klooster and J. Heirman (edd.), *The Ideologies of Lived Space in Literary Texts, Ancient and Modern* (Ghent, 2013), 125–40, at 130. Pace Newlands (n. 1), 119–53, 305–65, who argues that nature is tamed but magically cooperates with human needs. Following Newlands is M.C.J. Putnam, ‘Statius *Silvae* 1.3: a stream and two villas’, *ICS* 44 (2019), 66–100, at 75.

<sup>20</sup> D. Wray, ‘Wood: Statius’ *Silvae* and the poetics of genius’, *Arethusa* 40 (2007), 127–43, at 138 recognizes that Statius stresses ‘collaboration [rather] than a contest’. Similarly, Spencer (n. 2), 105 and Reitz (n. 19), 130.

<sup>21</sup> Such combative language is used in 2.2.52–62; 3.1.117–38; 4.3.40–94, 124–38. For this theme, see Rosati (n. 14), 123–4. Outside the *Silvae*, nature is *uictrix* in Hor. *Epist.* 1.10.24–5, for which see C.E. Newlands, ‘Horace and Statius at Tibur: an interpretation of *Silvae* 1.3’, *ICS* 13 (1988), 95–111.

<sup>22</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 145 notes that this competition is not adversarial. For the Latin, I use the OCT edition by E. Courtney (ed.), *P. Papini Stati Silvae* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 132. H. Cancik, ‘Tibur Vopisci. Statius, *Silvae* I 3: villa tiburtina Manili Vopisci’, *Boreas: Münstersche Beiträge zur Archäologie* 1 (1978), 116–34, at 123–4 and Newlands (n. 21), 99 posit that the Anio is actually a canal or artificial channel.

reaffirms the closeness between the natural and the artificial. They are so close that they are considered to be a unity (1.3.24–5 *tectum mitissimus amnis | diuidit*).<sup>24</sup>

This closeness suggests that nature is peaceful of its own accord, instead of acting out of consideration of Vopiscus or being controlled by him.<sup>25</sup> The Anio (1.3.21–3)

... tumidam rabiem saxosaque ponit  
murmura, ceu placidi ueritus turbare Vopisci  
Pieriosque dies ...

In the context of the harmony just described, we are encouraged to read *ueritus* as reverential respect rather than fear.<sup>26</sup> By *ceu*, Statius conveys only an impression that the river has quietened down just for Vopiscus. Translating the lines ‘as though it respectfully cowed from disturbing the Pierian days of restful Vopiscus’ does not give the sense that the river is ‘obedient to Vopiscus’ needs’.<sup>27</sup> Later on, when we read that the river is connected to the bathhouse boiler (1.3.45 *uaporiferis iunctus fornacibus amnis*), there is no need to read *iunctus* as yoked ‘like a servant’.<sup>28</sup> Even though the heat of the fire and the chilly banks are starkly juxtaposed (1.3.44 *impositum ripis algentibus ignem*),<sup>29</sup> with *impositum* suggesting an intrusion upon the natural landscape, the river was not adversely affected by its connection to the boiler. Rather, the very next line, in which the river laughs at the panting nymphs, indicates that this is a harmonious intrusion. The river is receptive, not disgruntled or subservient. In short, in no place does the text urge us to read that Vopiscus tamed or subjugated the river Anio.

Second, in the poem, sunlight (the natural) and reflective tiles (the manmade) work together to illuminate Vopiscus’ lustrous mosaic floor (1.3.53–6):

... nam splendor ab alto  
defluus et nitidum referentes aera testae  
monstrauere solum, uarias ubi picta per artes  
gaudet humus superatque nouis asarota figuris.

In this passage, the sun’s radiance prefigures the scene in the baths of Claudius Etruscus (1.5.45–6 *multus ubique dies, radiis ubi culmina totis | perforat atque alio sol improbus uritur aestu*). Here, however, Statius focusses on the precedence of the

<sup>24</sup> Courtney’s *tectum* is controversial. MS M transmits *nec te mitissimus amnis*. As discussed by Håkanson (n. 19), 38–9 and by E. Courtney, ‘Further remarks on the *Silvae* of Statius’, *BICS* 18 (1971), 95–7, *nec te* appears unsatisfactory because a personal object for *diuidit* is not expected, *te* cannot refer to the villa, and the second-person pronoun jars with the third-person *Vopisci* (22). However, if *nec te [Vopisce]* is not corrupt, the combination of villa, villa owner and the river in this single line encapsulates the harmony between the three for which I argue.

<sup>25</sup> Pace Newlands (n. 21), 100 and Newlands (n. 1), 145–6 that ‘nature [is put] strictly into the service of Vopiscus’. Similarly, B. Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 124.

<sup>26</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 140 instead reads fear.

<sup>27</sup> As Newlands (n. 1), 140, who continues as follows: ‘the servitude of nature in a sense substitutes for and occludes the system of slavery that underpinned the villa’s economy’.

<sup>28</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 134–5, whereas Putnam (n. 19) translates simply as ‘joined’, which works well. Only at 2.2.58 is the image of the yoke employed in relation to nature: *nunc cerne iugum discentia saxa*.

<sup>29</sup> Statius speaks of how chilly the Anio is elsewhere too in the *Siluae* (4.4.17 *Tiburis hi lucos Anienaque frigora captant*).

natural light as the source of illumination.<sup>30</sup> The material mimics the natural by reflecting it, and this recalls the earlier reflection of the foliage by the river (1.3.18–19 *fallax responsat imago | frondibus*). If we consider these two scenes of reflection together, the tiles appear to lose their materiality and become nothing but the sunlight they reflect. Furthermore, we see the ground rejoicing through the varied arts on display (1.3.56 *gaudet humus nouis figuris*). It does so because the combined appearance of the natural and the material surpasses even the famed ‘unswept pavement’ recorded by Pliny the Elder (*HN* 36.184).<sup>31</sup> Given this harmony, we should not read the ground’s rejoicing as a grateful response to a civilizing benefactor,<sup>32</sup> since this scene is very much unlike that in *Siluae* 2.2, where nature submits to, and even celebrates, its alteration by Pollius (2.2.57–8 [*possessorem*] *formantem rupes expugnantemque secuta | gaudet humus*). Two very different things are happening. In this poem, the harmony between both the river and the villas and between the sunlight and the tiles shows that the poem challenges the first commonly held view about mankind’s relationship with nature—namely, that man lords it over the landscape.

Similarly, this poem does not support the commonly asserted notion of the domineering gaze by the *dominus*. In the villa of Pollius Felix, this dominance is clear, as Statius describes the vistas from the rooms with particularly possessive language (2.273–5):

... sua cuique uoluptas  
atque omni proprium thalamo mare, transque iacentem  
Nerea diuersis seruit sua terra fenestris.

The use of *sua*, *proprium* and *seruit sua terra* makes it clear that it is the villa and the villa owner who are in ownership and control. On the other hand, when Statius describes the views from the *aula* of Vopiscus’ villa (1.3.39–42), this kind of language is absent:<sup>33</sup>

... te, quae uada fluminis infra  
cernis, an ad siluas quae respicis, aula, tacentes,  
qua tibi tuta quies offensaque turbine nullo  
nox silet et pigros mutantia murmura somnos?

In these lines, the villa seems to become transparent,<sup>34</sup> since its architectural details are, for the moment, elided in favour of the vistas it offers. We are in an open courtyard, seeing not so much the house but what it looks onto. The rockless river below (1.3.39 *infra*) balances the denser woods behind (1.3.40 *respicis*),<sup>35</sup> just as the calmness of the

<sup>30</sup> N.K. Zeiner, *Nothing Ordinary Here: Statius as Creator of Distinction in the Silvae* (New York and London, 2005), 91 rightly notes that the floor’s ‘visual impact was created by the sun’s rays’.

<sup>31</sup> Pliny the Elder speaks of an unknown Sosus, who at Pergamus laid a mosaic known as the *asarotos oecos* which featured representations of remnants of a dinner that would usually have been swept away and cleaned up.

<sup>32</sup> As Newlands (n. 1), 133.

<sup>33</sup> See Zeiner (n. 30), 79–81 on the value of the *prospectus*, the view from within a villa.

<sup>34</sup> A phrase from B. Bergmann, ‘Painted perspectives of a villa visit: landscape in Statius and metaphor’, in E.K. Gazda (ed.), *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa and Insula* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 49–70, at 57. This is not to suggest that Vopiscus intended to hide his villa by design, but rather that nature takes centre stage as Statius admires the views. By contrast, in 2.2.275 we are actively encouraged to imagine how the vistas are literally framed and figuratively controlled by the architecture (*diuersis seruit sua terra fenestris*).

<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Pollius Felix’s villa in *Siluae* 2.2 is explicitly *celsa* (3). This recalls Lucr. 2.1–2 (see Seo [n. 14], 61), the first words of which are found as graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in

former already described (1.3.20–3) is matched with the quiet atmosphere of the latter (1.3.40 *tacentes*). There is no sense that the trees have been ‘made silent and acquiescent’;<sup>36</sup> they simply are silent. Again, nature appears to act on its own accord. The woods and night itself are peaceful just as the Anio is freely at rest.

Moreover, Tibur’s natural beauty explains why we hear nothing certain about the estate’s landscaped gardens.<sup>37</sup> There is no terraforming as with the villa of Pollius Felix (2.2.52–62) or with the *uia Domitiana* (4.3.50–60). Statius does not suggest that the tall woods (1.3.17–18 *memora alta citatis | incubuere uadis*) were planted for naturalistic effect, as in Pollius’ estate (2.2.55–6 *ubi nunc memora ardua cernis | hic nec terra fuit*). This limited detail suggests rather that Vopiscus tried to preserve the pre-existing beauty of the natural landscape (1.3.15–16 *quae forma beatis | ante manus artemque locis*). Where Ovid speaks of nature’s imitation of art (*Met.* 3.158–9 *simulauerat artem... | natura*) and hence of the ambiguity between the natural and the artificial,<sup>38</sup> Statius instead stresses the complementarity between manmade and natural beauty, and the compounding effect they collectively produce. First came Nature’s own lavishing (1.3.16–17 *non largius quam indulsit Natura sibi*), following which came man’s handiwork and art (1.3.15–16 *ante manus artemque*), all of which produced the many marvels that Statius beheld (1.3.14 *quam lassos per tot miracula uisus*). Vopiscus did not so much replace but enhance the natural beauty that was long present.

Contrary to the three commonly held views of nature’s subjugation, the domineering gaze of the *dominus*, and the heavily landscaped gardens, in this poem it is the villa’s architecture which is accommodated and integrated with the best possible natural beauty. The Anio obviously preceded the buildings,<sup>39</sup> and, unlike the rivers in the way of the *uia Domitiana*, the Anio is neither servile (as in 4.3.67–94) or diverted (4.3.54–5 *hi... | longe fluuios agunt minores*).<sup>40</sup> As we saw earlier, the buildings do not transgress the river’s flow. The limited human intervention in the natural landscape is confirmed by Statius’ description of the *uenerabile ... | lucorum senium* (1.3.38–9).<sup>41</sup> Their age indicates that they too predated the villa, and that they were left undisturbed by men. The clearest example that human intervention was generally limited is the tree at the villa’s heart (1.3.59–61).<sup>42</sup>

Pompeii, which faces the sea; see R.R. Benefiel, ‘Dialogues of ancient graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii’, *AJA* 114 (2010), 59–101.

<sup>36</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 135.

<sup>37</sup> Newlands (n. 1), 132. Hartswick (n. 11), 77 states that ‘Manilius’ villa must have included extravagant gardens, but Statius draws our attention not to these planted, formal gardens.’

<sup>38</sup> S.E. Hinds, ‘Landscape with figures: aesthetics of place in the *Metamorphoses* and its tradition’, in P. Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge, 2002), 122–49, at 135–6. See also K. Volk, *Ovid* (Chichester, 2010), 71, who notes that ‘culture improves upon nature’ in *Ov. Medic.* 1–50 and *Ars am.* 3.101–28. Such a framing suggests nature’s inferiority, but there is no like suggestion in *Siluae* 1.3.

<sup>39</sup> As recognized by F. Vollmer, *P. Papinii Statii Silvarum libri* (Leipzig, 1971<sup>2</sup> [1898]), 265.

<sup>40</sup> For the control of water in other contexts, see Purcell (n. 8), 199–209 and I. Östenberg, ‘Defeated by the forest, the pass, the wind: nature as an enemy of Rome’, in J.H. Clark and B. Turner (edd.), *Brill’s Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Leiden, 2018), 240–61, at 257.

<sup>41</sup> Ancient trees also appear in 1.2.154–5 *excludunt radios siluis demissa uetustis | frigora*, a connection missed by Newlands (n. 1), 99–100.

<sup>42</sup> In *Siluae* 2.3, a plane tree takes centre stage. On trees’ general significance, see Hartswick (n. 11), 85–6.



quid te, quae mediis seruata penatibus arbor  
 tecta per et postes liquidas emergis in auras,  
 quo non sub domino saeuas passura bipennes?

The preservation of the tree (1.3.59 *seruata*) hints that the villa architecture was actually dictated by this feature. Its growth is additionally uncontrolled and uncontrollable by man, since it rises through the doorways and past the roof into the open air. That it was not cut down is better understood as the result of the villa's enhancement by it, rather than as the result of Vopiscus' benevolence.

Granted, there are a couple of architectural features that intrude upon the natural setting. As mentioned earlier, the fire heating the baths was imposed—albeit harmoniously—upon the chilly banks (1.3.44 *impositum ripis argentibus ignem*). In addition, the *aqua Marcia* cut across the river's flow (1.3.66 *per obliquum penitus quae laberis amnem*). However, effort was made to limit the visibility of such an intrusion, for the pipe was *penitus*, hidden from sight. This detail confirms that care was taken to ensure that artifice, where necessary to provide modern comforts, was not obtrusive. There is also no negative connotation about the quality of the water flowing through the pipe. This contrasts with Horace, where water passing through lead pipes comes with the sense of unhealthy artificiality (*Epist.* 1.10.20–1).<sup>43</sup> Instead, in Vopiscus' villa, there is a delicate interplay between the manmade and the natural, where neither takes anything away from the quality of the other.

The river, the woods and the central tree show how the villa architecture was shaped by, and around, the natural landscape. But the harmony between architecture and nature as well as the temporal precedence of the latter extend to Vopiscus himself.<sup>44</sup> Scholars accept that the villa's virtues are identified with those of its owner.<sup>45</sup> This seems to be true only in as much as we accept the reverse. This is because Vopiscus' celebrated virtues are found in nature first. His 'song-filled slumbers' (1.3.23 *habentes carmina somnos*) and his *fecunda quies* (1.3.91) are enabled by the eternal rest (1.3.29 *aeterna quies*) of the landscape; his serene brow (1.3.91–2 *serena | fronte*) mirrors the peacefulness of nature, and Vopiscus steers the 'middle course between *uirtus* and *uoluptas*'<sup>46</sup> at the very place where the river rests in midstream tranquillity (1.3.20–1 *infraque superque | spumeus*).<sup>47</sup> It seems then that Vopiscus chose that particular spot for his villa because it was a *locus amoenus* by nature's own doing (as discussed above with regard to 1.3.15–17), and not that the nature of the place became quiescent because he chose the location. Vopiscus' choice of location was, furthermore, consistent with his Horatian way of life. Cucchiarelli observes how Vopiscus' literary interests—

<sup>43</sup> A. Cucchiarelli, 'Come Orazio a Tivoli, ma senza pensieri (Stazio, *Silv.* I 3)', *Aevum Antiquum* 18 (2018), 159–203, at 170.

<sup>44</sup> A. Hardie, *Stattus and the Silvae: Poets, Patrons and Epideixis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Liverpool, 1983), 177 recognizes through an Epicurean lens that 'Vopiscus must accommodate the house and its artifices to the splendour of its natural environment'.

<sup>45</sup> S.T. Newmyer, *The Silvae of Statius: Structure and Theme* (Leiden, 1979), 113; Newlands (n. 21), 97; Zeiner (n. 30), 79; A.R. Marshall, 'Statius and the veteres: *Silvae* 1.3 and the Homeric house of Alcinous', *Scholium* 18 (2009), 78–88, at 84–8; Seo (n. 14), 61; Rosati (n. 14), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Marshall (n. 45), 88. On the contrary, nature's imitation is explicit in 2.2.26–9. P.R. Hardie, 'Statius' Ovidian poetics and the tree of Atedius Melior', in R.R. Nauta, H.-J. van Dam and J.J.L. Smolenaars (edd.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden, 2006), 207–21, at 214 explores equipose in *Silvae* 2.3, where there is a 'careful balance of opposites'.

<sup>47</sup> Newlands (n. 21), 108–9 argues that the silence is 'less peaceful than deadening'. However, the text does not suggest that Vopiscus' ability to rest impinges on his literary productivity (1.3.90–104).

lyric, satire and epistles—are precisely those which Horace cultivated.<sup>48</sup> And just as Horace drew poetic inspiration from the countryside,<sup>49</sup> so too does Vopiscus. This, taken together with the villa owner's respect for nature as indicated by his non-subjugation of nature and by the harmony between the villa and the landscape, reinforces how the harmony between architecture and nature extends to Vopiscus himself.

This raises a question of hierarchy. Does nature's temporal precedence mean that it is in control? Only sometimes, when it imposed certain constraints on the architectural features and enabled Vopiscus' lifestyle. As discussed, the villa architecture takes second place to allow Statius to focus on the vistas of the river and the woods (1.3.39–42), while the central tree dictated the architecture of the heart of the villa (1.3.59–61). In other details, however, human intervention amplifies natural beauty. For example, in the mosaic floor scene described earlier, the ground rejoices because it is *picta* by human artistry (1.3.55–6), even if the sunlight has precedence as the source of illumination. There is, therefore, a seesaw rhythm to Statius' elaboration of the relationship between nature and mankind. None of this takes the poem's encomiastic function away, since the poet focusses on how, during his visit, nature, architecture and the villa proprietor are all in harmony. Indeed, the tempered theme of harmony fits well with the equally tempered presentation of Vopiscus' *luxuque carentes | deliciae* (1.3.92–3) and of his *docta otia*.<sup>50</sup>

The relationship between mankind and nature depicted by Statius in this poem helps us understand how it plays out in the rest of the *Siluae*. We have already seen how it differs from the depiction of Pollius Felix's villa in *Siluae* 2.2 and the *uia Domitiana* in *Siluae* 4.3. It is only from the former onwards, including in *Siluae* 3.1, that the domination of nature is brought to the fore. This trope culminates in the Sibyl's proclamation that Domitian is *natura melior potentiorque* (4.3.135). On the other hand, throughout Book 1 there is a more harmonious relationship between mankind and nature. It is true that in *Siluae* 1.1 the ground pants under the weight of Domitian's *genius* (1.1.56–8), whereas in our poem it is nature's *ingenium* at the fore (1.3.15 *ingenium quam mite solo*).<sup>51</sup> But even in the former we do not witness full-blown subjugation of nature, just significant strain. In other poems we find echoes of the harmony we found in Vopiscus' villa. For example, in Stella's townhouse in *Siluae* 1.2, ancient trees come along with a climate-controlled dwelling (1.2.154–7 *nec seruat Natura uices* [156]), details also found in our poem (1.3.7–8, 1.3.38–9). In both of these poems, the language of domination over nature is absent. And, as mentioned, the sunlight illuminating the mosaic floor (1.3.53–6) mirrors the scene in Etruscus' bath (1.5.45–6). This means that we should not be reading the poems of Book 1 with conventional assumptions about the relationship between mankind and nature: nature appears to be not oppressed, a downward gaze is not emphasized, and gardens are not utilized as opportunities for subjugation.

<sup>48</sup> Cucchiarelli (n. 43), 160.

<sup>49</sup> For example Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.65–86; *Carm.* 1.1.29–32, 2.19.1–4, 3.4.21–4, 3.25.1–8. See S.J. Harrison, 'Town and country', in S.J. Harrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Horace* (Cambridge, 2007), 235–47, at 244–5.

<sup>50</sup> Edwards (n. 1), 137–72 provides a long-term perspective on the moral discourse. On Flavian society in particular, see Myers (n. 3); Myers (n. 15), 108–11; Spencer (n. 2), 111–13; Newlands (n. 15), 68–9. On wealth, see Hardie (n. 44), 174–6; B. Gibson, 'Negative stereotypes of wealth in the works of Statius', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden, 2015), 123–38, at 128–31; Seo (n. 14) on Philodemus' pro-wealth Epicureanism.

<sup>51</sup> Wray (n. 20), 139 notes that here *ingenium* as 'native wit takes the lead over artistic craft'.



We find in our poem a paradigm different from the orthodox view. We have a villa, its architecture and its owner mirroring, integrating with and complementing the outstanding natural beauty of the place. Statius uses key natural features, such as the river Anio, the sunlight, the woods and the central tree to craft a harmonious relationship between the natural and the manmade. At times, nature takes centre stage, while at others it is the brilliance of the architecture that shines; artificial intrusions upon the landscape, where they are necessary, for example the *aqua Marcia*, are hidden from view. And Statius goes further to also suggest that Vopiscus' virtues match and harmonize with the qualities of the natural environment. Much like the unity of opposites in Vopiscus' character, where rest is productive and serious virtue is matched with calm brow (1.3.91–2 *hic premitur fecunda quies uirtusque serena | fronte grauis*), there is a sense of harmonious intrusion regarding the artificial and the natural. The villa is no small presence in the landscape, yet it occasionally cedes to and always complements nature's first move. It is this harmonious intrusion that encapsulates the relationship between mankind and nature in Statius' *Siluae* 1.3.

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