

Politics of Memory Creation and Erasure During and
After the Reign of Domitian

by

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Class of 2014

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Introduction

[The] notion of memory as a record or store is so familiar, so congenial, to us that we take it for granted and do not realize at first how problematic it is. And yet all of us have had the opposite experience, of “normal” memories, everyday memories, being anything but fixed—slipping and changing, becoming modified, whenever we think of them. No two witnesses ever tell the same story, and no story, no memory, ever remains the same. A story is repeated, gets changed with every repetition.”¹

In speaking of memory from the point of view of a neuroscientist who recounts manifestations of strange neuropsychological conditions, Oliver Sacks may at first not seem connected to a study of the politics of memory in Ancient Rome. However, Sacks describes a tendency to regard memory of a person or time period as fixed, when in reality perceptions and memories change constantly with each recollection. So why does remembrance of historical events or figures often remain the same for centuries? Although modern historical studies have undergone several waves of newfound methodology, the emperor Domitian and his policies have unfortunately languished for a long time as chronic victims

¹ Sacks (1995): 172.

of an era of scholarship that quickly condemned Domitian based on historical accounts written during the reigns of anti-Domitianic emperors. Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian drew political support from their opposition to an image of Domitian that they themselves helped to create and promote as a symbol of everything problematic and negative about the old ways of governing. The impact of that ongoing *damnatio memoriae* can still be felt strongly today in academia, as well as in Western classrooms, where grade school teachers of Latin and Roman history often talk about Domitian, if they address him at all, in straightforward and harsh terms: he was the son of Vespasian and the brother of Titus; he ruled from 81 to 96 C.E.; and he was an insane tyrant who silenced or executed those who opposed him. He also supposedly spent his first month in imperial office locked away alone in a room, trying to catch flies with his hands or a sharpened pen, depending on the version of the story.² Only two extended biographies of Domitian exist,³ *Essai sur le*

² E.g. Suet. *Dom.*3.1. *Inter initia principatus cotidie secretum sibi horarum sumere solebat nec quicquam amplius quam muscas captare ac stilo praeacuto configere, ut cuidam interroganti, essetne quis intus cum Caesare, non absurde responsum sit a Vibio Crispo, ne muscam quidem.* (During the first part of his principate, (Domitian) was accustomed to spending hours daily cloistered by himself with nothing more than catching flies and sticking them to a sharpened *stilus*).

³ These are the two full biographies; of course, other treatments that focus specifically on Domitian's reign exist. It's also important to acknowledge Southern (1997). Southern claims to offer a psychological profile of Domitian. In a very short treatment (176 pages,) Southern parses through the negative backlash against Domitian after his death and tries to pinpoint the exact moments that shaped his character. As a psychological profile, it doesn't fully explore Domitian's personality

règne de l'empereur Domitien by Stéphane Gsell, and *The Emperor Domitian* by Brian Jones, and they were written more than a century apart. Gsell, writing in the 1890s, largely echoes the negative perceptions of Domitian expressed by ancient authors such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio, who all criticized Domitian in their accounts of his reign. Brian Jones, writing in the 1990s in an effort to rehabilitate Domitian as a political figure, examines different sociopolitical aspects of the Domitianic period and focuses particular attention on the role of Domitian's *amici* and on countering the argument that Domitian lacked key support from his subjects. Unfortunately, Jones defends the emperor and his policies with such gusto that he begins to lose his claim to objectivity; he almost pushes the treatment of Domitian's memory to the opposite end of the spectrum in his praise for Domitian's policies and his personality. Neither Gsell nor Jones addresses the process of remembrance or the politics of memory that contributed so much to people's perceptions of Domitian during his lifetime and after his death. In the lengthy time during which Domitian has been considered in only straightforward terms, there has been no full investigation of the role that

using all the available techniques psychology has to offer, and as an historical study, it doesn't delve in-depth into issues such as family history or indeed the full scope of political issues during his rise to power, and it certainly does not address the issue of politics of remembrance. Ultimately, Southern simply concludes that Domitian was a

politics and social realities of the time played in crafting contemporary Romans' remembrance of Domitian, and it is a study that deserves scholarly attention.

Sometimes peoples' perceptions of an event may take a different form within a shared communal context. Remembering together constitutes a key form of group identity, and even if an individual's personal recollection of events may not reflect the group narrative, the group narrative may become part of the "truth" or the essence of their perception of the overall occurrence. This process is referred to as collective memory. It is important to acknowledge recent scholarship regarding collective memory and the intersectionality of individual memory and collective memory. Susan E. Alcock defines collective memory as "the shared remembrances of group experience."⁴ Aleida Assman argues that the two categories individual and collective memory do not sufficiently account for the interaction between types of memory, or for the fact that people may count as personal memories remembrances that they as individuals have not experienced themselves. She proposes four categories: individual memory, social memory,

"Tragic Tyrant" who wasn't as bad as some people claimed, but was certainly bad enough to merit condemnation on some level.

⁴ Alcock (2002): v.

cultural memory, and political memory.⁵ This study will focus on social, cultural and political forms of memory. Assman distinguishes between individual and social memory and political and cultural memory:

Individual and social memory is embodied; both formats are grounded in lived experience; they cling to and abide with human beings and their embodied interaction. Political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are mediated; both are founded on the more durable carriers of external symbols and material representations; they rely not only on libraries, museums, and monuments, but also on various modes of education and repeated occasions for collective participation. While social forms of memory are *intergenerational*, political and cultural forms of memory are designed as *transgenerational*.⁶

This study will examine the process and impact of that mediation of remembrance of Domitian, as well as the intergenerational and transgenerational transferences of memories and perceptions regarding Domitian's reign both during and after his lifetime.

The only recent scholarship that centers on the role of memory in the politics of Ancient Rome consists of a broad survey of the role of condemnation of memory, particularly through *damnatio memoriae*, during the reign of several emperors. In *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, Harriet Flower devotes only a brief portion of her discussion to each emperor, including a very brief

⁵ Assman (2001): 211.

discussion of Domitian. Because of the broad scope of her work, Flower's discussion of Domitian centers primarily on enforcement of *damnatio memoriae* and does not delve deeply into other sociopolitical realities of the time. Nevertheless, her treatment of the reign of Domitian and posthumous erasure of his memory offers critical insight into the politics of transmission of power and the programmatic manipulation of memory in order to affect reception of newly empowered regimes. Flower claims, "...the decline and fall of the Republic ran parallel to the rise of punitive sanctions against the memory of Roman citizens and the use of past history for partisan purposes".⁷ The notion of using past history for partisan purposes helps inform a discussion of Roman authors such as Tacitus who invoke Domitian's memory as an example of corruption and bad policy, and who seek to reshape Domitian's memory to influence people's perceptions of his regime.

In particular, Flower draws a strong connection between the condemnation of Nero and the condemnation of Domitian⁸; she argues persuasively that the Flavian dynasty under Vespasian profited greatly from negative propaganda surrounding Nero and his policies, just as

⁶ Assman's emphasis. Assman (2001): 215.

⁷ Flower (2006): xxi.

⁸ Flower (2006): 234. For an in-depth discussion of the disgrace of Nero during and after his reign, see Flower (2006): 197-232.

Domitian's infamy benefitted the subsequent reigns of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian. . Scholars have done little to explore the issue of memory of Domitian's reign and the way that individual and collective memory of that time period was shaped during his lifetime and reshaped after his death. Remembrance becomes political when shaped by political agents, and scholars have yet to explore in depth the issue of the politics of memory during and after Domitian's reign and fully investigate its implications for modern understanding of the Domitianic period and its aftermath, as well as scholars' approach to the study of memory itself.

During his reign, Domitian instituted several major changes as part of his domestic policy. He launched campaigns to enforce morality-based laws against crimes such as adultery, stabilize the price of grain, crack down on corruption in the Roman provinces, and complete numerous building projects; of the ancient sources that provide accounts of his reign, even those who later criticized him noted that he was successful in these ventures. When several conspirators assassinated Domitian in 96 C.E., they represented a small but powerful minority who comprised elite members of Roman society. Where others saw civic improvements and reduction of urban blight, many aristocratic families saw a reign of terror during which several powerful figures perished, critics faced censorship or death, and the emperor completely eradicated the authority of the

Senate and his political opponents. These people conducted one of the most thorough and systematic attempts to erase a single person's memory up until that time. The anti-Domitianic fervor lasted as a trend for decades after Domitian's death, allowing four different emperors to capitalize on the hatred and define themselves in contrast to a human embodiment of every single policy, idea, or character flaw that they opposed. Much later, during the fourth and fifth centuries, Domitian and the other so-called bad emperors served as a prime example of corruption and sin for the steadily growing Christian leadership seeking to define their own image in contrast to earlier Roman leaders.

The aftermath of Domitian's assassination and the power of the negative portrait of Domitian has proved so influential that only a few scholars throughout modern times have sought in any way to rehabilitate his memory.⁹ Luckily for scholars aiming to study the Domitianic period,

⁹ Some scholars credit Ronald Syme with the first attempt to rehabilitate Domitian's memory: in "The Imperial Finances under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan," Syme argued that scholars had relied too heavily on ancient authors writing with clear bias shortly after Domitian's death in order to assess the state of the imperial treasury under Domitian (Syme (1930)). I would argue that although Syme initiated an extensive, ongoing debate over Domitian's effect on Rome's economy and the economic policies of his immediate successors, Syme did not embark upon a full-scale revision of the account of Domitian's life, as Brian Jones did in *The Emperor Domitian* (1992). In his treatment of Domitian's policy approach toward the provinces and Domitian's reception by the Senate, H.W. Pleket explicitly advocates for a more "balanced" view of Domitian; he argues that the Senate's negative reaction to Domitian has unfairly colored so much of modern scholars' perceptions of Domitian's character (Pleket (1961): 297). However, like Syme, Pleket only considers a small aspect of Domitian's reign.

Domitian's detractors did not completely succeed in erasing all remnants of Domitian's reign, and late emperors even claimed some of his monuments and policies as their own, thus preserving them in part for posterity to later examine.

During Domitian's lifetime, he sought to create a distinct image of himself and control the ways in which others perceived him. To that end, literature of the Domitianic period reflects Domitian's public imperial message about his reign, as well as the political considerations authors had to make when considering imperial themes in their work. In the *Silvae*, which have long lacked nuanced critical and scholarly attention, Publius Papinius Statius sets out to shape and communicate a very specific image of the emperor Domitian, one that in celebrating Domitian's glory carves a place for Statius in the realm of literary immortality. Statius gambles on the future of Domitian's reputation, and because he stakes his own literary reputation on the successful communication of a particular image of the emperor, Statius reveals quite a bit about the politics of shaping memory in literature. Statius' treatment of Domitian serves several important purposes: it flatters Domitian and highlights the positive aspects of his character; it depicts the life of an emperor for those who may not be familiar with him; and it establishes a firm link between Domitian and Statius, the self-proclaimed poet of the

Flavian age. In an examination of Statius' treatment of imperial themes in the *Silvae*, it becomes clear that Statius has positioned himself very strategically and is playing politics using the idea of imperial imagery and praise poetry. Statius' treatment of Domitian and imperial themes in the *Silvae*, far from repeating mere flattery, actually encourage his readers to think about the ways that Domitian is being remembered and the ways that Domitian controls his public persona.

Although Statius used his poems in the *Silvae* in part to aid Domitian in his task to glorify the Domitianic period, Statius also managed to cast a critical eye on some of Domitian's policies and the way in which he cultivated his public persona. As a writer living and working during the Domitianic period, Statius invested in the public image of the emperor for the sake of his own reputation. He also found a way to draw attention to the fiction and performativity in his own work commemorating Domitian's life. An examination of the politics of memory in the *Silvae* and in particular the ways in which Statius mediates between Domitian and Statius' readership yields a complex portrait of an emperor who became incredibly powerful and incredibly vulnerable in his quest to control public perception of his public image. Statius also offers insight into certain aristocratic citizens' perceptions of Domitian as they experienced his reign. When he addresses the

individual circumstances of his patron-friends in his poetry, Statius also reveals that way that certain laws and policies enacted by Domitian affected the lives of some elite citizens, helping to explain in part the negative perceptions that they formed regarding Domitian and his reign. Domitian functions as both patron and performer, while Statius' readers become audience members and witnesses to the process of memorialization itself. Statius acts as mediator and bridges the gap between Domitian and his subjects, all while inviting them to cast a critical gaze on Domitian and his policies, and even Statius' own efforts to memorialize the emperor in a certain way. Statius' *Silvae* thus not only help to illuminate the ways in which Domitian and his supporters sought to promote his public image, but also the ways in which remembrance and memorialization constitute fictive, performative actions, with dramatic potential to reshape people's individuals and collective memories of Domitian and his reign.

Domitian's assassination and the subsequent succession of Nerva offered Domitian's detractors a unique opportunity to condemn Domitian's memory and encourage approval for the new regime, a regime that would potentially restore the old elite's former authority. Their mission to sway the Roman people faced some significant hurdles: according to several historical sources, the emperor generally enjoyed

approval among soldiers and the poorer members of Roman society, many of whom benefitted from Domitian's economic, social, and political policies. In order to counteract people's impressions, Domitian's detractors had to reconstitute him in people's memories so as to make him seem like a cruel tyrant whose policies had proved disastrous for Rome.

In 98 C.E., Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus, an upper-class former statesman who highly disapproved of Domitian, wrote *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*, an account of the life and death of his father-in-law, Agricola, a well-known military leader and former governor of Britannia. In his work, Tacitus recounted Agricola's interactions with the late Emperor Domitian, especially during the last years of Agricola's life, when a controversy arose over that fact that he did not take a post as governor of Asia or Africa, despite being worthy of such a post. In his *Historiae*, an anecdotal account of the imperial history of Rome, Tacitus acknowledges that he actually benefitted from the reigns of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian.

I will not deny, my reputation was begun under Vespasian, augmented by Titus, carried forward a long way by Domitian: but let men who have expressed incorruptible faith speak all without love or hatred. Whereby I have set aside for my old age, should my life flourish, the principate of divine Nerva and the reign of Trajan, matter more fruitful and free from care, concerning a rare time in which it is permitted to feel what you wish and say what you feel.¹⁰

¹⁰ This translation is my own. Tac. Hist. 1.1. *Dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim: sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est. quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiolem securiolemque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.*

Tacitus makes this full disclosure an exercise in contradictions, acknowledging his potential bias while claiming impartiality, and potentially undercutting his claims regarding Domitian's cruelty and emphasizing that his future account of the reigns of Nerva and Trajan as a study in contrast to those dark years under Domitian. In the *Agricola*, Tacitus likewise depicts a study in contrast between Domitian, who represents tyranny, oppression, and vice, and Agricola, who represents modesty, heroism, and virtue.

Sociopolitical circumstances greatly shaped Tacitus' depictions of Agricola and Domitian. The *Agricola* was written two years after the emperor Domitian was assassinated in 96 C.E., and five years after Agricola himself died in 93 C.E. With the memory of both Domitian and Agricola still fresh, Tacitus' task to persuade his readers to accept his account might have potentially conflicted with readers' own memories of the events that Tacitus depicts in his narrative. With that in mind, Tacitus reconstructs events in such a way as to deny the persuasive mission of his account, giving readers the freedom to make up their own minds while encouraging them to remember Domitian's reign in a very specific light. Through narrative *exempla* of virtue and vice, Tacitus makes remembrance part of an educational lesson on morality, one in which the

fate of future generations lies on his readers' ability to correctly remember and account for the lessons of the past so that they do not make the same mistakes in the present or in the future. For Tacitus, remembrance becomes a call to action as well as a source of communal accountability. He indicts the entire Roman citizenry, himself included, for their failure to respond appropriately to Domitian when they had the chance, and he seeks to persuade his readers that only through condemnation of Domitian's memory and reversal of his policies can they truly rectify the mistake of staying silent during his reign.

Just as Tacitus placed the fate of Domitian's memory in the hands of his readers, the realm of art and architecture likewise took on the task of shaping Domitian's image and then destroying and reshaping it after his death. During his reign from 81 to 96 C.E., Domitian restored, completed, or built from scratch fifty projects, including buildings and monuments, as well as numerous sculptures and coins. He also put his own stamp on the Flavian style of art, and although the decree against his memory caused the destruction of many images, inscriptions, and monuments, enough material evidence survives to build a picture of Domitianic art and architecture and investigate the ways in which Domitian carved an image for himself in an effort to control remembrance of him during his own lifetime. Domitian, as a young man

newly arrived in office, evoked imagery and iconography from past emperors to link his reign to their legacy. Through his projects, he sought to make a place for himself as the heir to the successful reigns of his father and brother, as well as to ally himself with their accomplishments; he also sought to link himself with the character of Augustus and the golden age he represented.

Teaching Others How to Remember:

Tacitus' *Agricola* and Memories of Domitian's Reign

At first glance, *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae* by Cornelius Tacitus appears to consist of a biographical of the life and death of Cnaeus Julius Agricola; however, Tacitus' account also attempts to influence his readers' perceptions of the emperor Domitian's reign. He subtly conveys the way that he believes all Romans ought to remember Domitian, even if their lived experiences have not necessarily reflected the collective memory he creates for the Roman community. Although *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae* focuses in great detail on his father-in-law Agricola's military campaigns, Tacitus begins the work by announcing that he is setting out to depict the time during which Agricola lived, thereby introducing the reader to the era of Domitian's reign. Tacitus wrote his work during a time when memory of Domitian's rule was still fresh in the minds of Romans. Not all Romans shared Tacitus' view that Domitian was a cruel tyrant who instituted bad policies during his reign as emperor. In order to persuade his readers to share his opinion of Domitian, Tacitus draws upon the power of narrative and the social currency of virtue to provoke emotions that spark reshaping of memory. In *De Vita et Moribus Iulii Agricolae*, Tacitus weaves examples of

virtues and vices into his historical account of Agricola's life under Domitian in an attempt to reshape his readers' recollection of Domitian and his policies. Tacitus employs the traditional Roman biographical form to construct three-dimensional portraits of two men who display opposing characters. Through the character of Agricola, who serves as a foil to vice-ridden Domitian, Tacitus aims to show his readers how virtuous behavior can help them overcome and overpower the evil acts of an immoral leader. Tacitus' vignettes depicting brief scenes in the lives of Agricola and Domitian that illustrate the nature of the moral characters; in doing so, Tacitus invites his readers to reimagine events of the most recent past, reshaping their memories of the Domitianic period to reflect those innate virtues and vices that Tacitus' stories depict.

Although Tacitus supposedly leaves room for his readers to arrive at their own conclusions, he intends that the process of self-reflection and reimagining of events will help convince them of the need for condemnation of the harmful policies of Domitian. Ultimately, Tacitus aims to impress upon his readers the sense that a collective trauma occurred during Domitian's reign, and all Romans should therefore collectively remember his reign as a period of strife and mutual hardship. Looking back, any positive memories that readers may have held should be considered misremembrances. Instead, they should reimagine or edit

their remembrance of Domitian's reign to better reflect the collective memory and communal narrative that Tacitus claims all Romans should hold. Looking forward, that experience of mutual hardship should unite all Romans and influence their future decisions as to what sort of leaders and policies they will henceforth support. Tacitus hopes to persuade his readers to remember Domitian and his reign as part of a dark period of history. Tacitus believes that all Romans, himself included, should implicate themselves for their contribution to that dark period in the form of their choice to remain silent rather than speak out against Domitian during his lifetime. Furthermore, Romans should seek to reconcile with and rectify this traumatic period of their past. If they draw the correct lessons from events in the *Agricola*, Tacitus' readers will condemn Domitian's memory and support the new age of peace and prosperity begun by Domitian's imperial successors, an age that represents a return to the more ideal moral principles of Rome's glorious past and as well as a new vision of a better form of government for the future.

Scholars have previously considered the historicity of Tacitus' *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*, as well as the extent to which his work sheds light on the time period in which he writes; most of the discussion centers around the role of narration rather than the role of memory. One of the main issues with the range of scholarship that focuses on Domitian

and Tacitus stems from the fact that there are only a couple of biographies that offer a complete treatment of Domitian's life; sources such as Tacitus and other ancient historians tend to serve as sources for reconstruction of Domitian's life and the historical period during which he reigned. Other treatments that focus on Tacitus himself deal mostly with his literary and historical value as an author. In these accounts, scholars have not developed a comprehensive discussion of the role of memory in the work of Tacitus and in his treatment of Domitian in his writings.

Some scholars have attempted to evaluate the role of fear and oppression in accounts of the reigns of Domitian and other emperors; however, productive contributions to the scholarly conversation in this context do not account for the role of memory and invocation of memory as a political tool. In "On the Ancient Uses of Political Fear and its Modern Implications," Daniel Kapust considers the uses of political fear in Ancient Rome and modern times and isolates those uses to evaluate "fear's enervating role, especially in the writings of Tacitus".¹¹ However, in speaking of the politics of ancient authors such as Tacitus, Kapust draws heavily on the context of modern political thought to frame his discussion, and he does not deal with the role of memory in preserving or

creating a sense of fear or other politicized emotions. In fact, trauma and fear play key roles in shaping communal memory of events; in *Agricola*, Tacitus evokes a sense of community trauma in his narrative in order to persuade his readers that Domitian's reign terrorized Romans and rendered them powerless.¹²

Using Techniques of Fiction to Create Truth

Tacitus applies literary form to historical content in order to reshape memories. The rhetorical devices that Tacitus employs rely on the power of fiction to produce new memories, rather than the power of historical recollection of old memories. Historical narrative blends with fictional elements to recreate a time and space that no longer exist except in memory. In *The History of Make-Believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome*, Holly Haynes argues that scholars need to evaluate Tacitus' work in the context of lived reality and investigate the process of reinvention of

¹¹ Kapust (2008): 355.

¹² In *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews*, Michela Borzaga interviews social workers at a trauma center about the psychological affects of trauma on entire communities. One social worker, Miriam Fredericks, notes the feeling of helplessness that trauma induces in a community; she comments that if traumatic circumstances persist, people then seek to blame someone for their pain (Borzaga et al. (2010): 79). Tacitus blames Domitian, and he wants his Roman readers to blame him, too, for instituting bad policies during his rule of Rome. Part of Tacitus' difficulty in portraying Domitian's rule as a reign of terror lies in the fact that not everyone who experienced it viewed it as traumatic. In order to effectively portray Domitian as a terrorizer of the Roman people, Tacitus has to convince his readers that the emotional truth of the communal experience of terror he describes outweighs the emotional truth of their own individual memories.

history that Tacitus' work necessarily undertakes.¹³ Although Haynes only treats Tacitus' *Historiae*, her argument holds relevance for his biography of Agricola as well. Because Tacitus applies a fictive narrative lens to a previously experienced reality, his task becomes one not only of reconstitution but also of invention. For instance, Tacitus includes speeches that various important actors in his account supposedly gave at certain key points, and he also includes dialogue between people. Tacitus includes these excerpts not as evidence of what was actually said but as evidence of the character of men such as Agricola and Domitian. Tacitus clearly has written these speeches and verbal exchanges himself; he does not extract them from historical record, as no such historical record of those particular speeches exists. In his use of direct dialogue between people and direct quotes from speeches, Tacitus lends a false sense of believability to his account of events. Tacitus treads the line between fiction and history; this speaks to his goal to both invent and reinvent a collective memory of the reign of Domitian.

Narrative, Trauma, and Memory in the *Agricola*

At the beginning of his work, Tacitus speaks to the power of narrative to influence collective memory regarding well-known men and

¹³ Haynes (2003):2. In her introduction to her work, Haynes argues that interpretation of historiography such as Tacitus' *Histories* must combine literary analysis with an

locates himself in a strong tradition of Roman narratives that lends credence to his own historical account. According to Tacitus, the narrative sequence elucidates the deeds and characters of men. In the first sentence of the first chapter, Tacitus locates his work in the trajectory of a long tradition of recording the deeds and characters of renowned men for posterity:

To pass on to posterity the deeds and characters of renowned men, is an ancient custom used habitually, which even the age at the present, however careless of its own ones, did not omit, whenever some great and famous virtue has conquered and superseded vice common to small and large citizenries, ignorance and envy of virtue.¹⁴

Tacitus claims that that tradition is present even in the current age, which is careless in regard to its own sons and harbors ignorance and envy of virtue (*ignorantiam recti et invidiam*). Already, in his first sentence, Tacitus establishes a clear contrast between the customs of the past and the present, customs that authors demonstrate through the recording of the deeds and characters of great men. However, the narrative sequence helps its audience to gain accurate understanding of the nature of a man's moral character, even if the time period during which the author of the

investigation of the “experience of a lived, historical reality” (Haynes 2).

¹⁴ This translation is my own. This translation is my own. Tac. *Ag.* 1.1. *Clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere, antiquitus usitatum, ne nostris quidem temporibus quamquam incuriosa suorum aetas omisit, quotiens magna aliqua ac*

narrative writes may not prize virtue or morality. In the past, Tacitus claims, great deeds and characters existed because of the character of the state, but now they exist *in spite of* the character of the state. Tacitus adds power to his own account by linking it to a long tradition of narratives centered on deeds and character; he grounds his work in a historical trajectory of authorship. Tacitus thus invokes a communal tradition in which narrative serves to memorialize certain versions of events and depictions of people that reflect moral judgment of their characters.

Through a narrative of trauma, Tacitus taps into the powerful sense of community among Romans in order to reshape communal memory of events. He depicts an imagined, presumed collective experience of trauma and a collective memory of events that he now expects readers recognize and identify as their own. In his first chapter, Tacitus declares that his task to record his father-in-law's deeds necessitates that he depict an age that is cruel and disturbed when it comes to virtue.¹⁵ Tacitus does not claim to have had more awareness than any other person about the danger at the time, or to have worked more to combat the reign of terror that the Romans experienced. He can only claim in hindsight to be able to offer an account of what actually occurred. Tacitus will demonstrate the

nobilis virtus vicit ac supergressa est vitium parvis magnisque civitatibus commune, ignorantiam recti et invidiam.

virtues and vices of the age as evidenced in the characters and deeds of two men, and what follows will be an exact reconstruction, to help his fellow Romans to remember the time as he recreates it for them. By framing his reconstruction of events in such terms, Tacitus outlines a programmatic account of the age that appears objective while acknowledging its own subjectivity.

Tacitus invokes imagery of collective trauma and violence to reshape his reader's memories of Domitian's reign. Immediately after his opening remarks about a terrible age, Tacitus launches into a description of Domitian's reign, making it clear that Domitian's reign is the terrible age of which he speaks. Tacitus references the *triumviri capitales*, officials who had the responsibility to carry out book burnings as part of Domitian's alleged censorship of authors of whom he disapproved.

We read that when Thræsea Paetus by Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus by Herennius Senecio were praised, it was a capital matter (i.e. a capital crime,) and in order to be violent against not only the authors themselves but also their books, with the task assigned to the three-man commission (*triumviri capitales*) that monuments (*monumenta*) of the most brilliant of intellectual men were to be burnt in the *comitium* and the forum.¹⁶

¹⁵ This translation is my own. Tac. *Ag.*1.4. ...*tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora.*

¹⁶ This translation is my own, drawing from Benario (2006). Tac. *Ag.*2.1. *Legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thræsea, Herennio Senecioni Priscus Helvidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auctores, sed in libros quoque eorum saevitum, delegato triumviris ministerio ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur.* PICK SOMEONE'S TRANSLATION- e.g. Benario.

In his notes on the passage, Herbert Benario claims that normally the task of book burning fell to the *aediles*, not to the three commissioners tasked with dealing with people condemned to death.¹⁷ Here, these books seem to merit their own special execution of sorts. In her essay in *Constructions of the Classical Body*, “Cicero’s Head,” Amy Richlin explores the political significance of the fact that the *triumviri capitales* oversaw both book burning and executions.¹⁸ She notes that Roman authors often identify men with their ability to speak and their writings, so that book burning constitutes not only a form of censorship but also a form of death, in this case death of memory. Written works could outlast their authors and allow their memory to live on in some form. By burning books, Domitian not only ended the lives of those he condemned but also contributed to erasure of their memory. In speaking of acts of erasure, Tacitus also mentions the names of several well-regarded aristocrats who perished under Domitian, as well as the expulsion of philosophers; he concludes that Domitian’s regime regarded virtues as an affront.¹⁹ According to Tacitus, these incidents constitute concrete examples of Domitian’s cruelty and censorship; they also signify his willingness to

¹⁷ Benario (2006): 26, Note 4.

¹⁸ Richlin (1999): 200.

restrict forms of expression and remembrance during a time that people are now desperate to move beyond and forget.

In his second chapter, Tacitus indicts himself along with other Romans for not condemning Domitian and his policies while the emperor was still alive. Tacitus indicts the community in particular for choosing to remain silent rather than to speak: he claims that the Romans would have no memory of these events, if only it was as easy for them to forget as it is to keep silent.²⁰ However, Tacitus also paints a stark picture of life under Domitian: a period during which many able men perished, and when, out of those who survived, Tacitus writes, “The young aged ahead of their time, and the old were almost put out of existence.”²¹ In just a few sentences, Tacitus conjures up a clear picture of a collective trauma, during which everyone was struck dumb by the sheer force of brutality and the utter fear they experienced. Tacitus carefully chooses not to situate himself above his readers, either in terms of moral integrity or ability to grasp the meaning of events that transpired. This, he claims, was something that all Romans experienced; he uses the inclusive first

¹⁹ See Tac.*Ag.*2.2-3. For a more detailed account of censorship and charges of treason under Domitian, see Rogers (1960): 19-23.

²⁰ This translation is my own. Tac.*Ag.*2.4. *Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.*

person plural for all of the verbs that describe those who lived through the age, and those who now live to read about it in his book. *This was our experience*, he implies; *this is a story of what happened to us*. The inclusion of the entire community in this shared experience makes this memory all the more strong, and Tacitus' persuasive argument all the more powerful.

Memorializing Morality as Part of Teaching Morality

As part of his aim to reshape memory, Tacitus draws heavily upon the social currency of virtue in Rome. In *Emotion, Restraint and Community in Ancient Rome*, Robert Kaster explores the use of virtue language among Roman writers and the social impact of that language upon the reader; although he never examines Tacitus' work, Kaster's exploration nevertheless provides a useful framework for considering Tacitus' rhetorical strategy and in particular his aim to persuade the reader in a social context. Tacitus only uses virtue vocabulary under very specific circumstances; for the most part, he prefers to draw upon the same principles Kaster outlines in order to evoke the sense of a certain virtue rather than naming that virtue explicitly. Tacitus channels those specific social principles surrounding common notions of virtue and vice

²¹ This translation is my own. Tac. *Ag.* 3.2-3. ... *exemptis e media vita tot annis, quibus iuvenes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae aetatis terminos per*

in order to draw a sharp contrast between the characters of Agricola and Domitian. That comparison functions as a dark mirror that reflects Agricola's virtues and Domitian's vices. Tacitus uses common notions of virtue and vice to prove that a good man can teach a bad emperor by example, in order to inspire the Roman people to rise up, condemn Domitian, and take control of Rome's future.

Tacitus also draws upon the social currency of exemplary narratives, which present people with modes of behavior to emulate. Tacitus, like other Roman authors, seeks to improve his readers through the use of exemplary narratives, and he also seeks to use those narratives to shape people's perceptions of Agricola and Domitian's moral characters. In *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Timothy Duff outlines the ways in which treatment of historical narrative in Roman texts involves "the improvement of the reader."²² According to Duff, Roman authors aimed to guide rather than explicitly instruct their readers; their texts would serve as tools for self-improvement. Duff mentions earlier writers such as Livy and Valerius Maximus, who employed exemplary narratives for such purposes; that historical use of exemplary narratives serves to ground Tacitus and his contemporary

silentium venimus...

²² Duff (1999): 5.

Plutarch in a rich Roman tradition of earlier writers who came before them.²³ Duff argues that Ancient Roman biographical accounts served to connect readers with a set of moral principles by presenting them with stories of people from the past who exemplified certain qualities: “Reading about a statesman of the past and making judgements on his conduct and character would lead to that kind of self-examination which brings moral improvement.”²⁴ Tacitus’ biographical account follows a tradition in Roman literature that favors texts that address issues of morality through suggestions to the reader rather than forced conclusions. By highlighting the characters of Domitian and Agricola, Tacitus sets up two contrasting models of behavior for readers to evaluate, as well as a potential mode of virtue to emulate. Like other Roman authors, Tacitus seeks to employ his text as a tool and potential model through which his readers might choose to reevaluate their understanding of Domitian, and possibly revise their memories of his reign as well.

Tacitus exploits the straightforward application of storytelling as an educational tool in order to demonstrate the virtues of Agricola and the vices of Domitian. Tacitus strategically draws upon his readers’ familiarity with Roman social and moral principles in his use of brief

²³ Duff (1999): 6.

²⁴ Duff (1999): 5.

vignettes, each of which focuses on a particular moment or event that demonstrates a certain facet of Domitian or Agricola's character. As part of his use of virtue narratives as an educational tool, Tacitus recalls memories of Agricola that exemplify *verecundia*, stories that he pairs strategically with vignettes that demonstrate the contrasting arrogance of Domitian. Kaster's first chapter addresses the principle of *verecundia*, which he equates with social consciousness. According to Kaster, *verecundia* denotes awareness of another person's priorities and respect for that person; he terms it a distinct lack of arrogance, refusal to toot one's own horn, utmost restraint in describing one's own character.²⁵ It defines one's modesty in a social context. Although Tacitus never uses the word in his text, he does in fact recount several instances in which Agricola demonstrates *verecundia*. For instance, Agricola returns to Rome in triumph after campaigns in Britain, but he refuses to celebrate raucously; he only meets up with a few friends and says barely a word to anyone.

Meanwhile Agricola had delivered his quiet and secure province to his successor. And so that his entrance would not be conspicuous and noteworthy on account of the crowd running to greet him, avoiding the favors of his friends, he entered into the city during the night, and he went to the Palatine, as that had been ordered; and, received with a brief kiss and no speech, he mingled with the

²⁵ Kaster (2005): 15.

crowd of servicemen. For the purpose of a reputation other than performing military service, which was burdensome among those at leisure, he displayed proper restraint through other qualities; he soaked up tranquility and relaxation, with moderate behavior, with facile conversation, escorted by one or another of his friends, to such an extent that very many people, for whom it was customary to evaluate great men based on outward ambition, when they had seen and observed Agricola, enquired about his reputation; it would be inferred by few.²⁶

Tacitus claims that Agricola behaves with so much humility that many people misinterpret his modesty and do not guess that he has such a great reputation. According to Kaster, Roman society greatly valued *verecundia* in men of esteem and greatness; to show modesty and refrain from praising oneself was seen as a distinct asset in men who had something to brag about.²⁷ Here, Agricola seems to push the concept of *verecundia* to the point where his humility acts as a detriment rather than a testament to his character. Where Tacitus interprets the reclusive behavior that Agricola exhibits as a show of proper restraint, others might see aversion to social activities and conscious avoidance of friends and

²⁶ This translation is my own. Tac.*Ag.*40.3-4. *Tradiderat interim Agricola successori suo provinciam quietam tutamque. Ac ne notabilis celebritate et frequentia occurrentium introitus esset, vitato amicorum officio noctu in urbem, noctu in Palatium, ita ut praeceptum erat, venit; exceptusque brevi osculo et nullo sermone turbae servientium inmixtus est. Ceterum uti militare nomen, grave inter otiosos, aliis virtutibus temperaret, tranquillitatem atque otium penitus hausit, cultu modicus, sermone facilis, uno aut altero amicorum comitatus, adeo ut plerique, quibus magnos viros per ambitionem aestimare mos est, viso aspectoque Agricola quaererent famam, pauci interpretarentur.*

²⁷ Kaster (2005): 15.

acquaintances, which would constitute anti-social rather than socially admirable behavior. One might wonder whether Tacitus places such emphasis on Agricola's brief return to Rome in part to rectify what he perceives as a misunderstanding of Agricola's actions that was apparently widespread enough to warrant reshaping people's memory of that incident.

In contrast to Agricola, Domitian seeks every opportunity to broadcast his successes and cover up his mistakes. One of the worst offenses in Tacitus' mind for which he deems Domitian guilty consists of his concealment of his genuine emotions and his false outward expression of emotions that he fakes for political gain. For instance, when Domitian hears of Agricola's victory in Britain, Tacitus draws particular attention to his emotional reaction, followed by his calculated response.

Domitian received this order of events (Agricola's victory over Britain's military forces,) although it was reported without embellishment in Agricola's letters, as was his custom, with a joyful countenance and an uneasy heart.²⁸

According to Tacitus, Domitian then retreats into seclusion and decides to wait until the excitement over Agricola dies down, because Agricola

²⁸ This translation is my own. Tac.*Ag.*39.2. *Hunc rerum cursum, quamquam nulla verborum iactantia epistulis Agricolae auctum, ut erat Domitiano moris, fronte laetus, pectore anxius excepit.*

has control over Britain and a display of jealous retribution would probably engender a political fallout.²⁹ According to Tacitus, he schemes to hide his true intent from the public. Tacitus argues that Domitian feels threatened by Agricola precisely because Agricola does not seek great praise, even though he deserves it; through his modesty, Tacitus claims, Agricola exposes Domitian's arrogance.

Although Tacitus does not use the word *verecundia* in his description of Agricola and Domitian's contrasting behavior, he links his narrative to the concept. Domitian lies about his own accomplishments, apparently purchasing slaves and dyeing their hair to make them look like captives. Domitian, in demonstrating his willingness to exploit rather than downplay his own successes, proves that he not only lacks modesty but also exudes arrogance.

Tacitus does unintentionally cast some doubt on his own interpretation of Domitian's motivations in his response to Agricola's military victory over Britain. Despite his supposed jealousy of Agricola's success, Domitian orders the Senate to grant the customary awards in place of a triumphal procession, with a long eulogy for Agricola as well; Domitian also explicitly hints that as the previous governor of Syria has

²⁹ See Tac. *Ag.* 39.4.

just died, Agricola shall become the next governor of Syria.³⁰ Tacitus describes this in such a way as to make it appear that Domitian is displaying his characteristic hypocrisy and hiding his true emotions. However, given that Domitian technically has the authority to refuse to even reward Agricola for his achievement or at least to prevent him from receiving a full eulogy that celebrates his virtue, Domitian seems to behave properly under the circumstances. Henry W. Traub mentions that emperors often awarded a customary payment as reward for successful campaigns, instead of a pro-consular post.³¹ Perhaps in this instance Domitian actually followed custom and recognized the strategic importance of Agricola's military capabilities. Agricola's military achievements also do not necessitate his appointment as the governor of a key territory, Syria; the fact that Domitian recommends him for the post seems to suggest that far from jealously preventing Agricola from receiving proper recognition, Domitian values his abilities and has gone beyond the mere customary response to ensure that Agricola receives a just reward for his services. Tacitus reads arrogance and hypocrisy into what may well simply have been a straightforward political move. In his attempt to expose Domitian's alleged mistreatment of Agricola, Tacitus

³⁰ Tac. *Ag.* 40.

³¹ Traub (1954): 255.

fails to account for political precedent and alternative motives, writing his account of the incident in such a way as to portray Domitian in the darkest light possible. Instead, he draws attention to his own questionable interpretation of the narrative.

Tacitus fully explores and exploits the moral implications of what he considers to be the biggest political event in the story of Agricola's relationship with Domitian: Agricola's refusal to seek a high-profile, prestigious pro-consulship in Africa or Asia, for which he was qualified. Tacitus assigns a great deal of importance to this decision, which effectively halts the forward progress of Agricola's political career. Tacitus argues vehemently that Domitian pressured Agricola to refuse such a post out of pure jealousy and fear of Agricola's virtue and accomplishments. In Tacitus' version of events, envoys sent by Domitian discourage Agricola from seeking a pro-consulship in Africa or Asia, first through hints then through outright threats.

Now the year was at hand for the pro-consul of Africa or Asia to be selected by lot, and with Civica³² newly struck down, Agricola

³² C. Vettulenus Civica Cerialis had been the pro-consul of Asia when he was executed on unknown charges, possibly for insubordination against Domitian. Some scholars believe that he was executed for his role in the revolt of Saturninus, but without reliable information about his actions in office, the length of his appointment, and the date of his execution, it is uncertain whether the revolt impacted the treason trial. In "C. Vettulenus Civica Cerialis and the False Nero of A.D. 88," Jones argues that Civica may have played a role in the rebellion of the "false Nero," a man who impersonated Nero, claiming reports of his suicide had been incorrect and that it was his right to reclaim the Roman Empire (Jones (1983)). However, without sufficient

did not want for advice, nor Domitian a precedent. Certain men familiar with the opinion of the emperor who approached Agricola enquired whether he would go on to another province. And at first more covertly praising leisure and quiet, soon offering their efforts in making a good excuse, now at last no longer hiding, simultaneously persuading and terrifying him, they dragged him to Domitian.³³

The smooth maneuvering of the Domitian's "envoys" who accost Agricola comes across easily in Tacitus' coupled with the sense of threats and violence evoked in this brief passage leave little doubt as to the question of whether Agricola had a choice in refusing a pro-consulship of Africa or Asia. Tacitus tightly controls the narrative voice, giving his readers little choice as to how to perceive Agricola's decision to refuse the governorship, just as Domitian's representatives supposedly gave little choice to Agricola.

The topic of Agricola's refusal of the governorship has produced a lot of scholarly debate over the veracity of Tacitus' accusations, and the possible alternative motives for refusing a governorship; this debate strikes at the heart of the issue of remembrance of the relationship

evidence in ancient sources, it's impossible to make a conclusive determination about Civica's potential role in any conspiracies.

³³ This translation is my own. I follow Benario (2006) in particular in taking *exemplum* as "precedent". Tac. Ag. 42.1-2. *Aderat iam annus, quo proconsulatum Africae et Asiae sortiretur, et occiso Civica nuper nec Agricolae consilium deerat nec Domitiano exemplum. accessere quidam cogitationum principis periti, qui iturusne esset in provinciam ultro Agricolam interrogarent. Ac primo occultius quietem et*

between Agricola and Domitian. In “Agricola and Domitian,” T.A. Dorey argues that Domitian did not offer Agricola the governorship of Syria as a bribe so that he wouldn’t protest the recall of his governorship of Britain, as some claim, and that Agricola simply wished to retire and enjoy a more private lifestyle after his governorship of Britain ended.³⁴ Dorey also argues that Tacitus’ claim that Domitian hated Agricola was based on false evidence, and so was the idea that Agricola was forced to refuse a pro-consulship of Asia or Africa.³⁵ Henry W. Traub analyzes and counters Tacitus’ accusations in more detail in “Agricola’s Refusal of the Governorship.” Traub notes that excusing oneself was viewed as a *beneficium* in itself, and cites a letter from Fronto as precedent for excusing oneself from the post.³⁶ Part of this debate centers around the question of the relationship between Agricola and Domitian; some scholars conclude that he was one of Domitian’s *amici* and a close confidant at court, while others, following Dio’s characterization,³⁷ maintain that he was actually a former friend of Vespasian and became a victim of Domitian once Domitian took power. Dorey claims that

otium laudare, mox operam suam in adprobanda excusatione offerre, postremo non iam obscuri suadentes simul terrentesque pertraxere ad Domitianum.

³⁴ Dorey (1960): 66-68.

³⁵ Dorey (1960): 69-71.

³⁶ Traub (1954): 255-257.

³⁷ See Dio 67.2.1-3.

Agricola and Domitian had a close friendship.³⁸ Jones takes a middle position, arguing that Domitian probably did not victimize Agricola, but also that Agricola would probably not have been one of Domitian's closest advisors.³⁹ Jones points out that Agricola, as commander of Britain, had demonstrated that Domitian's desire to conquer Britain was not easily attainable. This may have produced additional friction between the two men.

Taking Jones' idea a step further, the fact that such a capable, experienced general as Agricola had spent years trying to quell British forces without being able to conquer them would have stood as a painful reminder that Domitian, a ruler inexperienced in military command and desperate to prove himself, had tried to carry out an obviously impractical mission. Jones notes that Domitian may also have been upset that Agricola had not in fact conquered Ireland with only a legion and a few auxiliary forces, nor had he completed conquered Britain as he had promised.⁴⁰ If Jones has correctly assessed the situation, perhaps Domitian's reception of Agricola in Rome may well have reflected his disappointment in the general, and Domitian may have been wary of

³⁸ Dorey (1960): 67.

³⁹ Jones (1992): 58.

⁴⁰ See Agr. 42. Note that Tacitus says that he has heard Agricola make this specific claim several times, but that Agricola never makes the claim in direct speech to the reader himself.

placing Agricola in charge of another province when he could not successfully conquer Britain. However, it seems more likely that Tacitus' claims about Domitian do not reflect the emperors' actual opinion of Agricola, and that Domitian actually went out of his way to honor Agricola and help him advance his position.

Tacitus utilizes time and a sense of the past in order to portray Domitian's hypocrisy. That Domitian's envoys would force Agricola to beg to be excused from seeking a pro-consulship in Asia or Africa reflects a serious breakdown in the time-honored tradition of the *cursus honorum*, the standard political trajectory every leading male citizen in Rome should follow in order to enjoy an illustrious and honorable career. This episode signifies Domitian's disregard for Agricola's distinguished career, and perhaps more importantly his disregard for the notion of rewarding high-level Roman officials for their civic and military service and achievements. Domitian refuses to acknowledge Agricola's prior deeds and maintain accountability for his own actions.⁴¹ According to Tacitus, Domitian has chosen to reject the traditions and customs that helped elevate Rome's character.

When Tacitus recounts how Agricola appeared before Domitian to refuse the governorship, he uses the incident to illustrate just how much

arrogance Domitian could display. In this particular passage, although, according to Tacitus, Domitian has sent his envoys to persuade Agricola to refuse the governorship on no uncertain terms, Domitian nevertheless has the nerve to graciously grant Agricola's request to be recused and accept Agricola's humble thanks for allowing him to recuse himself from the position he had been discouraged from taking. The idea that Domitian forces Agricola to put on a false face, and then himself reacts to Agricola's charade with false emotion, demonstrates his own capacity for *invidia* and his two-faced nature. Instead of reacting with righteous, justifiable indignation, however, Agricola demonstrates his capacity for forgiveness and, given Domitian's supposedly wrathful nature, remarkable levelheadedness and good sense:

It is characteristic of a kind of human to hate those whom one has injured. Indeed, the character of Domitian was inclined toward anger, and for him, the more hidden it was, the more irrevocable it was. At last he was mollified by the moderation and prudence of Agricola, who did not summon fame and death out of stubbornness nor through inane gestures at liberty.⁴²

Domitian wields immense power, and from the very beginning of this biography, Tacitus has portrayed Domitian's willingness to punish those

⁴¹ Kaster (2005): 95.

⁴² This translation is my own. Tac. Ag. 42.4. *Proprium humani ingenii est odisse quem laeseris: Domitiani vero natura praeceps in iram, et quo obscurior, eo inrevocabilior, moderatione tamen prudentiaque Agricolae leniebatur, quia non contumacia neque inani iactatione libertatis famam fatumque provocabat.*

who offend him or disobey him in any way. Domitian lets his anger fester, refusing to acknowledge it openly, letting it take control of him and guide his actions. If Domitian's anger grows inside him like a disease, Agricola offers the remedy. Agricola knows better than to try to assert himself or advocate for recognition under such a man as Domitian; in fact, Agricola seems to be the only person who can placate Domitian and halt his tendency toward anger and vengeance through the sheer extent of his humility and discretion. While Agricola appears to embody the very essence of virtue and diplomacy, Domitian comes across as envious of Agricola's power and wary of Agricola's commendable behavior, exposing his own vices through his hatred of Agricola's demonstrable virtue. Even though the political realities of the time necessitate a more complex consideration of Agricola's decision to refuse the governorship, Tacitus draws such a stark picture in black-and-white terms that his readers forget the grey areas and remember first and foremost the contrast between the two modes of morality that Domitian and Agricola represent in this instance. To counter the sort of wrathfulness and arrogance that Domitian displays, virtuous Romans should offer humility and reconciliation.

Agricola serves as a role model for ordinary Roman citizens; in killing Domitian with kindness (metaphorically, of course,) and refusing

to sacrifice his principles to appease a tyrannical ruler, Agricola demonstrates how to overcome the limits imposed on a person by corrupt leaders and how to better embody Roman ideals of integrity and courage. Tellingly, at the end of his passage on the pro-consulship incident, Tacitus declares, “It is possible for great men to exist even under evil emperors.”⁴³ Agricola’s example offers Romans means by which to overcome their recent past and a guide to better behavior in the future. Tacitus thus connects his text to a Roman ideal of morality that is not contingent upon temporality, one which Romans can at any point in time choose to embody and one that, significantly, empowers Romans regardless of the moral characters of those who rule them. Tacitus gives his readers the opportunity to remember the reign of Domitian as a negative influence on Rome, while enabling them to maintain a positive view of the character of the Roman people as a whole.

In contrast to Agricola, whose *verecundia* metaphorically and etymologically stems from fear of behaving improperly, Domitian does not blush when his improperly motivated actions cause undue harm to others. Tacitus notes that unlike Nero, who ordered others to carry out his

⁴³ This translation is my own. Tac. *Ag.* 42.5. *Posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse.*

shameful crimes, Domitian takes pleasure in watching the results of his actions.

Nevertheless Nero averted his eyes and gave the order to defile, he did not watch:

a particular misfortune under Domitian was to see and be seen, when sighs our sighs were written down, when singling out the pallor of so many men, he hid under that wrathful face and ruddy expression, with which he defended himself against shame.⁴⁴

The comparison between Nero and Domitian bears significance, as Nero was another emperor whose memory Roman politicians chose to condemn after his death, and whose image as a corrupt, immoral official the Flavian emperors exploited to gain favor for their own policies.⁴⁵

Thanks largely to the Flavian dynasty, Nero's name still bore great meaning and had severely negative connotations, even though Nero had been dead for over a decade. Tacitus claims that Domitian is worse than Nero: presumably, Nero recognized the immoral nature of his actions, and his fear of potential repercussions motivated him to give others the

⁴⁴ This translation is my own. Tac.*Ag.*45.2. *Nero tamen subtraxit oculos suos iussitque scelera, non spectavit: praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici, cum suspiria nostra subscriberentur, cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille vultus et rubor, quo se contra pudorem muniebat.*

⁴⁵ See Flower (2006): 236. Flower writes, "Domitian's disgraced memory illustrates the essential nature of memory sanctions: they reflect the ambition and fears of those who implement them, providing no more than a distorting mirror to view the individual who is the subject of the sanctions... Such sanctions were at their most powerful when they were officially imposed and in cases where they were followed by a stable new dynasty... As Pliny and Tacitus demonstrate, the excellent character of the new regime could be viewed as a mirror image of the oppressive past."

task of directly enforcing his own criminal decisions. In contrast, Domitian seems to embrace his immoral behavior, or at least to protect himself against the shame of acknowledging it by assuming a ruddy, cheerful demeanor. His awareness of his own actions and his choice to openly take credit for them speaks to the extent of his arrogance and cruelty. His expression of good cheer while witnessing horrible crimes adds to the savagery of his response. His behavior indicates his general disposition toward *iracundia*, or wrathfulness, rather than *verecundia*.⁴⁶ The idea that a leader such as Domitian demonstrates improper social values in a community that prizes the social currency of virtue not only proves that leader's lack of good character, but also suggests that that leader does not deserve to hold a position of authority in that society. Thus, although Tacitus never explicitly mentions *verecundia* outright, he weaves the concept into his narrative to highlight Domitian's arrogance and wrath. Tacitus encourages the reader to remember Domitian as a cruel, authoritative, wrathful ruler with a particularly cruel dispensation toward violence, reinforcing notions of communal trauma and underscoring the need to condemn Domitian's memory.

⁴⁶ See Kaster (2005): 16, where Kaster distinguishes between disposition and occurrence, i.e. inclination or tendency toward a certain emotion, and an actual on the spot experience of that emotion itself.

Tacitus also utilizes Roman notions about *pudor*, or shame, to draw a negative portrait of Domitian and thereby influence his readers' recollection of Domitian's character. In his work, Kaster focuses on *pudor* as a negative emotion in Roman thought that implies a sense of self-awareness and accountability for one's own actions. According to Kaster's analysis, it does not typically carry the same positive connotation of modesty and selflessness as *verecundia*.⁴⁷ As a social value, *pudor* indicates not only a person's sense of propriety but also that person's capacity to feel shame for the right reason, e.g. shame upon having committed a shameful act. The notion of shame ties directly into a person's perception regarding and memory of an action, as well as the ways in which personal memory can motivate personal accountability. Tacitus uses the word *pudor* once in his text, in the same instance in which he compares Domitian to Nero. Domitian wants to see and be seen, and while he gazes at the pale faces of those who cower in fear in front of him, he himself defies shame with a savage, ruddy countenance; instead of blushing, as would be appropriate, he is sanguine.⁴⁸ The use of imagery here is quite significant; the word *rubor* implies an almost cheerful ruddiness, rather than the redness associated with modesty and

⁴⁷ Kaster (2005): 28-29.

proper shame. Tacitus claims that once again Domitian has revealed the true character that he sometimes attempts to conceal for strategic purposes. Not only does he commit violence, but he willfully refuses to display shame, undermining his respect for communal social values.

Tacitus also indicts the Roman citizenry at large for failure to enforce those communal social values in light of Domitian's behavior. Tacitus seeks not only to undo some of the damage wrought by Domitian through reconstitution of his memory, but also some of the damage wrought by Romans' complacency during Domitian's reign. Kaster, in his discussion of the notion of *paenitentia* and the social uses of regret, seeks to elucidate a particularly prescient concept of choosing to regret something that one previously accepted, even actively supported, when retroactively it appears to have been displeasing.⁴⁹ In Tacitus' first chapter, he asks the Roman people to retroactively retract their previous positive comments about Domitian and to retroactively condemn his memory. Tacitus believes full-heartedly that the mistakes of the past can be remedied by means of one's behavior in the present or future. In his first two chapters, regret serves as a motivating force by which to urge his readers to reconsider their own opinions and think critically, now that

⁴⁸ This translation is my own. Tac. *Ag.* 45.2. ...*cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille vultus et rubor, quo se contra pudorem muniebat.*

they are no longer living in the moment, about what sort of man Domitian truly was. He and the rest of the Romans must do penance for their inaction by condemning Domitian in full force and striving to return their society to its former great reputation. Kaster, in his discussion of other Roman authors, argues that this sense of personal responsibility and agency, once again necessitating self-awareness, actually constitutes in some ways hypocrisy, even though Romans might also take it as penance in a more positive sense.⁵⁰ This penance itself is an act of reshaping memory, and reconstituting of one's own sense of moral integrity.

Tacitus not only reflects on his own behavior during the reign of Domitian as part of his reconstitution of memory; he also has to reconstitute certain elements of Agricola's character as well in order to fit Agricola more neatly into the paradigm of virtue that so aptly contrasts with Domitian's display of vice. In "The Not-so-perfect Man: Some Ambiguities in Tacitus' Picture of Agricola," S. J. Bastomsky argues that Tacitus' account alludes several times to Agricola's potentially immoral or questionable behavior. Bastomsky aims to counter the general consensus among modern scholars that Tacitus consistently praises Agricola and holds him up as an example of embodiment of Roman

⁴⁹ Kaster (2005): 66.

⁵⁰ Kaster (2005): 67.

virtues.⁵¹ Bastomsky claims that Tacitus may have recognized that some of Agricola's actions demonstrated collaboration with rather than defiance against Domitian; Bastomsky argues that "the hypocrisy involved in co-operation with a despised regime" may have been hard for Tacitus to reconcile with the image of virtue he attributes to Agricola in his writing.⁵² Although Bastomsky only offers a brief treatment of evidence in the article, his statement points to an important aspect of Tacitus' investment in the language of morality and virtue in the *Agricola*. In his account, Tacitus has to persuade his audience to conclude that Agricola's interactions with Domitian demonstrate the corrupt nature of Domitian's character and his policies. In order to convince a Roman audience that his position holds weight, Tacitus has to demonstrate that Agricola opposed Domitian's principles, and that Agricola did not accede to Domitian's policies.

Bastomsky also speaks to another important flaw in Tacitus' narrative of collective trauma: Tacitus does not consider the extent to which political expediency and ambition played a role in people's reception to Domitian, and the ways in which many ordinary people and politicians benefitted from their strategic support of Domitian during his

⁵¹ Bastomsky (1985): 388-389.

⁵² Bastomsky (1985): 393.

reign. Any time a ruler comes into power, customarily he rewards his allies and punishes his enemies; Roman historians all depict transitions to power in their narratives as times when people often either allied with a leader in the name of political expediency, or paid dearly for their opposition. Perhaps Agricola took the opportunity to gain political benefits by acceding to Domitian's policies, spurred by the same strategic goal that prompted him several years before to support Domitian's father Vespasian once it became clear that Vespasian would succeed in his campaign to become emperor.⁵³ Bastomsky draws attention in his article to Tacitus' description of Agricola's decision to support Vespasian: Tacitus states that Agricola, hearing that Vespasian's victory was imminent, joined forces with him immediately, despite the fact that Agricola's mother had just been murdered around the same time.⁵⁴ A military leader and politician who was calculating enough to ally with the winning political leader without regard to filial piety might easily act

⁵³ See Tac. *Ag.*7.3. *Patrimonii partem diripuit, quae causa caedis fuerat. Igitur ad sollemnia pietatis profectus Agricola, nuntio adfectati a Vespasiano imperii deprehensus ac statim in partis transgressus est.*

⁵⁴ Tac. *Ag.*7.1. According to Tacitus, Otho's fleet murdered Agricola's mother and ravaged and pillaged the estate that he had inherited from his father. Perhaps with so much of his inheritance lost, Agricola may have seen strategic gain in joining up with Vespasian immediately. Because Tacitus does mention the amount of time that had passed between Agricola's death and the point at which Agricola was placed in charge of enrolling on behalf of Vespasian, it is unclear whether Agricola mourned his mother for the customary period and tended to his ruined estate before returning to Rome and aiding Vespasian and Mucianus.

with just as much strategic calculation when considering whether to support Domitian's regime. Thus, Agricola's story offers a potential alternative to the narrative of collective trauma in the form of politics as usual; people may well have regarded Domitian's reign as harmful or beneficial depending upon whether or not they chose to support him, and whether his rise to power hurt or helped them. If Agricola cannot fit perfectly into Tacitus' paradigm of virtue, perhaps Domitian cannot fit perfectly in Tacitus' paradigm of vice. This complicates Tacitus' attempts to reshape his readers' memories of Domitian's reign.

Temporality and Memory

One of the other problems Tacitus encounters in his attempts to reshape Romans' memories of Domitian consists of the possibility that his readers' experience of the time during which Domitian ruled may not have mirrored Tacitus' experience. In *Tacitus, the Man and His Work*, Clarence W. Mendell claims that Tacitus' opening statement declares that Domitian's reign forced Romans into silence for fifteen years.⁵⁵ The duration of the reign of Domitian represents a long period, during which Romans had plenty of opportunities to form their own impressions of his

⁵⁵ Mendell (1957): 8-9. This point merits some clarification: Mendell claims that in the introduction to the *Agricola*, Tacitus mentions that he has endured fifteen years of enforced silence under Domitian. However, that number is not explicitly mentioned in Tacitus' text. From historical sources, scholars know that Domitian reigned for

reign, and to see the effects of his policies on society. However, his assassination came only two years before the publishing of the *Agricola*. To drive home his point, Tacitus has to condense the time during which Domitian reigned in order to evoke a sense of the immediate past. Thus, Tacitus even treats events that occurred during the beginning of Domitian's reign, seventeen years prior, as recent events that should still shake the community's consciousness. For Tacitus, Domitian's reign is emotionally located in the very recent past, and the psychological effects of his reign still appear in Tacitus' writing. Because his readers might not identify with Tacitus' experience, Tacitus needs to evoke for his readers the same sense of time that he attaches to the reign of Domitian. To locate his narrative in the visceral past, and by extension to incite a visceral memory in his readers, Tacitus utilizes language of suffering and endurance, conveying his view of the time period through provocative and emotional images that recall the past as if the readers were experiencing those events in the present.⁵⁶ When he recites the names of

fifteen years; Tacitus only mentions that he and other Romans remained silent during Domitian's reign.

⁵⁶ This particular concept relies on the notion that memories can be vicariously relived or re-experienced in the present through personal recollection. For a comprehensive treatment of vicarious relived experiences, see Baron, Chetelat, Desgranges, Eustache, Giffardquillon, and Piolino (2004). In his account, Tacitus uses the framework of personal recollection to summon so-called "memories" that the reader may or may not have experienced in the past but can experience in the present through Tacitus' recounting of those memories.

men executed at the orders of Domitian⁵⁷ or describes a time period drenched in bloodshed⁵⁸ or details an incident in which Domitian feels threatened and schemes to undermine Agricola,⁵⁹ Tacitus brings the reader into the emotional state associated with a particular moment in time and allows the reader to vicariously experience the feelings of that moment. In reliving that moment through Tacitus' text, the reader forms a new memory of the event that overrides any prior memory or lack thereof. Historical time frames do not apply to Tacitus' treatment of historical events; rather, historicity and temporality surrender to the emotional power of a memory to transform during the retelling of it. Tacitus' use of the present tense and constant referral to the past as a recent event forces the reader to re-experience memories that they may not even have experienced themselves.⁶⁰ The power of imagination to

⁵⁷ See *Tac. Ag.* 2.1.

⁵⁸ See *Tac. Ag.* 2.2-4.

⁵⁹ See *Tac. Ag.* 39-40, e.g. According to Tacitus, in this instance, Domitian recognizes that Agricola's military triumph in Britain has put him in a bad light, as Domitian has falsely manufactured his own military victory. Tacitus argues that Domitian reluctantly awards Agricola honors but does not give him the full recognition he deserves. This particular view of events will be contested with a fuller analysis of the incident on 22-23.

⁶⁰ The process of forming false memory is well documented in psychological studies, and multiple theories exist to explain them. For instance, psychologists have studied the ways in which adults' stories about an individual's childhood or younger years may induce a false memory in that individual (e.g. Hyman, Husband, and Billings (1995)). In these cases, the individual imagines an event based on someone's account of an event that occurred when the individual was too young to form a concrete memory. Despite lacking the ability to access a genuine memory, the individual forms a false memory of his own imagined version of the event, which the individual

spark a false sense of memory negates the temporality of the past in place of a visceral vicarious experience of the events in Agricola and Domitian's lives.

The Role of Speech and Silence in Conjuring Memory in the *Agricola*

Tacitus uses the past to persuade his readers that times have changed, and the Roman character no longer merits respect or fear from its enemies and allies, thanks to Domitian. In a striking passage, Tacitus recounts a speech supposedly given by the Britannic commander Calgacus to his troops, excoriating the Roman character as a true symbol of vice and greed. In his lengthy speech, Calgacus indicts the Romans on no uncertain terms for their ruthless ambition and lack of morals, as well as their hypocrisy.

But now there are no people beyond, nothing except the waves and the rocks, and the Romans, more dangerous, whose arrogance (*superbiam*) you would in vain escape through obsequiousness and modesty (*obsequiam ac modestiam*). Ravishers (*raptores*) of the world, after they defile the earth, laying waste to the whole thing, the seas are ransacked: if the enemy is rich, they are avaricious; if poor, they are ambitious. They are men whom neither the East nor the West will have satisfied, they alone of all men seek wealthy and poverty with equal effort. Raping, pillaging, massacring, they

“remembers” as a past experience. The power of the adult storyteller mirrors the power of Tacitus to conjure up new false memories in his readers; despite the false nature of those imagined memories, Tacitus' readers may in fact consider his version of events to be their own genuine recollections of events during Domitian's reign.

are empire by false names, and wherever they (the Romans) create a wasteland, they call it peace.⁶¹

The speech does not represent historical record; instead, it represents Tacitus' own version of events as he imagines them to have taken place. Possibly Calgacus has become a mouthpiece of the author to better express Tacitus' own opinion of what Rome has come to symbolize in this new age of terror. Like Domitian, the Romans are portrayed here as arrogant, callous tyrants who have no regard for liberty or honor and secure their empire by unsavory means. Calgacus speaks with such harsh, bitter terms of Roman imperialism, and he does so passionately and articulately. In the Greco-Roman world of rhetoric and speechmaking, Calgacus argues his point of view persuasively, potentially swaying his audience with the power of his words. Given the freedom to recreate this moment however he pleased, Tacitus would no doubt have considered the issue of whether to make Calgacus' words ring false or hit home, and here, he has chosen to hit his fellow Romans pretty hard by ripping into

⁶¹ This translation is my own, and the Latin words I have drawn attention to are a result of my own emphasis. Tac. *Ag.* 30.4-6. ...*sed nulla iam ultra gens, nihil nisi fluctus ac saxa, et infestiores Romani, quorum superbiam frustra per obsequium ac modestiam effugias. [5] raptores orbis, postquam cuncta vastantibus defuere terrae, mare scrutantur: si locuples hostis est, avari, si pauper, ambitiosi, quos non Oriens, non Occidens satiaverit: soli omnium opes atque [6] inopiam pari adfectu concupiscunt. auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.* (I follow Benario (2006) in using "wasteland" for *solitudinem*, as I think it best connotes the sheer gravity of the devastation that Calgacus evokes).

their image of Rome as a glorious, honorable superpower and their image of themselves as law-abiding, good-willed people who fight honest wars for good causes.

Either this speech represents merely the opinion of an enemy fighter, in which case it might serve to rally Roman readers against their savage foes, or Tacitus wants his readers to pause and reflect, and potentially to consider the possibility that their city's character may have suffered greatly under the reign of imperialism, and in particular under Domitian's policies. The power of the speech to affect Roman readers' perceptions lies in Tacitus' consistent references throughout this work to a more glorious, idealized Rome of the past, a golden city in a golden age of morality whose moral fortitude future generations should emulate. If Calgacus' speech reflects the way that the rest of the world views the Romans, isn't it high time that the Romans reevaluate their current state of affairs and seek to reclaim their former reputation? Tacitus never has Calgacus refer to Domitian or any other Roman by name; Calgacus does not lay the blame on any one individual. Instead, Calgacus seems to evoke a longer period of decline, one that seems to have taken place over more than a couple of decades due to several immoral leaders but has clearly culminated in Rome's current turpitude. Setting the current age against this distant idyllic past allows Tacitus to exploit Roman's cultural

memory to convince them that Rome has undergone a severe decline and needs to return to a former state of loftier morality and superior motives. It is not up to the new line of emperors alone to fix the trend toward depravity, corruption, and violence; Tacitus does not take the opportunity to follow up after Calgacus' speech and foreshadow the dawning of the new age represented by Nerva and his successors. Instead, Tacitus' readers, ordinary Romans, are the ones who bear the indictment against the entire citizenry; they have been included in this indictment, and it is up to them as well as to their leaders to save Rome from herself and bring her back to her former glory.

Strikingly, neither Agricola nor Domitian ever speaks directly in the *Agricola*. As the narrator, Tacitus always relays the words or thoughts or feelings; such acts of speech or silence thus go through an additional process of mediation, further distancing Agricola and Domitian from the reader. When Agricola and Domitian appear in the narrative, Tacitus always controls the context in which they appear, and thus in part their reception by the audience, the readers. As narrator, Tacitus produces a secondhand account of events for readers to vicariously experience and around which they can form specific recollections of the incidents and the ways that those incidents reflect upon the characters of Agricola and Domitian. Portrayed thus, Agricola and Domitian become allegories for

the consequences of moral and immoral behavior; they live on in this story only in service of the greater message, which preserves only certain parts of their personalities that Tacitus has chosen to highlight. The “immortality” that supposedly comes from being preserved in a lasting work of literature comes with a serious caveat: the immortal portrait of a person is forever shaped by the way in which the author chooses to portray him or her. Readers who only have access to the literary work and not to the real living, breathing person in three dimensions, with all the complexities of personality and behavior that that person’s humanity entails, can only “remember” the person the way he or she has been written; their imaginative memory relies on the author’s parameters. The fact that neither Agricola nor Domitian speaks at all in the narrative suggests that Tacitus does not value them for their actual words and deeds but more for what they represent as characters and the ways in which he can mold their characters in his work to better reflect his overall mission to educate his readers. His readers have to be carefully taught; he cannot leave room for nuance, or for the characters to potentially contradict his overall narrative. Agricola and Domitian have no control over the story that presumably features them and their lives; remembrance of them must reflect the bigger purpose, so aspects of their characters have been erased or forgotten in service of the larger narrative.

Tacitus further emphasizes Domitian's vices through his counter-example of ways in which Agricola exemplifies virtue not only through modesty, but also through acceptance and forgiveness. According to Tacitus, unlike Domitian, Agricola fully acknowledges his place in life. Significantly, Tacitus notes that Agricola submits to his fate at the end of his life instead of resisting death. Agricola even seems to try to give Domitian a full acquittal for his actions, despite Domitian's treatment of him.⁶² According to Tacitus, this demonstrates fully honorable behavior worthy of a great military leader. Agricola has the strength of character to recognize and move beyond events in his life, and to make a conscious choice to demonstrate proper behavior and courtesy, even in the context of death and dying. In his last moments, Agricola moves beyond his recollection of the ways in which Domitian has wronged him, thereby opening himself and others to reconciliation with the past and freedom from painful memories. Tacitus, however, remains fully cognizant of Domitian's wrongdoing and cannot bring himself to forgive or condone Domitian's action. Tacitus feels the need to rally his readers to actively condemn Domitian, as if that gesture can somehow help him to better reconcile with the past and his own failure to act. Tacitus uses several lines of text to explain how he and his wife regret not being with

⁶² See Tac.*Ag.*45.3.

Agricola during his last moments.⁶³ He declares that they can only hope that his memory lives on and that his virtue is preserved in this work for all eternity.

Whatsoever in Agricola we loved and admired, that is going to remain in the minds of men, in the never-ending span of time, by the glory of his achievements; for oblivion will overwhelm many men of old as if they were without glory and of no rank: Agricola will survive, his story told and transmitted to posterity.⁶⁴

Here Tacitus closes his biography in the same way he begins it, with a notion of regret and a sense of the importance of remembrance. Because Tacitus has written this account, Agricola will continue to live on in historical record, guaranteeing Agricola a place in history and in public memory.

Looking to the Future

Tacitus begins and ends his account of Agricola's life with the reminder that Agricola did not leave to see post-Domitianic Rome and the positive effects that Domitian's successors seem to have had. Tacitus expresses confidence that these new emperors are themselves ushering in a new era reminiscent of the happier, morally superior days of old that he so wishes Romans of his own time would emanate. Tacitus already sees

⁶³ See Tac.*Ag.*45.4-6.

⁶⁴ Translation from Benario (2006): 56. Tac.*Ag.*46. *Quidquid ex Agricola amavimus, quidquid mirati sumus, manet mansurumque est in animis hominum in aeternitate*

his vision coming alive under Nerva and Trajan. With the death of Domitian, the conspirators seem to have purged a bad influence. With the end to this traumatic period, the opportunity presents itself for Rome to revisit her legacy and sculpt a new and improved self-image, the community must condemn Domitian's memory and the citizens of Rome must collectively decide to reject his policies. Tacitus hails a new age in which Rome is being rebuilt, but in order to rebuild successfully, it must start its healing process with the destruction and damnation of the source of all its woes, Domitian.

temporum, fama rerum; nam multos veterum velut inglorios et ignobilis oblivio obruit: Agricola posteritati narratus et traditus superstes erit.

The Art of Shaping Remembrance:

Visual Representations and Transformation of Memory During and After Domitian's Reign

A rare example of a completely erased monumental text from Puteoli, originally dating to the last year of Domitian's life, bears witness to the fierce erasure of Domitian's memory here... So far this is the only example of a completed erased text of Domitian... Everything was removed, including the name of Puteoli itself (a Flavian colony) and the record of its warm relations with its former patron and benefactor Domitia. The erasure signals the willingness of the local people to embrace political change and their fears based on their traditional closeness to the Flavian family...⁶⁵

Destruction takes many forms, but destruction that people can readily see physically before them constitutes one of the most tangible and memorable forms. One of the most striking elements of the aftermath of Domitian's reign lies in the physical erasure and destruction of Domitian's legacy as represented by art and architecture, and the rebuilding or repurposing of surviving Flavian constructions to better serve the aims of the emperors who succeeded Domitian. The juxtaposition of that destruction with Domitian's own attempts to reshape and rebuild art and architecture during his reign yields great insight into the role of art and architecture in shaping and reshaping Domitian's legacy, and in the process of remembrance itself. An examination of

⁶⁵ Flower (): 257.

visual imagery and visual language that depicts the period provides a striking contrast between imagery and language generated by Domitian and that that was generated by others after his death. The imagery and mythology that have come to represent Domitian's legacy deserve a thorough investigation in their own right, one which modern scholars have yet to fully address in terms of the treatment of memory formation in visual art. While this particular case study does not delve into the full array of scholarship available, it does provide a format in which to weave together modern perceptions of Domitian's reign with ancient perceptions on which modern scholars have relied, and to compare Domitian's vision of his own legacy with that of his posthumous detractors.

Domitian's death marked a distinct turning point, as it supposedly constituted the beginning of anew golden age of imperial rule. The defining point of origin for that beginning came with the destruction of remnants of the legacy of the dead emperor. Ancient authors offer similar accounts of the immediate aftermath of Domitian's assassination in 96 C.E. According to Suetonius, after Domitian's death, the Senate rejoiced and immediately convened to pass a unanimous resolution condemning Domitian's memory and ordering the destruction of his inscriptions, images, statues, and monuments.

After [Domitian] was struck down, the populace was indifferent. The soldiers bore it heavily and immediately there was an attempt to rank him as a god, and, if they had not lacked leaders, they would have been ready to take vengeance, which, indeed, a little later, they accomplished by very obstinately advocating for the punishment by execution of the conspirators. On the contrary, the senate was overjoyed to the limit, so that, with the courthouse packed enthusiastically, they did not hesitate- why should they?- thus they tore the dead man to shreds with all manners of abusive and harsh exclamations. They even ordered ladders to be brought and *clipeosque et imagines* his shields and images to be torn down and smashed upon the ground before their very own eyes. They decreed that his inscriptions should be erased everywhere, and all most recent *memoriam* (memory) of him abolished.⁶⁶

The etymological symbolism of demolition reveals a powerful connection between literal and figurative erasure and speaks to the power that images and imagery held for the Romans. Destruction of images speaks to elements of fear and anxiety; Romans worried not only about their own legacies being corrupted, but also about how to address the legacy of others whose behavior presented a problem for Roman society.

⁶⁶ This translation is my own. Suet. *Dom.* 23.1. *Occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles grauissime tulit statimque Diuum appellare conatus est, paratus et ulcisci, nisi duces defuissent; quod quidem paulo post fecit expostulatis ad poenam pertinacissime caedis auctoribus. Contra senatus adeo laetatus est, ut repleta certatim curia non temperaret, quin mortuum contumeliosissimo atque acerbissimo adclamationum genere laceraret, scalas etiam inferri clipeosque et imagines eius coram*

Physical destruction of monuments and images, which often held immense symbolic power, allowed Roman politicians to mitigate the impact of the messaging behind those monuments and to reframe the policies or attitudes that those monuments or images represented. Destruction provides to exercise political control over the image or monument as well as its subtext. In “Demolished Houses, Monumentality, and Memory in Roman Culture,” Matthew B. Roller notes the similarity between some of the terms Ancient Roman authors employ to describe demolition of houses and terms used to describe political overhauls.⁶⁷ These terms carry usages that pertain to larger-scale destruction as part of a political act or statement. Roller argues that a demolished house constitutes a monument, and a study of the systematic demolition of houses in Ancient Rome helps to elucidate “the dynamics of memory that are implicated in such a monument, and the social values that are thereby asserted or affirmed.”⁶⁸ Roller explores accounts of destruction of private houses dating from the Republic to the early

detrahi et ibidem solo affligi iuberet, nouissime eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret.

⁶⁷ Roller (2010): 121. “Livy commonly employs *diruere* (‘make to fall apart’) when referring to such destruction, while other texts employ *eruere* (‘dig out,’ ‘overthrow’) and the noun *ruina* (‘downfall’). Also common are compounds of *verto*: Cicero regularly uses *evertere* (‘overturn’) to describe the fate of his house and others he deems comparable; elsewhere we find *subvertere* (‘topple from the base’).”

⁶⁸ Roller (2010): 121.

Augustan period as an aspect of sanctions against memory; private citizens who faced sedition, treason, or similar charges, such as Cicero, faced destruction or confiscation of their property in part as punishment for misdeeds.⁶⁹ According to Roller, the demolition of houses presents a great analogy for erasure of memory, and its practice offers insight into the ways in which destruction of a physical monument served to help eradicate or transform a population's memory of an individual.

Like memory sanctions, destruction of houses holds the purpose to inflict loss on the individual. Now, there is an important distinction between politically motivated house demolition and memory sanctions: not all people whose houses were demolished on the orders of authorities had actually died before the demolitions took place, while the process *damnatio memoriae* only occurred after an emperor had died and thus could not impact the emperor's legacy while he was alive. A house constitutes not only a place of residence but a stable dwelling, with personal memories attached to it. Destroying a person's house would entail destroying a person's home, the space that the person lived in and the space that provided a sense of security and belonging. People often fill houses with aspects of their life that they wish to either share or preserve; the layout and appearance reflect not only personal taste, but

⁶⁹ Roller (2010): 119.

also the ways in which the owner wants to be perceived. Through seeing the home, other people may perceive how the owner lives and the lifestyle that the owner has chosen to cultivate. Similarly, monuments and buildings communicate a vision that a person wishes to promote: a vision of the person's life and philosophy, and in the case of a prominent political figure, the policies and vision of government that that political figure wishes to propagate and for which he or she seeks approval. Destroying a monument destroys a record of the vision and frees up physical and metaphorical space for others to communicate alternative visions through their own monuments and imagery. The original monument would present a potential contradiction to any opposing vision, so destroying it would reduce the risk that it might negatively impact the agenda behind the new monument.

In "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," Peter Stewart pays close attention to the impact of the process of destruction itself. He argues that it represents a long tradition with its own set of expectations and conventions, much like the policy of *damnatio memoriae*. Stewart focuses on the continuation of that tradition among Christian leaders through the destruction of idols and pagan imagery, yet he reserves a few words for Domitian specifically. Stewart argues that Domitian's legacy, or rather the legacy of attempted erasure of his memory, became a classic

paradigm of the fallen tyrant in late antiquity.⁷⁰ In one account, the *Anecdota*, Procopius links the fate of Domitian's memory with that of Justinian. Procopius describes the lone statue that was allowed to remain on the Capitol after Domitian's death, which was an image of Domitian's remains after his wife sewed them up.⁷¹ Procopius' use of this bizarre portrait to depict the extent of the attempt to destroy Domitian's legacy helps Stewart pinpoint one of the most impactful aspects of *damnatio memoriae*: the gruesome imagery it evokes. For Stewart, the destruction of images becomes an act of violence:

It was the image of Domitian... and he was so bad that the Romans meted out a remarkable punishment: they could not satisfy their rage by ripping him to pieces; so the senate decreed that his name should be removed and that his images should not survive anywhere; so his name was chiselled [sic] out of inscriptions and only the one statue remains anywhere in the empire.⁷²

The action stands in for physical violence, and the images stand in for the physical body. Thus, the senators can vent their rage, without the moral consequences that might accompany their participation in his actual murder. Like the destruction of houses during the Republican era, the destruction of Domitianic monuments and images provided Domitian's detractors with a means to vent their rage at the emperor and enact

⁷⁰ Stewart (1999): 183.

⁷¹ Procopius *Anecdota* 18.12-21, cited in Stewart (1999): 183.

violence against his legacy, destroying his attempts to creating a self-image and thus destroying part of his power over the visual landscape of Roman society.

Dorothy M. Robathan's essay, "Domitian's 'Midas-Touch,'" provides important background for a discussion of the memorialization and subsequent erasure of Domitian's legacy, as well as testament to the staying power of Domitian's influence despite posthumous attempts to minimize his impact on Rome. Robathan provides a complete, annotated catalogue of all of the buildings and monuments that Domitian restored, built, or completed. She also traces the history of those buildings, particularly their fate after Domitian's death; she notes that because of the "zeal" of Domitian's successors, who transformed the landscape of the city after Domitian's death, the structures of the Flavians were "obscured or destroyed," forcing historians to rely largely on literary accounts to assess Flavian building projects.⁷³ Fortunately for modern historians, Robathan's evaluation of access to Flavian structures veers on the pessimistic side: in fact, enough Flavian structures remain today, in almost-whole or in part, giving scholars enough physical material evidence by which to assess Domitian's contributions to Rome's urban

⁷² Stewart (1999): 183.

⁷³ Robathan (1942): 130.

landscape. Robathan explores the notion that the fate of Domitianic structures in part echoes Roman reception toward Domitian after his death and offers a portrait of the extent to which the process of *damnatio memoriae* reshaped memories of Domitian's actual reign.⁷⁴ Robathan notes that several architectural structures that Domitian built or restored continued to exist under the purview of new emperors, often with new uses or new names. For instance, she notes that Hadrian imposed an entirely new structure on the iconic Pantheon, while only the original Flavian foundation remains.⁷⁵ Likewise, the Forum Transitorium became the Forum Nervae after Domitian's death, while the Forum Trajani stemmed from a forum that Domitian failed to complete before his death.⁷⁶ Domitian himself restored and renovated multiple structures created by his predecessors, with the most dramatic projects resulting from destruction by fire.

Fire and Rebirth in Roman Architecture

Fire was an important symbol of destruction in Rome. Because of the flammable nature of construction materials that Roman builders used and the lack of fire codes at the time, Rome was often prone to particularly dangerous fires that spread quickly with little to stop them.

⁷⁴ Robathan (1942):

⁷⁵ Robathan (1942): 134.

Most city houses were built next to each other, so even a small fire could spread to entire blocks of houses long before people could contain it. Fire provoked a particular sense of fear and vulnerability, as its fatal power signified death as well as destruction. Roman law treated the crime of arson with particular harshness for this very reason. The legendary image of Nero playing a fiddle while Rome burned encapsulated all that Romans came to hate about Nero after his death- his neglect of the city, his callousness, his cruelty, his madness, his character as a whole. The city was particularly vulnerable at these times, and the emperor's response to emergency situations spoke greatly to his character in times of struggle.

Such a state of emergency also gave the new emperor a chance to become the people's hero: when the state needed a new kind of emperor, he could appear, and by contrasting himself with the old emperor, offer his vision of imperial rule as the perfect remedy for the empire's ills. Like other emperors before him, Domitian saw building projects as important means by which to leave a permanent trace of his legacy and heighten the visibility of policies and characteristics for which he wanted to be known. Domitian chose to restore the burnt buildings and add his own personal stamp to their appearances. Thus, he built upon an already-

⁷⁶ Robathan (1942): 140-141.

established legacy and associated that glorious past with his own rule in the present.

Fire provided Domitian with the opportunity to present his legacy as a rebirth of the past, linking memory of his reign with that of his worthy predecessors. Although Suetonius acknowledges Domitian's contribution in the form of restoration of buildings he nevertheless writes,

“[Domitian] restored many splendid buildings that had been destroyed by fire, including the Capitolium, which had been burnt again, but in all instances with the inscription of his own name only, and with no mention of the original builder.”⁷⁷

Suetonius accuses Domitian of taking sole credit for the restoration projects he commissioned, leaving out the names of builders on inscriptions. This would imply that that Domitian was egotistical and self-centered, and that his self-aggrandizement came at the expense of others. Worse, if Domitian not only did not mention the builders but also did not reference the names of the emperors who had previously built these structures, he would be disregarding the memory of his predecessors and taking advantage of the destruction of the buildings to take credit for their accomplishments. However, several modern scholars

⁷⁷ This translation is my own. Sue. *Dom.* 5.1. *Plurima et amplissima opera incendio absumpta restituit, in quis et Capitolium, quod rursus arserat; sed omnia sub titulo tantum suo ac sine ulla pristini auctoris memoria.*

dispute Suetonius' claims, citing Jones, who argues that Suetonius' language is unclear, and that far from taking credit where credit was not due, Domitian in fact downplayed his creative role in these projects, preferring to depict himself as merely a restorer of glorious monuments.⁷⁸ Expanding on Jones, this would seem to indicate that Domitian preferred to downplay his own contributions rather than enhance them. In addition, it is important to note that scholars actually know the name of one of Domitian's foremost architects, Rabirius, a man who designed both the imperial palace on the Palatine and Domitian's Alban villa. Often, artists who carried out Roman imperial commissions remained anonymous; the fact that people know Rabirius' name and can identify the projects he completed contradicts the idea that Domitian refused to acknowledge the contributions of those who labored on commission on his behalf.

Domitian responded to fire with political acuity: he used it as an opportunity to solidify his mark on the Roman architectural landscape and define his role in the city as a restorer as well as a creator of monuments. One of Domitian's most dramatic projects called for a complete restoration of the Capitol. The Capitol had been destroyed once before in 69 C.E. when Vespasian was in power. In 80 C.E., a year before Titus' death and Domitian's ascension to the throne, the Capitol burned.

⁷⁸ Jones (1992): 80.

The city lost multiple buildings with important religious and civic functions. This most recent fire in 80 C.E. presented Domitian with the perfect opportunity to make his mark on a complex that was crucial to civic life, doing honor to his father's reign and the complex itself in the process.⁷⁹ The Capitol not only held import as the symbol of the center of power in Rome, but also as a reminder of the darker legacy of Vespasian. When Vespasian took power, Rome was embroiled in civil war, and he arrived in the Capitol amidst burning and destruction. The Flavians tried to rid themselves of the image of the dynasty commencing amidst fire and death, and the restoration of the Capitol and prevention of future damage held utmost priority in that mission. For Domitian, the Capitol would have reminded him of the days when he was left as a young man to guard his entire family's legacy against their enemies, and the time when he was forced into hiding to escape attempts to murder him. Restoring the Capitol offered not only the opportunity to improve upon the complex but also the opportunity to rebuild the image of Flavian rule, and rehabilitate the memory of Domitian's role in the rise of the new dynasty.

⁷⁹ Apparently religious concerns dictated that only the height of the original buildings could be explicitly modified, and that had been seen as the one area for potential improvement. See Tac. *Hist* .4.53.

Domitian had to reconcile his new vision with the past. Domitian constructed new monuments to his own legacy, in an effort to leave a visual imprint on civic life. Suetonius mentions some of the buildings that Domitian restored:

Furthermore, [Domitian] built a new temple on the Capitoline Hill in honor of Jupiter Custos and the forum which is now called by the name of Nerva; also a temple to the Flavian family, a stadium, an Odeum, and a basin for the reenactment of naval battles, from which the Circus Maximus was later rebuilt with the stone used in this last one, when the two sides of it had been destroyed by fire.⁸⁰

Through these structures, Domitian made a completely new contribution to several areas of civic life, including sports entertainment, religion, public commerce, and performance. At first, however, Domitian needed not to define himself as a new emperor with a distinctive vision so much as he needed to prove his own moral worth. As soon as news of Titus' death spread around the empire in 81 C.E., rumors sprang up about Domitian's possible involvement in his brother's untimely demise. Although Titus had supposedly succumbed to a sudden illness, some people claimed that Domitian had murdered his brother in a bid for the throne. Some people also noted the speed at which he had himself

⁸⁰ This translation is my own. Sue. *Dom.* 5.1. *Novam autem excitavit aedem in Capitolio Custodi Iovi et forum quod nunc Nervae vocatur, item Flaviae templum gentis et stadium et odium et naumachiam, e cuius postea lapide Maximus Circus deustis utrimque lateribus exstructus est.*

proclaimed emperor as Titus lay on his deathbed and interpreted his actions as overeager. Domitian would have had to address those allegations in order to ensure respect for his authority. He accomplished this in part by harnessing the legacy of his father and brother.

In 81 C.E., Domitian built the Arch of Titus, a towering monument in the heart of the bustling Roman Forum that commemorated Vespasian and Titus' military victory over Jerusalem in 70-71 C.E. The inscription reads, "From the Senate and the People of Rome, to Divus Titus, son of Divus Vespasian, Vespasian Augustus." By dedicating the monument on behalf of the senators and the Roman citizenry at large, Domitian includes them his vision of the memory of his father and brother. The inscription presupposes that all Romans share Domitian's recollection of the Flavian legacy he has inherited. The tall, broad archway hovers above Romans as they walk into the Forum, serving as a commanding visual reminder of the legacy of Titus due to its large size. Although more modestly decorated than later arches such as the Arch of Constantine, it has intricate ornamentation and portrays important scenes from Titus' life.

With the Arch of Titus, Domitian sought not only to carve himself a place in history through the memory of his late brother but also to capitalize on Titus's military exploits. While Vespasian and Titus had

presided over multiple military victories, Domitian had yet to have any real experience in battle, much less to earn his own military triumph. His lack of military prowess stood out in contrast to his late older brother's formidable record as a soldier and a commander. Domitian saw himself as a capable military leader who had yet to be given a chance to prove himself.

These images at once evoke the triumph at Jerusalem; the bold carving style leaves no doubt as to the imagery's significance, and the dramatic presentation, with every inch of spare stone covered in sculptural relief, adds to the overwhelming visual impact of the arch itself. One relief panel on the arch depicts Titus' triumphal procession from the Porta Triumphalis to the Forum Boarium. The soldiers march in front of rows of horses carrying loot from the sacking of Jerusalem, including important symbols of the conquest of Judea such as a seven-branched candelabrum, trumpets, and a tablet that may represent the Ark of the Covenant. Another relief depicts Victory herself crowning Titus as reward for his triumph. These tableaux remind viewers of Titus' legacy, and yet, the apotheosis on the interior vault reminds viewers that Titus has passed: there an eagle carries Titus' body to the heavens. Titus has passed away, and his successor, Domitian, has built this impressive structure that glorifies Rome's victory over its enemies. Surely, the new

emperor Domitian can share in Titus' triumph. This image could also double as an augur of prosperity and triumph to come with the continuation of the Flavian dynasty under Domitian. The monument serves in part as a promise that Domitian will continue to further that legacy and bring Rome future glory, that he too will become a victorious leader of the military and a worthy leader in the new era.

The artists and artisans who sculpted the face of the arch further solidified Domitian's mark on the Roman Forum by testing out brand new innovative sculpture techniques. Their juxtaposition of high and low reliefs to emphasize foreground and background result in a dramatic presentation in which back figures recede and front figures pop forward, rendering them more realistically three-dimensional and giving the arch a particularly dynamic visual impact. This also means that a passerby can discern the figures from far away. The arch thus commands focus and dominates the visual landscape of the forum.

The location of the Arch also holds symbolic significance. Domitian strategically placed the Arch of Titus on the Velia, a small hill that rests to north side of the Palatine, between the Palatine and the Oppian, which itself is part of the Esquiline. The Velia was also sometimes called the Summa Via Sacra, or "Summit of the Via Sacra," because it marks the highest point of the Via Sacra, which itself leads to

the heart of the east side of the Roman Forum. The Velia lies near the Forum of Augustus, which would have allowed Romans to associate that Forum and its structures visually with the Arch of Titus, thus linking Titus and Domitian to the venerable Augustus and his visual legacy. For Domitian, the location of the Arch of Titus coupled with its colossal size and imposing visual presence would have carried just the sort of symbolism that he needed to link his reign once more with that of the well-liked emperor Augustus.

Domitian also capitalized on the legacy of his father and brother in the form of one the most impressive structures they had built, the Flavian Amphitheater, which the Romans would later rename the Colosseum. Vespasian had started the building project during his reign, but Titus actually completed it. When Titus became emperor, he held games and festivities in the huge structure for one hundred days, a lengthy time even by Roman entertainment standards and an important gesture to the Roman people that signaled his willingness to please them and share the wealth of the empire with them. The Colosseum became a symbol of the Flavian dynasty's gift of entertainment and spectacle to the Roman people. The games offered not only diversion and a source of pride for the Roman people, but also a chance for the emperor himself to appear before the people and demonstrate his own character. Domitian

constructed a basin within the arena and held mock sea battles with actual ships and paraded precious loot from conquered territories. Although Domitian is not usually credited with the construction of the Colosseum, and rightly so, his use of the Colosseum shaped its legacy and the events with which it has been associated.

Rising from the Rubble: Building upon the Ruins of Domitian's Legacy

Just as soon as Domitian's reign ended, the process of destruction and erasure of his legacy began. Immediately after he succeeded Domitian, Nerva sought to capitalize on the wave of hostility toward the dead emperor by channeling people's anger into physical destruction of Domitian's legacy. As one of his first steps to ensure his reign, Nerva had Domitian's gold and silver coins melted down.⁸¹ Coins that had been issued in previous years often circulated among Roman consumers; it was common for emperors to each issue their own coinage upon important occasions but relatively rare for emperors to actively destroy their predecessors' coins. By melting down Domitian's coins, Nerva delegitimized the images of Domitian that had circulated around the Roman Empire; this sent the Roman people a strong message about the lack of a place for Domitian in Rome's present memory. In addition, Nerva's

munities had left Rome in serious need of extra revenue, which the melted gold and silver provided.⁸² With Domitian's numismatic image literally put out of circulation, Nerva then set about defining the look of his own currency.

Like other emperors before him, Nerva sought to encapsulate a vision of his reign in the images and inscriptions on his coinage. Because he lacked the full support of the army, Nerva's early coins bore the reverse-side legend "Concordia exercituum," or "Concordance of the Armies," a legend only included on coins when the army was not in fact in harmony with the emperor.⁸³ Despite only holding office as emperor for one year, Nerva issued six separate coins, each in an attempt to solidify his authority and guide people's perception of him through the inclusion on his coinage of virtue-related phrases such as "aequitas august" and "iustitia august," phrases that he consistently edited or

⁸¹ Dio 68.1.1.

⁸² There has been considerable discussion among scholars about the nature of finances under Domitian and his successors. Ancient authors such as Suetonius and Dio portrayed Domitian as responsible for an economic recession that his successors successfully transformed into an economic surplus. However, scholars such as Ronald Syme have argued that Domitian actually left Rome with a significant surplus, and the financial policies of Trajan, along with his expensive campaigns during the Dacian Wars, served to weaken rather than strengthen the economy. Syme (1930): 215-226, in which Syme first laid out his argument, sparked an intense intellectual debate in which he sparred with C.H.V. Sutherland and others over the imperial finances under the three emperors. See also Sutherland (1935): 150-162 for the main counter-argument.

⁸³ Syme (1930): 64.

changed for each new coin issue.⁸⁴ In the numismatic portraits of Nerva, he appears with a large, narrow nose that slopes downward like a beak, a big neck, and a hint of a double chin. His eyes have creases and hollow curves underneath, and the lines on his face likewise emphasize his aging appearance. On two silver cistophori, he also bears a wreath, and his hairstyle imitates that of Augustus, with rows of short, curly locks. Although he did not acknowledge the inspiration, Nerva followed the artistic precedent set by the Flavian emperors. The Flavian portrait style allowed him to acknowledge his age and physical flaws while working them to his advantage in projecting an image of a mature and experienced statesman. The visual legacy of Domitian and his family influenced emperors even after his death, but the memory of that source of inspiration had to be forgotten for Nerva and his successors to adopt the new style and make it their own without political ramifications.

The Faces of Domitian

Nero's traumatic reign and his sudden suicide had presented Vespasian with the perfect opportunity to reinvent the image of Rome and firmly establish himself as a new kind of leader. It was easy for Vespasian to offer himself as an alternative to the imperial attributes and policies that Nero exemplified: Nero's decadent, superfluous

⁸⁴ Shotter (1983): 219.

consumption of culture and luxury offered the ultimate study in contrast when compared to Vespasian, who cast himself as a down-to-earth, modest, even humble man and openly spoke of his own shortcomings and mortality as a means to prove his humanity. He could claim that he rose to the throne with the approval of his fellow Romans, unlike Nero, a product of royal inbreeding who represented despotic hereditary rule and greed fueled by a lust for power. Under Nero, Rome burnt, and its moral character, like its economic and civic well-being, languished in the ashes and the dust. Vespasian presented the perfect image of a phoenix to lead Rome's reputation out of the ashes and into glory. Vespasian had already been hailed as a capable warrior with a proven military record and a strong ability to lead, and he came into power with the critical support of Rome's legions.⁸⁵ He also came from a suitable background: as the son of a tax collector or equestrian rank, his social status was high enough for him to achieve political upward mobility, yet not so high that he would seem overly privileged and reliant upon his social rank to achieve success. He did not lay a hereditary claim to power, nor did he boast of a quasi-divine lineage, nor did he claim to be a god among men. His

⁸⁵ In the age of the professional Roman military with its profound loyalties to individual commanders, soldiers' approval or disapproval of imperial rule could make or break an emperor. Like other emperors, Vespasian waited for the troops to declare him emperor and proclaim his authority before he assumed power in Rome.

relationships with prior emperors, instead of being a potential liability, became a political asset, as he could claim that he had experience with negotiations and distinguishing himself through his virtuous behavior. Unlike Nero, whose effeminate qualities and sexual proclivities quickly became the stuff of legend after his death, Vespasian was a manly soldier with a steadfast character, a straight arrow at a time when imperial rule had come to represent corruption and uncontained lewdness. Unlike Nero, who inherited his position at a young age, Vespasian assumed the throne when he was sixty years old; to later biographers, this seems to have rendered him immune to the greed and ambition that can come with ascent to power at a younger age. Refreshingly, Vespasian claimed to usher in a new era for Rome: one of accountability, honesty, and prosperity. He quickly proceeded to cultivate an image not only for himself, but also of his two sons, who represented the new dynasty and immediately benefitted from their father's efforts to feature them prominently in his court and help them rise to positions of authority. Like the Flavian emperor, Flavian art and architecture represented a new era for Rome.

To mark the beginning of this new era, Vespasian boldly strayed from the idealistic portraiture of previous reigns. Vespasian's sculptors carved every flaw in his face to show Vespasian's modesty and humility;

his wrinkled forehead and his signature crow's feet represented the wisdom of mature age and the prudence of a man who knew better than to pretend to look younger than his age. Although his body still held the same god-like form as other emperors, his face became a symbol of the new kind of emperor: an emperor with a sense of humor and self-awareness, willing to show his true self to his fellow Romans. Of course, this represented an effective calculated tactic: the portraits of Vespasian, while more realistic than those of his predecessors, carefully flattered him and advantageously portrayed his flaws as plausible assets that aligned well with the imperial image he sought to convey. Like Augustus, Vespasian quickly capitalized on the popular opinions of his time and appealed to the people for widespread support, in turn increasing his power and influence over them. Vespasian left behind a remarkable legacy, and an image of a well-loved, benevolent father of the people, who died a peaceful death.

Titus represented the natural heir to such a legacy; equally decorated and praised for his military prowess, Titus benefitted from his father's inclusion of him as a right-hand man in every military and political situation over which Vespasian had control. Titus received a court education and took every top position available to him as Vespasian's heir. There was no question of the smooth transition from

the reign of Vespasian to the reign of Titus. Because Titus' reign was so brief, there was no reason to view him as anything other than the heir to Vespasian's legacy. He demonstrated no flaws in character, presumably left the economy in great shape, and started several impressive building projects. Domitian had a tough act to follow.

Like Augustus and Vespasian, Domitian faced a daunting task in carving out a space for himself and his vision. Although Vespasian and Titus had created a solid reputation for the Flavian dynasty that Domitian automatically inherited, Domitian did not have the same military or political experience. He had been too young to fight in most of Vespasian's campaigns, and Titus had always gotten the top political positions as the emperor's heir. Furthermore, Titus' sudden death placed Domitian in a delicate position: his supposed rivalry with and jealousy of his brother now made him a potential murder suspect, and his lack of experience made it necessary for him to carve out his own unique image, one that marked him as more than just the younger son of Vespasian. To present himself to the Roman public, Domitian took the Flavian portraiture style a step further: while Vespasian's Flavian style presented a stark contrast from prior styles, Domitian presented a seamless blend of Flavian and pre-Flavian artistic styles. He often cherry-picked the most flattering and evocative elements of prior portrait styles to help establish

him as a worthy cultural and political successor of the famous beloved emperors who had come before him.

Domitian managed not only to shape memory of his own reign through the construction of new monuments and buildings but also to harness the legacy of well-esteemed emperors who had come before him, in particular Augustus. Like Augustus, Domitian attempted to establish and enforce several morality laws aimed at regulating citizens' behavior so as to discourage depravity and vice. To that end, Domitian enforced one of Augustus's laws, the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, which carried a stiff penalty for adultery; according to the law, if a man caught his wife engaged in adultery, he could kill the adulterer with impunity, provided that he divorce his wife as soon as possible.⁸⁶ As part of his morality program, Domitian sought to cast himself in the image of Augustus, and his portraits of the time reflect this.

For some of his portraits, Domitian reappropriated Augustus' image as the divine *princeps* with complete moral integrity. Augustus managed to cultivate the paradoxical image of the invincible godly ruler

⁸⁶ See Jones (1992): 35. Domitian posthumously received negative accounts of his reign for his supposedly hypocritical attitude regarding morality. Allegedly, while Domitian enforced the letter of the Lex Julia, he did not practice it himself; when his wife, Domitia, had an affair with a well-known actor, Paris, Domitian had Paris killed but initially declined to divorce Domitia. Eventually he did divorce her and sent her into exile, but he soon called her back and remarried her (Suetonius includes these

who was at once virtuously, benevolently superior and utterly humble. Augustus had a reputation for an austere sensibility; for example, Suetonius famously commented on the ugly, plain house in which Augustus chose to live. In a similar vein, Augustan portraiture emphasized the pensive, serious expression of the emperor, and the clean, modest look of his features. Although Augustus himself carried the brand of humility and piety associated with his choice to live a less grandiose lifestyle, he nonetheless often portrayed himself in a more youthful, idealized form, an unrealistic representation of the aging emperor that held metaphorical rather than literal value. Augustus, as the first emperor, pioneered the use of the so-called Classical beauty model of the Ancient Greeks in Roman imperial portraiture. Under this format, the subject of the portrait would have a youthful idealized face and body that reflected both Greek golden standards of physique and appearance and often bore similarities with sculptures of deities. However, with this form, Augustus was careful not to detract from his image by seeming vainglorious or reveling in his self-praise; in each idealized portrait, Augustus bears a slight frown or pensive expression, meant to convey his modest demeanor. This combination of idealistic beauty and apparent modesty

and other alleged acts of hypocrisy in Sue. *Dom.* 8.1-8.4). For a colorful account of Paris's murder, see Dio 67.3.

suiting Domitian well. Thus, in his imperial portraits, Domitian's facial features reflect that Augustan youthfulness and bear that characteristic pensive frown, but the portrait also remains true to the Flavian tendency to acknowledge physical flaws in that the artists also include Domitian's hook nose and protruding upper lip (and, for a brief period, his receding hairline.) Domitian adapted Augustan idealism and mediated it through Flavian realism in his imperial portraiture, thus emphasizing his inheritance of multiple legacies and his promise to embody both old and new ideals.

Augustus set a strong precedent in portraiture that would remain virtually unchallenged until the Flavian dynasty, which sought to memorialize its emperors in an entirely different light. In contrast to Augustus, Vespasian adopted an ultra-realistic model in his portraits; commissioned artists recorded every wrinkle, furrow and flaw in his facial features, and he capitalized on the progression of age to help convey his wisdom and life experience. Capitalizing on a trend started by Galba during his brief reign,⁸⁷ Vespasian embraced the weathered face as

⁸⁷ Kleiner (1992): 168. By the time Galba became emperor, he was already in his late seventies. Rather than continue the trend of ignoring the reality of his age in favor of portraying himself with a youthful physique, Galba decided that there was no use in fooling anybody. On a sestertius from his brief reign in 68 CE, Galba has close-cropped hair that begins to thin over the forehead, a hook nose neatly gauged out by the artist, strong jowls and a prominent double chin. His eyes seem small in proportion to his face, and he has baggy patches under his eyes that speak not only to

a symbol of military experience and venerable old age, setting a strong precedent for future emperors, who would likewise often choose to adopt a realistic mode of portraiture to politicize their own attempts to be down-to-earth and “real.” Choices such as hairstyle, degree of realism, resemblance to prior styles of portraiture, and potential inclusion of iconography became symbols of an emperor’s rule and the identity with which he wanted to be associated at that particular moment.

Domitian himself changed the looks of his portraits several times over the course of his reign and referenced the styles of several of his predecessors, which speaks to his struggles to solidify and shape his identity. Most notably, and perhaps most surprisingly, in later years Domitian chose to style himself after the later emperor Nero, an odd and somewhat risky choice given Nero’s lack of popularity. According to portrait busts and statues of the period, the Neronian style consisted of wavy curls of hair, closely cropped and layered, with perfectly smoothed and curled locks gave the appearance of a halo or victory wreath around the crown or forehead. Nero’s youthful, beatified portraits reflected his

his age but also to his frailty. Galba’s image on these coins associated him with his status as an experienced military commander, implying that his experience and age should be a clear asset in his ability to lead Rome. Although Galba reigned for a little more than seven months, his style of portraiture clearly influenced Vespasian, who decided after becoming emperor to take the Roman imperial portrait style to even further heights of performative veracity and exploit his experience as a military leader to prove that he was qualified and capable enough to govern Rome successfully.

love of Hellenistic art and culture. At the time of his reign, Rome's economic woes and political strife made Nero's so-called obsession with art and literature seem like a slap in the face to his ordinary subjects, who faced starvation and lack of infrastructure. Nero imported sculptures and commissioned copies of manuscripts, yet he could not seem to lead the Romans out of crisis or even ease their burden. In fact, Nero's fascination with Hellenistic and Near Eastern art styles and forms produced some of the most significant developments in Roman art and created a period of intense artistic output. Nevertheless, Nero could not seem to reconcile his plan for cultural advancement with the decline in Rome's political and economic stature. With that in mind, Domitian's choice to emulate Neronian style portraiture might come across to modern viewers as asking for trouble. However, in the few years prior to Domitian's assassination, Rome was experiencing economic growth and prosperity. Domitian had managed to solve or avoid major crises at home and abroad, and he had maintained his authority as emperor. Like Nero before him, Domitian had a penchant for literature and art; he even composed poetry and received praise for his work. He drew inspiration from Hellenic and Near Eastern culture, and from the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Domitian may have seen an opportunity to elevate Roman art and architecture to a new level. As such, Domitian would want his image

to reflect a Hellenic ideal as well as the Julio-Claudian style, exemplified by the most recent descendant, Nero. FIX TRANSITION HERE.

Divine Portraits and the Emperor

Domitian's commission of images deities and divine themes reveals his complex relationship with Roman gods and goddesses. Augustus had begun a long tradition in which emperors associated themselves with specific patron deities; through dedications of temples and other religious buildings, as well as commissions of statues of gods and goddesses, the Roman emperors often sought to link themselves and their reigns symbolically to different deities. Sometimes Roman emperors would commission portraits of themselves in the fashion of demigods, or portraits of Apollo or Zeus might bear a certain resemblance to a particular Roman emperor. In imperial Roman portraiture, there was a fine distinction to be made between elevating one's own image and portraying oneself with godlike features, and actually equating oneself with the gods, a sacrilege reserved for insanely narcissistic emperors such as Caligula.⁸⁸ For emperors, the solution could be found in portrayals of the hero-demigod Hercules, a godlike yet

profoundly human mortal who represented strength, brute force, heroism, the epitome of muscular physique and physical fitness, and courage.

Hercules and his labors became a favorite subject of imperial imagery.⁸⁹

One such prime example of Herculean imagery at work in service of the image of the emperor lies in the Domitianic statue of Hercules from the Aula Regia of the imperial palace on the Palatine Hill.⁹⁰ In this statue, Hercules has a double chin and fleshy face, but the rest of his body is all exaggeratedly muscular; his neck is almost as wide as his head, with a throbbing vein to emphasize his strength. His arms and legs indicate his supreme physique through clearly articulated muscles. They also seem almost double the proportion of his head, rendering him at once massive and oddly short in stature. His head boasts carefully coiffed curls and a trimmed beard that comes just down to the end of his jawline. For Domitian, this figure represents the heroic male ideal, and the ideal form of masculinity and male appearance. Like Domitian, the statue also has a slightly protruding upper lip, although Hercules' protrusion is more subtle. Significantly, this statue stood behind Domitian's throne along

⁸⁸ According to Ancient Roman authors, Caligula believed that he was the human incarnation of Jove and supposedly had his subjects worship him like a god. He also took his half-sister as a wife, hailing her as Juno.

⁸⁹ For example, for a detailed recent treatment of Herculean imagery, see Palagia (1990): 51-70, which discusses two statues located in the Forum Boarium in Rome in context of Herculean imagery and several other comparable Ancient Roman depictions of Hercules.

with several statues of divinities. When Domitian received visitors in his throne room, he had carefully arranged it so that he would be flanked by and dead center in front of a whole array of divine beings, thus associating himself with their ilk and reminding his visitors of the divine support his reign received. As Kleiner remarks, interactions between the human emperor and divine gods or personifications “would become one of the hallmarks of Domitianic art.”⁹¹

Domitian, like other emperors, took great pains to restore temples and erect statues in honor of his divine patrons; he believed that he had a special relationship with Minerva in particular, and many works of art associated with the Domitian highlight Minerva and her role in bringing honor and glory to his reign. A statue of Minerva stands guard atop the only remaining portion of the Forum Transitorium, which Domitian built in the 80s or 90s as part of his extensive program and Nerva later rededicated as the Forum Nervae, the name for which it is known today.⁹² The famous *Equus Domitiani* statue, now lost, also featured Minerva at the emperor’s side, holding the head of a Gorgon in front of Domitian’s horse as the emperor rode him.⁹³ These and other images of Minerva An

⁹⁰ See Kleiner (1992): 184 for reproduction of image.

⁹¹ Kleiner (1992): 183.

⁹² Kleiner (1992): 193.

⁹³ See third chapter for an analysis of Statius’ description of the statue in *Silvae* 1.1.

allusion to Minerva also appears in another Domitianic equestrian statue, a bronze equestrian statue of Domitian from the Sacellum of the Augustales at Misenum, which Peter L. Tuck interprets as a depiction of the emperor hunting, rather than in battle.⁹⁴ These and other Domitianic images of Minerva serve to link the goddess and her divine attributes with Domitian and help to define his self-image.

If Tuck's interpretation holds weight, the statue from the Sacellum proves that Domitian was the first emperor to depict himself hunting in an imperial statue, a tradition most scholars believe originated thirty years later. According to Tuck, through such hunting imagery, Domitian seeks to redefine the notion of *virtus* and model it after Hellenic idealized imagery of manhood, which emphasize not only skill in battle but also accomplishments in hunting, music, and other cultural elements of daily and civic life. If so, Domitian would face a difficult task in redefining *virtus* after the Hellenic model: Caligula and Nero had attempted to elevate the importance of cultural pursuits, and they were met with such resistance that their emphasis on elevating Roman art forms actually served as one of the main justifications for the posthumous condemnation

⁹⁴ See Tuck (2005). Tuck's main argument about the nature of subject matter of the statue rests on specific Roman guidelines concerning what apparel and accessories can be properly used under which circumstances; essentially, Domitian would never have worn those shoes and that clothing to battle. In addition, the saddle he uses does not have the traditional four pommels of a cavalry saddle.

of their memory. If Domitian did wish to advance a new notion of *virtus*, perhaps in this instance he utilizes iconography of Hercules and Minerva for a new purpose: to show that virtues like strength, courage and wisdom do not necessarily have to come from battlefield accomplishments. The figure of Domitian has a cuirass a winged gorgon, part of the iconography commonly associated with Minerva, featured front and center. Under the gorgon's chin lie two serpents entwined in a Hercules knot. These reliefs connote Domitian's association with strength and courage, and wisdom and skill in war. As Tuck notes, the incisions in the relief work on the cuirass would originally have been damascened in copper with a silver inlay,⁹⁵ serving to draw the viewer's eye to it and emphasize its importance in the highly symbolic composition. Domitian wishes to highlight the idea that Hercules and Minerva guide him even when he is not in battle. The fact that Domitian displays divinely associated attributes while hunting suggests that he manages to cultivate his *virtus* in an alternative setting, rather than in war. With the heavy emphasis on battle-readiness in many Roman equestrian statues, the alternate activity might also serve to highlight Domitian's non-violent diplomatic victories and his prioritization of peace and tranquility, although given Domitian's emphasis on

⁹⁵ Tuck (2005): 231.

establishing his own military prowess, this particular interpretation seems unlikely. In any case, this statue demonstrates Domitian's aim to define a new concept of *virtus*, a mission that later emperors attempted as well.

According to Ancient Roman historians, Domitian famously took the title "dominus et deus," or "lord and god," a move that supposedly highlighted his narcissism and his hubris. Kleiner argues that it also highlighted the relationship Domitian felt he had with the gods and his wish to be considered a divine person even while still alive.⁹⁶ Domitian's title of "dominus et deus" appeared on another important form of imperial portraiture, minted coins. Because of their wide circulation and relatively cheap manufacturing costs, gold, silver and bronze coins in all denominations offered emperors the perfect platform on which to convey their chosen public images. Because of the limitations of the medium, the sharpness of incisions, and the small size of the coins themselves, these particular imperial portraits could only offer the most succinct, dramatic version of the attributes an emperor wished to highlight: due to the sharpness of the incisions, a sharp beak nose would appear even sharper and bird-like, for example. These imperial portraits would have been seen in any place that accepted Roman currency, so the wide distribution necessitated careful consideration and forethought. Former emperors'

coins remained in circulation except under special circumstances as well, so it would be immediately apparent to the average Roman if a particular emperor's coinage evoked certain styles or attributes of previous emperors. Commemorative issues on the occasion of special events such as religious festivals or military victories also offered emperors the chance to advertise their achievements to a large audience. Melanie Grunow Sobocinski highlights the significance of a particularly informative group of coins issued on the occasion of the Ludi Saeculares:

During Domitian's 14th consulship and eighth year of tribunician power (September 88-September 89 C.E.), an extraordinary issue of coinage encompassing every major denomination of gold, silver, and bronze interrupted the regular output of the mint of Rome. The 15 coin types commemorating Domitian's celebration of the Ludi Saeculares (so-called Secular Games) in 88 C.E. (841 A.U.C.) are the most extensive set of numismatic images concerning a single religious festival to have survived from Roman antiquity.⁹⁷

Domitian founded the Ludi Saeculares as part of his quest to make a mark on Roman communal entertainment. Tacitus played a significant role in the planning and execution of the Ludi, although not much of his eyewitness account survives.⁹⁸ Although Domitian probably decided the overall design and thematic considerations, the coin engraver had at some

⁹⁶ Kleiner (1992): 183.

⁹⁷ Sobocinski (2006): 581.

⁹⁸ See Tac. *Ann.* 11.11.1 for mention of his involvement.

discretion in their individual renditions of designs on individual coins.⁹⁹ Because the ordinary public comprised the main audience for these coins simply by virtue of their constant handling of monetary transactions, Domitian sought to project a specific image of himself as an ally of the people, a populist emperor. The common legend on the coins reads, *IMP(erator) CAES(ar) DOMIT(ianus) AVG(ugustus) GERM(anicus) P(ontifex) M(aximus) TR(ibunicia) P(otestate) VIII CENS(or) PER(petuo) P(ater)P(atritae)*.¹⁰⁰ The fact that Domitian chooses as his title in this instance *Pater Patriae*, or “Father of the Country,” suggests that in this case he wishes to emphasize his role as paternalistic caretaker rather than as supreme ruler, in keeping with his desire to emulate Augustus, the first and foremost *Pater Patriae*. The imagery on the coins likewise conveys his connection to the people, as well as his foremost consideration of their wishes. For example, a bronze coin known as an *as*, Domitian performs a sacrifice over an altar with a temple behind him, while two

⁹⁹ Sobocinski (2006): 595-596. This means, in part, that others may have had a hand in the presentation of Domitian’s image besides the emperor himself, although no historical records exist that show scholars to what extent Domitian or the engravers were responsible for various aspects of the coins’ appearance. In addition, the theater where the games were held got demolished before the manufacture of the Ludi coins, requiring artists to draw on their memories of the theater’s appearance or imaginative visions (Sobocinski (2006): 596).

¹⁰⁰ I have used Sobocinski’s expansion of the abbreviations that appear on the coins; see Sobocinski (2006): 583, Note 3.

musicians accompany the sacrifice, which Sobocinski terms “simplest and most generic of all the sacrifice designs.”¹⁰¹ Sobocinski argues that the generic nature of the sacrifice represents the crux of Domitian’s message: he has held the Ludi for the sake of his people, not for the sake of his self-glorification. The fact that the scene does not portray any of Domitian’s specific contributions to the event suggests that he does not wish to prioritize his accomplishments but rather celebrate the event itself and its reception by the public. Likewise, “the tetrastyle facade-and-flank temples, found only on the sestertii, effectively divide the field of the coin into two halves. They separate the emperor from the citizenry, a divide emphasized by the emperor's elevated position (seated on a platform when citizens approach on foot, or standing while they kneel in prayer).” (596)

Although the flank of the temple frames and thus isolates the emperor, in every case gesture connects him with the citizens. The artists do not set Domitian directly beneath the temple facade, perhaps to avoid the suggestion of divinity that might result.¹⁰²

The Ludi coins offered Domitian the opportunity to once again associate his achievements with that of Augustus.

¹⁰¹ Sobocinski (2006): 598.

¹⁰² Sobocinski (2006): 596.

Having emulated the visual record of Augustus, the coin designers surely realized the potential for such images to influence both memory and history. The importance of this tactic at the time of the Ludi Saeculares cannot be overstated. The visibility of the festival in the coinage of Domitian stands in sharp contrast to the numismatic invisibility of the Ludi of Claudius. The repetition of Augustan iconography was part of a larger effort to link Domitian's Ludi Saeculares to Augustus' event by all means possible, and at the same time to discount Claudius' inconvenient celebration.¹⁰³

Sobocinski argues that while the coins cannot possibly offer a full Domitianic inscription describing Domitian's vision of the event, nor can they replace an eyewitness account of the games themselves, they hold value for the type of memory of the games that they sought to evoke, as well as the connection to past Ludi that held such symbolic significance for Domitian.

Nerva in the Aftermath of Domitian's Death

Domitian's death became a rallying point for his opposition, who saw it as an opportunity to reshape and reclaim Roman domestic policy. Authors such as Suetonius, writing after Domitian's death in the years of heightened anti-Domitianic sentiment promoted by his imperial successors, hailed Domitian's death as a sign of the death of tyranny and the glorious birth of a new and improved Rome, with a new and better

¹⁰³ Sobocinski (2006): 600.

kind of emperor exemplified by the great leaders Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian. Suetonius ends his account of Domitian's life and death in *De Vitae Caesarum* with a story about a prophetic dream that Domitian had. Suetonius writes,

They say, in the same manner, that Domitian dreamed that a golden hump grew out from the back of his neck, which he held as the portent of prosperous and joyous things to come for the state after him, just as it shortly came about in his absence through the wholesomeness (*sane*) and moderation (*moderatione*) of subsequent emperors.¹⁰⁴

Although anti-Domitianic fervor had helped to put him in office, Nerva did not seem to take his own position for granted or consider it in any way secure.¹⁰⁵ Prior to Domitian's assassination, Nerva had fallen into the pro-Domitianic faction of the Senate. Although the Senate had selected him almost immediately, Nerva was by then an older man with decades of experience in political office; he knew that his prior allegiance to Domitian would place him in an awkward position and give senators potential leverage over him. Nerva also made sure to promptly hand out the *congiarium*, a customary monetary payment to the people of Rome in

¹⁰⁴ This translation is my own. Sue. *Dom.* 23.2. *Ipsum etiam Domitianum ferunt somniasse gibbam sibi pone cervicem auream enatam, pro certoque habuisse beatiorem post se laetioremque portendi rei publicae statum, sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum.*

¹⁰⁵ *Epit.* 12.2-3: After rumors spread that Domitian is alive and wants to reclaim the emperorship, Parthenius and Arrius Antoninus have to reassure Nerva. See also Hammond (1956).

return for their support. The late emperor Galba's fate had offered later emperors an important lesson in public opinion: the people did not react well if an emperor refused them a *congiarium*. Nerva also knew that they did not react well when the emperor ignored the need for their support and disregarded the value of public opinion. Nerva was conscious of the near-uprising among the soldiers when Domitian was assassinated; he also knew that the late emperor had many supporters among the poor and destitute who, far from regarding his death with indifference as Suetonius claimed in his account, actually saw real benefits in some of his attempts to offer financial assistance and crack down on local corruption in the provinces and in local governments.¹⁰⁶ Domitian had been a young, enterprising heir to a dynasty who clearly exercised his authority and refused to bow down to the whim of the Senate, which would set a precedent for his future successors' dealings with that political body. He also left Rome with few foreign and economic conflicts. He executed

¹⁰⁶ For a thorough treatment and evaluation of Domitian's anti-corruption measures in the provinces and his reception amongst the poorer factions of Rome, see Pleket (1961): 296-315. Pleket argues that Domitian's anti-corruption efforts in particular rankled the senators, who as beneficiaries of the customary unspoken perks of provincial governorship seriously resented the crackdown. Pleket details abuses of power such as governors' demands for gifts, lodgings and other unreasonable accommodations upon visits to territories, in return for the governors' tolerance and protection of the local people. Pleket also neatly sums up aristocratic attitudes toward Domitian: "He had increased the pay of the legionaries with one third, spoiled Rome's citizens by prodigious festivals and shows, while his building program did the rest). In short, his reign was one of devastating terror and extravagance" (Pleket (1961): 296-297).

numerous building projects that he managed to fund without putting a significant dent in the budget and found several ways to tax groups such as the Jews efficiently and benevolently in a way so as to appear to be doing them a favor.¹⁰⁷ Nerva inherited Domitian's legacy, and he had a difficult choice as to whether to openly maintain Domitian's more successful policies and risk the penalty of association with the memory of Domitian's reign, or to capitalize on anti-Domitianic fervor and face the challenge of building upon Domitian's successes without alerting the public to his retention of those supposedly hateful policies.

Nerva chose to take a pragmatic approach to the question of Domitian's legacy and his own involvement in Domitian's reign. Nerva claimed that despite his support of the late emperor, Domitian had in fact threatened his position; in other words, he too had been a victim of Domitian's personality, just like everyone else. By the time he assumed office, Nerva was and in ill health. He did not waste time fabricating an idealized image of himself; all portraits of him from the time depict him as old and venerable, with no illusions as to his features. While Nerva did not try to hide the reality of his age or his limitations, later emperors such

¹⁰⁷ Domitian enacted the *lex Judaica*, which allowed Jews to freely practice their religion if they agreed to pay a tariff. While such measures may seem anti-Semitic to a modern observer, until Domitian's time, Jews had not been free to practice their religion openly at all. Under Domitian, they became legitimate businessmen whom the state not only tolerated but also viewed as a financial asset.

as Trajan and Hadrian paid kinder tribute to him in their commission of posthumous portraits of him as deified emperor; in these busts and statues, Nerva appears more heroic, with idealized features. In seeking to deal with Domitian's legacy, Nerva approached crafting an image in the same pragmatic and strategically effective way as he approached the promotion of his own image: he acknowledged the unavoidable truths while using them to his advantage. In Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio's accounts, Nerva appears as an honest old soul with a straightforward manner who established a reign of reason and prudence, an impression carefully crafted and promoted by Nerva himself while he lived.

Despite the foresight that these subtle maneuvers displayed, Nerva faced a challenge as to how to respond to people whom Domitian had exiled and ostracized. Several of those whom Domitian had punished had committed serious crimes, and overturning their convictions or releasing them from exile despite the juries' verdicts and the evidence presented against them would have hurt not only Domitian's reputation but the state of Rome, should those people return to Rome and become repeat offenders. With this in mind, Nerva permitted all exiles except those convicted of serious crimes to leave exile and reenter Rome, and he returned those former exiles' previously confiscated property. He took an oath promising the Senate not to execute any of its members, and he

declared that the Senate in turn had the discretion to prosecute whomever they wished as an informer. This created a volatile situation in which people came forward and accused their political rivals of being informers based largely on circumstantial evidence; with the Senate's newfound power to prosecute at will, there was no check to their acts of vengeance. Nerva's own declaration rendered him powerless to control the tide of false accusations.¹⁰⁸ The politicians who lived through what they perceived as a volatile, hostile environment under Domitian found themselves in a far more cutthroat scene under Nerva's new declaration; whereas Domitian had exerted tight control over his political rivals and spurred accusations of censorship, Nerva had gravitated toward the opposite anything-goes approach, which created its own set of problems regarding the limits of imperial authority.

Examinations of the visual landscape and visual imagery of a time period reveal great insight into the political propaganda of the time and the particular messaging about a leading figure's public self-image.

Domitian's rich and diverse contributions to Roman art and architecture,

¹⁰⁸ See Dio 68.1.3. In this account, Tiberius Catius Fronto, the first consul under Nerva, remarks that it is bad enough to have an emperor under whom one cannot do anything (Domitian,) but it is worse to have an emperor under whom one is permitted to do anything (Nerva). This remark reflects an interesting viewpoint: censorship, although it has a negative impact on freedom of expression and political thought, provides structure and stability. Several modern scholars have explored this notion in

both in terms of style and content, reveal the complex politics of shaping one's visual image during one's lifetime, creating a living memory with the potential to change as people continue to experience and remember the time period.

The process of destruction of such a visual legacy, offers equal insight into the value of reshaping the public's memories of a particular moment in time as well as their perceptions regarding a specific person. Domitian's detractors and the next several emperors who succeeded him, Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian, seized the perfect opportunity to destroy positive memories of Domitian's reign and replace them with a sense that Domitian had caused communal upheaval, moral depravity, and a general calamitous effect on Rome's reputation. The assassination of Domitian and subsequent anti-Domitianic fervor gave Domitian's critics the perfect straw man to use as political fodder, allowing them to define their own political positions in plain opposition to Domitian. Domitian could stand for any negative policies or qualities of the old Rome, just as his death offered the opportunity for the cultural rebirth of Rome. Domitian's successors had their own complicated relationships with Domitian's legacy; they reclaimed some of Domitian's policies and some of his

modern-day politics, for instance in studies of the countries that once comprised the Soviet Union and their recent electoral history.

monuments as their own. Nerva in particular faced a dilemma when soldiers protested the condemnation of Domitian's memory and the destruction of certain Domitianic statues. Nerva himself had to carve a new public image for himself through public art works; he adopted the Flavian style as a means to capitalize on rather than omit physical signs of old age in his appearance.

Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't:

Politics of Memory and Imperial Themes in Statius' *Silvae*

The title echoes that of a now lost word of Lucan. Like Greek *ὄλη*, *silva* has two meanings: 'wood' or 'forest,' and 'material' from which something is made. In the present context the meaning comes out clearly from a passage of Quintilian (10.3.17) concerning speech composition. Some speakers, he says, 'elect to make a draft of the whole subject as rapidly as possible, and write impromptu, following the heat and impulse of the moment. They call this draft their "raw material" (*silva*). They then revise their effusions and give them rhythmical structure' (Donald A. Russell's translation).¹⁰⁹

Like Domitian, Publius Papinius Statius has suffered for centuries from *damnatio memoriae*, although his takes a literary form, thanks largely to his positive treatment of Domitian in the *Silvae*. Fourth and fifth century poets such as Ausonius, Claudian, and Sidonius Apollinaris drew stylistic and thematic inspiration from the *Silvae*.¹¹⁰ Medieval writers drew inspiration from Statius' epics, the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid*, but not from his shorter poems on more commonplace themes in the *Silvae*. Italian Renaissance poets hailed the shorter poems, and several attempted to imitate them. However, until recently, modern scholars largely dismissed Statius; when they have wrote about him at all,

they labeled him as a simple propagandist who fed like a sponge off of truly great Roman authors such as Virgil and Lucan.¹¹¹ Assessment of Statius' work has been made all the more difficult by limited biographical details,¹¹² which otherwise might help to define his political career and its potential influence on his poetry (and vice versa.) Up until the past couple of decades, most modern-day scholars viewed Statius' work as trivial flattery with little literary or historical merit. Scholars argued that his constant praise of the emperor rendered him little more than a puppet during the Domitianic period, and therefore his work was largely inconsequential. In his 1994 work *Latin Literature: A History*, Gian Biagio Conte sums up that prevailing attitude in his less-than-ringing endorsement of the *Silvae*: "This mild futility... is the heir of a great and vigorous poetry (Virgil, Homer, Propertius, Catullus). From this tradition the poetry of the *Silvae* inherits expressive modes and

¹⁰⁹ Shackleton Bailey (2003): 5.

¹¹⁰ Zeiner (2005): 2.

¹¹¹ Many scholars have taken this view, from J.H. Mozley (1928) to Gian Biagio Conte (1994).

¹¹² Most of the details of his life are sketchy, particularly dates of important life events. His father, name unknown, was born in Velia but moved to Neapolis (modern-day Naples,) where Statius was born sometime around 45-50 C.E. Statius' father won several poetry competitions in Naples and Greece. Statius' father may or may not have been a knight who lost his status due to financial difficulties; later on, he became a teacher of literature (Shackleton Bailey (2003): 3.) Statius likewise won several competitions at the Augustalia and Domitian's new Alban festival but failed to win the famous Capitoline competition some time in the early 90s, after which he returned to Naples and remained there until his death, possibly sometime around 96

phrases, values and moral structures, but it sets out to exploit this residual splendor in order to highlight of everyday kitsch (which includes the emperor and his worship.”¹¹³ This burning criticism has been echoed largely without critical reevaluation; only in the past couple of decades have scholars such as Carole Newlands argued that Statius deserves consideration and rehabilitation. Nevertheless, Statius and his *Silvae* offer prodigious tools from which to understand the Domitianic period and its influence on art and culture, as well as the key role that Statius played in shaping memory of Domitian’s reign.

While modern scholarship has largely ignored or downgraded Statius and his work until recent decades, scholars such as Carole E. Newlands have sought through their work to rehabilitate Statius’ memory and promote more active consideration of his potential contribution to our understanding of the reign of Domitian. Newlands writes, “The subject matter of the *Silvae* – banquets, the emperor’s new statue, a new road – have been taken as evidence of the political and literary decadence of an age that no longer had anything important to say.”¹¹⁴ However, Newlands counters that perception with her argument that Statius in fact

C.E., possibly earlier. The *Silvae* were composed over a period of time during 89-96 C.E.

¹¹³ Conte (1999): 483.

¹¹⁴ Newlands (2002): 1.

provides a valuable perspective on imperial culture and the policies and imperatives that Domitian sought to enforce. These poems not only convey Domitian's vision, but also the ways in which it was received and echoed by the elite courtiers and the profound effects that Domitian's reign had on their lives. In her discussion of the use of epic allusion in Roman satire, Catherine Connors writes, "It is well understood that the Roman satirists use allusions to or descriptions of their satiric predecessors to articulate their poetic projects. What has been less appreciated is how precisely each poet chooses his allusions to epic to define his poetic project and its political dimension."¹¹⁵ Although not a satirist, Statius' careful consideration of the politics of his time and method of engagement with political realities gives him the same value as satire for assessing not only the political climate of the reign of Domitian, but the ways in which Statius helped to shape living memory of Domitian's reign during the emperor's lifetime. Statius offers an important counterpoint to Tacitus' later criticism of Domitian and his reign, and due to the highly evocative imagery of his poetry and the vivid portraits and scenes he depicts, Statius also offers a useful mode of comparison to visual representations of Domitian and his reign in Flavian art and architecture.

¹¹⁵ Connors (2006): 123.

This chapter will examine *Silvae* 1.1, 1.2, 1.6, 2.7, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, as they offer distinctive insight into the politics of memory during the reign of Domitian and the important role that the *Silvae* played in shaping memory of Domitian and allowing Statius to define his own connection to the legacy of the last Flavian emperor. Statius reveals upper-class people's perceptions of Domitian through the complex reciprocal relationship with the patron-friends¹¹⁶ to whom he addressed his poetry and who commissioned him to write on certain themes. Statius also reveals the effect that Domitian's policies had on elite men through his subtle reflection on the impact of certain laws on his patron-friends. Consideration of the performative elements of the text of the *Silvae* will help explore politics of memory and the public and private aspects of Domitian's personality and the ways in which Statius plays with notions of audience, spectatorship, and bearing witness through readers' exposure to his poetry. Statius' treatment of speech and silence in his poetry speaks to the political climate in Domitianic Rome and gives insight into the importance that the poet himself assigned to the question of whether to speak or remain silent.

¹¹⁶ I feel this term best describes social dynamics of the relationship between Statius and those who commissioned him to write poetry and their influence on his work, as opposed to simply calling them patrons, which connotes a more distant and less involved status.

By elevating Domitian to a superior level and offering gushing, lyrical compliments with multiple metaphors and mythical allusions, Statius highlights the value of his own words as well as the sentiment behind them, and he seeks to carve a place for himself in the permanent canon of great literature. In the first lines of *Silvae* 4.2, Statius cleverly alludes to Virgil and Homer, offering a glowing reference to each of their epics; for Statius, these two literary giants hold as much star power as Domitian. Statius then proceeds with the well-worn tradition in Roman poetry of striking a pose as the wide-eyed, nervous lesser poet endeavoring to follow in the footsteps of master writers before him. In this vein, Statius questions his own ability to portray a majestic theme, while simultaneously linking himself and his work to two of the greatest authors of the ancient world. Although the *Silvae* take a different poetic form than the *Thebaid*, Statius clearly chose to reference epic over elegy in his collection of shorter poems. Before composing the *Silvae*, Statius had linked himself to Virgil in his *Thebaid*.¹¹⁷ *Silvae* 4.2 expresses

¹¹⁷ See Ganiban (2007): 2. At the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius speaks even more explicitly of his desire to emulate Virgil: He tells the *Thebaid*, “Live, I beg, and do not compete with the divine *Aeneid*, but follow a long way off and always worship its footprints,” explicitly positioning himself as heir to Virgil’s legacy while modestly downplaying his skill level (Sta. *Theb.* 12.816-817; this translation is my own). *Vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.* Statius then goes on to predict that any negative reception of the *Thebaid* will give way to praise over time, thus expressing his confidence about the way in which he envisions that others will remember his work (Sta. *Theb.* 12.818).

Stattius' clear desire to be linked not only with the traditional of imperial patronage of famous writers such as Virgil, but also the epic tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome. This connection also helps define the way in which he wishes posterity to remember him and Domitian: as leaders of the new age of epic, continuing the glory of the tradition while celebrating the heroics of their own time.

Stattius hopes able to write his way into the canon of great literature and earn a place for himself beside the likes of Virgil and Homer; in order to accomplish that, however, he has to invest in an image of Domitian and define Domitian in such a way as to immortalize him and render his memory immune to attack. In linking himself so closely with an emperor and an emperor's self-image, Stattius gambles heavily on the assumption that Domitian will join the ranks of great emperors after his death, and that by preserving Domitian's memory, Stattius will be able to immortalize his own work and achieve everlasting fame on his own terms. To accomplish that goal, Stattius not only sought to associate himself with Virgil, but also to associate his imperial patron, Domitian, with Virgil's imperial patron, Augustus, the perennial standard for imperial virtue and morality, and the man whom Domitian himself most wished to resemble.

Stattus employs several strategies to associate Domitian with Augustus. In the *Silvae*, Stattus often explicitly compares Augustus and Domitian and ranks them as equals in multiple aspects of character and imperial rule. For example, in *Silvae* 4.1, a poem regarding Domitian’s consulship in 95 CE, Stattus writes: “Augustus wielded the axes Latium three and ten times over the flowing years [i.e. held the consulship thirteen times,]/ but he began to be entitled late in life. You [Domitian], as a young man, have gone beyond your forbearers.”¹¹⁸ According to Stattus, by achieving the rank of consul so many times at such an early age, Domitian has surpassed Augustus in terms of honors. For many generations of Romans, Augustus had represented the epitome of imperial virtue, and so he offered the perfect model with which to associate Domitian. However, Augustus had become such a powerful image in the minds of the Romans that the comparison required Stattus to make his writing all the more eloquent and passionate in order to persuasively argue that Domitian had outshined Augustus.

Stattus linked his fate with that of the emperor, and thus his writing became not only a means of achieving literary recognition, but also a

¹¹⁸ This translation is my own. Stattus *Silvae* 4.1.31-33. *Ter Latio deciesque tulit labentibus annis/ Augustus fasces, sed coepit sero mereri:/ tu iuvenis praegressus avos.* For commentary on the correct interpretation of *avos* in this context, see Shackleton Bailey (1987): 278.

political tool for Statius to utilize to promote a certain image of the emperor for his own gain. In contrast to Tacitus' image of Domitian as a scheming, two-faced hypocrite who, in Shakespeare's words, might "smile, and smile, and be a villain,"¹¹⁹ Statius portrays Domitian as a humble leader who has to be constantly coaxed into acknowledging his own triumphs¹²⁰ and whose modesty is far from false and is constantly beset upon by those who seek to honor him and draw attention to his virtues. Domitian's reign had benefited Tacitus' political career, and Domitian's patronage and praise had given Statius and his work the opportunity to shine. Tacitus wrote his scathing rebukes of Domitian's character after Domitian's assassination, while at the time that Statius wrote the *Silvae*, Domitian was alive and thriving and at the height of his powers. Statius' treatment of Domitian in his works could make or break his career, and in his poetry, Statius uses every laudatory comment about Domitian to further enhance his own status. In his poems, Statius often showcases his technique, and even the passages praising Domitian take on a tone of grandeur, with rich imagery that serve to emphasize Statius' writing capabilities as much as they flatter the emperor. Statius took

¹¹⁹ Shakespeare *Hamlet* 1.5.108.

¹²⁰ For example, see Statius *Silvae* 4.1, in which the god Janus urges Domitian to accept the honors he has deservedly been given, claiming that the emperor has repeatedly refused to accept such recognition until he has been forced to accept it by others (4.1.33-35).

advantage of the situation and utilized his commemorative poems as a means to gain recognition and political and literary status under Domitian. In his commemoration of Domitian's consulship, Statius, through the god Janus, speaks of his role in consecrating the emperor's memory¹²¹. Janus, as the personification of beginnings and of gateways, predicts what will happen for Domitian in the coming year; as the symbol of past and present, he also represents memory of the past and its potential to shape events to come. Addressing Domitian, Janus declares, "With me, you will establish another age, and the altar of the father of a great age will be consecrated. Accept such triumphs, and you will bring a thousand victory trophies."¹²² Through Janus, the poet himself seems to speak to Domitian directly: together Domitian and Statius will create a new age of Roman triumphs, both literary and political, and if Domitian permits it, they both will have the opportunity to attain glory. Statius has

¹²¹ Newlands likewise concludes that Janus speaks for the poet in *Silvae* 4.1. She writes: "As is characteristic of Statius' poems of imperial praise, the poet's voice is occluded by that of Janus who speaks the encomium of the emperor from his new temple in Domitian's Forum Transitorium, the Temple of Janus Quadrifrons. Flanked on one side by Vespasian's Temple of Peace, and on the other by the Forum of Augustus and the Temple of Mars Ultor, the new forum of Domitian was symbolically linked with both peace and war. As god of both war and peace, Janus appropriately emblematises the architectural programme of the new imperial complex. Fashioned by and for Domitian, the Flavian Janus of *Silv.* 4.1 is an appropriate spokesperson for imperial encomium" (Newlands (2002): 260).

¹²² This translation is my own. Statius *Silvae* 4.1.37-39. *Mecum altera saecula condes, / et tibi longaevi renovabitur ara parentis mille tropaea feres, / tantum permitte triumphos.*

chosen to invest in a particular memory of Domitian, as memory of his own achievements rests on the glory of the imperial patron during whose reign he writes. If Domitian agrees, Statius will bring Domitian glory through his poetry and ensure that Domitian will be remembered for his triumphs and his victories.

In a sense, the *Silvae* serve as a time capsule that preserve a certain memory of Domitian, one that Domitian's detractors partially destroyed in other forms of media due in part to its positive treatment of Domitian. It is worth noting that Statius most likely did not live to see Domitian's assassination;¹²³ the poems that have outlived him date to a time when Domitian had cemented his power, and his reign showed no signs of ending any time soon. Who knows how the content of Statius' poems might have changed if he had suddenly found himself under the auspices of Nerva, and then Trajan and Hadrian? Unfortunately, Statius' depictions of Domitian's reign have also cemented his reputation as a purveyor of that certain type of memory of Domitian, which in some ways has clouded many modern-day scholars' consideration of his outlook on the Domitianic period and the merits of his account. His particular recollection of Domitian's reign at a particular moment in time

¹²³ This is the consensus of modern scholars, although, as mentioned in the introduction, the actual date of Statius' death is uncertain.

when he was living through it remains preserved for later generations; from his He politicized memorialization of Domitian, and in turn he cemented his own posthumous reputation among scholars as a political puppet or, worse, a simple transmitter of propaganda, a position that more recent scholarship has sought to revise somewhat.

Not all scholars share the view that Statius simply parroted Domitianic talking points. In “Domitianic Themes in Statius’ *Silvae*,” Robin Seager counters the notion that Statius simply fashioned his poems to comply with imperial demands; Seager argues that although Statius probably treated imperial themes strategically, he did not function as a propagandist and in fact expressed genuine sentiments regarding the emperor.¹²⁴ Seager believes that “Statius intended what he says about Domitian and his policies to be taken more or less at face value” and makes a specific choice in the article to honor that intent.

So, what sort of relationship was Statius seeking to cultivate with the emperor through his poetry, and with the members of the elite who

¹²⁴ Seager (2009): 341. “It would be exaggerated to see Statius as in any sense an official propagandist. He was not close to the centre of power. But his success and wellbeing (perhaps not only as a poet) demanded the choice of themes that were of interest to the ruler and the exploitation of those themes in ways that the ruler would find acceptable, though detailed briefing on what was required will rarely, if ever, have been necessary. It will also be assumed throughout that Statius intended what he says about Domitian and his policies to be taken more or less at face value, that he did not, in other words, want his readers to assume that he consistently meant the opposite of what he said.”

commissioned him to write the poems included in the *Silvae*? Ruurd R. Nauta argues that Statius considered his relationship with his patron-friends in terms of reciprocity, and that those patron-friends also thought along those lines. Nauta advances a particular reading of the *Silvae*; he argues that Statius and his friends' Roman applied Roman concepts of debts and settling accounts through reciprocity and mutual agreement to the author-patron relationship in poetry.¹²⁵ The notion of reciprocity certainly resonates with Statius' treatment of his patron-friends in poems that concern them; Nauta points to multiple references within the text in which Statius refers to his poems as fulfilling obligations.¹²⁶ Nauta points to other authors' concepts of debt-bondage in the creative process as well.¹²⁷ Nauta's notion of general reciprocity resonates with Statius' writing, in which he clearly expects to receive recognition and support, as well as potential political benefits, in exchange for his positive treatment of individuals in his poetry.

It is much more difficult to assess Statius' relationship with Domitian himself. Although Statius places himself in the middle of Flavian politics as the next great writer of epics, it is unclear whether in

¹²⁵ Nauta (2002): 241-243.

¹²⁶ Nauta points to the proems in which Statius dedicates his work to his patron-friends, for example the dedications preceding *Silvae* 2 and *Silvae* 4. See Nauta (2002): 242-243.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Nauta (2002): 24.

fact he ever retained such a status and whether the emperor perceived his works as worthy of representing the Flavian dynasty. It is clear that the Flavian dynasty needed an epic tradition to set up the new era as the successor and rival to the age of Augustus and establish a glorious literary reputation for the latest imperial dynasty. Much as the *Aeneid* linked Augustus' military triumphs with the ancestor of the founder of Rome, the Flavians sought to link their own military exploits with an earlier aetiological myth that would cement their legitimacy. J.L. Penwill notes that ancient writers in the early 90s B.C.E. recognized Domitian as a potential poet for the new Flavian dynasty, and that "his claim to fame rests on such an epic."¹²⁸ Penwill advances a very interesting argument; if Domitian had indeed produced an epic for the Flavian age, surely it would have complicated his relationship with Statius if Statius had openly proclaimed himself to be the literary heir apparent to Virgil, and thus the direct rival of Domitian for the honor of being the next great epic poet. Certainly it is impossible to find an unbiased ancient source to evaluate Domitian's poems, none of which exist today. Many ancient authors writing during the reign of Domitian praised his poetry, which would have been a politically salient move, while others writing during

¹²⁸ Penwill (2000): 61. Although surprisingly Penwill does not name these ancient sources when he makes the statement, he is most likely referring to Quintilian,

the reign of Domitian's successors excoriated his works as trivial pieces that only drew praise because of everyone's fear of Domitian (likewise the politically expedient tone to take under the circumstances.) Because modern scholars have no access to Domitian's poetry or to impartial reviews of it, there is no way to tell whether they could have elevated Domitian to the rank of poet-emperor and topped the entire canon of Flavian literature.

Ultimately, it does not ultimately matter what actual merit Domitian's poetry had; if Domitian himself aspired to succeed Virgil as an epic poet, wouldn't Statius have been committing political suicide by so openly linking himself with Homer and Virgil and declaring his intentions to become the foremost epic poet of the Flavian dynasty? Even in the *Silvae*, Statius's allusions to epic tradition are not subtle, and Statius does not bury them in smaller poems on everyday themes; some of his grandest flourishes occur in poems in which he speaks of Domitian directly. The fact that Domitian did not censure Statius or punish him might suggest that the emperor was more open to free expression of thought and exchange of ideas than his detractors would have history believe. Likewise, Statius outlined his intentions and directly linked himself to Homer and Virgil in poems that contained the emperor's

name, making it more likely that Domitian might read them. However, those poems also contain grand praise for Domitian and his reign, presenting the emperor with an interesting dilemma should he choose to denounce their content. Such an open challenge to the emperor would have been provocative, some might even say subversive, suggesting that Statius, far from being Domitian's literary grunt mule, may have sought to assert his own viewpoint and push boundaries.¹²⁹ Of course, without hard evidence as to Statius' intentions, one can only speculate on his motives, and without hard evidence, one can only speculate as to Domitian's potential response. However, it is worth noting that Domitian invited Statius to the imperial palace to dine at his table and made no attempt at that point to threaten Statius. Domitian never accused Statius of treason or put him to death, which does speak to Domitian's consideration of him, as Domitian supposedly executed Helvidius the Younger for writing inflammatory verses referencing Domitia's affair with the actor Paris.¹³⁰ If Domitian had wanted to silence Statius, he

¹²⁹ Such a bold wink at the emperor, if intentional, would have aligned Statius more with Ovid than with Virgil. However, it's important to note that

¹³⁰ Although Suetonius and Dio cite this as the reason for Helvidius the Younger's execution, some scholars argue that he was in fact executed for committing treason. Helvidius the Younger was an active member of the staunch opposition against Domitian, and Vespasian had executed his father for treason as well. In "A Group of Domitianic Treason Trials," Rogers argues against the ancient authors' interpretation of prominent executions under Domitian as evidence of the emperor's tyranny. Rogers claims that Helvidius the Younger and six other people who stood trial under

could certainly have done so; the fact that he didn't suggests a more nuanced relationship between Domitian and his subjects than is often surmised.

In addition to potentially competing with the emperor over similar literary recognition, Statius also faced competition from his fellow ordinary poets. Sometimes poets address similar themes or take the same subject matter as their inspiration, and sometimes they perform by invitation on a similar given topic. Poets distinguished themselves through quality of composition, flow, ability to engage their audience, as well as original ideas or nuances that separated their poems from others dealing with the same sort of topics or even similar narratives and modes of comparison. Even in the non-stop streak of panegyric in 1.1, Statius makes his own unique mark, for instance by including a poetic passage about Mettius Curtius.¹³¹

The Lost Legacy of Domitian: A Horse and Its Divine Master

In the visual representations of Domitian's reign, one artwork is most notable for its absence and the profound impact it had on the visual

Domitian had demonstrated threats against Domitian, and that the play *Paris and Oenone*, far from being the main charge in the indictment against Helvidius Priscus, would have been a small item in a large charge of sedition or treasonous conspiracy.¹³¹ Mettius Curtius was known as the Roman who saved the city by leaping into the Lacus Curtius and then took on the divine persona of the river that took his life. Romans would pay respects to him at the river, and he was hailed as an exemplar of self-sacrifice and courage.

landscape of the Roman Forum. The *Equus Domitiani*, a large statue of Domitian on horseback, once stood _____ feet tall. Domitian erected it in 91 to commemorate campaigns in Germany and Dacia; a few years later, the statue and any images depicting it fell victim to destruction under *damnatio memoriae*. With the assassination of Domitian, the imposing equestrian statue became another casualty of the memory sanctions. Nevertheless, its impact can be felt in mentions by Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio, and Statius, who begins the *Silvae* by dedicating his first poem to praise of this statue. Amidst mythological references, inclusion of divinities who appreciate the statue, and comparison to prior imperial equestrian statues that cannot possibly rival this statue, Statius also provides a richly detailed description of the sculpture and drops hints at its location in the Roman Forum. Scholars continue to debate the location of the *Equus Domitiani*, and without any surviving visuals to suggest what the statue might have looked like, we rely primarily on accounts such as the depictions in Statius' poetry.

Statius has the statue appear so imposing as to seem to have fallen from heaven, and quickly praise of the statue becomes praise of Domitian, and Statius explicitly begins to hail Domitian as divine. Domitian, like the statue, strikes wonder and awe into the hearts of spectators, becoming a force to spur workers in their labor, a beacon of

light restoring the glory of the gods, a godlike warrior subduing the Germans and the Dacians in his wake. Not even Caesar's equestrian statue can compare (and, implicitly, neither can his reign.) Domitian's patron goddess Minerva stands proudly beside the statue with a Gorgon's head; not even the palm of Zeus can offer her a sweeter resting place.¹³² Domitian towers as high as Mars after a battle.¹³³ Domitian is more merciful than the founder of Rome himself, who could learn a thing or two from Domitian, because Domitian does not vent his rage even on crazy foreigners, instead choosing to grant the Cattians and Dacians a charter.¹³⁴ This is particularly interesting wording, as Domitian did not win a decisive victory over the Cattians or the Dacians; he negotiated a truce. Here, Statius spins the outcomes of these campaigns to make it seem as if only Domitian's mercy spared his enemies from complete, utter defeat. Statius seamlessly weaves in mentions of the highlights of Domitian's reign that Domitian himself promoted, while also giving his readers pause.

Conspicuously absent in this poem are the mentions of Domitian's modesty, humility, and reserve; it is as if Domitian, like any other god,

¹³² Statius *Silvae* 1.1.39-40. ...*nec dulcior usquam/ lecta deae sedes nee si, Pater, ipse teneres.*

¹³³ Statius *Silvae* 1.1.18-21.

¹³⁴ Statius *Silvae* 1.1.22-28.

has chosen to reveal his true divine form, and the effect is almost as blinding as the blind praise Statius starts to heap upon him. Statius openly compares Domitian to the gods and sometimes even elevates him beyond their position. For instance, Statius compares Domitian to Mars after the great battle with the giants.¹³⁵ For this particular interpretation of the allusion to Mars, I concur with Adam R. Marshall, who argues that both Statius and Silius make similar references to the Gigantomachy legend in their poetry.¹³⁶ The word usage in this particular passage has puzzled scholars: why does Statius would ascribe the verb *fumat* to the horse, which is often taken by translators to refer to breathing heavily or sweating? If the horse is supposed to be the mount of an immortal larger-than-life hero, why would it show signs of strain or tiring? Marshall argues that Statius has granted the horse fire-breathing powers as a complement to the Gigantomachy legend, which would partly explain the use of *fumat*. Elsewhere in the poem, Statius emphasizes the fact that men are sweating and laboring and are struck by the sheer weight of the colossal statue,¹³⁷ so I would argue that perhaps this allusion to heaviness likewise adds to the readers' appreciation for the magnitude of the statue

¹³⁵ Statius *Silvae* 1.1.18-21.

¹³⁶ Marshall (2008): 603- 604.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Statius *Silvae* 1.1.56- 60, where the earth can barely support the horse because of the weight of the divine personage on top of it, even though the

and the emperor. The combination of Statius' comparison of Domitian and his statue to divinities and mythical heroes, the image of workers and machines straining to handle the colossal statue, and the description of a hero-turned-river god exclaiming his reverence for Domitian, adds to the perception of Domitian as equal to or even better than the gods.

If Domitian spoken of himself or his statue in this manner, it would serve as a prime example of hubris; in the hands of Statius, it gives the reader a reason to pause and think critically about the praise directed at Domitian. People who consider themselves better than the gods or who challenge the gods' authority often incite jealousy and wrath; they often meet destructive ends, just as Domitian ultimately did with his dramatic assassination at the hands of members of his court. One can only assume that Statius, who was clearly well-versed in mythology and epic, must have been aware that this praise poem was defying certain boundaries between humans and divinities by comparing Domitian to an immortal god. Perhaps this poem invites the reader, who presumably recognizes Statius' allusions to mythology and understands the significance of his use of language, to question the degree to which the poet strives to

pedestal is strong enough to support "sky-bearing Atlas"; 1.1.63- 64, where "huge machines groan with the burden" of carrying the statue.

elevate Domitian to divine status. Perhaps the praise poem in fact offers the reader a potential mode of criticism.

You yourself, your raised head enclosed by unstained air, you outshine the temples and seem to watch whether, having scorned the flames, the Palatine rises more beautifully than before, whether the Trojan fire with the secret flame keeps watch, and whether Vesta now praises her purged attendants. Your right hand forbids wars, the Tritonian virgin (Minerva) does not weigh down your left, and holding out the neck of beheaded Medusa, just as with a goad, she incites the horse. Nowhere does the goddess have a sweeter chosen resting spot, not even if you, Father (Jupiter), should hold her.¹³⁸

Here, Statius seems to appeal not so much to his readers but to the emperor. Domitian considered Minerva to be his patron deity, and so her support held special significance for him. Here, Statius not only shows that he recognizes the imperial message behind Minerva's inclusion by the side of Domitian, but also the significance of her relationship as supporter and benefactor of Rome itself. According to the legend

¹³⁸ This translation is my own. Statius *Silvae* 1.1.32- 40.

“Ipse autem puro celsum caput aere saeptus
templa superfulges et prospectare videris,
an nova contemptis surgant Palatia flammis
pulchrius, an tacita vigilet face Troicus ignis
atque exploratas iam laudet Vesta ministras.
dextra vetat pugnas, laevam Tritonia virgo
non gravat et sectae praetendens colla Medusae:
ceu stimulis accendit equum; nec dulcior usquam
lecta deae sedes nee si, Pater, ipse teneres.”

repeated by and Suetonius, right before his assassination, Domitian had dreamt that Minerva came to him and told him that she had been overpowered by Jupiter and could no longer protect him.¹³⁹ Hers was the statue he had placed outside his bedroom window so that he could see it every day, and she was the main deity to whom he prayed for guidance.

Statius also gives his readers food for thought when he compares Domitian to Caesar, whose legacy had been treated with careful scrutiny and a critical gaze by the Romans, who saw him as an exemplum of military prowess but also as a cautionary tale when it came to his use and abuse of power.¹⁴⁰

Speech and Silence: Text as Monument and *Memoria* in the *Silvae*

Statius' concern with speech and silence reflects the political climate of Flavian Rome. Compare Statius' tendency to lean toward panegyric with Tacitus' summation of the role of panegyricism in Domitianic Rome: while Statius seems to treat his praise poetry as a strategically sound political gesture, Tacitus begins the second chapter of the *Agricola* by reminding his readers that for Arulenus Rusticus and

¹³⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 15.3.1.

¹⁴⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of Statius' comparison of Domitian in relation to Julius Caesar, see Geysen (1996): 66-86. See also Malamud (1995) for a brief consideration of negative implications of equating Domitian with Caesar.

Herennius Senecio, their panegyric poetry became a death sentence. If Tacitus' account is truthful and these authors were indeed executed for their poetry, then Domitian must have initiated a great degree of censorship. Of course, as has been discussed, Tacitus' bias and his literary agenda obscure the veracity of some of his claims; it has already been demonstrated that his work only reflects one perspective on the reality of life under Domitian. That said, his words reveal the power of speech to make and break individuals and emphasize the importance of the choice of whether to speak or remain silent. Even if Domitian was no more tyrannical or censorious than any other man who held imperial office, he would have engaged to some degree in weakening or silencing his political opponents, and he would have paid close attention to the ways in which writers of the time chose to portray him and the Flavian dynasty as a whole. To that end, Statius' treatment of Domitian and Domitianic Rome in his poetry reflects very conscious decisions as to his portrayal of the political reality of Domitianic Rome as well as the immortal memory of the emperor Domitian.

In *Silvae* 2.7, Statius celebrates the birthday of the late poet Lucan, an epic poet from the age of Nero who struggled over whether to speak or be silent about disturbing themes in his subject matter, and whose battle with his place in his own text revealed his ambivalence about his own

treatment of historical events in the context of epic. In 2.7, Statius celebrates birth and death of Lucan, who died at age twenty-six having carved a place for himself among the canon of noteworthy epic poets of Rome. Statius clearly admires Lucan; his numerous references to minute details and specific vocabulary within Lucan's *Bellum Civile* denote his close study not only of Lucan's work and his familiarity with Lucan's writing style, but also his understanding of Lucan's point of view as an author and the thought process that he attributes to Lucan.¹⁴¹ Although Lucan himself acknowledges the deceit and falseness of certain myths he depicts in his epic, Statius decides to distinguish himself from Lucan by drawing attention to Lucan's small-scale deceptions and throwing a dark mirror at the tradition of writing history in epic. In *Silvae* 2.7, Statius addresses the dangers of associating oneself with one's epic subject matter; in covering such topics, one may implicate oneself, and one's own time period, in one's portrayal of deeds of the past. Malamud writes, "Through careful allusion to significant passages in Lucan's epic, Statius has built up a picture of a poet caught in the trap of his own text."¹⁴² Statius, too, struggles with the question of how to treat current history and events in his poetry, and unlike Lucan, in the *Silvae* Statius confronts

¹⁴¹ For an in-depth treatment of Statius' close study of and allusions to Lucan and *BC* in particular, see Malamud (1995): 13-20.

the mythology of the present head-on: like Lucan, Statius explicitly lays out the ways in which his depictions are false or meant to give an illusion, and in doing so, Statius invites a critical gaze on the part of his readers.

The contrast between speech and silence in *Silvae* 2.7 occurs most strikingly in the contrast between the poetic narrator's speech and the poet's imposition of silence on other people who appear in the poem. Statius consciously chooses to silence the Muses at the beginning of *Silvae* 2.7,¹⁴³ a striking move considering that the Muses are authorities on art and poetry and often speak at the beginnings of poems that concern a writer's talent. Because of the primacy of the convention of the muse's speech in poetry, Statius had to know that he would be drawing attention to the Muses' silence and that readers would instantly grasp its significance. In the poem, the muse Calliope gets license to speak because she recounts the story of Lucan's birth, but the poet's request for auspicious silence haunts the rest of the poem. Statius also has Lucan remain silent when he appears in the poem as an infant and later a ghost. Strikingly, Statius ends the poem with a plea to Lucan to come and have

¹⁴² Malamud (1995): 14.

¹⁴³ Statius *Silvae* 2.7.19- 22. CHECK CITATION.

“one day of the gods of silence” with his (Lucan’s) wife Polla.¹⁴⁴ Statius refers to the belief that a dead person’s spirit was allowed to return to a spouse or loved one for one day before permanently taking up residence in the afterlife. Statius does not call the gods of the underworld the gods of death; he hails them as the gods of silence, which now becomes associated with death and decay.

The Effect of Domitian’s Laws on the Elite

Although mediated by Statius’ words, through the *Silvae*, scholars also can also assess the impact of Domitian’s laws on some of Statius’ patron-friends. This may help modern scholars to better understand the ways in which some elite members of Roman society formed their own memories of Domitian’s reign as they experienced it. For instance, in *Silvae* 1.2, Statius dedicates a poem to Arruntius Stella on the occasion of Stella’s marriage to a widow named Violentilla. After naming the

¹⁴⁴ Statius *Silvae* 2.7. 120- 123. ...*adsis lucidus et vocante Polla/ unum, quaeso, diem deos silentum/ exores: solet hoc patere limen/ ad nuptas redeuntibus maritis*. In the Roman funerary ritual tradition, it was believed that a dead spouse could return for one day to be with a loved one before departing permanently for the Underworld. It’s significant that Statius emphasizes the deadline of silence when he alludes to the gods of the nether world as gods of silence, as opposed to simply gods of death. The word choice also alludes to the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the quintessential story of the importance of silence in death.

marriage as the subject of the poem, Statius then describes how other people will receive the news:

Let cares and worries surrender; let lying artifices of oblique poems cease; rumor, be silent: that unrestrained love has submitted to laws and bitten down on the harness, the story of vice has been sated, and the citizenry have seen the kisses that had so long been a story.¹⁴⁵

These lines refer to a courtship that has only recently been placed under the yoke of marriage and that only now yields to the demands of the law. It seems that Stella and Violentilla may have been carrying on an affair out of wedlock, which would have been in direct opposition with the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, the law prohibiting adultery that was originally proclaimed by Augustus and that Domitian was beginning to reinforce at that time. Now, fortunately, the poem declares, the act of marriage will end the nasty rumors and legitimize the relationship. According to Nauta, who briefly discusses the poem and the potential love affair, Martial wrote a similar poem on the occasion of the marriage that included a less tactful reference to the nature of Stella and

¹⁴⁵ This translation is my own. Statius *Silvae* 1.2. 26- 30.

*...cedant curaeque metusque,
cessent mendaces oblique carminis astus,
fama tace: subiit leges et frena momordit
ille solutus amor, consumpta est fabula vulgi
et narrate diu viderunt oscula cives.*

Violentilla's prior relationship.¹⁴⁶ Nauta notes that Martial also mentions a dove in Book 1 who belonged to Violentilla and became the subject of one of Stella's poems; according to Nauta the poem about the dove, reminiscent of Catullus' sparrow poem, serves as evidence of courtship, and Nauta concludes based on the relative dates of the poems that the affair probably lasted for at least five years.¹⁴⁷ If the affair had lasted for such a long time, the timing of the marriage probably had less to do with a need for commitment and more with a need for formal recognition. The *lex Iulia* imposed a fine on those caught in marriage-less love affairs, and it also considered consensual intercourse with respectable widows such as Violentilla to be an act of *stuprum*, an equivalent of adultery that carried the same legal penalty.¹⁴⁸ The law may indeed have spurred the marital union of Stella and Violentilla. Now, Statius writes, Stella and Violentilla can publicly confirm the rumors about their love and rejoice with open displays of affection, and the secure knowledge that their love is no longer illegal. Thus, in *Silvae* 1.2, Statius' poem about a couple's story of courtship and marriage also sheds light on the way that the *lex Iulia* impacted certain members of the elite. It also suggests how

¹⁴⁶ Nauta (2002): 296- 297.

¹⁴⁷ Nauta (2002): 297- 298.

¹⁴⁸ Nauta (2002): 298-299.

Domitian's enforcement of such a law may have impacted the way in which members of the elite would remember his reign.

Although Domitian sought to restore several Augustan laws, he also enforced his own moral code, which did not always have imperial precedent and did not always reflect the preferences of members of the elite. For example, during his reign, Domitian expressly forbade the act of genital mutilation of male slaves. Prior to Domitian, no ruler had ever outlawed castration. Although castration severely impacted several important aspects of a male's social life,¹⁴⁹ it also constituted one of the many ways in which slave owners demonstrated control over their human property. For legal purposes, slaves were always the property of their masters, and suggesting that castration should be outlawed on the basis of cruel practice granted slaves an element of humanity that they often lacked in legal proceedings, pitting the potential welfare of a slave directly against the potential desires of the slave's owner. For example, castration sometimes served as a means of ensuring a male slave's continued high value. By condemning such a practice, Domitian was intruding into the private realm of the household to regulate people's

¹⁴⁹ Castration impacted multiple aspects of a eunuch's life and potential legal standing. See, for instance, *Digest* 23.3.39.1, concerning an action in the case of a woman who marries a *spado*, or eunuch (cited in Brier and McGinn (2004): 29). In determining a person's right to marry, the jurist Ulpian makes a distinction between

treatment of their own property. Reverend Charles Merivale, writing his history of the Roman Empire in the late 19th century, took a break from his invective against Domitian to comment, “In one direction indeed, and one only, Domitian seems to have deviated from his usual recurrence to ancient prescriptions, and to have acted on the motion of a more enlightened moral conscience.”¹⁵⁰ Statius, too, breaks suddenly and uncharacteristically from his narrative to weigh in strongly against the practice of castration in *Silvae* 3.4, a poem concerning one of Domitian’s slaves, Earinus, a eunuch who sought power and influence even as he remained under the absolute authority and ownership of the emperor.

In *Silvae* 3.4, Statius once again embraces panegyric with such fervor that he invites the reader to more closely scrutinize the world and culture of the imperial palace. In the poem, Statius describes an occasion on which Earinus dedicates a lock of his hair to the shrine of Aesculapius at Pergamum and tells a mythical story of how Venus united Earinus and Domitian. The fictionalization and mythologization of the context of the relationship between Earinus and Domitian allows Statius to create a distance between the subject matter of his poem and the contentious realm of the imperial court. Because he draws attention to the fictional

castrated eunuchs and those who lack testes due to natural reasons, arguing that castrated individuals do not have the right to marry.

aspects of the poem, Statius likewise draws attention to the fictionalization and mythologization that occurs as part of memorializing an event in Roman culture. According to Newlands, Earinus, bound to his master Domitian and even referred to as his “spouse,” symbolizes everything glorious and questionable about the royal house.¹⁵¹ The law against castration comes in conflict with the recognition and renown that Earinus has received as a result of the preservation of his boyhood; without the existence of the procedure, Earinus might not have appeared at Domitian’s court, and Statius might have a reason write about him. Although Statius criticizes the practice of castration and expresses regret that Earinus will never become fully physically mature, the erotic implications of Domitian’s relationship with Earinus probably form the source of Earinus’ potential influence and power in the imperial palace. What does it say about Domitian, that he can prohibit castration and yet receive entertainment from eunuchs at court? B.C. Verstraete argues that while he does not think the poem presents a full-on critique of Domitian and his court, Statius’ explicit treatment of castration in his poem certainly points to a higher degree of freedom of expression under

¹⁵⁰ Merivale (1872): 363.

¹⁵¹ Newlands’ wording. Newlands (2002): 111.

Domitian than scholars usually surmise.¹⁵² However, Newlands believes that the strategic distance Statius carves between himself and the elements of mythopoesis he draws attention to in his own work actually functions as a form of criticism, a special form of criticism that allows Statius to question the mythologization of which he takes part while simultaneously using it to embellish his poetry.¹⁵³ Ultimately, Statius does manage to offer critical commentary while memorializing the official position of the emperor. The law prohibiting castration exposes some of the complexities involved in Domitian's policies, in particular the potential complications for slave-owners and castrated males. In *Silvae* 3.4, Statius offers a window not only into the politics behind a specific law and its human consequences, but also the ways in which Domitian's policies affected the general legal treatment of a lower class of people, immediately impacting and potentially threatening the culture of legal entitlement normally afforded to the elite members of society.

¹⁵² Verstraete (1989): 412. "Statius' evident freedom in raising the delicate fact of Earinus' castration in more than simply allusive fashion should cast some doubt on the general picture drawn in our literary sources for this period of Domitian as the paranoiac and ruthless dictator of letters and free expression of opinion." Verstraete further argues that this freedom of expression allows Statius to creatively push the boundaries of the panegyric form: "...this frankness has produced an arresting document to the poet's refusal to remain totally confined by the conventional demands of panegyric" (Verstraete (1989): 413).

¹⁵³ Newlands (2002): 113.

Earinus' position in this poem as the prototype of the powerful and influential slave under the command of the emperor serves as a metaphor for the difficult position of the courtier under Domitian. Earinus is alternately his own person and inextricably bound to the rules and wishes of his master. Newlands argues, "The paradox of Earinus—emperor's favourite and slave, object of erotic desire and castrated male— suggests the courtier's uneasy position between 'power and powerlessness.'" Courtiers naturally seek upward mobility and influence within the imperial court, but at all times they must moderate their behavior so as to meet the emperor's expectations regarding loyalty and obedience. If they grow too powerful, they may present a threat to the emperor, yet if they are not powerful enough, they will lack influence in court. This delicate balancing act reflects the general position of courtiers, and of the members of the elite in general, as well as the position of Statius' patron-friends, who needed to perform roles of equal empowerment and powerlessness in order to survive and thrive under Domitian. Statius too became a part of this intricate network of social negotiations, and it is easy to conclude that he and his patron-friends channeled their anxieties about the reign in Statius' poetry into fervent praise that might better guarantee their security. However, *Silvae* 3.4 reflects a more nuanced approach to Domitian's policies in which Statius chose to combine

flattery with a critical, intelligent gaze; even in speaking out in support of imperial policy, Statius puts forth a more complicated response to the law that encourages his readers to think about Earinus' position at court and the situation that landed him there. Although Statius does not deal directly with the issue of aristocratic citizens' response to the anti-castration law, he offers modern scholars a glimpse into the human realities of life at imperial court, and with that, once again, a view of the ways that Domitian's policies might shape the aristocracy's negative perception of his reign.

Gazing and Being Gazed Upon: Domitian Himself in the *Silvae*

In his description of a dinner banquet hosted by Domitian in *Silvae* 4.2, Statius not only portrays an emperor in the height of luxury and power but also offers people who lack access to the emperor an inside look into the lifestyle of Domitian. As the narrator, the poet expresses his profound wonder, offering detailed descriptions of the banquet as he becomes the reader's window into the room itself. In speaking of Domitian's gaze, Anna McCullough also considers the parameters for the circumstances in which the public gazes at Domitian and the circumstances under which he appears before the public.¹⁵⁴ Statius

¹⁵⁴ McCullough (2008/2009): 145.

describes the wonder of gazing upon Domitian, but Domitian himself does not appear in the poem. Neither, as Martha Malamud points out¹⁵⁵, do any images or works of art; they might potentially compete for attention with the emperor, so excluding them directs further attention to Domitian. Domitian is in control of his own image throughout the poem. His presence defines the moment and the evening, and indeed becomes a high point of the poet's life:

These are the first days of eternity; this is the threshold of life. Can it be that as I recline I behold you, ruler of the world, great father of the conquered globe, hope of humanity, dear to the gods? Is it you? Is the indignity granted, is it permitted that I gaze upon your face nearby between the dining table and the wine, and is it not suitable to rise?¹⁵⁶

Statius' words emphasize the power that Domitian has to evoke awe and reverence, as well as Domitian's capacity to control his public image and the ways in which others can see him and be seen by him. Domitian's mere presence seems to stop Statius in his tracks and direct his attention solely to the emperor. While Statius stares in disbelief and questions

¹⁵⁵ Malamud (2007): 234.

¹⁵⁶ This translation is my own. Statius *Silvae* 4.2.13- 17.

...haec aevi mihi prima dies, hic limina vitae,
tene ego. regnator terrarum orbisque subacti
magne parens, te. spes hominum, te, cura deorum,
cerno iacens? datur haec iuxta, datur ora tueri
vina inter mensaeque et non adsurgere fas est?

whether he can really sit in the presence of the emperor and not feel compelled to rise and pay homage to his sovereignty, his poem grinds to a halt. The poem remains fixated on a point in time, and the action does not proceed. Even Statius' Latin, which usually reflects eloquent word choice and sophisticated verbosity, cannot seem to overcome the moment; his grammar, style, and flow seem to recall an avid admirer who stutters in the presence of the object of his attention. The man who transforms tropes and sometimes even turns them on their heads resorts to clichés. Statius' speech comes under the total control of the emperor, and as the readers rely on Statius to recount the events of the evening, the readers come under the emperor's spell as well. In this poem, Domitian completely determines the way in which he is remembered and portrayed. It's all an act, though: as the author of the poem, *Statius* in fact holds control over the poem's wording, begging the question: who exactly is shaping people's memory of Domitian here? As Vessey notes, Statius may have presented the poem at the banquet, and Domitian most likely read a copy of it.¹⁵⁷ This adds another layer of complexity to Statius' task, because Domitian has become both performer and audience member in this display of public image. In speaking of Statius' task to memorialize this particular event, Vessey claims, "[Statius] is called

¹⁵⁷ Vessey (1983): 207.

upon and constrained by his vocation.”¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Statius takes the political considerations necessitated by memorializing an event featuring an imperial figure in poetry and pushes the performativity of the genre of panegyric to the forefront of his writing, thus foregrounding the role of performativity in memorialization.

Theater of Memory, Political Drama and Bearing Witness in the *Silvae*

In poetry, it is very important to consider the role of the readers as audience members. The readers can function as receivers of a focused message or agenda, and they can also bear witness to the viewpoint an author projects and the emotional truths he or she strives to communicate. At the same time, their imaginations hold the key to their perceptions, and so as audience members, readers have the ability and freedom to interpret an author’s words however they choose; the key for the author lies in successfully persuading them to accept a certain point of view. Through the voice of the poetic narrator, an author can channel any sort of personality and strike any pose. The element of performativity is crucial to keep in mind when considering the role that the narrator’s voice and the poet’s voice play in offering modern scholars a glimpse

¹⁵⁸ Vessey (1983): 208.

into the thought process of someone living during a certain time. Because a certain part of composing literature involves artifice and fictitious elements, it's important to consider the question of authenticity when embarking upon a project of deconstructing a writer's point of view through analysis of that writer's work.

Saturnalia, Public Ceremony and Public Performance of Memory in

***Silvae* 1.6**

In *Silvae* 1.6, Statius explores the issue of public performance of identity and the role of the public in the spectacle of public image and projected messaging. In this poem, Statius plays with the imagery of Saturnalia, a Roman festival that inspired its own literary *topos*.¹⁵⁹ During Saturnalia, a carnival-like atmosphere prevailed, complete with revelry and debauchery, and, more importantly, the reversal of social norms and hierarchies and general disregard of social stature. By its nature, Saturnalia supposedly rendered all citizens equal and gave them a brief opportunity for free speech and expression, with the notable exception of the emperor, who remained the superior ruler and served as sponsor of the festivities. The free-for-all atmosphere of Saturnalia contrasts sharply with the controlled ideology expressed in imperial themes in poetry. The spectacle provides an illusion of freedom without cost. The festival

constitutes a public performance of memory as a public ceremony with a live audience that offers space to perform and express a diverse array of identities. With the encouragement of counterculture behavior, Saturnalia offers the perfect dichotomy for Statius between free, unrestrained activity and the limits of imperial-sponsored and officially promoted activity.

In the *Silvae*, Domitian also plays the role of a political performer with a public persona that is separate from his private, personal life.

McCullough writes,

Indeed, Statius rules out any thought of competition or challenge by identifying Domitian as the only political actor in the *Silvae*. But neither can Domitian himself truly interact with his public; he cannot disguise his superior status and essential isolation from society at large. This ambiguity infuses the *Silvae* and is the result of an intersection of the historical, autocratic, suspicious, negative Domitian; the panegyricized, cultured, egalitarian, positive Domitian; and Statius' efforts to negotiate this divide and interpret the emperor's public image for a potentially hostile and skeptical aristocratic audience.¹⁶⁰

McCullough argues that the multiplicity of this public persona allows Domitian to conceal his real and private personality behind his own public image; he hides himself in plain sight. This then leaves Statius with the responsibility of mediating between emperor and audience and

¹⁵⁹ Chinn (2008): 102.

accounting for the emperor's public and private personas. Statius' poetry serves as the prime intermediary that presents Domitian to his audience and communicates the way in which Domitian wishes the public to see him. Statius faces the additional challenge of bridging a gap between the emperor and the public; because, as McCullough notes, some members of the public may feel hostile toward Domitian, Statius must determine how best to formulate his rhetoric and persuade his audience to view Domitian in a more positive light. Domitian probably faced a similar battle to that of modern politicians: no matter how a public figure portrays his or her actions, detractors can manage to spin those actions in a negative light. When it suits his detractors, Domitian appears weak and self-serving, or authoritarian and dictatorial, depending on the circumstances. Domitian can only hope to control the public's perceptions of his public image so as to remain favorable in their eyes, and he can accomplish that in part by directing the public as to where to look and controlling the context in which they see him. Statius, as mediator, adds this element of controlling the public's gaze to Domitian's position as a subject of his poetry. Throughout Statius' poems, and especially as McCullough notes, in *Silvae* 1.1, 1.6, and 4.1-4.3, Domitian gains power and control from his position as the one who gazes upon others but whom others have little

¹⁶⁰ McCullough (2008/2009): 160.

opportunity to gaze upon in return.¹⁶¹ Domitian rarely directly appears before his audience in the *Silvae*, and when he does, he remains distant and unapproachable, allowing him control over how others view him literally and metaphorically and granting him a private space in which he can protect himself from the public gaze.

Statius explores the conflicting senses of liberty and constant control that shape his memorialization of the Saturnalia feast. Domitian watches over his people in *Silvae* 1.6, even as the poem celebrates the notion of *libertas*. Statius comments, “Every order eats at one table: children, women, ordinary folk, equestrians, the Senate: liberty relaxes reverence.”¹⁶² Liberty relaxes reverence, but it also diminishes it; the more freedom the people have, they have the opportunity to criticize their leader. Even with the false equivalency of people from various backgrounds who come together to celebrate as patriotic equals, the element of hierarchy has to remain when it comes to the imperial gaze. Liberty remits reverence, but it does not *omit* it entirely. The physical and metaphorical distance between the emperor and his audience-subjects

¹⁶¹ McCullough (2008/2009): 145.

¹⁶² This translation is my own, but I have made use of other translations in considering how to take the famous phrase *libertas reverentiam remisit*. Statius *Silvae* 1.6.43- 45.

...una vescitur omnis ordo mensa,
parvi, femina, plebs, eques, senatus:
libertas reverentiam remisit.

remains; otherwise the critical gaze of the spectators could undermine the emperor's public image.

On this rare occasion, the emperor supposedly joins his people in the celebration, reminding them once again of his watchful presence:

And, why, even you—who among the gods would invite and promise to come?— you have joined these communal feasts with us. Now anyone, whoever he is, penniless, prosperous, boasts that he dines with the emperor.¹⁶³

Even here, in this more relaxed atmosphere, Statius reminds his readers that they feast at the pleasure of the emperor; they owe their happiness and their good fortune here and elsewhere to the emperor. They cannot forget this debt of gratitude, even as they are free to celebrate as they choose. No one here is free to refuse to celebrate, and no one here is free to criticize the emperor. This is political theater at its most provocative: the emperor proclaims the freedom of the public even as he seeks to remind them of their debt to him as their leader, stretching the meaning of *libertas* to accommodate and advance the imperial agenda. Is this just

¹⁶³ This translation is my own, referring to Shackleton Bailey (2003): 91 Note 11 for comments on how to take the interrogatory interruption. Statius *Silvae* 1.6.46- 50.

*Et tu quin etiam—quis hoc vacare,
uis promittere possit hoc deorum?—
nobiscum socias dapes inisti.
Iam se, quisquis is est, inops, beatus,*

another form of *panem et circenses*?¹⁶⁴ Perhaps Domitian want the public to freely choose to embrace his agenda, but he fears that given the choice, they will rebel against him and refuse to accept his authority. This tension between *libertas* and *auctoritas* comes to the surface in *Silvae* 1.6, and the poet leaves room for ambiguity when it comes to the will of the public.

The theatrical context of the celebration provides important insight into the general public's role as spectators and witnesses. Statius writes, "Here is what is either pleasing in form or is commended for skills in theaters."¹⁶⁵ The actors and entertainers are not the only ones who perform before an audience; the audience members perform before one another. Here people go to see and be seen; here the members of the public function as spectators and witnesses, as a collective body and as individuals with their own unique voices. The key to swaying the public lies in the art of persuasion and effective performativity.

Statius' Role in Remembering Domitian

convivam ducis esse gloriatur.

¹⁶⁴ The phrase "bread and circuses," which has come to epitomize political appeasement, comes from Juvenal's *Satura* 4.10.81. In his typical cynical fashion, Juvenal claims that the mob (the ordinary public), which once bestowed all sorts of powers and honors, now has constrained its desires and reveals its anxiety solely for bread and circuses, i.e. food and entertainment (*Satura* 4.10.78- 81).

¹⁶⁵ This translation is my own. Statius *Silvae* 1.6. 68- 69. *Quod theatris aut forma placet aut probatur arte.*

When it comes to the ways in which contemporaries of a dynasty shape its legacy, literature serves as one of the primary forms of remembrance. If a work of literature survives, it offers scholars a firsthand glimpse of how the poet and likeminded people of his or her time viewed their relationship with their emperor, as well as the ways in which they viewed themselves and their roles during the emperor's reign. Through Statius' *auctoritas* as a writer and a narrator of his poetry, he binds himself to an imperial message yet manages to articulate it in his own voice, adding to his own reputation. In Statius' poetry, it is the poet and not the emperor who brings fame, glory, and legitimacy to the imperial administration; his words, like amber, immortalize the emperor in a fixed manner for readers to view for generations, just as they immortalize Statius' patron-friends. In helping to define as well as articulate the emperor's legacy, Statius manages to have a say in the manner in which Domitian was remembered, and he also has preserved some of the process of shaping that memory in his writing. Statius also encourages critical thinking on the part of his audience, the readers, as they consider how to remember Domitian as a public figure. Statius' poems give life and meaning to a three dimensional portrait of an imperfect emperor with imperfect policies and imperfect subjects, a supposedly divine purveyor of authority who nevertheless comes across

ultimately as a flawed, outstanding human. Combined with Tacitus' harsh criticism and the messaging contained explicitly within Domitianic art and architecture, Statius' poems encourage appreciation and critical thinking on the part of their audience. The poems portray a man in power and the real-life consequences of his policies, and the response of real men and women to that man and those policies.

Ultimately, Statius does not offer blind praise for Domitian as a means to gain power and influence. Instead, Statius genuinely compliments Domitian and brings the full force of his artistry to bear in creating a glorious mythical narrative for his age, one whose mythological references should not be taken at face value as a literal translation of imperial propaganda, but rather as an artistic interpretation that exposes the fallibility as well as the awesome power of an enigmatic emperor. In the *Silvae*, Domitian seems to be a patron of the free arts; Statius seems free to create as a poet. Expression and creativity, instead of dampening, seem to flourish under Domitian. The court the emperor seems to cultivate is one of highly-educated, well-read individuals who not only appreciate literature and art but seek to define themselves and their reputations just as the emperor does: by becoming patrons and supporting the creation of works of art and literature that celebrate the dawn of a new era and take on original and complex subject matter, as

well as the nuances of everyday life. It is easy to see Domitian and the elite members of society who lived during his reign as the self-appointed heirs of an age that recalled Augustus but carried his legacy forward into his new age. Domitian's judicial activism and his original ideas seem steeped in history, just as Statius' poetry does. The budding excitement of watching the unfolding of a historical era is palpable in Statius' writing, as well as the clear-eyed politics and maneuvering that have become open policy. Statius' work is ultimately highly strategic and political, but it is also heartfelt. That makes his poetry a valuable tool for evaluating the reception of Domitian during his lifetime, one that hopefully scholars will continue to explore in more depth with better attention to Statius' own analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the administration that he had volunteered to promote. . Instead of hiding or disguising the political considerations involved in memorializing Domitian, Statius fully discloses his thought process, thus helping modern scholars to better understand and perhaps appreciate the politics involved in shaping memory.

Concluding Remarks

A great weakness no doubt for a person, to consist merely of a collection of moments; a great strength also: he is a product of memory, and our memory of a moment is not informed of everything that has happened since; this moment which it has recorded endures still, lives still, and with it the person whose form is outlined in it.¹⁶⁶

If treated properly, tracing the remembrance of a ruling figure cannot be a fully conclusive endeavor. So many voices and perceptions of individuals who lived during those critical times during which Domitian and his later detractors sought to shape people's memories of him and his reign have been lost; we cannot know fully how ordinary people who held no political sway and no real political significance for the elite truly thought of Domitian or the way that he was portrayed by himself and others. So much of what we do have on record comes to us through the lens of carefully crafted, strategic calculations about whether to speak or remain silent, and if to speak, how best to reflect the politics of the moment. This particular study is not a quest for some greater truth that will completely illuminate people's perceptions of Domitian during the first and second centuries, and it cannot shed light on the so-called

¹⁶⁶ Proust (1949) cited in Sacks (1995): 172, Note 6.

“truth” of what happened during Domitian’s reign. Those truths are rightfully lost to modern-day scholars, because even firsthand accounts are inherently subjective in that they present a person’s perception of events, and not an objective reality.

The story of the fate of Domitian’s legacy and the changing ways in which people evoked his memory speaks to the way that people politicize memory over time and reshape public and private forms of remembrance for political ends. Like many humans, Domitian feared death and being forgotten. His detractors feared that he would be remembered as the complex person that he was, and not through the lens of simple black-and-white characterizations through which they wanted people to view him. Domitian was very conscious of his position as a leader and of his position in history and his need to define himself in the public eye, and so too were his detractors. They realized that in order to control the effect of his legacy, they had to erase parts of his legacy that would cause people to see him in a positive light. They had to simplify and contain his image, and they saw the chance to capitalize on their own reinvention of Domitian’s legacy as a means to secure support for their own agendas. If the anonymity of the term “they,” a nameless, unknown collective enemy hell-bent on destroying everything Domitian created and the image and legacy he cultivated for himself, rings a bell in any

way, that is because even today in modern politics, people constantly use memory sanctions and memory reshaping to create and undo legacies. In today's modern world, individuals still tend to forget the processes by which a person's public image has been formed and reformed, and the process of memory erasure itself often undergoes erasure in the collective consciousness. By investigating the role of memory politics and politicization of memory during Domitian's reign and after his death, modern scholars not only can glean a better understanding of the politics of Domitianic and anti-Domitianic periods, but also a better understanding of the processes of mediation that available sources on those ancient periods have undergone before they come to scholars' attention. Investigating memory is a study in subjectivity and performativity, and peaking behind the curtain allows scholars to better understand the ways in which Romans prioritized certain memories and the ways in which they collectively and systematically chose to forget others. Certainly theories of memory formation and reformation have greatly influenced multiple fields, but the field of classical studies could use a more thorough investigation of particular figures whose legacies have been so distinctly shaped by ancient sources' portrayals that those sources' words seem to outweigh any attempt at historical treatment.

The legacy of memory erasure continues to haunt the study of history, and if modern people are to learn anything from the past, we all must become more conscious of the ways in which we choose to forget or reinvent memories of the past if we are to change our political consciousness in the future. Of course, it's important to note the ways in which Domitian's memory has been so systematically and successfully altered to reflect the prevailing views of people who opposed him centuries ago and capitalized upon his death through their own smear campaigns against him. However, Domitian's story doesn't just impact scholars' study of a particular period of history. What good is a comprehensive study of remembrance of a long-dead emperor if today's thinkers cannot recognize the same pattern in the smear campaigns against President Barack Obama? Even during his presidency, there are people who have sought systematically and in some cases pretty successfully to target measures such as the Affordable Healthcare Act, raising the minimum wage, and, most extensively, his role in responding to the current economic recession. Just as with Domitian, modern-day politicians have created a distinct language and visual-based vocabulary to highlight what they view as the negative aspects of Obama's tenure. They have labeled Obama a dictator, just as some ancient Romans labeled Domitian a tyrant. The comparison doesn't just apply to Obama;

plenty of leaders in history have experienced active and retroactive condemnation during and after their time in power. Others' legacies have equally fallen victim to whitewashing or sugar-coating; the most recent example might be Nelson Mandela, whose passing caused a groundswell of positive remembrances about his quest for peace and his nonviolent activism, while the mainstream media sources and those they quoted often failed to account for qualities such as his radicalism. The study of history itself loses its value for shaping future policy if historians only focus on black-and-white labels in their consideration of the past. The grey areas often the most valuable questions about what it means for a leader to choose between different policy tactics, to decide what public self-image to present, or even to choose to appear before the public in a certain context at all. There is great value in studying the so-called "bad" characters of history—the tyrants, the rebels, the radicals, even the ones generally considered to be "on the wrong side of history"—to discover how process of remembrance and memorialization contributed to modern-day perceptions, and whether there is something more to learn from their policy decisions that could have a positive impact on future decision-making, something that scholars have missed over the years because that powerful sense of judgment has obscured a more in-depth nuanced consideration. People constantly rewrite history as they live it;

the task falls on future generations to read between the lines and recapture certain aspects of a person's legacy that hold important emotional or political truths for current generations. We all must learn to better understand processes of memory creation and memory erasure so that no one forgets something that holds the key to a part of the future. In building the future, we must understand the power of destruction of the past.

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