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THE UNSETTLING LANDSCAPE: LANDSCAPE AND ANXIETY IN THE GARDEN OF THE HOUSE OF OCTAVIUS QUARTIO

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Abstract

Ancient Roman houses (domus) were both public and private spaces and were used by the homeowner (dominus) to send messages of power to his guests and family members. Scholarly analysis of the rhetorical power of the architecture and decoration of the domus has largely overlooked the role of the garden within this context. It is generally assumed that the purpose of the garden was to provide a calm green space in the center of an urban home. The purpose of this paper is to challenge this overly simplistic reading of Roman gardens and to explore how the dominus might have used this space in a much more complicated way, to affirm his power in his home and in Roman social hierarchy by alternately reassuring and unsettling his guests. Consequently, this paper will first briefly examine the background of natural landscape in literature and myth, and then it will elucidate the rhetorical strategy of power in the Roman house through an overview of these buildings, followed by an examination of a specific example, the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii.

Unlike the contemporary western home which is conceived of as a place of private refuge, the elite Roman house (the *domus*) consisted of both public and private space through which the *dominus* sent messages of power to his visitors. For this reason the *domus* has been aptly labeled a "powerhouse." However, despite extensive scholarly analysis of the rooms within the home, the role of one of the most important spaces in the *domus*, the garden, has been largely overlooked. It is generally assumed that the garden served no purpose beyond creating a peaceful green space within the home.

The purpose of this paper is to challenge this overly simplistic reading of the garden (Latin *hortus*) and to explore how the *dominus* might have used the garden space of his home, both its plants and its painted and sculptural program, to send messages of power through complex strategies of affirming and undermining the social positions and bodily integrity of his guests. Consequently, this paper will first briefly examine the background of natural landscape in literature and myth. It will then elucidate the rhetorical strategy of power in the Roman house, first through an overview of these buildings and then through an examination

of a specific example, the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii.

I. The Natural Landscape in Myth and Literature

The natural landscape which the *dominus* brought indoors in the form of a central garden space was imbued with literary and mythological tradition. A careful reading of myth reveals that the natural landscape was charged with the memory of rapes, kidnappings and dismemberments and that the plants themselves, many of which were formed (according to myth) as a result of rapes or violent transformations, also triggered these associations in the Greek and Roman mind. Moreover, in ancient Greece the natural landscape was often a metaphor for the female body. Anne Carson notes that while "[women are] united by a vital liquidity with the elemental world... Man holds himself fiercely and thoughtfully apart from the world of plants animals and female wantonness."¹ Carson also claims that since flowers were associated with virginity, the picking of flowers by a female mythological character foreshadows her impending rape and "defloration."

While Carson stresses the association of wild landscape with the female body, the French structuralists Marcel Detienne and Pierre Vidal-Naquet discuss Greek landscape in myth and ritual as the setting for gender ambivalence and reversal. Detienne claims that since the woman or wife is absent from natural landscape of forests and mountains, sociopolitical values are also missing and transgressions come to pass. Additionally, gender-inverting adolescent rituals were often carried out in the wilderness outside of the Greek *polis*. Adolescent boys were initiated into warrior life by temporarily masquerading as girls, thus behaving in a way which would be unacceptable in "normal" life. Young girls underwent gender inversion outside the city by dressing up as males before they were married. Girls who dressed up as bears at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron also underwent a period of ritual wildness from which they would turn when they were married.

The association of the inversion of gender roles with a natural landscape is apparent in myth as well as ritual. In Book 10 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his crew arrive at Aea, the home of Circe. When Odysseus leaves his ship to explore the island, hoping to find plowed fields, he instead finds the house of Circe with "[smoke] curling up high through the

¹ Carson, Anne. "Putting Her in Her Place: Women Dirt, and Desire." *Beyond Sexuality*. Ed. Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitin. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43.

thick brush and woods."² This is a setting much like that of the land of the Cyclopes in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, a landscape which produces anxiety because it is untamed and devoid of human influence. The men decide to travel through the woods to Circe's house where they are drugged and turned into pigs. In this instance the bodies of the men are rendered ineffective and traditional gender roles are reversed.

Like Greek men in the archaic and classical periods, Roman males were also concerned with gender roles and attempted to protect their bodily boundaries, a concern reflected in Roman literature in general and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in particular. The fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses* contain numerous instances of violent assault in a beautiful landscape setting (*locus amoenus*), and their influence on Roman wall painting has been demonstrated. In *Reading Ovid's Rapes* Amy Richlin observes that, while it was appropriate for a male to express love for a female or young boy, attraction between two adult males was unacceptable since penetration was seen as a staining of the body.³ It is easy to understand, given this penetration model with its active male and passive "female" figure, why Ovid's scenes of male rape would be so disturbing to the elite Roman reader. The active male/passive female assessment of Roman sexuality is indebted to the French philosopher Foucault and summarized by Jonathan Walters, who claims that the elite Roman male considered it his right to protect his body from violent and sexual assault.⁴ However, as Richlin notes, Romans expected gender inversion in literature, drama, and art, and at times, seem to have identified with the passive position of females or adolescent boys.

With this in mind, the myths of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* can be split into three typologies for the purpose of analysis. In the first a female figure is raped or penetrated. Here we find the story of Philomela who, while visiting her sister Procne, is raped by her brother-in-law Tereus in a hut in the woods (*Meta*. 6:590-977). The second typology consists of scenes in which the boundary of the male body is violated or the manhood and control of the main character is called into question. The story of Acteon and Diana belongs in this typology (*Meta*. 3: 155-252). Acteon is hunting in the woods when he stumbles upon Diana bathing in her grotto. As punishment for seeing her naked, Diana turns him into a stag and he is torn to pieces by his hunting dogs. The third typology is less connected with ideas of gender. Instead, nature itself proves to be dangerous because of its "wildness" and separation from the city. For example, when the lovers

Pyramus and Thisbe attempt to meet outside the city, a misunderstanding causes them both to commit suicide (*Meta*. 4: 55-166). Additionally, the story of Dryope speaks to the inherent danger of plants since she is turned into a lotus tree as punishment for picking lotus flowers (*Meta* 9: 340-393).

II. Overview of the Roman House

It is interesting that many of these literary myths find their way into the Roman house (Latin *domus*) in the form of wall paintings. As the place from which the homeowner conducted his business and received his clients and guests, the *domus* has been aptly labeled a "powerhouse". Rooms dedicated to *negotium* (work) were located at the front of the house. These include the *fauces* (entryway) the *atrium* where clients waited to meet with the *dominus* (homeowner), and the *tablinum*, a room which separated the public *negotium*-centered part of the house from the private spaces further within the home. In the *tablinum* the *dominus* met with his clients and controlled the boundary between the public and private spheres of his home and was "set off as a static presence on stage, not unlike the image of a god in his sanctuary."⁵

The more private part of the house was reserved for *otium* or leisure and included dining rooms (*triclinia*) and bedrooms (*cubicula*) often arranged around a rectangular peristyle garden. The mythological fresco painting which often filled and surrounded these rooms could also be used to send messages of power. Notably, frescoes of mythological scenes were often reserved for the more private parts of the house to be viewed by guests of high enough status and learning to appreciate the culture of their host.⁶

Regularly, these painted mythological scenes included themes of violence and "gender bending" in the *locus amoenus* (the idyllic landscape). When these types of images were arranged around the garden of a *domus*, it is likely that the educated guest was able to make connections between the disruption of the *locus amoenus* in myth and the beautiful natural landscape in which he was actually standing. Additionally, anxiety might be induced by the guest's awareness of the dangers to his body which are associated with the natural landscape as a result of the stories of myth and literature. It is also important to note that Romans saw symbolism where we might only recognize beauty and functionality. As Barbara Kellum has observed, Augustus was able to send messages about his power and the fecundity of his rule through the painted garden imagery of Garden Room at the Villa of Livia.⁷

² Homer. *Odyssey*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000). (10:165-167)

³ Richlin, Amy. "Reading Ovid's Rapes". *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*. Ed. Richlin. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1992). 174.

⁴ Walters, Johnathan. "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought." *Roman Sexualities*. Ed. Hallet and Skinner. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 36.

⁵ Clarke, John R. *The Houses of Roman Italy: 100 B.C.-A.D. 250*. (LA: University of California Press, 1991), 4.

⁶ Fredrick, David. "Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Exotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House". *Classical Antiquity*. (University of California Press. Vol. 12, No. 2, October 1995), 267.

⁷ Kellum, Barbara. "The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas." *The Art Bulletin*. Vol.76, 1994.

Through decorative imagery and the plants themselves the *dominus* was able to create a space of anxiety and power; a reminder of the dangers of the *locus amoenus* represented by his garden. Moreover, by choosing his myths carefully in sculpture and painting, he could underscore the unsettling implications of the natural landscape found in Greek and Roman literature, myth, and ritual.

III: The House of Octavius Quartio

The many houses which have been preserved by volcanic ash at Pompeii are invaluable sources of information about the character of the elite Roman *domus*. In this section we will analyze the decoration, waterworks and statuary of the garden and rooms of House of Octavius Quartio and assess how these were used to send messages of power to its guests. An analysis of the way in which Octavius Quartio used water and myth in his garden space suggests that he was attempting to “cue” certain responses in his guests as he both affirmed and questioned their role in the social hierarchy.

Pompeii is an extremely large site and for this reason archaeologists have split the city into nine regions in order to more easily locate specific buildings (Figure 1). For example, region VII contains the forum and the public buildings associated with this space. Region VIII contains the theaters, and region VI contains many of the most expensive houses.⁸ The house of Octavius Quartio, though relatively small, is an excellent example of a home with numerous wall paintings and a complicated garden. Located in region II (II, 2,2) (Figure 2), its owner was originally considered to be Loreius Tibertinus until a bronze seal bearing the name of Octavius Quartio was found within the home (ca. 1950). This has led scholars to believe that he was the last owner.⁹ Little is known about Octavius Quartio himself, but his home has been well preserved and offers valuable information about the type of spaces that the Roman *dominus* attempted to create within his home. In particular, the garden could be used to extend the unsettling message of the beautiful landscape as found in wall paintings in the house.

The fourth style wall decorations which fill the house are the result of the remodeling which took place after the earthquake in 62 CE. The house is certainly noteworthy for these frescoes, but its most remarkable characteristic is the elaborate 1,800 square meter garden plot which extends from the back of the house to the

edge of the southern block. Unlike many typical Roman house gardens, the garden of the house of Octavius Quartio is not a peristyle garden. Instead, the garden contains an elaborate system of canals for the movement of water throughout the large outdoor space.¹⁰

The plan of this house is also unique. A narrow *fauces*

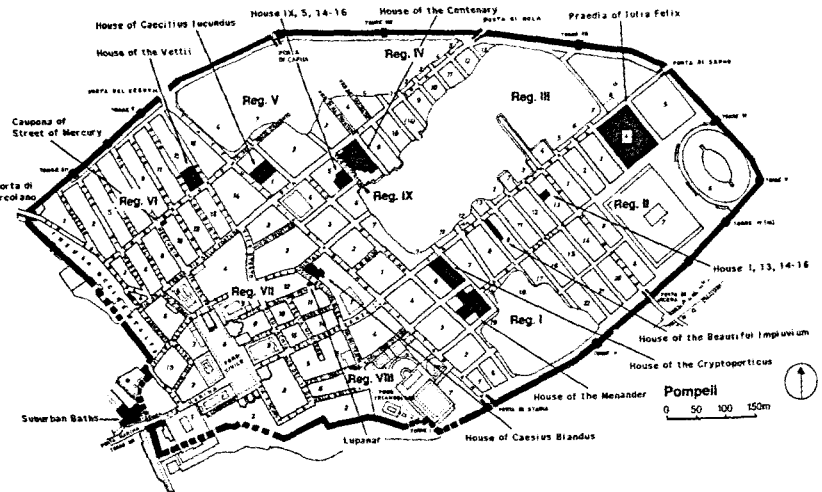


Figure 1. Map of Pompeii. From John R. Clark *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.–250 A.D.*

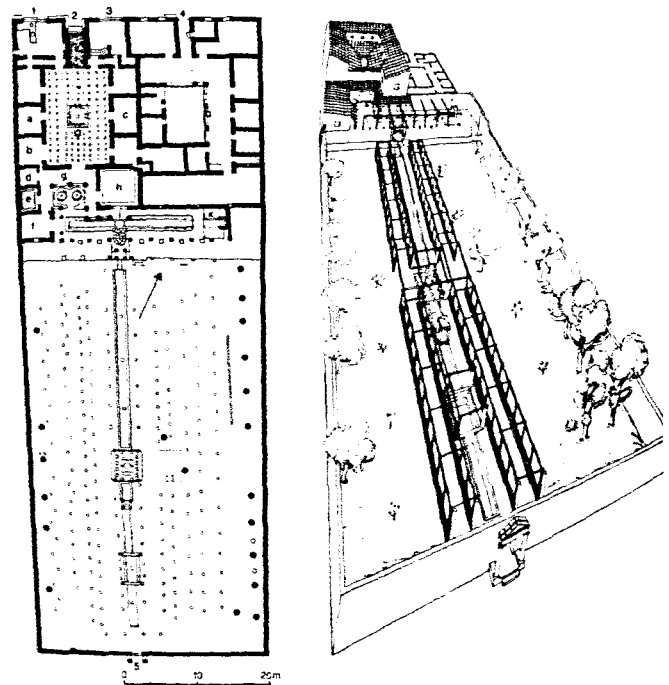


Figure 2. Plan and decoration of the House of Octavius Quartio. From John R. Clark *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.–250 A.D.*

⁸ Zanker, Paul. *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*. Trans. D.L. Schneider. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 33.

⁹ Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.–A.D. 250*. 1991, 193-194.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

leads into a large atrium with an *impluvium* in the center. The house is axial so that the atrium offers a view into the garden space that dominates the back portion of the house. In most Roman houses the atrium and garden were separated by the *tablinum*, but here the *tablinum* has been omitted from the plan. Instead, from the atrium, a guest would move into a sort of small preliminary garden space *g* which is flanked by rooms *d*, *e* and *f* on the west and *h*, a large dining *oecus*, on the east. Room *f* affords a view eastward down a long east/west canal to room *k*, generally considered to have been a summer *biclinium* with two couches flanking a fountain. This east/west canal was the water source for the north/south canal which runs perpendicular to it and which carries water to the southern edge of the garden.

When one visits the house of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii, it is apparent that the garden is not only the largest space in the house, it is also larger than the sum of the interior spaces. Undoubtedly, the garden is the focal point of this home. Dining rooms *f* and *h* are situated in order to offer views into this large garden space. Likewise rooms *f* and *k* overlook the canal which creates a sort of elaborate porch, a transitional space into the garden. What, then, is the garden's function?

Bettina Bergmann describes the way in which Roman villas controlled views of nature in their interiors. She writes, "The ordered access to nature which is contained within the geometry of architecture, determined the appearance of actual and painted landscape in the Roman *domus*."¹¹ Villa owners captured landscapes by depicting them on their walls as "time-paused" for their viewing pleasure. They also attempted to control views of nature through windows and to confuse the line between real and painted landscape. "The interpretation of outside and inside and the shifting focus between art and nature continued to be a blurred, hallucinatory experience in which vista and vision are confused."¹² In this way, the elite owner created an unstable experience for his guests through the combination of man-made and natural structures. Art and nature were also combined in the gardens of the Roman *domus*. Geometric garden beds, statuary and other man-made structures asserted the *dominus*' power over nature. This would have been noted by his guests and served as a reminder of the *dominus*' power over his home and those under him in the social pyramid.

Ann Kuttner notes another example of the attempt to control nature in her article "Delight and Danger in the Roman Water Garden: Sperlonga and Tivoli." She writes,

The Romans understood that taming water was a nation-making enterprise, as when they praised the Cloaca Maxima, the great sewer drain, which salvaged the city's heart from the fetid marshland of the original settlement from the earliest days of the Republic. The control and transport of water produced quintessentially beneficial technological wonders to which Republican nobles and emperors proudly gave their names as society's life-bringers.¹³

Aqueducts legitimized the power of the republican aristocrats, and later, the emperors who built them. In an elaborate system of waterworks such as that found in the House of Octavius Quartio, it seems clear that the *dominus* is aligning himself with that message of sustaining dominance and perhaps with Jupiter himself, the god of the sky, who



Figure 3. The canal running north-south. Personal Photograph

controls clouds and rain. The elaborate system of canals and architectural structures in the garden of the House of Octavius Quartio are a fine example of the owner's attempt to assert his dominance over nature (Figure 3). Not only has he brought order to the space through man-made structures, he has also shown his ability to harness water to sustain his family and his garden.

However, water carries other connotations. Kuttner observes that, "motion in water is neither simple nor safe"¹⁴ and she discusses the difficulty of moving in it, including the extreme danger of boat travel during antiquity and the fear of the open sea. Kuttner notes,

National or personal tribulation was imagined as

¹¹ Bergman, Bettina. "Painted Perspectives of a Villa Visit: Landscape as Status Metaphor." *Roman Art in the Private Sphere*. Ed. Gazda. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 61.

¹² *Ibid.*, 63

¹³ Kuttner, Anne. "Delight and Danger in the Roman Water Garden: Sperlonga and Tivoli." *Landscape Design and the Experience of Motion*. Ed. Conan. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107

the struggle to guide a boat's journey, and social violence was a storm raised or calmed by destructive or benevolent leaders...From the archaic Hesiod important Greco-Roman authors represent water motion as driven by greed...Hellenistic kings and elite Romans made boating a pleasure sport and constructed floating islands from luxurious yachts. Yet moralizing Roman satirists and historians depicted such tastes as indicators of dangerous instability or fluidity of character.¹⁵

Thus, in one sense, water could be associated with danger and difficulty. For this reason we might suggest that its inclusion in the garden may also have been intended to disarm or unsettle the guest as well as highlight the power of the *dominus*. Water is not simple. Instead water carries complex, almost contradictory meanings, which are certainly part of the danger of the *locus amoenus* in literature. If water can be read with such complexity, then it is likely that, when included in gardens, water imbues the space with ambiguity.

It is also worth mentioning that another key Roman social ritual, bathing, which was associated with water and almost always preceded dining, was charged with a similar ambiguity. Roman baths were complex spaces and bathing itself was a two-sided and vulnerable action. Katherine M. Dunbabin describes these complexities in her article "Baiaurum Grata Voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths." She notes that the mosaics, marble and reflected light of the baths created a space of beauty and pleasure. Men and women spent much time in their private baths receiving, entertaining, and impressing guests.¹⁶ However, Dunbabin additionally claims, "There could also be a darker side to the world of beauty and pleasure which the baths create. Excessive beauty, like any other exceptional achievement risks provoking *phthonos*, the envy which works through the Evil Eye of the envious, with disastrous consequences. Such dangers could threaten every sort of human activity...There is evidence enough to suggest that baths and bathers were especially vulnerable."¹⁷ She also suggests that baths were intrinsically anxiety-producing, since drowning and accidents were a real danger, and since baths and damp places were thought to be the haunts of demons.¹⁸ Baths could be spaces of both beauty and danger, a complex paradox which also finds a similar expression in the *triclinium* and peristyle garden.

In addition to the system of waterworks, Octavius Quartio included a sculptural and decorative program which may offer insight into how he intended his garden to be experienced. Thorough analysis of the frescoes which

surround the garden space suggests that they underscore the danger of the *locus amoenus*, since almost all of them depict myths in which a horrific event takes place in a beautiful setting, not unlike the one in which his guests now find themselves.

On the exterior of room f, which faces the east/west canal, four frescoes are painted. Fresco A depicts the Calydonian boar hunt. This is a particularly violent boar hunt resulting in the death of one man and two dogs. Interestingly, gender roles are confused and an erotic element is included in the story as the boar is struck first by a woman, Atalanta. After the hunt a dispute erupts concerning the spoils, and Meleager kills his two uncles. As punishment for this action Meleager's mother kills both her son and herself. Thus, while this may seem to be a simple hunting scene to us, the Roman guest, familiar with the literary precedent, would have been able to read between the images to recall the horrific and erotically charged event which took place during this hunt in the wilderness. This hunting image is bordered on the bottom by a frieze of dolphins and hippocamps.

The eastern facing exterior wall of room f also contains frescoes which are associated with the natural landscape and with unhappy events which occur in beautiful outdoor settings. Fresco C depicts Diana kneeling naked in a setting of hills and trees. Most certainly this image is in a dialogue with the image of Acteon located next to it. These two images are separated by the door leading into room f, but are nevertheless close enough together to be viewed as a set. Acteon stands naked in the center amidst a rocky landscape with his arms raised as two dogs tear into his legs. These two images in tandem reference the myth of Acteon and Diana during which Acteon stumbles upon Diana bathing in a grotto. It is helpful to remember that not only is it dangerous to view this goddess bathing nude, but, as we have seen, water and bathing itself are intrinsically dangerous. As punishment for seeing her naked, Diana turns Acteon into a stag and he is then torn to pieces by his hunting dog, consistent with the "male rape" typology found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is interesting to note that guests to the house of Octavius Quartio were not entirely detached viewers of these paintings. Simply, Acteon was killed for looking at Diana naked. Any guest who looks at this fresco group is also seeing Diana naked and any guest who looks at this fresco group is also committing the same offense, admittedly with a painted image. In this way the image, and the myth it calls to mind, unsettles the guest who stands at the entrance to the home's elaborate garden.

The north wall of the porch containing the east/west

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108. Since we have discussed the triclinium and dinner party, it is interesting to note the connection that was made between the Greek symposium and a ship. Francois Lissarrague discusses this claiming that guests stood for the ship's crew and that broken cups or uncontrollable drunkenness symbolized a shipwreck. See: Lissarrague, Francois. *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet: Images of Wine*

¹⁶ Dunbabin, Katherine M. "Baiaurum Grata Voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths". (Proceedings of the British Society in Rome. 1989), 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

canal has three frescoes. The door to room h is flanked by a fresco of Orpheus (E) on the west. An image of Venus Marina (Venus of the sea), referencing love and water is positioned next to the Orpheus fresco along with a *Paradeisos*, a scene of an ideal natural landscape, on the east. These frescoes are less explicit in their attempt to send an unsettling message to the viewer, but they do not contradict this theory. In fact Ovid's *Metamorphoses* connects Orpheus with the idea that violent events and dismemberments are "cued" by beautiful settings. At the beginning of Book 10 Orpheus has summoned Hymen to Thrace for his wedding to Eurydice. There are many bad omens for the couple and after the wedding takes place the bride is bitten and killed by a snake as she strolls through the grass.¹⁹ Meanwhile in Book 11, a mob of Thracian women (Maenads), seeing Orpheus from a hilltop, decide to tear him to pieces savagely and beat him with clods and branches because he has scorned them. Through this action Orpheus' elite male body is penetrated and violated. The remains of the Orpheus fresco at the House of Octavius Quartio are fragmentary so it is difficult to decipher what is actually depicted in the scene. Nevertheless, any image of Orpheus would likely have invoked, in the mind of the Roman viewer, the memory of his horrific death. The two other frescoes, though not directly images associated with unsettling



Figure 5. Pyramus and Thisbe. Personal Photograph

events, fit in well with the other fresco scenes set in a natural landscape and with the dangers of *eros* and water.

Two frescoes are located in biclinium k on either side of a sort of colonnaded temple front sheltering a statue of a river god. The fresco to the north of this shrine depicts Narcissus, who like Acteon comes from the city of Thebes, staring, partially nude, at his reflection in a pool (Figure 4). Half of the picture is taken up with an architectural structure. However visible to the left of this is a wooded area, suggesting that Narcissus is outdoors. This would be in keeping with the story told by Ovid during which Narcissus falls in love with his reflection in the water and wastes away admiring it. While this may not be a frightening event, it is certainly unhappy and it fits into the "male rape" typology which we discussed in the first section. The story is also another instance in which water is associated with the vulnerability of the body. Since Narcissus falls in love with his reflection in a pool of water, he loses the ability or desire to sustain and protect himself. Finally, the fact that it takes place in the wilderness ensures that the fresco fits in well with the painted program of landscape and the vulnerable body which we have analyzed so far.

On the right side of the shrine an image from the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is depicted (Figure 5). As already established, Pyramus and Thisbe were two young lovers who attempted to meet outside of the city. As a result of a



Figure 4. Narcissus. Personal Photograph

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Charles Martin. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 341.

misunderstanding both lovers end up killing themselves in their natural meeting place and their blood stains the berries of the mulberry tree purple. In the image, Thisbe leans over the bleeding body of her lover in the act of stabbing herself in the chest. The two dying lovers are surrounded by a wild landscape. A lion, who had wiped its bloody mouth on Thisbe's cloak causing Pyramus to believe she had been eaten, is visible in the background above their heads. This image, in which the beautiful landscape becomes the setting for the death of two lovers, challenges the idyllic nature of the *Paradisus* painting on the wall adjacent to it. It seems to be the case that while the two lovers were in the city they were safe. Once they leave the city and attempt to be outdoors, they are vulnerable. The result is a horrific scene. In this way the images of Pyramus and Thisbe and Narcissus are in keeping with those of Meleager, Diana, and Acteon in that they highlight the intrinsic dangers of nature and the ability of the idyllic landscape to become a stage for death and rape. These form the majority of the images surrounding the canal which marks the boundary between the indoor and outdoor space of the house.

The long canal which travels down the length of the garden also contains some intriguing sculptural imagery. The canal itself is on a lower level than that of the upper canal. Thus it was necessary for the guest to descend into the garden in order to view the *aedicule* (a small shrine) of Diana, the surrounding frescoes and the garden plants themselves. The descent into the garden marks an interesting transition on the part of the guest. In the upper canal the guest stands in a space that is both indoor and outdoor, and he or she is primarily a viewer of images. The viewer stands in front of the fresco and views the action taking place in the image from the outside of the scene, though as noted above he or she may be implicated in the action simply by viewing it, as in the paintings of Diana and Acteon. In one sense, this makes the guest relatively safe. He or she is an outsider looking in on the action taking place in a beautiful natural landscape. However, once the viewer has descended into the garden he or she is no longer a passive viewer. Instead the viewer has become part of the scene, a character moving through the stage of the natural landscape and therefore sharing a vulnerable position similar to the figures depicted in the scenes in the upper porch. Beatriz Colomina offers a modern example of how someone moving through a house becomes a part of a spectacle or the object of the gaze. She writes,

In the Moller house (Vienna, 1928) there is a raised sitting area off the living room with a sofa set against the window... Anyone who, ascending the stairs from the entrance... enters the living room, would take a few moments to recognize a person sitting in the couch.

Conversely, any intrusion would soon be detected by a person occupying this area, just as an actor entering the stage is immediately seen by a spectator in a theater box... Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant.²⁰

What is interesting in the garden of Octavius Quartio is that the story of Diana and Acteon dominates it thematically and is recreated within it. Our guest has already been reminded of the story of Acteon and Diana in the images in the upper porch. Now that he is in the garden, the guest has moved physically into that scene. First, Acteon was hunting in the woods when he stumbled upon Diana. Like Acteon, our guest finds himself in a space that has been planted to resemble a natural landscape. He is surrounded by trees and shrubs, flowers and vegetables.

Secondly, Ovid tells us that Diana was bathing in a grotto in the wilderness.

There is a grove of pine and cypress
known as Gargaphie, a hidden place
most sacred to the celibate Diana;
and deep in its recesses is a grotto
artlessly fabricated by the genius
of Nature, which, in imitating Art,
had shaped a natural organic arch
out of the living pumice and light tufa.
Before this little grotto, on the right,
a fountain burbles; its pellucid stream
widens to form a pool edged round with turf;
here the great goddess of the woods would come
to bathe her virgin limbs in its cool waters
when hunting wearied her.²¹

As the guest descends into the garden he faces the southern wall. If he were to walk in the garden and to turn and look north towards the house, he would find himself staring directly into a recreation of the grotto of Diana. The grotto is tucked away under a sort of roofed structure supported by two columns (Figure 6). This marks the point at which the water from the upper canals is channeled to flow down the lower canal. On the back wall of this structure is an arched niche cut out of the stone wall and next to it is another image of a nude Diana. Here, in keeping with myth, she stands with her bare back to the viewer surrounded by water and stone architecture. In case the reference has so far been lost on the guest, an image of Acteon is included on the opposite side of the grotto along with an image of a landscape. It is noteworthy that the

²⁰ Colomina, Beatriz. "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism" *Sexuality and Space*. Ed. Colomina 1992. taken from http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/bigiane.library/txt_colomina.html.

²¹ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. 2004, 97.



Figure 6. The "grotto" is located on the bottom level at the Source of the N/S canal. Personal Photograph.

angle of the guest's view leads his or her eye directly to Diana. Unless the viewer turns his or her head significantly, the viewer will only see the image of Acteon so that a connection is first made between Diana and the guest. It seems then that Octavius Quartio has created a space in which his guest has become the Acteon figure. The guest has unwittingly stumbled upon the grotto of Diana and has glimpsed her naked body. According to the myth, the male figure is now in danger of bodily harm. The implications of this "glimpse" for the female viewer are an open question.

Thus, the entire garden space is charged with reminders of the dangers of the *locus amoenus* in the form of both frescoes and architectural elements. In the middle of his home Octavius Quartio has created a space that both captivates and unsettles his visitors. Most importantly it seems that the decorative elements are related to one another in both the types of images and the moods they were intended to evoke.

In this home, nearly every fresco can be categorized as one which depicts or references the dangers of outdoor space. If Octavius Quartio is trying to say something through these images then it is likely that they would relate to one another. For this reason Paul Zanker's following analysis of the house of Octavius Quartio is an oversimplification.

Zanker claims that the trend in the first century CE at Pompeii and Herculaneum was to model a smaller, middle-class town house after an elite villa. The result of this fashion, Zanker argues, is often an odd and unrelated mix of villa elements. To prove this theory Zanker discusses the house of Octavius Quartio, calling it a "miniature villa."²² Clarke notes Zanker's comments in his own analysis of the house and writes,

Zanker counts many built elements taken from villa architecture: the canal, or euripus, allusive to the Nile; the rear peristyle with oecus; the little temple or aedicule with images of Diana; and the bichlinium with fountain. Add the many small-scale statues along the upper canal evoking gods as diverse as Isis, Dionysus, and the Muses, plus five different painted cycles on the exterior walls, two painted friezes from different epic sagas in the oecus, allusions to Isis in the sacellum, and one has an excellent example of the kind of bad taste that Cicero had decried a hundred years before.²³

In Clarke's analysis, all of this decoration combines to produce what he calls a "crowded Disneyland."²⁴ Zanker himself concludes, "The owner, eager to imitate the lavish world of villas he so clearly admired, preferred quantity over quality." Certainly it is more difficult to find continuity among the statues which line the porch and extend into the garden itself. One could argue that the herms of Dionysus (Bacchus) remind the viewer of the story of Pentheus in Euripide's *Bacchae*, Theocritus' *Idyll* 26, and Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Pentheus refused to honor Dionysus and was torn to pieces by the Bacchantes in a clearing in the woods. The statues of the lion devouring the antelope and the greyhound attacking a hare may serve as reminders of the deaths that occur in the wilderness. They may also serve as reminders of mythological rapes since these are often compared to pursuit by a predatory animal of its prey, as in Ovid's treatment of Philomela. The statue of baby Hercules strangling a snake may be a reversal of the danger of nature since here man conquers the wild animal in much the same way that geometric beds and architectural elements might tame the natural landscape or garden, thereby highlighting the power of the *dominus*.²⁶ The hermaphrodite in the garden may have reminded the viewer of the fountain of Salmacis and the

²² Zanker, Paul. *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*. Trans. D.L. Schneider. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 145-156.

²³ Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy: 100 B.C.-A.D. 250*, 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵ Zanker. *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*, 156.

²⁶ A similar interpretation of the painting of Hercules and the snakes in the House of the Vetti can be found in Fredrick 1995.

creation of the first Hermaphrodite through a sort of "male rape" scene. However, not every statue fits into this trend nor does it need to. This paper does not intend to suggest that every aspect of the garden served as a reminder of a violent event directly or indirectly. Instead, even a suggestion of violence or anxiety in the garden space complicates the simple "peaceful" reading which has been found in the scholarship to date.

The *Iliad* and Hercules friezes of room h are very different from those in room f and those on the exterior walls. However, if the space of the domus attempts to both affirm and disarm its male guests, then we may consider that room h, most likely the primary *triclinium*, with its emphasis on male power, strength and impenetrability, was a necessary part of the affirmative message.²⁷ This stands in opposition to the unsettling images on the exterior walls and in the garden, creating a now familiar tension between imagery that affirms male dominance and imagery that subverts or challenges it.

As noted, the point here is not to find continuity in every decorative element in the House of Octavius Quartio. Certainly there are a variety of types of imagery, some of which may seem entirely unrelated. But to say that the home and garden is simply a "crowded Disneyland" denies the calculating mind of the *dominus* and the thematic role of the garden within the house at large. While he may have made references to villas and highlighted his wealth by the variety of his decorative program, this does not refute the fact that Octavius Quartio could have sent very pointed messages to his guests through this decorative program. Not only was the Roman eye trained to see political and social messages in art, but we have also noted that much of the space and its decoration is connected by a literary history which taught Romans to associate beautiful outdoor spaces with terrible events. This analysis suggests that the House of Octavius Quartio was much more than a museum of haphazardly chosen cultural references. Instead, the owner utilized imagery on the walls of his home, statuary, a grotto, and the natural elements of the garden space itself to disarm his guests and to assert his authority over his home and his power in the Roman social hierarchy.

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Mentor Comments

Ms. Brutesco has been enthusiastically supported in her thesis work by her advisor Dr. David Fredrick, who writes:

I am very pleased to recommend this condensed version of Sarah Brutesco's honors thesis, "The Unsettling Landscape: Landscape and Anxiety in the Garden of the House of Octavius Quartio" for publication in Inquiry. While Sarah is an outstanding student in other respects, this letter will address specifically the contribution of her research.

The past two decades have seen significant new research on the rhetoric of power in the Roman house. The work of Bettina Bergmann, John R. Clarke, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, and Paul Zanker in particular has illuminated how the architectural layout and decoration (painting, sculpture, mosaic) of the domus

²⁷ The interior frescoes of room f and the small peristyle garden also seem unrelated. These seem to focus entirely on images and statuary that recall Egypt. Included are images of a priest of Isis and statues of Ibis, Bes, and a pharonic figure. It has been suggested that the canals might have a reference to the Nile.

delineate and reinforce distinctions of class and gender. However, while these scholars have paid close, nuanced attention to the interaction of space and decoration in significant rooms of the house (fauces, atrium, tablinum, triclinium), the garden has been largely overlooked. It has been viewed primarily as a source of light, air, and greenery with little connection to the visual rhetoric of the rest of the house.

Sarah addresses this blind spot in her thesis. She demonstrates first that the natural landscape (the locus amoenus, or "beautiful place") carries with it a set of troubling associations in Greco-Roman culture. It is frequently a setting for gender-bending rites of passage in ritual, and violent assault, rape, and metamorphosis in literature and myth. She then argues that Roman house owners engaged these associations when they laid out and decorated their gardens. While the owner demonstrated his mastery over nature through the careful planning of the garden and its framing by a series of views, he could also suggest the violent, gender-troubled connotations of the locus amoenus through his arrangement of plants, sculpture, and paintings in and around the garden space. Hence the rhetorical strategies of the garden are complex, seeming to both affirm and undermine the boundaries of status and gender. Sarah demonstrates that such complex strategies are in fact found in the painted decoration of Roman houses, and in Roman literature associated with Roman dining. Hence they are appropriate for the garden.

Sarah uses as her test case the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii, making a brilliant argument that this house owner first announces violent themes in a natural landscape through two-dimensional wall paintings (Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, and especially Actaeon and Diana) and then brings them to life in three dimensions in his garden. Specifically, the visitor to this house sees, in the upper part of the house, a pair of paintings of Diana surprised at her bath by Actaeon (a hunter who is subsequently transformed into a deer and torn apart by his own

dogs). Then, upon descending a set of stairs into the garden, the visitor himself comes upon a "real" grotto of Diana, with another painting of the goddess, whom he has now surprised in "real" space, just like Actaeon. Sarah argues that this clearly planned and intentional strategy of drawing the viewer into the locus amoenus as a setting for gender instability and violent transformation is not atypical. It connects the garden with rhetorical strategies which are common in wall painting and mosaics, and thus makes the garden a central contributing space to the overall messages of power in the house.

Sarah's thesis is firmly grounded in Roman art and architectural history, and draws upon a wide range of methodological approaches, from structuralist analyses of Greek myth and ritual (Detienne and Vidal-Naquet) to psychoanalytically informed studies of domestic space (Colomina on the houses of Adolf Loos), to Foucault's penetration model of Roman sexuality. Because of its breadth, Sarah's argument demands this theoretical range, and her ability to adapt her sources appropriately and judiciously is very impressive. If I were to come across this article in a journal I would sit up and take notice, because rather than overlooking the peristyle garden as an obvious and transparent space, Sarah problematizes it. This allows us to see it in a new way, as a sophisticated, complex player in the decorative program of the Roman house.

NOTE: Sarah's thesis work was supported by a Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) grant for 2006-2007. She has traveled twice to Pompeii, first during the University of Arkansas Classics and Humanities study tour of Italy in summer, 2006, and again as part of a scanning project in ancient Ostia via the University of Arkansas Center for Advanced Spatial Technology in March, 2007. She has spent many hours walking through and photographing Pompeian houses, including the House of Octavius Quartio. It's unlikely her argument could have developed so fruitfully without these opportunities for extended hand-on experience at the site.