Is Jove a Rock or Leaner? Interpreting the Central Paintings of Pompeii's House of the Tragic Poet

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Abstract

When confronting a piece of ancient Roman artwork, the modern viewer faces the question, "How do we see like the Romans did?" Geographical, temporal, and cultural differences combine to make the process of understanding ancient art particularly complex. This piece attempts to bridge the gap between ancient Rome and the present through an analysis of the central mythological paintings located in regio VI, insula 8 of Pompeii. A three-dimensional model of the insula, created in the honors research colloquium "Digital Pompeii" at the University of Arkansas, is essential to the examination of the complex interaction between the paintings and their architectural context. By utilizing gender and gaze theory, examining Roman oratorical and memorization practices, and the rituals of daily life, this piece traces the social messages encoded in these paintings through the spatial sequence of the insula, paying particular attention to issues of gender instability, phallic power, and political hierarchy in Roman society.

Introduction

For the contemporary viewer, understanding the frescoes that covered the walls of the *domūs* of the ancient city of Pompeii presents a challenge. One might hail them as glorious and perhaps remark upon the talent (or, occasionally, the crudeness) of the artists who executed their designs throughout Roman domestic space. However, this does little to advance one's understanding of the various meanings encoded in the art and still less to illuminate the reception of the paintings by their original Roman viewers. As part of her critique of traditional approaches to art history, Griselda Pollock argues, "What we are taught is how to appreciate the greatness of the artist and the quality of art objects. This ideology is contested by the argument that we should be studying the totality of social relations which form the conditions of the production and consumption of objects designated in the process as art."

While Pollock aims to apply contemporary feminist discourse to 19th and 20th-century art history, this assertion certainly applies to the study of the domestic artwork of the ancient Pompeians, since "the quality and decoration of a Roman's house was closely linked with his social standing." Because domestic decoration was so closely tied to social hierarchy, applying gender theory, especially its analysis of power relations and phallocentrism, to one's study of Roman

decoration is useful – and arguably essential – to decoding its meaning.

I propose, then, a fresh interpretation of the paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii. My interest in the subject finds its genesis partially in my reaction to Bettina Bergmann's "The Roman House as Memory Theater," in which Bergmann discusses the experience of the paintings by their original viewers as linked to the Roman practice of oratory. My interest also derives from the creation of a three-dimensional model of regio VI, insula 8 in "Digital Pompeii," an honors colloquium class at the University of Arkansas.

The goal of this class was to reproduce Pompeii's artwork and artifacts in virtual reality, using drafting and video game software. By generating a 3-D searchable database through which I could navigate and view the artwork in its original context (on the walls), I found myself better able to visualize the interrelation between paintings and the ways in which their stories overlapped to create a complex narrative, one which commented on the sociopolitical situation and power structure of ancient Rome. By assuming the role of spectator, a role difficult to adopt simply by looking at a 2-D photograph of the decoration, I better understood how the Roman viewer would have interacted with the artwork. By utilizing gender and gaze theory, along with the readings of Bergmann, and informed by my experience of "walking" within the 3-D model of the insula, this article presents a fresh analysis of the artwork.

Space and Ritual in the Roman House

In order to understand the decorative themes utilized in Roman domestic space, the viewer must recognize that "[t]he architecture of the Romans was, from first to last, an art of shaping space around ritual." These rituals not only denoted formal ceremonies or household culta, but also daily interactions that shaped Roman life. Moreover, "the home was a locus of public life. A public figure went home not so much to shield himself from the public gaze as to present himself to it in the best light." The rituals of daily life occurred predominantly in the home, and each space's size, position in the domus, and richness of decoration acted as a signpost to the Romans who entered it, indicating both a room's function and its owner's status. Thus, the architect was faced with the task of creating a space that served as a place to carry out rituals and also communicated its utility to visitors and inhabitants alike.

A helpful example in understanding daily ritual is that of the *salutatio*, the visits that the *clientela*, or dependents, made to their patron, the paterfamilias of the home. The salutatio was essential to the political fabric of Roman life. Clientela waited upon their patron in the hopes of securing his favor and thus benefitting, and the size and socioeconomic standing of a patron's clientela contributed to his political clout. Its importance is made manifest in the layout of the domus, since Roman builders and artists shaped the *fauces* (entryway from the street), *atrium* (the central hall onto which the fauces opened), and *tablinum* (the main reception space at the end of the atrium, in which the paterfamilias sat and received guests) around the salutatio. As the clientela entered the domus, a "sequence of architecturally framed planes conducted the client's gaze to the paterfamilias in the tablinum," guiding the guest's movement from entryway to his goal.

The 3-D model is particularly useful here, for it allows one to retrace the path of the visiting client, moving through from the fauces, through the atrium and its numerous paintings, to the tablinum. The position of the patriarch, stationary in the tablinum, gazing out through the atrium and toward the fauces, can also be visualized (Fig. 2). The fauces-atrium-tablinum axis, then, served as a spatial guide that informed the visitor's movement through the domus, and the decorative schema it contained was instrumental in conveying the social rank and political importance of the paterfamilias.

This hierarchy of decoration existed throughout the entire house, coding each room's importance. Wallace-Hadrill suggests that one may rank Roman domestic spaces by placing them within the axes of public versus private and grand versus humble. The first of these categories delineates the difference between public rooms like the atrium and tablinum, to which all guests were permitted access, and private rooms into which only a select few were invited, such as the triclinum (dining room) or cubiculum (bedroom). The second axis refers to the social and political importance of both the spaces and their typical occupants, such that the rooms of an influential paterfamilias rank above those of a slave. Wallace-Hadrill combines the two modes of evaluation in order to situate each space in a given house into a social hierarchy.

Those rooms that occupied the elite end of the spectrum were hallmarked by a central painting containing mythological images to which "extraordinary prestige [was] attached." In contrast, lower-ranking spaces might be decorated with pastoral images, various animals, or still-life scenes. Thus, "heroic and divine scenes enjoy prestige in the same way as heroic poetry and tragedy do compared to the 'humble' genres of lyric or epigram." Based on its grandeur, the quality of the artwork (including fineness of detail and cost of the pigment used), and its subject matter, the content of the central images in a space communicated both the societal significance of their owner and the position the viewer occupied within it:

From the point of view of the ancient consumer…
decoration allowed a social orientation of two types: first,
it helped to steer them within a house, guiding them round the internal hierarchies of social space…and second, it offered social orientation by contrasting one house with another, indicating the level of resources and social aspirations of the household.

Central mythological panels lie at the top of the decorative hierarchy and are among the most important clues to the relative status of the spaces in the domus. Their analysis, therefore, is essential to understanding the function of Roman wall painting; that is, how and what it meant in its original context.

Contemporary Gender Theory and Roman Art History

The following analysis will assess the significance of the mythological panels from a domus in region VI, insula 8: the House of the Tragic Poet. I will take into account John Berger's work on gender relations and his description of the active male and passive female in artwork. I will also utilize Laura Mulvey's work on film theory, in particular her analysis of the viewer's scopophilic and sadistic gazes and what these indicate about gender relations. Carol Clover's evaluation of assaultive and reactive gazes in horror films is also pertinent. Susan Bordo's analysis of portrayals of the male body and what these views indicate about the gendered political and social hierarchy that produced this artwork will also be useful in my analysis.

Bettina Bergmann discusses "memory theater" and highlights the importance of understanding Roman decoration based on interrelations of paintings, as connected to the educated Roman's mode of mentally moving through a house. Her work provides insight into the ways in which these paintings were originally interpreted. Here, in particular, my use of the 3-D model of the insula will be vital, for rather than being forced to rely on a 2-D map detailing the placement of paintings in relation to one another, I "walked" through the domus and viewed the paintings from multiple angles. Finally, I will examine David Fredrick's analysis of erotic content of Pompeian paintings, based partly on Mulvey's concepts, and its gendered implications for Roman political and social structure. In particular, I am interested in analyzing phallic power and the potential for male exposure and vulnerability in Pompeian artwork to challenge and destabilize such power. Early gaze theory (like that of Berger) fails to take into account for these issues, but they do arise in later work, including that of Clover and Bordo.

According to Berger, a man's social presence depends upon the (phallic) power that he may potentially wield. In contrast, a woman's presence deals with her self-image and forces her to watch herself continuously, anticipating Foucault's concept of self-surveillance. This construct, when applied to artwork, figures the man as surveyor and the woman as the one surveyed. Thus, according to Berger, *"men act and women appear.* Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."[xiv] As a result, women are objectified by the men who wield power over them.

Mulvey's analysis of the two gazes of the film spectator is also useful for the interpretation of the erotic scenes in Roman painting. Fetishistic scopophilia, a pleasure in looking at an idealized, fragmented woman, ignores her lack of penis, allowing the reader to deny the possibility that he, too, has the potential for suffering such a lack. Sadistic voyeurism, on the other hand, recognizes the woman's lack and watches as she is either forgiven or punished for it. The gazes tie in with Berger's point that often in artwork, men act upon passive, objectified women. This gendered power structure is vital to understanding the social and political hierarchy established in the Pompeian frescoes, and there is ancient precedent for its critical application, suggesting that this structure is not particular to modern media, but rather has ancient precedents.

Clover's work on gender in horror films deals with a twinned gaze, one of which invests its wielder with authority, while the other strips the gazer of power. The assaultive gaze is that of the predator, "a phallic gaze," that seeks to harm its victim; the reactive gaze is that of the victim or of the spectator seeking "to be oneself assaulted" by viewing "surrogates for one's own past victimized self."[xvi] In the case of the spectator, "Assaultive and reactive gazing are…housed in one and the same person," and thus one may identify in turn with both the assaulter and the assaulted. As Clover demonstrates, the role of the viewer and the sexualized rendering of the film's characters (or in our case, the painting's) should be taken into account in the work's analysis based on the information it provided about gender roles and "phallic cruelty."[xvii]

Clover's concepts have already found some application to ancient art. In "The Torturer's Apprentice," Helen Morales adapted Clover's gazes for her analysis of Parrhasius's art, based on Seneca's account in the *Controversiae* of the artist's practice of torturing a slave in order to portray accurately the body in pain. Morales argues that ancient Romans recognized the viewer's function in understanding decoration: "Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae*…is an important document which negotiates the social and moral responsibilities of the artist and the spectator…It considers the spectator's role as a victim of Parrhasius' art (the reactive gaze) and as an active consumer (the assaultive gaze)."[xviii] Morales's work, then, supports the application of modern gaze theory to ancient Roman artwork in order to better understand the messages encoded in the paintings.

Bergmann's methodology centers on the notion that "memory played a vital role in the creation and reception of Roman pictorial ensembles in domestic situations."[xix] As such, moving through the space and analyzing its artwork "constituted a process of remembering" that required the viewer to evaluate works in conjunction with other pieces throughout the domus.[xx] This process of remembering is closely linked with the "systematic memory training" which formed the groundwork of the education of elite Roman males: Cicero, Quintilian, and the author of *Ad herennium* recommended that students train their minds by likening memory to a large house with numerous rooms through which one could move. In this house, everything has its place, and "it is the spatial order of the storage that allows for retrieval."[xxi] Because they were trained in the art of remembering, the ancient viewers would have applied this model to their experience of artwork in a physical house, especially as it prompted an association between images that produced complex meaning.[xxii]

Therefore, by analyzing the paintings from different points of view, taking into account various spatial relationships and the myths they represent, one may discover multiple meanings in the works and attempt to recreate the associations that the Roman viewer would have formed. Using a navigable 3-D model of the domus, such as the one generated in the "Digital Pompeii" class, serves as perhaps the best way to appreciate the kinaesthetic experience of the house (per Bergmann's model). As already mentioned, the model casts the user into the role of a spectator walking through the house, thereby aligning one's experience with that of the ancient Roman. If one hopes to understand the paintings in their original context (that is, to recreate the Roman process of memory association), the ability to view them in the house is vital. If the Roman visualized the memory process as a house, then the modern viewer must have access to a 3-D model of the domus in order to fully grasp how Roman structured their thought processes, and, by extension, their reading of the artwork.

Fredrick, on the other hand, focuses on the eroticism, and often violence, of the scenes, traits which many critics ignore. Though some, such as Wallace-Hadrill, place space in the decorative hierarchy based on the type of literature (ranging from epic to epigram) it references, Fredrick points out that the content of these erotic paintings "is usually not 'heroic'." "Rather, their erotic and/or violent content requires the consideration of gender as a means for encoding power (or powerlessness)."[xxiii] He notes that eroticism is "intimately connected with larger political and social relations of power"; as such, scenes in which a male asserts his sexual power can been seen as celebratory of influence, whereas those in which a male is made passive or is symbolically castrated represent fear of loss of said power.[xxiv]

While the tools of gaze theory will be essential to my analysis of central mythological images, Bergmann's "memory theater" will provide the point of departure for this examination. Bergmann analyzes the House of the Tragic Poet, a house featuring the most and best-preserved set of images in insula 8. It should be noted that this domus is fairly modest in size, indicating that, though rich in decoration, it did not occupy a place at the most elite end of the social spectrum. In general, Bergmann's examination makes sense, as she interrelates the myths on several different layers in order to show the complex relationships that can be drawn between them. For example, Bergmann points out that the women in the various paintings in the atrium all inhabit liminal stages, about to cross a threshold into a new part of their lives, be that step marriage (Juno), enslavement or rape (Briseis; Amphitrite),

or elopement with a lover (Helen).[xxv] She also touches on more formal considerations, such as the way in which Hera and Aphrodite are positioned on the west and east side (respectively) of the fauces (1) entrance to the atrium, creating a dynamic of chastity versus eroticism (Fig. 1).[xxvi]

However, she does not pay adequate attention to the erotic aspects of the works, ones which carry interpretive weight and which should be significant to the connection of domestic decoration to social power. By incorporating Bergmann's memory association with Fredrick's connection between eroticism and political power, and Clover's and Morales's assaultive and reactive gazes, the viewer may gain a fuller understanding of the gendered political and social commentary that the art offered to the Roman eye. At the same time, the emphasis on the exposure and vulnerability of the male body in my analysis of these paintings is not found in Berger or Mulvey's work on gaze theory, although perhaps it is anticipated in Clover and Bordo.

Analysis of the Central Paintings of the Atrium Area

The atrium (3) features six central paintings,[xxvii] two of which are barely discernible, even in the 19th-century lithograph. On the south wall, to the west side of the fauces, is placed a painting of the wedding of Jove and Juno (Fig. 2). In it, Juno is clothed and faces the viewer; Jove lounges half-nude, holding Juno's arm and drawing her toward him. His position and lack of clothing make him a potential object of Mulvey's fetishistic scopophilia, for though he seems to assert his phallic power by claiming his bride, his stance leaves him open to the viewer's gaze. It is important to note that neither Berger nor Mulvey addresses the possibility of male vulnerability, focusing instead on male gazer/actor and a female recipient of the gaze. Nonetheless, when an exposed male body is portrayed in a manner similar to that of the female bodies to which they call attention, it is reasonable to use Berger's view of objectification and Mulvey's gazes to assess the power construct that the image implies. In addition, since Clover and Bordo consider the possibility of male exposure and the implications of this construct, their work is also pertinent here. Bordo would classify Jove's position as that of a "leaner," one with a soft, rounded, even vulnerable body. Similarly, on the east side of the fauces, a portion of a painting featuring a nude Venus is located (Fig. 3). Bergmann notes that this may have been a panel of the <u>Judgment of Paris</u>, in which case Venus's nudity would act as a display inviting male judgment. As it stands, Venus' naked body faces the viewer, though she covers her genitalia with her robe; this certainly fits with fetishistic scopophilia. Not only is Venus idealized, but she hides from the male viewer her difference from him, allowing him to fantasize without anxiety about her lack. Both paintings invite the viewer to fantasize, yet neither Jove nor Venus fully relinquishes power: Jove still dominates his bride, and Venus manipulates Paris into selecting her as the most beautiful, ultimately leading to the events of the Trojan War.

The west wall of the atrium contains two paintings that are significantly eroded and therefore more difficult to evaluate.[xxxi] One features Poseidon kidnapping Amphitrite, a situation that showcases sadistic voyeurism (Fig. 4). The viewer watches as the nude, helpless Amphitrite is carried away against her will by powerful Poseidon, a near-rape Bergman fails to address, at least in terms of its violence. Amphitrite's lack is punished in that she is forced into a sexual situation she does not desire; if she had a penis, Poseidon would probably not be a threat to her. One point in the painting that deviates from this model is Eros taking Poseidon's trident (an overt symbol of phallic power) away from him, seeming to indicate that his lust has unmanned him in some way; in Roman sexual ideology, a male who was unable to control his sexual desires jeopardized his dominant social position.[xxxii] The painting farther down the wall, closer to the tablinum, features the wrath of Achilles, but the lithograph fails to capture the majority of the painting, making it difficult to analyze a potential gaze (Fig. 4).[xxxiii] Both paintings feature powerful men exercising their own will, despite the wishes of another, indicating that a narrative parallel can be drawn between them, in accordance with Bergmann's analysis of rhetorical pairings between paintings, and as seen in the 3-D model of the house.[xxxiv]

The east wall also contains two paintings, the southernmost of which features Agamemnon's abduction of Briseis (Fig. 4). Unlike Amphitrite, Briseis is fully garbed, and though she shrinks from her captor, she does not invite the sadistic gaze. The men in the painting, Agamemnon and Patroclus, are the more likely recipients of a fetishistic gaze, for both are half-nude, displaying idealized bodies. Patroclus especially seems an object of the gaze, as he is oriented toward the viewer, though he watches Briseis. Therefore, though Agamemnon asserts his phallic power here by forcing Briseis to accompany him, the painting is complicated by its portrayal of the men. The other painting contains an image of Helen about to board a ship, presumably to run away from Sparta and Menelaos to Troy with Paris (Fig. 4). She, like Briseis, is fully clothed and seems hesitant to take her next step; a man (possibly Paris) guides her by the arm and seems to push her toward the gangplank. Thus, the male is active and the female, passive, but the contrast is not as great as in Poseidon's abduction of Amphitrite or Agamemnon's claiming of Briseis as his war prize. The viewer is left to question whether Helen's actions are consensual or forced; either way, neither Helen nor her male counterpart invite either of Mulvey's gazes. The wall's theme seems to be the action of men forcing (or coercing) women to accord with their wills, a theme that would plausibly underscore the political power of the owner of the house. However, this exercise of power does not exclude a concomitant objectification of the male body by the gaze of the viewer. Even as these powerful men bend women to their respective wills, the viewer can employ a fetishistic or assaultive gaze and at least partially objectify these "active" males.

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Room 6A also features two central mythological paintings, both of which lend themselves to interpretation based on gender and gaze theory. The south wall contains a painting of Europa and Jove in the guise of a bull. Europa is the epitome of the passive female object of the fetishistic gaze (Fig. 5).[xxxv] She wanly holds on to the bull, and her clothing billows away from her body. She turns toward the viewer, such that one breast is exposed and a hint of her genitalia may be seen. Even the bull has turned to gaze at her, implying that the viewer will as well. The bull's size, ability to carry her off, and horns all reference phallic supremacy and the man's ability to act on the woman. As 6A extends off of the atrium, if one stands at an angle oriented southwest, this image can be seen through an atrium doorway that separates the paintings of the abductions of Briseis and Helen. The relationship between the three paintings was made particularly clear by navigating the 3-D model (Fig. 7). This image of Europa's abduction, then, bridges the two other images, connecting all three as scenes in which men force their will upon women (with the possible exception of Helen).

The painting on the west wall of 6A, one of Phrixus and Helle, is less clear (Fig. 6). The siblings flee their step-mother's murderous intentions, aided by their mother who sends the ram to carry them away. Phrixus' power, then, is not sufficient to extricate himself (and Helle) from their trouble; however, he stays atop the ram, whereas Helle falls into the ocean and drowns. In the painting, Phrixus is physically imposing when compared to the diminutive Helle; though both are nude, fabric covers Phrixus' genitalia, whereas the drowning Helle is exposed to the viewer, indicating she may be the object of a sadistic gaze. Phrixus' phallic power here is murky: he is superior to Helle, but when compared to Jove, he is found wanting. As this painting, too, can be seen when looking through the 6A doorway, Phrixus may serve as a foil for the powerful Poseidon, Achilles, and Agamemnon, reflecting the fact that power, in the Roman social hierarchy, was not an either-or binary. Instead, it fell on a continuum, as seen in Wallace-Hadrill's progression from servi (slaves) through freedmen and clients, to close friends (*familiares*) and finally the owner himself.

The tablinum (8) contains one central painting which tells the story of Alcestis and Admetus (Fig. 8). An old woman prophesies Admetus's impending death; Admetus leans toward the viewer, stunned and overwrought, while a calmer Alcestis reaches out and comforts him.[xxxvi] All of the characters are clothed, and none of them seem particularly sexualized, rendering the gazes an ineffectual means of assessment. However, phallic power still comes into play, for a woman is delivering dire news to Admetus, and the latter realizes that he lacks the power to circumvent its coming to pass. Though not portrayed in the painting, the viewer realizes that Admetus is being punished by Artemis for failing to make a proper sacrifice to her. Though Apollo intervenes, he cannot negate the punishment, but can only allow for the possibility that a substitute life may be given in his place. This indicates that

Artemis wields the phallic power here (at least in this stage of the myth), though she is female, and that no male character can dissuade her, symbolically castrating Admetus.

Here, the artist makes use of the "material body as site of political struggle," referencing Fredrick's assertion that some paintings encode a fear of loss of political power by depicting a man's being stripped of phallic power.[xxxvii] However, it should be noted that later in the myth, Hercules agrees to descend into the Underworld and wrestle Death in exchange for Alcestis, then restores her to Admetus; to an extent, then, a male reclaims phallic power at the end of the story. Still, this scene allows one to understand better the dynamic of the decoration for visiting clients. As they walked through the atrium, they were surrounded by images of powerful men imposing their wills upon others, paintings which remind them of the power and influence of their patron. Using the 3-D model of the domus to retrace this path allows the modern viewer to experience this dynamic. In the tablinum, however, a more cautionary tale exists, one that warns the male visitor against hubris, for should he fail to behave rightly and honorably, he could potentially lose social and political power. As such, the didactic nature of this painting contrasts with the exposed male bodies that the visitor encountered on his walk through the atrium.

Analysis of the Paintings in the Peristyle Area

Another significant mythological painting is found in the peristyle (10), one detailing the sacrifice of Iphigenia (Fig. 9). Here the powerful role of Artemis continues. Iphigenia resembles Europa, in that she is nude (with the exception of her genitalia) and wholly exposed to the viewer, powerless against the sadistic and fetishistic gazes, as well as against her captors. According to Mulvey, the sadistic and fetishistic gazes are distinct and should not exist simultaneously in a scene; however, this image complicates Mulvey's reading because the portrait of Iphigenia does expose her to both. All of the men have averted their gazes from her: her father, Agamemnon, hides his face beneath his cloak, and the others look toward the sky, where Artemis presides. According to the myth, she will save Iphigenia from being killed. For now, however, she remains steadfast in her demand that Agamemnon sacrifice the girl to her in order to make reparation for killing her sacred deer, then boasting of his skill. He is powerless to refuse her, as are the other men in the scene; moreover, he has a larger political goal at stake (namely obtaining a favorable sailing wind for the Greeks, so that they can attack Troy). Thus, staying in the goddess's good favor is essential.

This continues the theme of the tablinum, in that a fear of powerlessness pervades the scene. The tablinum contains a large window that opens onto the peristyle and allows the spectator to view the painting of Iphigenia (as demonstrated by the 3-D model). It should be further noted that both paintings praise the sacrifice of women (those even more powerless than the suffering men) in order to save the men from further doom. This femicide could be read as an extreme fulfillment of

sadistic voyeurism, one not included by Mulvey but pertinent nonetheless. Iphigenia's death stands in contrast with that of Alcestis and highlights the dualism of the woman as willing or unwilling sacrifice. Whereas Agamemnon (and Artemis) chooses to kill his daughter (allowing her death to be seen as punishment and therefore sadistic), Alcestis voluntarily offers her life in exchange for her husband's (which could be read as either self-abnegation or a desire to exchange her physical life for social fame).

The triclinium (15) contains three central pieces; Bergmann does not address these paintings in her reading of the house, but they contribute to understanding the overall decorative implications of the House of the Tragic Poet. The painting on the north wall is identified in *Pompeii: pitture e mosaici* (an encyclopedia of all of the decoration found at the excavated sites of Pompeii, including photographs and descriptions) as the "Sale of Cupids."[xxxviii] Per the myth, Cupid is imprisoned as though he were a runaway slave, a punishment for the crimes he has committed against various lovers. His captors put him on sale, thus inverting his former position of power into that of slavery. In light of the myth, Cupid's body invites both a fetishistic and scopophilic gaze: the curve of his body (which figures him as a "leaner") and the exposure of his genitalia invite the spectator (who knows that Cupid will soon be punished) to gaze upon him. Just as the tale of Admetus serves to caution the viewer, so could this painting be read as a warning against the dangers of desire, which could enslave its victims like Cupid, should they allow it to dictate the course of their actions.

The painting on the south wall returns to Artemis, who stands with Callisto (Fig. 10). The painting has suffered serious damage, rendering it difficult to evaluate the precise condition of the figures. However, it seems that they are all clothed, and neither woman turns toward the viewer to invite his gaze. Phallic power permeates the myth, in that Jove rapes Callisto; however, he must assume the form of a woman (usually Artemis) in order to do so.[xxxix] This calls to mind Fredrick's point about the gender-bending present in Roman art and literature, as demonstrated by the frequency with which Hermaphroditus is depicted in painting and sculpture and the subordination of the poet-lover to the *puella* in elegy. Jove is unable to assert his phallic power outright, but rather must associate himself with femininity (typically the antithesis of power) in order to achieve his desires. This ties in with the image displayed in the peristyle (10), in which Artemis exerts power over Agamemnon. A persistent narrative of men being stripped of power, or at least having their power lessened, emerges and further connects with the image in the tablinum (8). The painting of Cupid, then, serves as a humorous foil to the reversal of power frequently experienced by "serious" male figures in many of the paintings. As the triclinium opened onto the peristyle, a visual connection between the two rooms existed, and the spectator would have linked the images they contained (as demonstrated by the 3-D model).

A clearer-cut case of male superiority appears on the room's east wall, which features Theseus abandoning Ariadne (Fig. 11). He stands on the ship and turns to gaze at the reclining Ariadne. (Since the painting is also damaged, it is difficult to determine whether she is sleeping or simply powerless to prevail upon him to stay.) Her position and her nudity invite both a scopophilic and a sadistic gaze (not unlike Iphigenia), for her lover abandons her, leaving her exposed and alone. The 3-D model shows the correlation between these two paintings, in that the viewer facing the painting of Theseus and Ariadne also experiences that of Iphigenia, which is positioned on the left, on the rear wall of the peristyle (Fig. 12). The informed viewer knows that soon Dionysus will encounter and rape Ariadne, furthering her punishment, though this is also regarded as a "wedding" and thus a kind of "reward" (from the man's perspective).

Conclusions

While it is impossible to experience Roman artwork as the Romans did, the ability to navigate through a virtual, three-dimensional Pompeii allows one to reconstruct the erotic narrative that the paintings create. Locating oneself in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet, for example, and facing every angle possible is much more useful in understanding how the paintings reflect and speak to one another than is viewing them printed in a two-dimensional reproduction. It further allows one to retrace the path of the salutatio, assuming the position of the clients who walked through the fauces, into the atrium and toward the tablinum, all the while surrounded by central mythological images that told stories of power exercised and power lost. Conversely, one might stand in the tablinum, in the position of the paterfamilias, and look out across the atrium toward the entrance to the domus. Here one can view the decorations commissioned to hallmark one's social standing and political power and perhaps observe their effects on one's dependents (Fig. 2). Books and flat images, valuable though they are, cannot offer this experience, and for this reason, the virtual model is indispensable in understanding Pompeian art.

Moreover, the model aids in the application of techniques such as those suggested by Fredrick and Bergmann, both of which evaluate the meaning of artwork and of the implications of said meaning regarding Roman daily life. As Bergmann's work places emphasis on the rhetorical and compositional relations between the paintings, the models constructed through the Digital Pompeii Project are powerful aids in visualizing and critiquing Bergmann's assessment. As previously noted, Bergmann suggests that the process of remembering in Roman rhetorics can be enhanced by visualizing memory as the mind's movement through a domus containing many rooms. The details of a speech, in memory, become the decoration on the walls, and are thereby entwined with the paintings one encounters. The process of ordering the scenes, interrelating them, and drawing conclusions is equated with the ability to synthesize knowledge into a verbal argument. Thus,

Bergmann demonstrates that the lucid rhetorical arrangement of "paintings" exhibits the Roman male's oratorical skills, political power, and social position – his phallic power, in other words. The 3-D model allows the modern viewer to move through a Roman domus, providing insight both into the process of reading the paintings and that of ordering the Roman mind.

This visualization, then, serves to organize the orator's thoughts by superimposing the different portions of his speech over the artwork in his mental domus. It might be said that the paintings he sees comprise an inner narrative. Through its content, the artwork of regio VI, insula 8 allows this progression to be evaluated, in light of Mulvey's work, as an erotically charged narrative that prompts scopophilia and voyeurism on the part of the viewer and invites movement between gendered positions. It seems as though this eroticism would undermine the task at hand, namely the organization of a political speech. After all, mental images of a nude Venus manipulating Paris or of a glorious Artemis commanding Agamemnon do not appear conducive to composing and delivering a speech on the often weighty topics of Roman public oratory: the management of the grain supply, for instance, or a military campaign in Asia Minor. Visualizing sexually-charged, role-reversing scenes would potentially destabilize the oratorical narrative, based on their ability to distract, confuse, or even frighten the orator. The use of images that challenge established gender roles in this memory theater questions the traditional view of Roman power and oratorical prowess as aggressively masculine.

Corbeill's work on the importance of movement to the Roman orator supports the assertion that gender-bending occurred frequently in the political arena. Cicero writes about the proper set of bodily movements, or habitus, to which an orator should confine himself, rejecting those that he deems either effeminate or rustic. To act outside of the habitus, in his view, reflects upon the character of the actor, to the point of implying that a man is "sexually submissive," and thereby lacking in phallic power or political influence. Nevertheless, notable politicians, including Julius Caesar, rejected the habitus of the dominant political party in order to set themselves apart as opposing this group's political stance. In fact, Caesar went so far as to don "nonmasculine dress" as a means of "self-advertising" his opposition to Sulla's policies. The salient point to be made is that Caesar and other "popular" orators engaged in gender-bending behavior not to establish a sexual difference, but rather a political identity apart from their contemporaries.

Hadrian's immortalization of his lover Antinous's image throughout the Roman Empire provides an additional example of how hegemonic gender roles could be manipulated to political ends.[xliii] Caroline Vout suggests that Hadrian's decision to reproduce Antinous's visage on marble busts, coins, memorials, and inscriptions was not motivated solely by the emperor's desire to deify his deceased lover. Rather, Hadrian intended to force his subjects to think of their ruler every time

they encountered a visual representation of Antinous, thereby insinuating himself in Roman daily life. His method of doing so, however, entailed challenging the sexual relationships deemed acceptable for a "real man," or uir, which did not include "his sleeping with a freeborn citizen."[xliv] Despite this violation of social mores, representations of Antinous were not automatically fetishized and stripped of phallic power. Vout argues that Antinous remained a "young intact male" (rather than being associated with a male slave or being deemed effeminate) and therefore cannot be read according to Mulvey's gaze theory, because he concomitantly possessed power and was rendered a passive, objectified body by spectators.[xlv]

Based on my analysis of Roman decoration and on the aforementioned examples, I suggest that one would be mistaken in figuring the political and social power structure of the Roman Empire as solely based on phallic power and aggressive masculinity. Gender-bending not only occurred, but was also successfully utilized as a tool in the political machinations of various orators. Occasionally, conflicts were even resolved via the utilization of traditionally-feminine traits, rather than masculine strength or combat. Suetonius records that a certain Gallic chief was so affected by the beauty and softness of Augustus's body that he eschewed pushing the emperor off a cliff, as he had previously planned. Thus the qualities that saved Augustus's life were antipodal to the masculine ideal.[xlvi] The erotically-charged encounter imbued Augustus with a certain power, even if it did deviate from the Roman meme of proper masculinity. This, too, speaks to the need to reconsider notions of Roman masculinity and phallic power in order to account for deviations from these paradigms. The artwork of Pompeii supports this complication and aligns itself with a reading that takes into account the importance of gender-bending in obtaining political power. Therefore, when we view and move past the paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet, we see the reflections of a much more flexible and unstable "phallic power" than we might expect, but one which is consistent with the complex gender positioning of elite oratory.

References

[i] Griselda Pollock. *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism, and histories of art.* London: Routledge, 1988, 3.

[ii] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. *Houses and Soceity in Pompeii and Herculaneum.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 4.

[iii] Bettina Bergmann. "The Roman House as Memory Theater." *The Art Bulletin.* 76.2 (1994), 225-56.

[iv] John Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration.* Berkeley, 1991, 1.

[v] Wallace-Hadrill, 5.

[vi] See Clarke, 2; 28-29.

[vii] Clarke, 4.

[viii] Wallace-Hadrill, 11.

ix Clarke, 12-13.

x Wallace-Hadrill, 31.

xi Ibid.

xii Wallace-Hadrill, 36.

xiii John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972, 45-6.

xiv Berger, 47.

xv Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999, 834-38.

xvi Carol Clover. *Men, Women and Chainsaws*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 173-4.

xvii Clover, 175.

xviii Helen Morales. "The Torturer's Apprentice: Parrhasius and the Limits of Art." *Art and Text in Roman Culture*. Ed. Jaś Elsner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 184.

xix Bergmann, 225.

xx Bergmann, 237.

xxi Bergmann, 225.

xxii Bergmann, 226.

xxiii David Fredrick. "Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne." *Classical Antiquity*. 14.2 (1995), 267.

xxiv Fredrick, 268.

xxv Bergmann, 245

xxvi Bergmann, 245.

xxvii For the location of the paintings as situated in the House of the Tragic Poet, see Fig. 2.

xxviii These 19th century lithographs by Pedicini (contained in *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*) are valuable in analyzing the atrium's artwork, as some of the paintings are no longer extant, and minimal photographic evidence of their contents remains. Bergmann also relies upon the tempura paintings of Raoul-Rochette to decipher the room's artwork (233).

xxix Susan Bordo. *The Male Body*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999, 186.

xxx Bergmann, 237.

xxxi Ibid.

xxxii Jonathan Walters. "Invading the Roman Body." *Roman Sexualities*. Eds. Hallett and Skinner. Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 1997, 29-43.

xxxiii As Bergmann points out, the painting may be identified based on the the stance of the sandaled foot and the red cloth garbing the figure (237).

xxxiv Bergmann, 226.

xxxv While Bergmann mentions this painting, she pays minimal attention to it in the course of her interpretation. She does describe the visual effect of looking into room 6A from the atrium, however (251-55).

xxxvi A key text for interpreting this painting is Euripides's play *Alcestis*, as noted by Bergmann (pp 232-34).

xxxvii Susan Bordo. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 7. Also, Fredrick, 268.

Mentor Comments:

David Fredrick provides background information about the use of a 3D searchable database of Pompei, explaining how Rachel Newberry used this tool to explore interpretations of the paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet. He writes:

I am delighted to write a letter in support of Rachel Newberry's publication in Inquiry. Rachel's piece had its origin in an undergraduate research colloquium, "Digital Pompei," that aims to produce a 3D searchable database of wall painting, mosaics, and artifacts from Pompeii. Its core is a 3D model of Pompeii, linked to a database developed from Pompei: pitture e mosaici (PPM), a multivolume Italian encyclopedia of wall paintings and mosaics. The 3D model is published through a game engine, so that it can be navigated online, with data about paintings and mosaics pulled from the database into the web player. The course is limited to 6 students each semester, and each student is responsible for one insula (city block) from Pompeii--they trace the 2D plan of the insula, extrude it into 3D, scan the images the artwork from PPM, and input data on the artwork into a database. They also read secondary works on the history of Pompeii, the development of the Roman house, and interpretation of decorative ensembles; the final paper for the course consists of a critique of current interpretive approaches to Pompeian art based on what they have learned modeling their insulas in 3D, and being able to walk through their spaces in virtual space.

Rachel's article evolved from her final paper for the course, and it certainly illustrates the power of the 3D database to further research on Pompeian art. Her piece considers the most important published interpretation of the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii (VI.8.3-5), "The Roman House as Memory Theater" by Bettina Bergmann, and notes that while it draws important connections between the arrangement of the paintings and Roman oratory, it neglects the erotic content of many of the paintings and the relation of this to issues of gender and power. The piece argues that this content is particularly striking to a viewer moving through the House of the Tragic Poet as reconstructed in virtual space-- since most of the paintings have faded or been removed to the Naples Museum, the original decorative program cannot be appreciated by visiting the actual house today. In exploring the connection between eroticism and power, Rachel makes sophisticated use of gaze theory, drawing on film criticism and contemporary art history; however, she notes that the paintings in her insula challenge the clear division between male activity and female objectification found in much gaze

theory. Rather, the male body is frequently exposed, made vulnerable as the object of the viewer's gaze. She concludes the piece by pointing that the display of gender-bending and male vulnerability in the paintings stands in pointed contrast to the emphasis on the assertion of elite male status through oratory found in Bergmann's interpretation. She argues for a more complex and nuanced view of Roman masculinity, noting that gender instability seems to have been an effective part of self-presentation for politicians in the late republic, and that "passive" eroticism remains part of the public persona of many Roman emperors.

In its combination of 3D content, art history, and gaze theory, this is a remarkable piece of work, combining critical theory with an eye for how the paintings actually work in their (virtual) space. While it emerged from the larger research aims of "Digital Pompeii," this submission certainly stands independently, both for its analysis of the particular paintings found in the House of the Tragic Poet, and for its suggestion of how eroticized male bodies might be understood in the context of masculine display and social competition in Roman culture. In this case, the student has essentially created the tool (the 3D database) that pushed the interpretation along--a tool that is not currently available to any other researchers on Roman art. This involved learning a whole new set of skills (in Cinema 4D, Photoshop, and the game engine Unity) which again are very rare among art historians doing research on Pompeii. Further, Rachel drew upon film theory to inform her approach to erotic content; this is not easy reading, and she elegantly summarizes some quite difficult concepts, showing clearly how they are at play in the Roman paintings. This submission is the result of extremely hard work acquiring software skills, sifting and entering data from PPM, working through secondary sources on Roman art and Pompeii, and considering how contemporary gaze theory could illuminate these paintings, and contribute to our understanding of how Roman identity is defined (and sometimes challenged) in domestic decoration. Rachel's work is worthy of publication in a national journal. Its publication in Inquiry represents he very fine work that our students do in the humanities at the University of Arkansas.

Figure 2. South wall of atrium (3), House of the Tragic Poet. Wedding of Jove & Juno (left) and fragment of Venus. Render from 3-D model.

Figure 3. Wedding of Jove & Juno and Fragment of Venus. South wall of atrium (3), House of the Tragic Poet. Pompei: pitture e mosaici (1990) Vol. IV, 539.
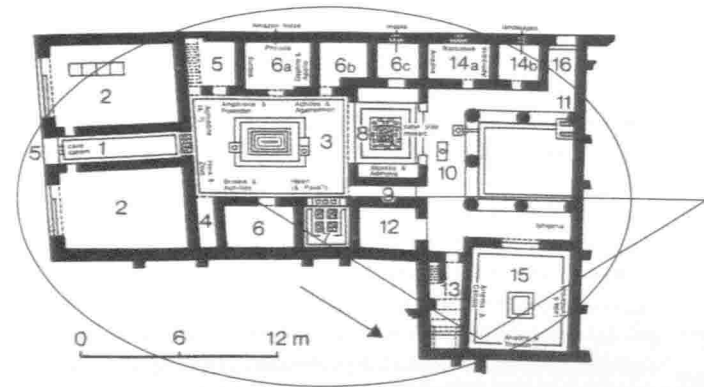

Figure 1. Map of the location of the artwork in the House of the Tragic Poet. Bergmann. "The Roman House as Memory Theater." The Art Bulletin. 76.2 (1994), 250.
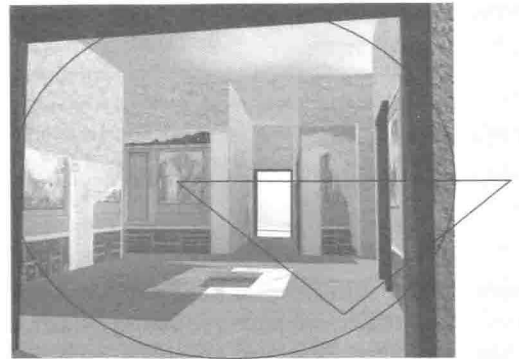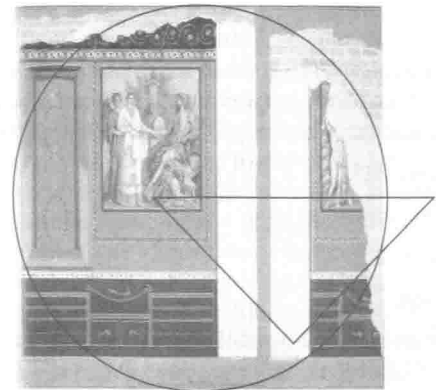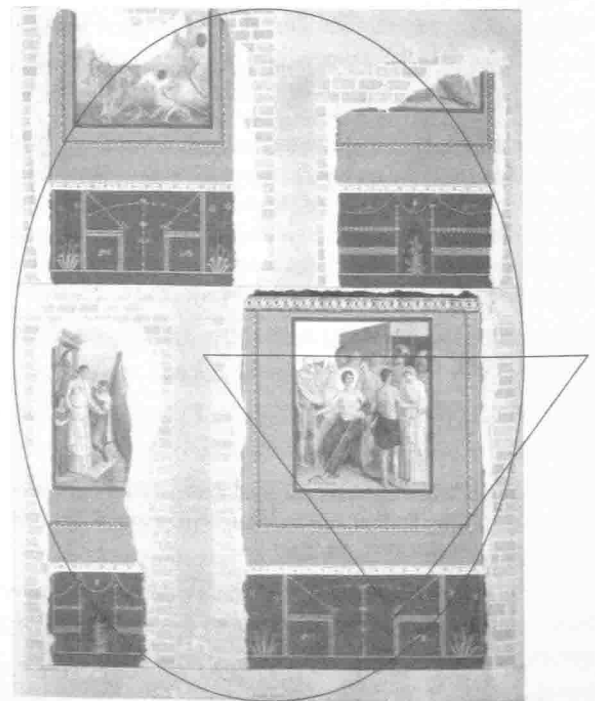
Figure 4. Lithograph of Poseidon Kidnapping Amphitrite; The Wrath of Achilles; Helen (and Paris?); and Agamemnon Abducting Briseis. West & east walls of atrium (3), House of the Tragic Poet. ADS 262 (Fot. Pedicini)

Figure 5. Europa and the Bull. Cubiculum (6A), House of the Tragic Poet. *Pompei: pitture e mosaici* (1990) Vol. IV, 595

Figure 6. Phrixus & Helle. West wall of cubiculum (6A), House of the Tragic Poet. *Pompei: pitture e mosaici* (1990) Vol. IV, 597.

Figure 10. Artemis & Callisto. South wall of triclinium (15), House of the Tragic Poet. Pompei: pitture e mosaici (1990) Vol. IV, 581.

Figure 7. Atrium (3) with image from 6A, House of the Tragic Poet. Render from 3-D model.

Figure 11. Theseus Abandoning Ariadne. East wall of triclinium (15), House of the Tragic Poet. Pompei: pitture e mosaici (1990) Vol. IV, 576.
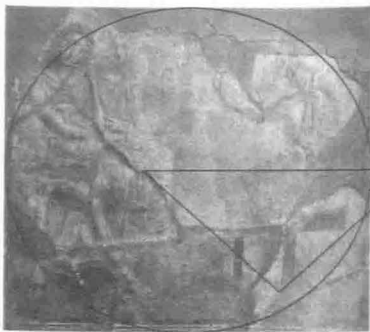

Figure 8. Alcestis & Admetus. Tablinum (8), House of the Tragic Poet. Pompei: pitture e
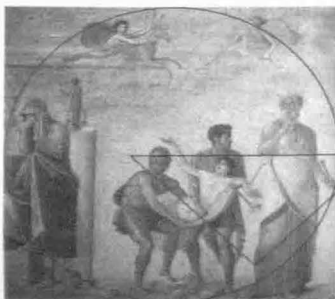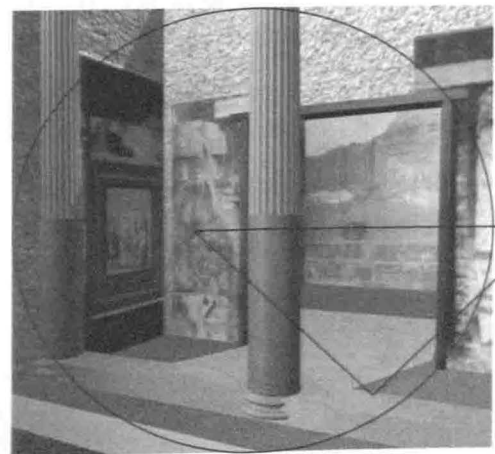

Figure 12. Sacrifice of Iphigenia and Theseus Abandoning Ariadne. Peristyle (10) & triclinium (15). Render from 3-D model.

Figure 9. Sacrifice of Iphigenia. Peristyle (10), House of the Tragic Poet. Pompei: pitture e mosaici (1990) Vol. IV, 552.