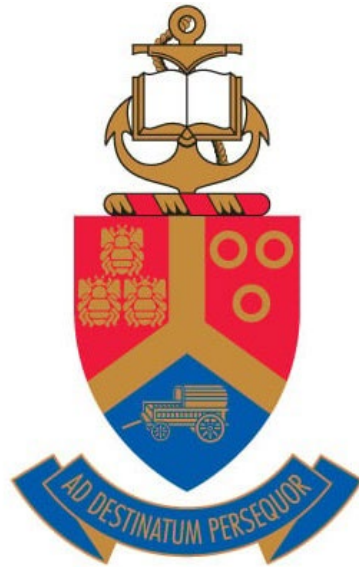


Topomythopoiesis

*The expression and reception of
classical mythology in gardens from antiquity to 1800*



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Dr Stephen Whiteman (The Courtauld Institute)

Declaration

In accordance with Regulation (4e) of the General Regulations (G.57) for dissertations and theses, I declare that this thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree *Philosophiae Doctor* in Landscape Architecture in the Department of Architecture in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at the University of Pretoria is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I further state that no part of my thesis has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that this thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in the text and lists of references.

The thesis is 114558 words long (including footnotes and headings; excluding front matter, list of references and appendix).

Signed:



Date: 6 January 2024

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Abstract

This thesis introduces ‘topomythopoiesis’ as a distinct genre of landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myths.

A theoretical framework was developed to elucidate the relationship between myths and the gardens that manifest them. Based on theories of perception and garden reception, it is posited that designed ‘topomyths’ are not to be understood as physical incarnations of myths, but as compositions of emblematic, spatial and somatic signifiers that summon a virtual landscape. This imagined place is cultivated within the garden dweller through their acquaintance with the verbal and visual representations of myths. When this immaterial dimension of landscape is brought in relation with the sensory – an act of participation – enchantment is felt.

This thesis provides the first panoramic history of the continual expression and reception of classical myths in gardens as an exemplary tradition of topomythopoiesis, from its origins in the cult sanctuaries of ancient Greece up to its decline in the landscape gardens of the late nineteenth century.

A broad, multidisciplinary literature review of secondary and primary sources was undertaken to write a series of chronological episodes that each focuses on different aspects of classical topomythopoiesis. It was found that the tradition was transmitted through various means: the artistic mimesis of statue and spatial types; the dissemination of the myths (both ancient and re-imagined, both verbal and visual); the collation and elucidation of mythical iconography in emblem books; the visualisation and theorising of topomythopoiesis in design treatises; and the cultivation of participation through poetic and polemic literature and guidebooks. First-hand accounts of garden reception confirm that classical topomyths were encountered through participation to offer glimpses into the virtual landscape of Arcadia. Thus, classical topomythopoiesis serves as an example of a way of place-making that invites a participatory mode of reception that pursues enchantment, and has potential to be employed in the face of the disenchanting world of modernity.

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Research contributions

The following peer-reviewed publications are included in this thesis, almost in their entirety:

- Chapter 3: Prinsloo, J.N. 2019. Classical topomythopoiesis: the origins of some spatial types. *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 41(3):203–224.
- Chapter 4: Prinsloo, J.N. 2023. Classical topomythopoiesis: survival of the pagan gods during the Middle Ages. *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 43(1):1–22.
- Section 10.3: Prinsloo, J.N. 2022. *Must Venus Be Cancelled?* Poster for the conference *Future History: Teaching History in Landscape Schools*, Sheffield, 8–9 September 2023.

Prior to the commencement of this thesis and during its development, the argument for topomythopoiesis as a distinct approach to place-making was presented to peers:

- Prinsloo, J.N. 2014. *The Resurrection of Adonis: Towards a Mythopoetics for Contemporary Landscape Architecture*. Paper presented at the Inter-Disciplinary.Net conference Space and Place, Oxford, 3–5 September 2014.
- Prinsloo, J.N. 2021. *Topomythopoiesis: Myth as a Place-Making Language*. Talk delivered for seminar Decolonization: Indigenous Architecture at the Realm of Metaphor & Thought, Architecture and Urbanism Research Hub, University of Lagos, 25 November 2021.

The concept of a virtual landscape and the role of text in the expression and reception of landscapes were explored before the commencement of this thesis in the following peer-reviewed publications (and condensed into the Preface):

- Prinsloo, J. N. 2012. De-picturing the landscape: Notes on the value of text for the conception and experience of landscape. In: Stoffberg, H., Hindes, C. & Müller, L. (eds). *South African Landscape Architecture: a Reader*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Prinsloo, J. N. 2009. I'm not there: on the *ex situ* experience of landscape architecture in texts. *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1):157–170.

The understanding of the role of myth in landscape architecture was applied to the analysis of hotel resorts in Mauritius:

- Prinsloo, J.N. 2021. Mauritian mythologies: paradise lost and found in hotel resorts. In: Meuser, P. & Dalbai, A. (eds). *Architectural Guide: Sub-Saharan Africa*. Berlin: DOM, 406–411.

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Definitions

The following definitions serve as a quick reference for the meanings of the terms as applied in the thesis. The development of the concepts they represent are discussed elsewhere.

Place: an outside space created by humans with the intention of adding significance to the environment,¹ whether through minimal or extensive physical intervention. Consists of both tangible and intangible dimensions.

Topomyth: a place that evokes myths. Can range in scale from an entire garden, to a small space within one.

Topomythopoiesis: the making of topomyths.

Classical topomythopoiesis: the creation of topomyths that evoke the Greco-Roman myths.

Signifier: the visible means by which myths are evoked. Can be emblematic (e.g. a statue), spatial (e.g. a grotto) or natural (e.g. water).

Virtual landscape: an imagined landscape patched together from the surroundings of myths.

Arcadia: the virtual landscape conceived from classical myths.

Dense representational network: the collection of representations of myths, both verbal (e.g. written stories) and visual (e.g. paintings), from which the individual's virtual landscape is constructed.

Participation: the individual's share in bringing the virtual landscape (an immaterial dimension of place) into relation with the topomyth (the material dimension of place).

Enchantment: the felt experience resulting from participation.

Private participation: when the evoked virtual landscape is constructed mainly from personal memories and associations.

Collective participation: when the evoked virtual landscape is constructed mainly from a shared representational network; remains an internal experience at the individual level.

¹ This general definition of place, and by implication place-making, is echoed by Wieczorek (2019:9) who sought to identify a common thread in the various perspectives on the topic: "place-making looks at how people assign meaning to their locale".

On enchantment

One rosy summer evening, when the wall opposite her window was flaked all over with rosiness, she threw herself down on her bed, and lay gazing at the wall. The rose-colour sank through her eyes and dyed her brain, and she began to feel as if she were reading a story-book. She thought she was looking at a western sea, with the waves all red with sunset. But when the colour died out, Alice gave a sigh to see how commonplace the wall grew. “I wish it was always sunset!” she said, half aloud. “I don’t like gray things” (MacDonald 1999:4).

The more I think about enchantment, the less I find it. As I am writing this with my adventure into Thesisland coming to an end, I hope I can stand forlorn again on a beach in the gloom of stormy dusk, holding a pebble-shard of amber glass sculpted by years of thundering waves and imagine distant lands across the horizon where mapmakers draw with brass tools in candle-lit rooms; as I did as a child. I hope I can stumble into a forest once more, where the fleeting sight of a white wolf in the mist illumines a vision of life on the brink of eternity; as I did one early morning two decades ago on the stony path of St James. I hope to return to the ruins of Rome where the overgrown red-brick cliffs are transubstantiated by the prophetic words of the ancients, from behind the walls stained by the blood of martyrs; as when I searched there for communion with Beauty. I hope I can trek across the South African Karoo while the copper light of dawn washes slowly over the beautiful dying of the cold Afrikaans-night; as the old poets of my forefathers scrambled for words to chisel light from dust. I hope to find another green garden like Rousham where Venus of the murmuring cascades imbue the sensuous valley with love; as I found with my wife. I hope I can hear my footfall on Addison’s walk in Oxford while from the spires bells toll eternal truths above the hysterical chants of fad-slogans that wither the blue flowers, while the singing of birds foretell the end of endful things; as I heard many years ago while pondering what this thesis should be about.

These are the landscapes that have given me rare gifts of *enchantment* throughout my life. They have offered me golden moments – selfishly grabbed – mostly always lying out of reach, like the blue of mountains. I have not been thus enraptured by a contemporary designed landscape. This begs a question I have been trying to answer for many years: how can landscape architecture afford enchantment?

Enchantment defies precise definition. Outside its literal usage to denote the casting of a magic spell, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (‘enchantment’, 2022) defines it as an “alluring or overpowering charm; enraptured condition; (delusive) appearance of beauty”. It is the latter quality of the beautiful that is most relevant to landscape experience.

From the memories recounted above, can be gleaned that enchantment covers a wide range of experience in natural or artificial landscapes: on the beach I saw an imagined place; on the pilgrimage I felt transcendence; in Rome I witnessed the resurrection of history; in

the Karoo I was overcome by nostalgia; at Rousham I sensed an epiphany of love; on Addison's walk...

Although varied, these experiences share characteristics that inform a definition of enchantment that found reinforcement throughout this thesis: Enchantment in the landscape is felt like something grabbing you from the other side of the physical place, whether from an imagined geography, the Wholly Other, the past, an emotion or a bigger pattern of being. When the vastness of nature gushes over our experience, we can call it 'sublime'. Italian critics of the Renaissance described the overwhelming effect of literature (including its landscape settings) and painting as *stupore*. This was an experience especially valued by the Mannerists (Spahr 1967:83). Both experiences of the sublime and *stupore* fall within my definition of enchantment, but are too specific to be equated with the term. An enchantment can, for example, be felt by sensing the mild, pastoral charms of a gentle landscape.

Enchantment is not an intellectual experience that seeks to interpret meaning, although thinking may turn to rapture. The experience feels poetic and transformative. It makes you feel that you are giving something of yourself; you give over to it, and receive beauty in return. This radiating beauty often feels incomplete, for its source remains out of reach: "Since we never entirely bring away from the object all its beauty, this implies that even when we stand before the beautiful object, we are 'held' by something that binds us only in its not-quite arriving. To experience the beautiful is not only to be satisfied, but also to be frustrated satisfyingly..." (Milbank 2003:1–2).

Often, the experience is 'dyed' by representations of the place, or those coupled with it: H.V. Morton's *A Traveller to Rome* and Fellini's films underlie the foundations of Rome; N.P. van Wyk Louw's² words grow like guarrie³ in the Karoo; C.S. Lewis' *What the Bird Said Early in the Year*⁴ is engraved at the end of Addison's walk. Thus, books, poems, artworks and films build faintly viewed fragments of the place within the imagination, there to augment reality. One such source is mythology, with which this thesis is concerned in my ongoing search for enchantment.

This broad definition of enchantment, sprung from personal experience and mirrored in historical accounts, echoes from within the deep past of the mythological tradition studied

² N.P. van Wyk Louw (1906–1970) was a poet who had a formative influence on Afrikaans, my native language. Born in the Karoo, he wrote poems like *Karoo-dorp: Someraand* (1962) which expressed the tragic beauty of the desolate landscape where time moves slowly (roughly translated as 'Karoo town: summer's night').

³ *Enclea crispa*, a common, small tree that grows in the semi-desert of the Karoo.

⁴ Originally published as *Chanson D'Aventure* in 1938.

on these pages. In *The Odyssey*, Homer describes the affect of the songs of good poets on their audiences as an enchantment (*thelxis*). Through song they impress truth, received as if from the tongues of gods; the listener is moved to a spellbound state wherein self-consciousness and worldliness is suspended.

But the Greeks did not only believe that song can enchant, also place. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BC) the titular character dedicates a garland to Artemis, the goddess of hunting, woven from the flowers of a sacred meadow. In this unworldly “mystic garden” (Euripides 1931:6) where Artemis is found only as an invisible presence, he feels at home, free from worldly desire that may sully his pure life of chastity. There Aphrodite cannot enter, for she wishes him to fall for earthly pleasure should he succumb to the passions of Phaedrus, his stepmother. She, in her agony over the unrequited love, also longs to dwell in the meadow, for its enchantment promises to suspend her self-conscious desires and pain (Euripides 1931:12):

Oh for a deep and dewy spring
With runlets cold to draw and drink!
And a great meadow blossoming,
Long-grassed, and poplars in a ring
To rest me by the brink!

Her Nurse, witness at her bedside to these delirious visions, tries (in vain) to bring her back to reality – why yearn for a place that offers only use-less things for the spirit? The Nurse is disenchanted.⁵

⁵ This reading of the Greek concept of enchantment and the *Hippolytus* is based on Walsh (1984).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE DEATH OF MYTH IN GARDENS

1.1.1 Modernity and disenchantment

The project of modernity has disenchanted the world: scientific analysis gradually lifted the veil of mystery that hung over phenomena from antiquity to the eighteenth century.

This sweeping statement about the effects of the secularisation and rationalisation of the westernised world since the Enlightenment follows the argument popularised by sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) in 1918¹ and furthered in the twentieth century by philosophers like Adorno & Horkheimer (1994:3) who ascribed disenchantment to “the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy”. Any such generalised claims about history are bound to fall flat in the face of the complexity of life: many still find enchantment, even in the wonders of science itself.² Furthermore, any criticism of the Enlightenment must admit the good that has come from it, like the proliferation of universities from where such critical attacks on it are launched. Whether historically true or not, the sense that something of the world’s aura³ has been lost remains potent and prevalent, and accepted as an assumption on which this thesis is founded.

A disenchanted view of the world sees phenomena as non-representational (Brown

¹ Weber used the German word *Entzauberung* in his lecture delivered at Munich University in 1918, translated as ‘Science as a vocation’ (Weber 1958).

² For a critical bibliography around the discourse of ‘disenchantment’, see Snell (2006), who concludes that the ‘disenchantment-enchantment’ dichotomy leads to a self-fulfilled prophecy of disenchantment: a self-imposed belief about the state of the world that can be verified by hand-picked evidence.

³ Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) used the term ‘aura’ to refer to the compelling presence that glows from an artwork, as opposed to its mass-produced copies. When perceiving an object with such an aura, it is as if one is looking at a person, who looks back (Benjamin 1968:188–190).

2004:16–25); the modern view attempts to show us *things for what they are*. To gain such certainty of knowledge in favour of wonderment, “the individual stands apart in independent assessment over against what is being assessed rather than as engaged actively within it” (Brown 2004:86) – the ‘innocent’ onlooker looking at an objective world. Modernity is thus characterised by a monistic implosion of differences between the transcendent and the immanent; the signified and the signifier; the eternal and the transient (Goosen 2007:228).

According to Owen Barfield (1988:142), disenchantment is the consequence of an evolution of consciousness that

... can best be understood as a more or less continuous progress from a vague but immediate awareness of the ‘meaning’ of phenomena towards an increasing preoccupation with the phenomena themselves. The earlier awareness involved experiencing the phenomena as representations; the latter preoccupation involves experiencing them, non-representationally, as objects in their own right, existing independently of human consciousness.

The non-representational experience of phenomena involves a loss of participation. As defined by Barfield (1988:40), participation is “the extra-sensory relation between man and his phenomena”. Brought into the field of landscape architecture, participation can be understood as the creative act of seeing the landscape as more than the sum of its material parts (Figure 1.1).⁴ I have elsewhere described the loss of participation in the landscape as the inability to see the ‘invisible in the visible’, perpetuated by the objectification of landscape architecture’s reductionist graphic notation system (Prinsloo 2009; 2012).

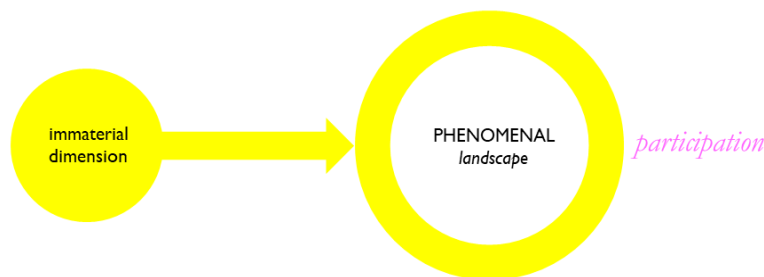


Figure 1.1. A diagrammatic definition of participation. Enchantment is felt when an immaterial dimension is brought into relation with landscape phenomena through participation; the invisible radiates from the visible (Author 2023).

I will now provide a brief historic background of how the invisible presence of myths, evoked by iconography developed in the western garden-making tradition, was affected by modernity and its disenchantment.

⁴ I am indebted to Spencer (2010:128) for the phrase “seeing as a creative act”, who used it to discuss the way in which Pliny the Younger (61–c. 113) described his Roman villa gardens by verbally overlaying onto a visible scene images evoked from external references (like paintings).

1.1.2 The iconoclasm of landscape's modernity

As the mechanistic and materialistic worldview was gaining ground in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, there was a gradual erasure of mythological imagery from gardens:

Character is very reconcileable with beauty; and even when independent of it, has attracted so much regard, as to occasion several *frivolous* attempts to produce it; statues, inscriptions, and even paintings, history and mythology, and a variety of devices have been introduced for this purpose. The heathen deities and heroes have therefore had their several places assigned to them in the woods and the lawns of the garden; natural cascades have been disfigured with river gods; and columns erected only to receive quotations... *All these devices are rather emblematical than expressive...* (Whately 1770:150–151; my italics).

These words by Thomas Whately (1726–1772) tolled the death knell for mythological iconography in designed landscapes, albeit suffering a long and slow demise. The period following the watershed of 1800, marked by John Dixon Hunt (1992:286–289) as the beginning of landscape architecture's modernity, is characterised by a dislike of emblematic gardens and a privileging of private mental associations in response to expressive scenery; open signs in favour of a shared symbolic language.

The 'frivolous devices' that had come under attack largely consisted of landscape forms and figurative images drawn from a millennia-old tradition of mythography, representation and place-making that originated in ancient Greece and Rome. Eighteenth century English authors like Whately relegated this iconographic tradition to the formal and frivolous gardens of the past by coupling it with Continental aristocracy and Catholicism. Protestantism and English liberty were expressed by the natural and farm-like environs of the English landscape garden. Although its earlier proponents like William Kent (1685–1748) sought to find a balance between the emblems of myth and the expressions of scenery, later designers such as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716–1783) and Humphrey Repton (1752–1818) erased all references to the gods in their gardens – existing statues were sometimes destroyed by these iconoclasts. Lamenting the loss of formal gardens and their stone statues in England during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, architect Reginald Blomfield (1891:215) in his *The Formal Garden in England* describes the old, myth-filled landscapes *in ruin*:

When the old formal gardens were destroyed by landscape gardeners, the stone terminal figures, the statues of Pan and Diana, were broken up to make the paths, or pitched aside into builders' yards, where a few melancholy survivors may still be found.

This revolutionary metamorphosis of the English (and later, European) gardens from formal and emblematic settings into naturalised environments, sent the gods of classical mythology to the guillotine. The discipline of landscape architecture, emerging in the nineteenth century, embraced *this* style of gardening that was freed from the 'disfiguring

heathen deities and heroes'. To establish the causes of death of this iconographic tradition, a brief postmortem follows:

1.1.3 Private participation

Within the dark recesses of poet Alexander Pope's (1688–1744) grotto in Twickenham, completed in 1725, could be seen a dim reflection of the river Thames in a mirror. The very presence of the grotto testifies to the popularity of myth-inspired spaces in England during the early eighteenth century, but the view towards a flat, mirrored image of the landscape foreshadows its waning by the year 1800.

The scientific revolution of the Enlightenment included the discovery that the perception of objects requires a mental *translation* of sensory impressions; material reality is not the same as our perception thereof. Newton's *Opticks* (1704) showed that light as perceived, is not light 'as it is'. His friend, John Locke (1632–1704), in the first book of his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) refuted the rationalist doctrine of innate ideas⁵ by insisting that our minds are like a *tabula rasa* which gains ideas⁶ solely from experience; knowledge gained from authority and tradition ought to be tested and questioned. Objects experienced through sensation are received by the mind 'as they are' and then, via the imagination, become translated into flat mental pictures. In the same way that Pope's inner grotto provided a flat rendering of the river, the inner mind is constantly involved in "pictorializing the outside world" (Myers 2013:16). These neutral inner projections then become the subjects for inner reflection and abstract thinking: any meaning beyond what is visible – the invisible – is read *into* the scene by the private percipient. Both Hunt (1992:286) and Myers (2013) have demonstrated (to use a very Lockean word) how Locke's theory of ideas and their perception influenced garden design in eighteenth century England: the eyes of the individual, like a *camera obscura*, were thought to capture a personalised perspective of the unadorned landscape within their minds, where the imagination could freely produce "meaning in terms of private association rather than shared understanding" (Myers 2013:17).

Thus, the imagination was not deemed the faculty of the mind that allowed for seeing transcendence or even fantasy, but for seeing *reality*. It thus reveals a paradox that resulted

⁵ The view, held by rationalists like Descartes (1596–1650), that some knowledge and concepts are not gained from sense experience, but implanted in the mind. An example is the idea of a perfect, infinite God (Descartes 1911:170).

⁶ The term 'idea' is used rather broadly by Locke (1689:4), defined by himself as "whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding, when a man thinks". Thus a mountain (sensed) is an Idea, as much as the thought that a mountain is dangerous (reflection).

from the Age of Reason, namely that the world is to be understood as an enclosed, material system that can be objectively analysed, yet even the simple act of seeing requires subjective participation. Thus, Locke's empiricism still accommodated participation and by no means instantly killed the garden gods: Joseph Addison (1672–1719), influenced by Locke (Batey 2005:189), publically (through *The Spectator*) promoted gardens with mythological references (8.1). Or rather, promoted the individual's ability to conjure *within* their imaginations the mythical landscapes of Homer, Virgil and Ovid upon viewing a landscape with correspondent character. The mythical content was internalised and did not need much externally to prompt it, or to use Northrop Frye's (1990:421) words in relation to Romantic art, it merely required "suggestive evocation" leaving the rest up to the private imagination.⁷ This participation through association eventually lead to the twentieth century attitude to art reception, in which "we are encouraged not to rack the arts to search their profundities, but to respond to them with a sensitive receptivity, a relaxed awareness..." (Frye 1990:22).

The gradual shift from collective experiences to that emphasising the individual's perception of the world had begun, culminating in the general abandonment of shared symbolic languages in favour of individual impressions.⁸ There was then, in the eighteenth century, a general 'attack' on classical iconography as being unreadable, inaccessible and undesirable – a growing "ignorance of emblematic codes" (Hunt 1992:123). Private participation was preferred, and cultivated by travels to the rugged, mountainous Alpine regions of Europe and the wild parts of the British Isles (Hunt 1992:122) that formed a memory bank of wild scenes that supplanted those writ by the ancient poets.

1.1.4 The cult of nature

Already before Whately expressed his dislike for emblematic gardens, a growing distaste for landscape artifice developed (Hunt 1992:76), as can be gleaned from these lines from a poem by Joseph Warton, *The Enthusiast: or, The Lover of Nature. A poem* (1744, ll. 4–10) – a primitivist lament against the artificiality of gardens like Stowe and Versailles:

Lead me from gardens deck'd with art's vain pomps.
Can gilt alcoves, can marble mimic gods,
Parterres embroider'd, obelisks, and urns
Of high relief; can the long spreading lake,

⁷ Frye's comments of the decline of classical mythology as an iconographic system were made in his *Fearful Symmetry* (1990), a study on the work of William Blake, who resisted the move away from myth as source for art and literature (and was vehemently opposed to John Locke's ideas).

⁸ In his discussion of Ruskin's attitude to picturesque landscapes in *Modern Painters* (1843–1860), Hunt (1992:201) traces Ruskin's use of "impress" to the Lockean distinction between the "merely visual from the visible's address to the mind".

Or vista lessening to the sight, can Stow,
 With all her attic fames, such raptures raise
 As the thrush haunted copse...

The poem reveals another reason, in addition to the privatisation of participation, for the growing distaste for mythical iconography: The simplistic beauty of birdsong in the trees was preferred over all the ‘marble gods’ – “can Kent design like Nature?” (l. 47). As Blomfield (1891:80) sneered, “It now became the fashion to rave about nature...”

Yet, elsewhere in the poem the language used to get divorced from “luxury and pomp” (l. 142) to espouse “genial earth untillag’d” (l. 91) is filled with the *genii* of the lost Golden Age: nymphs (ll. 19 & 249) and muses (l. 249) still enchant nature. Again, the gods of myth were not banished, but the attempts to ‘mimic’ them in sculpture were. Thus, the poem shows the way in which myth was still ‘seen’ in the eighteenth century English landscape, but in the private recesses of the mind, cultivated by the rhetoric of Arcadia, and not so much in the external, physical landscape.

This return to nature was thus more a return to the *mythical* nature of ancient pastoral poetry. For example, when Brown extended Stowe with his Grecian Fields – possibly in response to Warton’s critique of Stowe’s vanity (Hunt 1992:99) – he required the capabilities of thousands of workers to transform the site into a natural valley of gushing water. His forceful hand failed, however, to create water where there was none, and the valley dried into a field. Blomfield (1891:84), again in his scathing history of the naturalisation of the garden, commented on this kind of false naturalism, referring to William Kent’s work: “He might as well have nailed stuffed nightingales to the boughs”. On Horace Walpole’s (1717–1797) famous statement about Kent’s legacy – “He leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden” – Blomfield (1891:85) remarks that it was “probably his [Walpole’s] masterpiece in claptrap”.⁹

This near deification of (idealised) nature and its effect on gardening was also mocked by English architectural historian Geoffrey Scott (1884–1929) who, in the early twentieth century, sought to explain the fallacies behind the demise of the classical language of architecture in his *The Architecture of Humanism*:

But when nature, through poetry, acquired its prestige, the formal garden stood condemned...
 Eighteenth century philosophers, seated under porticoes still impeccably Greek, were enabled

⁹ The line is from Walpole’s influential *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening* (1771; 1995:43) that enshrined Kent as the father of landscape’s modernity. It must be noted that Blomfield was equally dismissive of Kent’s use of mythical iconography that required on-site elucidation. For example, after listing all the elements of Stowe, he adds: “not to mention many other monuments of minor interest, while at every point inscriptions were at hand to tell you what to admire and to supply the appropriate sentiments” (Blomfield 1892:84).

comfortably to venerate Nature or, if not Nature, at least her symbol as they watched their ancestral but unromantic gardens give place to a ‘prospect’ of little holes and hills (Scott 1914:67).

The instinct of reverence, if science dislodged it from the supernatural world, attached itself to the natural world... The Romantic Movement, with its theory of Natural Rights, gave to Nature a democratic tinge (Scott 1914:75).

The association of nature with democracy has its roots in Enlightenment philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) whose ideas were to fuel the republican fire of the French Revolution. In his influential *Emile, or a Treatise on Education* (1762), Rousseau situates the ideal education in the countryside where the adolescent is allowed freedom to follow their own curiosity, encounter God (unmediated by religion) within the order and beauty of nature, and discover the love of wisdom by asking existential questions (Barzun 2001:386–387). Emile also fell in love with Sophia (wisdom) with whom he stumbles upon a simple, productive garden with her parents (Rousseau 1979:420):

“What a beautiful place” cries out Emile, full of his Homer and always enthusiastic. “I believe I see the garden of Alcinous”. The daughter [Sophia] would like to know who Alcinous is, and the mother asks. “Alcinous,” I tell them, “was a king of Corcyra whose garden, described by Homer, is criticized by people of taste for being too simple and without enough adornment”.

‘People of taste’ are those of the city, where gardens are adorned and education is contrived, from where Emile is liberated to pursue a more natural upbringing. In the footnote to the passage, Rousseau (1979:420) explains that in Homer’s garden (*Od.* 7.107–135) “one sees neither trellises nor statues nor waterfalls nor bowling greens”. Rousseau took recourse to a Greek myth to dispel mythical iconography. Elsewhere, in his *Julie, or The New Eloise* (1761) he situated the ideal family-life on a productive farm at Clarens in Switzerland, mythically named Elysium, where moral improvement was achieved by living a life of productive gardening and contemplation (Morawińska 1977:466). In his last work, the autobiographical *Confessions* (1780), he provides a clue of what sort of garden designer he would have been, had writing not consumed him:

At the bottom of the garden [of Madame Houdetot at Raubonne]¹⁰ a considerable copse, through which we passed on our way to a pretty grove ornamented with a cascade, *of which I had given her the idea*, and she had procured it to be executed accordingly (Rousseau 2012:518).

Rousseau’s design proposal to his beloved was an artificial, naturalised water feature situated in a grove, without any ‘trellises nor statues’, but a ‘waterfall’ nevertheless. His last

¹⁰ Rousseau confesses about his intense platonic relationship with Madame Houdetot, played out in the setting of a garden.

pupil, René Louis de Girardin (1735–1808), took Rousseau’s ideas to his 850-hectare estate at Ermenonville, where he transformed it into a *jardin paysager* by manifesting the ideals of nature as an agent for personal and social reform, becoming the first French landscape garden (Wiebenson 1978:72). In 1777, Girardin published a treatise wherein his views echoed that of Whately in England:¹¹

When you are sensible that there are landscapes of all sorts – the sublime, the magnificent, rich, beautiful, soft, solitary, wild, severe, peaceful, verdant, simple, rural, rustic, & c., you will be convinced that *it is not necessary to have recourse to fairy-land and fable* (which are always as far below the imagination, as falsehood is inferior to truth)... (Girardin 1783:92; my italics).

Amongst Ermenonville’s natural streams, rolling hills and copses of trees Rousseau spent his last years on Girardin’s invitation. There he lived-out his ideal of a rustic, simple life. The parkland was not without artifice and included a temple and, upon Rousseau’s death, his tomb on an island of poplars (Figure 9.7). But, the temple was dedicated not to a god, but to philosophy, and the tomb to one of the great followers of the cult of nature.¹² The grave became a pilgrimage site for European intellectuals (Menudo 2020:1), until his remains were moved to Paris in the wake of the French Revolution, in spite of Girardin’s refusals.¹³ Following much debate amongst the revolutionaries, and eventually celebrated with great public fanfare, his ashes were carried into the Parisian Panthéon of the great men of liberty. There his remains remain in a miniature Doric temple-tomb with rough-hewn timber columns – a primitivist recreation of the mythologised ‘original’ timber temple – engraved with the words *Ici repose l’homme de la nature et de la vérité*: Here lies the man of nature and of truth. The Panthéon was secularised from a church into a hall of fame; the Doric temple from a house of a god into a coffin for a man-of-nature deified.

With the erasure of the visible emblems of mythology from gardens – partly as a result of the scientific materialist view, partly due to the associations of nature with personal and political freedom – the myth-shaped hole¹⁴ (once filled by ‘fairy-land and fable’) was filled by the cult of nature.

¹¹ Published as *De la composition des paysages, ou des moyen d’embellir la nature autour des habitations, en joignant l’agreeable a l’utile* in Geneva, 1777.

¹² I borrow the term “cult of Nature” from Scott (1914:75); also used by Curl (1995:95) with reference to the eighteenth century reverence for nature that influenced the design of Wörlitzer Park in Germany (9.1).

¹³ For a detailed account, see Higgins (1955).

¹⁴ This is a rewording of a concept developed by Blaise Pascal within the Christian tradition: there is a vacuum within each person that can only be filled by God. Here I am using it to denote a certain longing (‘hole’) for an extra-sensory dimension in the landscape, which used to be filled by mythological iconography.

1.1.5 Instrumentalism¹⁵

A contemporary of Locke, John Evelyn (1620–1706) took the spirit of the Scientific Revolution to the garden. As a founding Fellow of the Royal Society, he wrote a number of books on horticulture and plead landowners to reforest their lands – an early prophet of the re-wilding movement. The seeds for a landscape architecture driven to solve the environmental and social ills caused by industrialisation were planted.

One such early proponent for the *instrumental* value of landscape was the Scottish garden designer and botanist Claude Loudon (1783–1843). His early use of the term ‘landscape architect’ signalled that, at the very birth of the profession, it was omened to become driven by *issues*. Similar to Evelyn’s proposal to use nature to purify London’s air,¹⁶ Loudon proposed a far-sighted plan for London’s future expansion in *Hints for Breathing Places for the Metropolis* (1829). The plan included elements of what today might be called ‘green infrastructure’: the expansion of built fabric must be interwoven with agricultural land, fertilized by sewage; the urban layout should not be purely geometric, but irregular in response to topography; and other open green spaces must be used for the public’s amusement. His instrumental view of landscape architecture, however, did not imply an endorsement for the fake nature of the Brownian landscape. Influenced by Italian gardens, Loudon thought of gardening as an art form, beholden with a Lockean private eye that can be educated to fully appreciate beauty (Boniface in Loudon 1987:15). Thus, Loudon was calling for the involvement of the garden visitor, but not to evoke the non-sensory dimension of myth, but to, with an analytical mind, study the botany of plants. There was here a return to a ‘shared symbolic language’, but a language not of mythology, but of natural science coupled with the practice of horticulture; a language not of the statue-figure and the faux temple, but of the plant specimen and the potting shed.

By the time of Claude Loudon’s visit to Stourhead in 1833 on one of his famous garden-tours, he had felt it unnecessary to comment on the mythical iconography of that famous garden with gods, grottoes and temples. Rather, he commented on the management, specific plants, layout and buildings, and the “impressions” (Loudon 1987:143) of the lake at first view. Again, he was not against mythological iconography as such (he greatly admired

¹⁵ Following the definition of ‘instrumentalism’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2022) as: “Any of various views which regard an activity, method, theory, or discipline chiefly or exclusively as an instrument or tool for some practical purpose”.

¹⁶ In his *Fumifugium: or The Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated* (1661).

gardens like Stourhead and Stowe, and those in Italy),¹⁷ but his interest shifted – and signals the general shift of attention – away from signs that evoke invisible presences in landscapes to the visible plants-in-themselves; the gods were not exterminated but ignored.

1.1.6 Parks go public

Private participation, the cult of nature and the instrumentalist view of landscape architecture became characteristics of the discipline of landscape architecture as it developed through the nineteenth century, especially in the United States of America. This newly professionalised discipline is exemplified in the work of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) and Calvert Vaux (1824–1895) who used the term ‘landscape architect’¹⁸ to define their work as encompassing landscape elements (topography, water...) and architecture (walls, walks...). This emphasis on the use of essential landscape elements – topography, water, trees, paths – was very much inspired by the Brownian landscapes Olmsted encountered during his travels to England,¹⁹ which he preferred for their simplicity above the gardenesque style of Loudon, wherein he did at least find “botanic beauty” (Rybczynski 2000:180). This preference for the natural-looking over the artificiality of intricate and formal gardens guided their competition design for Central Park in New York (selected in 1858), which was conceived mainly as an antidote for city-life:

Two classes of improvements were to be planned for this purpose: one directed to secure pure and wholesome air, to act through the lungs; the other to secure an antithesis of objects of vision to those of the streets and houses which should act remedially, by impressions on the mind and *suggestions to the imagination* (Olmsted 1973:45; my italics).

Central Park, as natural scenery, was to serve the *function* of providing clean air for the citizens of New York. Olmsted was driven by the belief that the privilege of gardens enjoyed by the aristocrats of Europe must be opened to the public, and thus saw Central Park as an American “democratic development of the highest significance” (ibid.). Yet, as the last line of the quote above reveals, this was no mere functional approach to design and remained

¹⁷ In his magisterial, but never finished, theory on garden design, *Elysium Britannicum*, he leaves room for artificial ornament, but only in the absence of natural features on a site: “For seeing Nature dos in the universal oeconomy of things praeceede Arte, and that Art is onely Natures ape, and dos nothing but by the power thereof... But when nature will be more proper, then to take [leave] of Art and save charge” (in Goodchild 1991:106).

¹⁸ Olmsted was not all too satisfied with using the ‘old’ words of architecture and landscape to denote a new profession, see Eigen (2014:242).

¹⁹ Olmstead regarded the garden at Trentham, designed by Brown and visited in 1859, as the best in England (Rybczynski 2000:181).

directed at private participation within the imagination – the Park was seen as a source for Locke’s ‘impressions on the mind’ through its ‘suggestions to the imagination’. For example, Olmsted (1973:250) describes how a natural rocky outcrop covered in moss and plants becomes a fertile image for the private imagination:

... mainly because the intricate disposition of lights and shadows seen in the back parts of it would create a degree of obscurity not absolutely impenetrable, but sufficient to affect the imagination with a sense of mystery.

Realising that, apart from such isolated features, the creation of wild nature was not possible on the site, Olmsted and Vaux opted to provide pastoral scenery, which, through the imagination, could be experienced as a vast expanse of bucolic beauty:

... the imagination, looking into the soft commingling lights and shadows and fading tints of color of the back ground would have encouragement to extend these purely rural conditions indefinitely (Olmsted 1973:250).

The very words they used to define the design language as “... picturesque sylvan scenery” (Olmsted 1973:250), reveal the park’s debt to the landscape of the ancient bucolic poets like Theocritus and Virgil. But, apart from its atmosphere swimming in the language of classical mythology,²⁰ its figurative representation was absent from Central Park, for the gods were barred from entering: the original design did not include any statues, for such artifice was deemed non-essential to landscape architecture’s palette, as fine-tableware (and tables) are not as essential to dinner, as is the food:

As neither glass, nor china, nor knives and forks, nor even table and chairs are the essential elements of a dinner, so neither bridges, towers, shelters, seats, refectories, statues, cages for birds and animals, nor even drives and walks are the essential elements of the park... They are undesirable to be seen, so far as they tend to weaken, divide, blot or make patch-work of the essential or natural landscape elements (Olmsted 1973:251–252).

Olmsted and Vaux regarded artefacts as incompatible with the conceptual motivation of the park, namely to offer an experience that was definitively free from the artificial trappings of the city. By 1872, following the original construction of the park, several proposals had been received for modifications and additions, including for sponsored sculptures. To prevent an iconographic invasion, a Committee of Statues in the Park (that included Vaux) wrote a report in 1873,²¹ in which it articulated some of the original, guiding

²⁰ I am borrowing a phrase from historian Tom Holland (2020) who used it to explain the main argument of his book *Dominion* (2019), in which he claims that a secular, Western world may have cast out the religious contents of Christianity, but its values, images and ideals remain “swimming in Christian waters...”

²¹ Report of the Committee (of the Board) on the subject of Statuary on the Central Park, 25 April, 1873.

principles that were not to be forsaken for the sake of civic euergetism, for example (in Olmsted 1973:489–490):

Third, extended landscapes, to refresh and delight the eye, and, therefore, as free as possible from the rigidity and confinement of the city and from the incessant emphasis of artificial objects which inevitably belong to its ordinary conditions.

Thus, Olmsted and Vaux, oft regarded as the fathers of professional landscape architecture (Pregill & Volkman 1999:517), did not deem statuary and other emblematic accoutrements as essential to the language of landscape. Their lasting influence on the profession included the perpetuation of a distaste for emblematic gardening that sprung from the eighteenth century English world of Whately and Walpole. The reasons for this are manifold: from the Lockean empirical tradition, they inherited and passed on the emphasis on subjective experiences of the imagination; from the individualistic Romantic tradition of Rousseau via Americans like Ralph Waldo Emerson (and from personal encounters with wild nature), they inherited and passed on the veneration for wild nature as a liberating, and even transcendental, force for personal reform;²² from Loudon via the writings of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), they inherited and passed on the ideal that designed landscapes can solve environmental and social problems.²³ In short, the profession of landscape architecture inherited from its proto-practitioners the preference for *private participation*, the following of the *cult of nature* and *instrumentalism*.

1.1.7 The persistence of the gods: the Beaux Art

Olmsted's son published his father's professional correspondences in 1920, and commissioned Theodora Kimball (1887–1935) as editor, who was then the librarian at Harvard University's influential School of Landscape Architecture. Three years before, she co-authored with husband-to-be Henry Hubbard (1875–1947)²⁴ the first textbook of

²² Olmsted was specifically influenced by the transcendentalism of Emerson who, in turn, was directly influenced by Rousseau (LaFreniere 1990:41). Olmsted personally met Emerson and read his *Nature* (1836). Yet, he did not share the transcendentalist deification of nature as an object for reverent contemplation, but rather approached nature as “a means of serving the public and private needs of the people” (Nicholson 2004:341).

²³ Olmsted was influenced by the work of Loudon during his travels, and visited the latter's Derby Arboretum (Rybczynski 2000:180). More directly perhaps, Olmsted's view that parks can fulfil social functions and serve moral ends was influenced by the writings of Loudon's friend and the father of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (Nicholson 2004:340).

²⁴ Hubbard worked for the Olmsted brothers 1901–1906 and 1918 onwards. He was thus by no-means some kind of anti-Olmstedian!

landscape architecture, entitled *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (1917, revised in 1929). It includes an introductory theory of perception that notes how participation, albeit situated within the private recesses of the mind, can be *shared*, which is worth quoting at length:

The pleasure caused by any work of art will be different in the mind of each beholder as the mind of each beholder is different. The designer can be sure of his effect only in so far as he can know the mass of memories to which his design must appeal. There are some experiences which are the common lot of all mankind throughout the ages, and works of art which appeal to the memories of these will appeal to every man, and will live as long as these memories remain the common property of man. But works of art which depend for their interest on knowledge or desire born of a transitory period will die with the desires which brought them into being. *In the same way, a work of art designed for an individual owner, without regard to the common memories and training of mankind at large is apt to please no one but the owner and will probably not please him for long* (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:15; my italics).

Influenced by the *L'École des Beaux Art*, it accommodated mythological statuary as, it can be inferred, exemplary of what they deemed to embody a 'mass of memories':

Almost as surely should one expect that a statue in an orchard should be of Pomona or some of her mythologic kin; a statue in a grove, a dryad; a statue in a flower garden might well represent Flora or Vertumnus; and we are not surprised to see Peter Pan playing his pipes in Kensington Gardens. Such a statue of the genius of the place may express and give life and personality to the effect which the landscape architect is striving to produce by his whole design (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:211).

Importantly, they did not consider such statues only as ornaments to signify spirits of place, but as representational, anthropomorphic beings that could evoke both human empathy and a numinous presence in congruence with the landscape character of its setting:

But beside all this, the statue has the added attraction of representing a living form in which every man who sees it must feel some interest of kinship (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:210–211).

It must be sufficiently natural and lifelike to suggest the living form and express the spirit of the being which it represents (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:211).

... the effect and suggestion of the statue must be congruous with its location (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:212).

Other landscape elements associated with myth were included too, for example the grotto, albeit with a stern warning that such spaces can easily become “dank and unpleasant” (Hubbard & Kimball 1929:213). Thus, albeit the winds of change towards non-representational, nature-based and functional landscapes were blowing through the American cities, the discipline in its infancy retained, up to the 1930s, some tolerance – even encouragement – for the gods and their haunts. That was soon to change.

1.1.8 Final blows: twentieth century

In his prescribed copy of *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*, a young student at Harvard during the 1930s named Garrett Eckbo (1910–2000) made some notes in the page margins revealing his dissatisfaction with the curriculum he was being fed (Treib & Imbert 1997:16). Upon reading the section on design styles, he wrote: “He [Hubbard] completely takes for granted that we must make this, that we can use these [styles] now; 20th century U.S.A.; My God!” (in Treib & Imbert 1997, n. 27, ch. 2). He regarded the book as an antiquated attempt to safeguard landscape design as a fine art within the ambit of the elite: “Who cares? Nuts to ye great artist – individual ego rampant” (ibid.). He turned towards the modernist immigrants, like German Walter Gropius (1883–1969), who were filling the lecture halls with their ideas of a brave new world. Another was the Canadian landscape architect Christopher Tunnard (1910–1979) who can be regarded as the father of modernist landscape architecture. His *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (1938)²⁵ was the primary English source for the dissemination of modernism, until Eckbo’s own *Landscape for Living* was published in 1950 (Treib & Imbert 1997:17).

In the book, Tunnard (1938:62) rejoices that “... though science has restored in some measure that which she has taken away by giving us a new and more substantial mythology, she is being beneficently ruthless with the old methods and styles”. The old gods and their haunts were ‘beneficially’ banished by a scientifically driven approach to landscape design; the modernists associated myth with a pre-rational past, and accepted science as their mythology.²⁶

Contemporaneous with Tunnard’s writings, and probably with his involvement, the *Association Internationale des Architectes de Jardins Modernistes* (AIAJM) manifesto was scribed: it called for a design language that responds to societal needs, is determined by function, underpinned by geometry and expressive of the individual designer’s “specific knowledge and experience” for the sake of non-traditionalist “pure creation[s]” (Imbert 2007:223–224).

Working under the paradoxical modernist spell of social instrumentalism achieved through the individualism of the designer, Garret Eckbo later developed perhaps a more nuanced view of landscape design which he expressed in his *The Landscape We See* (1969). Therein he acknowledged the value of history as inspiration for design (Eckbo 1969:63) and

²⁵ First appeared as a series of essays in the *The Architectural Review* between 1937 and 1938.

²⁶ For example, Eckbo (1950:1), in the introduction to *Landscape for Living* declared his optimism in the value of the scientific method as a means to develop a landscape design: “The scientific method is one which takes nothing for granted, accepts no precedents without examination, and recognizes a dynamic world in which nothing is permanent but change itself”. For a discussion, see Treib & Imbert (1997:29).

admired the achievements of the past. Yet, he maintained a sceptical stance toward any attempt that reeked of historicist and eclectic imitation:

Beaux Art geometry is a vulgarization and oversimplification of the strength and freedom of classical and Renaissance prototypes. Romantic naturalism is a vulgarization and oversimplification of the strength and freedom of natural prototypes (Eckbo 1969:125).

Although he refers specifically to the overall language of those styles he encountered in his much-maligned textbook, he considered, by implication, the use of mythological statues as equally vulgar and oversimplified. For he saw art as one of the essential, always-changing, forces that drive human development:

... the creative forces of man, seeking not only answers to questions but decisions based on those answers – *new forms, new techniques, new relationships, new ways to communicate visions of the world, as it is and might be* (Eckbo 1969:43; my italics).

As two of the most influential landscape architects of the twentieth century, Tunnard and Eckbo's work and ideas represent the modernist spirit which finally killed the spirits of mythology: a preference for abstract art that invites subjective experience over historical styles and symbols, and an emphasis on the function and societal role of landscape. This was a spirit fired by the constant search for the new, unshackled by tradition. Modernism furthered landscape architecture's privileging of *private participation* and *instrumentalism*, but was by no means a sanctuary for *the cult of nature*.

1.1.9 Environmentalism

For that, I turn to another rationalist movement of the twentieth century that was an accomplice in the murder of mythology. Environmentalism, epitomised by Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature* (1969), sacrificed all artifice at the temple of the idol nature and became entrenched in the discipline of landscape architecture from around the 1970s, including at my alma mater (and current academy), the University of Pretoria (Young 2019:37).²⁷ Motivated by the environmental crisis, informed by ecological thinking and practised as a systematic approach to design by means of map-overlays, the environmental determinist approach to landscape architecture sought to cleanse landscapes from any visible signs of the destructive hands of mankind. Whereas the modernists sought to create artifice, like

²⁷ The influence and reverence for McHarg within the programme of landscape architecture at the University of Pretoria is testified by the decision to honor him with an honorary doctorate in 2000. He passed away before the degree was awarded (Artefacts: not dated). Also, he visited the programme in 1973 as a speaker at the Institute of Landscape Architects of South Africa (ILASA) conference hosted by the Department, specifically focussed on environmental issues.

outdoor rooms, groves on grids, sculptures and sculptural landscape forms, employing the techniques of the abstract artists, the ecologists had little time for such egomaniacal trifles.

In a Reflection Riding lecture delivered at the University of Pennsylvania in 1979 McHarg (1980:135) presented a brief ‘history’ of the evolution of religion to expose the Judaic and later Christian monotheistic and anthropocentric worldviews as the origin for the environmental crisis: Man, regarding himself as master of nature, thus sees no problem in destroying it. By extension, McHarg disparaged Renaissance gardens as the epitomic embodiment of the western tradition (Herrington 2010:5). For McHarg (1980:137) humanism is hubris against nature, for man is nothing but a “plant parasite”. Although he shows a respect for the technical achievement of the classical exemplars of garden design, he does regard them as outward expressions of a world-destroying world-view; “a skilful expression of a false statement” (1980:136) in need of a radical revision:

It is submitted that the modern ecological view does indeed correspond to reality and has not only survival value but holds promise for a harmony of man-nature and the potential for symbolic expression – a new metaphysical symbolism (McHarg 1980:133).

Thus, McHarg (1980:140) advocated the need for the ecological worldview – proven true by science – to find expression in its own “ecological symbolic language”. This does show that, unlike what is sometimes believed, there was more to his vision of landscape than ‘map overlays’. Yet, what exactly constituted this symbolic language was never fully articulated, only that it was *not* anthropomorphic *nor* derived from history. Taken to the extreme, he explains that we *can* revert to these old forms of garden-making, but only *if* we agree with their underlying metaphysics. So, for example, McHarg (1980:140) permits the use of the “formal exemplars” of the Greeks (including their statues, presumably), *should a society hold a polytheistic worldview*.²⁸ It follows that, since modernity holds no such view, it ought not tolerate the emblems of the gods of Hellas. It should then not surprise us that he praised the mid-eighteenth century work of Brown and company, and regretted the nineteenth-century reversion to “tuffa grottoes and hired hermits” (McHarg 1980:137).

1.1.10 Postmodern rumours of resurrection

In both the currents of modernism and environmentalism, the discipline of landscape

²⁸ As is nowadays often the case during social media debate-storms, McHarg (1980:140) called on Hitler to settle the matter: “It is no accident that both Hitler and Mussolini found the forms of ancient Rome to be sympathetic to their political views”. Seemingly, he forgot about of all the other political ideologies – far removed from fascism – that also employed the same language of design, including the proto-democracy of ancient Greece.

architecture partook in the post-war jettison of Western culture, including its myths, that swept through all the major forms of art. Postmodernism rallied against these iconoclasts in search of lost meaning. However, this did not (quite) lead to the return of the gods or abandoned symbols. In what, St-Denis (2020:238), called the “semiotic turn” landscape architects of the 1980s and 1990s became spatial storytellers. This wave of meaning-making was spurned, albeit hesitantly at first, by the environmental art movement that originated in the USA during the late 1960s and went on to claim public outside spaces within their ambit of output (Howett 1998:92). Their work, as is seen in that of Robert Smithson (1938–1973) was characterised by earthworks shaped into abstract forms, and the employment of “... ecological process as the generative source of art-making...” (Howett 1998:93) – they sculpted suggestive, abstract forms like the modernists, but using the materials and processes favoured by the environmentalists. This language of environmental art, which Ross (1998:224) regards as “every bit as serious as the greatest of the early eighteenth-century gardens”, evoked the mythical, but not specific myths. Rather, it was *suggestive* of the sacred landscapes of a pre-historic past – a primitivist hark to the cosmic-orientated stone and earth formations of a distant, pre-colonial and pre-civilised Utopia.

Landscape architects sought to reclaim their turf by emulating environmental art, notably that of Smithson and Maya Lin, specifically her Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC (Howett 1998:92–93). During the 1980s, landscape architects like Peter Walker (in his Tanner Fountain, Harvard University) and Charles Jencks (in his Garden of Cosmic Speculation, Dumfriesshire, Scotland) created landscapes that evoke primordial, archetypal forms and esoteric cosmologies. The discipline thus embraced meaning (even vaguely mythical), but not classical myth. In addition to such *suggestive landworks*, other forms of meaning-making from the postmodern period can briefly be summarised as follows:

The “open symbol” is a term used by Gillette (2005:92) to refer to landscapes that invite subjective interpretation, like Martha Schwartz’s whimsical frogs at the Rio Shopping Centre in Arizona, which, unlike the Ovidian frogs of the Latona Fountain at Versailles (6.1.4),²⁹ is unable to convey much meaning (ibid.).

Symbols of nature can be used to describe those landscapes that deliberately represent natural environments. For example, Yorkville Park (1994) in Toronto, Canada (involving both Walker and Schwartz, amongst others) represents a series of Canadian bio-regions in the small-scale.³⁰ Less didactic examples include the Ira Keller Forecourt Fountain (1970) in

²⁹ Whether Schwartz derived her frogs from those at Versailles remains unsettled, as far as I know.

³⁰ This precedent was often used by one of my lecturers, Graham Young (who was highly involved in the design of Freedom Park in Pretoria).

Portland by Lawrence Halprin with Angela Danadjieva – an abstraction (not imitation) of a natural waterfall.

Avant garde assemblages refer to those cutting-edge attempts to give expression to the fluid and dynamic, heterogeneous forces of a postmodern world, typically using collage and palimpsestic overlays as design tools. For example, the Garden of Australian Dreams (2001) in Canberra, Australia by Richard Weller and Vladimir Sitta's Room 4.1.3.

In the wake of this surge of symbolism, much ink was spent on journal pages to discuss the merit of this revolution of representation, notably those essays published in *Denatured Visions* (1990)³¹ and *Meaning in Landscape Architecture and Gardens* (2011).³² St-Denis (2020) provided a recent attempt to analyse the 'problem of signification' that hangs over postmodernism: do these landscapes mean what their authors say they mean? St-Denis (2020) says 'no'. Does it matter if they don't? Herrington (2011) says 'no'. Can landscapes mean at all? Gillette (2005) says 'no'.

A recurring problem that is identified in this discourse on meaning is that of the lack of a *shared* symbolic language, or what Spencer (2010:8) calls a "shared semiotic system".³³ Treib (2011:111) poses the problem by asking whether a garden can serve as a "common semantic channel" between the designer and a pluralistic society. He did so following a brief discussion of the "semiotic constellation[s]" (Treib 2011:110) found in eighteenth century English landscape gardens, mostly comprised of myth-related elements. Although their precise, original meanings may be lost on the contemporary visitor, the visible signs of gods remain recognisable and their associations intelligible. That is because the Greco-Roman myths – forming a shared, traditional semiotic system – remain cultural currency, albeit depreciated in value. The mere mention of Hercules conjures, even today, vague images of strength, courage and muscled arms, if only taken from a Disney film.³⁴ These gardens are unlike landscapes that rely on designer-made and project-specific layers of meaning, which cannot hope to attain the density of mythological 'constellations'.

Yet, none of the approaches to place-making of the postmodern movement critically reverted to classical or other mythological traditions, apart from one striking exception: Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006). The Scottish artist and poet is one of the few who seriously grappled with the role of classical mythology in garden design in the twentieth century, albeit

³¹ With notable contributions by John Dixon Hunt, Steven Krog and Marc Treib.

³² With contributions by Marc Treib, Jane Gillette and Susan Herrington.

³³ Writing of Roman (not post-modern) landscapes.

³⁴ With reference to the animated film from Walt Disney Pictures' *Hercules* (1997), directed by John Musker and Ron Clements.

as an outsider to the discipline of landscape architecture. For example, his own garden (Little Sparta, near Edinburgh) includes, amongst others, a statue-head of Apollo with the words *Apollon terroriste* engraved on his forehead that invite a paradoxical reading of the myth: the god of music and reason can be stirred to violence (Figure 1.2).³⁵

Notably, both Treib (1991:108) and St-Denis (2020:241–243) cite Little Sparta as a precedent for an approach to meaningful place-making that transcends the problem of private participation, for its ‘semiotic constellation’ is dense with mythological references that spring from a deep, historic well of signification, brought into dialogue with the contemporary world. In his book on the work of Finlay, Hunt (2008:171) identifies his “deployment of mythology” as Finlay’s most important means of drawing from the wells of tradition, serving “as a language to communicate themes lost to immediate sight in our modern world”.



Figure 1.2. Ian Hamilton Finlay with Alexander Stoddart, *Apollon Terroriste*, Little Sparta, Scotland, 1988 (Hunt 2008:77).

Finlay’s employment of mythological iconography was no mere commodification of archaic images. He did not follow an approach to symbolic appropriation that Treib (1991:107) warns against when commenting on *nostalgic historicism* (another mode of postmodern

³⁵ Finlay also related Apollo to the French Revolutionary, Saint-Just, who is referenced throughout Little Sparta.

signification): “the garden of classical antiquity has been trivialized as a ‘classical’... touch for your home”. The mere ornamentation of a garden with, say, a statue of Hercules is, according to Treib (ibid.) at risk of wrenching semiotics “from their settings and societies”, thus leading to the “dissolution of meaning”.

Despite the attention that Finlay’s sophisticated use of classical myths has received by writers such as Treib, St-Denis and Hunt, such an approach to place-making has not been absorbed by the discipline of landscape architecture. Finlay, unfashionably highbrow, once bluntly described the West’s self-exile from Arcadia: “As public sex was embarrassing to the Victorians, public classicism is to us” (in Abrioux 1992:40). The classical gods remain embarrassing to landscape architects.

1.1.11 The twenty-first century

The discipline of landscape architecture as it currently stands, in “an age which values science and rationality” (Etteger, Thomspson & Vicenzotti 2016:80), is concisely represented by the body of contributions in the *The New Landscape Declaration: A Call to Action for the Twenty First Century* (2017) which is very much a genetic offspring of the preceding modernist, ecological and postmodern movements. Practitioners, like the modernists, advocate the functional value of landscapes to solve urban problems and issues of social justice (*instrumentalism*); like the ecologists, they advocate a rational understanding of natural processes towards creating resilient green infrastructure to combat man-made climate change (*the cult of nature*); like the postmodernists, they advocate the importance of culture and heritage by means of suggestive symbols for inner contemplation (*private participation*). Like all three movements, there is little room within the fractal geometries and curvilinear flows for the articulated settings and anthropomorphic emblems of classical mythology; those remain on the floors of garden centres, along with concrete statues of gnomes, fairies and Buddha.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Granting exceptions like Finlay and other *garden designers* like English architect Cecil Pinsent (1884–1963), German-French illustrator Ferdinand Bac (1859–1952) (Figure 1.3) and contemporary English duo Isabel and Julian Bannerman – fringe figures who remain excommunicated from the mainstream of the discipline³⁶ – landscape architects, at least in

³⁶ An exception of a prominent landscape architect is Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900–1996) who included some references to classical myths in the design of English landscapes at the High Energy Laboratories at Hartwell, Berkshire (naming artificial mounds Zeus, Themis and Clotho) and Shute house, Wiltshire (including busts of the ancient poets Ovid, Virgil and Lucretius).

the Anglosphere of the twentieth and current century, research and practice without much critical consideration for classical mythology, which remains in its grave. As a result, the topic has been largely ignored within the discourse of the discipline: there is no developed theory or history that focuses on the relationship between classical mythology and landscape architecture.

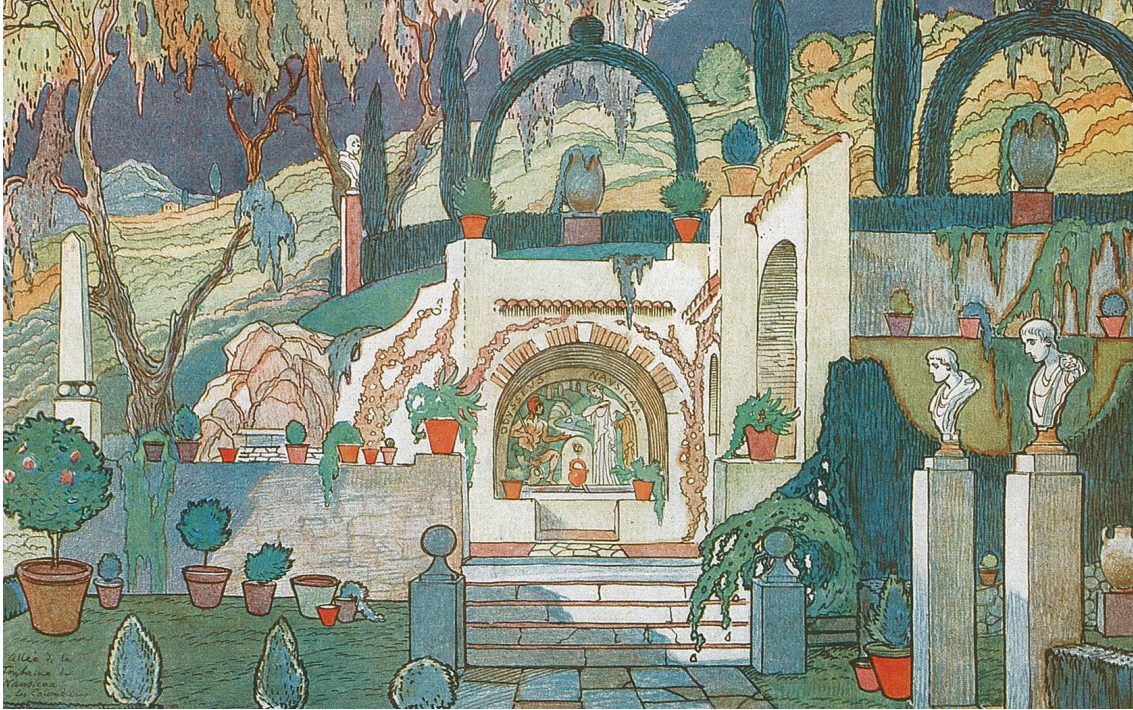


Figure 1.3. Ferdinand Bac, *The Fountain of Nausicaa*, Le Colombières, Menton, France, 1925 (Du Vachat 2017:96–97).

This general absence of mythology as a focused topic within landscape architecture is not witnessed in other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and philosophy in which myth enjoyed vigorous interest since the nineteenth century from well-known (some even public) intellectuals like James Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, 1890), Carl Jung (*Man and His Symbols*, 1964), Mircea Eliade (*The Sacred and the Profane*, 1957), Claude Lévi-Strauss (*The Raw and the Cooked*, 1964), Joseph Campbell (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949), Roland Barthes (*Mythologies*, 1957) and more recently, and controversially, Jordan Peterson (*Maps of Meaning*, 1999). As a discipline with a long history of engaging with mythology, landscape architecture can contribute meaningfully to myth-studies from within its own domain. Within garden historiography, there are already notable contributions that focus on:

- the mythological iconography of individual historic gardens, for example David R. Coffin's essay 'The Elysian fields of Rousham' (1986), his seminal study *Villa d' Este at Tivoli* (1960), and Claudia Lazzaro's *Villa Lante at Bagnaia* (1974);
- mythological tropes of specific periods, such as Cellauro's article 'Iconographical aspects of the Renaissance villa and garden: Mount Parnassus, Pegasus and the Muses'

(2003);

- the histories of specific typologies related to myth, such as Naomi Miller's *Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto* (1982) and *A History of Groves* (2018) edited by Jan Woudstra and Colin Roth;
- the mythological connotations of plants, thoroughly covered by Annette Giesecke's *The Mythology of Plants* (2014) and, in terms of the nomenclature of plants, *Gods and Goddesses in the Garden: Greco-Roman Mythology and the Scientific Names of Plants* by Peter Bernhardt (2008);
- the sacredness of religious settings for ritual, such as *Sacred Gardens and Landscapes: Ritual and Agency* (2007) edited by Michel Conan; and
- the esoteric and magical potency of gardens with mythical symbols, for example Christopher McIntosh's *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic and Meaning* (2005).

Yet, there is no study, at the time of proposing this thesis in 2019, that attempts to provide a more sweeping account and analysis of the relationship between myth and garden in the classical tradition.³⁷ Such accounts have been written with emphasis on art, literature and philosophy, for example: Michael Greenhalgh's *The Classical Tradition in Art* (1978), or multi-disciplinary works like Michael Silk, Ingo Gildenhard and Rosemary Barrow's *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* (2017).

As for the role of mythology within the classical tradition, some art historians associated with the Warburg Institute have studied the *Nachleben der Antike* (afterlife of antiquity) with emphasis on the mythological iconography of paintings, for example Panofsky and Saxl's 'Classical mythology in Mediaeval art' (1933) and Jean Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (1953). Although Panofsky inspired a lineage of garden historians³⁸ (some of whom were taught by him) to apply his iconological method to the analysis of the meaning of individual, early modern (and mostly Italian) gardens, these studies focused on specific periods and not on the long-enduring role of mythology in garden history.

This thesis takes in a broader scope of garden history in emulation of the

³⁷ The numerous writings of eminent historian John Dixon Hunt often include references to mythology, and this thesis owes a great debt to his body of work. Yet, he has not collated his ideas into a focused study on garden and myth. His recent book *Genus Loci: An Essay on the Meanings of Place* (2022) comes close, but is not focused on the classical tradition.

³⁸ Including David R. Coffin, Elizabeth Blair MacDougall and Claudia Lazzaro, all of whom are cited in this thesis.

aforementioned studies that investigate classicism as a *tradition* – a way of outside place-making that is transmitted across generations, and “... has Greco-Roman antiquity as its unifying point of reference, but comprehends such a variety of forms and figures, social settings and relations, themes, media, and conflicting ideologies” (Silk et al 2017:6).

1.3 POSITION

By writing a long-term history on an aspect of the classical tradition, I am positioning myself alongside the aforementioned scholars, and those fringe figures of landscape design who maintain that a dialogue with the classical tradition (amongst many others) can nourish the pursuit of beauty, defined by Milbank (2003:2) as seeing the invisible in the visible. Especially since it offers the inquiring mind a historical tapestry of stories, ideas and places cultivated by poets, philosophers, artists and gardeners that grappled with that which is intrinsic to garden-making – the desire to cultivate paradise; a view shared by contemporary Spanish garden designer Fernando Caruncho (in Cooper 2000:18–23).

Although such a position lies at the margins of the discipline, currently preoccupied with issues pertaining to climate change and social justice, the intersection between the visible and the invisible landscape remains one of the discipline’s “least analysed paradoxes” (Hunt 2004:37) and deserving of scholarly attention.

1.4 AIM

The aim of this thesis is to fill a gap in the literature on garden history by providing a long-term account of the role of classical mythology in the design and experience of gardens from antiquity to 1800.

It is hoped that such a study will encourage researchers and designers to further tap the potential of traditions of mythology (classical or otherwise) towards a landscape architecture that enfold private *and* shared participation, a concern for nature *and* a celebration of humanism, instrumentalism *and* beauty beyond function.

1.5 APPROACHING MYTH

How can a study of the role of mythology in garden history be approached? One way is to follow those geographers and anthropologists who have studied the relation between myth and cultural landscapes. We find, for example, an article like ‘The privation of history: Landseer, Victoria and the Highland myth’ by Pringle (1988) who provides an analysis of late nineteenth century paintings of the British Royal Family in the Scottish Highlands. Following Roland Barthes’ (2009:138) definition of myth as a “metalanguage” that sits behind the primary order of language, things are not what they seem: behind the surface (a portrayal of

the Queen signified as great), lies the concept of Royal “imposition and appropriation” (Pringle 1988:147) in the myth of the naturalness of the Royal Family in the loyal Highlands. In ‘The colonial gaze: imperialism, myths, and South African popular culture’ art historian Jeanne van Eden (2004:33) ‘exposes’ a holiday resort in South Africa, The Lost City, as a landscape fabricated to uphold the colonial gaze of Africa as an exotic playground for the rich, and calls on South Africans to “move beyond myth and stereotype” in our search for identity.

This approach to myth leads the scholar to de-code the mythologies of culture that are communicated through semiotic associations that are not always apparent. This postmodern habit of trying to ‘see through’ things is not absent from landscape architectural discourse. The concept of ‘nature’ for instance, is sometimes regarded as an instance of mythical thinking. For example, Weinel (2004:38) studied the role that the myth of nature played in the modernist making of the American West in California (as a source of personal improvement). As critical theory, such readings of culture and landscape semiotics are valuable in so far they can blow the whistle on false or even dangerous myths and ideologies that lurk behind the surface. But, by doing so this approach perpetuates the Enlightenment operation of dissecting mythology for the purpose of analysis and has little to say about the potential of myths as sources for meaningful design. However, such potential *is* grasped by popular culture which abounds with myth: crowds flock to watch blockbuster films within the *Marvel Universe* (the highest grossing franchise of all time) that is steeped in Norse, Greco-Roman and African mythologies, children devour books from the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series³⁹ and gamers smite mythological beings in acclaimed titles such as *Immortals Fenyx Rising*⁴⁰ and *God of War*.⁴¹

Such widespread, global appeal dispels any objection to classical mythology as a Eurocentric shibboleth for an elite stronghold of toffs. Also, it can be recalled that it was the rich who removed the gods from their pedestals in eighteenth century England, while public crowds flocked to Vauxhall Gardens (side-by-side the ‘celebrities’ of the day) where they enjoyed entertainments amongst ornate settings and sights of Apollo, Venus, Pan, nymphs (Figure 1.4) and Neptune (Figure 1.5).⁴² Such public interest, then and now, suggests that

³⁹ Written by Rick Riordan, published between 2005–2009.

⁴⁰ Released 2020, published by Ubisoft.

⁴¹ First in the series released in 2005, for Sony Interactive. Later games in the franchise steered away from Greco-Roman mythology to Norse.

⁴² The interior of a rotunda for musical performances was decorated with a number of mythological figures, from Venus to Jupiter, as well as a statue of Apollo; elsewhere a bust of Handel in the guise of Orpheus moved a visitor to write “See Orpheus rising from th’Elysian seats!” (Anon. 1762:36).

mythology may yet be a fruitful source for the creative pursuits of landscape architecture.

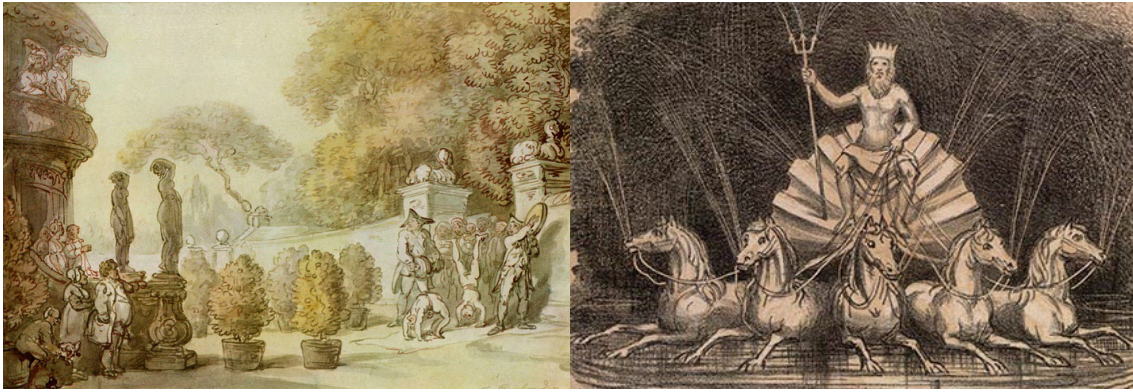


Figure 1.4. Left: Thomas Rowlandson, *Entrance to Vauxhall Gardens*, 1826 (Holme 1922, Plate 9). ‘High’ and ‘low’ society stare at one another within purview of two bathing nymphs.⁴³

Figure 1.5. Right: The Fountain of Neptune. Detail from poster entitled *Royal Vauxhall Gardens. For a Few Nights Only. Admission One Shilling! The Greatest Attraction Ever Offered to the Public*, c. 1841 (© British Library Board, Evanion Collection 474).

1.6 MYTHOPOEIA

If myth is to be considered for its creative agency in landscape architecture, and more ambitiously as a means to re-enchant experience from the disenchantment resulting from the Enlightenment, a fruitful parallel history can be found in literature: inspired by the work of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)⁴⁴ who argued for the legitimisation of mythology as a “path to both reality and transcendence” (Jamme 2005:29), the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) “rescued myth from the criticism of the Enlightenment by describing it as poetic or pictorial language” (Jamme 2005:32) in order to retrieve its “validity as a poetic tool” (ibid.). Herder inspired a counter-Enlightenment spirit in Germany evident in the works of Moritz, Goethe, Hegel and Schelling (Jamme 2005:29–45). In 1800, at the very time that myth was fading from gardens, William Blake (1757–1827) and Novalis (1772–1801) were working on modern myths: *The Four Zoas* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* respectively, both works published posthumously. These creative pursuits were supported by a growing theoretical discourse in, for example, Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) and Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry* published in 1799 (Von Hendy 2002:31). These writers did not regard myth as a phenomenon of a primitive, pre-scientific past that can be analysed to reveal the hidden social structures and systems of belief of ‘primitive’ people, but rather as a symbolic language that can be employed to create poetic literature.

⁴³ I infer the identity of the two statues from their stance, similar to the figures in another sketch by Rowlandson of *Diana and Her Nymphs Bathing*, undated, The [English] National Gallery of Art. Certainly, there were nymphs at Vauxhall, if not at the entrance (Anon. 1762:23, 27).

⁴⁴ Vico’s ideas on mythology influenced the design of the central garden of Caserta, Italy, begun in 1753. See Hersey (1981) for an iconographical analysis.

Thus, the rational, secularising project of modernity was shadowed by figures like these. Their myth-making provided antidotes for the disenchanted world of modernity. Their legacy lasted into the twentieth century, when the term ‘mythopoeia’ was adopted to denote a *genre* of writing that involves the creation of modern myths, rooted in the deep wells of mythological traditions. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–1955), rooted in Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythologies, is a prime example. Whereas its author J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) and, before him, artists like Blake, created fictive, mythopoeic worlds – alternate realities – modernist writers like T.S. Eliot (1898–1965), Franz Kafka (1883–1924) and James Joyce (1882–1941) allowed the parallel universe of myth to penetrate and structure their portrayals of a disenchanted modernity, as T.S. Eliot (1923:483) advocated in his review of Joyce’s *Ulysses*:⁴⁵

In using the myth [of *The Odyssey*], in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him.

In television and film, we find the same distinction: *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019)⁴⁶ presents a mythical world; *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000),⁴⁷ set in the American Deep South of the 1930s, is a parallel (and satiric) re-enactment of the adventures of Homer’s *The Odyssey*, without any fantastical sites or beings in sight.

As cultural artefacts, modern myths – both fantastical and realist – can be distinguished from traditional ones, since they are produced self-consciously by distinct authors, and not by the anonymous voices within communities who created, received, adapted and re-told those narratives, often pertaining to the super-natural, deemed to be of social importance.⁴⁸ In short, modern mythopoeia is created for poetic effect, *not* for their dissemination within a community as important stories to promote social cohesion and identity, reveal metaphysical truths, direct behaviour and script religious rituals.⁴⁹

1.7 TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

To extend mythology as a poetic tool to the discipline of landscape architecture, this thesis

⁴⁵ For a discussion on modernist mythopoeia, see Bell (1997).

⁴⁶ By David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, based on the mythopoeia of George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

⁴⁷ Directed by Joel and Ethan Coel.

⁴⁸ This definition of myth is based on Eric Csapo (2005:9) who defines it as “a narrative which is considered socially important, and is told in such a way as to allow the entire social collective to share a sense of this importance...”

⁴⁹ Individual readers may of course receive modern myths along these lines. For example, the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling has inspired many a ritual involving cloaks.

proposes *topomythopoesis*⁵⁰ as a theoretical framework to describe a way of landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myths.⁵¹ To invoke Hunt (2004:37–38), such places “allow ourselves to be drawn” into pre-existing “mythological languages”. This neologism is compounded of *mythopoeia* (making of myths)⁵² and the Greek *topos* (place) and thus means the ‘making of myth-related places’. Similarly to literary mythopoeia, topomythopoesis is proposed as a *genre* of landscape place-making that is practised for poetic effect, not necessarily for the purpose of making sacred landscape-settings that play a role within societies steeped in mythology. However, when taking the historic view of topomythopoesis, it is unnecessary to exclude pre-modern⁵³ and contemporary, non-secular practices from the definition. For the means of making an outside place to evoke myth is essentially the same, whether the end is to create a setting for ritualistic sacrifice, or capricious dallying; poetic spatial experience can lead to religious epiphany, or aesthetic delight

Topomythopoesis is by no means proposed as a mode of design to replace current practices, for the scientific-based methods that have been developed over a century to respond to social and environmental issues remain effective. Rather, as often throughout its history, topomythopoesis can interrupt our quotidian existence with glimmers of the world beyond the visible landscape, operating in the shadow of landscape modernity’s emphasis on private participation, the cult of nature and instrumentalism.

⁵⁰ I first used the term, in the form of ‘topo-mythopoeia’, in a paper entitled ‘The resurrection of Adonis: Towards a mythopoeics for contemporary landscape architecture’ presented at the *Space and Place* conference in Oxford, September 2014. Since then, I have altered the term and developed it as a theoretical framework, presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis. I have altered my earlier ‘topomythopoeia’ to respond more closely to a semantically related word used in spatial design, namely ‘autopoiesis’ (coined by Patrick Schumacher in *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*, 2011) which, to some extent, is the antithesis – with its emphasis on innovation – of the mimetic approach of topomythopoesis. Also, in architecture, the ‘poiesis’ is used to refer to the technical aspects of building. I am indebted to Profs Kritzing and Botha from the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Pretoria for their inputs regarding the semantic correctness of the neologism (personal communication 11 & 12 April 2017).

⁵¹ The word ‘invoke’ is also often used in relation to myth, for example: ‘He invoked the gods to smite his enemy’, or my figurative invocation of eminent garden historian John Dixon Hunt. It implies a certain call on a deity or other power to influence a situation, whilst ‘evoke’ simply means to call on a reference to something within the mind. For some, topomythopoesis may involve invocation, but not for all.

⁵² Mythopoeia is itself derived from the Hellenistic *mythopoiia*, from *mythos* and *poieia*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (‘mythopoeia’, 2003).

⁵³ I do not use the term here chronologically, since there are current, typically indigenous, societies that both partake in the traditional making and telling of myths, and their related spaces.

1.8 PROBLEM STATEMENTS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main problem of this thesis is describing the role of classical mythology in the expression and reception of gardens from antiquity up to 1800, answered in response to two sub-problems:

1.8.1 The sub-problems, research questions and thesis statements

- *Problem statement 1:* The use of myth as a poetic tool holds potential for the design of landscapes that can be experienced as enchanted places. However, there is no developed theory that explores this potential.
- *Research question 1:* How can the role of mythology in the expression and reception of designed landscapes be understood and defined in relation to the pursuit of enchantment?
- *Thesis statement 1:* A theoretical framework is proposed for ‘topomythopoeiesis’ as a mimetic⁵⁴ approach to landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myths, thereby cultivating participation in the pursuit of enchantment.

- *Problem statement 2:* There is no history of the long-enduring expression and reception of classical mythology in gardens.
- *Research question 2:* What role did classical mythology play in the experience and design of gardens from antiquity to the end of the eighteenth century?
- *Thesis statement 2:* Classical myths and their representations provided a source for the shared semiotic content of gardens designed in the tradition of classical topomythopoeiesis, emerging in antiquity and waning from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is characterised by the periodic mimesis of spatial and emblematic signifiers, often informed by the verbal and visual reincarnations of myths.

1.8.2 Research methodology

The inquiry into this problem is situated in Groat & Wang’s (2013:76) definition of the research paradigm “intersubjectivism”, centred between the extreme opposites of

⁵⁴ Mimetic refers to the two-fold role of imitation in the tradition of classical topomythopoeiesis: First, the statues and spatial types, typically, imitate nature (environments and the human body), albeit sometimes as stylized representations. Secondly: the artefacts themselves become imitated. Both levels of imitation ensure a consistency in the aesthetic language of classical topomythopoeiesis.

considering reality as hyper-subjective (constructivism) and hyper-objective (positivism).⁵⁵ This position relates to the topic of inquiry, since it involves both constructed gardens and other representations that exist(ed) objectively, and their experience within the subjective beholder.

The research questions invite a historical research methodology to guide the writing of a history through an interpretive lens “in a narrative form and in a holistic fashion” (Groat & Wang 2001:137), or what Borden & Rendell (2000:220) calls “theorised [architectural] history”. Following Groat & Wang’s (2001:173–214) discussion of the historical research methodology, and with reference to the discourse on garden historiography, the following principles of the methodology employed in this thesis are formulated:

The imagination of the historian-storyteller

Historiography involves the writing of a narrative about past events that “occurred in the actual flow of time” (Groat & Wang 2001:138); a non-fictional story about the past. The main body of this thesis is such a chronological story about the role of classical mythology in the design and experience of gardens. From Collingwood’s (1962:282) long-influential position argued in his *The Idea of History* (1945) that the “historian must re-enact the past in his own mind”, it follows that the historian’s imagination plays a legitimate role in the attempt to render, from the available evidence, a coherent picture of a historical world (Groat & Wang 2001:141). Since this thesis, amongst other things, delves into the poetic experience of places, I have sought to, where appropriate, write verbal re-enactments of garden experiences by stitching together artefactual evidence with first-hand accounts (where available). Whereas I make use of the ‘literary present’ tense when discussing the contents of the references, I similarly use a ‘spatial present’ tense to recreate past experiences.

Meta-narrative: the history of a tradition

Hunt (1999:82) lamented the state of garden history at the dawn of the twentieth century, in part, for its “... refusal to envisage clearly a *longue durée* of garden history”, remaining stuck in simplified conceptions (like the dichotomy between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’) that arose in the writings of people like Whately in the eighteenth century (quoted earlier). Similarly, Birksted (2003:19) proposes that one way for landscape architectural history to define itself as a domain-specific discipline, is to embrace its *longue durée* to conceive a “metahistory” (ibid.), citing the example of the French *Annales* School, whose long-term histories were originally concerned with landscape (of the Mediterranean), a phenomenon that is by its very

⁵⁵ Groat & Wang (2013:76) developed a spectrum of ontological and epistemological stances, veering away from the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy that has dominated discussions of research paradigms.

nature formed over thousands of years of interaction between man and his environment – this thesis is limited to a span of about 4000 years.

In the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, the long-term view is important to take, as it demonstrates how a semiotic system is developed, passed-on, and adapted over time, thus forming a density of meaning lacking in postmodern attempts at creating subject-centred significance. By investigating such a panoramic history,⁵⁶ care is taken to not perpetuate entrenched clichés about mythological iconography, but look afresh at histories well-trodden.

A cultural re-turn

By researching the metahistory of classical topomythopoiesis, this thesis does not follow the critical theoretical approach that led historiography to taking a ‘cultural turn’ during the last quarter of the twentieth century by moving away from sweeping narratives (Groat & Wang 2013:175). Not only that, but this thesis does not study its materials to reveal dormant issues of gender and power that characterise the cultural turn (Groat & Wang 2013:176). This is to avoid imposing twenty-first century values onto the historical subjects under investigation, which may distort an accurate account of how classical topomythopoiesis was conceived and received. This approach differs from much of landscape historiography of the late twentieth century written, often within the bounds of other disciplines, through the interpretive frameworks of feminism, Marxism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism. This reliance on theoretical frameworks established in other disciplines, is perhaps because garden history is an “emergent discipline” (Conan 1999:1) without an established set of methodologies as found in art history. Throughout the twentieth century the latter has largely informed the former – as is the case for studies in the history of architecture.⁵⁷

This alliance has ensured that the methodologies used by garden historians throughout the twentieth century closely followed the pattern of art history (see Beneš 2011): from the formal analysis of canonical works (Wölfflin *et al*) to the iconographic search for meaning

⁵⁶ In his, rather satirical, essay ‘Two varieties of historical writing’, Ševčenko (1969) uses the term “panoramic historian” to refer to those that write sweeping accounts of the past, in contrast with those interested in the minutiae of history. The latter type of historian, he dryly remarks (Ševčenko 1969:332), indulges footnotes such as this one, “convinced that scholarship is what is to be read in small print”. This thesis, with its numerous footnotes, is concerned with both, written by a butterfly looking at history from atop, and by the caterpillar looking from below, paraphrasing Ševčenko (1969:332).

⁵⁷ Aspects of recent interest unique to the study of gardens include the influence of weather (Mark Laird’s *A Natural History of English Gardening*, 2015) and the role of the gardener (Julian Raxworthy’s *Overgrown: Practices Between Landscape Architecture and Gardening*, 2018).

(Panofsky *et al*), to the *longue durée* geographic and economic histories of the *Annales* School (Braudel *et al*), to the before mentioned post-modern proliferation of attempts to apply to art history the ideas of sociologists (Lefebvre *et al*), semioticians (Barthes *et al*), philosophers (Foucault *et al*) and anthropologists (Geertz *et al*). In short, the methodologies of art history (and by garden history by association) have steadily shifted their emphasis from object to context, from artist to public, canon to the everyday, and from form to ‘force’.

This thesis makes a re-turn to the more aesthetic-orientated approaches to garden history of the mid-twentieth century and seeks to explain the way in which classical myths were expressed and received *as can be gleaned from the primary sources and secondary iconographical studies*. Following my intersubjectivist stance, I accept the “... values and intentionality of people’s actions and interpretations of meaning... situated in the larger social or historical context” (Groat & Wang 2013:78). Thus, I do not seek out the potentially hidden agendas and motivations based on contemporary norms, but rather look for evidence about the views on mythology in gardens from owners, designers, theorists and beholders of gardens. Furthermore, the thesis accepts the canon: well-trodden gardens like Versailles are revisited, not *because* they are elite, but because they served, historically, as precedents for topomythopoiesis.

However, where the thesis does veer from earlier histories (apart from not being as good) is in its attempt to not only focus on the visual contents of gardens, but also on their somatic⁵⁸ and extra-sensory dimensions – aspects that deserve the unique attention of the landscape historian (Birksted 2003:8).⁵⁹

Secondary and primary evidence

The panoramic view necessitates the use of secondary sources – existing garden histories and theory – as a means to narrate and interpret the historic development of this tradition covered in chapters three to nine. Thus, it does not entail the in-depth and primary analysis of the meaning of individual gardens, as was the case with the iconological studies during the

⁵⁸ In her doctoral thesis on the gardens of the Villa d’ Este, Bay (2019:50) stresses the importance of studying the somatic dimension of Renaissance gardens (in relation to their symbolic elements) – an aspect neglected in garden historiography of early modern gardens.

⁵⁹ Birksted (2003:8) also highlights the importance for garden historiography and theory to take the mobility of the beholder into account. Although this aspect of garden reception does not form a fundamental part of the thesis methodology, sequential experience does emerge from first-hand accounts and guidebooks of topomythopoic gardens.

twentieth century⁶⁰ of the early modern Italian gardens that soon became the “interpretative playgrounds or perhaps battlegrounds for garden iconologists” (Ribouillault 2020:293). Rather, it relies on such studies and does not attempt to solve (or add to) their iconographic controversies. Some opinions contrary to the main sources (and my own arguments) are included in footnotes.

Other secondary studies on mythology, theology, philosophy, archaeology, the classical tradition, architecture and literature are cited throughout in order to elucidate the general reception and expression of mythology within each period. Such an approach is advocated by Ribouillault (2020:320) who argues that “... a fruitful hermeneutic approach requires a broader interdisciplinary methodology that more precisely contextualises the construction of a garden within its appropriate intellectual culture”.

Apart from secondary sources, various types of primary literature were concurrently reviewed in order to situate and verify the expression and reception of topomythopoiesis:

- Treatises and emblem books: to gain insight into how topomythopoiesis has been theorised (*as evidence for ideas on expression*).
- Visitor accounts (and letters): to gain insight into first-hand experience of topomythopoeic gardens (*as evidence for first-hand reception*).
- Visitor guidebooks: to gain insight into how experience of topomythopoeic gardens were expected (*as evidence for intended reception*).

1.9 DELIMITATION, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Delimitations

The scope of this thesis is delimited to the translation of *classical* myths to European gardens (and a few public spaces) from antiquity to the nineteenth century; from its origins up to the beginning of its decline. As a panoramic history, it does not involve the detailed spatial-compositional and iconographic analysis of individual gardens. Although the thesis does set out to establish a set of foundational concepts that can be applied to the study and practice of topomythopoiesis, it does not seek to generate contemporary design principles.

Furthermore, situated within the discipline of landscape architecture, it does not interrogate the origin, psychological meaning or social role of myths. Nor will it seek to identify universal patterns found in myths from various societies. The thesis will thus not

⁶⁰ The undertaking of iconographic analyses of a single garden has for long been a mainstay of doctoral theses on garden history, especially for those following the iconological approach of Erwin Panofsky. It is impossible to emulate such studies for numerous gardens in various geographic locations and periods.

contribute to the anthropological or philosophical study of mythology.

Limitations

The study will rely on English translations of texts originally written in the ancient and Romantic languages. Due to the vast scope and travel expenses, gardens will only be studied from the desktop.

Notes on the text

Where antiquated English sources are cited, the original spelling is maintained without the unnecessary use of [*sic*]. Where significant, cross references to related parts in the thesis are indicated with (x).

1.10 THESIS OBJECTIVES

The thesis comprises two main parts, corresponding with the two research questions, in order to achieve the following objectives:

1. Theory (Chapter 2): To develop a theoretical framework for the study of topomythopoiesis that informs the “interpretive questions” (Borden & Rendell 2000:218) asked throughout the research.
2. History (Chapters 3 to 9): To apply the concepts of the theoretical framework in an interpretive history of classical topomythopoiesis from its origins in antiquity up to its decline from around 1800.

1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The history is thematically organised into chronological *episodes*: since such a broad survey is at risk to either inflate beyond the breadth of a thesis, or remain in the shallows of generalisations that ignore the complexities and nuances of history, each period is discussed with a particular focus. These foci not only delimit the scope of each chapter, but also serve to highlight various *aspects* of the tradition not covered comprehensively throughout: Chapter 3 focuses on morphology; Chapter 4 on the philosophical and literary reception of classical myths; Chapter 5 relates a first-hand account of garden reception to various design approaches; Chapter 6 looks at garden guidebooks and treatises; Chapter 7 emphasises the role of poets in re-imagining the classical myths; Chapters 8 and 9 place greater emphasis on the phenomenal landscape. Most of these aspects are touched on throughout, but not with the same attention.

The outline of the chapters is described below, together with the research methods employed:

Chapter 2 **defines topomythopoiesis** – in relation to disenchantment – as a way of creating transmaterial landscapes by evoking myths. To enable the study thereof, a theoretical framework is developed that seeks to articulate the relationship between physical landscapes and myths, following an explorative approach to research based on a broad literature review of garden history, myth theory and perception studies.⁶¹ The theory is mainly based on Owen Barfield’s concept of *participation*, and John Dixon Hunt’s *virtual landscape*.

From there ensues the definition of supporting theoretical concepts that will be used throughout the study, by collating various terms from authors that have sought to describe the relationship between the inhabitant of place and its material and intangible dimensions.

Autoethnographic reflections on my personal experiences of landscape phenomena serve as a method to illuminate my understanding and explanation of the concepts, for the imagination of others remain a foreign country.⁶²

Chapter 3 introduces the **morphological types** of classical topomythopoiesis – mound, grotto, grove, fount – and interprets their origins as a gradual monumentalisation of natural settings for religious ritual to artificial settings for delight. The argument is supported by citing exemplar landscape artefacts, discussed chronologically (per type) from Bronze Age Greece to Imperial Rome to infer the continuity and development of the morphology and mythological associations of the types. Emphasis is placed on the mound and grotto, with brief and concluding notes on the origins of the grove.

Chapter 4 introduces various **ways of interpreting myth** by summarising how early Christians received the pagan gods and their iconography, concluding that some of these approaches legitimised the continuous association of myths with gardens throughout the Middle Ages. It traces the origins of the garden of love literary trope to show how it opened the gate for the gods of love to become baptised within later medieval garden culture.

The chapter then provides a novel reading of the Narcissus-fountain episode in the *Roman de la Rose* as a hypothetical exemplar of how the myths in gardens were evoked through a process of interpretation that echoes medieval biblical exegesis. The chapter concludes by

⁶¹ As defined by Breen (2002:138), explorative research is done at the onset of a study to “identify, define and illustrate relevant phenomena, to explain specific characteristics and effects and (inter)relationships”. Thus, it is part of the research process that generates the concepts to inform a more detailed study.

⁶² Autoethnography is a “autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author...” (Poulos 2021:4).

arguing that Boccaccio's liberation of the literary garden as an imagined, sensual setting signals a shift towards a Neoplatonic approach to topomythopoiesis.

Chapter 5 covers the **experience and conception** of topomythopoiesis by investigating the various ways that myths were evoked in the villa gardens of Italy during the sixteenth century. A first-hand account of such villas by Bartolomeo Taegio (published in *La Villa*, 1559) serves as a framing device. Extracts from his letters are quoted to introduce specific aspects of Renaissance topomythopoiesis: the rhetoric of Parnassus, the appearance of statues in gardens and their appropriation, Neoplatonic participation, and varying approaches to its expression.

Chapter 6 focuses on the **rationalisation and systemisation** of topomythopoiesis by showing how the experience and design thereof became codified in France by the end of the seventeenth century. The argument is based on an interpretation of the guidebooks and literary accounts of Versailles as ekphrases meant to *instruct and expound* the imaginative and intellectual participation of garden visitors – Félibien's *Description de la grotte de Versailles* (1679) and La Fontaine's *Les Amours de Psyche et de Cupidon* (1669) serve as exemplars. The argument is extended to design by discussing the role of emblem books in systemising mythic iconography, and the role of design treatises in setting forth rules for topomythopoiesis.

Chapter 7 interrupts the chronology by providing a background to the eighteenth century topomythopoiesis in England by tracing the **influence of Puritanism** on the literary topomythopoeia of Edmund Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*, 1596) and John Milton (*Paradise Lost*, 1667) that was to influence the eighteenth century taste for countrified gardens with simple and edifying allegories.

Chapter 8 discusses the **moralisation and regulation** of topomythopoiesis by focusing on the early to mid-eighteenth century. It argues that the English preference for rusticated spatial types and isolated statues amidst wild scenery was partly influenced by a reformist reception of myth discussed in the previous chapter. It does so by showing how Joseph Addison propagated the aesthetic appreciation of topomythopoeia for moral ends. It then discusses Stephen Switzer's and Batty Langley's attempts to provide rules for the proper use of statues in their design treatises, and Castell's influence on the use of faux temples in the landscape. To conclude, it is shown how the allegorical meaning of such temples with their statues were elucidated by Joseph Spence's *Polymetis* (1747) as a counterpoint to the complexities of previous emblem books, and in response to the decline of knowledge of classical mythology.

Chapter 9 continues the discussion of the eighteenth century, turning to Germany where Neoclassicism, the Enlightenment and Romanticism influenced the topomythopoiesis of Wörlitzer Park, which was intended for **public education**. It focuses on the visitor's guidebook by August Rode (1788) that was written as part of the pedagogical conception of the park, and shows how all three of the intellectual currents in Germany were reflected in his descriptions of, specifically, the temple of Venus. The use of such faux temples was discussed by C.C.L. Hirschfeld, who was probably influenced by Wörlitz, in his treatise *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1779–1785) that provided some rules for topomythopoiesis.

Chapter 10 derives a number of design-centred **conceptual themes** from the history of classical topomythopoiesis. It does so by interpreting and organising the various approaches to the making of topomyths with reference to the artefacts and episodes discussed in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 WHAT DOES PEGASUS MEAN?

This Chapter seeks to answer the first research question: *How can the role of mythology in the expression and reception of designed landscapes be understood and defined in relation to the pursuit of enchantment?*

This will be done through the development and formulation of a theoretical framework that provides an understanding of the role of mythology in the expression and reception of gardens within the classical tradition.¹ The chapter concludes by posing two broad interpretative questions that directed the historical research.

The necessity of such a framework can be illustrated by citing from a recent and rigorous “seminal discussion” (Bucher 2018:82) on landscape architecture theory, namely Susan Herrington’s *Landscape Theory in Design* (2017). Although she does not treat mythology at length, she does briefly refer to the Fountain of Pegasus at Villa Lante (Figure 2.1) that “conveys this myth” (Herrington 2017:23) to prompt a series of questions of the role of mythology in designed landscapes, all left for the reader’s own musings: “If you were unaware of the myth of Pegasus would you be less likely to enjoy this fountain? If you did know the myth would you have a deeper appreciation of the garden’s design?” (Herrington 2017:24). Put to the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, these questions can be generalised as:

- Does mythical iconography affect garden experience?
- How does knowledge of referenced myths influence garden experience?

In response to Herrington’s questions, I add:

¹ The theoretical framework of topomythopoiesis is, I believe, equally applicable to other mythological traditions, but these lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

- What does it mean to state that a garden ‘conveys’ a myth? Does it tell the story?
- How do gardens convey myths?



Figure 2.1. Vignola, Fountain of Pegasus, Villa Lante, Bagnaia, Italy, 1560 (photo: Giacomo Mazzuoli in Canino 2011).

The theoretical framework for topomythopoiesis answers these questions by synthesising theories on perception and mythology, drawing from the initial literature review of the history of classical topomythopoiesis and reflections on my personal experience of landscapes. To introduce the underlying proposition on the nature of perception that supports the framework, I will be using an olive tree as a *locus* for the discussion. Following that, a series of theoretical concepts will be defined.

2.2 THIS IS NOT A TREE

When encountering an olive tree in a garden (or any tree anywhere), we are not usually aware that we are perceiving a *representation*.

2.2.1 Sensation to figuration

A representation is a depiction of some-thing, not the “thing-in-itself” (Kant 1889:73).² Phenomena, like olive trees perceived, are also representations: we do not see, hear, smell or touch quarks or electrons (sub-atomic particles); we do not see, hear, smell or feel

² Translated from the German *Ding an sich*.

mitochondria, vacuoles, chloroplasts... (components of plant cells); we do not perceive an unmediated conglomeration of material things or a “chaos of sensory impressions” (Cassirer 1955:29).³ Following Barfield (1988:17), this unmediated mass that constitutes the material world can be called “the unrepresented”, and to be more specific ‘the physical-unrepresented’. It is like raw data, processed by our sense-organs into *sensations* (Barfield 1988:24)⁴. This is the first level of contribution we make to the experience of phenomena.

Next, we translate these sensations into (re)cognisable ‘things’ that have “perceptual presence (Seth 2019:395). Everyday language plays an important role in this process, for it provides us with a lexicon of ready-made concepts to make sense of sensations. Barfield (1988:24) called this process “*figuration*”. According to the current theory of prediction error minimisation, our brains are constantly filtering sensory data and fixing attention on those inputs that reliably and predictively fit our inner expectation (‘predictions’) of what the world out there is like (Seth 2019:383) through a process of “unconscious inference” (Seth 2019:381) and “interpretation of sensory input” (Seth 2019:378).

Thus, when we perceive a tree, it is the outcome of a body-mind process that constructs the tree from a set of sensations (colours, textures, shapes) and a correspondent, predictable concept signified by the word ‘tree’; we perceive a phenomenon (or an appearance) and not the thing-in-itself, or its “as suchness” (Cassirer 1955:27). An olive tree is perceived differently than a thorn tree because its unrepresented materials, the sensations they stimulate, and its name (a species of the concept) are different. Following evolutionary and environmental theories of psychology, we can add biological responses to sensory stimuli, such as figuring a tree as a refuge from where a prospect can be gained (Appleton 1975:70–74), or a niche that offers the affordance of “climbability” (Heras-Escribano & De Pinedo-García 2018:13), very much lacking in the thorn tree.

Furthermore, figured perception is *shared*, since we can more-or-less agree that there is an olive tree in front of us – it is no mere subjective hallucination or the sight of a magician’s illusion, but a “collective representation” (Barfield 1988:18) perceived as “veridical” (Fish 2010:3).⁵ When we perceive a collection of figured, visible things – trees, grass, flowers, water, sky, buildings – we can call it a *physical environment*.

³ Seth (2019:382) calls the totality of sensory data “the noisy and ambiguous signals that continually impinge on our various sensory surfaces”.

⁴ More precisely, we receive sensory inputs through “exteroceptive modalities” (Seth 2019:390) – sight, hearing, smell – proprioception (the awareness of our bodies in space) and interoception (the “internal physiological condition of the body” (ibid.)).

⁵ Veridical means truthful, meaning here the perception is truthful to the world ‘out there’, perceived by many.

We are seldom aware of the fact that a veridical tree or its environment is a representation, that there is a distinction between appearances and reality. Figuration, typically, occurs unconsciously and involuntarily.

2.2.2 Participation towards enchantment

Yet, our perception of phenomena is not only figured from the raw data of the physical world, but also con-figured from its *immaterial* dimension – it is often said that landscape is both tangible and intangible (for example, Müller 2012:8–9; Moya Pelliterio 2011:59). Let us take for example an olive tree growing in the garden of my childhood – a plant coupled with personal memories. These may flood me upon re-encountering the tree in older age: climbing its branches, riding its dragon-neck, falling and breaking bones. Thus, the tree in front of me is not just any old olive, but one from an innocent childhood-paradise lost. Good memories may turn the most indistinct specimen into a joyful place of play, or a beautiful specimen may turn into a depressing nest of hurt. Thus, when the memory is recalled, willed or involuntary, as I am standing in the garden, it *affects perception*. The transformation of perception involves a change of consciousness which is invariably a poetic experience.⁶ Since the change of consciousness involves perceiving the invisible in the visible, the tree is transformed, perhaps only with a flicker, from a mere thing to a tree enchanted.

Thus, the childhood-tree is a combination of a tangible place entangled with intangible associations, as faded and unreliable as these may be. This process of grafting the sensed object with immaterial *contents* can be called *participation*, following Barfield's (1988:40) definition (quoted at the beginning of this thesis) as “the extra-sensory relation between man and his phenomena”. Similarly, in his introduction to *Architecture and Sacrament: A Critical Theory*, David Wang (2020:1) defines “participation” as the voluntary act of a believer within a sacred space that unlocks the experience of “vast immaterial presences” evoked by “embodied environmental forms”, or more poetically: “*The distribution of the building in front of me rhymes with an internal moral order within me, which in turn rhymes with an orderliness in the cosmos*” (Wang 2020:2); the childhood-tree in front of me rhymes with an internal memory within me.

Perception of the world affected by participation brightens and dims like a candle in the wind, unlike the steadfast facts of figured things – the enchantment quickly fades, or

⁶ See Prinsloo (2015:4–6).

participation is lacking altogether, as a disinterested mood makes the world matter only.⁷

2.2.3 The virtual tree

If I were to behold the tree in the company of a friend, they may be surprised by my enrapturement at this non-descript, backyard trunk-and-leaves; to them it may be a *mere* tree – we do not share in the enchantment, since mine was lit from *private participation*.

From this discrepancy in perception, it follows that the material contents of the tree do not fully account for its experience – the role of its immaterial dimension must be acknowledged.⁸ For this, the concept of *virtual* existence is helpful: in physics “virtual processes, entities, etc., are not actual, but their existence is postulated to explain certain effects” (Ross 1998:176). Similarly, the existence of a virtual tree can be postulated to explain the effect of enchanted perception. If I were to try and explain to my friend why my childhood-tree ‘rhymes’ within me, I would be verbally representing the virtual tree. In his book on the history of garden reception, Hunt (2004:33–56) dedicates a chapter to the ‘Garden as virtual landscape’ wherein he provides the example of Isamu Noguchi’s Beinecke Courtyard at Yale University (1960–1964) to distinguish its strong material presence (a plantless composition of abstract forms made from white marble) from its “virtual existence” (Hunt 2004:38) – its inner meaning. Thus, the virtual landscape consists of the “imaginary zones” (ibid.) that are entangled with the “strong, sensual, physical presence” (ibid.) of gardens.⁹ My virtual childhood-tree is the imaginary zone that I bring to the garden as my beholder’s share¹⁰ – participation is to allow, willingly or not, the virtual to illuminate the physical.

⁷ Pun disclosure: the statement both means that the beholder does not always bring their share of participation to the beholder. Hence, a tree becomes ‘merely’ physical matter (seen without its intangible dimension), but also: only this material world ‘matters’, i.e. there is ‘nothing more to the world’ than what ‘meets the eye’ – it is a feeling of disenchantment in two ways.

⁸ Within neuroscience it remains controversial whether abstract ideas such as cultural norms, or for the present discussion, imagined landscapes, can actually ‘penetrate’ perception, or whether they remain within the cognitive domain. Although unsettled, Seth (2019:401) states that there is enough evidence to suggest that phenomenal experience is indeed affected by “high-level beliefs and cognitions”.

⁹ Hunt (2004:36), like myself, does not use the term to refer to digital landscapes, albeit the strong connotations of the word to computer-generated settings.

¹⁰ I am using Ernst Gombrich’s term ‘beholder’s share’ which he used to entitle the third part of his popular *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1956), to describe the perceptual involvement of the subject when viewing art, which he developed from Alois Riegl’s earlier ‘beholder’s involvement’. Gombrich’s theory has remained remarkably compatible with contemporary theories on perception and neuroscience (Seth 2019:400).

If I were to return to the garden and find the tree felled, a deep loss may be felt, but the virtual childhood-tree can continue to grow happily within my imagination, where it can be conjured at will, or burst forth unexpectedly, even (perhaps especially) when I am not in the garden. Thus, once formed, it exists *independently* from concrete reality and not within historical time; more muddled collage than high definition picture.

2.2.4 Dense representational network

Walking out the garden of youth and finding another olive tree growing in a grove outside the city, the virtual childhood-tree may or may not be evoked. But, for this specimen (and others in general) there is something else that infuses my perception. There is another virtual tree that radiates an aura¹¹ from its gnarled trunk and silvery leaves: some ancient-rustic strife for life in the sun, lonely shepherds, a white dress in the night, desolate Christ, fluttering wings, and chirping dust... a vague hazy, halo that illumines the tree, transmitted from old texts, memories of footfalls on stony paths, art and films. These are the things that cultivate my virtual Mediterranean olive tree, the stuff that form a *dense representational network*.¹² Such is this network that this virtual tree may be *shared* in its rough outlines: others may have seen Van Gogh's *Olive Trees*,¹³ read about Christ on the Mount of Olives begging to be spared death,¹⁴ seen *Jean de Florette*,¹⁵ walked amongst Mediterranean olive groves, heard the hum of cicadas in the heat of a dusty breeze... These, and many other, visual and verbal representations (and experiences) that relate to olive trees construct a virtual version within the individual imagination of those versed in them.

Yet, the ecologist next to me may insist on removing this damned exotic. Their everyday language is grafted with the scientific language of ecology (and perhaps by some anti-humanist rhetoric) that affects perception via the association of an exotic tree with humans-meddling-in-nature-stuffing-up-the-planet. Science, like art, affects perception because it is a representational language that seeks to lift the veil of phenomena by peering into the physical-unrepresented, for example the olive tree's sub-atomic particles and cells. Scientific language seeks to remove participation by viewing the objective world as

¹¹ See footnote 3 of Chapter 1.

¹² My term is an alternation of "dense metaphorical network" used by Claude Calame (2007:49) in his essay on the trope of meadows in a poem by Sappho.

¹³ A series of paintings of olive trees in 1889 in Provence.

¹⁴ Matthew 26.

¹⁵ A French film directed by Claude Berri (1986). Set in Provence, it follows the tragic toil of the titular farmer facing environmental and social obstacles in planting flowers; olive groves form part of the ubiquitous Mediterranean landscape – beautifully harsh.

independent from perceiving subjects.

2.2.5 Myth is world-making

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (published in three volumes between 1923 and 1929), the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) identified science and art (visual and literary) as symbolic systems that, in differing ways, function as world-making languages that translate the ‘chaos of sensory impressions’ into conceivable forms; they offer different modes for the “objectivization” (Cassirer 1955:201) of things. Having been brought up on those German romanticists who saved myth as a poetic tool (Grosholtz 2010:695), Cassirer analysed an additional symbolic system in the second volume of *The Philosophy*, namely mythology. Like Schelling, he did not regard myths as allegories or veiled history (euhemerism), but as “autonomous configurations of the human spirit” (Cassirer 1955:4). For Cassirer (1955:23), mythology is a means of giving inner spiritual expression to outer objective reality, not a means to *explain* ill-understood phenomena or *structure* social behaviour and ritual. As such, he veered from some of the most prominent approaches to mythology developed since its birth as a distinct object of study in the nineteenth-century, briefly summarised below:

Etiological theories

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mythology, when the theory of evolution (with the assumption that simple things develop into complex things) was beginning to hold sway, anthropologists like E.B. Tylor (1832–1917) and James Frazer (1854–1941) were reading myth as a primitive form of science, to be replaced and exceeded by, first religious (in the case of Frazer), and then modern scientific thinking (Segal 2004:14–24). Myths were read as ignorant explanations of and incantations to affect (again in the case of Frazer) the physical world. As Segal pointed out (2004:24), the difficulty of this etiological approach to myth is that, in the face of modern science, myth has persisted alongside rational, logic thinking.

Functionalist theories

The philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) and sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) shifted from the ‘personified causes’ of Tylor and Frazer. By not seeing myth as ‘bad science’, they saved it from contempt by those who regarded myth as the product of undeveloped rational thinking. Like Cassirer, Lévy-Bruhl (1985:366) regarded mythopoeia as a wholly different mode of conceiving the world, specifically to serve the role of replacing the “mystic symbiosis” once felt between man, his society, phenomena and the invisible universe; myths make up for the loss of “mystic participation”.

Durkheim’s main contribution was to describe the social role of myth, taken further

by anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) who interpreted myths as means to “reinforce and perpetuate the social system” (Csapo 2005:140).

Unlike these etiological and functionalist definitions of myth, Cassirer’s implies that Zeus was not created as a pre-scientific explanation of thunder, nor a means to create an authoritarian figure to uphold moral behaviour. Rather, he is a means of creatively imbuing the phenomena of thunder with an image that entangles nature with the fear thereof (and of fatherhood), lurking in human consciousness: an “objectification of feelings” (Cassirer 1955:45); a fusion of the material and immaterial dimensions of experience.¹⁶ In this mythical mode of perception there is no distinction between the symbol and symbolised: Zeus is thunder, and thunder is Zeus – myth seeks to find *unity* between human culture and nature (Cassirer 1955:192) by finding ways of expressing congruence between the world ‘out there’ and ‘within us’. If we were to try and decode the myth of Zeus to find its hidden meanings, we would no longer be dwelling with a mythical consciousness, but with the abstractions of scientific inquiry.

Following the outlines of Cassirer’s theory, the ‘making of’ olive trees from their physical-unrepresented contents, through figuration and participation, can be influenced by various symbolic languages: the linguistic concept of ‘olive trees’ renders them as recognisable things; art and literature heighten our intuition of the “grotesquely arthritic postures, their silver leaves above improbably delicate and pure” (Jacobson 1970:60);¹⁷ science allows us to know that “[t]he wax of the olive fruit contains predominantly oleanolic acid” (Orihara & Ebizuka 2010);¹⁸ and myth can give trees a cultural history, enfold them with human feeling, and lift their presence from the profane to the sacred:

... the olive which once the son of Amphitryon brought from the shady springs of the Danube, to be the most beautiful memorial of the Olympian contests.¹⁹

... Within the space, an olive tree had stood, / A sacred shade, a venerable wood, / For vows to Faunus paid, the Latins’ guardian god. / Here hung the vests, and tablets were ingrav’d, / Of sinking mariners from shipwreck [*sic*] sav’d.²⁰

¹⁶ I am using Zeus here to provide a basic explanation of Cassirer’s theory, only roughly based on his own interpretation of the Greek father-god.

¹⁷ From the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* (2004) entry for ‘olive tree’, citing Jacobson’s *Rape of Tamar* (1970).

¹⁸ From the publisher’s summary of Yutaka Orihara and Yutaka Ebizuka’s chapter ‘Production of triterpene acids by cell-suspension cultures of *Olea europaea*’, in Preedy, V.R. & Watson, R.R. (eds). 2010. *Olives and Olive Oil in Health and Disease Prevention*. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 341–347.

¹⁹ Pindar, *Olympian Ode* (3.14–15).

²⁰ Virgil, *Aeneid* (12.766–769).

By following this definition of myth as a world-making language, this thesis proposes topomythopoiesis as a theoretical framework to account for the role that myth can play in re-enchanting garden experience.²¹ This will be achieved by positing that the garden dweller can contribute to constructing the phenomena of a physical landscape through participation with a virtual landscape, (partly) formed by myths.

2.3 CONCEPTS OF TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

2.3.1 The garden dweller

Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘garden dweller’ for the percipient of topomythopoeic gardens. I do so in favour of the following more commonly used terms:²²

- *User* suggests someone who utilises a landscape setting like a tool, and thus firmly sits within a modern, instrumentalist approach to landscape architecture against which this thesis is, in part, positioned.
- *Garden visitor* suggests someone who enters a garden, not their own, for the sake of leisure. In this thesis, some of the subjects inhabit and cultivate their own gardens. Also, in the earlier history of topomythopoiesis, subjects inhabited the outside spaces to partake in rituals, not access them as a cultural commodity.
- *Beholder* is not as common as the abovementioned and a good alternative, since it does not imply a functionalist approach to landscape experience and evokes Gombrich’s ‘beholder’s share’ (see fn. 10 of this Chapter). However, it remains an ocularcentric term that ignores the somatic dimension of landscape experience.

As the inhabitant of a home does not merely use, visit or look at a house, the *garden dweller* is someone who inhabits the garden, irrespective of duration, and participates in its being, and perhaps their being is shaped by the garden in turn. ‘Dwell’ has a phenomenological ring in design-culture from Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) via Norberg-Schultz (1926–2000) (1980:23), who states that poetic architecture “concretizes the *genus loci*”: good buildings embody the spirits of their place, felt by those who dwell in them. Although the theory of topomythopoiesis is not strictly speaking phenomenological, for it does not

²¹ Although building on the understanding of myth developed by the German idealists such as Schelling, Cassirer himself held reservations of ‘harnessing’ the poetic power of myth, for he witnessed how it was used by Hitler to hold sway over the German nation’s imagination in the build-up to the Second World War, as analysed in his *The Myth of the State* (1945).

²² Hunt (2004:32) notes that there is “no satisfactory word to describe those who receive gardens and landscape”.

exclude more cognitive modes of experience and does not rely as heavily on the archetypal essences of things, it does share its claim that place-making should fundamentally be concerned with perception.

2.3.2 The virtual landscape

In this framework, the virtual landscape functions as a mediator between the myths themselves and physical gardens. To further explain the virtual landscape, we can turn to a place some of us may know from reading stories while sitting under childhood-trees:

The land of Faërie is known to all who have stepped across the border between our world into the land of fairies, elves and dwarves during bedtime stories or animated films. There they find “... all manner of beasts and birds... shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords” (Tolkien 2001:3). For someone who grew up on Grimm and Disney, there is within my imagination some faint picture (both grotesque and cute) of northern forests, clear springs, flowery meadows filled with birdsong, foreboding bridges, craggy mountains and creaky houses inhabited by a motley crew of enlightening and shadowy characters. Yet, not one of the stories I read describe Fairyland *as* a landscape. My imagination has stitched together fragments of story-settings into a patchy region of wonder, evoked when reading. There it exists, locked for others to see. Yet, the virtual Fairylands within all who have read the similar stories, seen similar illustrations and watched similar films (that is, have been fed on a shared representational network), will have much in common, and probably resemble *An ancienne mappe of Fairyland: newly discovered and set forth* – an attempt to visually represent Fairyland (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2. Bernard Sleight, *An Anciente Mappe of Fairyland: Newly Discovered and Set Forth*, 1918 (© British Library Board, L.R.270.a.46).

Similarly, the classical, virtual topomythopoeic landscape is an atemporal and imagined landscape that is created as the by-product of the garden dweller’s reception of myths and their representations. It is seldom coherently conceived, but emerges from a mythological tradition as a conglomerate of *topoi* deposited together within the imagination of the

individual recipient.²³

Representations

The representations of myth include their written incarnations, retellings, paintings, sculptures and even scholarly studies. These form the dense representational network of texts and images that supplies the recipient imagination with stories and their settings. As with the internet, the gods and their settings within this network function like hypertexts that provide links to yet other representations.²⁴ For example, when seeing a painting of Venus, it links to other representations of the goddess, thus far exceeding the ‘meaning’ of the painting than could ever be intended by the painter. The density of this network, and hence its processing-power to render virtual topomyths, is dependent on the individual’s familiarity with it. Thus, the virtual topomythopoeic landscape within the garden dweller can be *cultivated* through active engagement with a mythological tradition and its manifestations. Within the classical tradition, we can simply call this virtual landscape *Arcadia*.

Arcadia

Although the name is derived from the mountainous geographic region on the Peloponnese in Greece, it is used here to denote that virtual, idyllic landscape inhabited by the rustic gods which became the subject for art since antiquity. It does present some problems, for the mythologist will point out that not all the original Greco-Roman myths are located in Arcadia, which is mainly the realm of the rustic deities such as Pan and the nymphs. For example, Venus (a common garden-god) is associated with locations like Cythera, and Mount Parnassus (a common topomyth) is located in central Greece. Yet, its usage in the history of art is sufficiently general and polysemous to, usefully, evoke an image of a distant mythical land of groves, mountains, springs and caves, haunted by the gods. According to Bruno Snell’s (1953:252) influential analysis, Virgil was the first to virtualise Arcadia as a mythic geography for his *Eclogues*, for he “needed a new home for his herdsmen, a land far distant from the sordid realities of the present” (Snell 1953:282) which he imbued with a “golden-haze of unreality” (ibid.). Virgil thus departed from his bucolic Greek predecessors like Theocritus (c. 300–260 BC), the father of pastoral poetry, who also wrote of the idyllic life in

²³ The *Lord of the Rings* and other modern myths are examples of mythologies that are set within a coherently conceived landscape – they, of course, too are ‘virtual landscapes’, but a bit more ‘coloured-in’.

²⁴ I am borrowing the ‘hypertext’ analogy from Clark’s (2015:2) study on Aphrodite/Venus, in which she argues that representations of the goddess “... are, in effect, hypertexts in a functioning open-ended domain where two legendary designations from Greco-Roman cultures provide interactive links to much worthy literature beyond...”

Arcadia in his *Idylls*, but had a real setting with real people in view.

Sources

Like phenomena, the virtual Arcadia too absorbs both physical and non-physical informants. The physical informants are those recognisable elements of physical environments that find their way into the myths. In the classical tradition, these are the mountains, caves, groves, springs and temples of the Balkan peninsula, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. The non-physical informants are those very subjects which the anthropologists, psychologists and philosophers have been so keen to analyse: morals, structures of society, ideas, ideologies, emotions and the transcendent, as will be discussed throughout the chapters.

2.3.3 Aspects of phenomenal topomyths

The signifiers of topomyths

The evocation of Arcadia can be prompted by visible things in the landscape. Landscape morphologies like grottoes and groves evoke its geography and atmospheres, whereas inscriptions and statues evoke its inhabitants; the signifiers that invite participation can be *spatial* or *emblematic*, or both (like a statue in water). In addition to these visual signifiers, there are those *natural* to the landscape setting (whether intrinsic to the site or artificially created): breezy air, fragrances and sounds, foliage and shadows present an atmosphere, or ‘sensescape’²⁵ which can in itself evoke Arcadia, especially its *loci amoena*. A *topomyth* refers to the combination of the spatial, emblematic and natural signifiers. The cult sites from which the signifiers developed (see Chapter 3), can be considered the original topomyths. *Topomythopoiesis* refers to the act or tradition of making topomyths.

Poiesis

Topomythopoiesis involves both imitation (*mimesis*) and imaginative creation (*phantasia*), to varying degrees. In the classical tradition, the makers of topomyths have consistently imitated a palette of spatial and sculptural types, yet have periodically applied these in new combinations or in altered forms. In some cases, new signifiers were invented. A recent example are the abstract sculptures used at Plaz Metaxu to evoke myths, with no evident visual semblance to the classical statue types and other representations within the tradition. For example, Psyche is represented by a ‘sail’ (Figure 2.3). Throughout the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, the balance between mimesis and phantasy fluctuates: from the

²⁵ Porteous (1985) used the term ‘smellscape’, to refer to the olfactory dimension of space. By extension, ‘sensescape’ refers to the somatic dimension of space, imbued with associations (and thus not merely sensory experience).

hyper-*mimesis* of mass-produced sculptures of Venus to the phantastical artefacts in the gardens of Bomarzo, yet most often veers towards the mimetic.

The duality between imitation of things seen (*mimesis*) and the creation of things never seen (*phantasia*) is intrinsic to the classical tradition, and cited by Philostratus (c. 170–250) (1912:79) in *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* to claim that the Greeks sculptors ‘invented’ the appearance of the gods through the faculty of the imagination – models that became the object for imitation.



Figure 2.3. *The Alarm Sail (Psyche)*, Plaz Metaxu, Devon, England (Hunt 2021:199).

Manifestation of the virtual

The extent to which the virtual landscape is concretised by the signifiers varies from highly visualised examples where the topomyth is a near simulacrum (a re-created scene) of the virtual landscape,²⁶ to landscapes that contain only subtle footnotes (like inscriptions and place-names) as faint glimmers into Arcadia. For an extreme example of the former, is the Greek Mythology Thematic Park in Crete (2020), which is a simulacrum of ancient Greece, complete with mock temples and cult statues. On the other end of the spectrum are Ian Hamilton Finlay’s utilitarian benches in the Serpentine Gallery garden in London (1998):

²⁶ In her study *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity*, Spencer (2010:xvi, 42, 82) uses the term ‘simulacrum’ to refer to Roman landscapes that appear as imitations of another place, yet is an illusory fabrication; a fantastical version of the original.

engraved lines from Virgil's *Eclogues* unexpectedly evoke idyllic Arcadia, a subtle interruption of sitting-in-the-park.²⁷ Simulacra are often employed to offer immersive jaunts into a mythical world, whereas footnotes are employed to interrupt the quotidian spaces of everyday life. Arguably, the more completely a topomyth represents the virtual landscape, the less room the garden dweller is given to participate creatively in its perception. Conversely, minimal prompts may leave participation unignited.

Ontology

Topomyths exist on yet another spectrum, that between the sacred and profane, terms defined and popularised by Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) in his *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957). Sacred topomyths are approached with a sense of awe wherein an encounter with a numinous being is sought, a hierophany that is “the manifestation of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world” (Eliade 1959:11). Sacred topomyths are often created as a setting for ritual by communities for which ‘myth’ is a misnomer since their stories about the super-natural are deemed to convey metaphysical truth. At the other end, some topomyths are created and approached with a capricious bent of mind; a place for whimsical entertainments, like the theme park in Crete. Somewhere in-between lie those topomyths which are approached with the spirit of contemplation.

Character

The overall impression of a topomyth is determined by its morphology and syntax, and ‘texture’ of materials and plants. These, together with natural variables such as the weather, define the topomyth's *character*, often congruent with its ontology. In the classical tradition, a helpful categorisation of character was formulated by Joseph Addison (*Spectator* No. 417, 1712) who distinguished between the virtual landscapes conjured by the three poets most prominent in the tradition: Homer's is vast and sublime, Virgil's is productive and pleasant and Ovid's is marvellous and strange. These categories of character are well-suited for phenomenal topomyths and, respectively, correspond incidentally with Christiaan Norberg-Schulz's (1980:42–47) phenomenological landscape types of the cosmological (vast skies and planes), classical (defined forms, order) and romantic (intimate and ever-changing).

Strangeness

I have elsewhere described poetic experience in landscape as a “felt change of consciousness” (Prinsloo 2015:4), often instilled by spaces in the landscape that are differentiated by their

²⁷ For a discussion of this and other public topomyths by Finlay, see ‘A people's Arcadia: the public gardens of Ian Hamilton Finlay in relation to Little Sparta’ by Eyres (2009).

“strangeness” (ibid.) in relation to their environments. This definition holds true for topomythopoiesis, since it serves to evoke the gods and their haunts of myth within the imagination of the garden dweller. When induced, this turn of a mental image invariably involves a change of consciousness. It is often achieved through ‘estrangement’ *via* spatial practices like demarcation, the use of distinct landscape morphologies, monumentalisation, and the inclusion of distinct iconographic elements such as statues, herms, monoliths and texts. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the very origins of the topomyths can be traced back to natural settings that were differentiated from their environmental contexts.

2.3.4 Aspects of participation

Modes

Participation is used throughout the thesis to refer to the garden dweller’s share in constructing the phenomenal topomyth by evoking Arcadia, at the individual, group or collective level. As their imagined virtual landscape can be cultivated by an engagement with representations, participation can be practiced. The garden dweller, upon encountering the signifiers, can participate in various modes: analytical, somatic-symbolic and imaginative. The analytical mode involves *thinking about* the topomyth. The obvious type is *exegetic participation* which is a cognitive process of decoding a garden’s symbolism, often to extract and interpret its moral or spiritual meaning (e.g. 4.6). Similarly, *narrative participation* involves ‘reading’ the topomyth in relation to its other representations, or what Spencer (2010:48) calls “narratology”, referring to “[h]ow space gains meaning as a network of time, place, and stories...” Another type of analytical participation can be called *academic participation*, which involves the scholarly description and analysis of a topomyth by, for example, identifying the signifiers, recalling their origins and describing their artistic styles (e.g. 6.2.2). Less obviously, but perhaps more poetically, the garden dweller can experience an (often sub-conscious) *somatic-symbolic participation* by feeling the presence of Arcadia through the garden’s sensory impressions; a flowery meadow can be *felt* to have an Elysian glow. The final mode is *imaginative participation*, which can be *pictorial* when a topomyth evokes an imagined view of Arcadia or a specific representation (e.g. 8.1.1), or *fantastical* when the topomyth itself is imaginatively transformed.

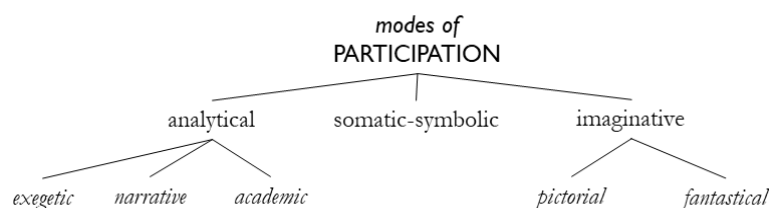


Figure 2.4. A taxonomy of the various modes of participation (Author 2023).

Emotions

As there are various modes of participation, there are also various emotions that ensue from the encounter with a topomyth. As will be seen throughout the chapters, these range from the *epiphanic*, *revelatory*, even *visionary* moments that are felt in the presence of a sacred or sublime topomyth. Pleasant topomyths may lead to a lingering *delight*, and strange topomyths tend to elicit a sense of *wonder* and *marvel* (even *disgust*).

2.4 ILLUSTRATION

To return to the questions asked at the onset of this chapter about the Pegasus Fountain at Villa Lante, we can now answer them briefly with reference to a series of diagrams. The answers are provided simplistically for the sake of clarifying the theoretical framework, not in response to a proper scholarly analysis of Villa d' Este and its iconography.

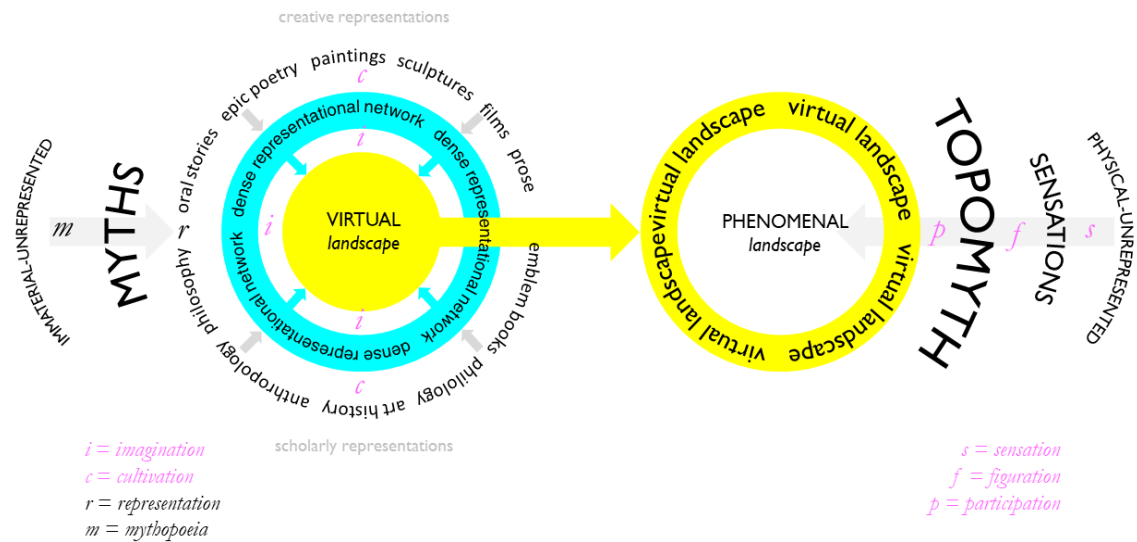


Figure 2.5. Diagramme illustrating the role of mythology in the experience of topomyths. The text in pink refers to the garden dweller’s share in creating their virtual landscape (left circle) and phenomenal landscape (right circle) (Author 2023).

Does mythical iconography affect garden experience? (‘If you were unaware of the myth of Pegasus would you be less likely to enjoy this fountain?’)

Yes, without knowledge of the representational network of the Pegasus myth (creative or scholarly), there is no virtual counterpart to infuse the garden dweller’s experience of the phenomenal fountain. On the diagram above (Figure 2.5), *p* is unaffected by the virtual landscape (the yellow ring) and thus the fountain remains a mere thing, visually appealing as it may be. Of course, the garden dweller may privately have a non-mythical virtual counterpart related to, for example, memories of horses that can still be evoked through *p*. The somatic and aesthetic qualities of the topomyth may still be enjoyed through sensation (*s*) and figuration (*f*).

How does knowledge of referenced myths influence garden experience? (‘If you did know the myth would you have a deeper appreciation of the garden’s design?’)

The myth of Pegasus does not exist as a single, original story, and its true origin (*m*) will never be known. Rather, the myth is represented (*r*) in various forms: creative representations (arc of text above *r*) are the most obvious, for example the story of Pegasus creating the Hippocrene Spring as told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (5.250), or of his adventures with Bellerophon in Pindar’s *Olympian Ode* (13.60–90), recently retold by Stephen Fry (2019:139–146). Then there are more contemporary and whimsical representations of Pegasus, as in Disney’s *Hercules*. The myth is also represented in scholarly forms (arc of text below *r*), such as emblem books that seek to explain the allegorical meaning of myths: in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* from the Renaissance (6.5), there is an illustration of Bellerophon on his winged horse, killing a Chimera, with the explanation that this signifies “killer of vice” (Ripa 1709:80). Other scholarly representations may include art-historic studies of the statue, for example in Cellauro’s (2003) ‘Iconographical aspects of the Renaissance villa and garden: Mount Parnassus, Pegasus and the Muses’. The extent of familiarity with creative and scholarly representations of the myth will cultivate (*c*) the density of the garden dweller’s representational network (blue ring). This becomes the source from which their imagination (*i*) draws to render a virtual landscape of the myth (yellow circle).

The topomyth’s signifiers evoke the virtual through participation (*p*). This can occur in various ways, depending on the mode of participation, explained in the next few diagrams to answer the question: *What does it mean to state that a garden ‘conveys’ a myth? Does it narrate a myth?*

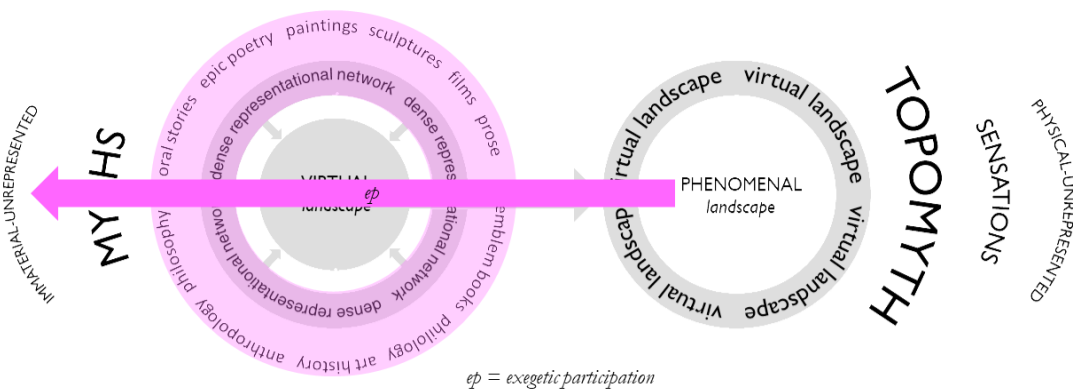


Figure 2.6. Diagramme illustrating the exegetic mode of participation (Author 2023).

A common response to topomyths is to look for their meaning: the garden dweller performs an exegetic participation (*ep*) by looking beyond the phenomena towards the contents of the myth’s representations (pink ring). For example, the garden dweller may *think about* the association of Pegasus with poetic inspiration gleaned from scholarly

interpretations, and exclaim: ‘I get it, the fountain symbolises poetic inspiration!’, or were they to think of Bellerophon: ‘Ah, it’s about the triumph of virtue over vice!’ Their exegesis may not stop there, for it may be transformative and inspire the garden dweller to write some verse, or pursue virtue. Furthermore, the garden dweller can reach deeper and start contemplating the fundamental origins of the myth (‘immaterial-unrepresented’), perhaps intuiting that gushing water is an archetypal source for human creativity. Such cognitive experiences may leave the phenomena unaffected (and even leave it disenchanting).

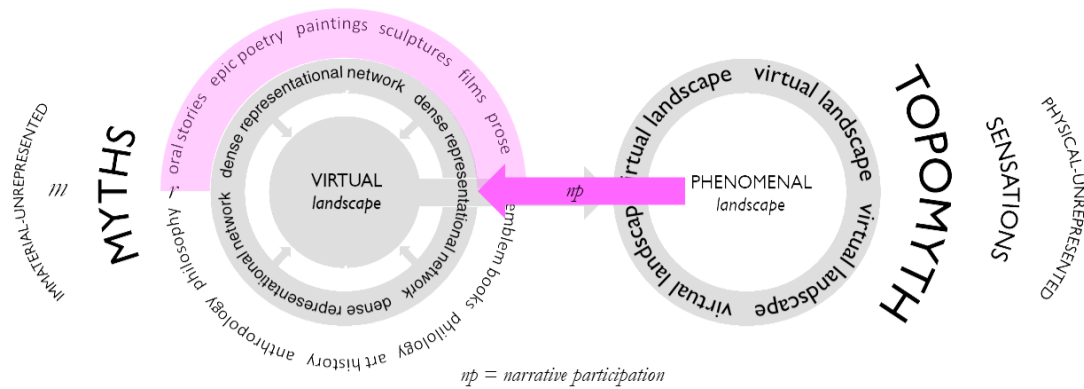


Figure 2.7. Diagramme illustrating the narrative mode of participation (Author 2023).

Contrary to my assumption when embarking on this thesis, topomyths are not generally aimed at telling stories in spatial form. Yet, the garden dweller can engage in narrative participation (np) by recalling in their minds the stories (pink arc) of Pegasus prompted by the horse’s presence in the fountain. If done so consciously, this becomes a cognitive exercise which moves the experience away from the phenomena (pink arrow pointing left) towards the creative representations of the myth.

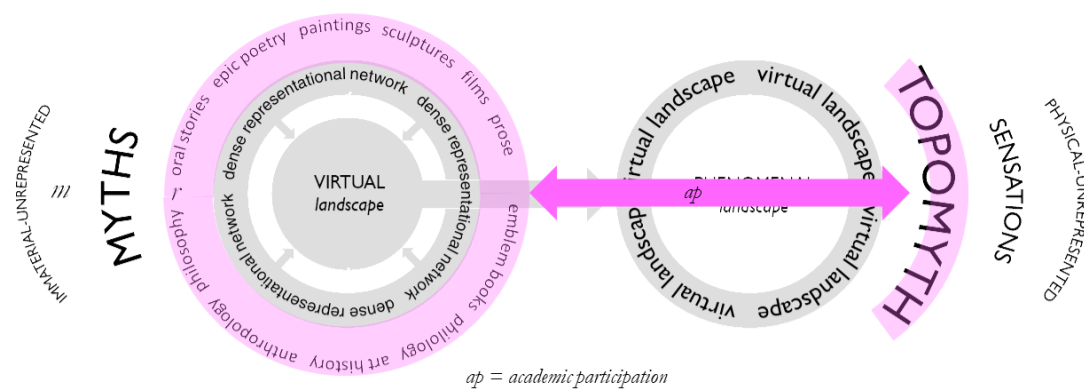


Figure 2.8. Diagramme illustrating the academic mode of participation (Author 2023).

If the garden dweller had a scholarly bent, they may stand in front of the Pegasus Fountain and describe it like a guide in an art museum. The topomyth itself is studied (ap) in relation to the representations of the myth: ‘The fountain was commissioned by Cardinal Gambara... and is clearly in the style of the central Italian Renaissance... created in the

workshop of... in the year... considered by Montaigne as superior to those of Pratinolo... the story of Pegasus was used by Freud to...' Similar to narrative participation, such analytical reception moves the experience away from the phenomena.

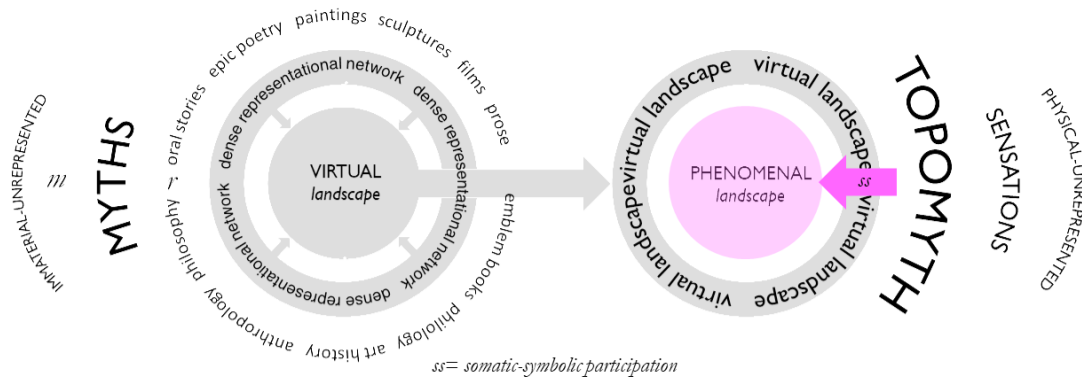


Figure 2.9. Diagramme illustrating the somatic-symbolic mode of participation (Author 2023).

If the garden dweller were to encounter the Pegasus Fountain and experience the sight of the winged horse on its rocky outcrop, glistening as the sunlit rain of water falls on its back, and feel momentarily filled with a poetic intuition of a deep well on the far-off peaks in Arcadia, then they are drawn into somatic-symbolic participation (*ss*): the experience of the phenomena is affected by the virtual landscape within the immediacy of body-mind perception; the meaning of Pegasus is *felt*.

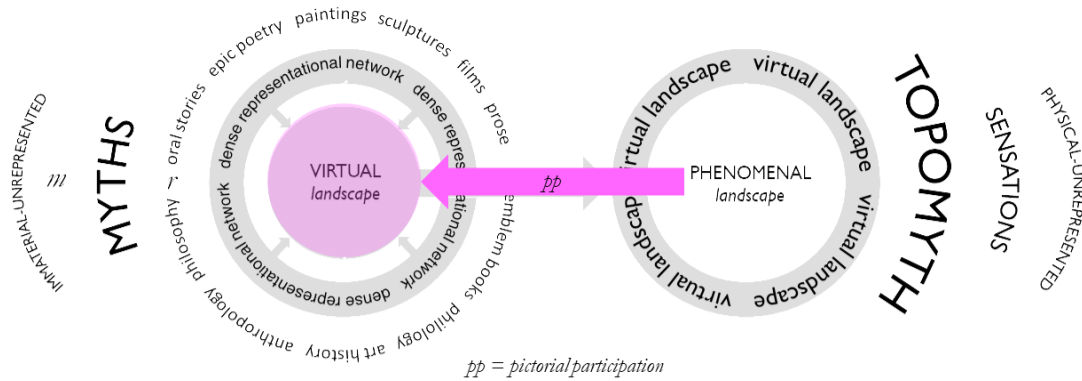


Figure 2.10. Diagramme illustrating the pictorial mode of participation (Author 2023).

A view of a topomyth can sometimes evoke a view of another place, seen within the imagination; pictorial participation (*pp*) is seeing the virtual landscape (or a specific representation like a painted view) in the mind's eye. The Pegasus Fountain may evoke a mental picture of an imagined Parnassus, or a peak in Africa, or the Pegasus at Bomarzo...

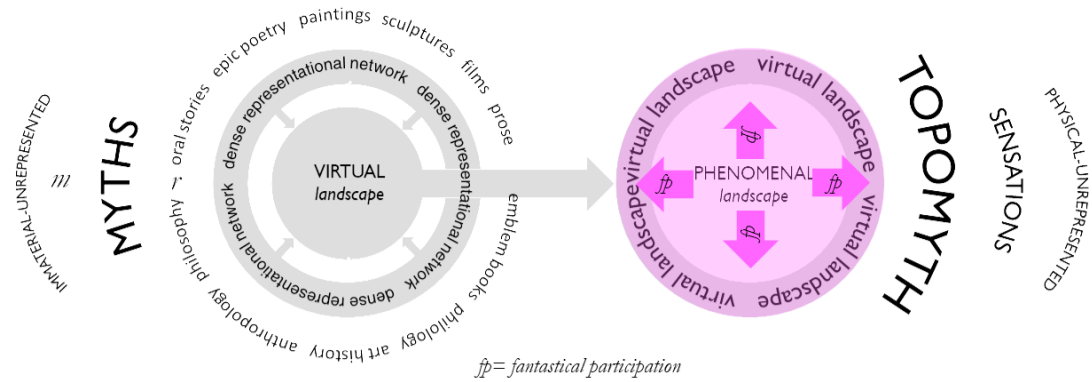


Figure 2.11. Diagramme illustrating the fantastical mode of participation (Author 2023).

Lastly, and most strangely, the garden dweller may – by sheer will of the imagination – transform the phenomena to the likeness of the virtual landscape itself, like a child jumping over the lava-floor of their house. Here at the Villa Lante the statue beats its hooves, the Muses emerge from the depths singing, the craggy pedestal trembles... the scene becomes, quite literally, enchanted.

Of course, the reality of perception is not so clearly defined and demarcated as these modes have been defined – reception of the Pegasus Fountain can comprise any number of these modes, perhaps sequential, or muddled together. For example, the initial enchantment from somatic-symbolic participation may prompt further, analytical participation or vice versa. The final question will be answered very briefly, *How do gardens convey myths?* As a topomyth, the Pegasus Fountain contains a number of signifiers: emblematic (the statue of the winged horse), spatial (the rocky ‘mountain’) and natural (the water, albeit in an architectonic basin). These in composition prompt the various modes of participation.

The foregoing theoretical framework informed the following broad interpretive questions, asked throughout the research and writing of the history of classical topomythopoiesis from antiquity to the nineteenth century:²⁸

- Regarding expression: what constitutes the dense representational network that constructs the virtual landscape of classical topomythopoiesis (Arcadia) and how has it been signified in gardens?
- Regarding reception: how has the participation of garden dwellers with Arcadia been enacted and cultivated?

²⁸ Note that this history is not structured according to these questions, but ‘infiltrated’ by them: questions are not dealt with separately, but as underlying questions that inform the research *throughout*, but not *apart*.

3 ORIGINS IN ANTIQUITY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the origins of the classical topomythopoeic tradition in Greek and Roman antiquity, with specific emphasis on the *topoi* of mountain and cave that gradually transformed from sacred, natural settings of ritual to artificial places of delight. I will highlight throughout some of the characteristics of classical topomythopoiesis as they emerge from the discussion.

Granted the limited archaeological record of designed landscapes of the periods under discussion, and the lack of expositions that reveal their creators' precedents and intentions, it is impossible to create something akin to a phylogenetic diagram that maps the origin and evolution of the spatial types and their mythological associations. Even if evidence abounded, such a structuralist schematic analysis will be futile since the relationship between designed landscapes and myths is like the internet: an untameable and near endless network of hyperlinks. Indeed, the impossibility of a taxonomy of classical topomythopoiesis befits the tradition, for even the ancient (and later) mythographers did not care much to codify and structure the myths, and actually “encouraged intermingling and disorder” (Seznec 1972:241).

That said, I have attempted to describe the origins of this tradition by highlighting exemplar landscape artefacts, more-or-less chronologically from Greece to Rome, that share morphological traits. Their precedents and mythological associations are sometimes known or obvious, and at other times, conjectural.

3.2 THE STRANGENESS OF SANCTUARIES

The role of mythology in the enchantment of landscape was not initially aimed at aesthetic experience, but rather religious epiphany: the participant in ritual within a cult sanctuary sought to experience an invisible divine presence in the form of a “personal opposite” (Burkert 1985:8) – an anthropomorphic god, not a theological abstraction, who was sometimes represented by a cult statue. The stories of these gods, with dim echoes of tales

from the Near East and Neolithic times, provided details of their lives and the geography within which their actions took place; an imagined landscape that both reflected and refracted everyday life: In his discussion of mythical mountains, Buxton (1992:6–7) interprets them as curated and intensified versions of the ‘real thing’. For example, in myth Megaros sought refuge from the Great Deluge on Mount Gerania (while Deukalion and Pyrrha found dry land on Parnassus); in reality mountains were places for refuge from war and other threats. In myth, we find Endymion hunting in the moonlight when Selene fell in love with him; in reality, mountains were hunting grounds. These biographies of the gods – myths – thus dramatised the settings of ritual. Yet, the myths do not account for the morphology of the spatial types. For this, we must turn to the cult sites of the Greeks.

The sites for sanctuaries were chosen not for pragmatic reasons such as accessibility, but for their *difference* from the level plains on which the Greeks settled: wooded areas shaded from the sun, mountains that rise from the plains punctuated by dark and damp hollows, and water that rill over thirsty soil. These were strange places that interrupted the general grain of the environment, much like the hierophanies that occurred there disrupted the predictable rhythm of mortal life.¹ In his discussion on Greek groves, Barnett (2007:7) affirms this interpretation of cultic site-selection: “classical literary accounts of the sacred often suggest that within the vast zones beyond the agrarian planes there were interstitial terrains that held a special meaning because their geomorphological qualities marked them out as different”. Although there is no equivalent in Greek religion to the liturgical prescriptions found in, for example, the Vedas, each sanctuary did demand of its participants to act in a certain manner. It is in the performance of rituals where the ontological distinction between the topomyths of Greek cult sites and the ensuing garden design tradition is most marked. True to the disorderly nature of Greek myth, there is no fixed pattern of god-site associations: there were mountain cults for Zeus, but so too for Hera or Aphrodite; Pan was found in caves, but so was Zeus.

3.3 FROM PEAK TO MOUND

Let me begin to sing of the Muses of Helikon, who abide on the great and holy Mount Helikon. Around the deep-blue spring, with dainty feet, they dance, and around the altar of the mighty son of Kronos. Washing their tender skin in the waters of the Permessos or of the Horse’s Spring or of holy Olmeios, they set up their choral

¹ For the poetics of strangeness in the landscape, see my article ‘Dramatic transitions for poetic spaces: Notes on the potential of public walled gardens in cities’ (2015). Topomythopoeic encounters in gardens are often spatially demarcated to heighten the enchantment.

songs-and-dances on the highest point of Helikon (Hesiod, *Theogony* 1–7).²

The inclusion of artificial mounds in classical topomythopoiesis only became common from the Renaissance onwards, yet their form and iconography can be traced back to antiquity. There are two main types: the freestanding mound, often conical in form, and either mountable (like the Parnassus at Villa Medici in Rome) or as a fountain (like the Pegasus fountain at the *Bosco Sacro* in Bomarzo, Italy), and the terraced slope, often on the side of an existing hill (like the ‘Praeneste’ at Rousham, England). There are examples of freestanding, terraced mounds (like the mound at New College, Oxford). The materiality of either type ranges from the refined abstraction of nature to the rustic imitation of it.

3.3.1 Bronze Age peak sanctuaries

As with Greek religion in general, the peak sanctuary has its roots in the Minoan-Mycenaean age. Bronze Age peak sanctuaries emerged around 2000 BC in view from settlements (and other peaks) as places of sacrifice and fire. There is no certainty to which gods these were dedicated. Burkert (1984:28) speculates that these sites were closely linked with Eastern cultic rituals such as the Canaanite fire sacrifices to Baal on mountains, notably on Sapan – the “Mount Olympus of the Near East” (Fox 2009:246).³ This serves as some evidence that classical topomythopoiesis originated from a syncretism of diverse Mediterranean cultures. With the lack of literary evidence from the Minoan civilisation, we cannot assume they regarded the peak sanctuaries as the *abodes* of the gods (Belis 2015:32), as indeed the Akkadians regarded Mount Sapan as the throne of Baal.⁴

The characteristic topography of a mountain as an ascent to the sky thrusts itself on the imagination as an obvious sacred *topos*, and the prominence of such lofty spaces of ritual in, especially Cretan civilisation, seems to not require much explanation: there on the low-lying hills outside the cities, above the drudgery of daily life, the Minoans encountered higher-beings in states of ecstatic vision (Peatfield & Morris 2012). However, one must be careful

² These are the opening lines of Hesiod’s *Theogony* (c. 730–700 BC), a poem that provided a history and genealogy of the Greek gods.

³ For a full discussion of the Near Eastern sacred mountain, see Clifford’s *The Cosmic Mountain in the Near East and Old Testament* (2010).

⁴ The Minoans may have regarded the higher mountains – not the lower peaks nearby settlements – as sacred in themselves (Belis 2015:32). Further evidence for the significance of mountains in Minoan iconography is the famous ‘horns of consecration’ statues found at Minoan palaces: commonly understood as abstracted bull’s horns, yet these may rather be a symbol of twin peaks framing the rising sun, as found in Ancient Egypt and the Near East.

to not overemphasise the role of the natural environment (and its strangeness) in the enchanted experience of the peak sanctuaries. Burkert (1984:84–85) and Briault (2007:125)⁵ warn against the environmental determinist formula, which I paraphrase: since a location surely *felt* sacred due to its distinctive geographic identity, it became the site for a sanctuary. Rather, they argue, it is the presence of artefacts such as the myriad of figurines of animals, humans and human votive limbs, pebbles and clay pottery that sacralises space. Yet, the pattern of sanctuaries that consistently occur on distinct sites like peaks and caves suggest that, albeit perhaps not for the felt sacredness of the environment *au naturel*, such sites were chosen for their aptness for ritual. Indeed, according to Nixon (2009:271) the natural milieu, not constructed interventions, was more important in setting the scene of rural sanctuaries for Minoan palatial religion, and Marinatos (2004:35) has argued that trees and stones may have “designated a holy spot”. Such natural objects were possibly used as ritualistic devices: worshippers shaking trees – a common theme in Minoan representations of epiphany – may have served to evoke the presence of the deity, while stones may have been used for lounging to enter a dream state (Marinatos 2004:36).

Minoan peak sanctuaries did not include images of gods,⁶ but images of the worshippers (Peatfield & Morris 2012:229): “A most interesting coincidence between Homer and the Minoan world is the absence of cult statues. Votive gifts... are intended to delight and not represent or incorporate [the gods]” (Dietrich 1994:64). Early classical topomythopoiesis thus relied on the invisible presence of gods, albeit they were not *faved*.⁷

The presence of a constructed altar was limited to exceptional cases such as Juktas. Other built interventions, not essential or consistently present, are processional paths and rock-hewn ramps, and low stone-wall boundaries like those at Atsipades and Zou Priniias (Belis 2015:27). During the Second Palace Period (1700–1450 BC) some peak sanctuaries included temples (Burkert 1984:27). Some were located near springs or other distinctive natural features: Juktas, according to Soetens (2009), was chosen for its chasms on the peak, thus creating an *axis mundi* between the underworld, earth and sky, and due to the location of nearby springs, a place for rituals that beg for rain. Similar sites are found on the Greek mainland in the Late Bronze Age Mycenaean civilisation, sharing similarities with their Cretan forebears, yet research is lacking.

⁵ Briault (2007:122–141) has shown that sites, not on peaks, were used similarly and thus inferred that the geographic location was not a fixed criteria for these sites.

⁶ At least, no cult statues have been found (Burkert 1984:27).

⁷ Marinatos (2004:31) notes that, on golden rings representing epiphanies, the worshipper (shaking a tree, for example) does not look directly at the apparition of the god, perhaps out of fear.

3.3.2 Hellenic origins of the conical mound type

Greek religion took on its recognisable, Hellenic form in the ninth and eighth centuries BC following the hypothetical (and mytho-historical) attacks from the Sea Peoples around 1200 BC and the north-south ‘Dorian’ migration that brought an assimilation of the Indo-Europeans into native, Mycenaean language and culture. The mountain (*oros*) of Olympos became mythologised as the abode of the twelve anthropomorphic and universal gods. Place-bound nature deities such as nymphs survived. Although the famous snowy, inaccessible peak of Olympos was (probably) not itself a setting for ritual and its iconography never truly absorbed into the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, its divine inhabitants were venerated in other lofty liminal spaces between earth and sky.

The practice of rituals on mountains thus continued from the Minoan-Mycenaean into the Hellenic period, but the location of sanctuaries shifted from the hills in close proximity to cities, to the far-off high peaks – physically and conceptually separate from the plains and cities (Buxton 1992:2). Here, as at other Hellenic sanctuaries, the worshippers *faced* the material representation of gods:⁸ the presence of an anthropomorphic statue, often of a singular deity, thus emerges as a characteristic of classical topomythopoiesis. Unlike the later Roman sculptural showcases, the gods were not exposed, but veiled behind the colonnades and screens of temples. The cult statue was not generally believed to have been the host for the god (who shared the same ontological space with humans), and it was only until late antiquity that rituals were performed to ensoul or animate statues (Johnston 2008) – this art of *telestike* was revived during the Renaissance by the Neoplatonists and caused some garden statues to be viewed with suspicion (such as the Venus Felix discussed in 5.5.6).

Mountain sanctuaries were not only dedicated to the obvious gods of heights such as Zeus, but to almost all of the pantheon. Notable deities associated with peaks were the nymphs, Pan Artemis Agrotera (the huntress), Apollo and Hermes. Some sanctuaries were densely populated with furnishings for ritual drinking and dining. Some were approached on processional paths passing fountains and cisterns. As with their Minoan forebears, these sanctuaries were populated with votive offerings (Belis 2015:55), but contained very little in the form of architectural interventions. The altar (often only being an accumulated heap of ash) is often the only visible remnant of the sanctuary (Belis 2015:1). Some of the ash heaps became formalised over time, like the one outside the temple of Zeus at Olympia (Figure 3.1). These mountable, conical ash altars can opportunistically be interpreted as proto-types for the artificial, conical mounds of later classical topomythopoiesis.

⁸ For a full discussion of Greek religious experience in relation to the cult statue, see Platt (2011).



Figure 3.1. Friedrich Adler, Ash mound and Temple of Zeus (c. 463 BC), Olympia, Greece, 1894; reconstructed perspective (Curtius & Adler 1896, Plate 132).

Another, perhaps more plausible, prototype is the tumulus:⁹ earthen mounds, some with internal chambers, used as settings for burial (and rarely sacrifice) found throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age Mediterranean region.¹⁰ On mainland Greece, such funeral mounds were used from the Helladic period and forms part of the milieu of epic poetry:

Then they traced the compass of the barrow and set forth the foundations thereof round about the pyre, and forthwith they piled the up-piled earth. And when they had piled the barrow, they set them to go back again (Homer, *Il.* 23.255–256).

This description of the making of the tumulus of Patroklos in the *Iliad* sets the scene for Achilles circulating the tomb while dragging Hector's dead body behind his chariot at the start of Book 24. McGowan (2016:173) uses this episode as an example of the violent acts that were often associated with tumuli in Greek myth. A trope that recurs within the tumulus milieu is the mourning for a deceased hero (McGowan 2016:175), often someone at the peak of their youth, dead before their time. The use of such mounds for burial waned by the Archaic period and were no longer fashionable by the time young blood stained the field of Marathon in 490 BC. Yet, to heroize the fallen, the Athenians created two tumuli that still stand today (Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2). Whitley (1994:228) argues that this outdated burial practice points towards a deliberate evocation of the Homeric burial practices of the *Iliad*. As an artificial landform born from a religious prototype and created to evoke a myth, the mounds of

⁹ An interesting example, where the garden mound is literally the offspring of a Neolithic tumulus, is the Marlborough Mound in Wiltshire England that was appropriated as a garden mound in the sixteenth century, complete with a grotto.

¹⁰ See Celka's (2012) discussion on the origins of tumuli in mainland Greece during the Helladic period, which remains uncertain, but is probably related to the Neolithic practices found in the wider Mediterranean region.

Marathon can be identified as early examples of classical topomyths.



Figure 3.2. Tumulus, Marathon, Athens, Greece, c. 490 BC (Sulosky Weaver 2016:218).

Regarding the virtual landscape of the mound, it was not the drama of mourning that was evoked by later topomyths, neither the dark image of the mountain as dangerous, wild, violent, deadly and irrational.¹¹ Rather, it was the literary mountain as a poetic wilderness for quiet reflection and inspiration that was mostly associated with gardens. Hesiod describes, in the very opening of his *Theogony* (c. 700 BC), the Muses in a mountaintop sanctuary on Helicon singing and dancing around a deep spring and altar, from where they frolicked to bathe in the fountain forged by Pegasus. On nearby Mount Parnassus,¹² above the oracle of Delphi, did the god of music and poetry dwell in his lovely place overlooking the springs of the nymphs Cassotis and Castalia from which, by Roman times, poets quenched their thirst for verse (Parke 1978:206).¹³ Apollo's cheerful and lofty locus of creative inspiration, real-and-

¹¹ In mythology, mountains were often places of violent encounters between mortals and gods or monsters (like the Sphinx of Mount Phikion). The god is often 'caught off guard', for example when a lone wander – to his demise – stumbles upon a goddess bathing, as in the story of Actaeon and Artemis.

¹² Later intermingled with Helicon (Cellauro 2003:42).

¹³ The loveliness of Parnassus was described by an Anonymous poet in *To Delian Apollo* (l. 520), hymn 3 from the *The Homeric Hymns* (1914). The *Hymns* were a collection of anonymous poems dedicated to individual gods, attributed to Homer during antiquity.

imagined,¹⁴ was evoked in the gardens of classical topomythopoiesis, especially during the Renaissance, by metaphor, statues and artificial mounds (5.2).

3.3.3 Hellenistic monumentalisation

He has every snowy crest and the mountain peaks and rocky crests for his domain; hither and thither he goes through the close thickets, now lured by soft streams, and now he presses on amongst towering crags and climbs up to the highest peak that overlooks the flocks. Often he courses through the glistening high mountains, and often on the shouldered hills he speeds along slaying wild beasts, this keen-eyed god (Anonymous, *To Pan*).¹⁵

The artificial mounds of the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods were created within or as sacred settings of ritual. To find such mythical *topoi* in gardens, we need to turn to the Hellenistic period during which mythopoeic spaces became subsumed as delineated *encounters* within larger designed landscapes. References to myth *were* included in earlier, Hellenic gardens, but only in the form of iconographic elements such as masks “representing gods associated with the soil... often hung temporarily during annual festivals such as those of the sowing season” (Bowe 2010:214). The turn towards a topomythopoiesis that sought delight beyond the light of divinity, can be ascribed to the changing reception of the myths from around the fourth century before Christ when scepticism, widespread literacy and abstract thinking toppled the Olympian gods as the bearers of truth, although keeping them alive as subjects for poetry (Segal 1971:372–373) and, by extension, the art of place-making.¹⁶ Secularisation already began in the late sixth century, with the pre-Socratic philosophers (like Anaximandros and Anaximenes) who started giving matter-of-fact descriptions of the *kosmos* – no longer poetic and storied, but prosaic and abstract.

It needn't be overstated here that the expansion of the Greek world towards the East following the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) resulted in growing wealth, ambitious city-building and the monumentalisation and geometrisation of gardens and parks following Persian examples. Within one such park, the royal gardens of Alexandria, stood a

¹⁴ The term ‘real-and-imagined’ was used by Edward Soja (1996:11) to describe a definition of space that simultaneously combines its material and mental dimensions.

¹⁵ Hymn 19 from *The Homeric Hymns* (1914).

¹⁶ However, this is not to say that secularisation was universal and that there was no religion in the Hellenistic period: Henrich (1984:140) states that *private* piety increased, hero cults were established and some mythical deities like Demeter became regarded as ‘miracle workers’. Also, for some like the legendary Hermes Trismegistus Asclepius, the statues of gods were no mere objects of art, but were conscious and ensouled.

hill ascended by a spiral path dedicated to the god Pan, hence called Paneion.¹⁷ The horned goat-god roamed the wilderness where, during the Hellenic period, his sanctuaries were found in rustic settings such as Mount Lykaion. Within the grid of Alexandria we now find him on a civilised mountain – a simulacrum of his native ‘towering crags’. Although the mound may have been constructed as a religious space for sacrifice and mantic dancing, our only historic description of it recounts a rather more secular experience:

In short, the city of Alexandria abounds with public and sacred buildings. The most beautiful of the former is the Gymnasium, with porticos exceeding a stadium in extent. In the middle of it are the court of justice and groves. Here also is a Paneium, an artificial mound of the shape of a fir-cone, resembling a pile of rock, to the top of which there is an ascent by a spiral path. From the summit may be seen the whole city lying all around and beneath it (Strabo, *Geography* 7.1.8–10).

This account from the first century BC by the Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC–AD 24), who had a penchant for describing views from mountains, has been interpreted by Bowe (2010:2018) to indicate that the mound satisfied the “desire to look beyond the enclosure of a garden”. If so, we thus see a shift in the experience of mythopoeic places from religious epiphany to aesthetic delight.¹⁸

3.3.4 Roman monumentalisation

Strabo (*Geography* 5.3.8) also scribed an account of an artificial, Roman mound. Describing the verdurous Campus Martius in Rome, he noted the presence of a number of burial mounds, highlighting one in particular:

The most remarkable of these is that designated as the Mausoleum, which consists of a mound of earth raised upon a high foundation of white marble, situated near the river, and covered to the top with ever-green shrubs. Upon the summit is a bronze statue of Augustus Cæsar, and beneath the mound are the ashes of himself, his relatives, and friends. Behind is a large grove containing charming promenades.

Like the Paneion, the Mausoleum of Augustus (Figure 3.3) stood in a public park. Based on the description, this artificial mound was more for looking at, than for looking

¹⁷ Earthen funerary and commemorative mounds were a part of Greek place-making typology, but this was, according to Bowe (2010:218), a first for a garden or park. Other examples of Hellenistic garden mounds are unknown to this author. The mausoleum of Alexander the Great, also in Alexandria, is also sometimes thought of as a man-made mountain based on the description by Lucan (AD 39–65) in his *Pharsalia* as an *extracto monte*. However, the literal translation of this as a ‘constructed mountain’ has, according to Chugg (2003), wrongly been interpreted as an artificial mount, as the Latin *mons* simply refers to anything of great height. Chugg (2003:80-81) argues that the mausoleum probably resembled the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.

¹⁸ This follows the general tendency of the Hellenistic period to value gardens for their “aesthetic effect” (Bowe 2010:217) rather than merely for their production of food.

from. Also, the text makes no reference to myth, yet we cannot dismiss it as an example of topomythopoiesis too easily. Constructed during Augustus's lifetime (63 BC–AD 14) on the eve of Empire in 28 BC, the structure is a synthesis of the tumulus and the tholos (Reeder 1992): a conical mound of earth¹⁹ (supported on a drum) topped by a circular temple with an earthen roof crowned by a statue.

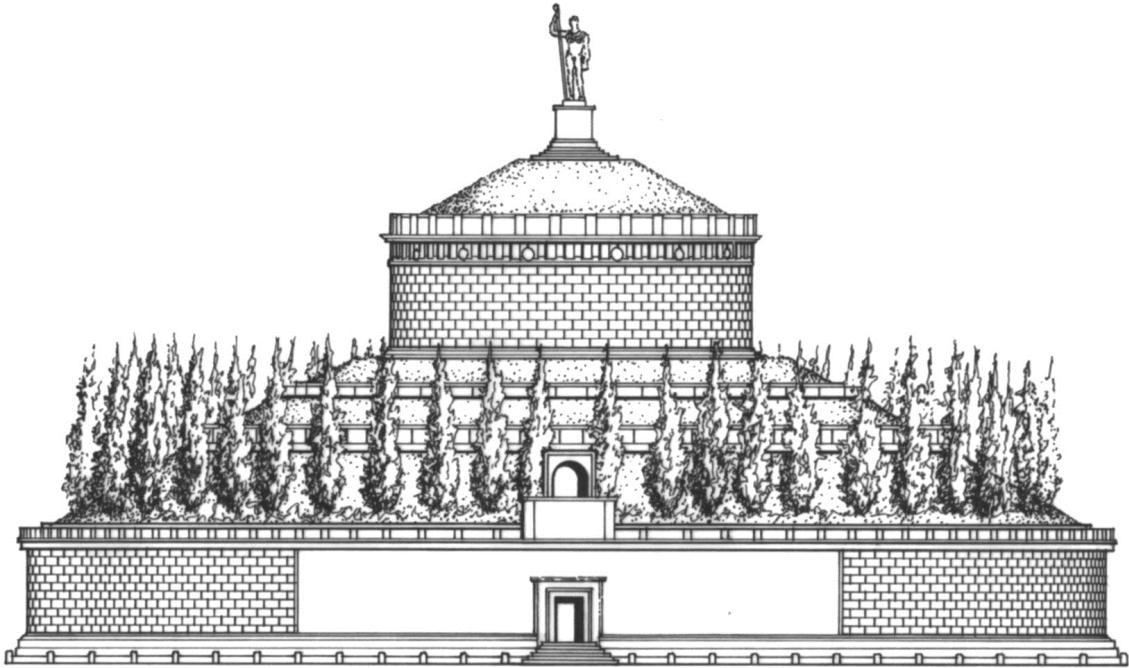


Figure 3.3. Mausoleum of Augustus, Rome, Italy, 28 BC; reconstructed elevation (Yegül & Favro 2019:210).

According to Holloway (1966:173), the tomb was unprecedented in Rome and *not* based on Etruscan tumuli as many scholars had thought, but rather a deliberate evocation of the Trojan burial mounds featured in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the latter composed by Virgil in the years directly preceding the construction of the Mausoleum:²⁰

High o'er the field there stood a hilly mound,
 Sacred the place, and spread with oaks around,
 Where, in a marble tomb, Dercennus lay,
 A king that once in Latium bore the sway (*Aeneid* 11.852–855).

¹⁹ A Medieval legend recorded in the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* (c. 1143) by Benedict, canon of St Peter's, explained the earth mound as the result of heaps of soil brought from all over the Empire as a means to memorialise the Emperor, on his instruction (Riccomini 1995:265).

²⁰ Reeder (1992:266) points out that Holloway's hypothesis of the tomb of Augustus being the earliest Roman round tomb does not hold, following a later study of Roman tomb tumuli in suburban Rome. However, this does not disqualify the possibility that a conceptual link was made with the tombs of the *Aeneid*. And, as Reeder also points out, influences beyond the Italian peninsula were likely. As it stands, the influence for the tomb remains conjectural.

The literary mythopoiesis of Virgil was the culmination of a long history of gods travelling from Greece to Rome: historically, Greek mythology was transplanted to Italy at the beginning of the eighth century BC by the establishment of Greek colonies in Sicily and southern Italy, heralding “the development of an impressive store of legendary narratives and mythographic constructions linking the heroic world of the Greeks with local Italian traditions, either by mixing them or by linking them” (Pallattino 1992:27). Thus, the myths that were to become part of the Roman religious and literary traditions – and find their way into Virgil – were largely derived from the Greek tradition. By evoking these stories in designed landscapes like the Mausoleum, Roman topomythopoiesis can be understood as a continuation of the classical tradition.

If Holloway’s theory holds, then the mound was meant to deliberately evoke the myth that sought to establish Augustus as the semi-divine ancestor of Aeneas and torch-bearer of Greek civilization; classical topomythopoiesis imbued with political propaganda as employed later by popes, princes and poets.²¹

Thus understood, Augustus ‘as gardener’ created the mound as an addition to the fabric of sacred groves and trees of the city that hark back to the very mytho-historic foundations of the city: Strabo (*Geography* 5.3.3) reported of the myth that the city of Rome was, even before Romulus and Remus, an Arcadian colony established by King Evander who, amongst other things, consecrated a grove for Hercules and whose mother, Carmentis, was worshipped by the Romans as a nymph in a grove. Such sacred topomythopoiesis continued throughout the city’s history and by the Late Republic elites deliberately “embraced new and pre-existing sacred sites and tombs in urban and rural estates, and tried to seem attentive gardeners of historic trees at Rome’s ancient holy spots” (Kuttner 1999:10). Fifteen hundred years later, when Julius II (a neo-Augustus) commissioned the Belvedere Court as an artificial Parnassus on the Vatican hill where Apollo’s cult flourished in antiquity, he was heir to a long tradition of rulers who stewarded the mythopoeic gardenscape of Rome (5.3.2).

The Mausoleum was used for various purposes throughout its history. During the sixteenth century, it was turned into a garden of statues “frequented by artists as well as antiquarians and other devotees of classical antiquity” (Riccomini 1995:265). It is satisfying to imagine that the ruins of the Mausoleum, much like the sculptures of gods in the Vatican Belvedere, influenced the Renaissance making of mythical garden mounds such as the

²¹ For an example of papal propaganda, see the brief discussion of Julius II’s Belvedere Court in 5.3.2; for royal propaganda see 6.1.1; for political commentary Ian Hamilton Finlay’s *Apollon terroriste* (Figure 1.2).

Parnassus in the Villa Medici. Unfortunately for such a neat hypothesis, the Mausoleum was rid of its earthen roof by then and was experienced as an open-air, cylindrical walled garden. However, the reconstruction drawings (varied as they are) of the time show an awareness of its mount-like past, so perhaps the theory is not too far-fetched.²² More plausibly, the Mausoleum with its mound-tholos combination can be interpreted as a prototype of the temple-topped hills of later topomythopoeic gardens like Stourhead and Wörlitzer Park (Figure 9.3). The architecture for these eighteenth century topomyths were specifically derived from another Roman artefact, namely the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli (Figure 3.4). The topomyth can also be seen in a twentieth century proposal for a war memorial in Pretoria, South Africa by Herbert Baker (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.4. Left: Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich, *Falls of the Aniene*, Tivoli, Italy, 1755 (The State Hermitage Museum, 5778). The painting shows the romanticised view of the Temple of Vesta as seen by eighteenth century travellers.

Figure 3.5. Right: Herbert Baker, *Proposed War Memorial Above Union Buildings on Meinjes Kopje*, Pretoria, South Africa, 1918 (RIBA, 4534). Baker visited a number of Greek temples during a visit in 1901 in preparation for a war memorial in Kimberley that also remained unbuilt.

The Romans not only created topomyths to evoke their mytho-historical past, but also

²² See, for example, the engravings of the Mausoleum by Etienne Du Pérac, 1575 (in Riccomini 1995:267) and Alò Giovannoli, 1619. It must be noted that there was no uncertainty that the Mausoleum used to be a towering structure, as can be seen in the reconstruction drawing by Pirro Ligorio following excavations of the monument in 1549, albeit not as a planted tumulus, but a series of cylindrical, architectonic, terraces. However, Cellauro (2003:43) cites Coffin's argument (from his *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome*, 1991) that, rather, the mounds of Renaissance gardens were a genetic offspring of the medieval garden mound. Yet, Ribouillault (2019:384) claims that the artificial mound in the Villa Medici in Rome was indeed an explicit reference to the Mausoleum.

the mythical realms of the conquered Hellenistic world: Hadrian's villa famously contains "contrived and allusive landscapes" (MacDonald & Pinto 1995:5), like the Serapeum and Canopus, that recalled scenes from his travels. The iconography of such geographic souvenirs would often be revealed by their names, like the propensity to call water channels in gardens 'Nile' (MacDonald & Pinto 1995:5). A rare example of a mound-like memento is the stepped fountain at the garden of Octavius Quarto in Pompeii. Giesecke (2016) speculates that it evoked the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Egyptian pyramids or ziggurats.

Apart from such oddities and burial mounds like the Mausoleum, free-standing artificial mounds evoking myths remained, as during preceding ages, a rare feature of Roman place-making.²³ Perhaps this was due to the Romans' ambivalence towards mountain scenery, of which they were rather silent in comparison to the Greeks (Hyde 1915:78). Even the loose meaning of the Latin *mons*, anything with great height, betrays a disinterest (Hyde 1915:80). Or perhaps the views towards real hills and mountains were so common in the undulating Italian landscape that there was no need to re-create them. A case in point is the view from a room in the House of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreal through a window to faraway hills, framed by a painted craggy mountainscape enveloping a numinous grotto: a real-and-imagined scene in which "art and nature collided" (Kuttner 1999:19) – mountain mythopoiesis through a *trompe-l'œil* with a view (Figure 3.6).

3.3.5 Roman origins of the terraced mount

The morphology of the terraced mount has its roots in the structured terraces and stairways of Egyptian and Hellenistic monumental precincts built on steep sites.²⁴ However, it is the Roman hillside temple complex of Fortuna Primigenia in Praeneste (Figure 3.7) that was fortunate to become the primary precedent for the terraced mounts of classical topomythopoiesis. Built in the second century BC on the site of an older cave sanctuary outside Rome in Latium, this monumental composition in itself reflects how classical topomythopoiesis in antiquity developed from earlier natural sanctuaries with limited

²³ On a less monumental scale, some private Roman gardens also contained burial mounds like one found at Scafati, Italy (Bodel 2017) – *tumuli* similar to those of Helladic Greece. Yet, I could not find any evidence for myths that were explicitly evoked by them.

²⁴ For an Egyptian example, see the temple of Hatshepsut. Although it is not certain whether it served as a precedent for terraced structures like the temple complex of Fortuna Primigenia, its influence is possible: in one of the latter's grottoes, the Roman fascination with Egypt is captured in the so-called Nile mosaic. Hellenistic influence is more certain: following the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic world, its craftsmen and designers came to work on Italian projects, bringing with them skill and knowledge of ornament-carving and terrace construction (Kuttner 1995:161).

architectural interventions, to artificial architectural showcases subsuming nature.



Figure 3.6. Fresco on bedroom wall, House of P. Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale, c. 50–40 BC (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 03.14.13a–g).

The series of parallel terrace walls perpendicular to the main axis, punctured with arched niches (sometimes as grottoes), double staircases and ramps became staple elements of Renaissance and ensuing gardens such as Baker’s design of a terraced garden in front of the Union Buildings mentioned earlier.

More specifically, Hunt (1996:61) has shown how the uppermost ensemble (beneath the crowning circular temple) of a colonnaded hemicycle approached by a set of convex and concave stairs became a popular garden feature after it had been incorporated into the Belvedere Court, and documented in Sebastian Serlio’s influential treatise on architecture, *I sette libri dell’architettura* (1537–1575) (Figure 6.23). Not all terraced mounts – freestanding or on hillsides – have explicit mythical associations, but there are some striking examples such as the Baroque theatre in the gardens of the Isola Bella, Lake Maggiore: its prancing Pegasus betrays its aspirations to be a Parnassus of creativity (Hunt 1996:62).

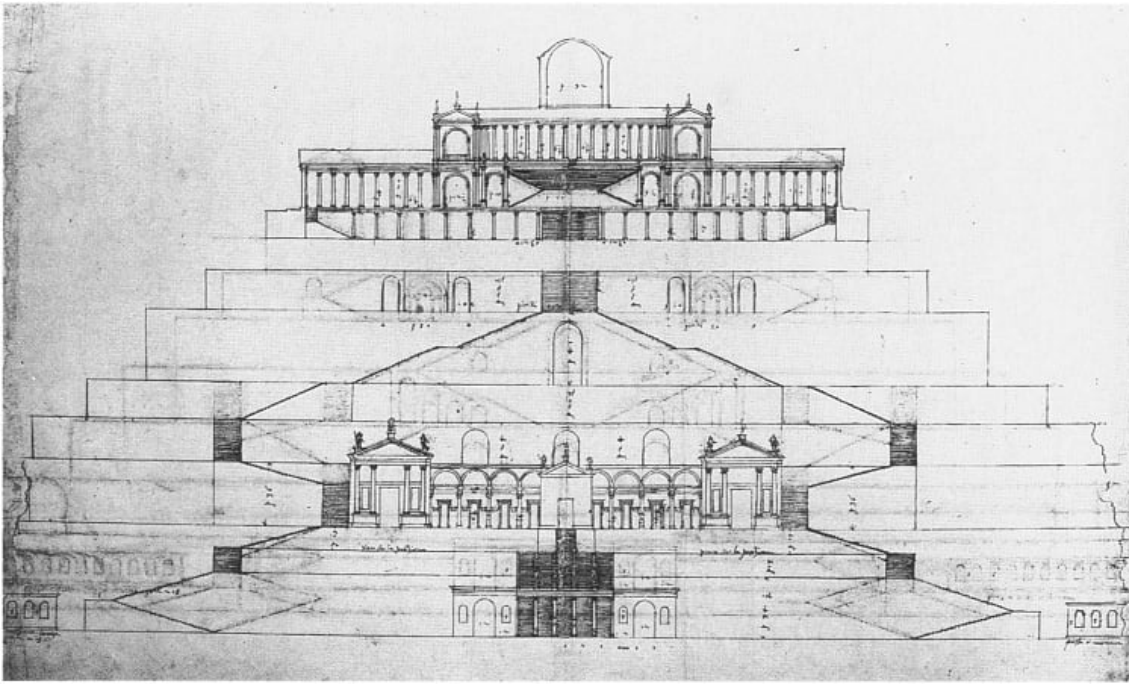


Figure 3.7. Andrea Palladio, Temple complex of Fortuna Primigenia (second century BC), Praeneste, 1560; reconstructed elevation (Royal Institute of British Architects, 125383).

3.3.6 Ovid and the beauty of tragedy

The Roman artefact that had the greatest lasting influence on the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis was not a monumentalised *topos*, but rather a collection of Greek myths retold in the first decade of the first century AD during the reign of Augustus: Ovid (43 BC – c. AD 17) created a series of aetiologies of things formed from unwilling bodies.

The *Metamorphoses* surpassed Virgil’s pastoral *Aeneid* and *Georgics* as a source-book for topomythopoiesis,²⁵ in spite of the violence and rape that arbitrarily and constantly penetrates Ovid’s peaceful landscape.²⁶ Or perhaps it is because of this emphasis on individual tragedy over collective triumph that ensured its allure:²⁷ unlike Virgil, Ovid did not create a metapoetic epic that attempted to guide the Romans towards the moral and patriotic society that Augustus sought to engineer. With its emphasis on “private experience” (Segal 1971:378) rather than “themes of social and cosmic order” (ibid.), Ovid represented the myths in a new light: by enlightening the myths of their moral and religious gravity, he

²⁵ That is not to say that Virgil did not influence garden-making in later ages, as will be seen throughout this thesis. For now, one only has to think of the evocation of the *Aeneid* at Stourhead, and the numerous quotes that appear in the works of Ian Hamilton Finlay.

²⁶ Segal (1969) analysed how Ovid’s landscape turns the peaceful refuge of the pastoral tradition on its head by ‘metamorphosing’ them into places of violent encounters.

²⁷ Morgan (2015:6) has also noted Segal’s interpretation of the juxtaposition of violence and pleasantness as being deliberately employed by Renaissance garden designers, such as those of Bomarzo, to evoke both the “*topophobic* responses as well as *topophilic* ones (both terror and delight)”.

stamped on them a “quality of secular grace and sensuous freedom” (Segal 1971:387) that was to inspire the artists and garden-makers of late antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and from the Renaissance onwards to mimic the encounters between hapless individuals and the gods, enframed by natural settings – mirrors of our fragile existence in a cruel, chaotic, but beautiful world.²⁸

Yet, these tragic moments of terror are interrupted by moments of whimsy and humour, such as the image of someone catching a fish from an elm tree whilst the great, universal flood is busy destroying mankind as punishment by Jove (*Met.* 1.296). This image of the flood was evoked at Villa d’ Este (Cellauro 2003:48, citing Claudia Lazzaro’s hypothesis), as was Parnassus with its twin-peaks whereupon Deucalion and Pyrrha, according to Ovid’s tale, survived to become the progenitors of all mankind.

Most of his descriptions of topoi were not particularly original, and he parroted the tropes of the pastoral tradition: springs, caves, vales and, relevant for the present discussion, mountains. In the encounter of Minerva with the Muses, the mountain is merely named as a milieu:

To Helicon, where the Muses lived, and landing
 On the sacred mountain... (*Met.* 5.260–261).

The emphasis quickly shifts to other landscape types (fountain, grove, grotto, flowery meadow) found within the mountain-setting. Ovid thus maintained the Roman ambivalence towards mountain-descriptions, although they feature frequently in the *Metamorphoses*. They are given general descriptors like ‘sacred’ (see above) ‘rough’ (for the ranges whereupon Hyacinthus roamed with hunters, in 10.177) and ‘bleak’ (for Caucasus, in 8.800). Yet, nowhere do we find a description elucidating the sensory qualities of the mountain *itself*; nothing like the ‘towering crags’ as found in the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*. However, in the above episode on Helicon an ekphrasis by Urania of the Hippocrene Spring ensures that the myth of the mountain and its font is conserved:

‘And the tale is really true: Pegasus did,
 Indeed, produce our fountain.’ She led the goddess
 To the sacred water, and Minerva stood there,
 Admiring long, and looked at woods and grottoes
 And lawns, bejeweled with unnumbered flowers (*Met.* 5.274–278).

Indeed, according to Cellauro (2012:43) Ovid’s account of the Hippocrene is the

²⁸ For example, Apollo and the transformed Daphne (under 5.6.1), Latona and the transformed peasants (under 6.1.4).

source of the very first depiction of a “mount of the Muses in garden architecture” in the, now vanished, gardens of Antonio del Bufalo in Rome – both as a scene in a fresco painting and later constructed as a small Parnassus fountain. In terms of morphology, Hewlings (1995:48) identifies the conical *Meta Sudans*, ‘sweating cone’, in Rome (Figure 3.8) as the prototypical “artificial mountain fountain”.²⁹

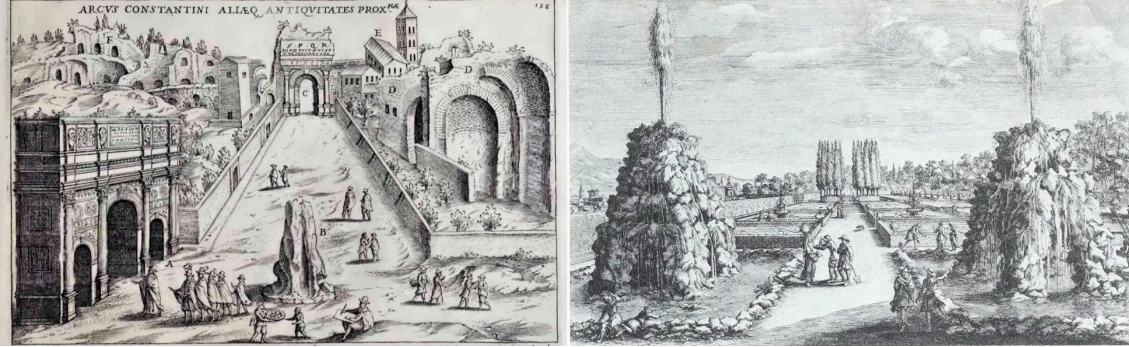


Figure 3.8. Left: Giacomo Lauro, *The Arch of Constantine and Other Antiquities*, 1630 (Lauro 1630, Plate 130). The drawing shows the *Meta Sudans* fountain (B), Rome, Italy, first century AD, as it appeared in the Renaissance. It remained until 1936.

Figure 3.9. Right: Francesco Venturini, Engraving of the *Meta sudanti*, Villa d’ Este, c. 1685 (Coffin 1960, Illustration 115). The Dupérac drawing of the original (built and unbuilt) gardens from 1573 show more conical and architectonic structures. The fountains were only realised in the early seventeenth century in more rusticated form.

Whereas the *morphology* of artificial mounds in classical topomythopoiesis can be traced back to such public fountains, actual peaks, ash heaps, burial mounds, terraced temples, the virtual landscape they evoke – which contain little of the blood-soaked rituals of the mountain sanctuaries – was cultivated by the poets like Homer, Hesiod and Ovid.

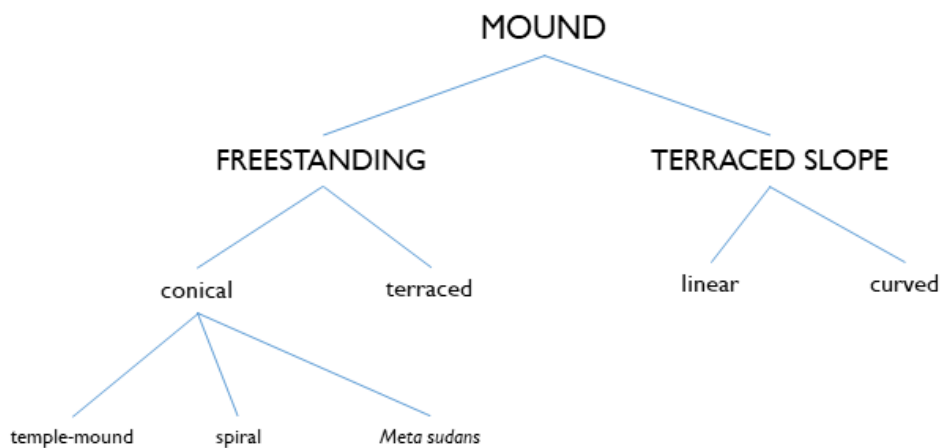


Figure 3.10. A taxonomy of the mound types of classical topomythopoiesis (Author 2023). All types can either be architectonic or naturalistic.

²⁹ This conical fountain was built in the first century in the vicinity of the Colosseum, functioning as a turning point for imperial processions.

3.4 FROM CAVE TO GROTTO

Would it not be a pretty cool habitation in summer, Dr. Johnson? ‘I think it would, Madam, for a toad’ (in Hunt 1992:77).³⁰

The origin of grottoes, like garden mounds, can be traced back to Minoan and Hellenic natural settings for ritual, taking on their recognisable artificial form through a process of architectural translation and monumentalisation from the Hellenistic period onwards.³¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I make the distinction between the *spatial* type and the *facade* type: the former can be entered (like the Stourhead grotto) and the latter is for looking at (like the *teatro dell’acqua* at Villa Aldobrandini).³² Both types can either appear naturalistic (Stourhead) or architectonic (Aldobrandini), or a combination.

The spatial type can be considered the genetic offspring of cave sanctuaries – places of descent into *darkness* (an interior experience). The facade type is the genetic offspring of the cave entrance and a celebration of the water spring, gushing forth from the earth into the *light* (an outside, and sometimes civic, experience). The two types are sometimes combined.

3.4.1 Bronze Age cave sanctuaries

On the island of Crete, the Minoans enacted their rituals not only on peaks, but on the opposite end of the *axis mundi* in the depths of the earth where in “these weird, dark, and barely accessible places an encounter with the sacred was sought” (Burkert 1985:24). Like the peak sanctuaries, these caves (especially during the Palatial Period) were some distance from settlements, and likewise differentiated from the plains: moments of shadowy strangeness in the sunburnt landscape. There too the worshippers did not commune with the gods in the presence of a cult statue, but sought their invisible presence. The rituals (of which little detail is known) within the cave were often performed in spaces of darkness and coolth; places sculpted with falling spires and bubbling cave formations, shimmering in pools

³⁰ This witty retort from Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) was made when a Lady from Lincolnshire showed him proudly her newly built grotto, which was a common spatial type of the English landscape garden of the eighteenth century – not liked by all.

³¹ The argument for the type’s origins in nature and its architectural translation during the Hellenistic and Roman periods was also made by Patrick Bowe (2013), describing the evolution as a “gradual transition from natural cave to artificial construct” (Bowe 2013:133). The longer history of the type is thoroughly treated by Mosser & Brunon in *L’imaginaire des grottes dans les jardins Européens* (2014), and Naomi Miller in her groundbreaking *Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto* (1994).

³² The term ‘façade nymphaea’ is also used by Aristodemou (2011).

of water.³³ These places of chiselled shadows are proto-typical of the naturalistic grottoes of classical topomythopoiesis: for example, Alexander Pope's (1963:707) description of his grotto at Twickenham in a letter to Lord Bolingbroke written in 1740, may as well be of the Psychro cave on Crete:

Where ling'ring drops from min'ral roofs distil,
And pointed crystals break the sparkling rill;
Unpolish'd gems no ray on pride bestow,
And latent metals innocently glow.

Other notable examples of Bronze Age ritual caves are found at Skotino, Vernopheto and Mount Ida. No singular 'cave deity' has been identified, although numerous gods were associated with the cave (Burkert 1985:26). These natural settings were largely left unaltered and unadorned. Only some have built altars, and artefacts were limited to crudely packed rubble in the shape of animals and, sometimes, drawings like that of the Mistress of the Animals at Vernopheto (Burkert 1985:24). Most archaeological remains are limited to votive offerings: clay pots, golden double axes, animal bones and tables for libation (Burkert 1985:25). Minoan topomythopoiesis thus largely consisted of furnishing natural spaces, not of mimicking nature.

A possible exception may be the *adyton*³⁴ (previously known as 'lustral basins') found in the Minoan palaces like Knossos. Following an argument first made by Spyridon Marinatos in 1941, Campbell (2013) speculates that these sunken, rectilinear rooms were used for cleansing rituals (not bathing as was initially thought) and spatially symbolise the descent into the earth related to chthonic religion. If the *adyton* were indeed architectonic abstractions of caves, then they are an early example of artificial, indoor and spatial grottoes within the tradition, and loosely similar in conception to the indoor nymphaea of Hellenistic and Roman houses.

The use, sacredness and renown of some of the Minoan caves survived into the Greek Archaic period (and beyond into Hellenistic and Roman times at places like Sphakia) and were written into the mythical topography of ancient Greece: the cave of Mount Ida (and others) became the birthplace of Zeus, and his daughter Eileithyia (the Greek goddess of birth) came to dwell in the chthonic womb of Amnisos near Knossos. The Minoan caves of ritual were thus partially absorbed into the virtual landscape of classical topomythopoiesis.

³³ For a full description of Minoan cave sanctuaries and their environmental characteristics, see Tyree (2013).

³⁴ Meaning 'off limits', also used to describe the innermost sanctuary of Greek temples.

3.4.2 Hellenic origins of the bucolic cave

Worship in caves continued into the Hellenic period on mainland Greece, albeit playing only a peripheral role in Greek religion (Burkert 1984:85). There is no clear evidence of artificially constructed caves during this time,³⁵ but caves³⁶ became increasingly artificial: the construction of loose or rock-hewn furniture, steps between levels, floors for dancing, water troughs and altars served as functional additions. Cultic activity included animal sacrifice and the dedication of offerings, including plants, libations, ceramic pottery (cheaply made), jewellery and terracotta figures. Based on existing evidence, the main difference between the Hellenic and the earlier Minoan cave sanctuaries is the presence of images of deities, outside or within the cave. These, although not always present, were sculpted or painted “presumably, with the intention of assisting visitors in summoning a divine presence” (Bowe 2013:131). Participation with the virtual landscape of the cave was further prompted by inscriptions (Bowe 2013:132). The presence of text to evoke the virtual within the material landscape became a common device within classical topomythopoiesis, from the conjuring of nymphs with the words of Pope in the Stourhead grotto to Ian Hamilton Finlay’s Latin quips.

As with all Greek sanctuaries, the cave was not dedicated to a specific set of deities – neither only to those with a “chthonic aura” (Larson 2001:227) – although the most frequent dedications were to those gods that came to populate the grottoes of classical topomythopoiesis: Apollo and the Muses, Pan and Poseidon.³⁷ However, the earliest cave sanctuaries were not dedicated to these Olympian gods, but to the nymphs (Pierce 2006:1) who “represent partly the moral neutrality of the intermediate world of nature and partly a world of mystery which is glimpsed but never seen, and which retreats when approached...”

³⁵ In the cave of the nympholept Pantalkes in Thessaly, an inscription states that “Herakles gave [Pantalkes] strength and *areté* and power with which he struck these stones and built them up”, yet it is unlikely the cave was actually constructed by human hands. The English translation of the inscription appears in Connor (1988:163). Larson (2001:227) mentions that “manmade caves were used only rarely”, yet she does not mention examples and couldn’t confirm any via personal communication (30 March 2021). The clay votive models of grottoes found at Locri do seem to indicate some artificial caves, but these may merely be natural caves dressed with interior architectural elements like ribbed arches.

³⁶ See Bowe (2013:128–129) for a discussion of the Greek’s fascination with the “geological phenomena” of caves.

³⁷ Often a number of gods are associated with a single cave. For example, in the previously mentioned inscription within the cave of Pantalkes, the cave is dedicated to Pan, Hermes, Apollo, Herakles, Chiron, Asklepios, Hygieia and the nymphs – each offering the worshipper a different gift in return for sacrifice and prayers. For example, Apollo gives health and Pan laughter.

(Frye 1990:196).

The physical and literary cave sanctuaries of the nymphs were, already from the time of writing *The Odyssey* in the eighth century BC, associated with a bucolic and even gardened setting enframing a *retreat*: as the irrigation channels and trained vine outside Calypso's home testify (*Od.* 5.50–80), the milieu of the nymph-cave is not one of untamed nature as conjured by the Pan-cave on the slopes of the Athenian acropolis.³⁸ Rather, the cave of Homer's nymph is a literary prototype for the garden-cave as a sexualised topography:³⁹ partially hidden amidst the cultivated verdure of thriving plants and bird-life lies the moist and sheltered space promising domestic care and divine seduction.⁴⁰ Whereas sex with the Olympian goddesses was hubris, such erotic encounters between mortal men and nymphs,⁴¹ often in caves, abound in Greek literature: “unlike the Olympian gods, one could feel an intimate bond, and the nymphs had a sensual, sexual aura shared by none of the Olympian goddesses except Aphrodite” (Larson 2001:10). The erotic dimension of the grotto remains part of its enchantment, as it was for the English artist Mary Delaney and her friend Margaret Harley at Bulstrode in the eighteenth century (Moore 2005:61). The presence of nymphs seem to both domesticate nature and ennoble its wildness with a calm air of order and delight, blowing through the trees, meadows and rivers of the landscape outside the *polis*. Such was the enchantment on the banks of the Ilissos River that intoxicated Socrates:

By Hera, it is a charming resting place. For this plane tree is very spreading and lofty, and the tall and shady willow is very beautiful, and it is in full bloom, so as to make the place most fragrant; then, too, the spring is very pretty as it flows under the plane tree, and its water is very cool, to judge by my foot. And it seems to be a sacred place of some nymphs and of Achelous, judging by the figurines and statues. Then again, if you please, how lovely and perfectly charming the breeziness of the place is! and it resounds with the shrill summer music of the chorus of cicadas (Plato, *Phaedrus* 230b–230c).

This oft cited description of a *locus amoenus* in which Socrates, later in the dialogue, “pulls extremes of free and controlled sexuality into the picture and implicitly hints at a

³⁸ Pan is also linked with caves. Buxton (1992:184) interprets the sanctuary to Pan on the slopes of Acropolis as a deliberate attempt to import something of the wild, rural primitive, pre-civilized Arcadia to the city.

³⁹ ‘Sexualised topography’ is a phrase by Turner (1982:357) that describes the erotic dimension of eighteenth century English gardens.

⁴⁰ Although the *locus amoenus* description of Calypso's cave in book 5 of the *Odyssey* is usually accepted as part of the seduction, Hogan (1976:191) counters that “if the seductive qualities of garden and grotto were described to illuminate the temptation of Odysseus, it is strange that the poet puts Hermes rather than Odysseus in this landscape”.

⁴¹ Erotic liaisons in caves are not limited to those between nymphs and men: for example, there is the story of the nightly visits of the moon god Selene to Endymion, lying eternally asleep in a cave on Mount Latmus.

tension between civic and rustic order” (Spencer 2010:17),⁴² enshrined the nymphs as inhabitants of spaces “intermediate between the untamed wild and the carefully tended field of grain or pruned orchard” (Larson 2007:58). Socrates is brought to a state of nympholepsy⁴³ into an almost poetic style of speech (Connor 1988:158). The poetic spell of the nymphs and the literary trope of the nymph-cave in the garden was literally imitated by nympholepts like Archedemos and Pantalkes who dedicated their lives towards tending and adorning cave sanctuaries (Figure 3.11), including by cultivating gardens outside the entrances.⁴⁴



Figure 3.11. Relief of Archedemos the Nympholept, Vari Cave, Attica, Greece, sixth century BC (Manske 2007).

The reasons for visiting these cult caves of the nymphs were various: from rituals around marriage, birth and healing (in association with Asklepios), hunting, divination and

⁴² Spencer (2010:17) argues that the invocation of Hera (in another part of the text) represents controlled sexuality, as opposed to the nymphs’ more free associations.

⁴³ Meaning, ‘seized by the nymphs’.

⁴⁴ Connor (1988:169 fn. 43) notes that the original excavator of the Vari cave, Richard Chandler, thought that the gardens of the Vari cave must have been like the ‘gardens of Adonis’, those short-lived gardens planted in shallow soils and actually planted *within* the cave and not outside.

personal devotion.⁴⁵ Most of these were to fade from the repertoire of acts performed within the grottoes of classical topomythopoiesis. Yet, their function as a space to receive wisdom – as at Delphi – endures. Perhaps it is because such spaces *actually* do alter our states of consciousness, as Ustinova (2009) argues using modern neuroscience.

Thus, the Hellenic contribution to the grotto in classical topomythopoiesis was not so much morphological, but the literary image of the cave set within bucolic serenity; a strange place promising to fulfil the desire for love and wisdom.

3.4.3 Hellenistic development of the spatial type

It was only the Hellenistic period that saw the emergence of the artificial and semi-secularised grotto, both in its spatial and frontal guises. Bowe (2013:133) interprets the construction of an entrance to the cave of Hercules in Delos (in the form of granite boulders forming a pitched roof, see Figure 3.12) as “a transitional point to a practice of creating a fully artificial cave”.



Figure 3.12. Entrance to Herakles cave, Delos, third century BC (Bowe 2013:134).

Cave sanctuaries were *constructed* on the acropolis of Rhodes in the third and second centuries BC (Figure 3.13), marking a departure from the Minoan and Hellenic practice of merely furnishing and adorning natural caves. However, the Rhodian caves were not wholly artificial, but cut and built into the rocky cliffs of the existing geology (Rice 1995:386).

⁴⁵ For more detailed description of cultic functions, see Larson (2001:229)

Although not proven by the archaeological findings, Rice (1995:399) infers that some of the niches in the walls of the grottoes probably housed sculptures of nymphs similar to other Rhodian examples. In her discussion of Greek garden sculpture, Ridgway (1981:12–13) identifies Rhodes as a setting with special significance where some Hellenistic statues of gods had been found that were seemingly custom-made for aquatic settings, for example a nymph slipping from rocks into water, and a Pan-fountain. However, all interpretations of the meaning and setting of these sculptures are conjectural since no information exists on their settings or purposes (*ibid.*). What is certain, is the continuation of the importance of the presence of nymphs in watery, cavernous spaces. From the likely presence of their statues (and that of Pan), Rice (1995:402) argues that the artificial grottoes of Rhodes can be interpreted as an attempt to re-create the rural cave sanctuaries of the nymphs for ritualistic purposes.

In addition to the probable presence of anthropomorphic statues, the simulation of the rustic cave sanctuary was achieved by structural form and surface decoration. The grottoes of Rhodes consisted of rock-cut barrel vaulted passages and semi-domed and apsidal spaces, and contained pools of water and arched niches within walls for votive offerings. The use of the arch in the construction of artificial caves can be interpreted as a *geometrisation* of the structure of the natural cave ceiling. This is echoed in the arches depicted in the contemporaneous clay models of artificial, vaulted grottoes found in the *Grotta Caruso* at Locri in southern Italy, which Bowe (2013:134–133) interprets as “a new formalism or geometric purism in cave depiction”. Possibly, the models depict *rock-cut* grottoes such as those at Rhodes and not ones constructed with stone masonry.⁴⁶

The materiality of the natural cave was simulated at Rhodes with “painted plaster inlaid with pebbles and shells” (Rice 1995:397), reminiscent of the *conchophilia*⁴⁷ evident in later garden grottoes.

These sanctuaries, as part of a series of landscape spaces on the acropolis in Rhodes, became used as public places of respite (Rice 1955:403), much like the cemeteries in the USA were used for recreation during the nineteenth century. As with the latter example, this does not imply a complete secularisation of the cave sanctuary: granted the finding of votive artefacts, Rice (*ibid.*) argues against the hypothesis that the landscape spaces of Rhodes were purely “features of ornamental urban landscaping”. Like the Paneion in Alexandria, the

⁴⁶ One of the models depicts parabolic arches for which there is no known precedent in Greek architecture, indicating that it probably depicted a rock-cut, and not constructed grotto.

⁴⁷ A neologism meaning ‘love of shells’, from the book *Conchophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe* by Bass et al (2021).

Rhodian grottoes represent a new chapter in classical topomythopoiesis: the making of artificial topomyths in mimesis of nature that evoke myth to prompt participation towards an experience of epiphany *and* delight.

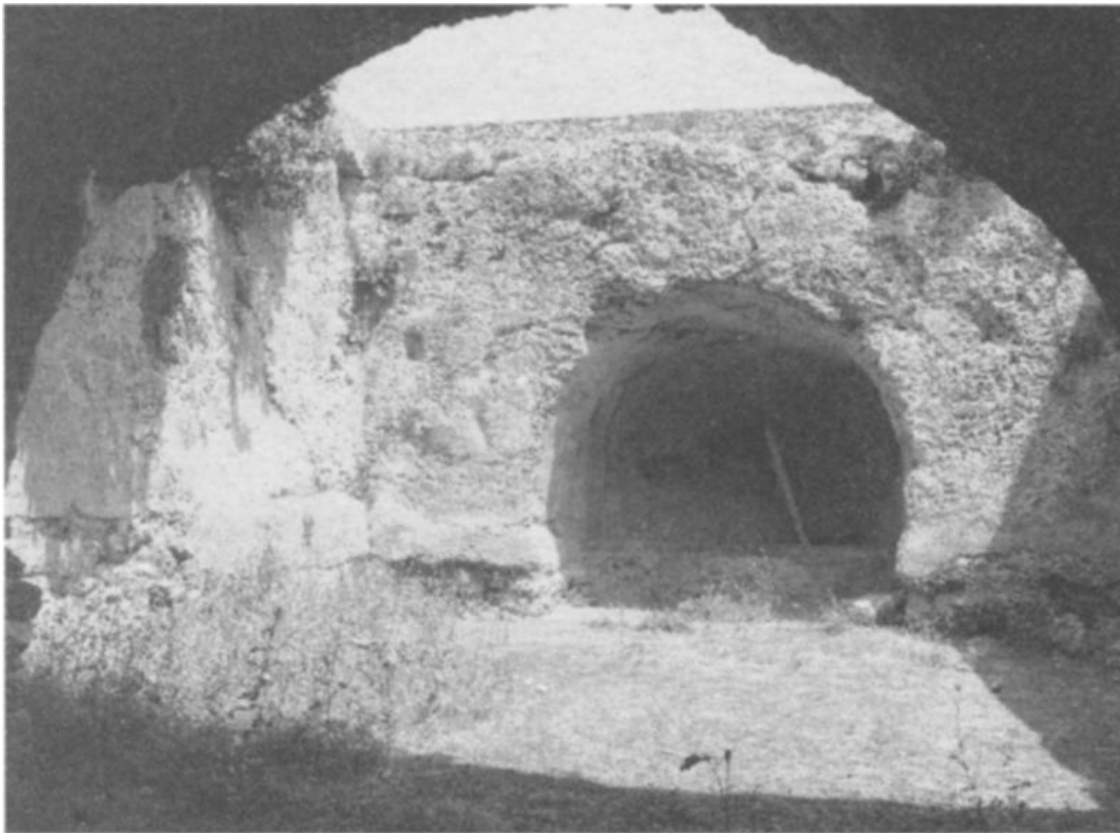


Figure 3.13. Grotto (system 2, north chamber), Rhodes, third to second century BC (Rice 1995:393).

3.4.4 Hellenistic development of the facade type

During the Renaissance, the facade type grotto became a common (sometimes automated) backdrop for garden theatres (Hunt 1996:63). The origin of the grotto as the *object* of theatrical spectacle, can be traced back to the pomp of the Ptolemies:⁴⁸ a procession through the streets of Alexandria in *c.* 275 BC⁴⁹ in celebration of the enthronement of Ptolemy II Philadelphus over Egypt featured a cart

drawn by five hundred men; in it was a deep cavern profusely shaded with ivy and yew. From this pigeons, ring-doves, and turtle-doves flew forth along the whole route... And from it also gushed forth two fountains, one of milk, the other of wine. And all the nymphs standing round him... (Athenaeus of Naucratis, *The Deipnosophistae of Athenaeus* 5.200c–d).

The imagery has been interpreted by Dunand (2007:256–257) as celebrating, as part of

⁴⁸ I was introduced to the Ptolemaic festival grottoes in Bowe (2013:134).

⁴⁹ The date for the festival is debated. Kuzmin (2017) argues for the date of 274/275 BC.

a series of displays, the life of Dionysos.⁵⁰ At Alexandria, the Ptolemaic kings used the image of the benefactor god of wine to propagate the ideal of *tryphē* (Dunand 2007:256): as Dionysos blessed them with wine and its pleasures, so doth the excessive and effeminate Lagid king soak his people drunk with the good-life.

We therefore see a shift from the dark, sacred, oracular and erotic natural spaces of the rustic grotto sanctuary, to a visual spectacle in civic light serving political propaganda. Whereas the cult images of the Hellenic period were deliberately veiled within the temple, here they are fully *exposed* in the open, public realm; the *demos* no longer left the city to search for an encounter with the gods within their strange haunts, the gods came to the people in the city. However, the grotto as a religious *setting* is flattened as a *scene* to be viewed, not entered. During the same festival, in the proto-basilica banqueting tent, caves⁵¹ were made in-between the columns of the upper-level of the nave “to house symposium-scenes with figures in dramatic costumes” (Winter & Christie 1985:293), deliberately meant to be watched over dinner from below. The iconography of the abundance, manifested in the drinking of wine, bestowed upon the people by the king is thus extended. Such visual spectacle was not only reserved for temporary grotto displays: Trümper (2015:201) refers to a third century BC description of a decorative grotto-fountain in Alexandria (with a statue of queen Arsinoë) that seemingly was a permanent tableau without any use for ritual.

The construction of facade type grottoes was not reserved for royal reverie, but can be witnessed in a series of domestic⁵² grottoes found within the densely packed houses of the elite at Delos that also “symbolized *tryphē* and luxury as well as pleasures, happiness, and enjoyment of an idyllic, bucolic-rural ambience” (Trümper 2015:225). These grottoes were typically constructed adjacent to peristyle courtyards (the dense urban fabric left no room for gardens) in the form of niches, often arched, containing sculptures (a nymph has been found) and running water (even milk).

⁵⁰ The importance of the Olympian gods waned during the Hellenistic period. Those gods that were deemed to be benefactors, like Demeter and Dionysos, “increased their beneficial activities” (Henrichs 1984:139). The agnosticism and even atheism of sophists like Prodicus (465—395 BC) influenced, via philosophers like Euhemerus, Hellenistic attitudes to the gods, stripping them of their divinity to some extent. Prodicus narrated Dionysos as a mortal who discovered viticulture and, by gifting this to mankind, became deified (Henrichs 1984).

⁵¹ In the Gulick translation (see above), the word ἄντρον (*andron*) is translated as ‘recesses’, yet Winter & Christie (1985:293 fn. 10) uses ‘cave’, as does Bowe (2013:134) – I am following these latter translations.

⁵² Trümper (2015:207) notes that the houses within which the Delian grottoes were constructed, may have been used as clubhouses.



Figure 3.14. Grotto niches, south wall of peristyle courtyard, House of Hermes, Delos, third century BC (Trümper 2015:204).

As with the Rhodian grottoes, these were often constructed into and onto natural rock features, to achieve a “deliberately explored combination of the natural rock and artificial features, such as stucco, built elements and sculpture” (Trümper 2015:220). Most probably, these domesticated grottoes – and not those of the Ptolemies – were emulated by Roman elites in their gardens and houses during the Late Republic (Trümper 2015:226).⁵³

3.4.5 Rome: private facade type grottos

Domestic nymphaea⁵⁴ in architectural rather than garden settings, such as those at Delos, were constructed in houses in the Roman coastal town of Herculaneum during the first century AD for ‘looking outside inside’.⁵⁵ A good example can be found in the House of

⁵³ Trümper’s argument is based on the fact that the Ptolemaic grottoes were not accessible, and possibly destroyed by the first century BC.

⁵⁴ The word nymphaeum is an elusive one since it originally referred to the natural, sacred sanctuaries of the nymphs, but came to denote, towards the end of the Roman period, any fountain structure for the display of water and cool respite (Van Aken 1951:273). In this thesis, I use ‘nymphaeum’ to refer to architectonic grottoes with fountains.

⁵⁵ Borrowing from Kuttner’s title for her article on Roman garden rooms ‘Looking outside inside: ancient Roman garden rooms’ (1999).

Neptune and Amphitrite,⁵⁶ owned by a wealthy shopkeeper⁵⁷ who seemingly sought to ‘keep up’ with the more spacious and verdurous villa gardens of nearby Pompeii. The facade type grotto adjoins an open-to-air court that served as a “precious substitute for a peristyle and garden” (Clarke 1991:255). Housed within a triumphal arch-like⁵⁸ structure, the cave is represented by a vaulted niche that was possibly inhabited by a nymph-statue and flanked by rectangular niches that contained other statues or fountains.⁵⁹ This purely architectonic cave is situated within a sacro-idyllic⁶⁰ milieu represented by garland patterns and hunting scenes in mosaic. Unlike the Delian examples, there is no visible in situ rock, nor any attempt to mimic the appearance of natural caves. The cave simulacrum is rendered by the granular texture of the inner surfaces of the niches and the strings of shells that articulate various edges of the composition.

This folly⁶¹ functioned as a pilastered facade screening a water cistern that fed a fountain in the court. The fountain stood within a water basin around which two or three guests could laze and dine on the couches of a triclinium.⁶² There, as in Ptolemy II’s banqueting tent, the guests were entertained by the nymphaeum facade showcasing a “wistful tableau of the haunts of the nymphs” (Clarke 1991:255), further enlivened by the Dionysiac theme⁶³ enshrined in the statue heads of bearded satyrs and a tragic theatre mask that crown the nymphaeum; Silenus sneers over the show from high on the wall above the nymphaeum.

The wall perpendicular to the nymphaeum was painted (in the Fourth Style) to further enhance the illusion of a garden. Amidst the flat foliage stands a painted aedicula, a flattened architectural frame wherein the titular gods of Neptune and Amphitrite pose in *contrapposto*.

⁵⁶ The House of the Skeleton is another example.

⁵⁷ The homeowner may also have been involved with fishing or shipping, perhaps explaining the choice of Neptune as a patron deity for the house (Jasas-Montinaro 2019).

⁵⁸ Miller (1994:70) makes a similar comparison to a triumphal arch in connection with the nymphaeum of *Chateau de Wideville* (1635).

⁵⁹ Clarke (1991:255) describes all three niches as housing statues, whereas Van Aken (1955:278) states that the side niches contained fountains identical to the one within the basin of the triclinium. All sources and reconstructions consulted indicate that the central niche contained a statue, probably of a nymph. (We can only guess that the statues in the three niches were nymphs or other water deities.)

⁶⁰ I borrow the term from Kuttner (1992:12) who used it to describe a mosaic in the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, which also included garlands from which implements for Dionysiac rituals were hung.

⁶¹ Miniature versions of sacred or monumental architecture are commonly found in the gardens of classical topomythopoesis, some with simplified detail and even clumsy proportions and construction.

⁶² The small triclinium would not have been able to accommodate large dinner parties (Clarke 1991:255).

⁶³ Identified by Clarke (1991:256–257).

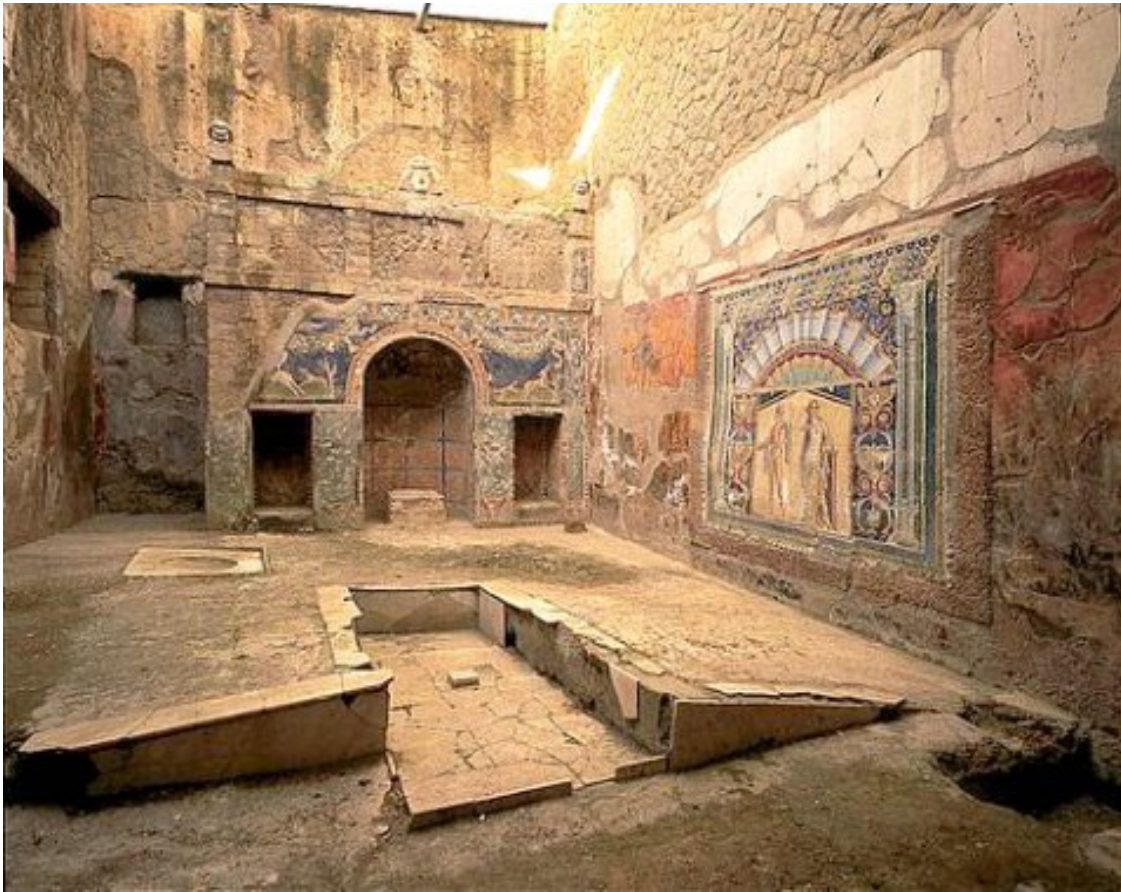


Figure 3.15. Nymphaeum, House of Neptune and Amphitrite, Herculaneum, Italy, first century AD (AD 79 [source]). Triclinium in foreground and mosaic of aedicula to the right

This two-dimensional architectural framework resembles, perhaps consciously, another type of domestic nymphaeum found in nearby Pompeii: *sacella*⁶⁴ in gardens housed gods like miniature temples, for example in the House of the Second Fountain (Figure 3.16). These also often formed a spatial unit with a triclinium. The shopkeeper and his company could thus imitate the social habits of garden-owning Romans: in their wine-soaked reverie they could discuss with pleasure⁶⁵ the iconographic programme of the court – nymph, satyrs, sea gods, grotto – and engage in an “ongoing game of memory and storytelling” (Bergman 1999:106). By recounting the stories prompted by the signifiers, they were engaged in a narrative mode of participation. Cicero testifies that the Romans took pleasure in both the physical enjoyment (*usus*) and mental reflection (*cogitatio*) of their gardens; experiences of the

⁶⁴ A small, Roman shrine.

⁶⁵ Bergman (1999:106) describes the way in which Romans took pleasure in their engagement with the mythical iconography of murals in rooms: “The strategies of that self-reflection, I believe, are comparable to the arrangements of myths in Roman rooms, where the abilities learned at school – to speak, listen, envision – became recreational pleasure”. It may be noted that the examples she discusses, depict *scenes* from myths, whereas in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite the onlooker is asked to take a bigger ‘beholder’s share’ since the gods are merely put on display rather than presented as actors in a mythical drama.

real and the imagined, prompted by somatic and symbolic stimuli.⁶⁶

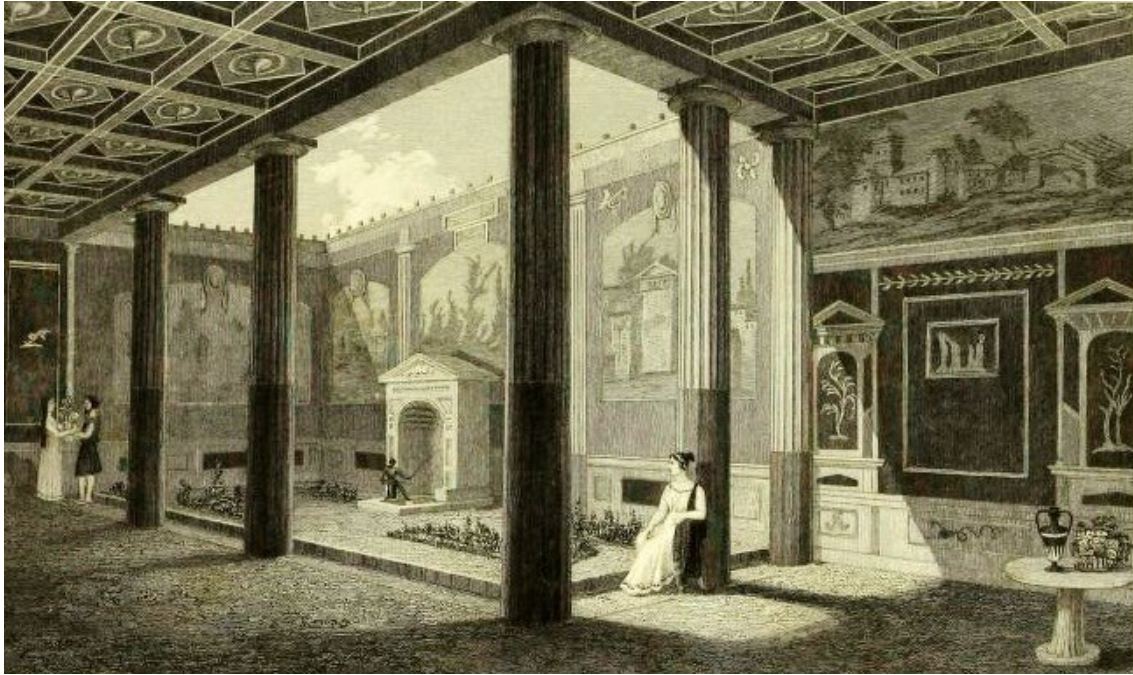


Figure 3.16. T. Seandrett (after W. Gell), *Pompeii Garden and Portico*, 1830; reconstruction of the garden of the House of the Second / Small Fountain, Pompeii, Italy, second century BC (Gell 1832, Plate 56).

The facade type grotto as a freestanding aedicula⁶⁷ in a private setting – whether built or painted – was ultimately derived from monumental, public fountains that were built to terminate aqueducts such as the Fountain of Neptune constructed in Roman Corinth at the dawn of the first millennium (Figure 3.17). Robinson (2013:355) interpreted the structure⁶⁸ – a fountain covered by a barrel vault and capped by a pediment, housing a statue of the trident-god – as a “formalized version of numinous caves in the limestone landscapes of Greece and Italy”, thus supporting the argument that topomythopoiesis went through a developmental stage during which natural, sacred *topoi* were translated to architectonic compositions.

The topomythopoiesis in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite thus rendered the court as a physical threshold into a virtual landscape cultivated by a network of myths that reach back into the rustic and sacred caves of Greece. Or, perhaps, the diners simply found delight in being transported to the villas of their betters, or the grand squares of far-off cities; or both. Whether participation was to stir the imagination or stroke the ego, the role of the

⁶⁶ “It is wonderful how not only the physical enjoyment [*usus*] of those [garden] places, but also thinking about them [*cogitatio*] somewhere else, gives pleasure” (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 1.2.3, in Kuttner 1999:8).

⁶⁷ A seventeenth century example of an aedicula type can be seen in an engraving by Francesco Fanelli for a grotto-portal in Paris, c. 1690 (in Miller 1994: 71).

⁶⁸ The structure was, at the time, unprecedented in peninsular Greece (Robinson 2013:355).

grotto during the Roman Imperial period had shifted further away from being a strange setting for religious encounters⁶⁹ to a visual prop in a playful performance; a diorama to spark dinner conversation.

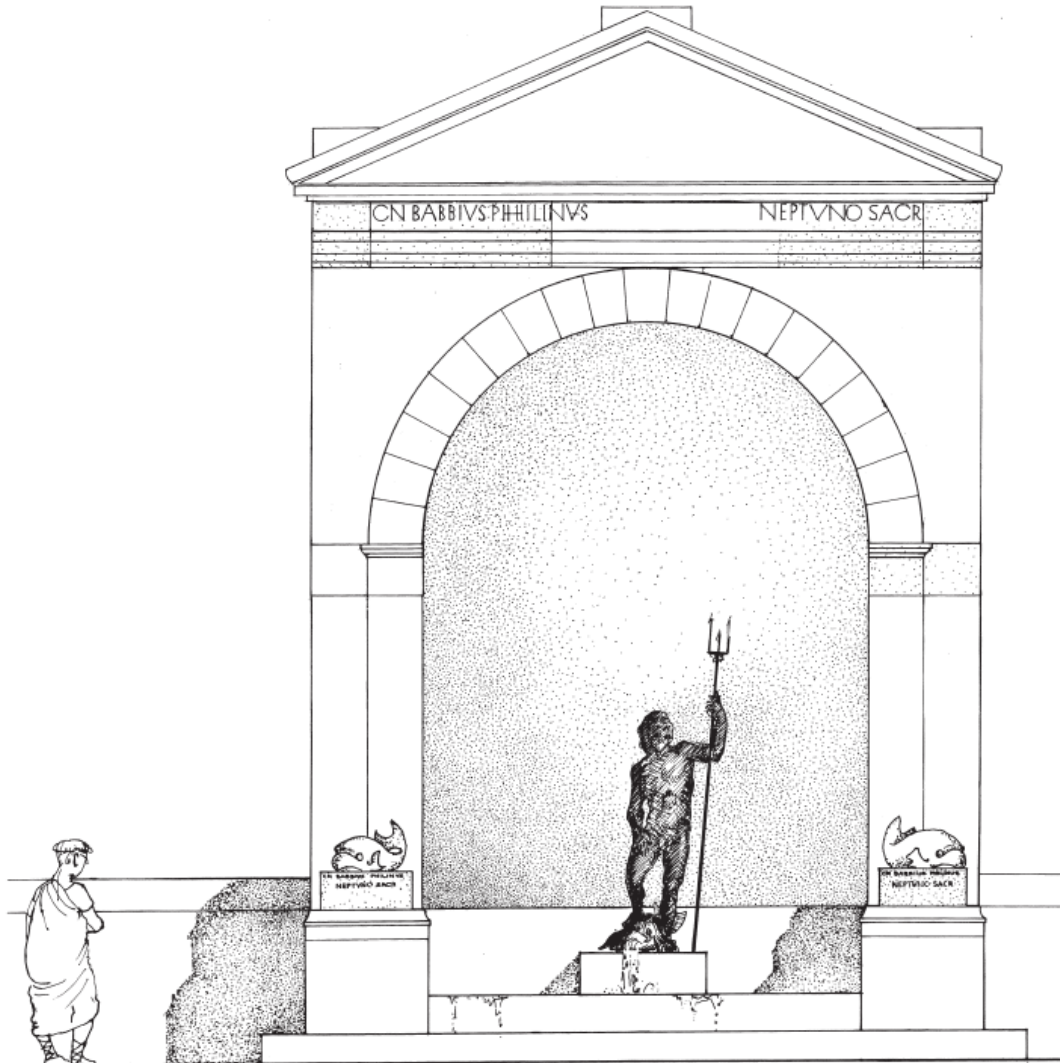


Figure 3.17. The Fountain of Neptune, Corinth, Greece, mid-first century AD; reconstruction of east elevation (Robinson 2013:353).

3.4.6 Rome: public facade type grottoes

The theatrical nature of the nymphaeum in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite is, according to Van Aken’s analysis (1951:279), no mere coincidence: “the whole structure, the monumental front, the shape of the niches, and the crowning with theatre-masks bears witness to a growing influence of the *scaenae-frons* in the nymphaeum architecture”.

⁶⁹ Van Aken (1951:281) states that the Herculaneum nymphaea, even more so than those found in Pompeii, have been deprived of their “sacred character”. Yet, religion was not banished from the Roman house, but centred around the *lararium*, an *aedicula* that housed the *Lares* and *Penates*.

As with the aedicula, the private nymphaeum probably imitated its public counterpart. These were built in Roman cities and emphasised the *display* of water and sculpture over the dominant infrastructural role of their Greek forebears⁷⁰ – not the cave sanctuaries, but fountain-houses. These had humble origins in the Archaic period as simple encased standpipes with spouts that were elaborated during the classical period to include colonnaded structures providing shade and some decorative displays (Bowe 2012:204). Following the further architectural elaboration of Hellenistic fountains (Figure 3.18), the Romans refined the building type by borrowing from the architectural language of the theatre – a fitting precedent for a public *screen* (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.18. Left: Peirene Fountain, Corinth, Greece, Hellenistic period (Robinson 2013:348, following G.P. Stevens). A series of parallel walls defined six antechambers from which water was drawn, supporting the in situ rock above. The site was believed to be the place where Bellerephon tamed Pegasus, and sacred to the Muses.

Figure 3.19. Right: Peirene Fountain, Corinth, Greece, early Roman period, c. 29 BC–AD 14 (Robinson 2013:349, drawing by J. Herbst). The perspective shows how the fountain was monumentalised with the addition of a two-storey architectonic screen, preventing access into the chambers, thus emphasising the visual experience of the grottoes.

The *scaenae frons* of Roman theatres developed from the second century BC in Italy and elaborated in the eastern Empire due to Hellenistic influence (Aristodemou 2011:172). Thus derived, the nymphaea typically “comprised a columnar facade forming *exedrae* and *aediculae*, niches in the back, and was sometimes supplemented with lateral wings” (Aristodemou

⁷⁰ The infrastructural role of water in Roman cities was, of course, very important. But, water was not only regarded as a source for drinking, cooking, sanitation and irrigation: the Roman senator, civil engineer, senator and water commissioner Sextus Julius Frontinus (c. AD 40–103) wrote a treatise on the aqueducts of Rome (*De Aqueductibus Urbis Romae*) in which he highlighted the visual and somatic benefits of Emperor Nerva’s waterworks: “Not even the waste water is lost; the appearance of the City is clean and altered; the air is purer; and the causes of the unwholesome atmosphere, which gave the air of the City so bad a name with the ancients, are now removed” (Frontinus 1961:418–419). In his breakdowns of how water volume was distributed to various types of waterworks, he includes “ornamental fountains” (Frontinus 1961:409–415), distinguishing them from more functional elements.

2011:165). These grandiose screens towered above the water body below and were populated by statues. The iconographic programme varied widely and stretched far beyond the *dramatis personae* of ‘grotto and water gods’, although it does appear like the *nymphaea* differed from theatres by accommodating deities “closely related to water and nature” (Aristodemou 2011:180). For example, the *nymphaeum* of Miletus (Figure 3.20) contained the old ‘cave deities’ like the nymphs, Poseidon, Dionysos and Muses. A third storey addition by Emperor Gordian III (225–244) displayed the Emperor himself and his family. Many fountains were built for such political ends, since their monumental delightfulness made them “primary candidates for civic euergetism” (Robinson 2013:342). Facing the Emperor or some other elite benefactor amidst the show of water, fantasy and power must have, again, been an experience rather far removed from entering an eerie, dark hollow in the earth to steal a glance of a nymph in the flickering light. Yet, perhaps the bustle and swelter of the Roman civic square was momentarily enchanted with a brief escape into a rustic cave in Arcadia.

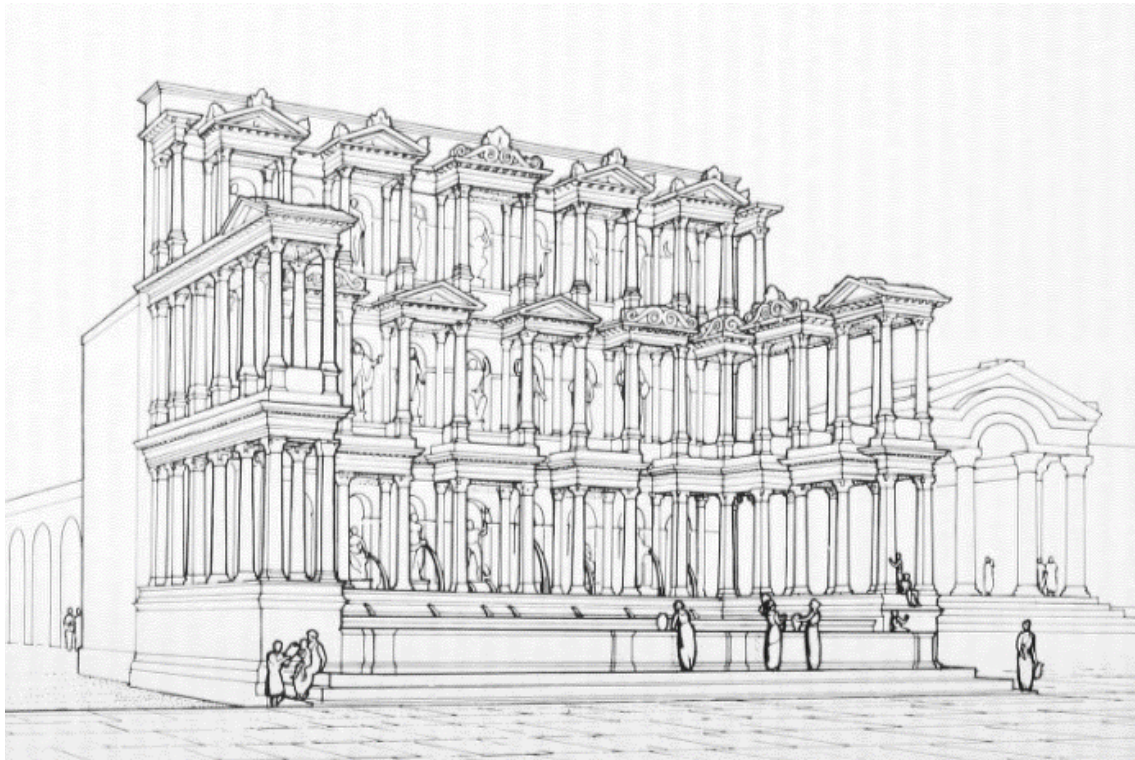


Figure 3.20. Nymphaeum, Miletus, Anitolia, AD 79–81 (Ward-Perkins 1981:298).

Indeed, the topomyth of the cave was not entirely erased by embellishment for the onlookers of Roman antiquity. In his ekphrastic description of the fountain in Corinth

(Figure 3.19) – welled by the tears of Peirene the nymph⁷¹ – Pausanias (*Description of Greece* 2.3) describes the spring screen: “ornamented with white marble, and there have been made chambers *like caves*, out of which the water flows into an open-air well” (my italics). Although the Roman facade prevented access to the original “subterranean springhouse” (Robinson 2013:349), the metaphor of the cave thus remained as a remnant of the ancient sacro-infrastructure space, and so too its resident nymph.⁷²

3.4.7 Roman spatial grottoes

Roman grottoes were not limited to the facade type. Littlewood (2017:249) provides a garden description by Diodorus Siculus from the first century BC as a literary source for the Roman spatial grotto, mimicking the bucolic cave of Greek myth: a circular space, sheltered by plants and furnished with couches for nymphs. The topomyth of the cave as an ominous setting for mystery and erotic encounters from the Greek literary tradition endured in other Roman authors and was a more commonplace *topos* than the mountain. Ovid exploits the trope of the cave as a sheltered space to introduce sudden episodes of “rude violence” (Segal 1969:21) that shatter “idyllic love” (ibid.), as when the cyclops Polyphemus hurled a rock to kill the lover of the nymph Galatea.

The one-eyed giant also features in a physical grotto that became a precedent for Roman grottoes, at least in terms of iconography: a well-known example of a spatial grotto that is an intermediary between the natural cave and the artificial grotto is the one at Sperlonga near Naples. A natural cave roof arches over a constructed, geometric pool and island-triclinium where the Emperor Tiberius (42 BC–37 AD) entertained his guests with a view towards sculpted scenes from the *Odyssey*:⁷³ the blinding of Polyphemus (book 9) and the encounter with Scylla (book 12);⁷⁴ the myths were evoked more for entertainment than

⁷¹ A less common aetiology is that Pegasus formed this fountain, as he did the Hippocrene on Parnassus. Common was the story that Bellerophon tamed Pegasus at the fountain of Peirene. Ovid’s version is as follows: After engineering the death of king Pelias (the throne belonging to Jason), the sorceress Medea fled to Corinth. On her way there she passed the spring Peirene where, since time began, humans sprung from rain-soaked mushrooms.

⁷² Apart from the association of the nymph (Peirene), there may also have stood a statue of one – moving from the invisible presence of the nymph as a numinous being, to being represented by a statue. No statue of a nymph has been confirmed, although one was found nearby (Robinson 2013:366 fn. 95).

⁷³ Although the origins of this cave is disputed, the sculptures have been dated with some confidence between AD 4 and 26.

⁷⁴ There is disagreement as to why these episodes were used and what meaning they were supposed to convey, see Carey (2002:45 fn. 5).

enchantment.⁷⁵

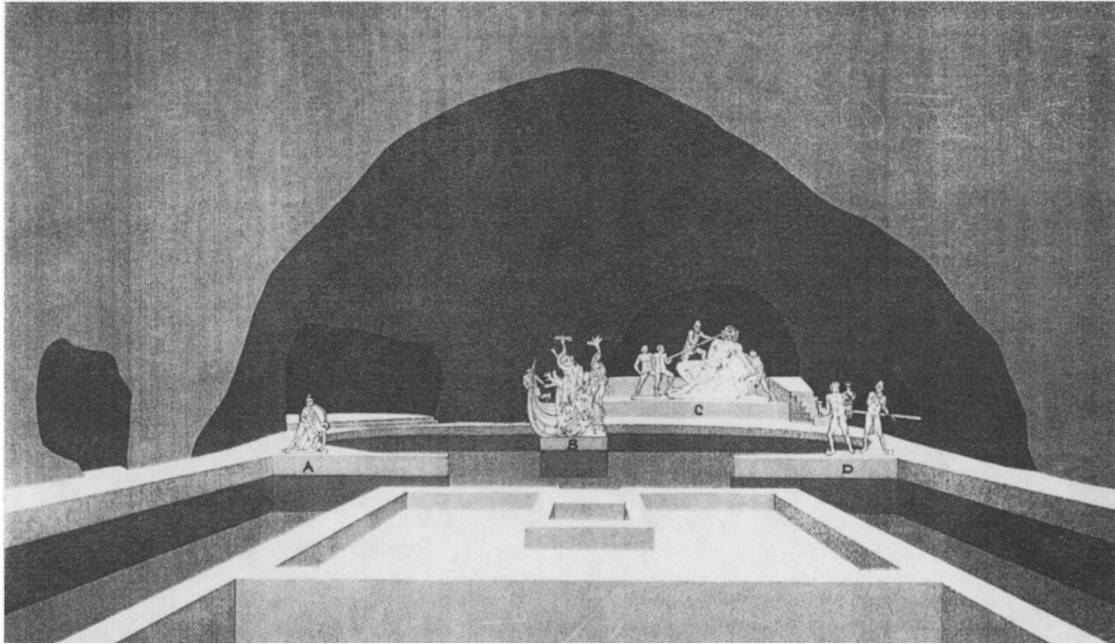


Figure 3.21. Cave of Sperlonga, Naples, Italy, 4–26 AD; A: Pasquino group, B: Scylla, C: blinding of Polyphemus, D: rape of the Palladium (Carey 2002:46).

The performance of the statues was supported by scenography: “The display was designed to emphasize the sculptures’ illusionistic qualities, so the blinding of Polyphemus was set in a dark recess to the back of the cave, while the Scylla group rose out of the pool at the grotto’s centre, transforming its calm waters into a spectacular struggle between monster and hero” (Carey 2002:48): the narrative participation of reading the myth is augmented by the somatic experience afforded by the cave setting. Thus, the material space seeks to manifest the geography of the virtual landscape, unlike the identical niches and aedicula of the facade type which enframes sculptures irrespective of their associated myths. This comparison reveals two opposing statue-setting relationships in classical topomythopoiesis: in the one the setting serves to heighten the phenomenology of the myth by *naturalising* the god in its location; in the other the setting serves to heighten the allegory of the myth by *universalising* the god. Sperlonga’s “vivid theatrical tableau” (Carey 2002:48) was further contextualised on a broader scale: across the bay from the cave is where Odysseus and company were held company by Circe.

These episodes from their adventures recur in later Imperial grottoes which, Carey (2002:56) argues, deliberately quoted the iconography of Sperlonga as a “delineation of imperial space” – in a way, Sperlonga becomes the topomyth that is evoked, not the grottoes

⁷⁵ The combination of grotto and triclinium possibly served as a model for the domestic nymphaea discussed earlier in the chapter.

of Homer. This highlights another important characteristic of classical topomythopoiesis: the designed encounters not only evoke myths or cult sanctuaries from Greece, but also other *topoi* constructed within the tradition itself. Thus, these form part of the ever-growing ‘representational network’ of the virtual landscape, to which one may add a ‘morphological network’.

The spatial grottoes that Carey (2002) cite are a nymphaeum-triclinium at Baiae (*c.* AD 45, Emperor Claudius; Figure 3.22), the nymphaeum of the grotto in the Golden House in Rome (*c.* AD 65, Emperor Nero) and the grotto-triclinium in Hadrian’s villa (often called the Serapeum).⁷⁶ The grottoes at Baiae and Rome are examples of the rectangular, barrel vaulted apsidal halls that Van Aken (1961:273) likened to the basilica, and reminiscent of the rock-hewn vaults of Rhodes. Other Roman examples include the nymphaea at the Ciceronian Villa at Formia (with coffered vault and columns) and the rock-hewn nymphaeum, without columns, at Castel Gandolfo (Villa of Emperor Domitian, AD 81–96). As the facade type grottoes, these mark a complete artificial translation of the natural cave. During the Renaissance, the interior surfaces of vaulted grottoes were rusticated to achieve a synthesis between the natural and artificial, thus evoking both the cultic caves of Greece and imperial nymphaea of Rome (Figure 3.23).

The nymphaeum at Hadrian’s villa is exemplar of the exedra spatial type consisting of a triclinium covered by a semi-dome. A similar fountain structure was built for the Olympic Games *c.* AD 150 by Herodus Atticus in Olympia (Figure 3.24). This type can be seen in exedra structures for musical performance, designed in the nineteenth century, at Villa Giulia, Palermo. Fully dome nymphaea are rare, but one impressive example was constructed in the Horti Liciniani in Rome during the fourth century.

⁷⁶ Carey (2002) follows the terminology used by the authors Pinto & MacDonald in their *Hadrian’s Villa and its Legacy* (1995), arguing against the common identification of the grotto at Hadrian’s Villa as a Serapeum, and the linear basin as a Canopus.

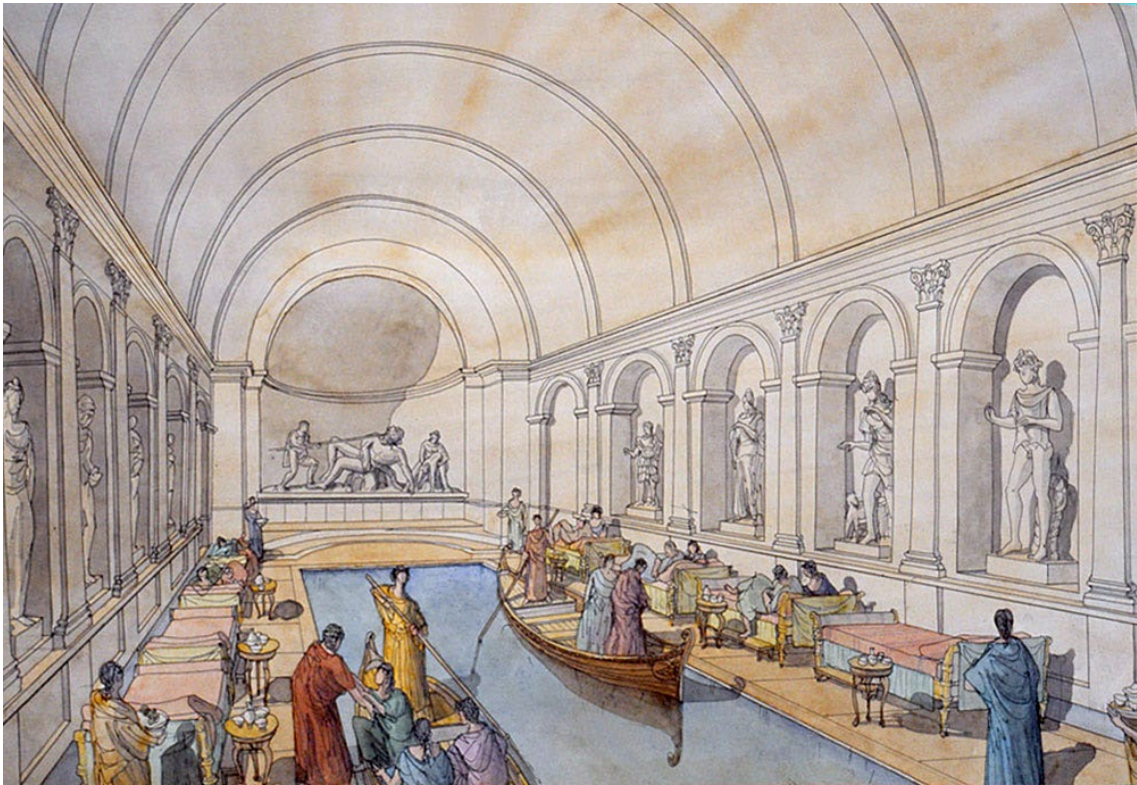


Figure 3.22. Jean-Claude Golvin, Nymphaeum, Villa de Pison, Baiae, Italy, *c.* AD 45; reconstructed perspective (Golvin 2018).

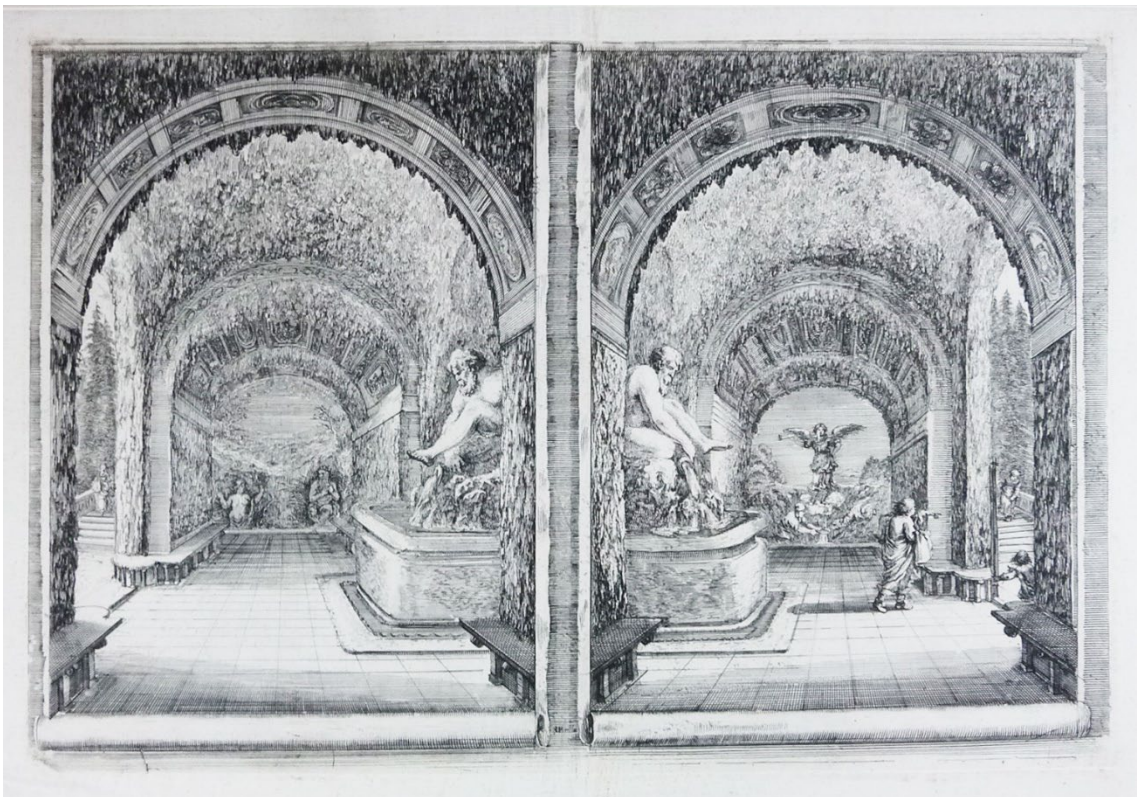


Figure 3.23. Stephano Della Bella, Two views of a grotto, Pratolino, Italy, *c.* 1653 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.136.537.5). The etching forms part of his series *Views of the Villa at Pratolino*. In the view on the left is a seated Pan playing his flute, and on the right Fame playing her trumpet – both automated statues.

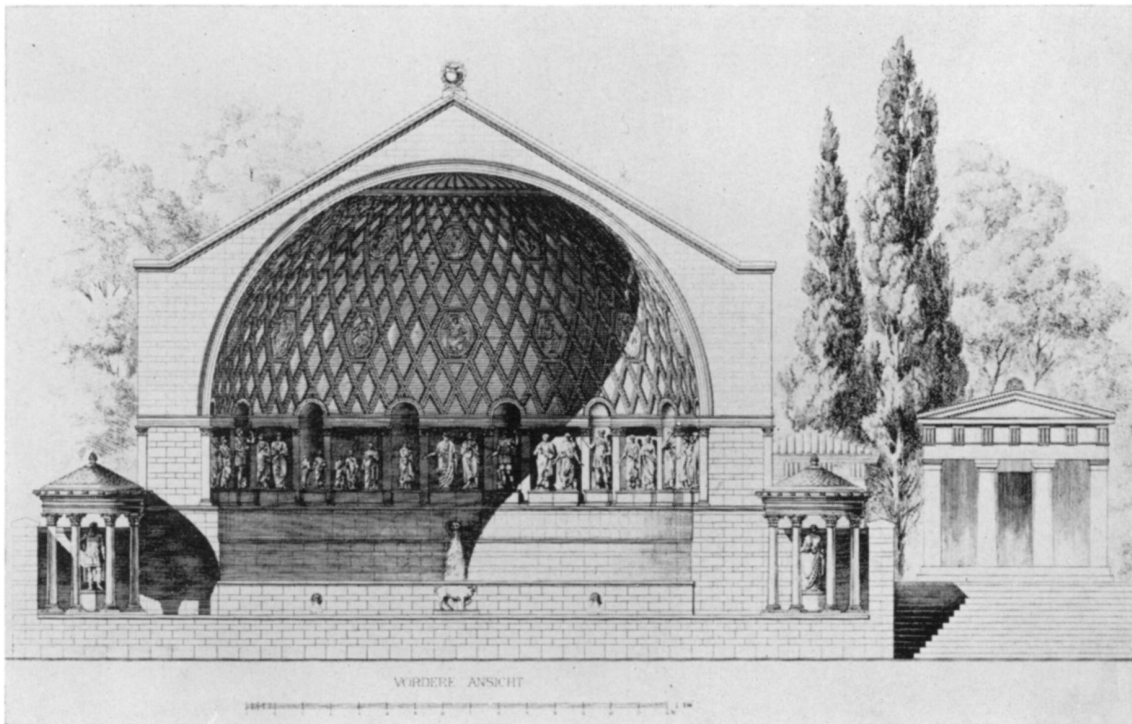


Figure 3.24. Friedrich Adler, Exedra of Herodus Atticus, Olympia, Greece, c. AD 150; reconstructed elevation (Elderkin 1941:133).

The imperial, spatial grottoes with their triclinia echo the interior grottoes of Herculaneum: assemblages of sculpted and painted representations of myths within architectural spaces that dimly recall the sacro-natural milieu of a Golden Age, affording a “combined physical and intellectual experience” (Bergman 1999:106) – whether the company of a shopkeeper or an Emperor, visitors within these spaces could count on a shared semiotic system that enabled a collective participation of seeing the invisible in the visible.

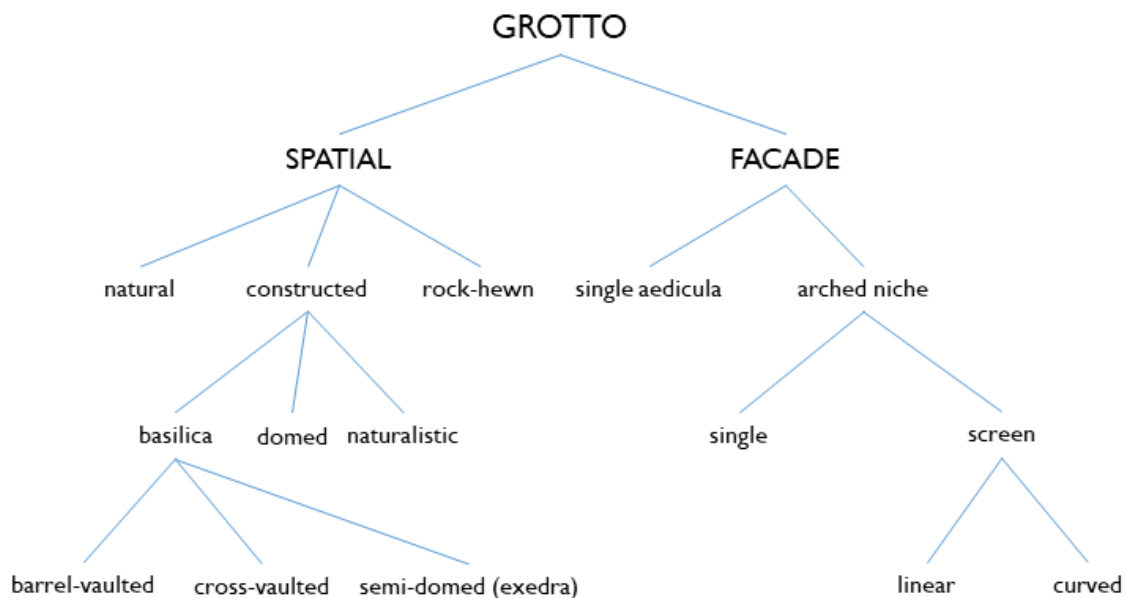


Figure 3.25. A taxonomy of the grotto types of classical topomythopoiesis (Author 2023). Types can be combined.



Figure 3.26. An imagined view of the origin of the spatial types of classical topomythopoiesis (Author 2021).

3.5 OTHER: FOREST TO GROVE

The focus of this chapter has been the development of the mound and grotto spatial typologies from natural settings for ritual. What follows are some brief remarks on another of the main spatial types employed in classical topomythopoiesis, the grove.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The groves of Ancient Greece and Rome have recently been thoroughly discussed by Carroll (2017).

Like mountains and caves, wooded areas with their green verdure and cool shade were differentiated from the dry, rocky environment of ancient Greece. As places of abundant life, some came to be associated with the “generative powers of the gods” (Bonnechere 2007:26): Demeter, the goddess of *agriculture* dwelled in a grove; Artemis, the goddess of *hunting* drew her bow amidst the trees from where she oversaw *childbirth*; the Muses and Apollo gifted to groves the aura of poetic *inspiration*. Like the other topomyths, the grove existed both as physical places and as imagined settings within myth, from Homer to Virgil.

The differentiation of sacred groves (Greek *alsos*) from their contexts were often further marked by a boundary wall. Some, but not all, were settings for ritual and some contained altars for sacrifice, cult statues and temples. Their strangeness was not only shaped by physical elements, but by their phenomenal differentiation: a pleasant place within a wild valley, a verdant escape within field or town (Bonnechere 2007:26).

Beyond their environmental differentiation, other types of strangeness were associated with the groves, as discussed by Barnett (2007): The rituals in the *alsos* disrupted the normality of daily life for the sake of change. Some groves were demarcated as *asyla* to which those fleeing danger could escape. Antonius Liberalis (a Greek grammarian) described how a fleeing Britomartis (the Minoan god of mountains and hunting) fled into a grove where she became invisible. The Aigenetans named her Aphaia and consecrated the place. In a description of a sacred grove, Pausanias (*Description of Greece* 8.37.10) notes an unnatural occurrence: “Beyond what is called the Hall is a grove, sacred to the mistress and surrounded by a wall of stones, and within it are trees, including an olive and an evergreen oak growing out of one root, and that is not the result of a clever piece of gardening”. Another example of natural estrangement is the topsy-turvy change of the natural hierarchy. Strabo (*Geography* 5.1.9) describes a setting in a sacred grove that is reminiscent of Golden Age harmony:

... two groves are likewise pointed out, one [sacred] to the Argian Juno, and the other to the Ætolian Diana. They have too, as we might expect, fictions concerning these groves; for instance, that the wild beasts in them grow tame, that the deer herd with wolves, and they suffer men to approach and stroke them; and that when pursued by dogs, as soon as they have reached these groves, the dogs no longer pursue them.

Some groves were exclusive. For example, the Grove of Hera at Aigion only admitted women, the Grove of Ares at Geronthrai only men, and the Grove of Artemis near Pellene was accessible only to priests.

Sacred groves, like their cave counterparts, were either left mostly natural (a forest with a few built elements) or artificial, in the form of trees planted in orderly rows (Carroll 2017:3). Such orderly groves were often found adjacent to temples, such as those excavated at the Hephaisteion in the Athenian Agora. Trees were planted in sunken pots from around the

third century BC until the Augustan era (Ridgway 1981:18).

Although the grove did not undergo the same striking formal development as the cave and mountain, it did also develop towards a typology applied during the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods for urban recreation (with Plato's grove of his Academy in Athens an intellectual-recreational prototype). In the account by Strabo of the Paneion (3.3.3), he mentions public groves in its vicinity. However, the most notable example is the *Porticus Pompeiana* built around 55 BC built adjacent to the Theatre of Pompey in celebration of his military victories. As the first public park of Rome, it became a precedent for urban parks in the Empire (Gleason 1994:26). The *porticus* consisted of a colonnade surrounding a double grove (*nemus duplex*)⁷⁸ arranged along an axis terminating in the Temple of Venus (built within the theatre). Thus, the precinct fulfilled a duo role, like the grottoes of Rhodes, as sacred and recreational space. The pleasantness of the space was amplified by other topomyths, as celebrated by the poet Propertius (c. 50–15 BC) who described “the waters that flow from Maro's slumbering form and run, their Naiads babbling through all the streets of Rome, till at the last, with sudden plunge, they vanish in the Triton's mouth” (*Elegies* 2.32.14–16). Such ordered groves became prominent features of classical topomythopoeic gardens, notably those of seventeenth century France.

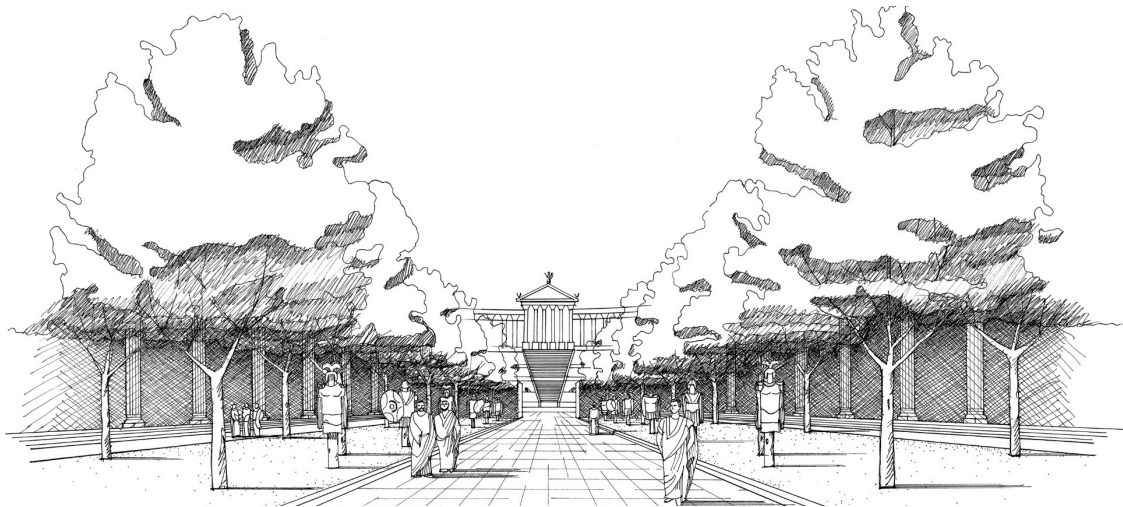


Figure 3.27. Lori C. Catalano, Porticus of Pompey, Rome, c. 55 BC; reconstructed view towards the theatre and Temple of Venus Vitrix (Macaulay & Gleason 2021).

More pragmatically, the portico served the function of providing shelter for theatre goers during rain storms, and for the making of stage sets (Vitruvius, *Architecture* 5.9.1). Writing about the precinct during the late second century AD, Tertullian (c. AD 155–c. 220) (1842:200–201) had the following to say:

⁷⁸ *Nemus* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *allos*, although Latin distinguished it from *lucus* which was a sacred grove in a more natural state (Carrol 2017:3).

And therefore Pompey the Great, less only than his own theatre, when he had built up that strong-hold of every vice, fearing that the censors might one day cast reflections on his memory, placed over it a temple of Venus, and summoning the people by a proclamation to the dedication, called it not a theatre, but a temple of Venus... But there is fellowship between Venus and Bacchus: these two daemons of drunkenness and lust have conspired and leagued together. Wherefore the theatre of Venus is also the house of Bacchus...

... the one dissolute through her sex, the other through his wantonness; while such things as are done by the voice, by music, by wind and stringed instruments, have for their patrons Apollos and Muses and Minervas and Mercuries. Thou must hate Christian, those things, the inventors whereof thou canst not but hate.

The vehement judgement of the spectacle of Roman theatre under the auspices of those very gods that inhabited the topomythopoeic landscapes of the ancient world, marks a dramatic change that was occurring in the spiritual life of people across the Mediterranean world. Like many others, Tertullian (in his mid-life) converted to the Christian Church, and the growing censure of the Greco-Roman gods as heathen idols meant that the continuation of the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis was not inevitable.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Classical topomythopoiesis originated in ancient Greece where sacred, natural sites (mountains, caves, springs and forests) were altered with minimal built interventions in service of rituals performed in the presence of a cult statue – participation, cultivated by knowledge of myths, towards religious epiphany. From these sites developed the prototypical combination found throughout the history of classical topomythopoiesis of natural-constructed setting (mount, grotto, fount and grove) and anthropomorphic deity (Venus, Apollo, nymph...); the signifiers of the natural milieu, and the spatial and statue types.

During the Hellenistic period such natural settings were increasingly monumentalised and recreated in cities as architectonic simulacra, whilst being appropriated for recreational use in addition to their function as settings for religious ritual. This development continued into the Roman Imperial period with the construction of monumental and public topomyths as acts of civic euergetism and beautification, and smaller imitations made in private gardens as objects of delight that prompted a narrative mode of participation.

4 SURVIVAL OF THE PAGAN GODS DURING THE CHRISTIAN MIDDLE AGES

4.1 EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF PAGAN MYTHOLOGY

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them... (Exodus 20:4–5)

In the previous chapter I discussed the origins of the classical tradition of topomythopoiesis which is characterised by spatial¹ (grove, grotto...) and statue (Apollo, Venus...) types that developed from natural settings for ritual and their cult statues. These form the lexicon of the signifiers of topomyths that prompt participation.

In this chapter, I am continuing the history of classical topomythopoiesis by focusing on its survival² during the Christian Middle Ages (in the remnants of the Roman Empire, East and West), starting with the reception of pagan mythology during the early Christian period and late antiquity.

While classical topomythopoiesis was practised in the elite gardens and public spaces of the Roman Empire during the four centuries after the death of Jesus, his monotheistic followers spread the gospel of his resurrection from the Levant across the Mediterranean world. Those who joined the Church, often from the lowest ranks of society, responded to the omnipresence of Greco-Roman polytheism in various ways.

¹ I focused on the grotto and mound, other spatial types include the fountain and grove.

² Here, and in the sub-title, I am echoing the phrase ‘survival of the gods’ from the influential book by Jean Seznec, namely *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (1972), which demonstrated that classical mythology by no means disappeared in the culture of Medieval Europe – a misconception held by many at the time of its publication.

4.1.1 Iconoclastic

The very presence of sanctuaries and statues of gods in Athens stirred the apostle Paul (c. AD 5–64) to confront the pantheism and idolatry of the Greco-Roman world (Acts 17:16). In his speech on the Areopagus in the mid-first century, he used Hellenistic rhetoric to persuade Stoic and Epicurean minds that the practices of representing god in human forms and serving him with human hands were inconsistent with their own philosophical critique of “cultic veneration as superstition of the masses” (Jipp 2012:581): in the transcendental God revealed in scripture they can find what they had dimly sought in the ‘unknown god’ who is not made in the image of man; man is made in the image of Him. This episode reveals the early (and, within the Reformist tradition, enduring) Christian belief, rooted in Hebraic iconoclasm, that representations of God chisel the creator into mere dead matter – a visible image that can be mistaken for the invisible and non-material “Lord your God” (Exodus 20:5).

In extreme cases, the statues of gods were thought to be possessed by demons, animated and even the cause of magic (Saradi-Mendelovici 1990:56–57). Such superstition sometimes led to iconoclasm, for example a possessed public statue of naked Venus in Gaza was toppled, or rather exorcised, by Bishop Porphyry (347–420) and his ‘mob’ in AD 402 (Mango 1963:56). A ninth century document accounts the martyrdom of Felix during the age of persecution under Diocletian and Maximian for destroying a statue of Mercury by the mere blow of his breath (Anonymous, no date).³ From the time of Constantine onwards, and especially during the reign of Theodosius I (347–395), statues and sanctuaries were destroyed by Imperial decrees seeking to cleanse the Christianised Empire from its pagan trappings. Sometimes, the motivation was more pragmatic, like Constantine melting idols for mint (Curran 1994:48). Not only were statues destroyed, but also their natural haunts: for example, St Martin of Tours (c. 316–397) felled sacred groves in Gaul (Fox 1986:29).

Yet, “a systematic destruction of pagan sanctuaries was never the intention of imperial policy” (Saradi-Mendelovici 1990:49) – the remnants of the pagan world faded not only at the destructive hands of the iconoclasts, but at the destructive hands of time, abandonment and neglect. Granted the lack of evidence on the fate of the gardens of classical topomythopoiesis we can only imagine many of them simply becoming *overgrown*.

Some sanctuaries that were not destroyed or left to decay were sanctified as Christian spaces for ritual, often simply through the erection of a cross, in the same manner that statues were converted by drawing a cross on the forehead (Saradi-Mendelovici 1990:54). A

³ The *Martyrdom of Felix and Adaeuctus* (Anon. no date) is written in Latin, presumably in Rome, at an uncertain date, by the ninth century at the latest.

(possible) example is the cave sanctuary of St Michael on Mount Gargano, Italy. Although the details of its origin are obscure, some argue that it was used as a Mithraeum (and before that in service of chthonic deities) before its conversion.⁴ Whether or not the sanctuary was pagan before, the hagiographic text that describes it, the *Liber de apparitione Sancti Michaelis in Monte Gargano*, was a “repackaging of pastoral discourse” (Arnold 2000:574) – a common tendency in the literature of late antiquity when Christian ideas were communicated using the structure and language of classical myth as a rhetorical “shorthand” (ibid.) for readers well versed in Homer and Virgil. Although grottoes with explicit associations with classical mythology did not become absorbed into medieval gardening culture, their form and function endured in the sacred geography of a Christianised landscape. Conversely, some rural sanctuaries that had become abandoned were re-used by non-Christians during late antiquity as the Christian Church grew in the cities (Arnold 2000:573).

4.1.2 Apologetic

The presence of the anthropomorphic deities was sometimes not erased, but rather exploited for apologetic purposes, as already witnessed in St Paul’s speech. As part of Constantine’s construction of Constantinople in the fourth century as the capital of a Christian Rome, he imported classical statues of gods (amongst other antique works) and put them on public display (Mango 1963:55). This seemingly blasphemous act was post-rationalised by Constantine’s biographer, Eusebius (c. 260–339), as a means to ridicule the gods by decontextualizing them from their sacred settings to secular spaces like the Hippodrome:⁵

In yet other cases [of correction the errors of superstition] the sacred bronze figures, of which the error of the ancients had for a long time been proud, he displayed to all the public in all the squares of the Emperor's city, so that in one place the Pythian [Apollo] was displayed as a contemptible spectacle to the viewers, in another the Sminthian [Apollo], in the Hippodrome itself the tripods from Delphi, and the Muses of Helicon at the palace. The city named after the Emperor was filled throughout with objects of skilled artwork in bronze dedicated in various provinces. To these under the name of gods those sick with error had for long ages vainly covered innumerable hecatombs and whole burnt sacrifices, but now they at last learnt sense, as the Emperor used these very toys for the laughter and amusement of the spectators (Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.54).

Not that the Constantinople public was always aware of the heathen identity of their

⁴ Arnold (2000:571) refers to the theories of scholars who assume that the grotto was used for ancient cultic activity, but notes that there is little evidence for (or against) this.

⁵ Curran (1994:47) heeds that Eusebius’ interpretation of Constantine’s placement of statues rested on two assumptions: first, that the public would indeed understand the presence of such statues as opportune for mockery and, second, that the de-contextualisation, what he calls the “transfer-as-neutralization theory” (Curran 1994:53), of statues indeed bereft them of their sacred character.

statues: a group understood as Adam and Eve was, in fact, a depiction of one of the labours of Hercules (James 1996:13).

The gods were also mocked in early Christian apologetics; the very human-nature of the gods was satirised to reveal the absurdity of Greco-Roman religion:

What? Don't their very forms and features betray the absurdity and indignity of your gods? Vulcan is lame and crippled; Apollo for all his years is beardless; Aesculapius sports a full beard even though he is the son of the ever-youthful Apollo. Neptune has blue-green eyes; Minerva eyes like a cat; Juno like an ox. Mercury has winged feet; Pan is hoofed... (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 22.5–23.1).⁶

St Augustine (354–430) mocked the sheer number of minor deities involved in daily Roman life. For example, in *The City of God* (1.6.9) he sarcastically probes into the mechanics of the divine presence among the sheets of the wedding bed:

What is this? If it was absolutely necessary that a man, labouring at this work, should be helped by the gods, might not some one god or goddess have been sufficient? Was Venus not sufficient alone...?⁷

I do not know whether Christians poked fun at gods in gardens.

4.1.3 Aesthetic

But perhaps Constantine simply put the statues on display for urban beautification, as Curran (1994:55) has argued: “The truth is that late antique emperors and noblemen merely carried on the kind of civic patronage which had characterized their class for centuries. There was no self-consciously religious motivation to their work”.

If this interpretation is correct, then this act of euergetism is an example of an attitude to the pagan gods that contributed to their endurance within Christian culture, namely that of aesthetic appreciation. For some, especially the well-educated, the monuments of antiquity were revered and enjoyed as works of art (Saradi-Menelovici 1990:50–52). In an Imperial decree, recorded in the Theodosian Code (16.10.8), ordering a temple in Mesopotamia to be made public, we read: “images... must be measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity”. Nor did the Byzantines regard classical art as immoral *per se*, as they drew no distinction between the art of pagan antiquity and their own (James 1996:14). By the fifth century sacrifice was illegal and a growing number of Romans in cities were Christian, yet the gods remained subjects for art. Liebeschuetz (1995:194) compares the early Christian affirmation of pagan mythology as a source for art to the Renaissance artists who equally had no scruples ‘making idols’. In his *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, Seznec (1972) demonstrated

⁶ Quoted in Beard, North & Price (1998a:29).

⁷ Beard, North & Price (1998a:33) speculate that the multitude of gods that Augustine ridicules was not necessarily a part of Roman daily life, historically, but derived from some pagan scholar's work on theology.

that the pagan gods not only survived as artistic subjects during the early Christian period when the conversion of the Empire was incomplete, but during the entire Middle Ages, albeit in a style that was growingly non-classical in form.⁸ It goes without saying that the appreciation of pagan art endured amongst those well-heeled Romans who were slower to convert to Christianity.

Some statues were not revered but reused. Since some Byzantine Christians believed in the power of images, they thought idols could be harnessed for practical ends. For example, statues were constructed into the fort walls of seventh century Ankara (and other cities in Asia Minor), pointing outwards as a means to direct their evil energy to ward off enemies (James 1996:16).

4.1.4 Allegorical

The fate of the gods was secured for Christian culture once they had been saved by philosophers as *allegories* veiling Christian truth. Indeed, it was not only Christians that sought to reconcile the myths of Homer and Hesiod with their beliefs, but also non-Christians that were critical of the immorality and anthropomorphism of the gods ever since the pre-Socratic philosophers started describing the *kosmos* in more prosaic and abstract terms at the end of the sixth century before Christ, when stories of *theogony* became scrutinised by theology. Protagoras' (481–411 BC) opening line from his, mostly lost, *On the Gods* agnostically⁹ confessed: “As to the gods, I have no means of knowing either that they exist or that they do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life”. The disregard for mytho-poetry as bad theology was entrenched in certain circles of Greek philosophy by the time Plato (c. 428–348 BC) – paradoxically, a myth-maker himself – criticised the myths of Homer and Hesiod for being untrue and immoral (*Rep.* 2. 377d–e), thus arguing for their ‘cancellation’ from the curricula for the young (*Rep.* 2.378a–e).

Mythology thus condemned was liberated (for the educated) centuries later by the Neoplatonist Proclus (412–485) who, in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, argued that the myths ought to be read *as* allegory since “symbols are not imitations of those things which

⁸ The depiction of pagan gods in Medieval manuscripts (specifically in the allegorical treatise on the gods from around 1100), was increasingly based on verbal descriptions of gods and Arabic imagery, and therefore no longer resembled the figures of gods from antiquity (Seznec 1972:167).

⁹ Whereas Protagoras, a Sophist, was agnostic as to whether the gods existed or not, his fellow Sophist, Prodicus was blatantly atheist and debunked the myths as stories of men who made advancements (e.g. in food production) from primitivism toward civilisation.

they are symbols of” (*In Platonis rem publicam commentarii* 1.198.15–16)¹⁰ – as such, the myths were received as “divinely inspired and truly trans-formative” (Domaradzki 2014:123); when not read at face value, the myths made for edifying reading. (This Neoplatonic interpretation of mythology became an important part of classical topomythopoiesis during the Renaissance, as will be discussed later.)

Thus, we must be careful to not overstress the difference of the interpretation of mythology initiated by the spread of Christian teaching and that of the late classical world, for the gods had for long been the subject of doubt:¹¹ by the sixth century, both agnostic pagans and monotheistic Christians could tolerate the myths through “the *moralising* of an amoral traditional deity” (Liebeschuetz 1995:199) – the exploits of the gods were *interpreted* to reveal higher truths.

This appreciation of myth as a code to be deciphered carried the myths through the Christian Middle Ages, culminating in mythography that deliberately retold the myths *as* Christian allegory – even scandalous Ovid was thus revived by an anonymous Burgundian author in the widely read *Ovide Moralisé* from the early fourteenth century. A similar work was the similarly titled *Ovidius Moralizatus* (1340) by Pierre Bersuire (c. 1290–1362), who influenced Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1392).

4.1.5 Euhemeristic

Another Christian approach to the myths that echoed pre-Christian scepticism was that found within the euhemeristic tradition which sought to demonstrate that the gods were benevolent, mortal rulers from a distant past that were deified through years of adulation.¹² In antiquity, this reading of ‘myth as history’ was a means to debunk the gods and cast them with suspicion, whereas for the Christians of the Middle Ages it provided the necessary rationale to think of the gods not as the ‘other gods’ forbidden by the God of the Ten Commandments, but as human figures of genius and nobility (Seznec 1972:13). The gifts bestowed upon humanity by the likes of Mercury and Apollo must be accepted with gratitude: “Our medieval compilers [of histories] feel themselves indebted to all these great men [‘gods’]; they also feel themselves their heirs... it is at last possible for medieval man unreservedly and even with pride to claim the heritage of antiquity” (Seznec 1972:18). This approach was taken by writers of late antiquity such as Fulgentius in his *Mythologiae* who was

¹⁰ Translated and quoted by Domaradzki (2014:125).

¹¹ For a full account of the disbelief in the gods during antiquity, see Whitmarsh’s *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (2016).

¹² Founded by Euhemerus in late fourth century BC.

to greatly influence Boccaccio and other mythographers centuries later.

There should be no doubt that the Greco-Roman gods were not wholly excommunicated by the Christians of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, only to resurface in the Renaissance. The gods were dead ‘as gods’, but long lived as subjects for art, apologetics, astronomy and allegory. Whereas the presence of the gods thus remained partially protected within the literature and visual arts of early Christian and later medieval periods, their *physical* presence almost completely vanished from designed landscapes.

4.2 CHRISTIAN GARDENS: TEMPTATION OR PARADISE?

For early Christians, the question was not merely whether the gods and their settings could be tolerated in gardens, but whether gardens should be tolerated at all; whether the followers of Christ may enjoy the “earthly joys and pleasures” (Meyvaert 1986:25) of a garden or whether piety calls for complete withdrawal from the world to rather cultivate the inner beauty of the soul by practising the virtues of “self-discipline [and] celibacy” (ibid.).

Again, it was not only Christians who were sceptical of the kind of garden where *voluptas* was more important than *utilitas*:¹³ “Throughout Roman culture there was a continuing debate, even criticism, of opulent and luxuriate landscaping” (Hunt 2012:52). Kapteyn (2015) argues that the *De re rustica* of Varro (116–27 BC), who died at the very birth of Empire, was an agricultural treatise veiling a commentary on the decay of the Roman Republic:

“A farm is undoubtedly more profitable, so far as the buildings are concerned,” said Fundanius, “if you construct them more according to the thrift of the ancients than the luxury of the moderns; for the former built to suit the size of their crops, while the latter build to suit their unbridled luxury...” (Varro, *De re rustica* 1.13.5–6).

Like the owners of the extravagant villa landscapes (with their topomyths) that were being fabricated towards the end of the first century before Christ (3.4.5), Rome itself had come to wallow in the pursuit of urbane luxury. Varro’s conservative nostalgia for a more rural and simpler past was echoed in the new millennium by Pliny the Elder and the younger Seneca. Such polemics did not stop the blossoming of topomythopoiesis in pagan Rome, but a similar sentiment was taken seriously by the Christian gardeners of the early monasteries who warded off temptation through husbandry, avoiding the decadence of artifice.

The lack of early Christian pleasure gardens and its mythical accoutrements also can be ascribed, simply, to the lack of money. The Roman topomythopoeic gardens of Pompeii,

¹³ From Roman mythology’s *Voluptas*, goddess born from Cupid and Psyche, and signifier of pleasure, often sensual. In opposition, *utilitas* refers to function, and in the case of gardening, food production.

Ostia and the rural villas were constructed by wealthy individuals. Early converts were poor, attracted by the Church's practice and teaching of charity, and ennoblement of poverty: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).¹⁴

At the end of the fourth century, wealthy Romans did start entering the Church at greater numbers which "marks the true beginning of the triumphant Catholicism of the Middle Age" (Brown 2012:32) – an even more important watershed in the Church's history than the conversion of Constantine in 312. Yet, even they did not commonly splash their wealth on 'Christian gardens', but volunteered a life of poverty. For example, when St Melania the Younger converted to Christianity in 404, she sold all her properties scattered across the Empire to give to the poor (Littlewood 2017:251).

Despite the early Christians' moral misgivings and meagre monies, gardening was baptised as a legitimate Christian pursuit.¹⁵ Even the first ascetics gardened. Meyvaert (1986:25) describes how the origins of monasticism and the later medieval walled garden go hand-in-hand, for without the productive garden a life of self-sustenance – in the desert environments of Egypt and Syria – would be impossible. These kitchen gardens were not settings for lazy *otium* or lavish *luxuria*, showing off wealth with nymphaea or wine-soaked chit-chat in *triclinia* about statue-gods, but productive places – free from iconographic exuberance – that required disciplined labour. This restrained form of gardening left little room for topomyths.

4.3 THE PERSISTENCE OF THE *LOCUS AMOENUS*

The lack of physical gardens with mythological iconographic programmes from the early Christian period, through the Middle Ages, must not be mistaken for a complete break in the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis. The virtual landscape of Arcadia was still evoked, if only through verbal ekphrasis. It was especially the classical landscape *atmospheres* associated with the Elysian fields and the *locus amoenus* that whiffed through the descriptions of (earthly and heavenly) Paradise, fused with the descriptions of Eden from Genesis and Revelation (Maguire 2002:23).

For example, when Basil the Great (330–379), founder of communal monasticism in

¹⁴ Rare examples exist of Christian gatherings in wealthy Roman households during the second century in Rome itself, as demonstrated by Lampe (2006) with reference to the Valentinians, a Gnostic Christian group.

¹⁵ Some sects, like the Manicheans persisted in their opposition to gardening (and hunting). Robin Lane Fox (1986:526) accounts of the story of Mani, the founder's visit to a Mesopotamian prince, brother of King Shapur (215–270), who was a proud garden owner. Mani, in a vision, showed him the gardens of the true Paradise which eclipsed his own efforts, upon which the prince converted and, presumably, quit gardening.

the East, wrote a letter to his brother Gregory to describe his mountain retreat in Pontus,¹⁶ he used Homer's language of the *locus amoenus*. Specifically, he evoked the garden of Calypso as a means to cultivate the mental image of the natural milieu, a setting that was congruent with his virtual ideal:

... I departed into Pontus in quest of a place to live in. There God has opened on me a spot exactly answering to my taste, so that I actually see before my eyes what I have often pictured to my mind in idle fancy. There is a lofty mountain covered with thick woods, watered towards the north with cool and transparent streams. A plain lies beneath, enriched by the waters which are ever draining off from it; and skirted by a spontaneous profusion of trees almost thick enough to be a fence; so as even to surpass Calypso's Island, which Homer seems to have considered the most beautiful spot on the earth (from Letter 14, in Newman 1840:126).

Later in the letter, the language of the garden of Alcinous, although not stated explicitly, was used:

Behind my abode there is another gorge, rising into a ledge up above, so as to command the extent of the plains and the stream which bounds it, which is not less beautiful, to my taste, than the Strymon as seen from Amphipolis. For while the latter flows leisurely, and swells into a lake almost, and is too still to be a river, the former is the most rapid stream I know, and somewhat turbid, too, from the rocks just above; from which, shooting down, and eddying in a deep pool, it forms a most pleasant scene for myself or any one else; and is an inexhaustible resource to the country people, in the countless fish which its depths contain. What need to tell of the exhalations from the earth, or the breezes from the river? Another might admire the multitude of flowers, and singing birds... (from Letter 14, in Newman 1840:127).

True to the reluctance of Christians to indulge in the pleasures of the landscape, he ends the lyrical description with a disclaimer: "but leisure I have none for such thoughts".

In the West, the *locus amoenus* trope was employed by Eucherius (c. 380–c. 449), bishop of Lyons, to describe the island of Lérins off the south coast of France as a good setting for a monastery: "a place bubbling with water, verdant with plants, offering pleasant prospects and lovely fragrances, presenting itself as a paradise to those who live there" (in Meyvaert 1986:44). In the East, a similar image efflorescing pleasantness is conjured in a sixth century description by Prokopios (c. 500–c. 570) of the sanctuary of the Virgin at the holy spring of Pege outside Constantinople, containing "thick grove of cypresses, a flowery meadow, a park of shrubs, and a quietly bubbling stream" (transcribed by Littlewood 2017:254) which Littlewood (ibid.) cites as possible evidence for the influence of pagan sanctuaries on the making of Christian church gardens.

The topomythopoeic spatial types of grove, meadow and spring thus had a more enduring influence on the Christian landscapes of late antiquity than the explicit iconography

¹⁶ Region on the southern coast of the Black Sea.

of the gods, and came to define the symbolic-somatic ideal of the medieval garden: “the pagan *locus amoenus*, a flower-studded meadow fringed with trees and watered by a meandering brook, became the ‘flowery mead’ of medieval art and literature” (Stokstad 1986:177). To the extent that, by the dawn of the first millennium, the *locus amoenus* had become a staple of literary style guides (Curtius 1973:197).

4.4 INVISIBLE GODS

Whilst the language of landscape that relates to the sanctuaries of the gods and their mythical haunts survived Christianisation, they themselves were seemingly banished. Yet, their *invisible* presence was still sometimes evoked through literary descriptions of real places. For example, when the Byzantine court poet Paul the Silentiary (?–c. 580)¹⁷ described the sea-fronted gardens of the palace at Hiercia,¹⁸ he conjured a mythopoeic scene wherein the water-dwelling nymphs of the ocean (Nereids) met those flowing over the land (Naiads):

The sea washes the abode of the earth, and the navigable expanse of the dry land blooms with marine groves. How skilled was he who mingled the deep with the land, seaweed with gardens, the floods of the Nereids with the streams of the Naiads (in Littlewood 2017:253).

The father of the Nereids was Nereus, who was himself evoked as an anthropomorphic image of the sea in a letter written in the West by the statesman turned monk and student of antiquity Cassiodorus (485–c. 585). He founded a monastery in Calabria, Italy and named it *Vivariensis* with reference to the living fish held in rock-hewn, salt-water fishponds – serving both *utilitas* and *voluptas*:

Scyllacium has also an abundant share of the delicacies of the sea, possessing near it those gates of Neptune which we ourselves constructed. At the foot of the Moscian Mount we hollowed out the bowels of the rock, and tastefully introduced therein the eddying waves of Nereus. Here a troop of fishes, sporting in free captivity, refreshes all minds with delight, and charms all eyes with admiration (Cassiodorus 1886:504).

Mindful that such ‘charms’ can seduce the faithful away from a higher calling, he wrote a disclaimer that typifies the medieval tension, mentioned earlier, between earthly pleasure and heavenly pursuits in his *Institutiones*: “It is a delightful place, but the delights it provides are temporal and passing, and not to be confused with the future joys yearned for by the faithful believers in Christ” (in Meyvart 1986:28).

¹⁷ The court poet (from a wealthy background), possible Christian, of Justinian at Constantinople; died c. 580. Famous for his ekphrasis of the Hagia Sophia.

¹⁸ Built by Justinian for his wife, Theodora, as a summer retreat on a peninsula known in modern Istanbul as Fenerbahçe (‘lighthouse garden’).

The evocation of the gods was no mere fading remnant of late antique literary style, but endured into the Carolingian era and later Middle Ages. In Strabo's *Hortulus* (*The little garden*, written around 840) – a poetic account of the monk's joys and troubles of tending his herb and vegetable garden – the monk evokes the garden gods, and often his Muse, for the poetic associations they carry. Sometimes, he does so while insulting them, for example in the opening lines when evoking the lustful nature god Priapus:

A quiet life has many rewards: not least of these
Is the joy that comes to him who devotes himself to the art
They knew at Paestum, and learns the ancient skill of obscene
Priapus... (Strabo 1966:25)

The elements of nature that shape Strabo's daily dealings, are described with the frozen language of the Greek nature deities:

... Plants stirred in the Zephyr's path (Strabo 1966:27).

His descriptions of his lovingly tended plants are irrigated with myth. When describing his climbing gourd (pumpkin), he compares it with a vine that grows up a tree which, inevitably, brings the god of wine into the picture:

Up and up: the bunches [of the vine] hang there for all to see,
Blushing in the palace they have made their own; the green storeys
Sag with Bacchus, whose broad leaves part the lofty foliage (Strabo 1966:35).

Other plant mythologies are recalled throughout, for example: the hyacinth¹⁹ as the metamorphosed youth – after being struck by a discus – with whom Apollo fell in love (Strabo 1966:45), and poppy is described with reference to Ceres who ate from the plant to forget about the “mourning of the loss of her stolen daughter” (Strabo 1966:49), the abducted Persephone.

Parts of Strabo's poem, and its style, was probably based on Virgil's *Georgics* (Meyvaert 1986:48), in which he extolled the virtues of farming. Virgil was regarded, throughout the Middle Ages, as a prophet who predicted the coming of Christ. He was thus baptised as a legitimate pagan source, including for his nostalgia for the lost Golden Age during which man, untainted by luxury, cultivated the earth in peace²⁰ – a poetic version of Varro's earlier pro-farming prose.

When palaeographer Ludwig Traube (1861–1907) classified the eighth and ninth

¹⁹ For more detail on the plant-mythology of the hyacinth and other species, see Giesecke (2014:49).

²⁰ Virgil's Golden Age was somewhat different to Hesiod's, as in the latter (as in the prelapsarian Garden of Eden) humankind need not labour, while Virgil's *Georgics* was in praise of toil; see Ryberg (1958:123).

centuries as the *aetas Vergilianus* – the age of Virgil – he was claiming Virgil as the exemplar ancient poet of the period, followed later by the *aetas Horatiana* (tenth and eleventh centuries), and *aetas Ovidiana* (twelfth and thirteenth centuries). We may tentatively extend this interpretation of medieval literature to the history of classical topomythopoiesis, by stating that the virtual Arcadia of the Early Middle Ages was a rustic Virgilian countryside in which the gods of agriculture made rare appearances.

Although the manuscript of the *Hortullus* was only discovered and gained widespread readership in the sixteenth century,²¹ we may infer that, for the literate medieval gardener of the Early Middle Ages the gods remained associated with their plants, long since their statues and architectural settings disappeared.

Not surprisingly, since early medieval knowledge of plants and their propagation was largely based on Greco-Roman sources such as Pliny, Dioscorides and Galen (Stannard 1986:72), some of the mythological plant-lore survived. For example, the magical powers of some plants were denoted by their divine names, such as the Narcissus bulb (*Narcissus poeticus*) and Jupiter's beard (*Sempervivum tectorum*). The former was thought to offer protection if kept in a house, and the latter was grown on roofs to prevent lightning²² (Stannard 1986:90).

In Volume 2 of the Byzantine *Geoponika*, an agricultural treatise dedicated to Constantine VII (913–959), the author provides a series of ten, short mythologies to introduce specific plants and their cultivation. These recall some ancient god-plant associations, such as Venus and the rose (1805:78), and Apollo and the bay tree (1805:68):

Daphne was a most beautiful daughter of the river Ladon; and Apollo being smitten with her, pursued her as his beloved object. When she was therefore apprehended by the god, they say that she supplicated her mother Earth, and that she was received by her; and when the Earth produced a tree for her, Apollo was struck with astonishment at the sight of it, and he called the tree Daphne, after the name of the virgin and taking a sprig of it, he crowned himself with it; and from that time the plant became a symbol of divination.

The continued reference to the pagan myths in the East shows that there was “at least a mild tolerance of paganism that could be intellectually consistent with Byzantine classicism” (Rodgers 2002:169). The *Geoponika* was influential in Byzantine medieval garden-culture until the fifteenth century (Constantinides 2002:100), thereby ensuring that the classical mythopoetics of plants, to some degree, endured until the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

4.5 GLIMMERING GODS

The use of the gods to personify nature (e.g. water as nymphs, wind as Zephyrus) or provide

²¹ See the foreword by George H.M. Lawrence to the English translation (Strabo 1966).

²² A drop in the level of the uterus before birth.

a poetic backstory for a plant (e.g. bay tree as Daphne) remained faint glimpses into the virtual landscape of Arcadia during the first Christian century. Their presence started to undim as the *aetus Vergilianus* with its emphasis on simplistic gardening passed over to the *aetus Ovidianus* when gardens were deflected with greater frivolity, together with the erotic allure and strangeness of the Ovidian myths.²³

The twelfth century witnessed two important developments for the tradition of classical topomythopoesis: the publication of illustrated mythological treatises and the emergence of the garden of love literary typology; the gods (and their visual representations) were in greater circulation and were convenient figures to inhabit the gardens of earthly pleasure.

Ovid's *The Art of Love* (AD 2) influenced the development of the medieval conception of courtly love (Parry in Cappelanus 1960:4–7): a literary vision of love that entailed the pursuit of a beloved, noble woman, by a socially inferior lover who, as a soldier for Venus and Cupid (the God of Love), suffers many trials and pains on his quest.²⁴ It originated at the end of the eleventh century in the love songs sung in the south of France by the troubadours.²⁵ The customs of wooing was codified in the twelfth century *Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus²⁶ (the Chaplain), albeit perhaps satirically.²⁷ In it, Venus and Cupid are evoked throughout as an allegorical shorthand for the duo of sex and desire.²⁸ Phrases like “the work of Venus” (Capellanus 1960:32) and “the darts of Cupid” (Capellanus 1960:119) are not used as much to evoke myths, but simply as polite manners of talking about rumpy-pumpy.

Although, in the Fifth Dialogue the God of Love makes a more concrete appearance:

²³ This categorisation, to some extent, mirrors that of Joseph Addison, who greatly influenced classical topomythopoesis in England during the eighteenth century, categorised the myths of Homer as evoking sublime landscapes; Virgil pleasant productive landscapes; and Ovid landscapes of strangeness (*Spectator* No. 417, 1712).

²⁴ The term, originally *L'Amour courtois*, was coined by literary historian Gaston Paris (1883:488) to describe the complex system of courting in the Medieval court developed in the twelfth century in the south of France by the troubadours. Whether developed independently from Byzantine romance is debated.

²⁵ For a study of their love songs, see O'Neill (2006).

²⁶ His work was not received well by all, and there is some debate as to what the contemporary reception of it was: some at the time read it for pure entertainment, as it deviated so much from Christian ideals. Others thought it to be ironic or humorous. For a full discussion, see Monson (1988).

²⁷ Clark (2015:98) speculates that the book was an ironic and “covert criticism on the shallowness of the courtly love milieu in the Middle Ages”.

²⁸ For a full discussion of their role in Medieval literature, see *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* by Tinkle (1996).

in the discussion between a French noble-man and woman, the former accounts of awakening from a nap within a pleasant meadow,²⁹ then seeing a mounted and crowned figure leading a procession of ladies on horseback. One of them reveals the identity of the glorious leader as the God of Love, on his way to take his seat on the throne next to the Queen of Love in an enclosed garden named Delightfulness (*Amoenitas*). The garden is circular, consisting of three concentric layers around a central fruit-bearing tree from which sweet-water springs at its roots and flows like a rillwash in all directions. The inner garden, furnished with soft and decorated couches, was like a heavenly paradise of this “love religion” (Lewis 1935:37) destined only for those ladies who lived by the laws of love. Others were banished to the second ring (*Humiditas*): flooded with icy water, drenched in harsh sun with no trees for shade; the worst ended in the outermost ring (*Siccitas*): waterless, hell-like (Capellanus 1960:78–79).

The paradisaical atmosphere of the central garden echoes that found in a source that was a possible precedent for Capellanus, namely *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love* (1022) by the Iberian Islamic poet Ibn Hazm (994–1064):³⁰ the delights of an Andalusian garden, with shades of the Quran and the classical *locus amoenus*, are coupled with the theme of love:

We promenaded for an hour, and then sat us down in a most desirable spot. There we stretched ourselves at our ease in spacious gardens; the broad panorama was a joy to the contemplative eye, a rich pasture to the ruminating spirit. Brooks ran through the meadows like silver ewers; birds chanted melodies that put to shame the inventions of Ma'bad and al-Gharid; hanging fruits leaned down to our reaching fingers, ready and eager to be gathered. Between the grateful shades we glimpsed the sun, that looked like the squares of a chessboard or gowns of gay brocade; sweet flowed the water, imparting the veritable savour of life; swift gushed the rivulets, sliding like serpents' bellies, their murmur now rising, now falling. Gay flowers of variegated hue swayed to the gentle fragrant zephyrs; the air was mild and cool; and my companions excelled all this loveliness in the beauty of their natural qualities (Hazm 1994:191–192).

This topomyth of the enclosed garden of love goes back to antiquity: in Claudian's (c. AD 370–404) *Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria*, the poet rendered a topomyth befitting their marriage: on an insurmountable mount in Cyprus grows a labourless garden with flowery meadows and groves of trees-in-love (“palm bends down to mate with palm”, Claudian 1922:247) that bask in eternal spring, encircled by a golden hedge. In the garden “spring two fountains, the one of sweet water, the other of bitter... and in these streams ‘tis said that Cupid dips his arrows” (Claudian 1922:249). There the god of love dwells with his mother,

²⁹ The *locus amoenus* situated within a wild forest was to become a characteristic of romance literature (Curtius 1973:201–202).

³⁰ For a comparison with Capellanus, see Semah (1992).

Venus, but not as the living, numinous deities of mythology, but as allegories of love told in celebration of marriage. C.S. Lewis (1935:73) cites Claudian's writing – with its “riot of personifications”³¹ – as part of an early literary trend that developed into the medieval allegorisation of mythology, written during the “ever-deepening twilight of the gods” (ibid.). Yet, Lewis also sees in this mount-garden another foreshadowing: that of the topos (such as in Capellanus) that is not smuggled into texts to serve the mere substitutive function as codespeak for love, but imaginatively created by poets as “regions of strangeness and beauty for their own sake” (ibid.) – the gods were dead, long lived they in the medieval literary topomyths of love.

The trope of the enclosed garden of love existed even before Claudian. In the second century Greek novel *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius,³² we read of the lover's bird-filled garden (also containing love-struck palms) where he finds refuge with his beloved:

This garden was a meadow, a very object of beauty to the eyes; round it ran a wall of sufficient height, and each of the four sides of the wall formed a portico standing on pillars, within which was a close plantation of trees (Tatius 1969:45).

In the midst of all these flowers bubbled up a spring, the waters of which were confined in a square artificial basin; the water served as a mirror for the flowers, giving the impression of a double grove, one real and the other a reflection (Tatius 1969:47).

This erotic novel was read in Byzantine literary circles up to the twelfth century (Leedom 2013:26) and influenced the late twelfth century *Hysmine and Hysminias* – also set in a walled garden – written by the Byzantine writer Eustathius Macrembolites (c. 1150–1200). As a revivalist of Greek romance, he employed the imagery of water spring and the gods of love to allegorise the scene where *Hysminias* declares how passion draws him away from reason: “Once I was the fountain of Zeus, full of virgin graces, but now Eros is making me flow away into the fountain of Aphrodite... Once my head was crowned with laurel, but now with roses” (in Warren 1916:239). The gods of love entered the Byzantine walled garden to dally around its fountain, again mostly serving the function of symbolic shorthand: Aphrodite signals the desire for love, as a turn from the more stoic life overseen by Zeus. This garden-image (probably) travelled to France where it was grafted with the system of courtship and remained rooted in the romance literature of the West as a distinctly medieval

³¹ For example, later in the description of the garden, we also read of gods as personifications of human traits, for example “Licence bound by no fetters” (Claudian 1922:249); “Boldness trembling at his first thefts” (ibid.).

³² Greek-speaking, from Alexandria, became Christian and a bishop. It is not certain whether the novel was written before or after his conversion.

virtual landscape as a syncretism between classical, Byzantine, Islamic and Christian sources.³³ The representational network of medieval classical topomythopoiesis was expanded from literature to objects like caskets (Figure 4.1) and combs that represented gardens, fountains and the Gods of Love.



Figure 4.1. Fragment of ivory casket, Lorraine (?), France, c. 1330–1350 (The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978.39b). The relief depicts, amongst many mythic episodes related to courtly love, a fountain of youth (left) and the God of Love (right) pointing his rose-tipped arrow at a couple in a tower. (It also shows the entrapment and hunting of a unicorn, a popular theme for medieval ivory caskets and combs).

4.6 AN ALLEGORY OF PARTICIPATION

The exemplar child of this union between garden and the rites of love was the widely-read *Roman de la Rose*,³⁴ in which Guillaume de Lorris, and then Jean de Meun, created literary topomyths and myth-filled episodes that also borrowed, in part, from Ovid and relied on the medieval reader's familiarity with the Roman poet (Fleming 1986:224). Yet, true to the medieval tendency to moralise myth, the Ovidian themes were not supposed to be taken at face value, as indeed the character Reason instructs in De Meun's part:

In our schools indeed they say many things in parables that are very beautiful to hear; however, one should not take whatever one hears according to the letter (De Meun & De Lorris 1995:136).

You will profit in delight and delight in profit, for in the playful fables of the poets lie very profitable delights beneath which they cover their thoughts when they clothe the truth in fables (ibid.).

Thus, the authors were following the tradition of interpreting the myths as allegories, as per Horace's instruction on the purpose of poetry from his *Ars poetica* (ll. 333–334), widely quoted during the Middle Ages (Olson 1982:21):

Poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life.

³³ Whether Byzantine erotic literature indeed influenced that of the west remains an open question. Saintsbury (1897:380–381) was inclined to see a positive correlation in his *The Flourishing of Romance and the Rise of Allegory*.

³⁴ *Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meun (c. 1230) and Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1275).

Poetry must either ‘profit’ (*prodesse*) or ‘delight’ (*delectare*) or, as Reasons reveals about the *Roman*, both.³⁵ The ‘playful fables’ could be enjoyed, but enjoyed for their veiled meaning, helpful in the pursuit of a life perfected.

For example, as the Lover (*L’Amant*) wanders through Delight’s walled garden of pleasure – while being shadowed by Cupid like a hunter – he encounters, underneath a magnificent pine, a clear-flowing fountain springing from a marble block (ll. 1428–1429). Chiselled words reveal the dark history of this seemingly life-giving source: it is here that fair Narcissus withered away to death. Like Pausanias who, upon encountering the sacred *topoi* of Greece during his travels, recounted their mytho-histories (sometimes sceptically), the Lover recalls Ovid’s story (*Met.* 3.351–510) and, unlike Pausanias, preaches its moral implications.³⁶

4.6.1 The exegesis of a topomyth

Such instructive literature was common in an age when people sought “useful guides for thinking well and doing well” (Fleming 1986:233). As a moral allegory on love, the *Roman* offered just that, but we may guess it also presented readers with guidance, if only adjunct, for lingering well in a garden.³⁷ If indeed the medieval reader of the *Roman* transferred the delightful profit of the Narcissus episode to their experiences of physical gardens, then the encounter with the fountain presented a model for exegetic participation, unfolding in four acts.

My conceptualisation of this progression of participation is based on the four levels of exegesis applied by medieval theologians in their interpretations of biblical passages, namely: literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical. For example, an episode from the Old Testament such as the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt may be interpreted at all four levels: The literal, is reading the episode as historic fact – the Jews really did migrate from Egypt. The allegorical, is reading the episode in relation to Christ or the Church – Jesus, like

³⁵ See discussion by Olson (1982:22): Medieval literature was generally understood in terms of this distinction between the delightful and the useful, and that works were understood as sometimes being delightful, but not useful and *vice versa*. She goes on to argue that in some cases, works were regarded as achieving both ends.

³⁶ When describing the Narcissus fountain on Mount Helicon, Pausanias (*Descriptions of Greece* 9.31.7) wrote, without interpretation and rather scathingly of the old legend: “They say that Narcissus looked into this water, and not understanding that he saw his own reflection, unconsciously fell in love with himself, and died of love at the spring. But it is utter stupidity to imagine that a man old enough to fall in love was incapable of distinguishing a man from a man’s reflection”.

³⁷ Ricci (2006:8) lists the *Roman* as one of the “reference models for the everyday life of the rising classes [of Late Middle Ages in Italy]”. We may infer that ‘being in a garden’ was part of this exemplum.

Moses, leads people from bondage. The tropological is reading the episode as a moral instruction for the transformation of the reader – the soul can be lead from the bondage of sin to the freedom of virtue. The anagogical is reading the episode as a representation of life beyond earthly existence – the redeemed soul can migrate to heaven.³⁸ In my reading of the *Roman*, it is not the Hebraic Old Testament read in dialogue with the New Testament of the Christian Church, but a Greco-Roman myth read in dialogue with the religion of love. Although I cannot claim that De Lorris had this in mind when writing the text, the chronology of the Narcissus episode does fit into this scheme rather neatly:

4.6.2 Act I: literal participation

The first act is simple: The Lover retells the story of Narcissus upon sight of the basin (ll. 1425–1504). Should the medieval garden dweller follow this example, they may recount a water-myth upon viewing a physical fountain as a kind of euhemeristic reading of the mytho-history of the artefact. As in the *Roman*, an inscription may serve to prompt a specific story, but little else, for medieval fountains, typically, did not include any sculptures of the gods.³⁹ At least, not going by prosaic descriptions from which we can glean their appearance, granted the scant remains of physical medieval garden-artefacts. For example, in the influential and widely read treatise, *Ruralia commoda* (c. 1309) by Pietro di Crescenzi (c. 1230–c. 1320) a fountain is recommended as part of a small pleasure garden:

And, if possible, a very pure spring should be diverted into the middle of the garden, because its purity produces much pleasantness (8.1.4 in Bauman 2002a:101).

The simple, stone fountain, reminiscent of the basin in *Leucippe*, was regarded as the ideal marker for a garden of somatic delights (*delectatio*), and its description bears witness to a conceptual shift from the earlier medieval emphasis on the productive aims of Christian gardening – here, delight (and not production) *is* purposeful. This shift was heralded earlier by Albert Magnus (1200–1280) who described the therapeutic qualities of *viridaria* in his *De vegetabilibus* with emphasis on the delights and benefits of sights and smells (*visus et odoratus*). The text was the direct, near copied, source for Crescenzi's pleasure garden (Bauman 2002b:117) who, throughout his treatise, also advocated for the 'profit in delight' of gardens

³⁸ This summary of the four levels of exegesis, using Exodus and an example, is taken from Mazzeo (1978:5).

³⁹ An exceptional example is cited by Miller (1986:141–142): "In the cloister of St Denis a single limestone block nearly twelve meters in diameter served as the ecclesiastical font. Ordered by the abbé Hughes, c. 1200, it once stood beneath a vault resting on sixteen marble columns. Pagan deities are juxtaposed with mythological heroes characteristic of the encyclopaedic preoccupations of the Middle Ages". Thus, perhaps mythic iconography was more common, but have not survived.

that can restore the body and the mind (Bauman 2002c:135). A fitting title then for *The Book of Rural Benefits*.

His treatise provides no provision for figurative sculpted elements to evoke classical (or Christian) stories: the garden-maker following Crescenzi may have pursued a *locus amoenus* with its murmuring stream and somatic echoes of Eden and Arcadia, but would not have included any statues or reliefs of the Virgin or Venus.

Thus, upon encountering a physical fountain as perhaps prescribed by Crescenzi, the garden dweller may, in emulation of the Lover's participation within a literary garden, evoke the tale of Narcissus without reliance on any visual cues to that beautiful son of river-god and nymph⁴⁰ – the youth dwelt in the garden, but only when viewed in the imprint on the garden dweller's imagination.

4.6.3 Act II: allegorical participation

Next, the Lover interprets the myth in relation to the laws of the religion of love (ll. 1505–1508): it is a veiled warning against the destruction brought by self-love and self-objectification, if we assume the Lover associated himself with Narcissus. Or else, it speaks of the despair brought by the self-isolation of a beloved, if we assume the Lover is like Echo, and thus directs the *exemplum*⁴¹ at haughty ladies (Hult 1982:135). To some extent, the fate of Narcissus is prophetic of the Lover's own entrapment (ll. 1603–1614), in the same way that, according to biblical exegesis, Old Testament figures and events foreshadow those of the New. An example is Adam as prefigure to Christ, but as an anti-type since Adam brought death to life, and Christ life from death (Mazzeo 1978:4). We may view Narcissus, who fell in love with himself, as the prefigured anti-type of the Lover, who falls in love with an-other.

4.6.4 Act III: tropological participation

In the next few lines (1511–1521), the Lover reflects on the moral implication of the story for himself: surely, he ponders, the lesson needs to be heeded and the *fons mortis* must be avoided. Yet, without providing a reason, he scoffs at his trepidation and proceeds to gaze into the fountain, which is then described as a strong, perennial spring of clear water, much like Crescenzi's.

The first three acts of participation, prompted by the fountain and its inscription, recall the Ovidian myth and brings its symbolic dimension into the fold of courtly love. Yet, the physical and somatic dimensions of the topomyth remain mostly unaffected. To put this in

⁴⁰ Narcissus was the beautiful son of river-god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope, yet was himself mortal.

⁴¹ A narrative with a lesson.

terms of a medieval understanding of optics,⁴² the fountain is seen as an object within the mirror-like surface of the eye, which then provides the input for the imagination where it is transformed into a phantasm⁴³ – an image of the fountain that is independent of sensation and, quite literally, *more than meets the eye*. According to Andalusian scholar Ibn Rushd (Latinised as Averroes; 1126–1198), who promulgated this Aristotelian theory of optics, we cannot dwell on both the sensed and the imagined object at the same time.⁴⁴ When not viewing the fountain as the final resting place of Narcissus, the Lover enjoys it simply for its bubbling water; the fountain and its virtual counterpart remain in dualistic opposition, with the inscription functioning as mediator.⁴⁵

This dualism is captured in those manuscripts of the *Roman* which included two illustrations of the very same Narcissus fountain: one with the Lover, and another with Narcissus gazing at his reflection. The fountain is depicted in various ways: manuscripts from the thirteenth century up to the mid-fourteenth, mostly show it as a natural spring, under a tree, flowing from a mound into a stream; (Figure 4.2)⁴⁶ from the mid-fourteenth century a

⁴² Note that two opposing theories of human vision, born in antiquity, competed during the Middle Ages: the Euclidean tradition maintained that the eye projected light onto the world, whereas the Aristotelian tradition followed and developed by Ibn Rushd and Ibn al-Haytham (Latinised: Alhazan) the opposite – the eye is like a mirror that receives external images. The *Roman* seems to follow this latter theory in its conceptualisation of the Narcissus fountain, yet reserves Euclidean projection for the fountain in De Meun’s part with its radiating carbuncles (Fleming 1986:219).

⁴³ Aristotle, in *De Anima* (3.3), briefly discusses the imagination (*phantasia*) from the activities of thinking and perceiving, as “that in virtue of which an image arises for us”.

⁴⁴ This description is based on Nouvet’s (2000:355–357) summary of Medieval optics as part of an interpretation of the Narcissus fountain in *Roman*. She applied this to explain why only ‘half the garden at once’ is seen in the fountain: one half is seen through sensation, the other half is imagined.

⁴⁵ In her essay on aesthetic experience in Crescenzi, Bauman (2002c:135) notes that we must be careful to not overstress the symbolic dimension of his – and by extension other – Medieval gardens, for they were distinctly different in nature from visual art, and mostly enjoyed for their beneficial sensory delights: “In the small garden of herbs, a tree can be planted in such a way that it conjures up associations with the Tree of Life and hence with the Garden of Eden; even so, its function is to provide shade.”

⁴⁶ Examples of manuscripts depicting the fountain as a natural stream: *Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 1569*, folio 11v (Narcissus), c. 1275–1325; *Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 378*, folio 17r (Narcissus), c. 1275–1300; *Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer, ms. 79*, folio 10v (Narcissus), 1308; *Bodleian Library, ms. Selden Supra 57*, folio 11v (Narcissus) & 12v (Lover) 1348; *Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 12588*, folio 10r (Narcissus), c. 1300–1350; *Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, ms. 5210*, folio 10v (Narcissus), c. 1366–1399; *Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 1559*, folio 13r (Lover), c. 1290–1310; *British Library, ms. Stowe 947* folio 13 (Lover; spring is a rare circular outline), c. 1325–1350; *Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 9345*, folio 6r (Lover), 1400 (latest).

square basin (Figure 4.3)⁴⁷ is preferred, and hexagonal (Figure 4.4)⁴⁸ or quadrilobe⁴⁹ ones appear from the early fifteenth century (Figure 4.5). Yet, apart from the odd spouting lion-head, none of the illustrations include any sculptural references to the god.⁵⁰

The illustrations of Narcissus at the fountain – in the manuscripts of the *Roman*, but also the *Épître d’Othia* by Christine de Pisan (1364–c. 1430) and *Ovide moralisé* – can thus be viewed as representations of the virtual, phantastical fountain. Such illustrations may well have further cultivated the medieval garden dweller’s participation through the mytho-historic and moral exegeses of topomyths.



Figure 4.2. Left: *Narcissus at the fountain* (natural stream), *Roman de la Rose*, thirteenth century (Bibliothèque nationale de France, *ms. Fr. 1569*, folio 11v).

Figure 4.3. Centre: *Narcissus at the fountain* (square basin), *Roman de la Rose*, fourteenth century (© British Library Board, *ms. Stowe 947*, folio 11v).

Figure 4.4. Right: *Narcissus at the fountain* (hexagonal basin), *Roman de la Rose*, fifteenth century (Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Philip S. Collins Collection, *ms. 1945-65-3*, folio 12v).

⁴⁷ Examples of manuscripts depicting the fountain as a square basin: *British Library*, *ms. Stowe 947* folio 11v (Narcissus), c. 1325–1350; *Bibliothèque municipale d’Arras*, *ms. 897*, folio 9v (Narcissus), 1370; *Assemblée nationale*, *ms. 1230*, folio 13r (Narcissus), 1370; *Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal*, *ms. 5209*, folio 14r (Narcissus) & 12v (Lover), 1370 end; *Bodleian Library*, *ms. Douce 332*, folio 17r (Narcissus), late 1300s; *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, *ms. Fr. 380*, 10v (Narcissus), c. 1395–1405; *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, *ms. Fr. 12595*, folio 12v (Narcissus & Lover), c. 1400–1405; Privately owned, *Ferrell Collection*, *ms. Ferrell Rose*, folio 7r (Narcissus) & 8r (Lover), c. 1470; *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, *ms. Fr. 805*, folio 12r (Narcissus; basin within rocky outcrop), c. 1400–1499; *Morgan Library and Museum*, *ms. 948*, folio 19r (Narcissus), c. 1525.

⁴⁸ Examples of manuscripts depicting the fountain as a hexagonal basin: *Philadelphia Museum of Art*, *The Philip S. Collins Collection*, *ms. 1945-65-3*, folio 12v (Narcissus) & 12r (Lover), c. 1450–1480; *Library of Congress*, *ms. Rosenwald 917*, folio C6r (Narcissus), Y4r (Lover; same illustration as for Narcissus), 1503.

⁴⁹ Example of manuscript depicting the fountain as a quadrilobe basin: *J. Paul Getty Museum*, *ms. Ludwig XV 7*, folio 11r (Narcissus), c. 1405.

⁵⁰ By the mid-fifteenth century, the fountains had become more ornate, with some covered by gothic canopies (Figure 4.6). An example is found in the *Bodleian Library*, *ms. Douce 195*, folio 11v (Lover) and 12r (Narcissus) – the latter (and curiously not the former) does contain figurative sculptures above the capitals of the canopy’s columns, yet not of gods but, seemingly, of knights.



Figure 4.5. Left: *Narcissus at the fountain* (quadrilobe basin), *Roman de la Rose*, fifteenth century (J. Paul Getty Museum, *ms. Ludwig XV 7*, folio 11r).

Figure 4.6. Centre: *The Lover at the fountain* (Gothic canopy), *Roman de la Rose*, fifteenth century Bodleian Library, *ms. Douce 195*, folio 12r).

Figure 4.7. Right: *The fountain of life*, *Roman de la Rose*, fifteenth century (Bodleian Library, *ms. Douce 195*, folio 146r).

4.6.5 Act IV: anagogical participation

The final act serves as a model for visionary participation that leads not to intellectual abstractions, but to an experience of transcendence. The literary topomythopoesis of the fountain does not stop with the evocation of the Ovidian myth, but is extended to form a unique medieval topomyth which invites the imagination to *transform* the fountain and its beholder: peering, against his better judgement, into the perpetual flow of silver-clear water, the Lover gazes beyond his own reflection (unlike Narcissus) into two crystals (l. 1537). The meaning of these stones have inspired much scholarly derring-do, which I cannot hope to emulate nor untangle. I will simply, by following the rough outline of those interpretations that explain the fountain with its crystals and crystalline mirror⁵¹ as an allegory of perception (Nouvet 2000, Fleming 1986, Knoespel 1985, Hult 1981), propose that it also serves as an allegory of participation: the text cultivates the medieval garden dweller's ability to see the invisible in the visible. Unlike a moral allegory that forces the mind to think *away* from the garden of things in order to ponder abstract ethics, this mythical fount makes the viewer see things concretised in the imagination, more perfectly ordered and filtered by a multitude of colours:

The crystals are so wonderful and have such power that the entire place – trees, flowers, and whatever adorns the garden – appears there all in order... the crystals reveal the whole condition of the garden, without deception, to those who gaze into the water... (De Meun & De Lorris 1995:51)

The garden is seen with perfect clarity, like Plato's cave dweller who escapes the confines of a shadowy world to discover the true forms illuminated by the sun. As Nouvet (2000:361) put it, the "mirror functions as a marvellous optical prosthesis, which

⁵¹ In the text, there is a distinction between the two crystals, and later with the shift to the singular 'crystal' – the latter refers to the crystalline surface of the water (Hult 1982:138).

supplements [The Lover's] naked eye", and Hult pointed out that through "the special perception afforded by the fountain, the garden is transformed" (Hult 1981:143). What, exactly, the clarified garden entails is unclear, beyond that it is 'all in order' and 'without deception'. For the medieval reader (and garden dweller) the image of the fountain as a mirror may have evoked St Paul's famous lines describing the limits of our earthly perception and "our inherently figural, mediated apprehension of God, the ultimate Truth" (Nouvet 2000:366):

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

This quality of the fountain of unveiling reality – to make seen that which is unseen – represents a spatially and spiritually transformative form of participation: unlike the mytho-historic, allegorical and moral exegeses of Acts I to III, the fountain itself is now transformed by the imagination into an enchanted spring – like a numinous sanctuary – which lifts perception, momentarily, to see behind the veil of nature.

Yet, the delight felt at this intensity of vision is soon replaced, again, by the dread of death foreshadowed by the tragedy that befell Narcissus, for this fountain is a trap where Cupid intoxicates lovers to strife for love without "intelligence and moderation" (De Meun & De Lorris 1995:51):

For it is here that Cupid, Son of Venus, sowed the seed of love that has dyed the whole fountain, here that he stretched his nets and placed his snares to trap young men and women; for Love wants no other birds (De Meun & De Lorris 1995:52).

Despite the danger, as before, the Lover kept his gaze into the spring, which then provides another vision, that of a garden of roses that fills his body with sweet smells and desire. Thorns then blocked the way, and Cupid shot an arrow to his heart – the entrapment was complete. The deceitful beauty of the Narcissus fountain is juxtaposed, later in the De Meun part of the poem, by the truly life-affirming fountain within a circular garden of Paradise envisioned by Genius, also identified by an inscription (hanging from an overhanging olive tree):

Here runs the fountain of life beneath the leafy olive tree that bears the fruit of salvation (De Meun & De Lorris 1995:336).

The *fons vitae* "makes the dead live again" (ibid.) and is trinitarian: three streams of water (flowing from within itself) and a red gem with three facets (which does not reflect light, but emanates it) – it is not associated with any of the gods. Thus, the earlier Narcissus fountain – having now become the historic topomyth brought into exegetical dialogue – is rendered for us to taste from its delightful and transformative amorous aesthetic, but the

temptation for cupidity it holds is chastised by opposing it with the simple, inartificial stream and meadow derived from Biblical Eden as a truer reflection of paradise.⁵² In that garden, the participant arrives at a somatic-symbolic unity where the unity between nature, man and God is regained – in such a state, the need for allegorisation falls away, for in a way it is no longer a symbol of Eden, but the Emyrean itself.⁵³

4.7 FOUNTAINS OF LIFE AND LOVE

Whereas this distinction between the mythical fountains of love and life existed in the virtual counterparts of fonts during the High Middle Ages, their physical appearance remained consistent, irrespective of their associations. The basin types found in the illustrations of the *Roman* mentioned earlier – hexagonal, octagonal, circular, quadrilobe – were used freely, whether to evoke Christian baptism or erotic entrapment, Biblical fountain of life, or Ovidian fountain of death.

By the Late Middle Ages, when patrician gardens were becoming more elaborate, there is some evidence to suggest that figurative sculpture was employed to serve as specific prompts for participation. The late thirteenth century park of Hesdin of the Count Robert II of Artois (1250–1302), completed after his death, contained a wealth of exuberant statues and automated devices to recall the magical and illusionistic devices of romance literature (Van Buren 1986:133) – perhaps prototypical of the Italian landscapes of artifice and autonomy of the sixteenth century. Although, to my knowledge, none of the spouting statues or automated monkeys at Hesdin evoked the classical gods. Therefore, we must look to literature and painting for some tentative examples. In the anonymous, early fourteenth century Byzantine romance *Belthandros and Chrysantza* the hero Belthandros describes, on entering the castle of Eros, the beauty of a “fount of the cupids” (in Dolezal & Mavroudi 2002:131) with its water “as cold as snow” (ibid.) – complete with an automated griffin.

A painted example can be found in a fifteenth century fresco in the Castello della Manta, Saluzzo, Italy: the anonymous artist depicted a fountain of youth wherein old people climb into a hexagonal basin, become rejuvenated and start making love (Figure 4.8). The fountain is crowned by a petit sculpture of Cupid shooting arrows from a gothic canopy. The

⁵² In a fourteenth century illustration (*Bodleian Library, ms. Douce 195, folio 146r*), the fountain is depicted as a nude female figure standing within a Gothic niche, from which water spouts from her two breasts and genitalia into a square basin containing the light-emitting source (Figure 4.7). It is tempting for my argument to interpret the figure as Venus, but I cannot say for sure.

⁵³ In Medieval Christianity, the Emyrean is the highest sphere of heaven, where saved souls live in a non-physical state of light with site of God (e.g. Dante, *Paradise* 30).

artist also depicted two figures – possibly Venus and Cupid⁵⁴ – bathing themselves in a quadrilobe basin above that used by the mortals. The image thus presents a real-and-imagined vision of life and love; a topomyth that brings the pagan gods of love into the fold of the biblical fountain of life: “... and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Psalm 36:8–9). The hexagonal basin, used as baptismal fonts from the early Middle Ages as the divine fountain of life (Miller 1986:138), is paired with Cupid concretised; the waters are enchanted by the visible God of Love and the invisible God of Life.

4.8 THE BAPTISM OF VENUS

Cupid’s mother, Venus, was also baptised into the iconography of a Christian world. Her role in the *Roman* was interpreted by Hill (1974) as part of the poem’s attempt to reconcile the Christian dilemma of sexuality: procreation is good, but irrational and carnal pleasure is bad – Venus represents ‘natural sexuality’ assisting with the more carnal aspect, yet leads to the good of procreation: “Venus represents within the poem fallen human sexuality. But although Venus is autonomous and irrational, she remains a necessary aspect of the postlapsarian world, since Venus enables man to perpetuate himself” (Hill 1974:420). Venus was thus baptised within the Christian universe as a legitimate, even if tentative, allegorical figure for the domain of marriage. This role can already be seen in an early Christian epithalamium by Magnus Felix Ennodius (474–521) in which “Venus stood naked on the pebbles of the cold sea, with her hair wafting around her, evoking erotic urges in the groom and preventing ‘frigid virginity’ from dominating his relationship with his bride” (in Long 2012:49–50).

⁵⁴ Discussed by Klapisch-Zuber & Reynolds (2015).



Figure 4.8. Anonymous, *The Fountain of Life*, Sala Baronale, Castello della Manta, Saluzzo, Italy, 1411–1416; fresco (Web Gallery of Art).

The survival of Venus during the Middle Ages and her association with gardens assured a prominent place for the goddess of love in the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis. Her presence became visible, especially on fountains, from around the fourteenth century. Writing during the fifteenth century – and mythologising the Middle Ages as a period that was bent on the destruction of classical art – Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) noted an anecdote that played out a hundred years earlier in Siena. An ancient statue of Venus⁵⁵ was found during the digging for a foundation and placed atop a fountain:

Everyone admiring praised it; to each of the great painters that were in Siena at the time it appeared to be of the greatest perfection. With much honour they set it on their fountain as a thing of great eminence. All flocked to place it with great festivities and honors and they set it magnificently above the fountain (Ghiberti, *I Commentarii*, c. 1447, 3.2).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ghiberti does not name the statue, thus its identification as Venus has been inferred by Long and others – he describes the statue having one foot on a dolphin; a clear iconographic clue as to her identity.

⁵⁶ This English translation is taken from Holt (1981:165).

Not long after, the fear of idolatry stirred as Siena was losing in war, the statue was destroyed and scattered on enemy land as to deflect the curse. The episode exemplifies the paradoxical reception of the gods and their stories during the Middle Ages, sometimes revered for their beauty and moral guidance, other-times repulsed for their vulgarity and devilry. It also predicts how Renaissance topomythopoesis started in gardens for found statues. Their appreciation, and that of Venus specifically, did not suddenly occur in the fifteenth century. From the early thirteenth century, we already have a description of the aesthetic appreciation of classical art, as we saw during late antiquity: in the *Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Romae*, Master Gregory reports of his encounters with classical statues in Rome (after acknowledging that most were destroyed by Pope Gregory).⁵⁷ Notably, he provides a vivid description of Venus (probably Venus Capitoline, in the *pudica* stance):

The image is made from Parian marble with such wonderful and intricate skill, that she seems more like a living creature than a statue: indeed she seems to blush in her nakedness, a reddish tinge coloring her face, and it appears to those who take a close look that blood flows in her snowy complexion. Because of this wonderful image, and perhaps some magic spell that I'm unaware of, I was drawn back three times to look at it despite the fact that it was two stades distant from my inn (Master Gregory 1987:26).⁵⁸

Long (2012:15) cites this description as evidence that the medieval reception of nudity (specifically of Venus) was not always negative or washed with sin, but sometimes a positive declaration of pleasure. This also serves as some scant evidence that the classical form of Venus was, to some extent, known by late medieval artists.

Ghiberti did not see the Siena Venus fountain first-hand, but in a drawing by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1290–1348), famous for his *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* in the *Sala dei Nove* in Siena's *Palazzo Pubblico*. Degenhart & Schmitt (1968:135) noted the similarity between the 'Siena Venus' fountain, and that of an early illustration of the *Decameron* (Figure 4.9).

4.9 STONE GODS

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) possibly himself drew this tree-filled garden with a hexagonal fountain crowned by the petit figure of Venus (also in the *pudica* pose)⁵⁹ as a frontispiece to the first illustrated manuscript of his *Decameron*, published around 1365 in

⁵⁷ This episode of iconoclasm – a Christian cleansing of pagan Rome – was a Medieval legend; see Buddensieg (1965).

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Long (2012:56) for the reference.

⁵⁹ The figure is of the Venus *pudica* type, so even the illustration shows a 'return' to the classical *forms* of mythology, as the medieval manuscript depictions of gods, from around 1100, were based on textual descriptions, rather than classical, visual models (Seznec 1972:150).

Florence. Next to the fountain sit ten nobly-dressed figures in a circle, seven women and three men. They form the *brigata* who retreated from plague- and corruption-stricken Florence to hillside villas, like those who were fortunate enough to find safety and sanity in gardens during the lockdown years of Coronavirus. There they dwelled in gardens, solacing to recreate a “Saturnian model of life” (Usher 1989:277), a return to a Golden Age free from sickness and moral decay. These are the edifying gardens of the *Decameron cornice* that frame the *novelle*, the ten stories, some set in gardens, told on each of ten days by the group.

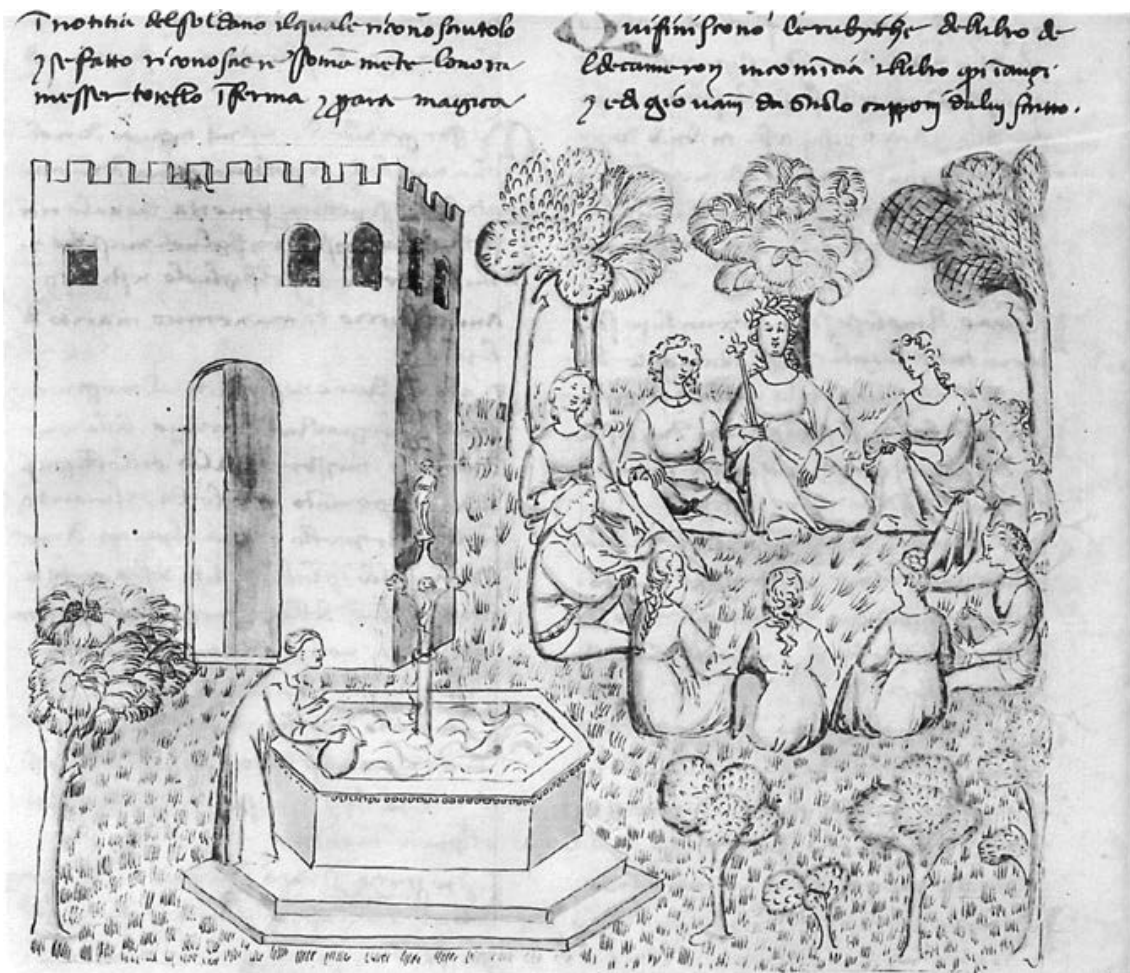


Figure 4.9. Giovanni Boccaccio, illustration of garden, *Decameron*, Capponi codice, c. 1365 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, *ms. It. 482*, folio 4 v, in Giannetto 2003:248).

The illustration thus depicts one of the *cornice* gardens. These are, throughout the *Decameron*, described as places of social and geometric order, increasingly so as the days progress (Usher 1989:278).

Thus, the presence of Venus – added by the illustrator’s hand, as it is not mentioned in the text – may seem out of place. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Venus had become by the

Late Middle Ages a legitimate embodiment of procreation; *Venus genetrix*.⁶⁰

But more specifically, the visual presence of the goddess of Love hints at the infamously debauch world of the *novelle*: baptised and modest Venus in the illustrated *cornice* points towards the characters' depraved indulgence of the flesh associated with pagan and carnal Venus, often ending in tragedy; *Venus meretrix*.⁶¹ Thus, the *cornice* gardens represent the actual gardens of Fiesole wherein Christian virtue could flourish, free from any fantastical artefacts and allegorical gods like the *Roman's* magical crystal fountain and God of Love. The *novelle* gardens, by contrast, are enchanted settings wherein the characters are free to act outside of Christian moral norms: "the contrast between *cornice* and *novelle* is one between actual reality and creative imagination, or restraining order and licentious freedom" (Giannetto 2003:246). Thus, Boccaccio maintained a strict separation, more so than in the dreamy medieval literary gardens, between real and imagined places, between the physical and virtual landscapes, between Christian Tuscany and pagan Arcadia.

The god-image within the 'physical' garden of the *cornice* can thus be interpreted as a point of convergence between the real and the imagined, and functions as a visual prompt for the garden company to participate in the imagining of a virtual landscape influenced by the celestial and corporeal powers of Venus. This illustration then, and not so much the textual gardens of the *Decameron*, foreshadows (and perhaps paved the way for) the blossoming of the emblematical topomythopoesis of the sixteenth century in Italy.⁶²

⁶⁰ I am not referring here to the statue type of the Roman 'foundress of the family', but specifically to Boccaccio's (related) definition of *Venus genetrix* as the embodiment of celestial Venus, given to procreation and the bodily function and pleasure associated therewith, in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1.3.22). My understanding of Boccaccio's account of Venus is based on the discussion by Mulryan (1979).

⁶¹ Boccaccio discussed Venus as prostitute (*meretrix*) in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1.3.23) to denote sexual intercourse void of love, thus at a mere animal level. Although Venus does not feature in the *Decameron* as a specific character, yet: "Venus, although she receives almost no direct treatment in the *Decameron*, is, nevertheless, the character whose attitudes prevail, and whose power controls the protagonists, and predicts the action of the stories" (Mulryan 1979:390). For a full discussion of Boccaccio's theoretical treatment of Venus in his *Genealogia*, and his 'poetic application' in the *Decameron*, see Mulryan (1979) and Lummus (2011). The argument for Boccaccio's clear distinction between the earthly Venus of the *novelle* and his Christian ideals – meaning he intended the erotic and lust-ridden stories to be cautionary tales – was made by Hollander (1977) in his book *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* which was a departure from the then prevailing interpretation of the *Decameron* as an unabashed celebration of eroticism.

⁶² Giannetto (2003) has argued that such (and later) illustrations for the *Decameron* and Boccaccio's distinction between the garden as a place of artificial beauty, and the *locus amoenus* as a place of natural beauty, paved the way for the artifice of Renaissance garden art, concluding that "the numerous illustrations of the *Decameron*, especially the late and most imaginative ones, show that Boccaccio's fictional gardens have a greater claim [than Petrarch] to be considered as a literary precedent for the art of gardens" (Giannetto 2003:252).

Thus, for Boccaccio (or an anonymous illustrator), as for the citizens of Siena, the statue of a god had become permissible, and permission was granted to the upstanding circle to indulge in the erotic romp in the grass and flowers of the virtual landscape of the *novelle*.

4.10 ASCENDING GODS

This distinction between the physical and the virtual allowed Boccaccio to create fictive topomythopoeic places, freed from the burden to conform to Christian ideals of morality, without fear that they would corrupt whosoever peeps at them. Indeed, the reader is instructed by Boccaccio in his final chapter to realise this distinction and be able to decide to take the virtuous path of the storytellers in the *cornice* gardens, or else be led astray “by surrendering to the charm of overtly fictional gardens” (Giannetto 2003:245).

I speculate that Boccaccio legitimised an imaginative mode of participation with the virtual landscape of Arcadia: the faithful subject may indulge in the god-haunted, sensuous, erotic landscape without concern that this voyeurism will necessarily corrupt their souls. I infer this from his defence of literary mythopoiesis against those who objected against its truth-value.⁶³

In his magisterial and proto-modern *Genealogia deorum gentilium*⁶⁴ he mustered the medieval modes of interpretation discussed at the onset of this chapter – euhemerism and allegorical interpretation – to write an encyclopaedic history of the gods, although by no means a methodologically rigorous study of the myths as were to appear in the sixteenth century. He takes care to inform the reader, and to convince those sceptical of his ‘idolatry’, that this endeavour is undertaken not because of his approval of the gods ‘as gods’, but precisely because they have been killed by the revealed truth of Christian doctrine; dead gods are toothless:

The foul indecencies of the pagan gods are not merely dormant or asleep; they have been buried forever, beyond any possibility of resurrection, by the holy teaching of Christ. They have been covered and pressed down by the enormous weight of damnation, and I, as a Christian man, have tried to increase the weight of this mass, inadequately perhaps, but as much as I could; and I looked for fitting praise of my work, not for recriminations (Boccaccio 1956:134–135).

By treating the debunked gods in a quasi-scholarly fashion, he – like Fulgentius before – stripped them of any lingering supernatural residue by presenting mythology as a “cultural

⁶³ Book 14 of his *Genealogia* contains a defence of classical mythopoiesis. Some of those on the other side of the quarrel are Giovannino da Mantova, Zoilus and Giovanni Dominici, specifically opposed to Mussato, Petrarch and Salutati respectively (Papio 2015:106).

⁶⁴ The work drew from earlier works on mythology like that by Albricus and the so-called Vatican Mythographers.

artifact that develops over time” (Lummas 2012:728): the Greco-Roman myths were written by *poeti theologi* (*Genealogia* 15.8) whose penetrating perception of the visible world allowed them to dimly intuit the metaphysical origin of cosmic order; their mytho-poetry expressed this dim vision of truth in metaphoric language. Also, unlike some other medieval allegorical readings of the myths, he found “truths of ethical or natural philosophy rather than doctrines specific to Christianity” (Hyde 1985:241). For example, Boccaccio deemed the anthropomorphic representations of Venus in ancient myths – whether as *genetrix* (procreation and its pleasures) or *meretrix* (prostitution and its depravity) – as poetic embodiments of the planet, Venus *magna*, which they intuited as the celestial origin of love. He considered that all of these Venuses were different sides of the same goddess – a poetic expression of the truth that there is a divine love above the perceptible world from which cascades all other loves, right down to the very passions which stir within our bodies.

This concept of the poet-theologian has ancient roots in Aristotle, but reached the Middle Ages via Isidore of Seville.⁶⁵ By taking this same approach in his own writing, Boccaccio was enabled to render his literary topomyths with a modicum of realism as enchanted landscapes inhabited by numinous beings – not as flimsy stage-sets for a cast of stifled gods used as placeholders for moral lessons or Church dogma. Yet, his topomythopoeia is created with the assurance that at some deeper level the gods (and their associated haunts) embody universal truths.

For example, in his earlier *Comedia delle ninfe Fiorentine* (1342), the character Ameto, while wandering through a *locus amoenus*, stumbles upon a company of beautiful nymphs bathing – a delectable image presented without any disclaimer or justification, described with such detail that the reader is not simply asked to evoke the allegorical associations of the clichéd *locus amoenus*, beautiful lady and falling-in-love, but invited to relish the scene *for the beauty of its appearances*:

... he betook himself to the spot from whence he heard the sweet notes; and hence, lifting his head, no sooner did he behold the shining ripples of the little river than he saw several young maidens, sitting on the bright bank in the shade of saplings amongst highly grown grass and flowers. Of these maidens, some bared their white feet in the low waters and were wandering along therein with slow step; others, having laid down their rustic bows and arrows, with their sleeves tucked up, were bending their warm paces over the clear brook and reviving them with the fresh waters; while still others had opened their bosoms to give way to the breezes, and sat intent on the song that one of them was happily singing...
(in Serafini-Sauli 1970:198–199)

Yet, for Ameto (and perhaps by extension for the reader) it is the beauty of the nymph Lia and the beauty of the landscape “that transforms Ameto’s love from sensual and carnal

⁶⁵ For a succinct history of the idea, see Curtius (1973:214–227).

to spiritual and moral...” (Giannetto 2003:242). This moral ascent represents a shift away from a substitutive, didactic allegorical interpretation of topomyths (e.g. a fountain is a symbol for life), to a Neoplatonic one:⁶⁶ visible things are not used as tokens for invisible things for their obvious resemblance (e.g. a lion resembles courage), but are deemed to *actually* be linked to a spiritual realm that can be revealed through epiphany – experiencing beauty is experiencing the transcendental radiance of this realm in the visible world.

At the end of the third day, the *brigata*'s response to the lament of Lauretta is witness to the potentiality of Neoplatonic reception in Boccaccio's mythopoiesis. Lauretta's song starts with a metaphorical link between the beauty of her body, and the beauty of divine love (Lummus 2011:79):

He that the heaven and every orb doth move
Formed me for His delight
Fair, debonair and gracious, apt for love;
That here on earth each soaring spirit might
Have foretaste how, above,
That beauty shews that standeth in His sight (Boccaccio 1960:266).

After recounting the rest of the tragic tale, the *brigata*'s response is opposed: some seek to read the story as a simple allegory, “after the Milanese fashion” (Boccaccio 1960:257), while “[o]thers construed it in a higher, better and truer sense” (ibid.). The first, practically-minded response limits the reception of love, and by association Venus, to its “embodied reality” (Lummus 2011:79), while its “metaphysical counterpart” (ibid.) is visible only to those in the company with a cultivated penchant for high-mindedness. To gaze beyond the sub-lunar world via Neoplatonic participation requires deliberate dedication and education.⁶⁷

Thus, the *Venus generix* represented by the statue of Venus in the font invites the company (and by extension the reader) to evoke, from the frame of actual gardens, the Arcadian landscape of the *novelle* wherein the spirit of Venus *meretrix* is pervasive... yet this lovely landscape filled with lovemaking, a poetic creation, can become a bridge towards the celestial Venus from which her earthly embodiments flowed. Thus, for Boccaccio there is no moral dilemma in creating a topomyth filled with the pagan gods, for it is ultimately a rung on the ladder towards divine love.

This Neoplatonic approach to meaning, turning away from the neatly defined “[s]cholastic aesthetics” (Eco 1988:212) of the Middle Ages which consisted of “structural schemas” (Eco 1988:213), allowed those humanists influenced by a Neoplatonist such as

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the Neoplatonic influences on Boccaccio, see Papio (2015).

⁶⁷ In the context of Neoplatonism, my ‘participation’ must not be confused with Plato’s *metechain*, the partaking of an object (instance) with its Form.

Ficino, to marvel at the anthropomorphic beauty and topographical strangeness of topomyths, imagine their mythical counter-place of distant Arcadia and, at moments of unexpected epiphany, ascend to the origin of all things, the love of God.

4.11 CONCLUSION

With the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, the pagan iconography of topomythopoiesis came under suspicion and bouts of iconoclasm. Yet, various Christian interpretations of pagan mythology ensured that the gods remained cultural currency during the Middle Ages, mostly as allegorical figures veiling Christian and universal truths, and objects of artistic appreciation. Although the spatial and emblematic signifiers were mostly absent from gardens, the gods and especially the mythological *locus amoenus* persisted in the verbal language of landscape. The literature of courtly love absorbed into its Christian vision the gods of love (Venus and Cupid), liberating them as legitimate figures for garden iconography, especially on fountains. The widely read *Roman de la Rose* served as an example for how such mythological iconography can lead to exegetic participation towards transcendental experience. Through his literary and mythographic works, Boccaccio further liberated the gods for aesthetic appropriation by drawing a clear distinction between the sensual virtual landscape where Christian morality is suspended, and the moral physical garden where virtue is practiced – from the physical we can participate with the virtual, which in turn is a step on a Neoplatonic ladder taking us to divine love.

5 THE BLOSSOMING OF CLASSICAL TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

5.1 THE RENAISSANCE VILLA: *O DULCE OTIUM*¹

The garden culture of the monasteries and courts of the Middle Ages was transplanted to the Italian villas of the Renaissance.² In literature, the *locus amoenus* remained ingrained in descriptions of place, as did the influence of medieval treatises on agriculture. During the fourteenth century Greco-Roman mythology provided a vocabulary for the renewed interest in the beauty of nature, yet the presence of the gods in gardens remained largely invisible. Following the excavations of antique sculptures in the fifteenth century in Italy, the gods started appearing in gardens – first as mere outdoor collections, and then in purpose-made gardens. Whereas the gods and their settings of the Middle Ages – apart from emblematic fountains – attained an invisible presence in gardens, there emerged in sixteenth century Italy a trend to *visualise* their presence. Yet, not everyone welcomed the arrival of the gods and the fear of idolatry persisted throughout the period.

Of all the periods of garden history covered in this thesis, the Renaissance and ensuing Baroque periods of Europe stand out for the visual predominance of classical topomythopoiesis. Since the scholarship on the iconography of gardens from these periods is so vast, focus was required. Thus, this chapter looks at the expression and reception of topomythopoeic gardens through the eyes of a contemporary chronicler of gardens, Bartholomeo Taegio (1520–1573). Extracts from his dialogue, *La Villa* (1559), are used

¹ *O dulce otium* is used by Pliny the Younger in one of his letters, to Minucius Fundanus (*Letters* 1.9), to describe the sweet rest of leisurely work (reading and writing) afforded by his Roman villa at Laurentum – an inspired, rural life that was to inspire Renaissance villa owners.

² The term ‘villa’ refers to both the house and grounds of an estate; the house alone is *casa villa*.

throughout the chapter to frame the discussion of Renaissance topomythopoiesis.

In the dialogue between the characters Vitauro (a veiled Taegio) and Partenio, Taegio makes an argument for the superiority of living *in villa* as opposed to in the city. Throughout the dialogue, Taegio (2011:169) describes the estates of a number of Milanese noblemen, with the requisite Renaissance penchant for hyperbole and aggrandizement:

But where is the noble and virtuous Signor Giovanni Francesco Torniello, very excellent jurist, who, as he is able to free himself, or, to put it better, as he is able to make a little truce with the business affairs that continually keep him busy in Novara, with respect to his very honored status, he escapes to the sunny and very happy hill of Vergano, where with great tranquillity of mind he enjoys the freedoms and pleasures of the villa?

These country estates intentionally harked back to the Roman ideals of rustic Republican living: simplicity, hard work and a striving for “scholarly and philosophical *otium*” (Ackerman 1990:110). Much of the garden descriptions lack specificity and echo the tropes of the *locus amoenus* of antique³ and medieval literature with clichés like “sweet smells” (Taegio 2011:175), “pleasant place” (2011:157), “clear waters” (2011:179) and “gentle breeze” (2011:155). Albeit stereotypical, such descriptions already draw the estates into the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis by evoking the myth of a Golden Age landscape, grafted from the Greco-Roman and Christian images of paradise.⁴ Within some of the descriptions we find a wholly modern, observational account of gardens, possibly written from first-hand experience. These descriptions provide some insight into how a contemporary visitor participated in the experience of topomythopoeic gardens; a participation which was, perhaps surprisingly, not overtly analytical or imaginative, but symbolic-somatic.

I say ‘surprisingly’ since the early to mid-twentieth century art historical studies of Renaissance gardens tended to emphasise the geometric ordering and iconographic programmes of these gardens,⁵ or their “style and aesthetic intentionality” as Wright (1996:58) put it, propagated in history of landscape design courses through history-survey

³ For example, Taegio borrowed “liberally” from Virgil’s *Georgics* (Beck 2012:327).

⁴ The syncretism of the classical Golden Age landscape and the Christian Eden is already found in the fourteenth century. For example, in Dante’s *Purgatory* 28.139–41 (Ricci 1996:33).

⁵ The American-European studies of the early part of the century focused on aesthetics, for example Edith Warton’s *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (1904) and Georgina Masson’s *Italian Gardens* (1966). Then followed the iconographic studies, influenced by Erwin Panofsky and Rudolf Wittkower. For example, David R. Coffin’s *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (1991) and *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* (1979), and Elizabeth Blair MacDougall’s *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers: Studies in Italian Gardens of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1994).

books like *The Landscape of Man*.⁶ Yet, according to Wright (1996), neither formal composition nor symbolic code was the main reason for the gardens' being, leading to 'post-aesthetic'⁷ interpretations of the Renaissance garden, compared with earlier studies that tended to rely on the visual: "photographs and diagrams have become a distinctive sign system which effectively reconstitutes Renaissance landscape environments as objects of the aesthetic gaze..." (Wright 1996:34). The gardens were the result of the interaction between nature and human know-how;⁸ gardeners formed gardens with their skills accumulated over many generations, not the sole, artistic genius.⁹ Rather, he argues, it was mainly to provide *pleasant* places outside the cities as refuges for healthy living:¹⁰ fresh *air* especially ('gentle breezes'), filled with fragrance ('sweet smell') and birdsong ('sweet songs'), was highly prized.¹¹ Thus, the clichéd language of breezes, smells and songs was no mere lazy and empty rhetoric, but a way to cultivate a somatic topomythopoiesis. Taegio's account confirms this interpretation, as he spends very little time musing on the *emblematic* meaning of the gardens. Rather, his experience is focused on taking-in the *sensory* delights of the estates, and leisurely observing and partaking of its agricultural pursuits: sowing, hunting and harvesting.

⁶ In their summary of the Renaissance garden, the Jellicoe's (1975:155) wrote "The proportions gave him [mankind] peace: the form was therefore crucial". The emphasis on composition is not misdirected, but tends to oversee the role of agricultural practice and aspects of health. However, their sweeping book remains a good introduction to the period.

⁷ 'Post-aesthetic' is taken from the title of Wright's chapter referred to above: 'Some Medici gardens of the Florentine Renaissance: an essay in post-aesthetic interpretation' (1996).

⁸ Giannetto (2008:88) notes that this know-how was propagated through treatises such as Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum* (1306, translated to Tuscan in 1350), mentioned in Chapter 4, in which "labour was emphasized more than the setting itself" (Giannetto 2008:90).

⁹ Giannetto (2008:97) provides some balance between Wright's emphasis on know-how and earlier author's emphasis on the geometric design of layouts: although the pragmatics of gardening dominated the fifteenth century, it alone cannot account for the 'mature' Renaissance of the sixteenth.

¹⁰ To this end, physical exercise was deemed important. Wright (1996:37) quotes from Alberti (*Della famiglia*, 1511:58): "Through inactivity the veins fill up with phlegm, becoming water-logged and flaccid, and the stomach becomes finicky, the nerves dull and the whole body sluggish and drowsy; and furthermore with undue laziness the mind gets clouded and dim, and every spiritual force becomes stagnant and feeble". Wright (1996:37) shows how pathways were designed to facilitate fast-paced walking, often directed towards a sculpture. Such pragmatism serves as a reminder that we must be careful to not attribute too easily ideological motives to Renaissance designs – not all axes were created to show 'man's dominance over nature', but simply to get man to walk up a hill to burn some calories.

¹¹ Such places offered respite from the foul air (*miasma*) of cities, such as Florence, that resulted from insanitary practices, like using open ditches to carry raw sewerage (Wright 1996:35). Criteria for such places were described in agricultural treatises: higher lying areas at the foot of wooded mountains, away from the cities and sea.

Does this lack of emphasis on iconography mean that classical topomythopoiesis played only a marginal role in the conception and experience of Renaissance gardens? On the contrary, topomythopoiesis was employed, or at least received by Taegio, not as a symbolic code to be unravelled as a storybook or treatise on morality, but as a way to conceptualise and enrich the *sensory* and *edificatory* experience of the estates where quiet contemplation and active farming happily lived side-by-side.

5.2 VILLA AS PARNASSUS

But where are you, Signor Giovanni Battista Rainoldo, very worthy senator? It's your turn to honor this dialogue of your most devoted Taegio with the splendor of your name. It's your turn to adorn this your villa, or rather Parnassus [*sic*], you who are (if your modesty allows me to say it) the supreme ornament of the sacred choir of the muses, and dearest friend of the villa (Taegio 2011:159).

5.2.1 The rhetoric of poetic inspiration

Throughout *La Villa*, Taegio (2011:159, 169, 175, 181, 183) refers to the villa estates as Parnassus – a metaphor to evoke that mountainous virtual landscape inhabited by Apollo and the Muses. As a topomythonym (mythical place-name) Parnassus is used as a rhetorical device to imbue the place with the numinous presence of the creative gods that inspire lofty thoughts and poetry.¹² This followed an old tradition of associating villas with the ‘home of the Muses’ as Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 1.9) had done in the second century by referring to his seashore villa in Laurentum as his “private Helicon”.

The villa owners in Taegio's circle approached (and, often, literally ascended) their estates as the ancients used to ascend Mount Parnassus to seek wisdom from the oracle, or like those Roman poets who sought to find poetic inspiration by the Castalian spring. The villa owners became participants in the ritual of seeking poetic and intellectual epiphany, perhaps seeking the kind of experience attested by a visitor to a garden-party in Rome who reported seeing an apparition of “the Muses, led down from Parnassus and Helicon” (in Bull 2005:323).

5.2.2 The poetic awakening of the early Renaissance

Indeed, the Muses dallying around the Hippocrene spring was a central image in the earliest conscious awareness of a creative stirring in the fourteenth century: Colucci Salutati (1331–1406) described the poetry of Francesco Nelli and Petrarch as reviving the flow of the Hippocrene Spring (Ullman 1952:108). Boccaccio, in his *Vita di Dante* (1357–1359), gave that honour to Dante whom he said paved the way for the return of the Muses (ibid.) and

¹² For discussions on the instrumentality of place-names as signifiers of meaning, see Rofe & Szili (2009).

imagined the laurel-crowning of Petrarch taking place on Parnassus (in a letter, 1372, to Iacopo Pizzinga, in Ullman 1952:109). Indeed, during the actual crowning on the Capitoline in 1341, Petrarch boldly stated that he would scale the deserted summit of Parnassus and lead the way up to poetic revival (Cellauro 2003:53).

Taegio's use of the Parnassus metaphor for landscape did not merely originate from an image used to conceptualise the zeitgeist, but from one used to describe Petrarch's own gardens in the south of France, which he named his "transalpine Helicon" (*Familiars* 8.8).¹³ Quoting from Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* (10.5–9), Taegio (2011:153) himself evokes the poet laureate's villa life as exemplary:

No palaces, no theater or loggia
But in their stead a fir, a beech, a pine –
Amid the green grass and the lovely mountain nearby,
From which one descends rhyming and rests –
Lift our intellect from earth to heaven.

The legitimacy of Parnassus as a topomyth in a Christian landscape was secured by the concept of the *poeti theologi* discussed in the previous chapter (4.10): the ancient poets intuited truth in their myths. In Dante's *Purgatory* (28.139–41), he ascends Mount Purgatory and finds atop the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden. To render this topomyth of an unfallen state, Dante draws Parnassus into the description as a foreshadowing of mankind's true prelapsarian home:

Those ancients who in poetry presented
the golden age, who sang its happy state,
perhaps, in their Parnassus, dreamt this place.

Dante's literary topomythopoiesis thus involves a syncretism, as we saw throughout the Middle Ages, of the topomyths of the ancients (Parnassus and the Golden Age) and Christianity (Ricci 1996:33). Although Parnassus, Apollo and the Muses survived the Middle Ages in the writings of Dante and Chaucer,¹⁴ and within the illustrated manuscripts of Ovid (Seznec 1972:178), it was hardly (if ever) evoked in designed landscapes that were, as was seen in the previous chapter, rather related to the Biblical Paradise and the classical *locus amoenus* befitting the medieval ideal of the garden as an enclosed and communal setting for spiritual and amorous retreat. The mountain was treated in the literature of the Middle Ages

¹³ The distinction between Helicon and Parnassus was blurred, ever since antiquity (Bull 2005:310).

¹⁴ For example, in the opening prologue of the Franklin's Tale, the Franklin admits his ignorance by stating that "I sleep never on the Mount of Pernaso" (*Canterbury Tales*, The Franklin's Tale 721).

as a hostile place and part of the threatening wilderness *outside* the garden wall,¹⁵ although such generalisations must be tempered by examples of positive reception, such as Basil the Great's description of his mountain retreat (4.3).

5.2.3 To higher planes¹⁶

Apparently, medieval man did not scale any mountains to take in the view (like Strabo did) until 1336 when Petrarch climbed Mount Ventoux near Avignon: an act which was famously (and controversially) interpreted by historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) as evidence for the poet-geographer's sensitivity to the beauty of nature – his “favourite accompaniment of intellectual pursuits” (Burckhardt 2010:180).¹⁷

A few years later, in writing the *Vita Solitaria* from 1346 onwards on his rural property outside Vacluse, Petrarch's ideal of solitary thinking within nature led him to script the garden milieu away from the medieval idea of the garden as a communal retreat for spiritual edification and courtly love (enclosed from nature), towards a retreat for the individual seeking poetic inspiration and self-improvement (opened to the wild). He achieves this by opening the gate of landscape experience to natural *topoi*, but (sometimes) humanises the wilderness by evoking mythical beings, like Muses, to suggest their numinous and inspiring presence:

Let provision first be made that, after the prosperous conclusion of his mental toil, one may be enabled to put off the burden of his weariness by having easy access to woods and fields and, what is especially grateful to the Muses, to the bank of a murmuring stream, and at the same time to sow the seeds of new projects in the field of his genius, and in the very interval of rest and recuperation prepare matter for the labor to come. It is an employment at once profitable and pleasant, an active rest and a restful work (Petrarch 1924:156–157).

The encompassing of natural settings like ‘woods and fields’ passed on a “spirit of... naturalism” (Bondanella 2008:27) to the humanists, clearly visible in Taegio's (2011:215) favourable comparison of the natural to the artificial, including the natural setting of villa gardens:

Even greater delight arises from the beautiful things that nature produces, which does not [arise] by virtue of those that imitate them. For clearly the difference between a natural fountain and an artificial one is apparent, and between a painted landscape and one that is real.

¹⁵ For example, see Classen (2012).

¹⁶ A phrase from Petrarch's (1898:316) letter to Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro.

¹⁷ Some scholars doubt whether Petrarch actually did climb the mountain. For example, Beecher (2004) argues that the content of the letter is an allegory of a spiritual conversion.

... in the gardens of the cities one enjoys only the view of the dwellings domestic and cultivated by masterful hand; but in the villa one also enjoys seeing the wild plants produced by nature in the high mountains...

Furthermore, Petrarch's emphasis on the garden as a setting for the *self* passed on a "spirit of individualism" (Bondanella 2008:27) to the ensuing age and sowed the seed for the wholly subjective orientation of the early nineteenth century – the private participation of landscape's modernity.

5.2.4 **Otium**

According to Ackerman's (1990:64) analysis of Petrarch's influence on Renaissance villa culture, he did not break wholly from the medieval model of the garden. Rather, he synthesised the monastic (not courtly) ideals of "solitude, chastity, celibacy" with the Ciceronian ideal of *otium* which Petrarch characterised as "a state defined by simple habits, self-restraint, proximity to nature, diligent study, reflection, writing, and friendship" (Bondanella 2008:14) – a life removed from the rushed public affairs of the city (*negotium*); a life where one could "conveniently attend to the cultivation of the field and the mind, because these two activities are not incompatible" (Taegio 2011:151). Taegio's account continues to oppose the city as the site for *negotium* and the villa as the site for *otium*: Parnassus as a topomythonym is thus a repository of all the associations of reflection, lofty thoughts and poetry that cling to its virtual landscape.

5.2.5 **Home of Apollo and the Muses**

Taegio (2011:165) invariably draws in the iconography of the peak of poetry's most famous inhabitants, Apollo and the Muses:

Doesn't he frequently leave the city of Milan in order to enjoy the very sweet countryside of Apollo, and of the Muses in the pleasant and very happy villa of Toresella, where he is often visited by brilliant scholars and judicious visitors for the sweetness and splendor of his eloquence?

Petrarch too evoked Apollo, and his opposite – Bacchus – at Vaucluse: he juxtaposed two of his gardens by associating them with these gods,¹⁸ albeit in an unexpected manner: a forested space for Apollo and a well-kept island in a stream for Bacchus. To explain the apparent paradox that the wilder, dark space of the forest is associated with the god of the sun and reason, is simply to note that topomythonymy is not limited to the association of landscapes to myths that share a visual or atmospheric character, but can include an

¹⁸ This Apollo vs. Bacchus opposition follows that developed during the Middle Ages: reason and temperance vs. licence and passion.

association of *function*: Petrarch *used* the shaded space for studies (an obvious escape from heat) – an activity enchanted by its association with Apollo. It is thus an example of topomythonymy as a means to ritualise space and give direction for how it is to be inhabited. Similarly, Taegio and his circle employed ‘Parnassus’ to conduct the activities of villa visitors towards poetic and intellectual edification.

5.2.6 A place for the mind

For some Neoplatonists, it appears that the balance of villa experience was tilted to the side of the mind. For example, Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464) wrote a letter from his villa at Careggi to the Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499):

I came to the villa at Careggi not to cultivate my field but my soul. Cometh to us, Marsilio, as soon as possible. Bring with you our Plato’s *De summo bono*... I desire nothing more ardently than to know the route that leads most conveniently to happiness. Farewell, and come not without the Orphean lyre (undated letter, in Ackermann 1990:73).

The spread of Neoplatonism through the likes of Medici and Ficino was widespread amongst the humanists and affected their perception of landscape.¹⁹ For now, it is worth mentioning that the Platonic ideal of the ascent of the mind is entangled with the Parnassus metaphor. Taegio (2011:167) elaborates the theme by describing the ascent of a hill – echoing Ventoux – on one of the estates as an ascent of the body *and* mind:

Then, climbing to the top of the hill, we would be able to recognize everything around. The forest is this our inferior world, the steep path is the heavens; and the hill the supercelestial world. And in order to understand well these inferior things, it is necessary to ascend to the superior, and by looking down from on high, we can have more certain knowledge of these [inferior things].

Taegio’s description of the view is rooted in Petrarch and reveals his Neoplatonic pursuit of moving from the visible world to the invisible. The dense representational network evoked by a name, Parnassus, helps to map the landscape as a place where this ideal can be realised: topomythonymy is thus a means to inform the garden-dweller of the topomyth’s ontology even before any visible iconography is encountered. The villa is thus a setting for the physical activities that a farm demands, but also the intellectual and creative pursuits demanded by Apollo (and Plato).

¹⁹ Bredekamp (1986) was not impressed by the twentieth century scholars in the Warburgian tradition who attempted to analyse Renaissance works of art in Neoplatonic terms. In his essay entitled *Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus* he declares that these studies were retrospective readings of Neoplatonism into works of art. Rather, he argues, philosophies like Epicureanism was more influential. However, the Neoplatonic language of Taegio serves as enough primary evidence that, at least to some extent, garden experience during the Renaissance was influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy.

5.3 THE RETURN OF THE GODS

5.3.1 Sculptures in gardens

A mere glance at images of Renaissance gardens reveals that topomythopoiesis during the period was not limited to evoking the invisible spirit of places. Taegio (2015:195) reports the presence of antique artefacts, including statues, in the garden of the Signor Pietro Paolo Arrigono:

... it is known that Greece and Latium themselves were despoiled of Doric columns, of very wide arches, and of antique statues, in order to clothe again and to adorn this royal dwelling.

This anecdote illustrates the (initial) way in which the villa gardens of the Renaissance became more populous settings for the gods of antiquity in comparison to their medieval forebears: during the fifteenth century, in Rome and Florence, the flourish of interest in antiquities led to the excavation of reliefs and sculptures, often misidentified,²⁰ that were hoarded in the gardens of their aspiring collectors, often associated with the Church (Bull 2005:9; MacDougall 1985:120 & 1994:23); Italian soil was dug to recycle the “litter of antiquity” (Bull 2005:7). By this time, artists such as Ghiberti lamented the ‘whitewashing’ of ancient art and welcomed the return of subjects and techniques from antiquity.²¹ Not everyone was impressed, and Taegio (2011:213) himself warns against the empty pomp that could underlie such collections if their owners did not seek out the virtue of the ancients, the original owners of the statues:

He said [Apollo to Gyges, king of Lydia], responding to him, the many pretty paintings and artful statues that are ancient (although few of the paintings exist) are very clear proof of the fallen world and of the dishonor of the present age, in which men buy antiques at a high price and with excessive cost, and of the praiseworthy manners and virtuous works of the ancients. If men do not pay heed to those [ancient ones], they ought to set fire to and burn the statues. As it is, they despise every virtue, and they do not have anything old other than some fragments of a statue of Caesar or of Scipio.

A famous example of such a sculpture garden was that of Lorenzo (the Magnificent) de' Medici (1449–1492) near the convent of San Marco in Florence, reported by both the biographers Condivi (1525–1574) and Vasari (1511–1574), and probably in existence from around 1455 (Borgo & Sievers 1989:242). For Vasari “the gardens acquire the prestige of a veritable museum of ancient and [R]enaissance art. Even more sensationally, he states that

²⁰ For example, the statues of Castor and Pollux located on the Quirinal in Rome were thought to be, during the Middle Ages, of the ‘sages’ Phidias and Praxiteles, until Petrarch noted these inscribed names may actually refer to the sculptors!

²¹ In Ghiberti's *Second Commentary*, he laments the destruction of ancient art due to Christian iconoclasm (in Holt 1957:153).

Lorenzo had created the gardens in order to institute in them an art school for young artists under the supervision of Bertoldo” (Borgo & Sievers 1989:237). Both Michelangelo²² and Leonardo²³ are said to have cultivated their skills amongst the broken bodies and heads of the gods lying on the grass (for a similar scene, see Figure 5.1).

Other artists also passed through the garden gates of that and other such gardens to meet the gods face to face and recast them for the villa gardens of Italy and beyond – the visible presence of classical mythology was thus spread from collections to gardens.²⁴

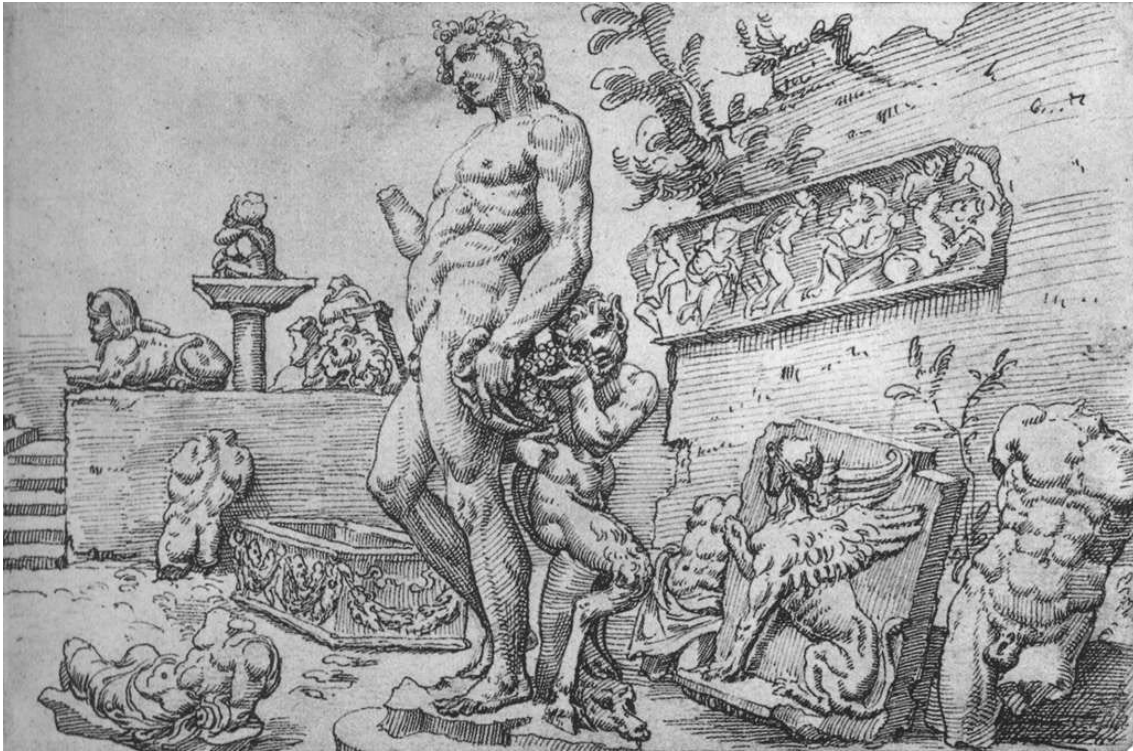


Figure 5.1. Maarten van Heemskerck, Michelangelo’s Bacchus in the garden of Jacopo Galli, Rome, c.1534 (Web Gallery of Art).

Eventually, the sculptural items were classified and catalogued. The first to do so were Ulisse Aldrovandi in his *Delle statue antiche* (1556), and visually only by Cavalieri in his four books from 1561 to 1594 which was “something like a comprehensive repertoire of mythological figure types” (Bull 2005:9). Mythological imagery, due to the incomplete authentic, visual record from antiquity, was often based on verbal descriptions, such as those

²² Vasari (1991:419) provides a mytho-historic ‘origin story’ of a young Michelangelo in Lorenzo’s sculpture garden: upon touching a chisel and marble for the first time, he sculpted a faun’s head from an antique model.

²³ Leonardo is related to the garden by the anonymous biographer Anonimo Magliabechiano, writing a few years before Vasari (Elam 1992:42).

²⁴ Although some twentieth century scholars have cast doubts on Vasari’s emphasis on the role of the garden, Elam (1992) has demonstrated its role (together with its patron Lorenzo) in fostering the arts during the early Renaissance (including the training of Michelangelo) and serving as a model for later sculpture gardens created to showcase antiquities and accommodate philosophical musings.

by Pliny the Elder. Yet, artists felt by no means compelled to simply mimic ancient models and allowed themselves the freedom to create their own imagery (Bull 2005:9). In other cases, statues were renamed: for example, a statue of a river god (now in the Vatican Museum) was called *Arno* – a type that did not exist in antiquity (Lazzaro 2011:73). The statue was further modified by Renaissance artists by adding a new head and emblems like a Medici ring around the vase.

5.3.2 The Belvedere: a collection of statue types

One of the first garden settings that was purposefully designed, at least in part, to accommodate the statues of the gods was the Belvedere Court. Designed by Bramante (1444–1514), it included a sculpture garden with herbs and orange trees (Figure 5.2) to house the statue collection of Giuliano della Rovere (1443–1513) when he became Pope Julius II in 1503 (and reigned until 1513). It was soon emulated by others,²⁵ and its statue collection became a veritable gallery of statue types for topomythopoiesis²⁶ from whence they found their way, by means of imitation and appropriation, to the gardens of Italy and beyond: the river gods (Figure 5.7), the Apollo (Figure 5.10), the Ariadne (then known as Cleopatra; Figure 5.8), the torso of Hercules/Ajax (in Figure 5.2) and the Venus Felix (Figure 5.9).

5.3.3 Parnassus made visible

The sculpture court formed part of the *Cortile*'s overall topomythopoeic programme, which was especially revealed when looking through a window in the *Stanza della Segnatura* within the apartment of Julius II on the third floor of the Vatican Palace:

Now, on the wall facing the Belvedere, where he painted Mount Parnassus and the fountain of Helicon, Raphael surrounded the mountain with a deep and shadowy laurel wood, where the trembling of the leaves in the sweet winds can almost be seen in the greenery, while in the air countless naked cupids with the most beautiful expressions on their faces are gathering laurel branches and making garlands of them, throwing and scattering them about the mountain (Vasari 1991:315).

The upper part of the window-frame was in the centre of Raphael's fresco of Parnassus (1509–1511; Figure 5.4) as the craggy and laurel covered throne of Apollo, overseer of the Muses and poets, ancient and modern, with the air infused by the sounds of the Christ-like god's *lira da braccio* and the burbling of the Hippocrene Spring.

²⁵ Hunt (1996:24) cites two examples that emulated the papal sculpture garden: that of Cardinal Cesi near the southern entrance of the Vatican (Figure 5.3), and the Villa Capri.

²⁶ For a full discussion of the statue court, see Brummer (1970).

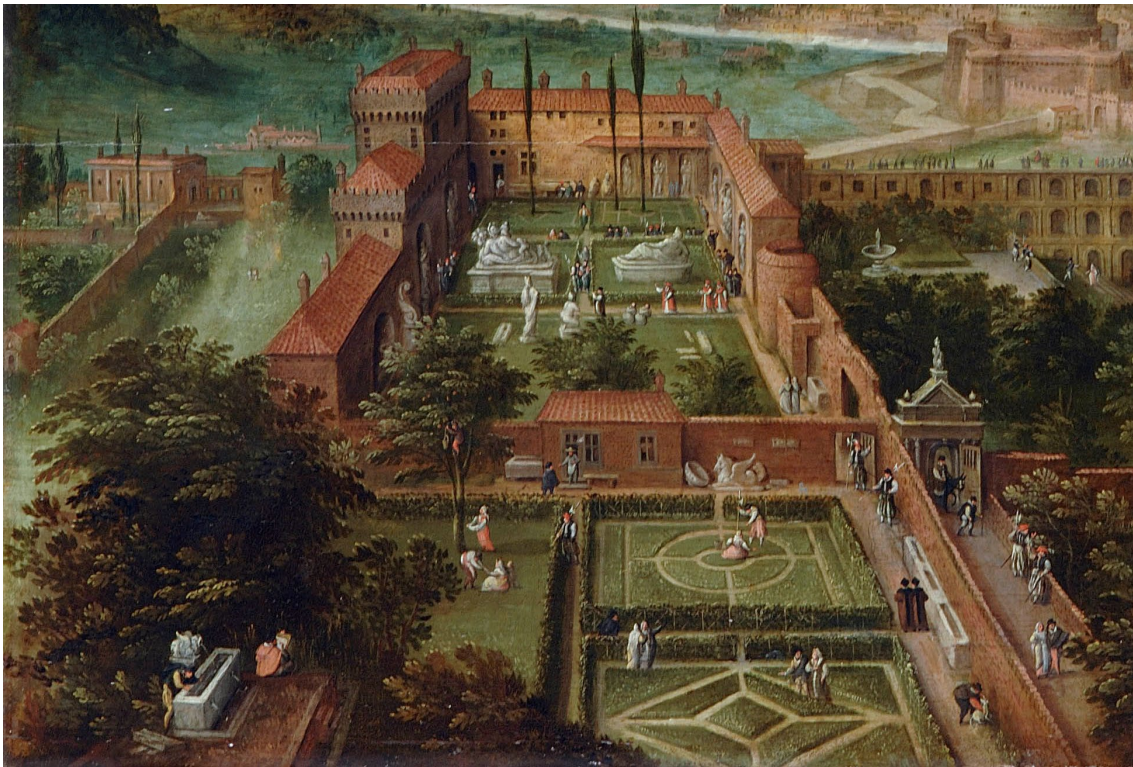


Figure 5.2. Hendrik van Cleef III, *View of the Vatican Belvedere Sculpture Gardens*, c. 1525–1590; cropped (Foundation Custodia, collection Frits Lugt, Paris, 1307). Note the uppermost court with river gods, torso of Ajax and statues in niches.²⁷



Figure 5.3. Hendrik van Cleef III, *The Sculpture Garden of Cardinal Cesi*, Rome, 1584 (National Gallery Prague, 1748).

²⁷ The identification of the torso on the painting is based on a drawing that was made by the Phillips Galle workshop (after Van Cleef III) where the figure beneath the river gods is clearly a torso (The British Museum, 1950,0306.2.15). However, on the painting it looks more like a reclining figure (possibly Venus), but I cannot verify whether such a statue was ever housed in the Belvedere Court.



Figure 5.4. Raphael, *The Parnassus*, Palace of the Vatican, c. 1511 (© Governorate of the Vatican City State – Directorate of the Vatican Museums).

The view towards the terraced mount of the *Cortile* (Figure 5.5) – modelled on the Praeneste (Ackerman 1951:85) – was thus framed by a visual representation of the virtual landscape of Parnassus. The painted iconography foregrounds and augments the view towards the stepped mountain, complete with its own Castalian springs.²⁸ This dialogue between the painted and spatial representations of the virtual Parnassus results in a real-and-imagined topomyth celebrating Julius's Rome as the peak of poetic inspiration.²⁹ The invisible evocation of Parnassus by Taegio, here became manifest.³⁰

In the ancient past the Vatican hill was a setting for the veneration of Apollo, a practice that continued with Renaissance pageants held in the court (Watson 1987:142), and thus an

²⁸ Watson (1987:142) suggests that the fountains of the Belvedere were intended as counterparts of the real-and-imagined Castalian spring.

²⁹ Poetry was so highly regarded in the Renaissance that Ficino declared it one of the seven liberal arts, replacing geometry.

³⁰ Another example is found to the west of the Belvedere Court, namely the Casino of Pope Pius IV, designed by Pirro Ligorio and begun in 1558. For its Parnassian iconography and possible use as an *Accademia*, see Cellauro (1995). Also, the Pegasus in the Oval Fountain at Villa d'Este at Tivoli has been interpreted to signify that the hill of the villa is a Parnassus (Inden 2013:65).

apt place to conceive a Parnassus; the site is a palimpsest of Parnassian topomythopoeia. The Belvedere became not only the home of some of the most common sculptural types of classical topomythopoesis, but in itself a spatial type – the terraced mount – employed at numerous hillside villas.

In the same vein that Augustus scripted a mythical genealogy and employed topomythopoesis to cast himself as the torch-bearer of the ancient Greek civilization and the protector of the soul of Rome (3.3.4), so did Julius II present himself as the new Julius Caesar (of the *gens Julia*)³¹ and created the Belvedere Court as “a re-embodiment of the Roman Villa – or Palace-Garden” (Ackerman 1951:88) as part of his grand project to reconnect Christian Rome with its ancient glory. Much like Constantine, he proudly paraded pagan statues within a Christian setting.

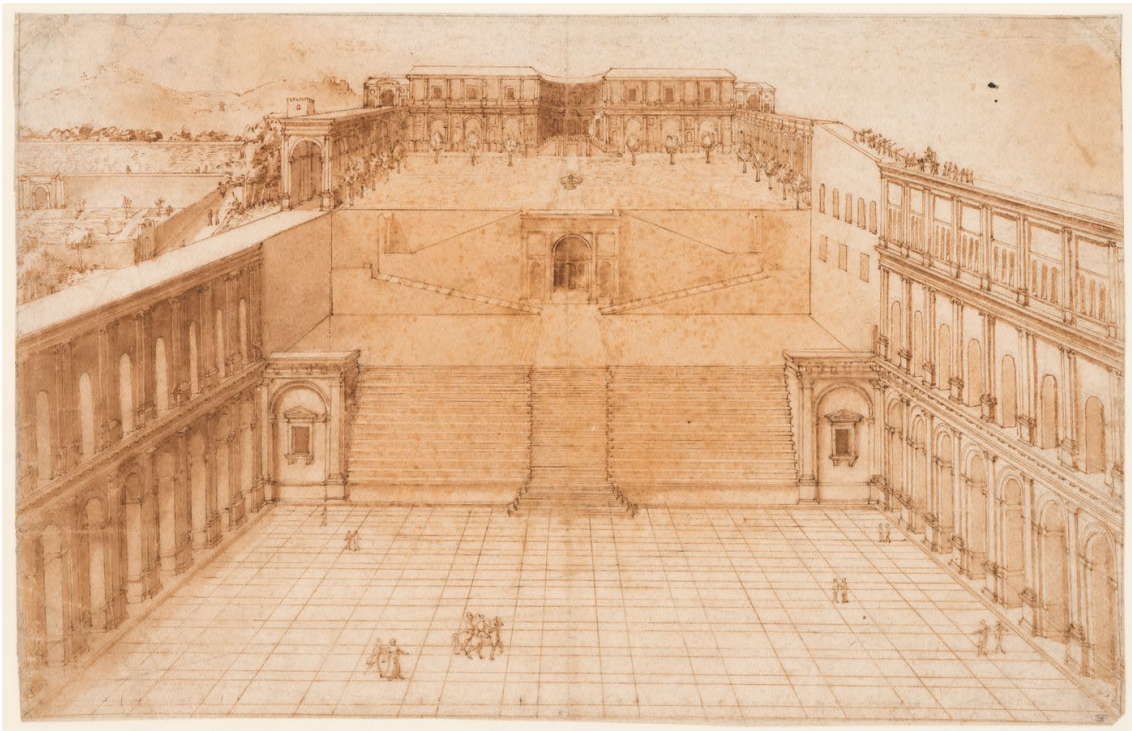


Figure 5.5. Giovanni S. Peruzzi, Belvedere Court, Vatican City, c. 1590 (Canadian Centre for Architecture, DR1961:0005). The court was designed by Donato Bramante and completed in 1558.

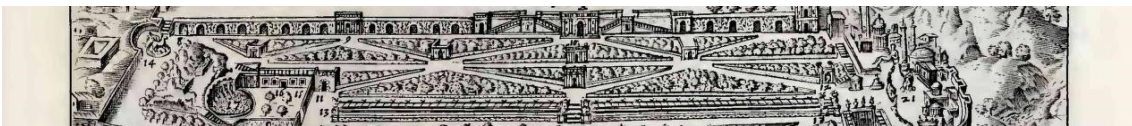


Figure 5.6. Giacomo Lauro, Villa d'Este terrace, after the Belvedere; cropped (Lauro 1630, Plate 161). The terrace was designed by Pirro Ligorio, c. 1550.

³¹ The self-representation of Julius II as Julius Caesar is accepted by Ackerman (1951), but disputed by Shaw (2005).

5.3.4 The naturalisation of statues: river gods and nymphs

The statues of the gods in the Belvedere Court were displayed in architectural frames – arched niches mostly – reminiscent of the way in which Roman nymphaea made a spectacle of the gods (3.4.6). However, some of the statues were (partly) naturalised³² by enveloping them with suitable artificial nature. The deliberate juxtaposition between art and nature was a common theme of the Renaissance. Claudia Lazzaro (2011) has discussed the ways in which the river gods of the Vatican (Tiber, Nile and Arno), and the sleeping nymph (later identified as Ariadne) were given apt natural milieux within fountain-settings to heighten the viewer’s awareness of these gods as the personifications of nature: a combination of irregular (often stratified), multi-coloured stone and the flow of water rendered simulacra of the gods’ watery and stoney haunts, all juxtaposed with an architectural plinth or niche (Figure 5.7). A drawing by Portuguese court-painter Francisco de Holanda (1517–1585), *The fountain of Cleopatra / Sleeping nymph* from 1538–1539 suggests living fern-like plants further contributed to the conceit (Figure 5.8). These gods were not viewed like the cult statues of antiquity as containers for the deities, but rather as personifications of nature: the gods became part of a vocabulary (neglected during the Middle Ages) to conceptualise nature, not supernatural beings within it: “So when, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, people started to take a more conscious pleasure in nature, they looked to classical sources to help them appreciate it” (Bull 2005:75). We thus witness a distinction between those old rustic gods used to personify nature (the nymphs, river gods and satyrs) and those used to personify aspects of human-nature (Apollo, Venus, Hercules and the Muses); gods of nature and gods of culture. However, as is often the case with dualisms, the one opposite contained something of the other, for example: Venus both embodied natural procreation *and* romantic love.

5.3.5 The fear of idolatry: Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola

Not everyone welcomed the sudden physical presence of the gods in gardens, nor received them as mere personifications of nature and personality, or objects of art. Walking through the grand Parnassian spaces of the Belvedere Court on a diplomatic visit to the Vatican in 1512, Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) was so shocked by the sight of pagan gods, especially lustful Venus and Cupid (so-called Venus Felix; Figure 5.9),³³ that he wrote a poem railing against this idolatry in the heart of Christendom: *De Venere et Cupidine*

³² A term used by Bull (2005:75) to denote the provision of figure-specific settings for statues; to make the gods at home.

³³ The Venus Felix was sculpted in the second century AD and, unlike the earlier Aphrodite of Cnidus, is partially dressed.

expellendis is a poetic warning against idolatry, and paints a proto-Reformation vision of a corrupt and beast-infested Rome – a Babylon – under the spell of its whore, Venus. Pico, at that time stripped of political power, knew he had no influence to have such statues removed. Instead, he wrote the poem as a guide, especially for young men, to resist the temptation of lust that the goddess of Love arouses in all that gaze at her near-naked body. Thus, Pico did not believe that images of gods were mere innocent vessels that stood for nature, or mere archaeological and artistic curiosities, but that they held power over those – of weak faith – who viewed them.



Figure 5.7. Left: Anton Raphael Mengs, *Study for the Sala dei Papiri*, late eighteenth century (Lazzaro 2011:75). The drawing shows the river god Arno/Tigris in his naturalised niche, Belvedere Court.

Figure 5.8. Right: Francisco de Holanda, *The Fountain of Cleopatra/ Sleeping Nymph*, Belvedere Court, Vatican City, 1538–1539 (Lazzaro 2011:77).

This attack on the goddess, echoing the iconoclastic reception of gods during the early Christian period, is set against the growing movement that called for renewal within the Catholic Church, culminating in the Reformation led by Martin Luther (1483–1546) who, two years before Pico, was equally appalled by Rome’s paganism on display in places like the Pantheon (Luther 1872:85). Both Luther and Pico were influenced by Girolamo Savonarola’s (1452–1498) preaching against the inner decay of the Church, and what he saw as a pagan revival witnessed by the mythological imagery that adorned buildings and public spaces. Savonarola did not call for a complete iconoclasm, but rather for the replacement of pagan with Christian imagery (Piana 2017:235). Although Pico’s poem is not explicit about whether he would rather the statue of Venus be replaced by a Christian one, he does call on Mary to

exorcize Venus (translated by Piana 2017:267):

virgin, eternally virgin, you who alone, with the sacred birth,
 restrained the sacrilege of fools;
 now grant me, I beg you, to chase twofold Venus away
 and those winged brothers whom mad antiquity forged
 as foolish gods; grant me to cast them out with this new song.



Figure 5.9. Left: Anonymous, *Venus Felix* (Roman copy of Greek original), c. AD 180–200 (Bucher 2005).

Figure 5.10. Right: Anonymous, (Pythian) *Apollo Belvedere*, c. AD 120–140 (© Governorate of the Vatican City State – Directorate of the Vatican Museums, 1015).

In Pico’s eyes, the Virgin of the medieval *hortus conclusus* is a more appropriate female presence within a Christian garden. Taegio (2011:85) was, a few decades later, equally unimpressed by the idolatry he saw in the cities where: “... I confess freely that in the city I do not see anything but pride, ambition, greed, hatred, falsehood, and idolatry”.³⁴ Yet, elsewhere in *La Villa*, Taegio (2011:197) himself took pleasure from seeing the sculptures of gods in the gardens of his friends: “This one [garden], by being adorned with better works than Praxiteles and Phidias...” revealing a paradoxical reception of the presence of pagan deities during the period (enduring from the Middle Ages): from Pico and Luther’s iconoclasm to the iconography of the Medici’s, Taegio’s text contains both a Christian critique of idolatry *and* a poetic swooning over the poetic role of statues in the experience of

³⁴ This anti-city trope is echoed in other late Renaissance authors such as Falcone, Lollo and Gallo (Ackerman 1990:113).

gardens. How was he and the other humanists (including Julius II) able to reconcile their Christian faith with overt pagan art? Their exact relationship to the visual language of the Greco-Roman myths remain a subject for debate,³⁵ but it seems certain that the humanists did not reject Christian belief in favour of paganism in a religious sense, as Godwin (2002:1) affirms in *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*; the statues did not play the same role as they did for the Greeks in the cult sanctuaries.

5.4 NEOPLATONIC ENCOUNTERS WITH TOPOMYTHS

5.4.1 Neoplatonism and the chains of meaning

But this does not mean that the statues of the gods in gardens were merely received as archaeological curiosities or autotelic *things* (art for art's sake). Rather, those influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophers (notably, Marsilio Ficino)³⁶ regarded the statues of gods as a means to a greater end; as a step on the path leading upwards to the realm of the invisible Ideas. Already witnessed in Boccaccio (4.10), the Christian Neoplatonists of the Renaissance, influenced by the fifth century Proclus and Plotinus, experienced the world within Plato's ontological hierarchy of the universe: the superior, spiritual world at the top (experienced through our intuition and imagination), and the inferior, material world at the bottom (experienced through the senses).³⁷ The upper and lower realms of this universe are connected by chains of meaning (*seirai*): each link is devised by God (not humans) and, if contemplated upon, will lead to the higher. *Symbola* are those visible links that partake (*metechein*) in the chain – they are thus not to be understood as our 'symbols' which, through resemblance, *represent* something a-part, neither are they and the higher links to be conflated. By encountering *symbola*, humans are invited to participate in the ascent to the invisible.³⁸

If devised by God, how are humans to know what on earth serves as *symbola*? One explanation was that the poets of antiquity, the authors of mythology, were like sages who passed onto us a 'symbolic lexicon' of the gods that existed high upon every chain. Homer was read by the Neoplatonists as 'divine Homer', a sage who dwelled high upon the chain

³⁵ For a brief summary of the varying viewpoints, see the introduction in Von Stuckrad (2006).

³⁶ Ficino, in his *De vita coelitus comparanda* (book 3 of *De Vita Libri Tres*) revived Plotinus's idea (*Ennead* 4.3.11) that divine images and statues "must be understood according to an emanative continuum that converges in the world soul that is present in all things" (Piana 2017:232).

³⁷ More specifically, this ontological hierarchy consisted of four levels, starting at the top: The One (akin to Aristotle's Prime Mover), Mind, Soul and the world of the senses, including Nature and Matter.

³⁸ Ironically, Plato himself insisted on the unbridgeable chasm between our sensible world and the higher reaches of Truth (Struck 2010:57) – not so his followers from late antiquity onwards.

and, through his words, were able to translate divine ideas through his *Odyssey* and *Illiad*.³⁹ The topomythopoiesis derived from such texts can thus be interpreted as spatial-temporal *symbola* that lead up to the virtual landscape of mythology, up to Homer, up to the gods, up to God. Thus understood, the gazing at gods in gardens was saved from blasphemy.

For example, in the extract from Pico's poem quoted above, he shuns the "twofold Venus". This refers to Ficino's conceptualisation of Venus in Neoplatonic terms, similar to Boccaccio's *Venus meretrix* and *Venus magna*. There is the earthly Venus (*Venus pandemia*) of the flesh and procreation, and then there is heavenly Venus (*Venus urania*) – love for the first can *lead up* to love for the latter. While looking at a statue of a Greco-Roman goddess of sex, the viewer – in a state of imaginative participation – can ascend towards an experience of eternal Beauty and pure love within a Christian universe; beauty beyond being.

The chains of meaning are not always straightforward, and the twenty-first century viewer should not expect to find simplistic 'meanings' like 'Venus equals sex'. Thus, the *symbola* are not always visually mimetic of their invisible counterparts, as shown in examples provided by Johnston (2008:455): in Proclus' *On Hieratic Art*, a lion and laurel are *symbola* for the Sun, and in Ficino's *Three Books on Life* sugar is, rather inexplicably, a *symbolon* for Jupiter. Johnston (ibid.) thus heeds us to not expect an obvious similarity between signifiers and the signified.

Ernst Gombrich (1948) was one of the first art historians to acknowledge that this 'un-scholastic aesthetics' must affect our analysis of the iconography of Renaissance art: we should not try to decipher or unlock Renaissance works of art with eighteenth and nineteenth century eyes – eyes that looked to find neat allegorical messages encoded in everything; one must not look with Aristotelian eyes at Platonic works of art.

Indeed, Taegio did not seek to provide his readers with a 'neat' interpretation of the topomythopoiesis of estate gardens, neither does he dwell on the visual contents of the iconography, very much unlike fictional Poliphilo's laborious descriptions of the garden-artefacts of his dream, *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* (1499). It is revealing that the first two villas described in *La Villa* are that of two prominent Neoplatonists: Ficino and his pupil Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), who is not to be confused with Gianfrancesco mentioned before, his younger and proto-Reformist nephew. Beck (2011:39–40), translator of Taegio, identified the influence of Neoplatonism in Taegio's writing, including a hierarchical scheme of the universe in which the intellect can take flight, influenced by Mirandola and French mathematician and philosopher Carolus Bovilus (1479–1566): "Don't you know that the

³⁹ For a full exploration of Homer and Neoplatonism, see Lamberton (1989).

intellect is a divine thing and that man is the link in the chain that binds mortal things with the divine?” (Taegio 2011:89).

I have already noted that the topomythonym of Parnassus established the ontological orientation of the visitor towards the villa gardens as congenial places for the ascent from the material to the immaterial world, through participation in the chain of meaning. The first-hand experience of such participation is illustrated in Taegio’s (2011:163) description of an encounter within the garden of Signor Cesare Simonetta, a villa of Castellazzo. The description provides us with a rare, first-hand account of the reception of classical topomythopoiesis, and thus quoted at length:

I say nothing of the thousand hidden recesses of the very pleasant garden, beside which near the hedge with soft murmur runs a rivulet of water, flowing from a clear fountain that springs forth in the middle of a grotto that lies to the left side of the garden. And of the water that overflows from the fountain; part goes around the garden and part into a very beautiful fishpond surrounding a parapet of whitest marble ornamented with wonderful carving, marble figures, and countless very beautiful antique [statues] that seem to contemplate the beauty of the notable fishpond, where the fish are seen playing in schools and sometimes coming up to the surface splashing. And the water is so pure, calm and clear that the eyes by looking without any impediment gaze on the diversity of the pebbles that are on the bottom. And the statues that are around it are seen likewise in the water as in a well-polished mirror. For I promise and swear to you that sometimes in the rising and the setting of the sun I have seen things so wonderful and beautiful in the aforementioned fishpond that it seems to me there could be another world, and so sweet to me was this delusion that there is no certainty that compares with it. I say nothing of countless other miracles of this place. And if it were not that I would not want to mingle fables with the truth, I would say that there and not in Cypress would be the reign of Venus and of her son Cupid.

From this description, we can infer some important characteristics of the experience of topomythopoiesis during the Renaissance, at least for those with a Neoplatonic bent, summarised as follows (quotes from Taegio are from the passage above, unless otherwise indicated):

5.4.2 Liminal encounters

Topomyths like these that contain spatial and statue types are rarely described in Taegio. Thus, they interrupt rather than dominate the rural ambience and relaxed *otium* of the estate: they are *encountered* as liminal spaces that offer poetic (and mental) interludes amidst the bodily pleasures of experiencing the fertility and sensual graces of the landscape. The “recesses” are syntactically separate from the meadows, groves and open skies of the estate-at-large which is not experienced as a sequence of iconographic-laden spaces that, together, form the script

of a mythical narrative.⁴⁰

One can thus identify two levels of topomythopoiesis: the first, as established by ‘Parnassus’ and the language of the *locus amoenus*, provides the productive landscape with a numinous presence of the Golden Age and its rustic gods, whereas the second level provides moments where visual fragments of the virtual landscape prompt participation towards seeing glimpses of the universe that exists above the phenomena.

5.4.3 Marvellous encounters

The tone of the passage betrays an experience of awe at inexplicable things; an experience of marvel that Taegio (2011:249), elsewhere, associates with the spirit: “The other [type of pleasure] is only of the spirit, which is that one of them that contemplating the marvellous effects of nature passes through the better hours”.

Morgan (2021:92) has compared the experience of the marvellous in sixteenth century gardens with the *Wunderkammeren*, or ‘cabinets of curiosities’ that were fashionable at the time: collections of strange natural objects that defied rational understanding, thus instilling a sense of wonder (*meraviglia*) – if something is comprehensible it is not wonderful. At the *Sacro Bosco* in Bomarzo, for example, we find some standard classical statue types of Pegasus, the Muses and a river-god. Yet, these mimetic gods are accompanied by a troop of marvellous, phantastical beings (Morgan 2021:26). These hybrid human-animal creatures (more Etruscan than classical) were influenced by the grotesques (*grottesche*) found at the grotto (from where the term) of the Domus Aurea, rediscovered at the end of the fifteenth century. Inspired by these is the nymphaeum *Fontana Papacqua* (1561–1579) at the Palazzo Chigi Albani in Soriano nel Cimino (Morgan 2021:82). Morgan (2021:85) lists the grotesque types, including: zoomorphic and teratomorphic (of fantastic creatures and monsters), phytomorphic (human torsos, plant undersides) and hybrids.

Giannetto (2015) has also drawn similarities between the wonderment found in gardens such as Bomarzo and books such as the *Hypnerotomachia*: in the former, it is the tension between comprehension and incomprehension that creates wonder, for example the semiotic ‘break’ of the leaning house with its promise of rest unfulfilled by its leaning floor Giannetto (2015:117) argues that the aim of such phantastical imagery was to provide visitors and readers with images that provoked thought and meditation by their mere strangeness,

⁴⁰ In Wright’s (1996:40) analysis of the Villa Medici at Castello, he identifies a syntactical dualism between enclosed spaces for “mental recreation” and open spaces for “physical exercise” – an opposition we find in Taegio’s accounts too, where the topomyths can be interpreted as those enclosed encounters for mental experience.

and not to provide any “single specific concepts” for interpretation. Such participation that leads to contemplation can be interpreted as a continuation of the monastic tradition of the cloister garden: strangeness “stimulates curiosity and leads to wisdom, wonder is the appropriate passion for a philosopher” (Giannetto 2015:114).

Taegio’s description befits these interpretations as he almost stumbles upon strange things that escape his understanding – echoing the dream-like experiences of Poliphilo, albeit in less exaggerated language. In this, we find a synthesis between the Aristotelian, analytical mind who seeks to collect and organise the natural world, and the Platonic mind that seeks to see above the natural world – Taegio can both contemplate the wonders of nature, make sense of it,⁴¹ *and* allow such experiences to ascend his soul towards the divine. In this intellectual-intuitive experience there is no room for exegetic participation. He comes with analytical eyes, but does not analyse. He is the modern observer of the world, but participates in it towards finding enchantment.

5.4.4 Epiphany: somatic-symbolic unity

As stated, Taegio’s experience of a garden setting inhabited by statues, possibly Venus and her son,⁴² is far from being an allegorical exegesis. Nothing in this garden is experienced as representing something else. We cannot here use the words employed by Lazzaro in her analysis of Villa Lante at Bagnaia to describe what each element “allegorizes” (1977:553), “represents” (1977:555) or “refers to” (1977:559). Rather, we should interpret the elements as an ensemble of *symbola*, not a collection of symbols.

The experience of epiphany is infused with the somatic delights cultivated in the *locus amoenus* literature that flows from Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid and Boccaccio. In her phenomenological interpretation (influenced by Taegio’s definition of the three pleasures of landscape) of the Villa d’Este, Bay (2019) demonstrates that Renaissance gardens ought to be understood as immersive topomythopoeic environments in which the sensory experiences offered by water and plants augment the symbolic contents offered by iconographic elements.

In Taegio too, the incantation is achieved through an ensemble of various topomythopoeic statues and spatial types working as a symphony of sensory and symbolic

⁴¹ Taegio (2015:249, 251) evokes Virgil’s call to understand the natural world, by paraphrasing from *Georgics* 3.475–482.

⁴² Perhaps similar to a statue group of Venus and Eros (and Anteros) that was found within the naturalistic grotto-fountain at the Villa d’ Este on the Quirinal in Rome, captured in an engraving in Cavalieri’s *Antiquae statuae* (in MacDougall 1994:31).

impressions: things in the garden are not individual objects for focused contemplation. The atmosphere of the *locus amoenus* is achieved by the fusion of nature and artifice – third nature:⁴³ natural-artificial elements of water (“rivulet”, “fountain”), plants (“hedge”) and contained animals (“playing... fish”) and the artificial-natural elements of “grotto” and anthropomorphic statues (“marble figures”). The somatic experience then moves, only momentarily, to the imaginative realm where the higher spheres are seen: “*it seems to me there could be another world*, and so sweet to me was this delusion that there is no certainty that compares with it” [my italics]. It is a vision that appears when Taegio is peering into the pool and seeing the *reflection* of the statues,⁴⁴ revealing a beatific vision of Venus.⁴⁵ This upward experience from the world of the senses to the intellect is captured in the move from hearing (“soft murmur”), seeing (“the fish are seen”), imagining (“it seems to me there could be a higher world”) and reasoning (“I would not want to mingle fable with truth”) – a hierarchy of experience that strikingly resembles Ficino’s ‘five pleasures’:

... but I promise you with the kindness of a father and a brother five pleasures, and five I give, pure, perpetual, and wholesome, of which the lowest is smelling; the higher, in hearing; the more sublime, in seeing; the more eminent, in the imagination; the higher and more divine in the reason (*De Vita* 2.15).

5.4.5 The mirror of the imagination

The analogy of the pool as a “well-polished mirror” has significance in a Neoplatonic text. For example, in Plato’s *Timaeus* (71a3–d4), the liver is described as that part of the lower body used to reflect the higher soul as a means for rational thinking to have some sway over the lower body. Sheppard (2003:212) argues that later Neoplatonists were influenced by Plato’s mirror analogies, albeit reworked as an analogy for the imagination, “presented as something positive: the mirror reflects a higher psychological and ontological level and the sight of them turns the soul back towards that higher level”.

⁴³ This recessed garden is thus third nature (*terza natura*) as meant by Taegio and Bonfadio, namely the grafting between nature and art. See Beck (2012) for a full discussion of the history of the term. It gained popularity in landscape architecture theory following John Dixon Hunt’s (2000:33) formulation of the three natures.

⁴⁴ During the Renaissance, reflected images in water and mirrors became emblematic of painting itself: nature represented accurately on a flat plane. For example, Alberti (1966:64) wrote in 1436, echoing Ovid (*Met* 3.402): “For this reason, I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting... What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?” For a full discussion of the role of the mirror image in Renaissance art, see Warwick (2016).

⁴⁵ Although he does not explicitly identify the reflection as that of Venus, her identity can be inferred from the line: “And if it were not that I would not want to mingle fables with the truth, I would say that there and not in Cypress [sic.] would be the reign of Venus and of her son Cupid” (Taegio 2011:163).

By seeing the statue *as a reflection*, Venus is immediately cast *as a representation* – a reminder that all things are mere dim reflections. Thus, the encounter with the topomyth, composed of the statue and spatial type (the pool), mimics the Platonic mechanics of the universe wherein the viewer is pulled into its depths where the higher ontological level is seen. Taken further, we can say that the reflection is a *representation of a representation*, since the statue *itself* is a work of art that represents the virtual existence of Venus in both her earthly and celestial guises. The strangeness that begets a change of consciousness is intensified by the somatic experience of the change of light, whether during dusk or dawn. (Topomyths are best seen early in the morning or just before dark, when dappled by shade, or veiled by mist.)

The mirroring of the divine within the phenomenology of the garden setting is revealed by a form of somatic-symbolic participation that witnesses the intelligible world cascading down into the sensible world from which, in turn, the soul floats upward.

It achieves an experience of psychosomatic unity within the garden-dweller: the Platonic conception of the relationship between the material and the virtual landscapes, otherwise as may be expected, is not world-denying: the encounter with a topomyth does not invariably lead to a dualism between body and mind, and the physical garden isn't dematerialised into an abstract virtual landscape. Such a conception of garden experience also defies an interpretation of the Renaissance period as one pre-occupied by the aesthetics of the surface, as found in Harbison's (2000:76–77) analysis of the garden-based narrative in the *Hypnerotomachia* as “an extended experience of emptiness” and thus “a prime document for understanding the Renaissance attitude towards artifice”. If such an interpretation is true of Poliphilo's encounters, it certainly isn't true of Taegio's.

5.4.6 Medieval confluence

In fact, there is no radical break in Taegio's garden experience with that of the Late Middle Ages discussed in the previous chapter, briefly revisited here. The act of peering into the depths of clear water (and the garden description in general) echo that of the Fountain of Love in the *Roman de la Rose* (ll. 1423–1652): that fountain, wherein Narcissus froze in a permanent 'selfie' of death, was equally clear (“fresh and new”), like a “mirror” (albeit “perilous”) and fed by “cavernous conduits” (presumably grottos). At the bottom are “two crystal stones” that incite “marvel”. The “pebbles” in Taegio are not described as crystals, but indeed draws onto them a deep “gaze”. Perhaps the similarities cast some suspicion as to whether Taegio's description was based on an actual garden experience, especially granted that much of garden writing, before and during the Renaissance, was mimetic and rhetorical. Yet, the description does contain those elements of Renaissance gardens, statues specifically, that were *not* found in the medieval literary garden, and the sensory experiences are,

throughout Taegio, much more descriptive. In Taegio we have not reached a modern ‘nihilism’ as Harbison and I (Prinsloo 2009:162) have suggested in relation to the *Hypnerotomachia*, but neither an intellectualised allegorisation of the garden – meaning is *felt*.

5.5 CONCEIVING TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

5.5.1 Neoplatonic intentions: Pirro Ligorio

The Neoplatonism of Taegio’s account raises the question whether the authors of gardens *intended* their topomythopoiesis to be experienced as such – epiphanies of the invisible in the visible – or whether Taegio was merely responding in this way due to his personal, esoteric, philosophy. One account from a designer’s perspective that does reveal at least a Neoplatonic sensibility, albeit inferred, was written by an antiquarian and architect that was highly influential in the development of the Renaissance garden, Pirro Ligorio (1512–1583).⁴⁶ In his description (documented in the Turin manuscript) of the grotesque paintings of Nero’s Domus Aurea, he describes the Muses and Apollo (and others) in the following terms:

The good Muses, Clio, Calliope, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Therpsicore, Thalia and Urania, their mother Mnemosyne, Apollo, Minerva and Hercules were all painted there to signify the labours and happy days of those who are dedicated to higher things, and *who lead man to the everlasting pleasures of the greatest knowledge, to high and profound meditation on seeing with the eyes of the mind how wonderful is the Prime Mover who made the heavens and the earth, so varied in its inspirations*. Thus the force and the essence of the divine light can be recognized in plants and animals (in Smith 1977:56; my italics).⁴⁷

Ligorio describes these figures from myth, all popular in the iconography of Renaissance gardens,⁴⁸ as guides towards the upper reaches of the invisible, intelligible, realm of God. Ligorio himself often employed them, for example in his design of the Casino for Pius IV in the Vatican. In his interpretation of the meaning of the topomythopoiesis of the Casino, Smith (1977:61) quotes from the passage above to argue that the iconographic programme, dominated by Apollo and the Muses, was intended to be experienced as a water-themed ensemble, grouped around the vase of Truth,⁴⁹ to render the Casino as a setting congenial for a soaring mind and – in the opposite direction – for higher beings to dwell. Thus, the garden was not intended as a place for deciphering allegories or taking moral

⁴⁶ Gardens attributed to him include some of the most famous and influential of the Renaissance, namely the Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican, the Sacro Bosco in Bomarzo and the Villa d’Este in Tivoli.

⁴⁷ The Smith translation is based on Ligorio’s letter published in Dacos (1969).

⁴⁸ MacDougall (1994:121) who cites the same passage, lists Hercules, the Muses and Apollo as being some of the most frequent divine inhabitants of Renaissance gardens.

⁴⁹ A vase at the centre of the casino’s façade – Smith derives (1977:58–59) its iconography from Ligorio’s identification of water as the source of truth, following Democritus.

lessons, even though Ligorio, as an antiquarian, was well versed in the *individual* narratives and associations of the figures.⁵⁰ Indeed, in his analysis Smith (1977:61) distinguishes between the “iconography” of individual figures, and the “meaning” of the whole. There is more evidence for a Neoplatonic bent in Ligorio’s thinking, although Smith (1977) does not refer to it: for example, Occhipinti (2009) has argued that the quadripartite geometry of Ligorio’s Villa d’Este in Tivoli was an attempt to manifest Plato’s conception of an invisible, numeral order of the universe. Also, Ligorio acknowledged Plato’s dualistic account of love – carnal and spiritual – in his description of earthly and heavenly Venus; *terreste Venere* and *celeste Venere*.⁵¹ In the spirit of Ficino and Pico, he characterises the love embodied in earthly Venus as lustful, and that within the celestial Venus as chaste and divine. Elsewhere in the Turin manuscript he reports on a Venus *prudica* statue that was mocked by religious onlookers as obscene and lists it as a statue type not suited for public viewing.⁵² Yet, he included a Venus *prudica* within a private grotto at Villa d’Este (no longer extant), interpreted by Bay (2019:257) as an encounter within the garden for male voyeurism: catching the goddess unawares undressing – or fulfilling a male “scopophilic fantasy”; a frozen peep-show in the garden. Indeed, Ligorio described the Grotto of Venus as being “dedicated to appetite and voluptuous pleasure”.⁵³ At face value, it may thus seem that Ligorio (and by extension, his client cardinal Ippolito II d’Este) abandoned his moral critique of lustful Venus when designing the grotto. However, if interpreted in Neoplatonic terms, the inclusion of the goddess of sex may have been intended – although surely not always experienced as such⁵⁴ – to evoke an enchanted experience of the celestial in the material, as felt by Taegio at the pool. Thus, this interpretation of Ligorio’s Neoplatonism reveals at least the possibility that some such lofty encounters as described by Taegio were *intended*.

5.5.2 Cheerful things

However, MacDougall (1985:131–132), who did not analyse gardens through a Neoplatonic lens, warns against looking for deep meanings in sixteenth century gardens. They were, in her estimation, more apt for *cose allegre* (cheerful things): “It [the garden] was not the place to contemplate the deep philosophical or religious questions that painting cycles evoked”.

⁵⁰ For example, elsewhere in the Turin manuscript, Ligorio provides detailed descriptions of mythical figures.

⁵¹ Discussed by Bay (2019:255), citing both from Ligorio’s Naples and Turin manuscripts: *Naples ms.* 8.B.3 f. 316 and ff. 322–23 and *Turin ms.* a.3.6, vol. 4, f. 35v.

⁵² Discussed by Bay (2019:259), citing *Turin ms.* a.2.16.J.29, f. 4v.

⁵³ Ligorio, MS f. 251v Zc., quoted in Bay (2019:253).

⁵⁴ Bull (2005:199) provides examples from antiquity and even the Middle Ages for the erotic power statues of Venus instilled in onlookers.

Rather, she contends (ibid.) the meanings of gardens, even to the literate elite, focused on basic concepts, mainly “contrasts of art and nature”, “pride of family and place” or “evocation of the pastoral heritage of classical antiquity”. Although Taegio’s account confirms that, as argued, allegorical readings were not the main purpose of the gardens’ topomythopoeia, ‘deep philosophical or religious questions’ were certainly not excluded from his experience within the liminal encounters discussed before. From Morgan and MacDougall’s analyses, and my reading of Taegio, we may conclude that participation in Renaissance gardens took on various forms and lead to a wide range of experiences: wonderful, delightful and epiphanic.

5.5.3 Meta-narratives

Granted that some garden designers held a Neoplatonic conception of experience and others troubled little with complex symbolism, it can be asked whether garden designers intended to create gardens with a coherent, narrative-like topomythopoeia. As Taegio’s encounters (and many other examples throughout this study) reveal, classical topomythopoeia was not often employed to narrate a meta-myth. There are, unlike I expected to find when embarking on this study, very few examples of gardens that attempted to be a material translation of a specific myth. In general, the myths remain ‘in their place’, that is within the virtual landscape. It is up to the garden dweller, consciously or not, to step into the dense representational network, prompted by the signifiers – emblematic, spatial and natural – and be drawn into a landscape of story. Thus, the gardens were not regarded as substitutes for the myths, but material fragments that form part of the physical-virtual dynamic. The topomyths can be likened to the illustrations in manuscripts of mythology: they accompany stories, but do not tell them. Indeed, Inden (2013:67) speculates that the reliefs at Villa d’Este in the Alley of the Hundred Fountains showing episodes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were based on illustrations from the period, and, on viewing them “prompted recitation of the text illustrated” – reminiscent of the Roman memory games played while dining on triclinia (3.4.5).

Yet, during the latter half of the sixteenth century there were created some gardens that did not merely contain encounters with scattered fragments of the virtual landscape, but attempted to, at least to some degree, ‘tell a story’. A famous example of an iconographic analysis of a Renaissance garden that reveals its narrative structure, is that of Claudia

Lazzaro's (1977) study of the Villa Lante at Bagnaia:⁵⁵ it demonstrates how that garden, as a commentary on the nature-art trope of the period, is a manifestation of the story of the flood as told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (1.143–1.384): the very form and syntax of the garden allows the story to progress along an axis, establishing a juxtaposition between the Golden Age and the postdiluvian Age of Jupiter (Figure 5.11).⁵⁶ David R. Coffin's study of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli (1960) reveals a similar substructure of narrative.

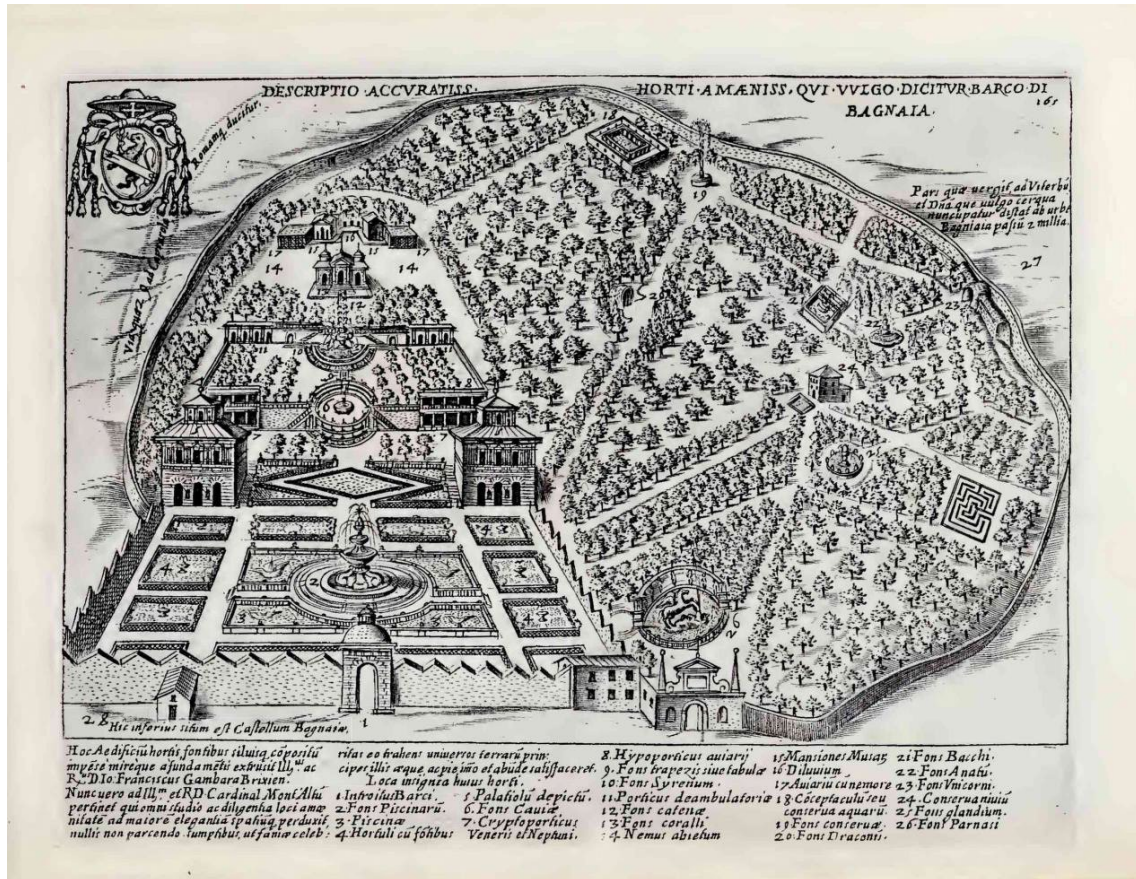


Figure 5.11. Giacomo Lauro, Villa Lante, Bagnaia, Italy, 1630 (Lauro 1630, Plate 165). The gardens date from c. 1560.

MacDougall (1985:131) points out that such “elaborate *concetti*” first started appearing in the 1540s, preceded by fountains (from around 1530) that told stories through a “complicated allegorical program” (MacDougall 1994:71) – sometimes multiple fountains worked together to “unravel the significance of the tale” (ibid.).

The iconography of such gardens – within which the virtual landscape is highly *presenced*

⁵⁵ First conducted in her doctoral dissertation at Princeton University, submitted in 1974 and condensed in her article “The Villa Lante at Bagnaia: an allegory of art and nature (1977). Note the use of the word ‘allegory,’ which, I argue, is not necessarily a term one can apply to all gardens of the time, since, at least for the Neoplatonists, gardens (and other works of art) was not deciphered as allegories.

⁵⁶ See Bay (2019:24–34) for a summary of the scholarship on Villa d’ Este, and alternative interpretations to Lazzaro, including a Neoplatonic one by Gerard Desnoyers (2002).

– can be ‘unlocked’ through analysis *a la* Lazzaro and Coffin. Although this may be true for Lante and d’Este, such solid, overarching semantics was not the rule.

Part of the reason for this, especially during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is that, as Giannetto (2008:88) informs us, the process of making gardens and designing them was not yet separated – there was no *a priori* conceptualisation of a project within a single mind and on paper which got implemented on site.

5.5.4 Gardens as *poesia*, not *istoria*

Another reason for the lack of meta garden narratives can be found in the Renaissance distinction, as applied to the visual arts, between *istoria* and *poesia*. Although the uses of these terms shifted from the fourteenth to later centuries, and varied from one author to the next, the essential differences can be explained as follows:⁵⁷ *istoria*, used by Alberti in *De pictura* (1435), referred to those works of art that sought to depict ‘historical’ events (whether Biblical or mythological) with multiple figures, often within a landscape. The artist’s job was thus to translate, truthfully and in good taste, an *invenzione*. These were typically in the format of paintings and reliefs.

There stood, between the artist and the myths, an iconographic adviser: someone who consulted mythographies, ancient texts, sculptures and handbooks of mythologies. Such an adviser were in effect translating the virtual landscape of myth, using classical conventions and contemporary commentaries, to a verbal iconographic programme which the artist needed to imitate visually. An example of such an adviser was Annibal Caro (1507–1566) who, amongst others, wrote an *invenzione* for the relief of the *loggia* above the nymphaeum at the Villa Giulia in Rome.⁵⁸ For his *invenzione* (some for Vasari), he consulted various sources: from the Hellenistic pastoral poetry of Theocritus, handbooks of mythology such as Vincenzo Cartari’s *Imagini delli dei degl’antichi* (1556) and his own, small collection of antique sculptures and texts. Paintings thus derived are visual recreations of an event via an *invenzioni*, into which the viewer can step. Decorum dictated that such *istoria* belonged to architectural settings where serious contemplation of the subject matter was demanded.⁵⁹

Poesia,⁶⁰ on the other hand, as used by Titian (1488–1576) to describe his group of

⁵⁷ I am indebted to MacDougall (1985:131) for introducing me to the relation of these terms to garden iconography. This discussion is based on the entries for *istoria* and *poesie* on Grove Art Online, by Emison (2003a & 2003b).

⁵⁸ Based on the entry ‘Caro, Annibal’, in *Grove Art Online* by Robertson (2003).

⁵⁹ An example of such an adviser for a garden may be, speculates Coffin (1960:94–95), Marc-Antoine Muret or Francesco Bandini Piccolomini (Archbishop of Siena) for Villa de’ Este, working with Pirro Ligorio.

⁶⁰ Alberti made no distinction between *istoria* and *poesia*.

mythological paintings for Phillip II of Spain, referred to those works of art that depicted scenes from myth that did not have a historical character, but rather portrayed individual characters faced with personal situations. The artist of *poesia* was allowed, like the poet, much greater freedom for *phantasia* in creating inventive subject matter, often of a more frivolous, capricious and even sexual nature.⁶¹ Writing in defence of such works in *De' veri precetti della pittura* (1587), art historian and critic Giovanni Battista Armenini (1530–1609) stated that they serve the purpose of delight and to prevent boredom – as long as they were relegated to the less important parts of a palace, such as the *loggias*, and, by extension, the gardens (Emison 2003a). There, amidst the verdure, the garden designer could create inventive topomyths that were “not bound by the same rules of realism and literalness that governed *istorie*” (MacDougall 1985:131). In short, the topomyths did not serve the role of depicting mythical events as stories, but rather as pastoral, poetic encounters with “*di ninfe... fauni, satori, silvani, centauri, mostri marini con altre cose acquatiche e selvagge*” (Armenini in MacDougall 1985:131 n.).⁶² Thus, the garden designer did not seek to translate a predetermined *invenzione* with political or religious gravitas, but create one himself, often by using statues (ancient and modern) to create “new scenes and narratives” (MacDougall 1985:120). MacDougall (1985:122) also notes another difference between topomythopoiesis, and painting and relief: there is in the former a near complete absence of Christian imagery, which she attributes to *decorum* that dictated myths as appropriate subject matter for garden settings. Topomythopoiesis was thus, during the Renaissance, not aimed at depicting mythical narratives, but rather at creating myth-infused environments in which the garden-dweller could immerse themselves in a numinous other-where place of enchantment; the topomyth becomes a mythical milieu in itself or, in the words of Comito (1991:40), “a concrete instance of the *urbs eterna* itself outside time and history”.

⁶¹ Vasari used *capriccio* to describe the fanciful, *flying* Peter and Paul in Raphael’s *Repulse of Attila* (c. 1514, Rome). Thus, meaning that Raphael created not an *istoria*, but a *poesia* as his imagination veered from the historical accuracy of the scene, explaining: “Raphael nevertheless may have wanted to depict it in this manner as an invention [*capriccio*] of his, for paintings, like poems, stray from their subjects in order to embellish the work without departing in an inappropriate way from the original idea” (Vasari 1991:323).

⁶² Although this list of Armenini is not definitive, it does illustrate that there was some kind of agreement as to what mythical figures belong in gardens – many myths found in paintings, are never seen in gardens. The latter contain those pastoral and wild myths involving nymphs, fauns, satyrs, centaurs and sea creatures. Of course, as has been shown throughout, figures such as Apollo, Hercules and Venus were also frequently placed in gardens.

5.5.5 Semantic ambiguity

Furthermore, it seems that the iconography of gardens was not always deemed very important. Jonietz (2009:329) demonstrates this by citing a letter by the Italian sculptor Baccio Bandinelli (1493–1560) in which he describes his project to a ducal secretary for a fountain for the Boboli gardens in which “the fountain’s appearance, the artists’ effort and the commissioner’s costs were worth mentioning, but not the iconographic details...” Although silence does not equate absence, it does reveal that the creators of topomyths were not always engaged in complicated ‘meaning-making’ schemes, but perhaps took for granted that their audience would be able to participate in their creations at will and according to their knowledge of the virtual landscape. Using the contemporary visitor’s accounts of the Medici gardens at Pratolino (completed between 1569 and 1581) as an example, Jonietz (2009:330) states that “Quite often, the single specifications of the art work’s metaphorical meanings differed from one viewer to the next... It almost seems as if arrangements of mythological sculptures provoked *letterati* to prove their knowledge and capability to deliver interpretations”. In other words, the *invenzione* is not supplied, but subjectively derived. Thus, the meaning and association of topomyths were, to some extent flexible, what Jonietz (2009:329) called “semantic ambiguity”: for example, at Villa d’Este in Tivoli, the presence of Hercules evoked a multitude of associations to the virtual landscape: the Garden of the Hesperides,⁶³ his choice between virtue and vice at the Crossroads, and the familial descent of the d’Este family (MacDougall 1985:128). We have seen above how a Venus could both signify lust to one, and a path to divine love for another. MacDougall (1985:128) lists a number of examples of the associations of the Parnassus imagery which had shifting (although not wholly different) associations within a number of gardens. The associations drawn were, to some extent, dependant on the visitor’s ekphrasis of a garden, or the owner’s intent, sometimes indicated by a text accompanying a sculpture.⁶⁴ This, together with the mysterious and elusive chains of meaning of the Neoplatonists, show that even for the Renaissance, the scholar will attempt in vain to provide a structuralist taxonomy of myths and their (fixed) meanings. Rather, the meaning is carried by the virtual landscape, existing within the imagination of the garden dweller. Although a shared semiotic system ensured some consistency in the interpretations, there was some room for private participation.

⁶³ To where, for his eleventh labour, he journeyed to steal Zeus’ golden apples.

⁶⁴ Jonietz (2009:301) notes that such in situ descriptions could include anything from the meaning of a sculpture, or even from where it was translocated in the case of ‘recycled’ statues.

5.5.6 Living marble

From the same accounts, Hunt (1983:9) remarks that it was, mostly, not the iconography that drew attention at Pratolino, but rather the “sheer mechanical virtuosity” of the automated statues (Figure 3.23).⁶⁵ Does this mean that, in such cases, the statues were not experienced as part of a topomyth; that the contemporary visitors stood with unenchanted eyes to decipher technological trickery? On the contrary. Filson (2018) highlights an aspect of Neoplatonism not mentioned before, namely its conception of magic and the ensoulment of statues, a possible reason for the fear of idolatry mentioned earlier. Quoting from the Medici court philosopher Francesco de’ Vieri’s account of Pratolino in his *Delle maravigliose opere di Pratolino* (1587),⁶⁶ Filson (2018:177) remarks that during the Renaissance, Hermetic texts⁶⁷ were rediscovered which “perpetuated Greco-Egyptian methods of investing man-made vessels, typically cult statues, with some kind of ‘life’ from received celestial influences, thus manufacturing the ‘living gods’ of antiquity”. The strangeness of witnessing moving statues was no mere marvel induced by wonder, but (for some) an experience of a statue ensouled. The art of statue ensoulment is related to the pre-Christian “theurgical practice of *telestikè* (τελεστικὴ), which concentrated on the consecration and animation of statues so as to obtain oracles from them” (Piana 2017:230). Filson (2018) interprets Vieri’s account as a synthesis between the empirical understanding of mechanics with a magical understanding of some hidden life-force; a synthesis between mind and soul that invites marvel at the limits of rational understanding.

5.5.7 Story follows stock

Often, the iconographic contents of topomyths was simply based on what sculptures were available to include in them. For example, when Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1572) described his *invenzione* for a garden for Giovan Battista Ricasoli (1580–c. 1620), described in his *Ragionamento primo*, he did so by, in part, recycling, two existing fountains by sculptor Camilliani and dedicated the one to Venus and the other to Neptune. The *concetti* was thus not based on the designer’s imaginative attempt to convey a mythical narrative, but on the pre-defined iconography of available sculpture stock.

⁶⁵ Automated statues included those that spouted water on people as tricks (*giochi d’acqua*), and others that played music (for example a Pan playing his pipe, and Muses on a Parnassus playing an organ).

⁶⁶ Morgan (2021:91–92) also uses this account of Vieri to further his argument about the experience of marvel in the Renaissance garden.

⁶⁷ Notably, the legendary Hermes Trismegistus’ *Asclepius*, written c. AD 100–300 in Alexandria.

5.5.8 Moralising allegory

The examples throughout this chapter that emphasised the Neoplatonic and phenomenological experience of topomyths, does not mean an exegetic approach to topomythopoiesis did not endure from the medieval period. As Gombrich (1948:183), who stressed the importance of analysing Renaissance art through Neoplatonic eyes, stated:

... it is well to remember that for all its fascination Neo-Platonism never held un-disputed sway in this field [religious philosophy and art reception] any more than in other fields. Though it may have encouraged an irrational confusion between the functions of the image there always remained scope for the application of 'discursive reason' and the exercise of rational distinction grounded on Aristotelian logic.

In short, some topomyths, and other forms of art, were received and conceived as allegories to be intellectually analysed. A case in point is the nymphaeum at the Villa Barbaro at Maser, designed by Palladio and built between 1554–1558. It is simultaneously a facade and spatial type, both architectonic (outside) and naturalistic (inside). The curved, pediment-covered facade contains niches with statues of mythical figures from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁸

According to Kolb & Beck's (1997) analysis, the figures are displayed as opposites across the main axis (that originates from the villa) as a means to signify cautionary moral tales, elucidated by texts that accompany each statue. For example, reading from left to right, the first statue is that of Pan, paired on the farthest right niche with a female satyr. Underneath Pan are the words:

Whoever is slow to do good works
Will be left with his hands full of wind,

And beneath the female satyr:

Wine from fruits or serpent's venom:
Tell me: do you know which was the most powerful in this World?

Both epigrams impart ironic 'lessons': a slothy Pan warns against idleness in charity, and a drunkard satyr heeds against the 'poisonous' power of wine (Kolb & Beck 1997:25). It can be inferred that the owner of the Villa wished to use mythological figures for didactic purposes, evoking the earlier tradition of the *Ovide moralise*.

Of course, any garden dweller of the time could interpret mythological figures in this moralising way, based on the contemporary moralising handbooks on mythology. So, for example, Coffin (1960:79), in his analysis of Villa d'Este, refers to the Ferranese mythographer Lelio Gregorio Giraldi's biography of Hercules that define the hero's virtues

⁶⁸ According to Visentini (2006:108) the nymphaeum recalls the Belvedere exedra.

as “not irascible”, “not avaricious” and “not pleasure-living” – moderate attributes befitting a Cardinal. Coffin infers that the cardinal and his guests would, with their knowledge of myths and their contemporary interpretations, make these intellectual associations through exegetic participation. Coffin (1960:82), in reference to the Hercules statues mentioned before, identifies an overarching moral theme that holds the iconography together, in this case that of Virtue and Vice, juxtaposed with the lust and chaos signified by the statues of Jupiter and Leda. Furthermore, the Christian visitor can moralise the classical iconography in Christian terms, as Coffin (1960:89) speculates how the Hercules behind the fountain of the dragon would have suggested “the well-known image of Christ trampling the dragon”.



Figure 5.12. Andrea Palladio, nymphaeum at Villa Barbaro, Maser, 1554–1558 (Photo: Phyllis Dearborn Massar in Kolb & Beck 1997:16).

Coffin’s (1960:82–83) meta-moral scheme is extended to interpret the presence of the already mentioned voluptuous Venus with the grotto of chaste Diana as the subjects of Hercules’ choice between *voluptas*, on the one side of the axis, and *virtue*, on the other side.

In her analysis, Lazzaro (1990:225) is more wary of interpreting the Hercules statues as part of a pre-planned iconographic programme: “The unnecessary repetition of Hercules and this unilluminating interpretation seemed occasioned more by the desire to display the antique statues than by thematic necessity” – another possible example of ‘story follows stock’. She also notes that the other statues in the gardens, mostly female and from antiquity, only has “loose formal and iconographic parallels” (ibid.).

5.5.9 Geographic allegory

Another layer of symbolic intent can be found in the topomyths that relate to a site's location, which will only be mentioned here in brief. Suffice to mention three examples: In Coffin's quotation from the Parisian manuscript (f. 256v) concerning the Oval Fountain of the Villa d'Este, it is revealed that it was then known as the "Fountain of Tivoli... so called because it represents the mountains and rivers of the countryside of Tivoli" (in Coffin 1960:85). In Vasari's (1912:20) description of the works of the artist Niccolò Tribolo (1500–1550) at the villa of Castello, he refers to an unrealised project for an architectural grotto. In one of its three niches, Tribolo planned to include a bearded figure representing Mount Asinao. From its mouth water would flow, eventually reaching a river-god statue representing the River Mugnone, all to represent the hydrological reality of the region around Florence.

Another example is the Appennino sculpture by Giambologna: a giant emerging from a rustic freestanding mount in the Villa Medici (renamed Villa Demidoff from the late nineteenth century) at Pratolino (Figure 5.13). This topomyth is a rare example where statue and naturalised space become completely inseparable.



Figure 5.13. Stefano della Bella, *Colossal Statue of the Appennino by Giambologna to Left, Represented as a Giant Crouching at the Entrance of a Grotto...* Villa Medici, Pratolino, Italy, c. 1653 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.136.537.6). The sculpture dates from 1580.

The giant-mountain is a personification of the Apennine mountain range, from whence its cold peaks water flows to irrigate the dry valleys of Tuscany; the geomorphology of the region is frozen in rock: "The contorted tension-filled pose dramatizes the difficulty in bringing water to a harsh environment" (D'Elia 2011:2). A contemporary ekphrasis of the

garden by Raffaello Gualterotti (1544–1638) in his *Vaghezze* (translated by D’Elia 2011:2) cultivated participation:

In the farthest part [of the garden]
Sylvan Apennine remains lying
And the hardest stones
He seems to push and press to draw forth waves:
He freezes utterly and shivers
For his veins, of ice and snow,
Close themselves to foggy and brief days.

The cold-blooded giant, hard-pressing water from rock, is in stark contrast with the rest of the paradisaical landscape and thus encountered as a strangeness. The iconography is rooted in earlier literary references to the Apennine, for example in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (12.697), and in visual representations: Hunt (1983:9) notes the resemblance of the statue Apennines to illustrations of Ovid, and D’Elia (2011:5) cites another garden sculpture as precedent, namely that made by Ammanati following Vasari’s *invenzione* for Duke Cosimo’s Villa Medici in Castello. Such geographic and mimetic-phantastic topomythopoeia draws from the general iconography of the tradition (e.g. the river god statue type) and *localises* it through association with local deities and geographic features.

5.6 THE ANTHROPOMORPHISM OF TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

The mythopoeic encounter with a living, anthropomorphic being sitting on an artificial mount is also found in Taegio (2011:203), who stumbles upon Apollo sitting on Parnassus:

And in the middle of this very pleasant place there is an Apollo of very white marble, which sits on top of a rough and damp rock, from which a fountain goes up, so that it sprays with very clear water everyone who is near it. And this god, the love that he shows on his face points out that for the sweet memory of his beloved Daphne he still enjoys contemplating some young laurel trees that rise around him like a crown. And even as in the past in a chasm on Mount Parnassus a cave was found into which whoever looked received the prophetic spirit, so here he who marvels at the aforementioned Apollo and feels the coolness of the breeze that softly blows here suddenly feels filled with divinity and, waxing poetical, says marvelous things in honor of the spirit of the breeze and of the charm of the Nicola...

This description of a topomythopoeic encounter supports the argument that, at least for Taegio, the mythopoeic contents of gardens were not experienced for the sake of intellectual decoding. Here, as before, the mythopoeic contents is not limited to the iconography of Apollo and Daphne, but immanent in the ensemble-milieu of statue, spatial type, plants, water and literary references – a dense network of somatic and symbolic impressions; meaning is felt not thought.

5.6.1 The spatial type as naturalising milieu

The “rough and damp rock” fountain (with its water-tricks reminiscent of those at Pratolino) probably resembled the rustic conical mound type, for example the Pegasus Fountain at Villa d’ Este. The type first appeared in the Italian Renaissance garden as a translation of the *Metamorphoses* (5.250–268) as a fresco depiction (c. 1525) on the facade of the Casino of Antonio del Bufalo in Rome, and then (in the same garden) as an artificially constructed, rustic fountain (Cellauro 2003:43).⁶⁹ An even earlier Parnassus, of the *Meta Sudans* type (Figure 3.8), topped by an Apollo Musagetes, was built in Rouen, France, in 1518 (Johnson 2009:177).⁷⁰ Although it is not typical to find an Apollo on a rocky fountain, the scene has obvious references to Parnassus, here translated as a miniature simulacrum of the natural site (in comparison with the monumental and architectonic Parnassus of the Belvedere court).

Apollo is commonly found in architectonic niches, for example in the statue court of the Belvedere (as the archer, *Pythian Apollo*; Figure 5.10), the Fountain of the Organ, Villa d’ Este (there holding a lyre, thus the *Apollo Musagetes* type; Figure 5.14) or in a grotto, as in the Villa d’ Este on the Quirinal (MacDougall 1985:122). Rocky fountains more typically served as pedestals for Pegasus, as at the villas d’Este (Tivoli and Quirinal) and Villa Lante at Bagnaia (Figure 2.1). Yet, in the early seventeenth century *Sala del Parnasso* at Villa Aldobrandini Apollo is seated on a rustic simulacrum of Parnassus overlooking, with lyre, the Muses and Pegasus, set within an apsidal niche – a combination between the architectonic and rustic abodes of the god.

The mound type was later monumentalised in gardens such as that of the Medici in Rome and Pratolino, or the elaborate Parnassus designed for Queen Anne at Somerset House (1609–1612; similar to Figure 5.17) by the engineer Salomon de Caus which, according to a German visitor in 1613, outdid the one at Pratolino (Eager 2020:566; Figure 5.16). According to Johnson (2009:177), De Caus (and his brother Isaac) may have seen (and delighted in) the Rouen fountain as small boys – classical topomythopoiesis includes both invention, but also imitation; one topomyth influences another.

The figure of Apollo in Taegio is thus naturalised, unlike the universalising context of the statue of the Apollo Belvedere, for he engages with his immediate setting by gazing at the laurels surrounding the fountain, the trees into which Daphne was transformed (*Met.* 1.452). In Taegio’s account the tree is not a symbol, but a living avatar of Daphne. Laurels had special significance in Renaissance gardens, especially for their associations with Parnassus and poetry, as indicated by the grove of laurels at Villa d’Este where the cardinal’s

⁶⁹ Cellauro’s history of the origins of the rustic Parnassus type is based on Coffin (1991:78–79).

⁷⁰ There are also two *mete sudanti* fountains at the fish pools at Villa De’ Este, Tivoli.

literary circle could come for inspiration (Cellauro 2003:45). Cosimo Bartoli, mentioned previously, thought that the mere planting of laurels on a natural mount, without any other signifiers, could evoke Parnassus (Cellauro 2003:43).⁷¹



Figure 5.14. Left: Francesco Venturini, Apollo Musagetes, fountain with water organ, Villa d' Este, c. 1685; cropped (Rijksmuseum, BI-1893-A39-92).

Figure 5.15. Right: Giovanni Battista Falda, Apollo Musagetes, fountain in the Hall of Parnassus, Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati, c. 1653–1691; cropped (Rijksmuseum, BI-1893-A39-41).

Here, in the garden of Signor Novato, Taegio also relates the laurel to the tragic love story in which the chaste nymph Daphne is transformed to forever escape Apollo's lust, manifested in the tension between the statue's lover-gaze and the surrounding trees; a frozen memory of the beloved. The tree and statue are thus animated through participation: Daphne's invisible presence and Apollo's unrequited love is seen via Taegio's imaginative

⁷¹ For the mythical iconography of laurels, see Giesecke (2014:33–36).

participation, cultivated by the literary tradition of classical mythology disseminated at the time. He was not the only one, and the poet of the Apennine, Gualterotti, reported on the laurels and myrtles of the Villa Medici in Pratolino as growing from the metamorphoses of nymphs and gods (D’Elia 2011:1) – nature animated by numinous presence of the gods. The allegory of plants during the Renaissance must, however, not be overstressed. MacDougall (1985:119) noted that “there is little evidence that they [plants] were allegorized” yet notes that “many associations were known from antiquity, such as the metamorphoses of Narcissus, Iris and Hyacinth... Oak with Jupiter or grapevines with Bacchus” (MacDougall 1985:132, n. 10). The encounter is again described as a “marvel” and evokes the Delphic grotto of Parnassus⁷² which steers Taegio’s participation to a vision – augmented by the feeling of water on the skin and the breeze – culminating in an epiphany in which Taegio suddenly “feels filled with divinity”.

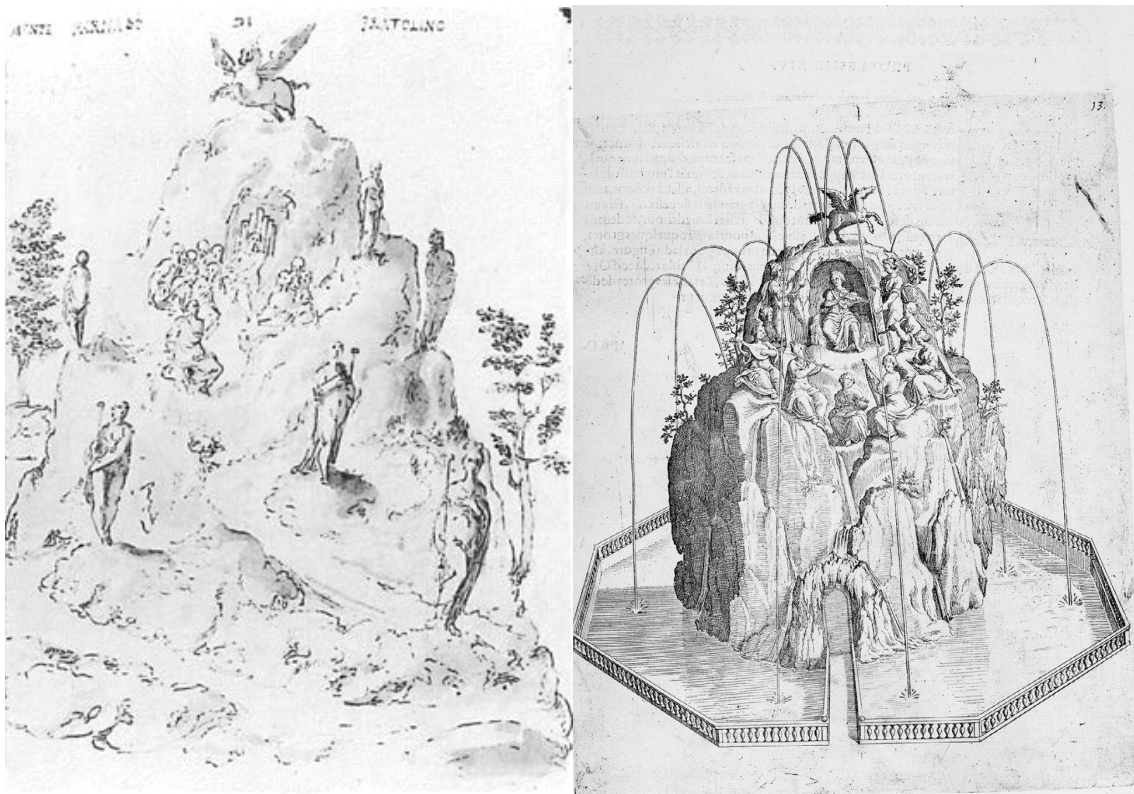


Figure 5.16. Left: Giovanni Guerra, drawing of Mount Parnassus, Pratolino, Italy, 1598 (ECHO).

Figure 5.17. Right: Salomon du Caus, design for Mount Parnassus, *Raisons des forces mouvantes* (Du Caus 1624, Plate 13).

⁷² Delphi was sacred to Gaia, whose Python-son protected its oracle. Apollo slew the Python and went to clean the blood off himself in the valley of Tempe. From there he came back victorious with a wreath of laurel (growing in the valley) on his head. The laurel-wreath thus became symbolic of victory and “possessing an inherent purifying potency” (Giesecke 2014:35) was used to sweep holy places and purify houses after death.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The presence of the gods blossomed during the Italian Renaissance, starting their life as excavated artefacts in outdoor statue collections in the fifteenth century, later naturalised during the sixteenth century in purpose made garden settings following the precedent set by the Belvedere Court in the Vatican City.

It is these sculpted beings of Greco-Roman mythology and their strange haunts that populate the lavish images of Italian Renaissance gardens that gloss the pages of history-survey and coffee-table books. These pictures may imply that mythical iconography formed part of an ocularcentric gardening culture that relished in making and deciphering myths-told-in-stone. Contemporary fictional accounts of the reception of mythical garden artifice support this impression – Poliphilo describes and interprets the topomyths encountered in his *Hypnerotomachia* like a pedantic emblemist.

Yet, the contemporary first-hand accounts of Taegio suggests an alternative mode of reception. He spends more time describing the agricultural and natural areas of the estates than he does recalling stories or symbolism evoked by the topomyths. In one section (Taegio 2011:207–209), he enters into a series of rhetorical questions that elaborates on the various aspects of the estate landscape from which one can gain pleasure, not mentioning once the pleasure of looking at iconographic elements: he lists the sights of water, meadows, woods, flowers, animals, branches waving in the air, peasants at work and the smell of fragrant air... all as wonderful things confirming that the Renaissance garden ought not be simplified as a nihilistic, iconographic spectacle. The passage is far removed from the allegorical and trope-based descriptions of gardens mostly found in medieval literature. Yet, there is in Taegio a continuity with the virtual landscape of the *locus amoenus* myth which he uses to infuse his phenomenological descriptions. Thus, the passage emphasises what Taegio (2011:250) identified as one of the three kinds of pleasures to be had in landscapes, namely that which is “only of the body and is called sensual”. The second type of pleasure is purely intellectual: “only of the spirit, which is that one of them that contemplating the marvelous effects of nature passes through the better hours” (ibid.). In his own words, “the third pleasure participates in the sensual and the intellectual, as is that of poetry, of rhetoric, of music, for reason of which it gladdens the spirit and the ear” (ibid.).

For Neoplatonists such as Taegio, the classical topomyths of the Renaissance prompted symbolic-somatic participation leading to an experience of seeing (and feeling) the higher realm of the universe cascading into the phenomenal world. They provided delight, evoked marvel and enraptured; enchantments that were to be codified in the pages of the guidebooks and treatises of the seventeenth century.

6 THE SYSTEMISATION OF TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

6.1 THE TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS OF VERSAILLES

With the influence of Italian Renaissance gardens on the gardening cultures of continental Europe and the British Isles during the seventeenth century, classical topomythopoiesis was, invariably, exported to the court gardens of the European aristocracy.¹ Topomythopoiesis by no means accounted for the overall syntax of these gardens, which was mostly governed by geometric systems often based on patterns published in design treatises. Similar to the codification of geometry, classical topomythopoiesis increasingly became systemised and was disseminated by the most influential treatises of the period; reception was guided by visitor's guidebooks.

Jacques Boyceau, Sieur de la Barauderie (c. 1560–1633), superintendent of royal gardens under Louis XIII, wrote the first French theory of garden art in which he prescribed a pleasure garden to include “enriched fountains, embellished canals and rivers, grottoes and subterranean areas, aviaries, galleries ornamented with paintings and sculptures, the orangery, better organized alleés and walkways...” (in Mariage 1999:55).² Such artifice – imported from Italy – came to characterise the gardens of the French aristocracy, influenced by Boyceau's lavishly illustrated book, published posthumously in 1638. In it, we find the earliest remnant

¹ The influence of Italian Renaissance gardens on those in England, has been thoroughly treated by Hunt in his *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination 1600–1750* (1996). For a discussion of the influence of Italian gardens on the French, see chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Kenneth Woodbridge's *Princely Gardens: The Origins and Development of the French Formal Style* (1986).

² From *Traité du jardinage selon les raisons de la nature et de l'art. Ensemble divers desseins de parterres, pelouzes, bosquets et autres ornements*, published posthumously in 1638

drawing of Versailles (Figure 6.1): an intricate parterre laid out when the park was still used as a hunting retreat, void of the gods that were soon to appear on stage.

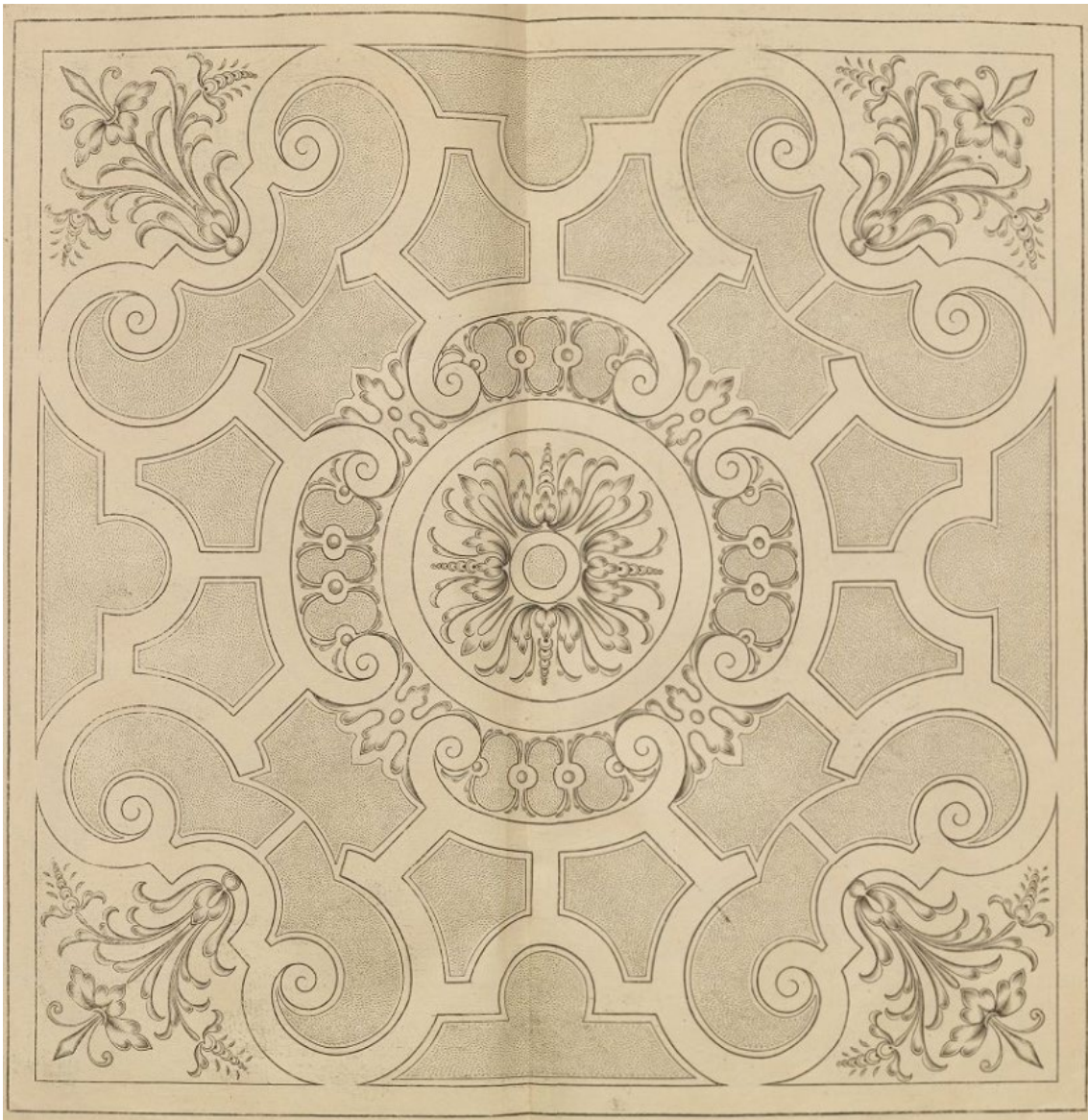


Figure 6.1. Jacques Boyceau, *Parterre for the Park of Versailles* (Boyceau 1638:no pagination).

6.1.1 The Apollo King

Following the death of Louis XIII, the role of mythology at Versailles was to provide a dense metaphorical network for Louis XIV's garden that manifested his reign over nature. The king was personified as the sun-god Apollo, whence radiates a life-giving power that sustains nature. This conceit is revealed by statues of Apollo and his sister Diana, as the king and queen of the heavens, described in the preface (*Instructions to the Reader*) to one of earliest guidebooks to Versailles by Le Sieur Combes (1684:no pagination):

On the front of the house, which looks into the garden, he [the king as Apollo] divides the year with Diana, where they communicate their mild *influences to the earth*, that it may produce all sorts of plants.

Within the Renaissance nature-art dialectic nature was still regarded as the exemplar

model to be imitated; the standard against which art is measured. Indeed, the official historian of Louis XIV's court and art theoretician André Félibien (1619–1695), summarised this mutual relationship in the production of art: “Nature furnishes the material [to imitate], and Art gives it form” (in Berger 2016:104). However, at Versailles the King was a surrogate for nature on whom the artists and other members of the *Bâtiments du Roi*³ depended as a pro-creative force; the nature-art dialectic became the king's monologue:

One can say of Versailles that it is a place where Art labors by itself, and that Nature seems to have abandoned, in order to give the King the opportunity to cause to appear there by a type of creation, if I dare to speak thus, several magnificent works and a great number of extraordinary things (in Berger 2016:104).

The topomythopoeia of Versailles is characterised, for the most part, by *artifice* – the gods are tamed by geometry and architectonic form; they are the King's guests, but must know their place within the perfected nature of the garden.

6.1.2 Golden Age 2.0

Outside the garden, control remained elusive with the chaos sown by the religious wars, climatic calamities and hunger. Thus, the gardens of Versailles resisted the change and chaos, the unpredictability and cruelty of the world outside by being cultivated as a Golden Age landscape where spring and bounty are eternal.⁴ The meta-myth of the gardens directed the ontology of place as a microcosm of the ordered universe with its predictable ebb-and-flow of time: the seasons come and go, day turns to night and the sun rises when the Apollo-King awakes, as it did for Augustus. Hyde (2021) demonstrates, as others have (e.g. Girard 1985:15), how the gardens and its topomyths exist at various time scales: from the eternal, the seasonal and the daily, all governed by the sun (the King) whose path is traced by Le Nôtre's system of axes. As with the origins of the Belvedere, Louis XIV (like Hadrian and Julius II before) wished to display works from antiquity, hence the presence of copies of the Laocoön and Apollo Belvedere (Girard 1985:11) and, moreover, sought to show that he had exceeded the works of the ancients. The Golden Age myth was not presented as a nostalgia

³ Established in 1602, this group was responsible for the French monarch's building, garden and art projects.

⁴ Hyde (2021:9) notes the Golden Age theme in the ballet in which Louis XIV performed himself, *Ballet de saison*, in the year he took power 1661. He played the role of Ceres, entering after springtime. At the end of the ballet, the King appears as *Le Printemps*, Eternal Springtime to signal him heralding a period of abundance. This evocation of the classical Golden Age is made explicit in the *livret* (booklet) for the ballet, written by Isaac de Benserade. Hyde (ibid.) also describes how Le Nôtre created Versailles amidst the “context of an ongoing climate crisis” namely the Little Ice Age – this feat was acknowledged and celebrated to underline further the fertile powers of King and company.

for a time past (as it was in the Middle Ages and Renaissance), but one recreated *now*. An extensive horticultural programme ensured that the gardens were always in flower (Hyde 2021:13), providing real sensory delights of the real-and-imagined *locus amoenus* – ‘sweet smells’ and ‘sweet breezes’ wafted through the palace gardens to perfume the air with a numinous, efflorescent glow of an eternal spring.⁵

6.1.3 Co-creation

The mid-1660s to early 1680s saw the conceptualisation and creation of monumental topomyths that consisted of both statues and spatial types. The *congetti* sprung from the literary mind of Charles Perrault (1628–1703) and visualised by his brother Claude and the painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690).⁶ Following these designs, the topomyths were executed by sculptors like Françoise Girardon (1628–1715) and the Marsy brothers, and located within the geometric strokes of André Le Nôtre’s (1613–1700) landscape design. Thus, the topomythopoesis of Versailles formed from a triad of fantasy, classical art and the ordering of nature. All of this bubbling creative energy was managed by the Comptroller-General of Finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). By the time of his death, the topomythopoeia of the gardens was roughly organised by two thematic axes.

6.1.4 The east-west axis: the sun

Taken from the bedroom where the sun-king rises daily (during the *grand levée*), the axis terminates on the horizon where the sun sets, pointing to infinity (top of Figure 6.2). It is therefore the axis of the *légende du Soleil* and contains numerous references to Apollo and his family.⁷ In terms of cosmological orientation, the narrative of Apollo is inverted on the axis, as he rises to the west of the chateau out from the waters of the Apollon Pond (1668–1671),⁸ and then – after a day of toil – submerges into the Grotto of Tethys (1666–1674) to the east for a night’s rest. In-between there is a memory from his childhood: his mother Latona stands on a low, freestanding, mound rusticated with sculpted plants protecting her baby son and

⁵ Contrary to my inference, the fragrance may not actually have been to visitors’ liking and even the cause of illness (Google Arts and Culture, no date). I have not been able to verify this information, although the stench of the palace interior is well documented.

⁶ First Painter to the King (from 1664) and a founding member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (in 1648).

⁷ The axis of the *légende du Soleil* is described by Hedin (2017:222), quoting Pierre Francastel (1930:35).

⁸ Designed by Le Brun, built by Jean-Baptiste Tuby (1635–1700) from gilded lead. The conceit is described by Combes (1684:no pagination): “In the garden near the Canal, at the Bason of Apollo it’s the Sun when he riseth, and seems to issue from the Sea”.

his sister, Diana, against six peasants from Lycia metamorphosing into frogs (spouting water) as punishment for refusing her water (*Met.* 6.313–381).⁹



Figure 6.2. Pierre Patel, *View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles, Seen From the Avenue de Paris*, 1668 (Château de Versailles, MV 765).

On the terrace just to the west of the bedroom, the king as Apollo and Versailles as the summit of his creative powers, was conceptualised in a topomyth that reflected the sacred mountains of Greece, Petrarch’s garden, the terraced mount of the Belvedere in Rome and the literary spirit of Italian villas – Mount Parnassus (Figure 6.3). Although never realised, the rustic mound would have extended the Apollonian geography of the axis and provided a naturalised setting for the god in contrast to the other topomyths of Versailles which mostly consist of architectonic, universalizing settings. It was designed by Le Brun as a rocky (and vegetated) cross-vault, seen-through from all four sides and penetrated by a vertical gush of water at its apex. The structure is inhabited by its indigenous *dramatis personae*, like the Muses.¹⁰ The theatrics were elaborated by its dualities: from one side, we see Apollo with his lyre and company – Parnassus (*Fontaine de Muse*); from the other we see Pegasus and company

⁹ The fountain was designed by Le Brun and sculpted by Gaspard and Balthazar Marsy in 1668. The current, architectonic, fountain resulted from changes made by Jules Hardouin-Mansart between 1687 and 1689. The veiled meaning of the fountain is debated, but commonly interpreted as a symbol for Louis XIV’s crushing of the *Fronde*, the civil uprising against his reign in a series of wars between 1648 and 1653.

¹⁰ Other figures include Apollo, Pegasus, the poetess Sappho, aquatic nymphs, children, swans and dragons.

– Helicon (*Fontaine de Arts*). Also, with the cross-vault, Le Brun was also able to create both an airy mountain myth, and a watery grotto underneath, inhabited by nymphs and river gods. And yet, the rustic ensemble would still have been tamed by the curvilinear geometry of its setting, the *Parterre d’Eau* (Figure 6.4; located at x on Figure 6.5).¹¹

To the west of the would-be Parnassus, lies a near-oceanic body of water. The Grand Canal (excavations started in 1667) was so-called to evoke Venice, the “mythical watery city” (Lablaude 1995:40), complete with gondolas and other boats. As a topomyth, it follows in the tradition of Hadrian’s canopus and the earlier ‘Niles’ of Roman domestic gardens. For the visitor viewing Apollo rising from the Apollon Pond, the canal augments the drama as a simulacrum of the vast ocean in the background.¹²



Figure 6.3. Jean Audran (after Charles Le Brun), *Fontain of the Muses* (left), *Fontain of the Arts* (right), 1685; unbuilt proposal for a Mount Parnassus fountain (Château de Versailles, GR 124). The rusticated cross vaulted structure is reminiscent of the *Mete sudanti* of Villa d’ Este (Figure 3.9).

¹¹ The current, simplified parterre (so-called second Parterre d’Eau, bisected by the main axis) was the result of the takeover François Michel Le Tellier, Marquis of Louvois (1641–1691) after Colbert’s death in 1683. Hedin (2017:218) argues that it was designed by Mansart.

¹² I am not alone to compare the Grand Canal with the ocean. In a literary explication of Versailles written by hydraulic engineer Claude Denis (1596–1680), he describes the canal as “*et qui semble une mer*” (Denis 1675:11) – like the ocean. Also, in La Fontaine’s *Loves* (1774:212) – discussed later in the chapter – he refers to both the Grand Canal and the Apollon Pond as “two oceans”.

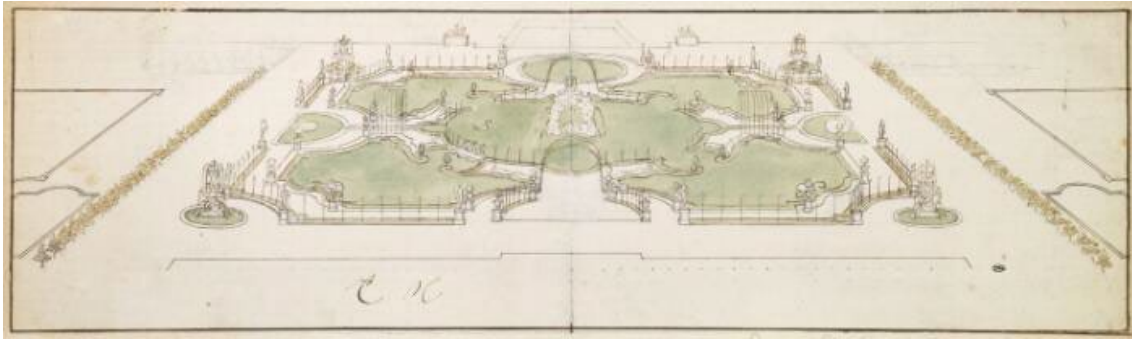


Figure 6.4. Charles Le Brun, *Proposal for the Parterre d'eau*, 1672 (Louvre, 30321). Mount Parnassus in centre.

6.1.5 The north-south axis: water

The north-south axis, which Hedin (2017) interprets as a more playful route of discovery compared with the more august (and hubristic) tone of the east-west axis, included a series of mostly aquatic-themed topomyths. Hedin (2017:207) points to the recurring crayfish on the fountains as signs of Cancer that reigned during the progenitive month of June, accompanied in some areas with putti holding up “baskets of natural plenty” (ibid.). Thus, the north-south axis hinted at the vegetal abundance that resulted from Louis XIV’s reign: in the Golden Age, “the fruitful earth unforced bare them [the first, golden race of mortal men] fruit abundantly and without stint” (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 115–120). Mostly focused on the section north of the main building (right on Figure 6.2), it did include the southern parterre populated by the garden’s oldest group of gods – a series of Olympian terms from 1663.¹³ To the north of the buildings, from south to north, it teemed with a siren and triton (and their offspring) in the Siren Fountain (1667, A on Figure 6.5); more sirens and tritons in the Crown Fountain (1669, B); yet more tritons, dolphins,¹⁴ and crayfish in the Pyramid Fountain (c. 1668, C); putti, amours, river gods, satyrs and bathing nymphs in the Bath of the Nymphs (1668–1670, D); tritons, satyrs, amours, putti and infants standing in-line in the Water Alley (E) leading towards a group of amours on swans aiming their arrows at a spewing dragon within the Rondeau Basin (1666, F), looked on by a group of satyrs and hamadryades staring from the edge of the surrounding grove.

¹³ The literature isn’t quite clear as to whether the group was only intended for this location or actually placed there. Certainly, they were moved from there, possibly to the entry gates, and their life thereafter remains a mystery (Hedin 2016:339; fn. 4).

¹⁴ Dolphins play a marginal role in Greco-Roman mythology, but feature nonetheless, somewhat like the idealised role of dogs in our society: they love humans for the sake of it, rescue us in times of need, grieve our deaths, play with children and show great courage in the face of a threat much bigger than themselves. Unlike most dogs, they have a fondness for music and accompanied Venus at her birth. And, relevant for Versailles, the heir to the French throne was called *dauphine*. For a brief discussion about the symbolism of dolphins, especially in the Dragon Fountain, see Hedin (2016:334–336).

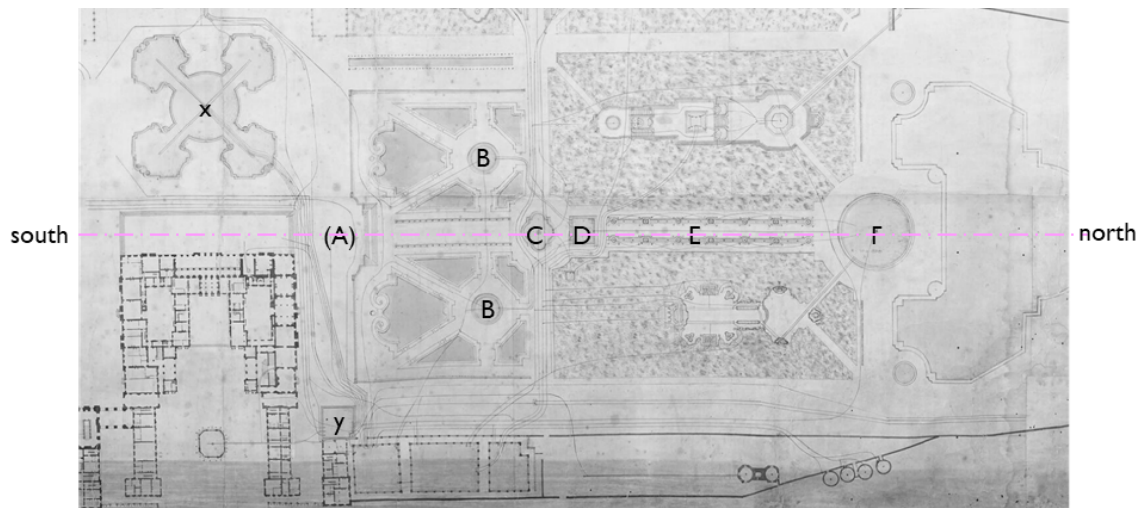


Figure 6.5. Agence des Bâtiments du roi, *General Plan of the Gardens of Versailles*, 1680–1681 (*Archives nationales*, 36 in Château de Versailles). Image cropped, recoloured and labelled by Author.

If there is any doubt that these topomyths were created as physical counterparts to a virtual landscape, then a series of commissioned paintings by Jean Cotelle II (c. 1688–1690) serve as a revealing testament of Versailles’s enchantment: in each scene, a representation of the virtual landscape with ‘living’ gods is overlaid onto a perspective view of a topomyth. For example, a perspective of the Rondeau Basin is augmented by the drama of Apollo slaying the dragon in the foreground, while Zeus and his fellow Olympians watch from above (Figure 6.6); Diana and her bathing nymphs surround the hexagonal pool in the Grove of the Domes, accompanied by statues of Apollo and his horses being tended¹⁵ while Aurora¹⁶ in the sky heralds the coming of night and rest for the hard-working king (Figure 6.7); in the Marais Grove nymphs frolic and console Narcissus while cupids flutter above to decorate trees with garlands (Figure 6.8). It is as if the paintings visualise what the attentive garden dweller will see if they commit to fantastical participation. To gain insight into visitors’ participation, a few remarks on the reception of the sculptural groups on either ends of the north-south axis follow: the Olympian terms to the south, and the *Petite Commande* to the north.

¹⁵ These statue groups were moved here from the Grotto of Tethys (6.2.2) when it got destroyed in 1684. They were again moved to inhabit the Apollo Baths constructed from 1778 to 1781.

¹⁶ Goddess of the dawn, accompanied on the painting by a river god bringing rain, a hippocamp (horse with fish tail) and Centaurus.



Figure 6.6. Left: Jean Cotelle, *View of the Dragon Basin with Apollo Slaying the Python*, 1688–1693 (Château de Versailles, MV 770).

Figure 6.7. Centre: Jean Cotelle, *View of the Grove of Domes with Diana and her Nymphs*, 1688–1693 (Château de Versailles, MV 734).

Figure 6.8. Right: Jean Cotelle, *View of the Marais Grove with Nymphs Playing Various Games*, 1688–1693 (Château de Versailles, MV 767).

6.1.6 Emblematic topomythopoiesis: the Olympian terms

The sculptures of Versailles, especially during the decade of the Premier Versailles,¹⁷ the 1660s, which marks Louis XIV’s first involvement with the estate, was mainly “an art for artists and alongside them a lofty group of connoisseurs and literati” (Hedin 2016:305) for whom the topomythopoiesis provided a source of “clever intellectual games” (Hedin 2001:651): “To engage it head-on, one had to be on familiar terms with the canons of ancient and Italian art; the print books and mythographic manuals of the day;¹⁸ the translations and explications of ancient books;¹⁹ and, by no means least, the theoretical debates²⁰ then taking place by the artists of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*” (Hedin 2016:305). In other words, the earliest visitors to the gardens of Versailles were well versed in the dense representational network that cultivated the seventeenth century virtual landscape of classical topomythopoiesis that was, in parts, materialised at Versailles.

The first collection of sculptures, broadly themed around love, betrays the emphasis

¹⁷ Thomas Hedin defines the period as 1661–1668 (2017:222, fn. 2).

¹⁸ For example, Natale Conti’s *Mythologiae*, originally published in Latin in 1567 (Venice), and translated to French by Jean de Montlyard in 1600.

¹⁹ As often in the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was required reading for understanding the iconography of Versailles.

²⁰ For example, in the ‘quarrel’ the relief-work of the ancient Forum of Trajan was unfavourably compared with that of the Bath of Diana which was lauded for its superior perspectival qualities (Hedin 2017:210–213).

on emblematic topomythopoiesis: eighteen terms²¹ of the Olympians positioned in predictable pairs, for example Adonis with Venus, and Apollo with Daphne. Unlike the latter pair in Taegio's account, these gods are presented not so much as living beings who dwell in their naturalised settings, express emotion and evoke empathy or awe, but rather as static emblems, accompanied by icons of their characteristics: Apollo is supplied with his lyre, Daphne with her laurel (Figure 6.9). Thus, the lyre *represents* Apollo's arts, and the laurel *represents* Daphne's transformation into a tree, yet no spatial or natural signifiers augment the perception, thus inviting an analytical mode of participation. The term-gods "wear their attributes like mini-cuirasses" (Hedin 2016:307) and serve more to prompt the playful, and reductive, association of emblems with myths, than to be part of an immersive somatic-symbolic experience.

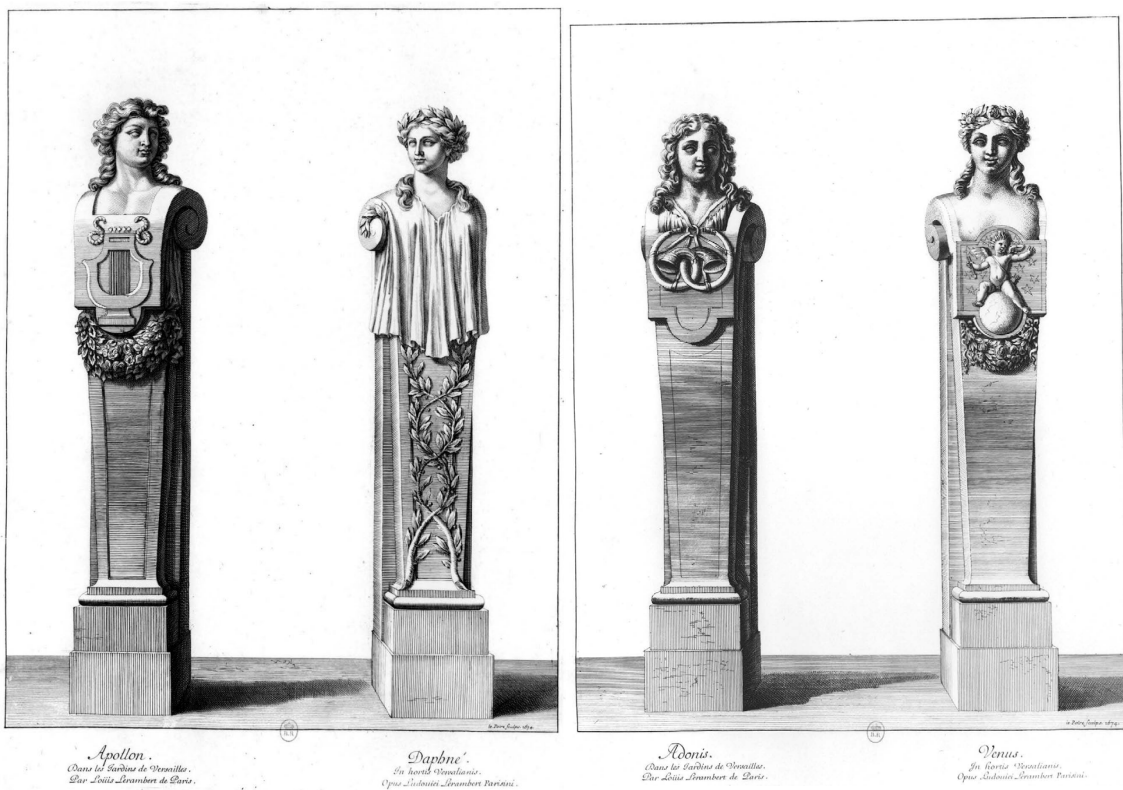


Figure 6.9. Left: Pierre Lepautre (after Louis Lerambert), *Apollo and Daphne*, 1674 (Hedin 2016:308).

Figure 6.10. Right: Pierre Lepautre (after Louis Lerambert), *Adonis and Venus* 1674 (Hedin 2016:309).

The terms were present during the spectacular, week-long festivities that opened the gardens in May of 1664, the *Plaisir de l'isle enchantée* (*The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle*) which included actors dressed as fauns and satyrs appearing to be coming from the forests (Girard

²¹ The term 'term' (from *terminus*) refers to "a statue or bust ending in a square pillar from which it appears to emerge" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'term' [15], 2017), similar to 'herm'.

1985:15)²² – the Golden Age landscape of Versailles was inhabited by the rustic gods; the invisible presence of Taegio’s rustic gods had become, fleetingly, visible.

6.1.7 Irreverent topomythopoiesis: the *Petit Commande*

The rustic gods were given a fixed place a few months after the festivities with a commission, the so-called *Petit Commmande*, for eight statues of satyrs and hamadryades.²³ These were originally placed in niches around Le Nôtre’s Rondeau basin, surrounding a scene of cupids-on-swans slaying a dragon, a veiled representation of Apollo slaying the python as painted by Cotellet. The basin terminated the north-south axis, and thus stood at the liminal edge of the grounds: its location within the northernmost zone of the gardens at the border between the civility of the palace and the chaos of the outside world, made it an ideal location for the rustic rabble.²⁴

Hedin (2001) argues that the statues, also paired male and female, provided the literate garden visitors with a parody scripted by Charles Perrault. They were initially visualised by his brother Claude and sculpted by Louis Lerambert and Philippe de Buyster with some artistic licence. The conceit was like a “rustic vaudeville” (Hedin 2001:669): lowly rustic characters were ‘dressing up’ as characters from the canon of great artworks. For example, a drunk satyr (Figure 6.11) was mockingly depicted as Michelangelo’s David,²⁵ winking across to Lambert’s tambourine player (Figure 6.12), a farcical stab at the Biblical David’s own struggles with the temptations of the flesh. And, the tambourine player herself evoked the Hellenistic Pergamese statue of *Cesi Juno*, thus rendering the satyr as an unfaithful Jupiter – perhaps fitting for this period of the King’s life filled with “youthful love affairs” (Rosasco 2015:149). Such iconographic buffoonery followed a literary fashion of the period, burlesque, as “the voice of incongruity and irony, irreverence and wit. The old legacies are turned upside down for the innocent fun of it” (Hedin 2016:311).

Thus, the tone of the *Petit Commande* was, quite deliberately, irreverent towards ancient sources; a mimetic mockery. Within the context of the ‘Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns’ (in which Charles Perrault sided with the moderns) the ancient sources are still

²² The main performances were that of Molière’s *The Princess of Elis* and his *Tartuffe (The Imposter)*. These plays were performed on a stage that framed the gardens in the background, augmenting the stage scenery for the pastoral scenes; real-and-imagined theatre.

²³ Nymphs bounded to a specific tree.

²⁴ The visually uninterrupted progression from artifice to nature (building to wilderness; *parterre de broderie* to *bosque*) was a deliberate design concept, found, for example, in Mollet’s treatise mentioned before.

²⁵ Unlike the poise of Michelangelo’s David in his *contrapposto*, the satyr leans on a stump to prevent him falling over in his drunk state (Hedin 2001:669).

acknowledged (and knowledge of them a requirement for interpretation) as they were in the previous century Italian gardens, but without any expectancy for spiritual ascent or moral edification. The gods had become caricatures ornamenting the gardens as a place for frivolous pleasure.



Figure 6.11. Left: Jean Lepautre (after Louis Lerambert), *Statue of a Faun, Seven Feet High*, 1672 (Château de Versailles, GR 157.57).

Figure 6.12. François Chauveau (after Phillipe de Buyster), *Statue of Tambourine Player with Small Satyr, Seven Feet High*, 1672 (Château de Versailles, GR 157.59).

It must be noted that, according to Rosasco's (2015:171) hypothesis, the later garden herms from the late 1680s which not only included gods like Apollo, but also philosophers like Plato and Theophrastus, was rather the opposite of these frivolous ones, and placed in the gardens as a means of didactic instruction to the heirs of Louis XIV – ancient models to cultivate young minds who had been ordained by God to rule with wisdom.

6.2 FÉLIBIEN'S VISITOR'S GUIDE

6.2.1 The guidebooks of Versailles

The interpretation of the topomyths of the early 1660s relied on visitors' knowledge of the associated myths and contemporary discourses in order to play the intellectual games prompted by the layered meanings (and in-jokes) of the herms and statues. However, the experience of the topomyths of the mid-1660s onwards was not left to chance, but brought

within the ambit of the court and king's artistic vision through a series of official and unofficial *ekphrases*.

Following the esoteric, first years of the “joyful, youthful” (Hedin 2017:191) ‘Premier Versailles’ as a hunting park animated by sports, spectacles, sex and statues, the garden gates were opened to a growing number of visitors²⁶ – Versailles was changing from a hunting pleasure ground to the site for the absolute monarch’s bureaucratic machinery. The bourgeois gentlemen²⁷ and ladies had not all the depth of knowledge of Arcadia: Versailles was more public than Vaux, or indeed most of the Italian predecessors, which sometimes resulted in the misreading of its iconography, as attested by some visitor’s accounts. Berger (1988:130) speculates that such blunders prompted the publication of guidebooks to educate these ignorant visitors:

The art of Versailles was in the main a public-orientated art, meant to be iconographically readable by a large audience. Previous French royal art did not always have this orientation, for there was an older, alternate tradition of the work of art as a cryptic mystery, to be unravelled only by a courtly or erudite elite (Berger 1988:136).

But I would venture to suggest that the guidebooks to Versailles, at least, constitute the first attempt in the history of art by a political regime to publicize its official art and shape viewer response on a comprehensive scale... [and used in]... service to the State (Berger 1988:137).

The keys to unlocking the ‘Versailles code’ were propagated through various media. Louis XIV himself wrote a number of guides between 1691 and 1695, not so much for the uneducated throngs,²⁸ but for the officials that guided important visitors.²⁹ These, rather brief, guides provided instructions for the order of experience (tailored to the time of day), as well as identifying (not analysing) the topomyths. A high-society magazine *Mercurie galant* (published from 1672), provided an ‘insider’s view’ of events and goings-on at the palace, for example their lavishly illustrated coverage (as four special editions) of the diplomatic visit by an entourage from Siam in 1686. Although not a guidebook per se, we can guess that its

²⁶ Until around 1685; opened again 1704.

²⁷ I am using the term in relation to a satirical play by Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, which premiered at Versailles in 1670 – a comic stab at the pretensions of the middle class to scale the social ladder towards nobility. Perhaps some of the new visitors had such ambitions, regarding the participation with topomyths as part of the entry requirements into aristocratic society.

²⁸ It must be noted that the working class, although not banned from Versailles, probably had not the time nor means to make excursions there, so with ‘throngs’ is meant middle-class visitors with some basic education.

²⁹ The King wrote his own guidebook, in various iterations between 1691 and 1695, entitled *The Proper Manner for Showing the Versailles Gardens*, only published after his death. For a recent compilation, see *Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles*, edited by Hoog (1982).

coverage had some influence on those readers who ventured from the magazine pages to the garden spaces.

Yet, it is the official guidebooks that provide us with the most insight into how the experience and understanding of the topomyths were dictated, ranging from those that provided “detailed account[s]” (Berger 1988:132) of iconography, to those that required the viewer to “decipher the deeper meaning of the image” (Berger 1988:134) to those, specifically for politically controversial garden elements such as the Latona fountain that “purposefully lack explanation” (ibid.) to avoid offence. Berger (1988:131) identifies four major guidebooks that broadly covered the estate,³⁰ and four written to elucidate specific areas, like André Félibien’s guide for the grotto of Tethys entitled *Description de la grotte de Versailles* (1679).³¹

6.2.2 The Grotto of Tethys

The grotto of Tethys (located at y on Figure 6.5) is a free-standing, square-plan building located to the north-east of the main building, and to the east, on-axis, of the Siren Fountain, which receives water from the grotto’s roof, a lead-lined reservoir revealing the structure’s original function.³² It was constructed in 1663–1664, but only transformed into a grotto from 1666 onwards. Its iconography belongs to both the main east-west and north-south axes mentioned before: as the resting place of Apollo, it complimented the rise of Apollo from his Pond to the west; as a watery abode it complimented the aquatic theme of the north-south axis. Although destroyed in 1684 to make room for the addition of a wing to the main building, a set of detailed drawings, included as plates in Félibien’s lavish guide, provide us with a clear picture of its design: amongst others a facade drawing (Figure 6.13), a plan (Figure 6.14 and sculptural details on Figure 6.15). The facade resembles a triumphal arch with its three arched portals, which lead to a vaulted interior. The main sculptural groups are located in three niches opposite the portals: to the left and right are Apollo’s horses tended by tritons, in the centre Apollo sits regally washed by the nymphs of Tethys. Behind the central niche, not visible to the visitor, was a hydraulic organ providing a sea-soundscape.

³⁰ A. Félibien’s *Description sommaire du chateau de Versailles* (1674), Le Sieur Combes’ *Explication historique, de ce qu’illy a de plus remarquable dans la maison royale de Versailles, et en celle de Monsieur à Saint Cloud* (1680), De La Force’s *Nouvelle description des chasteaux et parcs de Versailles et de Marly* (1701) and J. F. Félibien’s *Description sommaire de Versailles ancienne et nouvelle* (1703).

³¹ André Félibien’s accounts of Versailles can be regarded as bearing the official stamp of the King, as he was appointed Secretary of the Royal Academy of Architecture in 1671.

³² The grotto was mistakenly called by many, including Félibien and Le Combes, the Grotte de Thétis, whereas its true inhabitant was Tethys, great-grandmother of Thetis (Berger 2016:90).

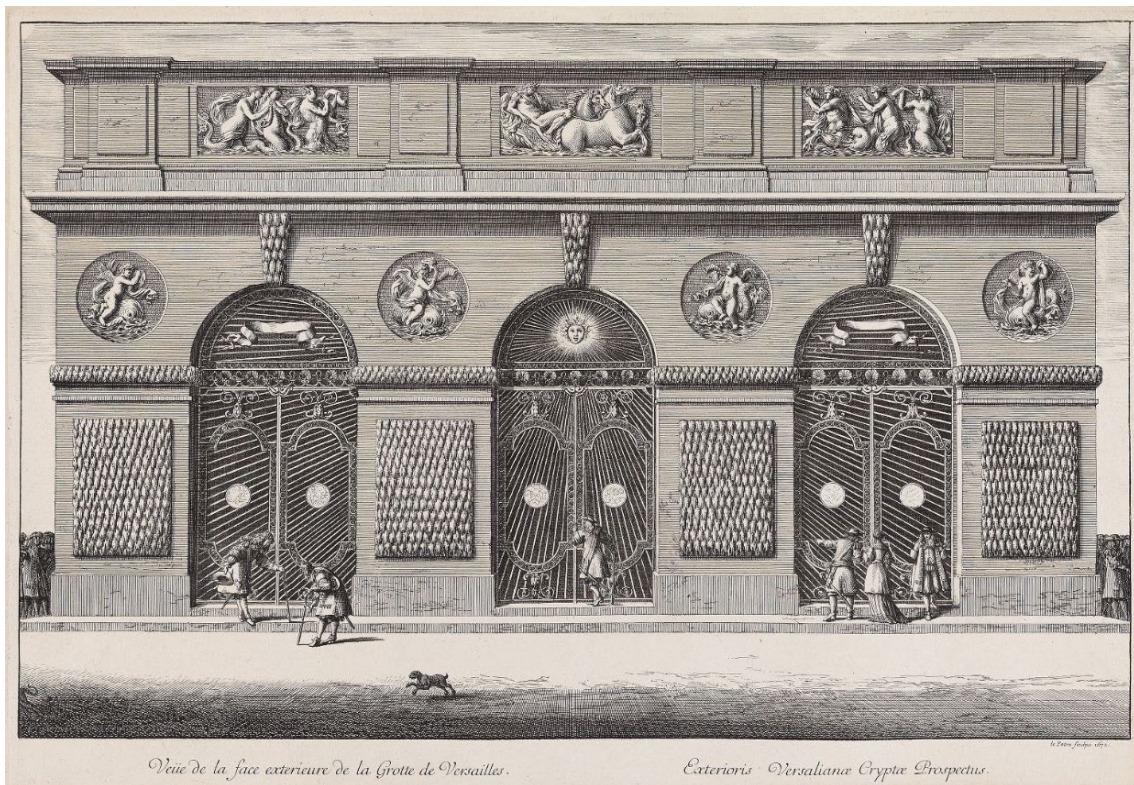


Figure 6.13. Jean Lepautre, *View of the Façade of the Grotto of Versailles*, 1672 (Félibien 1679, Plate 2).

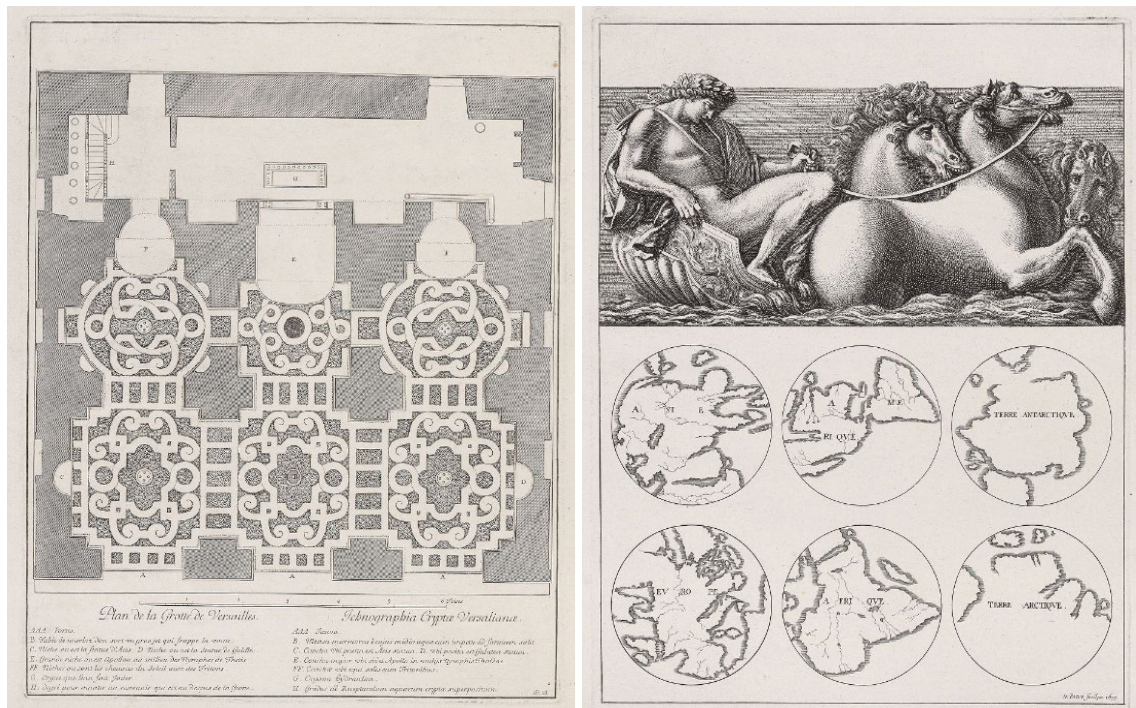


Figure 6.14. Left: François II d'Orbay (attrib.), *Plan of the Grotto of Versailles*, 1676 (Félibien 1679, Plate 1).

Figure 6.15. Right: Gerard van Opstal, *The Sun Sets Into the Sea* (top); *The Globe of the Earth Divided into Six Parts* (bottom), 1673 (Félibien 1679, Plate 3).

Some of the less analytical guides, like that of Le Sieur Combes (quoted in the introduction), simply name and identify the elements of the grotto and their authors, for example: “In the grotto in the middle Apollo is seen when he sets [*sic*] in the bosom of Thetis, with six Nymphs, who wash themselves...” (Combes 1684:47). Félibien, on the other hand,

was not only interested in naming deities and sculptors. His text is a rich ekphrasis of the grotto that expected a high level of *attention* from the reader and eventual garden visitor by addressing various aspects of the topomyth:

The architecture

Of all the literary accounts discussed in this chapter, Félibien is the most detailed in his treatment of the architectural elements. It provides the reader with a lexicon to describe and comprehend the plan-form, layout, materiality and ornamental details of the grotto. For example, he writes

The two other side grottoes are oval in shape. Their vaults in the form of domes have rustic, stone grounds, enriched all around with interlaces and guilloches of mother-of-pearl, bordered with yellow shells (Félibien 2016:113).

The characters and their actions

Like Le sieur Combes, he identifies the characters for the visitor unversed in mythology, but provides more details on their actions (refer to Figure 6.16):

These figures [in the central niche] depict Apollo surrounded by the Nymphs of Thetis, some of whom wash his feet, others his hands, while others perfume his hair. He is seated on a rock, having for his entire vestment only a large mantle that covers part of his body (Félibien 2016:115).



Figure 6.16. Jean Lepautre, *View of the Interior of the Grotto of Versailles, Decorated with Three Groups of White Marble which Represent the Sun and Nymphs of Thetis in the Centre, and His Horses Tended by Tritons*, 1676 (Félibien 1679, Plate 7).

Art history

The text moves beyond mere description, to provide aspects of art history that elucidate the rationale for some of the sculptural details and place the work firmly within the classical tradition.³³

And it is in this that they have followed the most skillful sculptors of antiquity, who often only depicted in the bodies of their divinities a slight appearance of nerves and (using the Tibiran caves in the Pyrenees as an example of the latter) muscles, because, imagining them in a glorious and incorruptible condition, they did not wish that those marks of weakness and decay appeared as strongly as in mortals (Félibien 2016:115).

Footnotes are used throughout to identify the sculptors, like Girardon for Apollo.

Art theory

I have already mentioned Félibien's theoretical account of the art-nature relationship of Versailles. It forms part of his introduction to the grotto, in which he provides a (very) brief history of the origin of the grotto spatial type to densify the representational network surrounding the virtual landscape (as I attempted to do in Chapter 3).³⁴ Yet, he is critical of naturalistic subterranean grottoes for their coldness and muddled artifice, for he deems their rustic character as unsuitably matched with statues and paintings:

But it is easy to judge that rock- and shellwork have no relationship to paintings; that is to mock Nature and disfigure her, instead of striving to make a beautiful imitation (Félibien 2016:105).

As for those [grottoes] that are made in underground places, they would be more tolerable if works were not intermingled there that are excessively finished and which are not appropriated (Félibien 2016:105).

He is thus tutoring the reader in matters of good taste: the Grotto of Tethys is an appropriately artificial imitation of a cave, in which the hand of art has given order to nature, yet not apart from it:

But in order to make manifest all the features of a natural grotto...[Art] has even borrowed from it everything it has judged suitable to compose the different pieces of workmanship with which this place is embellished (Félibien 2016:106).

This becomes required knowledge for those parts of the description where Félibien draws analogies between artificial elements and natural caves. For example, the not-so-

³³ He judges the grotto's design as successful by stating that the ancients would not have hesitated to deem it the creation of Thetis.

³⁴ Using the Tibiran caves in the Pyrenees as an example of a natural cave adorned with prehistoric paintings, although according to Berger (2016:121, fn. 1), he never visited these caves.

obvious association between the rusticated stone socle³⁵ on the facade as a reference to a natural cliff within which the cave is carved (Félibien 2016:106).

Ancients vs moderns

Granted the above nod to the skill of the ancients, the text – following a lengthy description of the nymphs as erotic creatures – initiates the reader into the general sentiment of the Versailles creative circle that regarded their works as on par with the ancient Greeks, if not superior:

... but in what is uncovered [of the nymphs' clothing], we perceive so great a degree of beauty and grace, that it is difficult to imagine that those beautiful figures of antiquity that are so esteemed were more perfect and more accomplished (Félibien 2016:116).

He wrongly deems the interior shell-work as an innovative art form, not known by the ancients (Félibien 2016:117).

Somatic simulation

Although most of the guidebook reads like the paragraphs quoted above, a detailed visual description of the grotto as an architectural-artwork, the ekphrasis reaches a climax of somatic and theatrical drama when Félibien waxes lyrical about the effects of water:

But when to the noise of the water, the sound of the organ harmonizes with the song of the little birds³⁶ of whom I have spoken, who, by admirable skill, join their voices to the sound of that instrument; and when, by an artifice still more surprising, we hear an echo that repeats that sweet music: it is at that time that, by a very pleasant symphony of sound, the ears are no less charmed than the eyes (Félibien 2016:120).

Seeing the invisible

The objectification and analysis of the topomyth is far removed from Taegio's Neoplatonic reveries, but does proceed from the somatic simulation above to a moment of seeing the invisible in the visible:

It seems that we see a perfect image of the concert of all the elements, and that we have found the art of making heard in that place that Harmony of the Universe, which the poets have represented by Apollo's lyre, as that which regulates the seasons and which tempers the elements (Félibien 2016:120).

It remains an attempt to *explain* the enchantment ('represented by...'), but an enchantment, nonetheless.

³⁵ Plinth.

³⁶ Birds carved from stone that make chirping sounds when water runs over them, found in the niches, subordinate to the main ones.

The One

According to Berger (2016:90), the *conchetto* for the grotto was imagined by Charles Perrault, who derived it from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.68–69), wherein is described Apollo's perilous chariot descent to Tethys for a night's rest:

Tethys, who takes me to her ocean waters,
Has often feared for me in that downward plunging.

Félibien explicitly instructs the visitor to not only focus their experience of the grotto on the physical appearances only, but to participate in the virtual:

It is not always the richness of the material or the length of the labor that must be considered in a work; it is the mind and the beautiful idea of The One who has directed it (Félibien 2016: 110).

Note that he does not direct participation to the story of Tethys as a means to enchant, but to the imagination of The One who created the *conchetto*, namely Perrault. Félibien's text was thus not meant to (only) cultivate the visitor's participation towards experiencing the grotto as a real-and-imagined simulacrum of a mythical landscape, but to behold it *as a work of art* conceived by a literary mind and executed by artists. As an art historian and theoretician, Félibien was writing to educate the visitor on *how to appreciate art*, not on *how to experience an enchantment*; academic participation towards *understanding and appreciation*.

The depiction of Tethys and Apollo in a grotto is rare, only appearing in French art in a painting by Le Brun, *Apollo Taking Leave of Tethys* from 1651 (Berger 2016:97), and not found in any prior garden as far as I am aware of.³⁷ It is exemplary of the way in which the topomyths from the first two decades at Versailles stood in a mimetic relationship with the virtual landscape of classical topomythopoiesis, but sought originality – to be modern – by not simply employing existing models and types. Yet, the triumphal arch-like facade, the internal spaces defined by cross vaults and arched niches housing aquatic deities, the presence of running water, and the decorative use of shells and pebbles place the grotto firmly within the taxonomy of architectonic, spatial grottos within the tradition.

³⁷ Tethys is sometimes featured in different narrative contexts, such as herself in a chariot being drawn by dolphins in a relief on the base of a garden fountain in the English Renaissance garden of the Earl of Leicester, Kenilworth, described by Laneham in an account of a visit by Elizabeth I in 1575 (discussed in Chapter 8). See reconstruction in Woodhouse (1999:139). Another example is one of the grottoes of Pratolino that was dedicated to Tethys.

6.3 LA FONTAINE'S LITERARY GUIDE

6.3.1 The literary accounts of Versailles

Another type of literature complimented the guidebooks, namely descriptions of the garden within literary works by of some of the most prominent authors of the time, a literary circle revolving around the King. The texts played no mere accidental role in augmenting reality, but were commissioned to do just that, which we can infer from the fact that the texts were written *before* some of the topomyths (like the Grotto of Tethys) were even complete, with the authors granted exclusive access to the works-in-progress and their underlying ideas (Berger 2008:464; Berger 2016:89).

The first of such accounts appeared in 1669: Jean de La Fontaine's (1621–1695) *Les Amours de Psyche et de Cupidon* and Madeleine de Scudéry's *La Promenade de Versailles* – both authors stood on the monumental Parnassus that was proposed for Versailles in 1733 by Du Tillet, a topomyth that would have enshrined Louis XIV as Apollo on his mount,³⁸ as with Le Brun's vision, Parnassus at Versailles remained unrealised.

There is a stylistic similarity between these literary garden texts and the guidebooks of Félibien (Goldstein 2008:131), namely that they are written in a tone that is conversational, spoken by onlookers that are often surprised, struck by awe and wonderment. Although similar, Félibien's is much more scholastic and descriptive.

6.3.2 La Fontaine's Loves

La Fontaine's *Loves of Cupid and Psyche* (hereafter *Loves*) is a re-telling of the Cupid and Psyche myth written by Apuleius in the second century. La Fontaine (siding with the ancients) narrates the story using the gardens of Versailles as a frame (much like the *cornice* gardens of the *Decameron*). While on a visit there from Paris, the character Poliphilus entertains his three friends (Acanthus, Gelastus and Aristus) by re-telling the myth; a story told within a story.³⁹ The narrative is interrupted by descriptions, some in alexandrine verse form, of the gardens, as well as conversations about various topics. For example, a musing on Plato's criticism of Homer's overtly comedic treatment of religion by “ascribing to the gods an immoderate laughter” (La Fontaine 1774:199).

³⁸ For a discussion of the ‘second’ Parnassus proposal, also a free-standing, rustic type of which a model remains, see Colton (1979).

³⁹ According to Berger (2008:481, n.16), the friends have traditionally been interpreted by scholars as stand-ins for persons: Poliphilus (Fr: *Poliphile*) for La Fontaine; Acanthus (Fr: *Acante*) for Jean Racine; Aristus (Fr: *Ariste*) for Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux; Gelastus (Fr: *Gélaste*) for Molière or Claude Chapelle – others suspect they were entirely fictional.

La Fontaine's text is a good example of the perennial retelling of myths – adjusted for their time – that played a role in the history of classical topomythopoiesis: In his preface to *Loves*, he admits to inventing some of the cast and episodes, only following the outline of Apuleius' narrative. He also elucidates the reader on the style of the text which conformed to the taste of the period which demanded “gay and humorous strokes” (La Fontaine 1774:93) in telling this tale filled with the “*Marvellous*” (ibid.), but “intermix'd with chit-chat” (ibid.). The small talk⁴⁰ is amongst the friends, bonded by the Muses,⁴¹ that had the “air of an academic conference” (La Fontaine 1774:107) – a model for the swarms⁴² of visitors to Versailles that were, ideally, contemplating and discussing the various topomythopoeic encounters with a scholarly spirit of enquiry, and a spirit of frivolous delight.

Yet, Goldstein (2008:136) argues that it was the more analytical way of seeing that prevailed, especially in comparison with an earlier garden-text by La Fontaine that he wrote of Vaux-le-Vicomte under the stewardship of Nicolas Fouquet, namely the fragmentary *Le Songe de Vaux* (1661). The title echoes the *Songe de Polyphile* published in 1554, the French translation of the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*, also mirrored in the name of the narrator of *Loves*, *Polyphile*. Indeed, both texts contain “fantastic, gallant adventures and detailed architectural and garden descriptions...” (Goldstein 2008:135). Yet, it is the *Songe* that emulates the dream-state of *Hypnerotomachia* more closely and presents a near mystic vision of a garden space that blurs the boundaries between the physical and the virtual, the somatic and the symbolic, the prosaic and the poetic, the real and the imagined, the factual and the mythic – the reader is invited to emulate this personal experience of the gardens and participate in creating their own enchanted place. The reader would most likely have been someone in Fouquet's cultured circle, educated by Jesuits in classical art, literature and mythology (Cormier 1992:15) and thus deeply cultivated in the virtual landscape that would enable such fantastical participation. For Versailles, the type of reader (and visitor) changed – bourgeois administrators buzzing alongside aristocratic literati, for whom the iconography of the gardens would be incomprehensible without a guide. In *Loves*, the garden descriptions are

⁴⁰ For an example of idle chit-chat: in the story it is mentioned that Psyche, having become an Empress, wore a new dress every day. The company interrupts the storyteller to smilingly agree that such an arrangement would be most wonderful (La Fontaine 1774:142).

⁴¹ The association of the garden visitors with the Muses harkens back to Taegio and his circle who approached their Parnassian estates in search for poetic inspiration, as for La Fontaine's (1774:107) characters: “Four friends, whose acquaintance began by the Muses...”

⁴² La Fontaine (1774:107; my italics) further explains that the group of friends never dwelled on any subject for long, but “rov'd from one to another, like *Bees*, who, in their flight, shou'd meet with a sweet profusion of various flowers”.

distinct from the myth of *Psyche*: “The mythological figures and fantastic adventures that had permeated Acante’s description of Vaux now occupy a fictional space separated from their exploration of the garden space” (Goldstein 2008:137).

Although the landscapes of *Psyche* and Versailles never meet in *Loves*, the landscape of *Psyche* can be interpreted as a virtual counterpart to those of Versailles. For example, the gardens of her monster-husband (Cupid, all along) is described as a Golden Age *locus amoenus*:

Spontaneously the glebe⁴³ must yield;
Perpetual verdure crown the field:
The streams in lulling murmurs flow,
And cooling zephyrs gently blow (La Fontaine 1774:146).

Verse descriptions like these of the mythical palace, introduces a climactic scene in which chaste Psyche – filled with trepidation at finding a lustful satyr in the woods – is led to a grotto in a bucolic setting, reminiscent of Calypso’s cave (3.4.2):

Being one day attracted by the beauties of a crystal rivulet, she wander’d, insensibly, along its banks; and after winding round and round, she came at last to its source. This was a spacious grotto, where, in a bason [*sic*], scoop’d solely by the hand of nature, flow’d, along a rock, a silver stream, whose murmurs invited to the softest slumbers (La Fontaine 1774:147).

After carefully treading through its threshold, she is re-assured by the voice and touch of Cupid:

He then drew near to his Psyche; seated her on a mossy bank; fell at her feet; and, after kissing her hand, he sigh’d and spoke thus: wherefore must I owe this delightful meeting to the beauties of a rivulet? (ibid.)

Rather annoyed that she sought out the grotto in search of the beauty of nature rather than the beauty of himself, he eventually sways her with his tender charm – surprising for the monster she thought he was – and the grotto becomes the site of Psyche’s falling-in-love with her monster-husband, cloaked in darkness:

This [his tender cries] was ecstasy to our fair-one; but as he spoke in too doleful a strain, she could not bear him go on so; and, therefore, she first put her hand hastily to his mouth; then applied her lips to his; and, by a kiss, more pathetic⁴⁴ than all the powers of language united, protested, that though he was invisible, and a monster, she yet would love him – such was the adventure of the grotto (La Fontaine 1774:149).

Following this episode, they continued to visit the dark recesses of “this delicious abode” (ibid.) for amorous strolls along the stream, intimate conversations and kisses “not

⁴³ Cultivated land.

⁴⁴ The ability to affect or stir (not weak).

like those dispens'd by Hymen” (ibid.).⁴⁵

Although La Fontaine did not explicitly couple his re-telling of the myth to Versailles, it can reasonably be expected that some readers may have, consciously or not, evoked these passages of a natural grotto (situated within the literary grotto topomyth tradition) to the artificial Grotto of Tethys. The very Golden Age atmosphere of Cupid’s Palace too may have intensified the fragrant floral, breezes of Versailles, and its “Fountains that would invade the sky” (La Fontaine 1774:145) and “canals whose flight no eye can trace” (ibid.) may have extended the waters of Versailles’ vertical and horizontal reach towards infinity. And perhaps the Palace of Cupid itself with “its majesty, its rich ornaments, its graces; together with the proportion, the regularity and harmony of its several parts” (La Fontaine 1774:143) may have sharpened the visitor’s gaze on the classical order of the facades of Louis XIV’s own palace; not speaking of the numerous statues and reliefs of Cupid in the gardens. Although all of this remains conjecture, I would argue that this virtual *locus amoenus* may indeed have provided some material for the visitor to evoke, undirected, while strolling through Versailles: an attempt to plant an ‘instant’ Golden Age landscape within the imaginations of the visitor unversed in Arcadia.

Such speculation aside, *Loves* and the other literary accounts of Versailles did not explicitly seek to create a real-and-imagined landscape wherein the deities dwell, but rather provide matter-of-fact analyses (albeit sometimes in poetic form) of mythically themed artefacts within garden settings. Poliphilus *et al* are thus not fully creative participants, since they do not allow the numinous to emanate from the sensory. As an example of this mode of description, we shall now return to the Grotto of Tethys as described in verse form in *Loves*, just before the commencement of the narration of the Psyche myth.

The arrival of the sun-king at dawn, when the strangeness of light fills the air, was painted in words by La Fontaine in his description of the facade:

Sol seem'd in his mild, Evening Glories drest:
Those Streams of Light the Sculptor had exprest;
The Rays, whose Splendor darting thro' the Skies,
Paint the Hesperian Gates with heavenly Dyes (La Fontaine 1774:114).

By commenting on the sculptor’s work, the verse was clearly meant to be read *as* an

⁴⁵ Hymen, the son of a Muse, was the Greek god of marriage thanks to his marriage to a girl whom he rescued from a band of pirates. In a footnote, Lockman (in La Fontaine 1774:149) explains why he thinks Cupid and Psyche did not end up in the marriage bed: “‘Tis no wonder our Author [La Fontaine] should exclaim against nuptial kisses, he, like Milton, being unhappy in a wife”. This refers to the many rumours that were spread by La Fontaine’s enemies, yet his (arranged) marriage to Marie Héricar was indeed rather dysfunctional and they lived in separate cities for the last forty years of his (unfaithful) life.

ekphrasis of an artefact to be encountered, and not an attempt to mythologise a landscape as the numinous habitat of gods. The text continues in this poetic ekphrastic vein to describe the interior of the Grotto, including its materials for which he even provides a quasi-scientific description of their origins:

Of choice Materials are the Roof and Floor:
 Shells, by the Waves disgorg'd along the Shore;
 Or Pebbles, which in Earth's deep Womb are found,
 Dispos'd in gay Compartments, glitter round (ibid.).

It continues with a brief description of some of the sculptures of sea-dwelling gods and their architectonic settings within niches:

Beauties unnumber'd in the Niche appear:
 There shines a Triton, and a Syren here;
 Swift thro' their sounding Trumps the Waters play;
 And, flying far, in Murmurs break away (La Fontaine 1774:115).

6.3.3 Revealing the conceitto

After elaborating on the physical appearances of the Grotto, La Fontaine finally reveals the conceit of the Grotto (mentioned before) and turns the text from visual commentary into an imaginative conjury of deities in motion:

To rest with THETIS, swift descends the Sun,
 His Steeds unharness'd, and his Progress run.
 Fam'd LEWIS, thus, unbends from Toils of State,
 And all the Splendors which on Grandeur wait (La Fontaine 1774:116).

The goddess, the sun-king and his horses are no longer described *as* statues, but as characters on a stage. Whereas the Renaissance visitor to, say, Villa d'Este was able to unravel the conceit of the garden by musing on the iconography, or was able to ascend from the phenomena to the higher spheres of the universe, here meaning is not left to the visitor's chance knowledge of Arcadia, but *directed*.

6.3.4 Ut hortus poesis⁴⁶

This scripted enchantment does not imply the lack of participation, only that the participation was scripted. Indeed, the poem itself reveals the intention of the text to “aid the Failures of the Sculptor's Art” (La Fontaine 1774:117) by cultivating seeing as a creative

⁴⁶ This is a re-wording of Horace's dictum *Ut pictura poesis* (in *Ars poetica*): “as is painting, so is poetry” to mean ‘as are gardens, so is poetry’, implying that garden poetry and the gardens themselves can be considered on equal footing in fostering – together – the garden experience as a combination of the virtual and the physical.

act to animate the lifeless stone sculptures into breathing marble, like Delia the nymph who attended to Apollo:

She blushes now, and now casts down her Eyes;
Blushes, as much as Stone can change its Dyes (ibid.).

By commenting on the limits of the sculptor's material ('as much as stone can change its dyes') the reader is stopped short of becoming fully immersed in the topomyth, and remains an observer of art or a staged performance: the beholder's share is enlarged and specified through La Fontaine's didactic poem which enhances the experience of the artefacts, but becomes a standalone work of art itself: "the beauty of the verses becomes a rival or alternate equivalent to the sculptures and ironwork" (Berger 2008:459). In the preface to his translation of *Loves* from 1774, John Lockman wrote:

His [La Fontaines'] description of *Versailles's* palace and its gardens, gave me no less delight than the objects themselves; and no pleasure was ever more exquisite to me, than when I compar'd that Elysium with my author's picture of it (Lockmann 1774:xxv).

This statement shows that La Fontaine's ekphrasis influenced visitors' experiences of Versailles for more than a century and is a good example of the role of ekphrasis in the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis: the visitor reads the text of the topomyth, forms a mental picture, and then finds delight in the congruencies between the virtual and physical place. The experience of the mythopoeic garden is formed by an interplay between *in situ* and *ex situ* encounters.

6.3.5 Completing the cycle

Following the description of the Grotto, it serves as the cool setting for the friends to hear the myth of Psyche. At one point, the group interrupts the story and starts exploring the rest of the gardens, including the Apollon Pond (Figure 6.17) which completes the mythical cycle introduced earlier:

In the first Sea, bright Phoebus slow ascends.
From Thetis' Grot, and tow'rd the Zenith bends:
Forth from his Torch the sportive Water flies;
Bursts forth in Rays, and in a Vapour dies (La Fontaine 1774:213).

As the heat of the day subsides, the real-and-imagined view is interrupted by the actual arrival of Louis XIV and his entourage to that part of the garden, a reminder of the very public nature of the king's courtly life. These verses reveal an extension of the Ovidian scene of Apollo and Tethys, namely the Palace of the Sun (*regia solis*) from book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*: "The Sun's fam'd Palace to Versailles wou'd yield" (La Fontaine 1774:210).

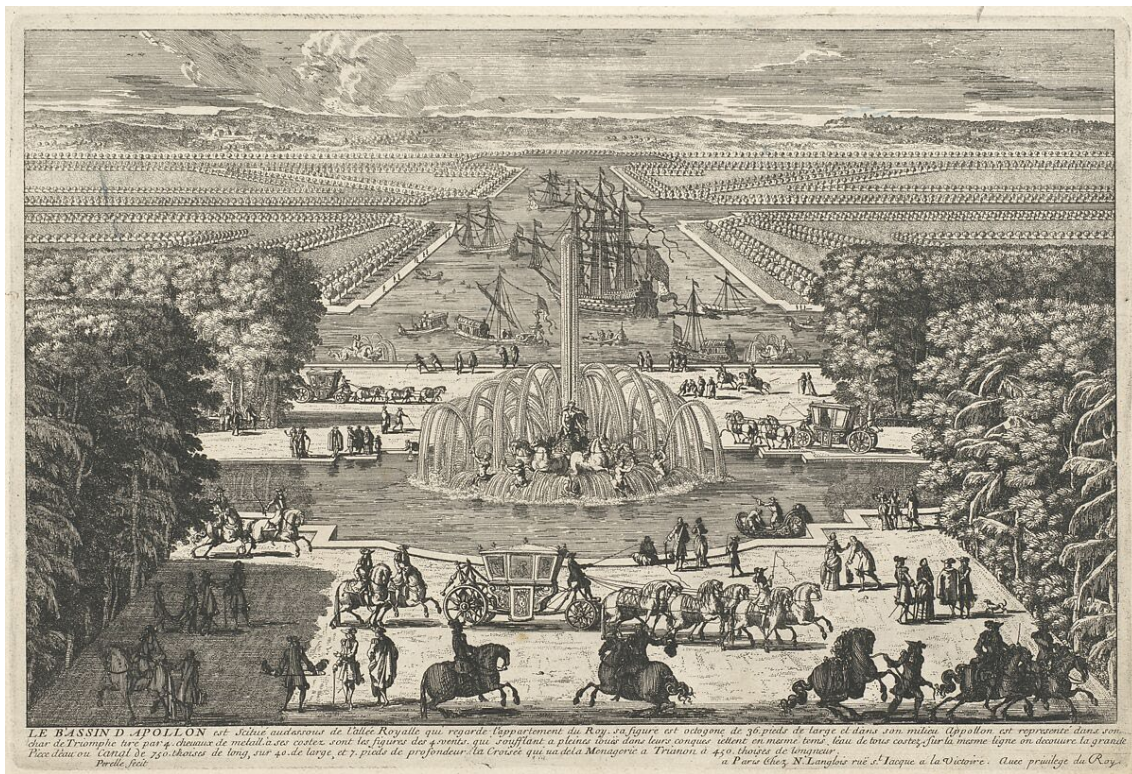


Figure 6.17. Adam Perelle, *The Apollo Basin*, c. 1680 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 52.519.84(88)).

Berger (2008:464) speculates that the Palace of the Sun, describe by Ovid (*Met* 2.1–2) as “bright with flashing gold, with bronze that glowed like fire”, was deliberately evoked in the conception of Versailles, as it for certain was in the creation of the new east facade of the Louvre finished in 1668. La Fontaine, privy to the circle of creators of Versailles, would have known this conceit, if true, and reveal it to the attentive reader.

Thus, the literary accounts and guidebooks, together with the other artworks from ballet performances to paintings, formed a dense representational network woven into Versailles’s topomythopoeia that cultivated the viewer’s imagined Arcadia. The fact that they were often created while the garden elements were still being conceived, indicates that they were no mere after-the-fact descriptions, but quintessential prolegomena for garden visits.

6.4 THE RATIONALISATION OF THE RECEPTION OF TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

6.4.1 Topomythopoeisis as theatre

In none of these ekphrases do we find the encounter with topomythopoeia as a Neoplatonic glimpse into a higher reality as in Taegio’s *La Villa*. The invisible presence of the nature deities that enlivened wild nature in Taegio’s villas have faded, with the emphasis rather on the visible *tableaux vivants* of deities within mostly architectonic settings derived from the spatial types. Neither were they read as allegorical exegeses of the myths to reveal their

underlying meanings or morals. Rather, the descriptions⁴⁷ show that the topomythopoeia of Versailles functioned much like that of Roman Imperial gardens: sculptural spectacles for a community of spectators engaged in polite conversation amongst peers sharing a semiotic system gained through an aristocratic education or didactic literature. The analogy of theatre⁴⁸ is as pertinent to Roman topomythopoesis, as it is to the Baroque gardens which sought to, like the theatrical spectacles of the time, “arouse wonder, to introduce the element of suspense, to elicit surprise or even fear – above all to astonish the observer” (Miller 1982:59). More directly, the concepts of stage design for theatres during the seventeenth century influenced the design of gardens in which single vanishing points (above the horizon) were created, presenting the view as a framed, flattened plane and by formalising depth with a number of parallel planes (Cormier 1992:32) – landscapes were designed and *viewed* as stage sets, and even (beyond the metaphor) used to stage theatrical events.

6.4.2 Seventeenth century objectification of experience

Furthermore, the shift from the individual as a participant in the making of meaning (like Acante in the *Songe du Vaux*) to that of an audience observing a scripted play, can be understood as part of the Baroque period’s objectification of vision, influenced by scientific theories of optics such as those developed by Kepler in his *Ad vitellionem paralipomen*, published in 1604 (Baridon 1998:13).⁴⁹ The ancient idea that the mind projects light onto the world outside was turned on its head: the mind *receives* light and renders images (*pictura*) like a camera obscura. But the possibility that such internalisation should lead to the subjectification of experience was excluded by ‘royal decree’.

This necessity for the dictation of the garden experience can be interpreted as part of Louis XIV’s quest for the unification of France by bringing various aspects of life under state control through a process of official systemisation and rationalisation: finances, trade, the

⁴⁷ Berger (2008:457) notes how the authors of French landscape descriptions did not regard them as mere trivia, but as a way to memorialise a place long after its material presence has perished. Indeed, some of the places described have perished and these verbal accounts have kept them in tact as a virtual reality.

⁴⁸ Baridon (1998:17) notes that the use of *théâtre* as a garden metaphor in early seventeenth century treatises like those of De Serres and Claude Mollet, ceased to be used for gardens by the nineteenth century, since the long perspective had rendered the idea of a space visible with a single glance, “ineffective as a metaphor in garden architecture”.

⁴⁹ Baridon’s interpretation of the influence of scientific progress regarding our vision, relates mainly to the change in the Baroque garden’s vanishing point which was set on the horizon, pointing to infinity.

army, language,⁵⁰ the arts and science.

In 1666, around the same time of the Petit Commission, Louis XIV (influenced by Colbert, rationaliser of the state's financial system), established the *Académie des sciences* where investigators were given “room for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake” (Mikuláš 2014:64) – state funded scientific progress was used to “dynamize state propaganda” (Baridon 1998:8), visualised in the technically advanced waterworks of Versailles.

The rationalisation of garden enchantment via literature was both an extension of this project and reflected it: “Both texts [Scudery and La Fontaine] extend the grotto's pedagogical performance by underscoring how it showcases Louis XIV's mastery over technology (hydraulics), wealth (symbolized as access to water), and maritime trade (presented in the symbolic ensemble of the grotto)” (Goldstein 2008:186).

The literary accounts and guidebooks of Versailles sought to provide a shorthand for the virtual landscape, a summary for those not versed in its vast tracts scripted by more than two millennia of stories, sculptures and pictures. As reflected in La Fontaine and Scudery, the gardens were not experienced by lone ramblers, but by groups of *promeneurs* for whom the ekphrases provided a *shared* semiotic system. The King and his circle brought it onto themselves to educate them in seeing creatively; absolute control over individual, private participation. It was not only the experience of topomythopoiesis that was rationalised in seventeenth century France, but so too its design.

6.5 THE EMBLEM BOOKS

The systemisation and rationalisation of mythological iconography is exemplified by the emblem books⁵¹ that influenced the conception and deciphering of topomythopoiesis. Most notable amongst these was Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* from 1593 (with illustrations in 1603), translated to French in 1644. The book was written as a source for artists, containing over three hundred (mostly anthropomorphic) emblems (accompanied by explanatory notes) as visual representations of ideas, including amongst others political concepts (‘democracy’), emotions (‘despair’), human traits (‘curiosity’), places (‘Tuscany’), natural phenomena (‘summer solstice’), seasons (‘Spring’) and moral behaviour (‘heroic virtue’). Ripa synthesised icons from the Greco-Roman and Egyptian traditions and invented some of his own. It is thus not a mythographic book visualising the myths, but uses some elements from myth to

⁵⁰ The *Académie Française*, established by Richelieu in 1635 was, equally, tasked with the rationalisation and systemisation of the French language.

⁵¹ An emblem book is one that, typically defined, includes an image accompanied with a motto and verse (Manning 1990:155).

“give body to our thoughts” – an explanation from the preface to the English translation from 1709 (no pagination), with its descriptive title: *Iconologia, or moral emblems: by Cesare Ripa. Wherein are expressed various images of Virtues, Vices, Passions, Arts, Humours, Elements, and Celestial Bodies; as designed by the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Modern Italians: useful for Orators, Poets, Painters, Sculptors, and all lovers of Ingenuity*. Visual references to the Greco-Roman gods are rare, with some exceptions like Hercules with his club depicting ‘heroic virtue’ in emblem no. 317 (Figure 6.18). The explanatory note reads as follows:

Hercules naked, leaning upon his Club; a Lion’s Skin about his Arms, holding three Golden Apples, brought from the Garden of Hesperides. The Lion and Club denote the Strength of Virtue, that is immovable... the Apples, bridling Anger, Temperance in Riches... the generous despising of Pleasure, which is heroic. The Club is knotty, to shew [sic] the great Difficulties to be met with in living virtuously (Ripa 1709:79).



Figure 6.18. Left: Cesare Ripa, *Emblem No. 317: Heroic Virtue*; from English edition (Ripa 1709:79–80).

Figure 6.19. Right: Cesare Ripa, *Emblem No. 76: History*; from French edition (Ripa 1636:106).

The meaning of this instructional image and text is plainly obvious: Hercules killed a lion with a cub, thus he is strong. Virtue is strong, thus Hercules is virtuous. He used this strength to fight temptation while stealing the golden apples from Zeus in the garden of the Hesperides, thus he is heroic. Thus, Hercules is a symbol for heroic virtue. The visible attributes of the figure are rationally matched with abstract ideas to form a substitutive allegory. In gardens, a statue of Hercules can thus be interpreted to signify heroic virtue, like at the Villa d’ Este (Coffin 1960:81).

This emblematic approach to topomythopoiesis is markedly different to that of the Neoplatonists who did not seek to find or create rational and obvious ‘chains of meaning’

between *symbola* and the higher Ideas. In Gombrich's (1948:183) comparison between Ripa's "allegorical imagery" and "Neo-Platonic mysticism", he describes emblematic imagery as "a rational search for qualities which abstract ideas and concrete objects may have in common". It thus requires a process of logical analysis in the Aristotelian tradition: iconography is treated like a science, and can systematically be codified.

We find references to Ripa's emblems in Renaissance gardens,⁵² like the statue of a beaver in the upper part of the Villa Lante at Bagnaia, which, according to Ripa, symbolises peace, fitting for the Golden Age metamyth.⁵³ It was used as a source-book at Vaux-le-Vicomte (Cormier 1992:37) and by Le Brun for his conception of the so-called Great Commission (*Grande Commande*) at Versailles in 1674: a collection of 24 statues, grouped in fours and organised according to six themes that, together, represent the cosmos: the four elements, the four seasons, the four parts of the day, the four parts of the world, the four humours and the four forms of poetry. These statues, originally planned for the Parterre d'Eau, in the shadow of Le Brun's envisioned Parnassus, are more easily decoded than the topomyths of the Premier Versailles, with their intricate web of references. Yet, even those statues were conceived using, in part, Ripa's *Iconologia* as demonstrated by Hedin (2001:670–671) in his analysis of the Petite Commande: in the statue of the *Joueuse de tambour* (Figure 6.12), the figure rests her foot on a stone-block which, in Ripa's French translation (1636), denotes steadfastness in 'history' (Figure 6.19). Yet, in true burlesque manner, the emblem is turned on its head since the tambourine player's right foot is on the block, and not the left as in Ripa – such were the intricacies of the emblematic games played by the visitors before the garden gates were opened to the public. Following the 'democratisation' of Versailles in the 1670s, the semiotic system was systematised and simplified. Whereas the guidebooks and literary accounts dictated the overall experience of the topomyths, emblem books functioned more like dictionaries.

Eventually the sculptures of the Great Commission were moved to other parts of the garden purely according to "aesthetic criteria" (Girard 1985:13), for they were deemed to interfere with the harmony of the building's facade. The figures no longer played a role in a larger, cosmic, topomyth, but became ornaments placed to anchor points within the geometry of the gardens.

⁵² Since many of his allegories were based on traditional associations, one must note that the presence of them was not always, necessarily, because of his book's direct influence.

⁵³ This is according to Lazzaro's (1977:556) analysis, who cites Ripa's inclusion of a beaver eating its genitals as a means to establish peace with those wishing to hunt the animal for its medicinal testicles. I was unable to verify this interpretation, as I cannot locate any beavers in Ripa.

6.6 SYSTEMISATION OF DESIGN: THE INFLUENCE OF DESIGN TREATISES

The seventeenth century's project to systematise and rationalise the world was extended to the art and science of gardening. The topomythopoiesis of the Baroque period was codified in books on garden theory and practice, along with design innovations such as the articulating vanishing points on the horizon as a views towards *infinity*, the gradation of designs from the from artificial to the natural (from house to forest).

6.6.1 André Mollet: putting the gods in their place

An early example is André Mollet's (c. 1600–1665) *Le jardin de plaisir, contenant plusieurs desseins de jardinage, tant parterres en broderie, compartiments de gazon, que bosquets et autres. Avec un abrégé de l'agriculture* published in 1651. Mollet, together with De Serres and Bouceau, was instrumental in establishing the distinct aesthetic language of the French formal garden from its Italian Renaissance forebears (Cormier 1992:3).

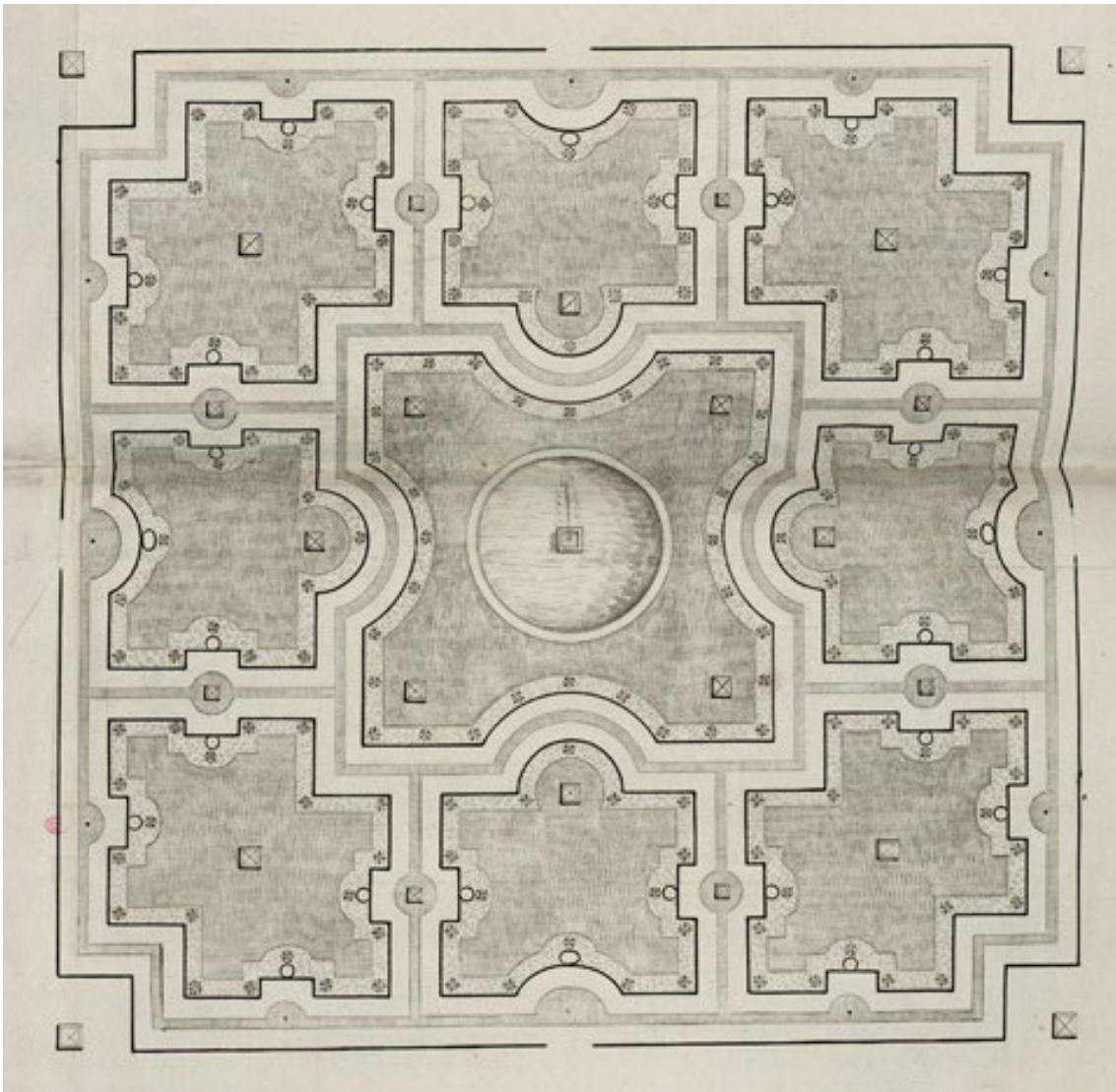


Figure 6.20. André Mollet, Proposal for a garden (Mollet 1651, Plate 22).

True to the “the geometrizing spirit” (Baridon 1998:8) of the period, Mollet’s text

mainly elaborates on the proportion and size of elements depicted in the illustrated patterned garden layouts. These plates are also accompanied by some notes on topomythopoiesis. For the most part, his concern is limited to treating statues as points to be inserted at specific geometric intersections, not as numinous beings naturalised with spatial types. As seen on the plan (Figure 6.20), the gods (located on the square plinths) are used as visible coordinates within a geometric system: the pattern is *adorned* with statues, like knots in an embroidered textile – a metaphor used throughout the text to refer to the woven character of the patterns.

A case in point of the application, of a topomyth that fulfils a geometric function, is found at Vaux-le-Vicomte, where André le Nôtre (influenced by Mollet, amongst others) located a statue of Hercules (of the Farnese type) to establish the vanishing point when looking from the chateau into the distance; and vice versa (Cormier 1992:45).

Mollet leaves the iconography of the statues for the garden owner and sculptors – he prescribes the location for the gods, but not their identity. This implies that the statues are not naturalised, and their identity independent from setting. For De Serres too, statues were akin to other ornamental objects like “columns, pyramids [and] obelisks” (in Cormier 1992:20) that distinguished the pleasure garden from other types.

An example of a constructed garden for which Mollet himself did various novel designs of *parterre de broderie* (some of which featured in his book) is the Honselaarsdijk pleasure gardens in Holland commissioned by Prince of Orange Frederik Hendrik (1584–1647), created between 1633 and 1635. The garden was well known for its antique statues. Yet, unlike Versailles (at least under Le Brun), these were not commissioned as figures purposefully made for site-specific topomythopoeic conceits, but were bought from existing collections, mostly from France (Tucker 1998:223). The imported statues were then located at the points dictated by Mollet’s geometric layouts. However, the choice of deities – Diana, Venus and nymphs (and shepherds) – supported the “themes of Arcadian pleasure” (Tucker 1998:223); and Mars and Hercules the theme of “martial vigor” (ibid.)

An example of the latter is the statue-group of Hercules and Cacus (Figure 6.21):⁵⁴ the physical struggle between Hercules and the fire-breathing giant is not specifically augmented by the landscape setting, yet is open for enchantment for visitors willing to participate by drawing associations between the myth and the politics of the place: the worthy prince is triumphant of “order (and strength) over chaos (and the enemy)” (Tucker 1998:223).

⁵⁴ Hercules killed the fire-breathing giant, Cacus (son of Vulcan), during his tenth labour.



Figure 6.21. Jan de Biscchop, *A Sculpture Group in the Garden of Honselaardijk Castle*, c. 1648–1671 (Rijksmuseum, RP-T-1888-A-1587). The sculptures are of Hercules killing Cacus.

6.6.2 Dézallier d’Argenville

Whereas De Serres, Boyceau and Mollet stood at the conception of the French Baroque garden, Antoine Joseph Dézallier d’Argenville’s (1680–1765) treatise was published after its zenith in 1709. Entitled *La theorie et la pratique du jardinage*,⁵⁵ the book can be interpreted as an encyclopaedic attempt to codify the French garden practice of the seventeenth century, specifically the work of Le Nôtre (Jacques 2016:25), who died a decade before its publication. Dézallier d’Argenville emphasised ideas already expressed in Mollet, such as the importance of gardens promoting pleasure, and the value of views beyond garden confines, hence the introduction of the *claire-voie* or “ah-ah” (1712:28), foreseeing the English landscape garden that was to flourish in the ensuing few decades.

As literary theorists of the time sought to establish the rules for neoclassical literature, the document sought to provide a set of “rules” for garden design (a term that recurs throughout, for example 1712:20), especially those concerned with geometry (as in Mollet): dictates are given for the size and proportion of elements such as walks and palisades, and for the appropriate choice of classical orders.⁵⁶

Regarding the spatial types, he showed a preference for groves, dedicating chapter six to this “ornament” (1712:18), but mentions nothing of its topomythopoeic character,

⁵⁵ Published in English as *The Theory and Practice of Gardening* in 1712.

⁵⁶ For example, ionic for arbours (Dézallier d’Argenville 1712:72).

meaning or sacred origins. Mounds and grottoes are missing from his palette, although he mentions grottoes as part of terraces that also include “a great many statues in niches” (1712:75), but he is generally sceptical of them: “grottoes are now but little in use... which are very subject to ruin” (1712:77). A proposal for a terrace published in the second edition of 1728 (Figure 6.22), can be interpreted as belonging to the Praeneste terraced mount type (Figure 3.7, Figure 5.5), with its convex-concave composition reminiscent of the uppermost level of the Temple of Fortuna Primigenia (Figure 6.23).

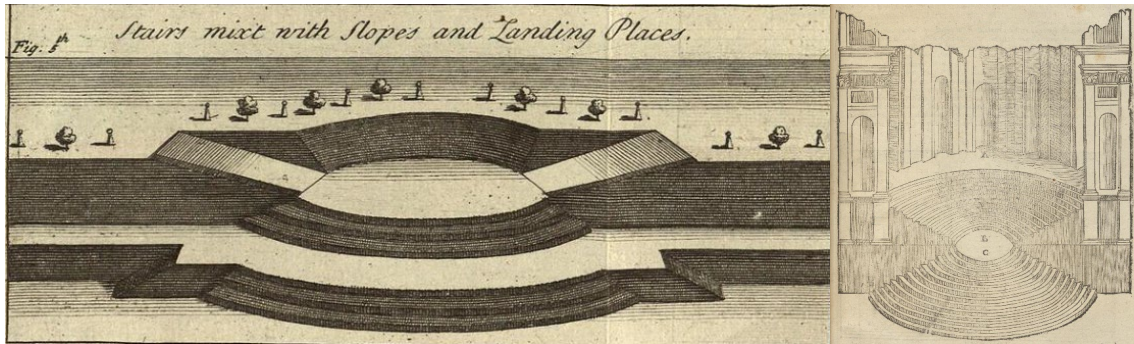


Figure 6.22. Left: Antoine Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, *Stairs Mixed with Slopes and Landing Places* (Dézallier d'Argenville 1728:148–149, Plate 36H).

Figure 6.23. Right: Sebastiano Serlio, *Exedra in the Vatican Belvedere*, 1600 (Serlio 1600:120). The concave-convex staircase has its origins in the top level of the Temple of Fortuna Primigenia.

However, Dézallier d'Argenville's topomythopoiesis is mostly limited to statues, subjugated to the geometric order, and not mainly placed for spatial drama: such statues, he concedes, are only affordable for the well-to-do, and thus dispensable (Dézallier d'Argenville 1712:70). Typically, statues (what he calls 'figures') are located at the intersection of lines or at their termination. For example, in the plan illustration of *Designs of woods of forest trees* the gods 'answer' the geometry, subserviently: “In the middle [of a wood] is a statue, which answers the line of the walks and benches” (Dézallier d'Argenville 1712:58).

In another proposal for a 'smaller' garden of about five hectares (1712:30), are two groves, “both cut into stars, and adorned with figures” that are located at the intersection of the diagonal and orthogonal paths (Figure 6.24).

Similar configurations of anonymous statues that function as ornamental pivots abound his treatise. He does not propose any larger narrative schemes that thematically draw together topomyths. In some cases, he does hint at a narrative conceit *via* the illustrations, left undescribed. For example, an illustrated staircase is flanked by unnamed figures of, presumably, Mars (with helmet and spear) and Venus (modestly covered) – the pair prompts the story of their adulterous affair. Elsewhere, he includes a relief on a retaining wall of a double staircase which appears to depict an *invenzione* (Figure 6.25): the myth (unidentified) is told by the relief, not by the interplay of topomythopoieic elements.

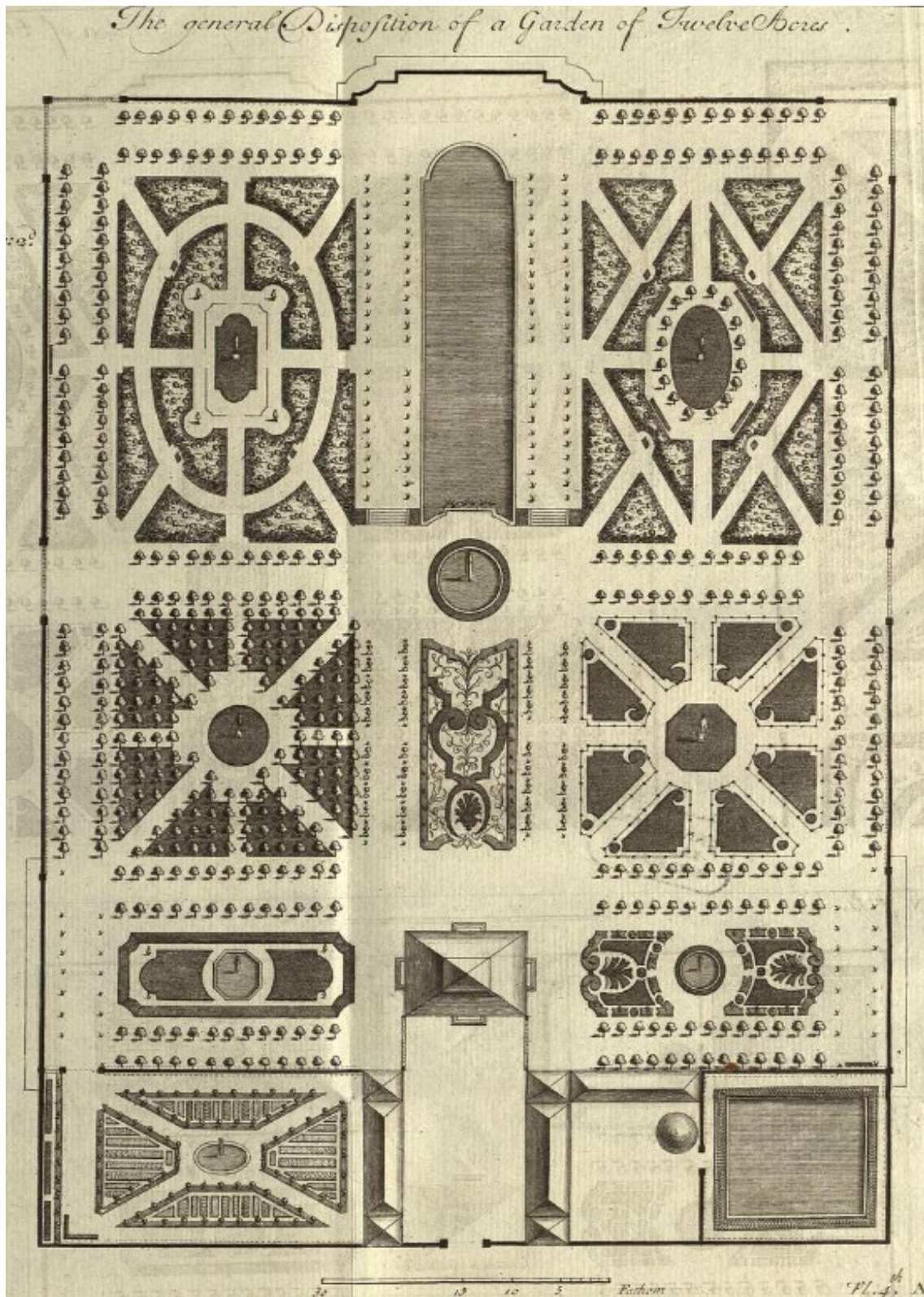


Figure 6.24. Antoine Joseph Dézallier d' Argenville, *The General Disposition of a Garden of Twelve Acres* (Dézallier d' Argenville 1728:38d, Plate 4A, Figure 2).

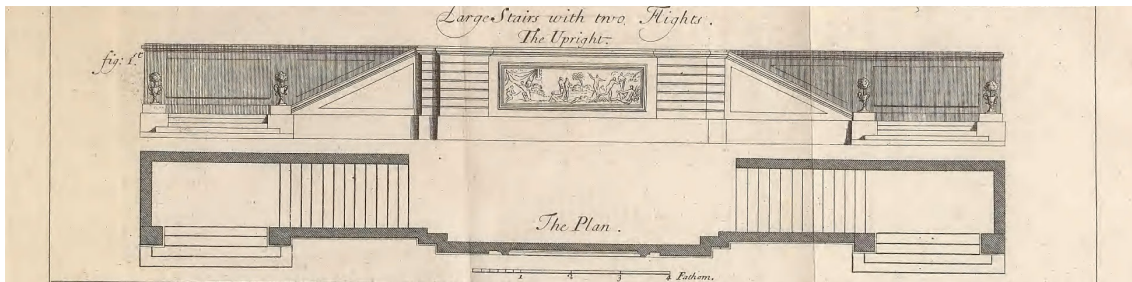


Figure 6.25. Antoine Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, *Large Stairs with Two Flights* (Dézallier d'Argenville 1712:126b, Plate 2H, figure 1). Relief of mythic *invenzione* in centre of retaining wall.

In other cases he is more prescriptive about the identity of the figures: In his description of the largest of his proposals (20–24 hectares), he describes a canal with a central fountain (Figure 6.26): “Beyond these groves is a large canal, reaching the whole breadth of the garden; in the midst of which is a group of figures, as *Neptune with Tritons*, throwing one great spout, and many lesser in every way” (Dézallier d'Argenville 1712:24–25).

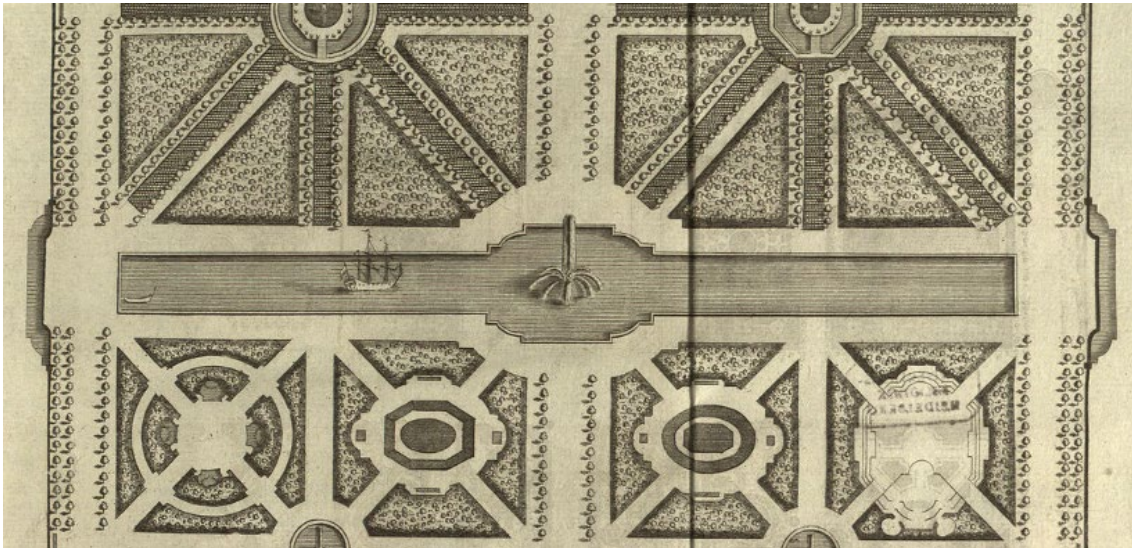


Figure 6.26. Antoine Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, *The General Disposition of a Magnificent Garden All Upon a Level* (Dézallier d'Argenville 1728:38a, Plate 1A).

Other more specific examples include illustrations of a cascade with water-nymphs (Figure 6.26, top-centre) and a Venus fountain (Figure 6.26, bottom-centre, right), both described prosaically (1712:217):

At bottom [of this ‘buffet’] are two figures of water-nymphs carried by dolphins, which spit water out at their nostrils.

Tis a great Shell raised at the End of a Bason, and sustained by Scrolls and Water-Leaves; in the Middle is a Figure of Venus upon a Base wrought with a large Hollow, borne by two Dolphins, which throw out Water. There are two Bubbling-Spouts upon the Sides of this Shell, from which the Water falls again by Sheets into the Bason below.

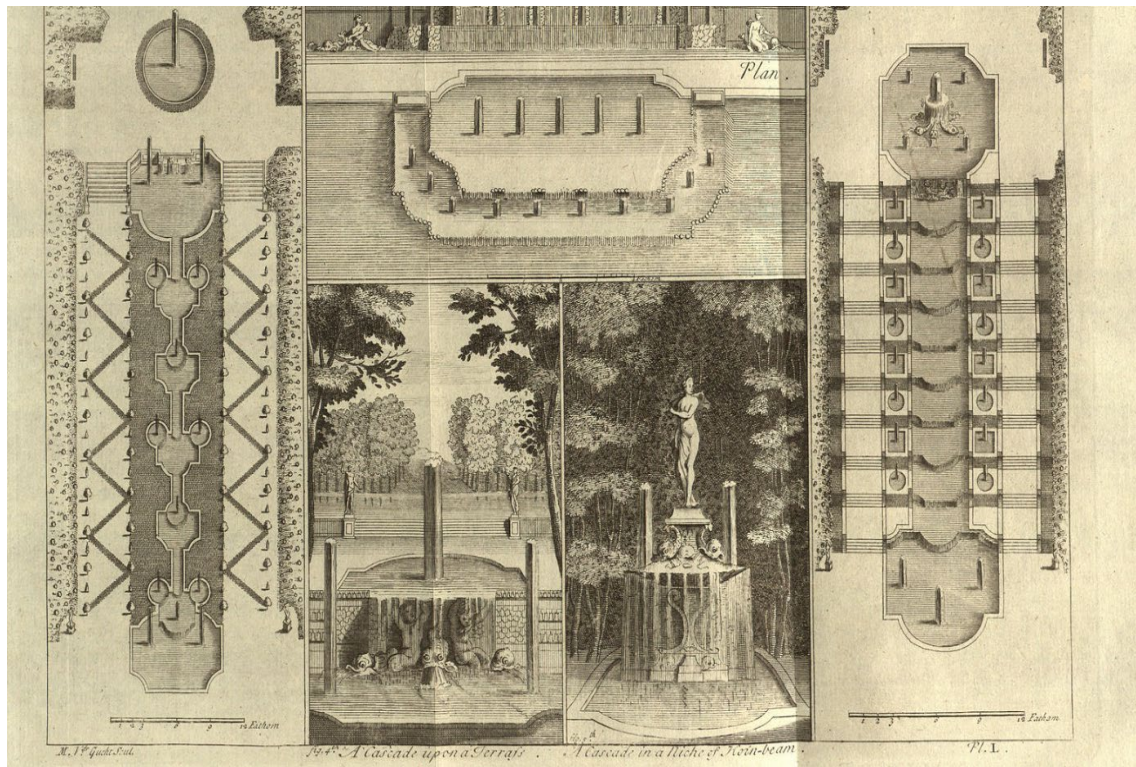


Figure 6.27. Antoine Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, Various designs for waterworks (Dézallier d'Argenville 1728:294a, Plate L).

The choice of all of these water-born deities was obviously apt for their watery settings. For Dézallier d'Argenville, the role of topomythopoiesis did reach beyond the mere visual articulation of the coordinates of a geometric system to the ennoblement of nature: a figure adds to the “embellishment and magnificence of a garden, and extremely advances the natural beauties of it” (Dézallier d'Argenville 1712:72). Thus, the deities inhabited the gardens to *compliment* their surroundings. To achieve this, he dictated some rules concerning the apt placement of the gods, which can be summarised by the following passage (1712:76):

These figures [referring to different types of statues such as terms and colossals] represent all the several deities, and illustrious persons of antiquity, which should be placed properly in gardens, setting the river-gods, as the *Naiades*, *Rivers*, and *Tritons*, in the middle of fountains and basons [old sp.]; and those of the woods, as *nylhanes*, *Faunes*, and *Dryads*, in the groves: sacrifices, bacchanals, and childrens sports, are likewise represented in bass-relievo, upon the vases and pedestals...

This simplistic association of setting with emblem, is emblematic of the way in which topomythopoiesis in France had gradually, throughout the seventeenth century, moved from the intricate semiotics, meta-narratives and spatial topomyths of Le Brun's Versailles to the 'put Neptune in a pool' dictates of the treatise books. Perhaps it was because of the predictability of such iconographic programmes that lead Dézallier d'Argenville to warn, in the second edition of his treatise (1713; English translation in 1728), that mythological figures (and artifice in general) ought not become the main object of composition and experience: He states that, as one of his four maxims, “art [should] give place to nature” (1728:18) and

proceeds to scoff at artificial trappings such as “fountains cluttered with ornaments” (ibid.) and “portico’s of lattice work fill’d with figures, vases, etc. which shew more manual art than anything else” (1712:19). Rather, a garden should consist of simple, unadorned elements, only “heightened here and there with figures and other ornaments of sculpture” (ibid.).

6.7 CONCLUSION

In aristocratic France during the seventeenth century, the reception of the classical topomyths of Versailles was cultivated and directed by official guidebooks and literary accounts, fostering academic and fantastical modes of participation. Towards the end of the century, the site-specific and dense metaphorical classical topomythopoiesis of Versailles became rationalised in design treatises that treated the statues as coordinates within geometric systems, governed by a set of rules for their correct placement.

7 ALBION'S ARCADIA

7.1 REFORMED MYTHS

At the time of the publication of the English translation of D'Argenville in London in 1712, the taste in England for geometric gardens like those printed in the treatise was fading in favour of more naturalistic scenery. For example, in Joseph Addison's oft quoted essay in the *The Spectator* of the same year (No. 414), he stated

... there is generally in nature something more grand and august, than what we meet with in the curiosities of art. When, therefore, we see this imitated in any measure, it gives us a nobler and more exalted kind of pleasure than what we receive from the nicer and more accurate productions of art.

The imitation of nature was part of the development of the English landscape garden style during the eighteenth century that, by mid-century, was characterised by a topomythopoesis of *faux* temples, rusticated spatial types and lonely statues scattered amongst rural and wild scenery:

... we might have Grotto's and Caves, disposed in a Rustick Manner; and at certain Points of View, Obelisks might be placed, or Summer-Houses, or Pavillions, built after the Manner of Grecian Temples, to be planted about with Firr-Trees, at such Distances as not to obstruct the Sight (Bradley 1731:361).

By 1800, the gods and their haunts had largely been expelled from the prominent gardens of England, as discussed in Chapter 1. This shift in taste already emerged during the seventeenth century. For example, Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639) in his *The Elements of Architecture* (1624:109) wrote: "... I must note a certaine contrarietic betweene *building* and *gardening*. For as *Fabriques*¹ should bee *regular*, so Gardens should bee *irregular*, or at least

¹ This term came to be used in the eighteenth century, from the French, for garden buildings, see Symes (2014). In this context, Wotton seems to use the word not limited to garden buildings (like follies), but also for buildings adjacent to gardens.

cast into a very wilde Regularitie”, citing afterwards an example of a garden he had visited that – on first glance from a terrace – appeared to be a “delightfull confusion” (ibid.), revealing itself as a series of distinct spaces each of which, upon entering, is experienced “as if hee had been Magically transporter into a new garden” (Wotton 1624:110). Wotton’s distinction does not exclude iconographic elements, for he lists (Wotton 1624:108) fountains and groves (and indeed, the garden itself) as outside, artificial, ornaments worthy of inclusion, together with natural collections of animals which ought to be revered because, citing Aristotle, “... *in all things that are naturall, there is ever something, that is admirable*” (Wotton 1624:109).

The reasons for this adoration of nature are manifold, some of which are discussed in Chapter 1, and thoroughly treated in Hunt (1992:286–289). Other reasons include the association of nature with British liberty as opposed to French absolute monarchy,² the exotic fascination with irregular Chinese gardens (Liu 2019), the influence of landscape paintings by artists such as Claude Lorraine, and the scenes of rustic Italian landscapes encountered on the Grand Tour.

7.2 EDMUND SPENSER

Another factor was the influence of the literary topomyths of the great English epics from the pens of the Protestant poets Edmund Spenser (1553–1599) and John Milton (1608–1674) who both showed a puritanical preference for the provincial, moralistic Virgilian *locus amoenus* to the courtly, world-wise Ovidian landscape charged with erotic sensuality, ruptured by rape.³ Their respective *Faerie Queene* (1590, expanded in 1596) and *Paradise Lost* (1667), can be interpreted as the torchbearers of mythical epics that influenced topomythopoiesis in the lineage of the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid* and the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*.

Spenser composed the mythic poem *The Faerie Queene* as an allegory of virtue that

² This is partly why the narrative of the ‘originality’ of the English landscape garden was emphasised as a teleological take on history wherein the naturalness of English gardens embodied the progressive move away from monarchy towards individual freedom, juxtaposed with the French; as Hunt (1996:180) put it: “The hold upon our imagination of this Whiggish progress of natural liberties at the expense of slavish art has been strong”.

³ Admittedly, both authors did draw from Ovid.

synthesised elements from classical mythology,⁴ the Christian Bible and Arthurian legend. It is set in Faerieland, ruled by the virgin Gloriana – a thinly veiled Elizabeth I (1533–1603) to whom the poem was dedicated.

The coronation of the Virgin Elizabeth in 1559 was viewed by some at the time as a fulfilment, at least poetically speaking, of the Virgilian prophecy of the return to the Saturnian Golden Age (Manning 1990:158): “*iam redit Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna*” (*Eclogue* 4.6), preceding Louis XIV’s golden age at Versailles by a hundred years. For the Protestants in England, their golden age meant a purification of Christendom; unstained by the whore-loving and Latin speaking clergy of Rome, scathingly depicted by William Warner in his poem *Albion’s England* (1586:304–305):

Thus erring *Rome* hath, doth, and will our Christian world unqueate
 May therefore Princes joyne to race that Monster from his seate.
 What will ye see a glorious God of earth? Goe see the Pope:
 Aspiring *Lucifer*? who els? truth fals’t? Reverse the Cope:
 Queanes like to Queenes? there halfe-mile Streets afford no other sort,
 And Skarlet Hats, Stoles, and Coules too much ingrost the sport.
 Full fortie thousand Curtizans there, ladies-like, doe live,
 That to the Pope for wantoning no small Revenue give.⁵

As Virgil used the *Aeneid* to mythologise Augustus as the ruler who reformed the decaying morals of Rome and re-rooted the Empire to rural life (with its emphasis on the reproductive of food and family), so too did Spenser mythologise Elizabeth I as the ruler who led the Reformation of England away from Marian rule and the corrupted popery of Rome, towards a Church rooted in the rural simplicity of the early Christians. Some years before the *Faerie Queen*, in his first major poem, Spenser had already begun mythologising the queen’s virtue as aptly surrounded by a pastoral landscape: In the *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) – in the vein of Virgil’s pastoral *Eclogues* – the Queene is represented as Elisa, sovereign of shepherds and flower of virgins, and likened to the nymph Syrinx.⁶ The shepherd who composes the song is reclining next to a murmuring stream, that typical lounging in a *locus*

⁴ Spenser was taught classical literature at the Merchant Taylors School. As England was expanding its mercantile sphere, skills-based education (in trade, technology and finances) became more prevalent. Spenser lamented what he saw as the decline of literary culture, manifested in his poem *The Teares of the Muses* (1591, but perhaps written as early as 1580) in which the topomyths of Parnassus and the grove of Venus feature to frame the lost poetic skill of the nine muses.

⁵ Commentators of the time often exaggerated the presence of prostitutes in Rome, yet they did play a complex role in everyday life in the city. For an academic survey of this role, see Cohen (1998).

⁶ Syrinx was a nymph who, willingly, turned into a reed to escape Pan’s lustful attempts to ravage her, then cut by him for his pipe.

amoenus for poetic inspiration, and draws in the associated topomyths of Parnassus and Helicon.

Ye daynty Nymphs, that in this blessed Brooke
 doe bathe your brest,
 Forsake your watry bowres, and hether looke,
 at my request:
 And eke you Virgins, that on *Parnasse* dwell,
 Whence floweth *Helicon* the learned well,
 Helpe me to blaze
 Her worthy praise,
 Which in her sexe doth all excell.
 Of fayre *Elisa* be your siluer song,
 that blessed wight:
 The flowre of Virgins, may shee florish long,
 In princely plight.
 For she is *Syrinx* daughter without spotte,
 Which *Pan* the shepherds God of her begot:
 So sprong her grace
 Of heauenly race,
 No mortal blemishe may her blotte.

Thus, the bucolic *locus amoenus* was employed by Spenser as a morally appropriate topomyth for post-Catholic England. The Queen herself presented her reign by using a garden metaphor in her poem *The Doubt of Future Foes* (1568): she likens herself to a natural garden, whilst the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, is likened to the “grafted guile” of artificial gardening (in Tigner 2012:27). Yet, these images of horticultural and pastoral purity, purged from popery, did not quite accord with the realities of courtly life: according to Hadfield (2003) Spenser criticised (as others did) the Queen for *not doing enough* to purify England from the decadence of Catholicism.⁷

7.2.1 The topomythopoeia of Kenilworth

For example, during her pompous summer’s progress⁸ of 1575 she visited the estate of the Earl of Leicester (c. 1532–1588) at Kenilworth. He sought to gain her affection by using his grounds and formal garden (Figure 7.1)⁹ as a stage for a magnificent display of music, theatre, fireworks and (very Romish) topomythopoesis, with references to the same sources that

⁷ For a discussion of the lingering ‘popery’ after Mary, Queen of Scots’ reign, and the ways the Elizabethan court-circle had to keep up the pretences that they were indeed radically reformed, see Harkins (2014).

⁸ Elizabeth I undertook yearly excursions into the countryside, with great pomp, to meet subjects outside the main centres of her rule.

⁹ One of the first formal Italianate gardens in England (Hunt 1996:104; Woodhouse 2008:94).

inspired Italian and French topomythopoiesis, namely the *Metamorphoses* and *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* (Woodhouse 1999:127; 2009:95), with Arthurian legend added to the mix. Much of the topomythopoiesis was expressed in the form of temporary installations, mechanical devices and theatrical performances, rather than fixed statues and spatial types.

In so doing, the Earl was attempting to show-off his “knowledge of Rome and his noble ancestry” (Woodhouse 2009:98), competing with European, Catholic suitors who possessed extravagant topomythopoeic gardens (Tigner 2012:32). And the Earl was well positioned to do so, since he, like Cardinal d’Este, was a patron of the classical arts, attested by the dedications to him of important iconographic sources: an English translation of the *Metamorphoses* by Arthur Downing (1567) and one of the first emblem books in English, Geoffrey Whitney’s *Choice of Emblems* (1585). In the latter, Whitney identified, in laudatory terms, the Earl with various historic figures, including Augustus. Thus, the Augustan golden age was deliberately enacted at Kenilworth: the Earl as Augustus, Whitney as his Virgil (Manning 1990:158) and the Queen as the Virgin fulfilling the sibylline prophecy. Yet, as a reminder of the complexities of history, it must be noted that the Earl was – despite his love for ornament, splendour and pagan iconography – a strict Puritan!

As during Louis XIV’s festivities, Elizabeth was greeted by the gods, not only in the formal garden, but throughout the grounds: some nymphs (silk-wearing actors) reciting verse,¹⁰ others like Ceres and Bacchus as benefactors of gifts,¹¹ some in the form of mechanical devices¹² like a mermaid carrying a Triton in the lake, and a dolphin (the sea-god, Proteus, in disguise, containing musicians in its belly) carrying Arion on it back¹³ (emblem No. 144 in Whitney) – a spectacle far removed from the pastoral idyll that Spenser imagined for his pure queen who, in the end, did not approve of all the luxuriance and left the party earlier than planned (Tigner 2012:37). Yet, such fantastical spectacles continued long into

¹⁰ As the Queen entered the inner gate of the castle, she was welcomed by the (Arthurian) Lady of the Lake, and two (Greco-Roman) nymphs, standing on an island, wearing silk and reciting metric verse (Laneham 1784:12).

¹¹ On the bridge leading to the castle from the gallery tower, were erected seven *pairs* of posts bearing gifts (Laneham 1784:14), wrongly counted by Woodhouse (1999:131) as “seven posts”. Each pair bestowed a gift upon the Queen from a different god. For an obvious example: the fourth pair contained bowls with grapes and, on the opposite post, containers with wine – gifts from Bacchus. Whether the posts themselves were ornamented with any iconographic details related to the gods is unknown to this author.

¹² One such device was a mermaid.

¹³ Arion was a musician who, according to Herodotus, invented the dithyramb dedicated to Dionysos, and was rescued by a dolphin, after a group of Corinthian sailors forced him to jump off the boat. The story is also told by Ovid in his *Fasti* (2.114–117).

her reign. For example, during her visit to Elvetham in 1591 (which she much enjoyed) she was entertained for four days, including by musicians performing a song dressed as Nereus and his Nereids, from a crescent-moon pond that alludes to Elizabeth's association with the moon-goddess, Diana (Figure 7.2).

The visit to Kenilworth was described by a witness, Robert Laneham, in a letter. From his account, it is clear that the visitors did not limit their appreciation to the formal garden, but also the wilder areas, associated with Diana in her guise as goddess of hunting (showing that the love for wild scenery did not appear out of the blue in the eighteenth century):

Beautifuld with many delectable, fresh, and umbragious bowers, arberz, seatz, and walks, that with great art, cost, and diligens wear very pleaszauntlie appointed; which also the natural grace by the tall and fresh fragrant treez and soil did so far fourth coomend, az *Diana* herself myght have deyned thear well enough too raunge for her pastime (Laneham 1784:6).

The formal garden contained Greco-Roman gods, and Medieval imagery (Woodehouse 2009:99); a biblical Paradise inhabited by pagan gods. Like a Medieval *hortus conclusus*, it was enclosed by a wall and contained a central fountain. Like an Italian Renaissance garden, its size matched the building and its layout comprised eight, more or less rectangular parterres.

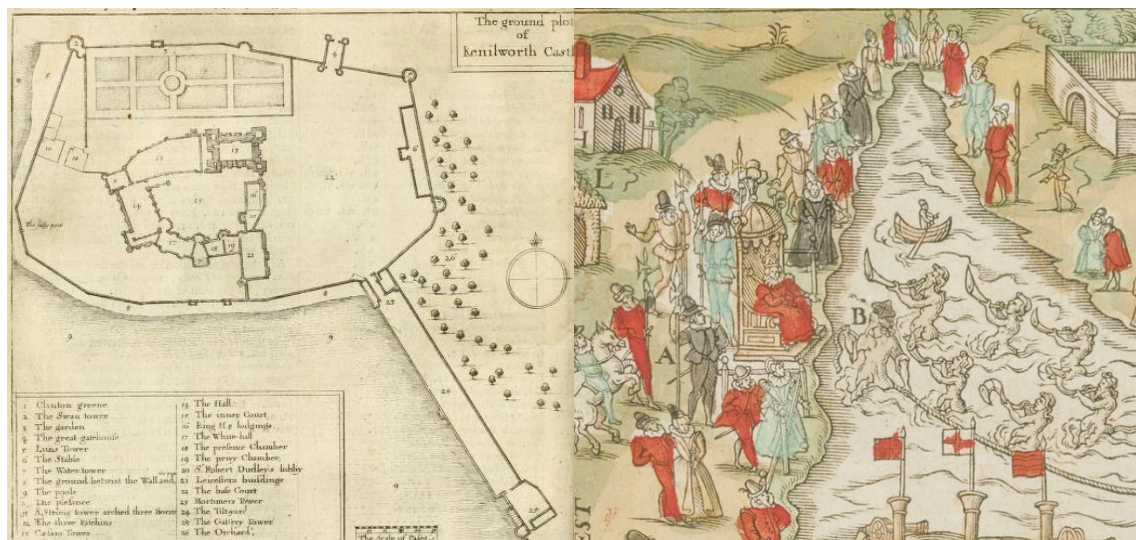


Figure 7.1. Left: Wenceslaus Hollar, *The Ground Plot of Kenilworth Castle*, c. 1656 (Dugdale 1656:160). Italianate garden north of castle.

Figure 7.2. Right: *An Entertainment for Elizabeth I at Elvetham, 1591*; cropped (The Royal Collection, RCIN 1024755). Actors dressed as Nereus and his followers entertain the Queen.

The iconography of the fountain, two Atlantes, back to back, carrying a sphere, is very much classical. The relief work on its base complimented the waterborne deities of the lake, and was taken from Ovid: Neptune and Tethys, and dolphins that referenced Venus. According to Woodhouse (2008:108) and Leslie (1992:10, 18), the imagery of frothy sea (augmenting the spurting fountain) and fertile gods (augmenting the courtship) elicited a

tension between the sexual purity of the Virgin Queen – symbolically harking back to the Medieval virgin in the garden – and the sexual desire of her company, as witnessed by Laneham (1784:74):

Heer wear things ye see moought inflame ony mynde too long after looking: but whoo so was found so hot in desyre, with the wreast of a cok waz sure of a coolar: water spurting upward with such vehemency, az they shoold by and by be moystned from top too toe; the Hee's to sum laughing, but the shee's to more sport: This sumtime waz Occupied to very good pastime.

7.2.2 Bower of Bliss

The same type of sexually charged fountain is encountered by Spenser's temperate Knight, Sir Guyon, in Acrasia's garden (*Faerie Queene* 2.12.58–83). There he encountered nymph-like “Naked Damzelles” (2.12.63.6) playing in the water, tempting the knight as their bodies rise like Venus from the sea: “... as the Cyprian goddess, newly borne, of th' Ocean's fruitful froth, did first appear...” (2.12.65.3–4). The pleasure garden is a music and flower-filled¹⁴ fictional space, akin to Italianate gardens of papal Rome and their aspiring imitations, such as Kenilworth (Leslie 1992:17). Apart from its real-world sources, the garden contains much from previous garden-of-love topomyths, for example: a central fountain (2.12.60.1) with elaborate images of naked boys, possibly Cupids (2.12.60.6), flowing into a pool containing jasper stones “shining bright” (2.12.62.8; like the carbuncles in the *Roman*) and innumerable rills flowing from the fountain (as in Capellanus). Once Guyon (guided by the Palmer) has resisted the temptations of the “wanton maidens” (2.12.66.1), he is faced with the ultimate temptation: wanton, silk-clad Acrasia, sorceress of the garden, whom traps and makes love to intemperate young men on a bed of roses in her Bower of Bliss (2.12.77–82). As in those gardens, the garden dweller is faced with a moral choice between falling for temptation into vice, or resisting by walking the path of virtue, like that prompted by Hercules at Villa d'Este (Leslie 1992:18). Sir Guyon took the virtuous path and destroyed the garden “with rigour pittillesse” (2.12.83.2) – a harsh act, but necessary to purge Faerieland from evil, Protestant England from immorality.¹⁵

By employing the topomythopoeic garden as an allegory for moral bankruptcy, Spenser thus brought into his metaphoric fold the gardens of papal Rome, like the Belvedere court wherein its Venus elicited a Guyon-like revulsion from Gianfrancesco Pico for her potential

¹⁴ Tigner (2012:46) shows how the profusion of flowers in the Bower mirrored the Elizabethan, aristocratic culture of floriculture. Thus, the Bower was not only a ‘Italian import’, but also reflected English horticultural practices. It can also be noted that Elizabeth I is evoked in the Bower as Flora, similar to how Spenser casted the Queen in his *April Eclogue* in his *The Shepheardes Calender*.

¹⁵ The allegorical meaning of the destruction of the Bower has attracted numerous studies and various interpretations, not all of which are considered here.

to seduce the unwary onlooker (5.3.5).¹⁶ Such anti-idolatry, echoing some early Christian receptions of topomythopoiesis, formed part of an iconoclastic attitude to the statues of gods that was to remain part of the Reformation spirit, including for Spenser and Milton, who employed the god-filled formal gardens of papal Rome (and English aristocracy) as allegorical topoi to denote decadence. It was the type of garden that, by 1620 in a poem *Hortus Mertonensis*, John Earle, later Bishop of Salisbury (in Leslie 1992:27) called “godless” because of their “fables, dreams [and] fancies dim”. Thus, Earle protested “lascivious statuary; mythological themes and structures, and specifically their recourse to paganism” (Leslie 1992:21) – a poetic argument against the falseness of the gardens, compared with the conservative and restrained gardens of his Merton College in Oxford. Artificiality was judged to be a moral deficiency. Yet, he approved of an artificial mound as “honest and open” (Leslie 1990:21), which seems to have been a popular (and acceptable) topomyth in seventeenth century Oxford where they featured in the gardens of Wadham (Figure 7.3) and New Colleges (Figure 7.4). The latter was initially created for defensive purposes during the English Civil War (1642–1651), and later associated with Parnassus (Fox 2013).

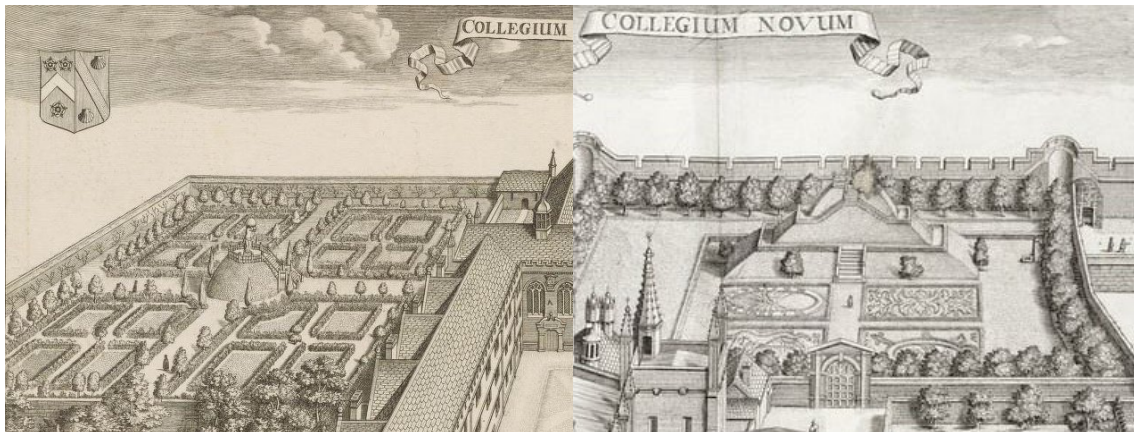


Figure 7.3. Left: David Loggan, *Collegium Wadhamense*, 1675 (Loggan 1675, No. 17). The garden contains an artificial, conical mound, topped by Atlas holding the globe, a common topomyth in Oxford at the time (Wells 1898:85).

Figure 7.4. Right: David Loggan, *Collegium Novum*, 1675 (Loggan 1675, No. 7). The garden of New College, Oxford contained a terraced mount with a Praenestean double staircase.

7.2.3 The garden of Adonis

Spenser’s Bower of Bliss as a topomyth to warn against Roman residue was juxtaposed with a landscape image that was in the same genre as his earlier eclogue. In *The Faerie Queene*, the

¹⁶ Leslie (1992:22) remarks that many of the statues, especially those of Venus, Isis and Cupid in *Faerie Queene* “are either capable of motion or are associated with movement... [a]nd all these incidents of statues coming to life are connected with sexuality and particularly with the potential for and dangers of violation, transgression, and adultery”. Thus, Spenser may have deliberately referred to the Renaissance hermeneutic-theurgic practices of statue-ensoulment (5.5.6).

Garden of Adonis is presented as the “anti-type” (Leslie 1992:27) of the Bower of Bliss:¹⁷ a landscape without the temptations presented by topomythopoeic encounters and conceits like frothy fountains of Venus:

Right in the midst of that Paradise
There stood a stately Mount, on whose round top
A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise,
Whose shady boughes sharpe steele did never lop,
Nor wicked beasts their tender buds did crop,
But like a girlond compassed the hight;
And from their fruitfull sydes sweet gum did drop,
That all the ground, with precious deaw bedight,
Threw forth most dainty odours and most sweet delight (*FQ* 3.6.43).

And in the thickest covert of that shade
There was a pleasaunt Arber, not by art
But of the trees owne inclination made,
Which knitting their rancke braunches part to part,
With wanton yvie twine entrayld athwart,
And Eglantine, and Caprifole emong,
Fashiond above within their inmost part,
That nether Phoebus beams could through them throng,
Nor Aeolus sharp blast could worke them any wrong (*FQ* 3.6.44).

There wont fayre Venus often to enjoy
Her deare Adonis joyous company,
And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy:
There yet, some say, in secret he does ly,
Lapped in flowres and pretious spycery,
By her hid from the world, and from the skill
Of Stygian Gods, which doe her love envy;
But she her selfe, when euer that she will,
Possesseth him, and of his sweetnesse takes her fill (*FQ* 3.6.46).

The Garden of Adonis as a virtual landscape is presented as a less ornate and artificial environment: here flowers propagate themselves, whereas in the Bower they grow by art. The Garden of Adonis remains true to the definition of paradise – a place enclosed – and described in the *locus amoenus* and Golden Age literary traditions. Yet, this garden is not a trans-natural environment in which spring never ends (as in the Golden Age); life and death pass through its gates. Rather, it is an allegory for the regeneration of life expressed in the

¹⁷Tigner (2012:41–44) does not follow the reading, initiated by C.S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love*, that the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Adonis are artifice (equals evil) and nature (equals good) opposites, remarking that they share many similarities.

cycles of birth, decay and death, driven by the forces of nature and God's hand. The garden is the liminal place where forms are given "substance and shape" (Geller 1976:67), from whence life is sent into the world, and returns here to decay and be given life again. The regenerative conceit of the garden is centred on a mount within the garden, upon which a grove forms the setting for the love-making of Venus and Adonis (who never consummated their love in Ovid, for Adonis was transformed into a stag). Venus as the perpetual giver of life through love, is presented here in her lineage as *Venus generix*. Tigner (2012:46–47) interprets the garden as the womb, and the mount as a "... graphic representation of Venus's pubic region or *mons veneris*".¹⁸

This landscape of regeneration fits the metamyth of Elizabethan England as a rural-centred, neo-Roman Republic. The role of sex in the cycle of life and death is interpreted by Coles (2002:45) as a signal that Spenser (and others) had shifted their earlier endorsement of the Queen's virginity towards an argument that she ought to deliver an heir to the throne: the Garden of Adonis shows that sex is necessary, as long as it is within the bounds of marriage.¹⁹ Tigner (2012:51) interprets the Garden of Adonis as a remaking of the Bower to mirror Elizabeth's re-branding herself from "seductress to 'natural mother'", extending the topomyth as a hopeful vision for a "national landscape" of regeneration. Whichever interpretation reveals Spenser's intention, the gods remain native inhabitants of his puritanical virtual landscape: like in the Middle Ages, Venus was not banished, only reformed. Spenser's ideal paradise is not bereft of gods, who are casted to inhabit a productive landscape more similar to, as Leslie (1992) argues, the northern, Venetian gardens of Italy than those surrounding Rome and Florence.

7.2.4 Spenser's influence

Spenser's influence on garden design can already be detected in the mid-seventeenth century: in his (unfinished) *Elysium Britannicum*, John Evelyn quotes stanzas describing the Bower of Bliss (2.12.58–59) to equate Spenser's topomyth with his own vision of an ideal garden where

¹⁸ The *mons veneris* association was manifested in a garden mound constructed in the mid-eighteenth century at West Wycombe in England: a rotunda temple of Venus stood on a mound with an oval shaped opening, described by a contemporary visitor as "the same entrance by which we all come into the world and the door is what some idle wits have called the door of life" (in Coffin 2000:186).

¹⁹ Tigner (2012:50) does not follow this interpretation that the Garden of Adonis is a reflection of married love, since Adonis and Venus are not married in the story. In the Bower, it is Acrasia who makes love with Verdant, which scholars usually interpret as illicit sex. It follows then that Tigner (2012:51) does not deem Guyon the hero-reformer, but rather the killjoy of passion and interprets the Garden of Adonis as a remaking of the destroyed Bower.

art is subordinate to nature (Goodchild 1991:108–109). As Hunt has shown, Spenser crops up again and again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the literary and artistic movement that begot the English landscape garden (Hunt 1986: 49, 160, 173, 182, 186, 190, 251, 261). For example, William Kent’s intuitive topomythopoeia from the 1730s may have been influenced by, amongst other formative experiences, his reading of *The Faerie Queen* (Jacques 2016:42), seen (possibly) in his conceit for the Vale of Venus at Rousham (Hunt 1992:86)²⁰. In William Gilpin’s (1724–1804) *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens at Stowe* (1748),²¹ the character Polyphth remarks upon seeing the Temple of Venus: “These Stories are taken from the *Fairy-Queen* I dare say; they look like Spenser’s Ideas” (Gilpin 1976:6), showing that some garden visitors had Spenser in mind when untangling iconography.

But, perhaps, Spenser’s most lasting influence on the tradition of classical topomythopoesis is, following Hume’s (1984:162–184) conclusion to an analysis of his work, that he preferred – and influenced others to prefer – simple, direct allegory to the complex, mysterious allegories of the Neoplatonists discussed in Chapter 5. Unlike the multi-layered biblical (and topomythical) exegeses of the Middle Ages (4.6.1), he followed Reformers like Luther who read scripture literally. Thus, the topomythopoeic gardens of Protestant England included gods, but as placeholders for simple moral lessons. We can only speculate that it was this didactic approach of reading topomyths that tired Whately and others, two hundred years later, of such intellectual games of ‘point-and-tell’ (there is Hercules, he *means* strength); mere analytical participation leaves little room for transcendence, and becomes a bore.

7.3 JOHN MILTON

Following in the puritanical footsteps of Spenser,²² the pro-republican John Milton too conceived of paradise in *Paradise Lost* (1667) as a pastoral *locus amoenus*, free from papal ornament and the excesses of monarchy; a republican rebuttal of the kind of decadent topomythopoesis flourishing at Versailles at the time of writing his epic.²³

²⁰ Kent also made illustrations for the *Faerie Queene* published in 1751 by Brindley and Wright.

²¹ Full title: A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honorouble the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire.

²² Milton’s widow revealed that Spenser, together with Shakespeare and Cowley, were his favourite English authors (Poole 2017:126). A major difference between *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, is that the former was “an allegory, whereas *Paradise Lost* retold biblical events, regarded as literally true”. This perhaps explains why the landscape in *Paradise* is less an abstraction than an attempt to render a real place with semiotic meaning, fused with somatic experience.

²³ All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are from Milton (2005).

7.3.1 Moral trepidation about ornament

Although Milton did not visit Versailles, Stark (2003:22) argues he was well aware of it and alluded to its grandeur as a metaphor for the decadence of absolute monarchy, something Milton feared would return after the Restoration (1660) with the coronation of Charles II (1630–1685). This manifested especially in his conception of Pandemonium, the capital city of Hell, which partly takes on the form of an ornate, classical building: “Built like a Temple, where Pilasters round were set, and Doric pillars overlaid with golden architrave...” (*PL* 1.713–715). From this we may infer that he was equally repelled by the ornate and power-infused gardens, which Charles II was actively trying to emulate by (unsuccessfully) luring Le Nôtre to the English court (Hunt 1981:92). In his later work, *Paradise Regained* (1671), Satan presents the man-made wonders of Rome to the eyes of Jesus as objects of desire in his attempt at temptation:

With Towers and Temples proudly elevate
 On seven small Hills, with Palaces adorn'd,
 Porches and Theatres, Baths, Aqueducts,
 Statues and Trophées, and Triumphal Arcs,
 Gardens and Groves presented to his eyes... (*PR* 4.34–38)²⁴

In *Paradise Lost*, the flowering plants of Eden are nature's gift, not restricted within the deceitful artifice of *parterres*:

Flours worthy of Paradise which not nice Art²⁵
 In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon (*PL* 4.242–243)

Eve, on the brink of eating from the tree of knowledge, was immersed in gardening (9.430–433) when Satan made his final move, suggesting that Milton regarded the absorption in flowers and their care as a dangerous distraction from a virtuous life (Knot 2005:79) – gardening as indulgence, as opposed to gardening for subsistence, adds another moral layer to an argument *against* horticultural finery.

Thus, Milton (like Spenser) was weary of the temptational trappings of architectural and garden splendour. Like many of his Puritanical contemporaries, he deemed the images of Greco-Roman antiquity and Catholicism as idolatrous, although he never joined in their physical destruction (Lewalski 2003:214). In his vision of Eden, there are no statues or architectonic grottos, no artificial mounds or decorative fountains.

²⁴ It is from these lines that John Dixon Hunt derived the title of his *Garden and Grove* (1986).

²⁵ ‘Art’ here means artificial and deceitful.

7.3.2 The moral obligation of farming and planting trees

Rather than imagine Eden as a place of ornate visual splendour, Milton created a literary topomyth that presented the English imagination with a vision of a post-Restoration England, restored from the ravages of war and environmental destruction. The English Civil War (1642–1651) damaged the landscape: farms and gardens were destroyed, leaving once fertile and beautiful grounds desolate. Industry had left rivers and the air of cities polluted;²⁶ much water was undrinkable and streets reeked of stench; oak forests were depleted and food was scarce. The project of environmental reform was seen by many as a moral imperative (Tigner 2012:213): proposals were made for the planting of forest and fruit trees, apples and vines for the making of cider and wine (in place of fouled water), crops to feed the hungry, and fragrant plants to perfume the cities. Educational reformers likened teaching to gardening and the edification of physical labour was a Protestant ideal: a restored England was, as oft today,²⁷ envisioned as a fertile, fragrant garden of plenty; a new Eden. And a picture of such a Paradise is what Milton painted with words, a landscape that God cultivated from chaos:

Grasing the tender herb, were interpos'd,
Or palmie hilloc, or the flourie lap
Of som irriguous Valley spread her store,
Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:
Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves
Of coole recess, o're which the mantling vine
Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant; mean while murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crownd,
Her chrystal mirror holds, unite thir streams.
The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune (*PL* 4.252–265).

It is this image of a productive, undulating landscape with pastoral fields and groves that eighteenth century commentators saw as a vision, a century before its time, of what became known as the English landscape garden, culminating in the work of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Milton's verses about paradise "were regularly and tendentiously ransacked for advice and retrospective sanction of 'informal' landscape designs" (Hunt

²⁶ A landscape-based solution to the problem of air pollution was proposed by John Evelyn in his *Fumifugium*, or, The inconveniencie of the aer and smoak of London dissipated together with some remedies humbly proposed (1661).

²⁷ For example, see James Rebanks's *English Pastoral: An Inheritance* (2021), in which the author presents the reader with a vision of a rural England that returns to its farming ways.

1981:86). His vision of a natural landscape was interpreted as morally superior to the artificial gardens that were still dominant during his lifetime, for it felt untainted by the folly of fallen man; God-made:

One man, one great man we had, on whom nor education nor custom could impose their prejudices; who, *on evil days though fallen, and with darkness and solitude compassed round*, judged that the mistaken and fantastic ornaments he had seen in gardens, were unworthy of the almighty hand that planted the delights of Paradise.²⁸

These words from Horace Walpole's *Essay on Modern Gardening* (1771:27–29) summarises his and other commentators' reverence for Milton's landscape vision and its mythologised Milton's guiding role in the progress towards the quintessential English garden. Walpole and other Protestant intellectuals saw artifice, specifically of a classical language, as a sign of moral bankruptcy (for the neo-Gothic at his Strawberry Hill was deemed okay), since it sprung from Catholic Europe, associated at the time with sexual perversion (Reeve 2013:419). The translation of Milton's virtual to the physical landscape is summarised by Tigner (2012:233):

Drawing from the scientific experiments concerning the natural world and from discourses of land reform of the 1650s and 1660s, Milton's literary conception of the natural would become a physical reality in the English countryside. The landscape gardens of Brown, Bridgeman, and Kent were indeed manifestations of Milton's ontological vision that had crystallized not only the paradise that was lost but also illustrated the potential for its re-creation.

This recreation of an unfallen world, specifically, influenced designers to create water bodies that mimicked lakes and meandering streams (springing from hills or caves), incorporate views to the countryside, and accommodate natural features – like forests and undulating topography – in their compositions (Hunt 1981:87-89). Not only did Milton influence the formal language of eighteenth century gardens, but also their reception. For example, a visitor to Stourhead evoked Milton to spare herself the drudgery of describing the landscape: "... even Milton's pen... would fail to give a complete idea of it";²⁹ Milton's paradise prose became shorthand for a beautiful, virtuous landscape; a virtual landscape that is good and wild, not corrupt and affected.

²⁸ The original text is italicised (next to the French in regular style), with a phrase from Milton in regular. In the quote above, I have done the opposite: the italicised text indicates a line from Milton's *PL* (7.25–27) that describes the fallen world.

²⁹ Mrs Chapone, quoted by Hunt (1981:90).

7.3.3 Not quite ‘made in England’

However, Hunt (1981:91–101) has shown that this patriotic reading³⁰ was somewhat selective by demonstrating that various passages in *Paradise Lost* are equally descriptive of, and probably inspired by, Italian Renaissance gardens like the Villa Lante at Bagnaia that Milton knew and visited (Hunt 1981:91). These gardens were, in Milton’s time, not yet dualistically straightjacketed as ‘formal’, and appreciated for their variety of both geometrically ordered *and* ‘natural’ areas (Hunt 1981:91–92). For example, the description of Satan’s approach towards Eden may as well describe the approach to a walled,³¹ Italian hillside garden that included ‘wilde’ parts on its edges:³²

A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woodie Theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher then thir tops
The verdurous wall of paradise up sprung:
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large (*PL* 4.140–144)

Walpole and other eighteenth century commentators saw in Milton what they wanted to see, for Milton himself had a more nuanced view of garden perfection (as indeed Brown himself).³³ Perhaps it is a testimony to his genius, for contemporary eco-critics also see in his paradise early stirrings of an ecological mind-set matching their ideals; a prophecy of wilding.³⁴

Granted that Milton’s Eden was not a wholly original, English, creation, he did choose to only include those parts of the Italian villa garden that befitted his vision – the shady groves and walled enclosure – omitting their decorative fountains, artificial grottoes and statues.

³⁰ The English eighteenth century commentators who used Milton to legitimise their naturalised gardening ideal, did so as “a direct consequence of their need to justify the landscape garden as essentially an English creation” (Hunt 1981:91).

³¹ Tigner (2012:216), unlike Hunt (see above), reads the enclosure of Paradise (see below) not as evidence for the influence of the Italian garden, but a mirror of the enclosure of wastelands by private landowners of the time, not intended as a social critique, but as a sign that wastelands were being converted into arable and productive farmland.

³² Solomon (2020:786) views the forested edges with “shade above shade” (*PL* 4.141) of Milton’s garden as a reflection of the practice in English gardens at the time to “evoke popular horticultural specifications for vertical gradations of green verdure”.

³³ Although Brown is famous for his naturalised landscapes of rolling hills with clumps of trees, he did design some grottoes and other fanciful structures, see Williams (1983).

³⁴ For Milton’s environmentalist legacy, see *Milton and Ecology* by Hiltner (2003).

7.3.4 The gods in a Christian Paradise

Yet, the gods were not wholly expelled from Milton's paradise. Although he created a landscape vision that was far removed from the visual opulence of the gardens of kings and cardinals, he relied on the language of classical mythology for his Christian topomythopoeia. As during the Middle Ages the gods remained, albeit reluctantly, bearers of the poetic image of the garden as a setting for love, temptation and tragedy – themes essential to the biblical story of Eden and the Fall; themes for which the sparse language of Genesis³⁵ (Martindale 1985:306) fell short to visualise as a semiotic *and* somatic garden space. Unlike the biblical emphasis on a chronology of events and identification of garden elements, *Paradise Lost* presents an *aesthetic* vision (at once mimetic and original) of Eden wherein the invisible radiates from the visible (Solomon 2020:787); a synthesis of classical and biblical topomyths, and real garden encounters that forms a vivid and richly detailed literary garden.

7.3.5 Milton's classical education

This mythological language was inherited during his schooling years at St Paul's in London, where he studied the ancient authors in Latin and Greek (Poole 2017:13) and developed his enduring love for Ovid;³⁶ the *Metamorphoses* was his favourite work in Latin as an old man (Martindale 1985:301). In Homer and Virgil he encountered the structure of the epic, later to inform his own. In Theocritus's *Idylls* he found the bucolic simplicity of "shepherding and love" (Poole 2017:228), and in Hesiod's *Work and Days* the georgic "commitment to agriculture and virtue" (ibid.). Yet the immersion in classical literature did not guarantee, within the iconoclastic climate of England at the time,³⁷ its survival in his own literary works.

7.3.6 The moral (and aesthetic) case for the gods

One of Milton's teachers was Alexander Gil the Elder (1565–1635), whose barely known

³⁵ The biblical Garden of Eden is described in Genesis 2:4–3:24 in just over a thousand words. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a retelling of the story, runs in at almost 80 000 words! The Genesis description focuses on the events leading to the Fall, and provides some descriptive notes on Eden such as the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the four rivers, but not much in terms of providing a lucid description of it as an inhabited landscape, experienced through the senses.

³⁶ Although the taste for Ovid waned in favour of Virgil after the Restoration, Milton remained a follower of the banished poet's work, to the extent that the *Metamorphoses* was his favourite Latin text in old age (Martindale 1985:301).

³⁷ Ever since Henry VIII's break from the Catholic Church, a series of Parliamentary orders prohibited the use of idolatrous images, and instructed their destruction (Shore 2012:23). Milton himself advocated this, but as Shore (2012) has argued (and myself in this Chapter) he did not 'destroy' the images of gods in his literary works.

Sacred Philosophie of the Holy Scripture (1635) argued for the legitimacy of citing ‘heathen’ authors, by referring to St Paul’s sermon in Athens which includes a line by the Hellenistic poet Aratus (315–240 BC)³⁸ as a means to argue *against* idolatry (Acts 17:28); an apologetic argument against pagan idolatry with appeal to a pagan poet. Instead of erasing the ancient poets and their gods, they are employed as a means to refute their own beliefs. Poole (2017:17–18) speculates that this reconciliation of pagan poetry and philosophy³⁹ influenced Milton, who made a similar argument in his *Areopagitica* (1644). Thus, Milton’s poetry is infused with the presence of gods, yet they are rarely allowed to exist without some hint that they are false and faded. For example, in his early poem *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* (1629), a moving image is conjured of the gods, in numinous nature, mourning their own fading with the birth of Christ:

The lonely mountains o’re,
 And the resounding shore,
 A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
 From haunted spring and dale
 Edg’d with poplar pale,
 The parting Genius is with sighing sent,
 With flowre-inwov’n tresses torn
 The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn (*Nativity* 181–188; Milton 1929:7).

This poetic image would have been impossible without the lament of the human-faced and human-hearted gods, amidst wild nature, that often endured tragedy and transformation. Yet, once they have served their poetic role they part from a Christian world. Milton thus used the language of myth to create enchanted places, an “idolatrous sublime” (Shore 2012:23), whilst he “hollows them out from the inside, thereby re-fashioning them as the instruments of their own disenchantment” (ibid.). This approach allowed him to infuse his works with the gods and their settings from Hesiod, Homer, Virgil and Ovid for poetic effect, without kneeling to the deities with reverence, for they continually “come under attack” (Collett 1970:88). Beyond their aesthetic effect, Collet (ibid.) argues that Milton, as a Christian, also saw foreshadowed *truth* in the myths, similar to some of the Medieval

³⁸ The line is “... for we are indeed his offspring...” from *Phaenomena*, line 5. In the poem, Aratus (a Stoic) refers to Zeus as an omnipotent deity, and thus not to be limited as an idol which is an insufficient representation of such a being.

³⁹ Gil (1635: no pagination) also refers to how the last pagan Emperor, Julian the Apostate, forbade Christians to be taught in the classical liberal arts, preventing them from wounding “the heathens with their own weapons”. Gil uses this to illustrate that ignorance of classical learning reduces the Christian’s ability to reason about the validity of scripture. Unlike the Lutherans of the time, Gil was arguing against the sole dependence on scripture to support faith.

interpretations discussed in Chapter 4:

What the sage Poets taught by th' heav'nly Muse,
Storied of old in high immortal verse (*Comus* 514–515; Milton 1863:64).

Milton saved the presence of the gods and their haunts in his poetry for poetic effect, and as veiled truth, albeit mostly as a *qualified* presence. Freed from the fear of idolatry, Milton used the myths in *Paradise Lost* in various ways. For example, he presented the gods and goddesses as fallen angels, thus bringing them into the fold of the biblical story.

7.3.7 Reluctant topomythopoeisis

More importantly for the present discussion, Milton evoked the virtual landscape of Arcadia to assist the reader in picturing a prelapsarian, pastoral landscape imbued with “sensual beauty” (Collett 1970:89). For example, when describing Adam and Eve’s wedding bed he evokes Pan, Silvanus, fauns and nymphs in order to enchant the wild forest setting with their erotic presence, whilst barring their entry:

In shadie Bower
More sacred and sequesterd, though but feignd,
Pan or *Silvanus* never slept, nor Nymph,
Nor *Faunus* haunted. Here in close recess
With Flowers, Garlands, and sweet-smelling Herbs
Espoused *Eve* deckt first her Nuptial Bed
And heavenly choirs the hymenean sung⁴⁰ (*PL* 4.705–711).

Earlier in Book 4, the garden of the Hesperides, the “epitome of sensuality” (Collett 1970:93), is evoked, once again only tentatively:

Hesperian fables true,
If true, here only (*PL* 4.250–251).

The garden of the Hesperides is evoked as a legitimate virtual place that may be conjured in the conception of Eden. Milton is careful, as always, to add a “gratuitous disclaimer” (Collet 1970:88) to the myth, ensuring that his use of it does not promote a lapse into paganism or popery by adding “if true”.

Elsewhere, naked Eve who “her unadorned golden tresses wore dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav’d” (*PL* 4.305–306) is compared with those goddesses that filled their

⁴⁰ This in itself is a mythological reference, as Hymen was the Hellenistic god of marriage, based on an ancient marriage song.

onlookers with desire: Proserpine (4.269), Pandora (4.714), Venus (8.59–61),⁴¹ Circe (9.522) and a wood-nymph (9.386).

Many of these figures (and settings like the Hesperian fields) have strong garden associations, and Hunt (1981:101) argues that such “mythic parallels” would, for the “knowledgeable and travelled reader”, conjure images of those Renaissance gardens that may have influenced Milton; the goddesses invite the reader’s participation by recalling the lovescapes of Italy and Arcadia.

This explicit sexuality of Eden – haunted by the gods of love and lust – may be a surprising feature for a Puritan epic. However, these associations are limited to the *unfallen* state of mankind, until innocence was lost in Book 9 (780–784) when Eve eats fruit from the tree of knowledge. Afterwards Adam also plucks the fruit and they are both overcome with “carnal desire enflaming” (9.1013), the kind of lust-fuelled sexual desire despised by the Puritans. Thus, in Milton’s Eden (as in Spenser’s Garden of Adonis), sex within wedlock is celebrated as a Protestant, Christian ideal – a correction of the Catholic practice of clerical celibacy (Boyette 1967:297). The reader is thus permitted to enjoy the *locus amoenus* of classical myth when imagining Paradise before innocence was lost, but not after; within the prelapsarian garden the mythical “sense imagery is cleansed” (Collet 1970:93). Yet, even in its baptised state, the beauty of Paradise is never indulged without constant reminders to the reader of Satan’s menacing presence (Forsyth 1981:147).

The impending tragedy of Book 9 is prefigured in the earlier pastoral accounts. For example, soon after the introduction of the Hesperian fields (and other pleasant locations like the Eternal Spring), our glance moves to the flowery meadow where Proserpine plucks flowers before Hades (Cis) abducts her to the underworld, and to the pleasant grove where Daphne is about to be changed into a tree to escape rape by Apollo. Like Ovid’s juxtaposition of lovely places ruptured with violence, Milton evokes the idyllic virtual landscape to create dramatic tension: “Milton chose those myths that combined sense appeal with sorrow” (Collett 1970:93).

7.3.8 Eden is not Arcadia

These images from Arcadia about the imminent danger in beauty are, as before, given a qualified presence in the passage: a whole map of topomyths are conjured as a dissimile between these, *feigned* versions of paradise and the true, biblical, Eden:

⁴¹ Although Venus is not directly mentioned, Forsyth (1981:146) and Boyette (1967:341) have shown how the presence of Graces as attendants to Eve in the passage cited, reveals Eve’s association with Venus, but probably in her role as Neoplatonic, celestial Venus.

Not that faire field
 Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gathering flours
 Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie *Dis*
 Was gatherd, which cost *Ceres* all that pain
 To seek her through the world; nor that sweet Grove
 Of *Daphne*⁴² by *Orontes*, and th' inspir'd
Castalian Spring, might with this Paradise
 Of *Eden* strive; nor that *Nyseian* Ile⁴³
 Girt with the River *Triton*, where old *Cham*,
 Whom Gentiles *Ammon* call and *Lybian Jove*,
 Hid *Amalthea* and her Florid Son
 Young *Bacchus* from his Stepdame *Rhea's* eye;
 Nor where Abassin Kings thir issue⁴⁴ Guard,
 Mount *Amara*,⁴⁵ though this by som suppos'd
 True Paradise under the *Ethiop* Line
 By *Nilus* head, enclosed with shining Rock,
 A whole days journy high, but wide remote
 From this *Assyrian* Garden... (PL 4.268–286).

Milton thus allows himself to use the topomyths to envision (not allegorise) beauty and enchantment by implying with “not” (268) and “nor” (273) that these settings are but shadows of Eden; he employs the topomyths whilst discarding them. The reader participates in the imagining of Eden by evoking a virtual landscape filled with flowering meadows, springs, groves and mounts – a beauty surpassed by Eden. It comprises some gods and settings common to classical topomythopoesis: Proserpine, Ceres, the Castalian Spring (on Mount Parnassus), Bacchus, but also real-and-imagined locations, like Amara in Ethiopia⁴⁶ which, to a limited extent, syncretises the Greco-Roman Arcadia with mytho-historic sites from Africa.

7.3.9 Albion's Arcadia

Instead of viewing, like Walpole did, Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a prophecy of a garden made in the image of nature, free from myth, we can rather read it as a *revision* of Arcadia in which the gods (hollowed of their divinity) and their haunts (rusticated from their artifice) are

⁴² The gardens of Daphne were located on the banks of the Orontes river in Syria, irrigated by springs and planted with laurel – the specie Daphne morphed into in escape from Apollo (*Met.* 1.450–468).

⁴³ Nysa is where Bacchus was raise by nymphs, envisioned here as an island.

⁴⁴ Children.

⁴⁵ A hill in current day Ethiopia, thought at the time to be a possible real-world location of paradise on the equator (the “Ethiop Line”); its mytho-history goes back to antiquity.

⁴⁶ Milton was a keen map reader and had a great interest in geography, which infused his topological writing, see Clark's (1950) *Milton's Abyssinian Paradise*.

admitted for their sensual beauty and dramatic tension. In this way, Milton's text amended the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century's reader and garden visitor's virtual landscape to one in which moralised gods move fleetingly, and reluctantly, in an edifying landscape of farmed land and wilderness. They make appearances, but the stories of their 'sinful' lives are not re-told as in the *Roman*, *Hypnerotomachia* or *Loves*.

As such, Milton's a vision was realised in the English gardens of the eighteenth century wherein the gods remained, but as forlorn figures amidst vast rolling fields and forests, not cast in narrative conceits. The popular presence of statues of Venus (and the Graces) perhaps suggests that the garden instilled a nostalgia for paradise before it was lost – as when reading *Paradise Lost* (Forsyth 1981:152) – an unfallen state where love had not sunken to lust.

The Protestant fear of idolatry and the dislike for Romish iconography could easily have led to the complete iconoclasm of classical topomythopoiesis from the fifteenth century onwards. Yet, as during the Middle Ages, the gods and their settings were saved for their poetic potential. But, unlike Boccaccio who passed on to the Renaissance a free pass to enjoy the virtual and physical sensual pleasures of Arcadia, Spenser and Milton passed on a disclaimed and moralised topomythopoiesis, closed for complex allegorical interpretations or Neoplatonic epiphanies. Thus, they played an important role in the development of the English landscape garden by cultivating the virtual landscape of the English imagination of the seventeenth century, in which looms a moral burden on mankind to cultivate the earth through productive labour, and in labour procreate: this Arcadia of Albion⁴⁷ manifested itself in the Augustan, georgic landscape of the eighteenth century.

7.4 CONCLUSION

While classical topomythopoiesis flourished in continental Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant England grappled with its idolatrous iconography. Yet, through the literary works of Spenser and Milton, the myths were saved by using them for moral ends. By the eighteenth century, English (and later continental) landscape gardens included topomyths that served as simple and direct emblems **to prompt pictorial participation** as part of moral edification.

⁴⁷ An old toponym for Britain, derived from Greek, used mostly poetically. Milton, in his unfinished mytho-historic *The History of Britain* (published in 1690) uses the term and explains its origins: the island was ruled by a giant, Albion, son of Neptune, for 44 years (Milton 1818:4).

8 AUGUSTAN TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

8.1 ADDISON'S PICTORIAL PARTICIPATION

“As the first Place among our *English* Poets is due to *Milton*...” – with these words Joseph Addison, who was quoted at the opening of the previous chapter to pronounce the shift in taste towards the imitation of nature in gardens, opened his series of critical essays published in *The Spectator* from 31 December 1711 (No. 262) to 3 May 1712 (No. 369). As the first major critic of Milton, Addison entrenched the reputation and legacy of *Paradise Lost* and “canonized Milton’s epic as an English epic” (Davis 2015:243). Before embarking on his analysis of *Paradise Lost*, he waxed lyrical in 1694 (twenty years after Milton’s death) about the poet’s ability to *picture* Paradise as a pleasant place in a poem *An Account of the Greatest English Poets* (Addison 1914:33, ll. 76–79):

But when, with eager steps, from hence I rise,
 And view the first gay scenes of Paradise;
 What tongue, what words of rapture can express
 A vision so profuse of pleasantness.

The *sight* of Paradise that Milton was able to picture with words is deemed superior to “Old Spenser” (Addison 1914:31) whose *Faerie Queene* is criticised, earlier in the poem (ll.17–31), for its convoluted allegories, overt moral lessons and superficial landscape descriptions:

The long-spun allegories fulsome grow,
 While the dull moral lies too plain below.
 We view well-pleas’d at distance all the sights
 Of arms and palfreys, battles, fields and fights,
 And damsels in distress, and courteous knights.
 But when we look too near, the shades decay,
 And all the pleasing landscape fades away.

The phrase used to describe that lovely sight, “profuse of pleasantness” (l. 79), echoes

Milton himself (*PL* 8.286)¹, and used again by Addison to describe (English) liberty as “profuse of bliss” (l. 120) during his year-long visit to Italy in 1701, captured in his poem *Letter from Italy* (1705), to which I shall return. Addison was clearly enchanted by the *locus amoenus* quality of Paradise and of political freedom. For Addison, Milton’s landscape was no mere means to an allegorical end, but a place that, in the experience of *itself*, brought pleasure. Whereas Spenser’s landscapes were, for Addison at least, puzzles of meaning that demanded intellectual analysis, Milton’s landscape was experienced *as a landscape* – viewed in the imagination.

8.1.1 Views in the mind

This enjoyment of a *place pictured within the mind*, as described in Chapter 1, became the subject for a well-known series of essays in the *Spectator* from 21 June, 1712 (No. 411) to 25 June (No. 414), published shortly after his essays on Milton.² Writing on the ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’, Addison applied the empirical theory of perception to aesthetics: These inner images, made upon our immediate sight of the world, provide us with the “Primary Pleasures of the Imagination” (*The Spectator* No. 411). The “Secondary Pleasures of the Imagination” are derived when the mind sees things *not* immediately in sight, but conjured by memory (like when a smell prompts us to see a place once visited), or when something fictional is envisioned (like when picturing a scene whilst reading).³ When the primary sight of something evokes the secondary sight of another, a double pleasure is had.

8.1.2 The moral ends of cultivated participation

The ability to participate with an object – and by extension landscapes – in this manner, can be *cultivated*, for which his theory (of participation) is worthy to quote at length:

A Man of a Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue. He meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the World, as it were in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind (*The Spectator* No. 411).

¹ The phrase ‘profuse of...’ is taken from Milton himself (Davis 2015:251, fn. 54), in Adam’s account of his birth in a *locus amoenus* (*PL* 8.286–287) and in the description of the Garden of Eden (*PL* 4.243) – in both instances, Milton uses the term to express nature, pulsating with life.

² He had already written a version of his argument by 1690 (Batty 2005:191).

³ For Addison and the other empiricists, even such fictive images are based on things once seen by the eyes. For example, if you were to imagine a tree when reading about it, that image is still made-up from your experience of seeing physical trees.

This cultivation of participation was, for Addison, no mere means to frivolous delight, but essential to the cultivation of a complete “moral subject” (Axelsson 2009:147) – a means towards virtue – contrasted with the “Vulgar” individual who cannot perceive with a richness and density of associations: “The distinction presents an explicit vision of the *kind of moral subject that is brought into being through the introspective practice of the imagination*” (Axelsson 2009:160; my italics). Addison’s argument for the moral-building effect of participation was, according to Axelsson (2009:164) a novel contribution to the history of aesthetics.

8.1.3 A dreamscape: a landscape view of virtue

This virtue of aesthetic experience through the cultivation of “fine taste” (Axelsson 2009:154) was explicitly nurtured in *The Spectator*, befitting its stated aim of improving the “morals and manners” (Kinsley 1967:482) of its large and diverse group of readers who “shared a mutual need for moral guidance” (Axelsson 2009:147).⁴ Yet, Addison did not seek to merely propagate the bleak morality of the Puritans, but wished to cultivate a more cultured, urbane, sophisticated and cheerful view: “I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit,⁵ and to temper Wit with Morality” as stated in one of the earlier editions (No. 10). Applied to the perception of landscapes, Addison promoted both the moral *and* pleasurable dimensions of gardens, both cultivated, in part, by the language of classical mythology. Landscapes were seen as *views* processed within the individual mind, and individual participation could be *cultivated* towards moral edification. To some extent, his vision of landscape was a synthesis of the moralising landscapes of Spenser, and the vast views of Milton. Addison freed Milton’s landscape vision from the prelapsarian disclaimers by regarding aesthetic pleasure as a moral good. I interpret this as a further move towards a moralising topomythopoiesis, by legitimising the aesthetics of classical topomythopoiesis in the pursuit of virtue in Protestant England.

This vision was expressed in the description of a dream described in a letter to Mr. Spectator⁶ published in issue No. 514. In the dream, the author (signed simply as “I”, but

⁴ It must be noted that his influence and the popularity of *The Spectator* waned by the mid-eighteenth century (Axelsson 2009:152)

⁵ The definition of the word ‘wit’ as used in the eighteenth century is quite elusive. For this context, Addison was using it more or less to denote human understanding and knowledge, with a benevolent and cheerful disposition. Such a demeanour safeguards the educated person to become an arrogant ‘know-it-all’. Yet, he advised that wit must be kept in place by a serious regard for morals. For a full discussion, see Aronson (1948).

⁶ A character written by Addison and co-author Richard Steele.

probably Addison himself),⁷ describes his journey through a landscape, after having been lulled asleep by Virgil's *Georgics*, culminating in his ascent of Parnassus where he sees with the kind of cultivated sight mentioned before. Below follows a series of extracts (all from *Spectator* No. 514, unless otherwise indicated) from the letter, which will each introduce a different aspect of Addison's approach to topomythopoiesis, which in turn reflects that of the Augustan age.

The pleasure of association

From the very onset of the dream it can be gathered that Addison and the like-minded eighteenth century garden dweller received landscapes as *views* brought into relation with imagined scenes of Arcadia:

Methought I was on a sudden plac'd in the Plains of *Boeotia*, where at the end of the Horizon I saw the Mountain *Parnassus* rising before me. The Prospect was of so large an Extent, that I had long wander'd about to find a Path which should directly lead me to it, had I not seen at some distance a Grove of Trees, which in a Plain that had nothing else remarkable enough in it to fix my Sight, immediately determined me to go thither.

The perception of landscapes as internalised *views* ('prospect', 'sight'), following the popularisation of the early eighteenth century empirical theory of perception (by Addison amongst others) heralded a shift in landscape design that was to consider a design as a composition – the whole over the parts. From the *sight* of a landscape the primary pleasure can be gained. If that image evokes another, the secondary pleasure can follow. Landscapes were thought of as pictures, like those seen in the camera obscuras, or through the 'Claude glasses'. Pleasure was found in the mental process of comparing the seen image with remembered pictures: a garden may correspond with imagined natural or man-shaped landscapes, or vice versa. One source for such an association of images, Addison thought, was that of classical mythology. In Homer, Ovid and Virgil (as in Milton), Addison found *pictures* of Arcadia, each different according to its ancient author's propensity to capture one of the three characteristics of images that stir pleasure, namely greatness, beauty and strangeness (*Spectator* No. 417):

⁷ I base this inference on the fact that Addison admitted in *Spectator* (No. 542) to invent some of the letter writers that submitted to the journal, in the same way that they created fictional people like Sir Roger de Coverley: "I must therefore inform these Gentlemen, that I often chuse this way of casting my Thoughts into a Letter". Another bit of 'evidence' is found in the letter itself, where the author writes: "among which, methoughts, I saw some of my own Writing" when seeing an old peasant leading people up to the throne of Apollo. He was presumably referring to his own writing, which he indeed deemed as guidance for those ascending the path of learning. For a full discussion on Addison's role in *The Spectator*, and his use of letters written under *noms de plumes*, see Kinsley (1967).

The first [Homer] strikes the Imagination wonderfully with what is Great, the second [Virgil] with what is Beautiful, and the last [Ovid] with what is Strange. Reading the *Iliad* is like travelling through a Country uninhabited, where the Fancy is entertained with a thousand Savage Prospects of vast Desarts, wide uncultivated Marshes, huge Forests, mis-shapen Rocks and Precipices. On the contrary, the *Aeneid* is like a wel [sic] ordered Garden, where it is impossible to find out any Part unadorned, or to cast our Eyes upon a single Spot, that does not produce some beautiful Plant or Flower. But when we are in the *Metamorphoses*, we are walking on enchanted Ground, and see nothing but Scenes of Magick lying round us.

Thus, when the *cultivated* garden visitor sees a view containing a grotto, mound, grove or statue, he can take pleasure from the sight, and then again by bringing into the imagination his prospect of Arcadia as a collage of images assembled from the ancient and other authors.

The importance of a dense representational network

According to Locke's empirical understanding of perception that influenced Addison, these virtual pictures can only be formed from things 'out there' received as food for the imagination (1.1.3). Thus, the internal visualisation of, say, Homer is assembled from prior experience: the virtual landscape is constructed from fragments of the physical landscape (seen in situ, or in representations), stored within the private recesses of the mind. The ability to picture Arcadia not only requires wide reading, but wide travelling and keen observation of actual places (to densify the representational network). Reading, appreciating art and travelling thus became, for the (wealthy) eighteenth century garden dweller, necessary pursuits to cultivate politeness⁸ and pleasurable pictorial participation:

When he is stored with Country Images, if he would go beyond Pastoral, and the lower kinds of Poetry, he ought to acquaint himself with the Pomp and Magnificence of Courts. He should be very well versed in every thing that is noble and stately in the Productions of Art, whether it appear in Painting or Statuary, in the great Works of Architecture which are in their present Glory, or in the Ruins of those which flourished in former Ages (No. 417).

For Addison, the virtual landscape – seen while reading – may be even more vivid than the sight of physical places: “Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of Things themselves” (No. 416). This implies that, even though the sights of actual places provide us with the ‘materials’ for the virtual landscape, their assemblage in verbal language leads to a landscape that exceeds the material. Following this, we may venture to state that the English landscape garden was

⁸ Lord Shaftesbury was influential, together with Addison, in promoting a way of life amongst the aristocracy (that equally appealed to the middle classes) in which art appreciation and other cultural activities were not undertaken *merely* for pleasure. Rather, such pursuits were thought to cultivate a genteel, polite and elite society in which culture is not separated from the moral-building of the self (Mortensen 1994).

created to evoke the *secondary* vision of the virtual landscape; the physical landscape with its topomythopoeic fragments is merely the doorway into Arcadia itself.

This participation by picture-association, did not entail the analysis of narratives: the garden dweller was rarely confronted with a metamyth (as at Villa Lante) or extended thematic ensembles (as at Versailles), but rather with prompts that open up the doors for private enchantment, shaped by their private representational networks: “imaginative transformations of the everyday world, producing meaning in terms of private association rather than shared understanding” (Myers 2013:16–17). Stated in the terms of the theoretical framework of this thesis: the material landscape evokes private, pictorial participation with the virtual landscape, thus becoming enchanted.

Morphological types (not banished)

In the dream-vision, T leaves the wide scope of the landscape in view (with its distant Parnassus) to enter a silent grove:

... a great Number of Walks and Alleys, which often widened into beautiful Openings, as Circles or Ovals, set round with Yews and Cypresses, with Niches, Grotto's, and Caves placed on the Sides...

The circular and oval-shaped clearings in the grove differentiate this from the later eighteenth century Brownian naturalised clumps of trees. It recalls those in Dezallier D'Argenville and the *bosques* designed for Versailles by Le Nôtre. The latter influenced a semi-natural grove in England, namely the Wray (or Ray) Wood at Castle Howard. Its woodland was planned and planted between 1701 and 1715 according to the designs of, amongst others, architect Nicolas Hawksmoor (1661–1736) who made sketches for rustic, spatial grottoes (Figure 8.1), cascades and serpentine streams (Jeffery 2005). A later plan (Figure 8.2) shows the wood, bounded by fortress-like walls, containing the juxtaposition of geometric elements (straight paths and circular clearings) with winding walks and scattered trees. The woodland was inhabited by a range of topomyths befitting the setting: “statues of Diana, Apollo [Figure 8.3], sybils, and Neptune” (Hunt 1992:37) and temples of Venus and the Four Winds. The topomythopoeia has been interpreted by Hunt (*ibid.*) as an “... imitation or representation of nature, but with the full vocabulary and syntax of Renaissance forms mingling with the native, indigenous trees” – the gods and their haunts were not regarded as antithetical to nature, but a means of expressing it. Hawksmoor's conceit for mythical sculptures in the wood was directly derived from Virgil and Ovid, possibly influenced by Stephen Switzer, and a vision supported by the owner of Wray Wood, Charles Howard, third Earl of Carlisle (1669–1738) (Jeffery 1995:40). Thus, although the taste for natural landscapes was gaining ground, places like Wray Wood and T's dream-grove still included the statue and spatial types of classical topomythopoeisis.

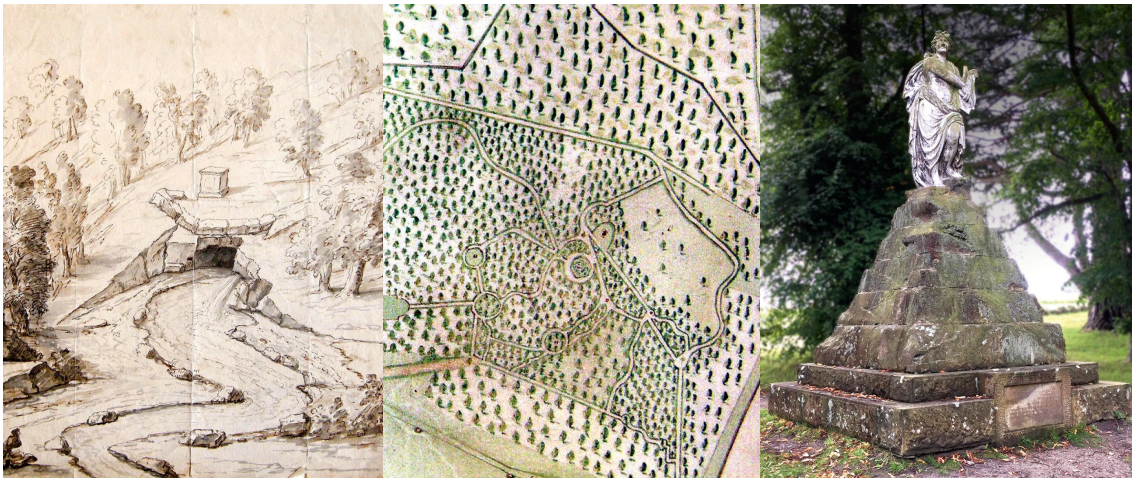


Figure 8.1. Left: Nicholas Hawksmoor, design for a rustic, spatial grotto and serpentine stream at Wray Wood, Castle Howard, Yorkshire, c. 1705 (Jeffery 2018:39, reproduced by kind permission of Wilton House).

Figure 8.2. Centre: John Turner, estate map of Castle Howard, 1773; cropped (Jeffery 2018:50). The drawing shows a naturalised woodland with a number of clearings connected by paths; red dots indicated positions for sculptures like Apollo (from the Castle Howard Archive, reproduced by kind permission of the Howard family).

Figure 8.3. Right: Henri Naudald, statue of Apollo on rough-hewn, pyramidal pedestal, c. 1705–1709 (Jeffery 2018:54). The statue used to stand atop a hill, further strengthening the Parnassian association made explicit by the mountain-like pedestal (carved with a relief of mountain scenery).

Cultivating virtue

T finds the grove an apt setting for deep contemplation and moral improvement. It is presided over by three allegorical deities,⁹ or “Divinities of the Place”: Solitude, Silence and Contemplation, signifying the ontology of the grove as a place for moral edification:

Surely, said I, there can nothing enter here but Virtue and virtuous Thoughts: The whole Wood seems design’d for the Reception and Reward of such Persons as have spent their Lives according to the Dictates of their Conscience and the Commands of the Gods.

In this state of virtue, the reveller reveals a longing for a Golden Age during the “Reign of *Saturn*, when none entered here but holy Priests...” suggesting that the vision also evokes the ancient cultic sites. This attests to the garden-philosopher of the eighteenth century’s awareness that the topomyths had their origins in settings for ritual, discussed in Chapter 3. Yet, Contemplation warns that the spiritual grove is sometimes infiltrated by Lust:

But the most frequent Intruder we have is *Lust*, who succeeds now the Deity to whom in better Days this Grove was entirely devoted. *Virtuous Love*, with *Hymen*, and the Graces attending him, once reign’d over this happy Place; a whole Train of Virtues waited on him, and no dishonourable Thought durst presume for Admittance...

This warning is a reminder that the eighteenth century garden ideal shared with (and

⁹ This is a good example of Addison’s preference for direct allegories, over convoluted ones: Silence, Contemplation and Solitude are direct personifications of the manners in which one ought to inhabit the grove.

was informed by) Spenser and Milton's nostalgic topomyths that harked back to a prelapsarian paradise untainted by lust.

Simple allegories

The above interpretation of a topomyth, where Hymen (the god of marriage) is dethroned by Lust, reveals another characteristic of Addison's 'theory' of topomythopoiesis, namely the preference for straightforward allegory, which Axelsson (2009:158; my italics) interprets as the very reason for Addison's success as an influential educator: "The pervasive influence arose from *moral simplicity and straightforward language*, both of which were essential for achieving the aim of general education leading to morality".

The dream-vision is filled with such transparent allegorical figures that concretise the moral tale: Diligence is a guide that helps those reach the summit of Parnassus who lack natural talent, Vanity promises a shortcut; a nymph named Fancy is judged for the "unbecoming Ornaments" of her dress... these are not the mysterious *symbola* of the Neoplatonists, nor the convoluted allegories of the Renaissance emblematisers.

In his *Dialogues on the Usefulness of Antient Medals* (1726), Addison explicitly argues against the "obfuscation of meaning" (Kelley 1983:29) and the tendency of interpreters of emblems to look for meaning deeply, when it lies at the surface: "This is certainly a much surer way than to build on the interpretations of an author who does not consider how the ancients used to think, but will be still inventing mysteries and applications out of his own fancy" (Addison 1726:32).

Addison illustrates his point by satirising the way that a "mystical antiquary" (1726:33) finds hidden meanings in ancient emblems, when the real meaning is much more evident and simple. He uses the example of a shield on the back of a coin showing an emperor: the shield, as in some ancient poets, simply (and obviously) signifies "protection or defence" (ibid.), yet the antiquary finds all sorts of hidden messages: the circle of the shield denotes perfection, for Aristotle said a circle is perfect! (It is the same distaste that Addison and his predecessors showed for excessive ornament in dress, manners and gardens). Rather, Addison promoted the use of "natural allegories" (Kelley 1983:29) whose meaning can be simply derived from pictures.

The implication for topomythopoiesis was that garden designers under Addison's influence did not abandon the inclusion of the gods and their settings, but did not attempt to create complex *concetti* or metamyths that demanded a cerebral untangling of their meaning. Rather, they opted to use the topomyths to signify meanings that could be easily deduced (by the well-read), in addition to evoking mental images; exegetic *and* pictorial participation.

Another example from Gilpin's dialogue at Stowe will serve as an example of how eighteenth century garden dwellers participated in this kind of direct allegoresis (Figure 8.4), although Stowe later became known for its overwrought emblematicism. After Calloph identifies the Temple of Ancient Virtue,¹⁰ it is admired by Polypth, who then notices a structure nearby in ruin,¹¹ and announces proudly his achievement of 'getting it':

O! I see the whole Design: A very elegant Piece of Satyr, upon my Word! This pompous Edifice is intended, I suppose, to represent the flourishing Condition, in which ancient Virtue still exists; and those poor shattered Remains of what has never been very... are designed to let us see the ruinous State of decayed modern Virtue. And the Moral is, that Glory founded upon true Worth and Honour, will exist, when Fame, built upon Conquest and popular Applause, will fade away (Gilpin 1976:21).

Although allegorically complex for later tastes, the message remains directly deducible from the topomyths, as Addison would have it. Indeed, the very conceit was based on yet another dream vision of his, predating the one by T, published in *The Tatler* (No. 123),¹² in which he walks along a straight path in a grove and encounters Temples of Virtue and Honour, the latter emulated at Stowe as the Temple of British Worthies (Orestano 2005:53–54), an exedra containing busts of, amongst others, Milton, Elizabeth I and Pope.

Cultivating seeing

T's dream ends with him reaching the summit of Parnassus where he could enjoy the "full Prospect of that delightful Region" lying between the twin peaks of Parnassus and Helicon; the valley of the Muses overlooked by Apollo on his throne shaded by a laurel. Joining them are Homer, Virgil and Milton, who sat looking down at the "Maze of Life" wherein mortals with their "infinite Cares and Anxieties" were torn away from the "Path of Virtue" that lead to Parnassus. Thus, for Addison, topomythopoeic participation, cultivated by an education built on the classical and English myths, is a means to ascend from the chaos of life.

In summary, Addison's ideas shaped eighteenth century topomythopoesis as ocular-centric, free from obtuse allegory and limited to fragments of Arcadia amidst wilder scenery that opens the door for aesthetic flights of the private imagination as a moral-building pursuit.

¹⁰ A circular, domed temple (rotunda), based on the Temple of Vesta (or the Sibyl) at Tivoli (Figure 3.4), housing four ancient figures that represented virtue in different spheres of public life: Epaminondas (military), Lycurgus (law), Homer (poetry) and Socrates (philosophy).

¹¹ The ruinous state of contemporary virtue was a thinly veiled stab at then Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole due to his enactment of the Excise Bill in 1733 (Orestano 2005:51–51), which they deemed as a greedy imposition of tax, lacking virtue.

¹² *The Tatler* was a magazine running from 1709 to 1710, and mostly written by Richard Steele. It served as a prototype for the *The Spectator* founded by both Steele and Addison.



Figure 8.4. Jacques Rigaud, *View from the Queen's Theatre from the Rotunda*, c. 1739 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 42.79(7)). The drawing shows, as in others by Rigaud of English aristocratic landscapes, visitors that “involve themselves in the gardens, exploring, examining some item...” Hunt (2004:83).

8.1.4 Arcadia is in Italy, Augustus reigns in England

Addison’s mode of pictorial landscape participation – evoking a virtual landscape image (cultivated by poetry and experience) upon seeing the physical – is already witnessed earlier in his accounts of his travels to Italy published in 1705 in *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c., in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* and the poetic epistle *Letters from Italy* (1701) addressed to Lord Halifax. For example, in *Letters* he waxes lyrical about the landscape cultivated by a tradition of literary topomythopoeia, a landscape existing within a dense representational network:

For wheresoe’er I turn my ravish’d eyes,
 Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise.
 Poetick fields still encompass me around,
 And still I seem to tread on Classical ground;
 For here the Muse so oft her Harp has strung,
 That not a mountain rears its head unsung,
 Renown’d in verse each shady thicket grows,
 And every stream in heavenly numbers flow (Addison 1709).

Similarly, his description of the Italian countryside in *Remarks* was so drenched with evocations to Virgil’s landscape of the *Georgics*, that Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) complained that much of the work must have been “... written at home” (in Johnson, D.R. 1976:32) for its lack of direct observations. Horace Walpole sneered that “Mr. Addison travelled through

the poets, and not through Italy” (ibid.). Yet, as in his later *Spectator* essays, Addison was using aesthetic experience for a moral end. His poetic travels from the Italy seen in front of his eyes, into the imagined Italy of the Augustan Age (and from there into the Saturnian Golden Age), was meant to show how the old Roman landscape of Virgil, virtue and toil had become ruined and impoverished by tyrannical rule and corruption. This served as a cautionary tale for his English countrymen of the importance of defending their state of liberty (Johnson 1976).

Addison, like Milton, thus encountered in the *virtual* Italian countryside a vision of a virtuous, productive landscape, and went on to render his own ideals of a moralising garden after the exemplar of the pastoral *locus amoenus*, as so often throughout the history of classical topomythopoesis. Apart from his philosophical and dreamy musings mentioned earlier, he propagated his vision through the voice of an imaginary gentleman, Sir Roger De Coverley. Addison and his friend Richard Steele (1672–1729) created a fictional, literary garden for De Coverley. It contributed to Addison’s influence on the development of the English landscape garden (Batey 2005), described below from an account of a fictional visit by Mr Spectator:

This state of mind was I in, ravished with the murmurs of waters, the whispers of breezes, the singing of birds and whether I look up to the heavens or down to the earth or turned on the prospects around me still stands with a new sense of pleasure (*The Spectator* No. 118).

The somatic qualities of the *locus amoenus* (3.4.2) – murmuring streams, breezes, birdsong – has its roots in the prototypical, literary topomyths of Homer’s *The Odyssey*: the gardens outside Calypso’s cave (5.55) and that of Alcinous (7.112). The latter was translated to English by Addison’s then friend, Alexander Pope (1688–1744), in an essay published in *The Guardian* (No. 173, 1713) as exemplary of the type of garden propagated by the ancients that “consist intirely of the useful part of horticulture, fruit-trees, herbs, water...”. He relates this to his own estate which elicited unexpected praise from a visitor he hosted for its “amiable simplicity and unadorned nature that spreads over the mind a more noble sort of tranquility, and a loftier sensation, than can be raised by the nicer scenes of art” (Pope 1713:496).

This rustic ideal is contrasted with the prevailing taste for artificial gardens, oft in the Dutch manner: “We seem to make it our study to recede from nature, not only in the various tonsure¹³ of greens into the most regular and formal shapes, but even in monstrous attempts beyond the reach of art itself” (Pope 1713:498). Thus, he shared Addison’s developing taste for simple and unadorned landscapes and valued the ‘useful’ parts of gardening; farmland

¹³ Clipped.

was valued for its produce *and* scenery. Thus, this well-known shift towards the ‘informal’ gardens of the eighteenth century was as rooted in mythology as any ‘formal’ garden like Versailles.

Pope also shared Addison’s pictorial mode of participation that viewed landscape as a painting (Jacques 2016:34), that can be augmented by the imagination, for example in his *Epistle to Mr Jervas*:

Or seek some ruin’s formidable shade;
While fancy brings the vanish’d piles to view,
And builds imaginary *Rome* a-new.

Such virtual scenes he thought, like Addison, forms in the mind, cultivated by the myths: while translating the *Iliad* between 1715 and 1720 “he had developed the idea that Homer’s poetry contained word-pictures that could stimulate the imagination” (Jacques 2016:38).

Where did Pope and Addison’s advocacy for rustic and ocular-centric gardens, and the pleasures of the evocation of virtual topomyths, leave the visible representation of the gods? In a poem, Pope rails, not against statues, but the *misplacement* of them, which he deemed a signal of bad taste and even lack of virtue (in Hunt 1989:86):

Here Amphitrite¹⁴ sails through myrtle bowers;
There Gladiators fight, or die in flowers;
Un-watered see the drooping sea-horse mourn,
And swallows roost in Nilus’ dusty Urn (*Poems* 3.2).

In these examples, Pope highlights the incongruence between god and setting, a deficiency of (English) Augustan character. But how was the garden-maker to know the stern rules of virtuous topomythopoiesis? An answer was provided in a treatise that sought to outline the practical application of the ideas of Pope and Addison, namely Stephen Switzer’s (1682–1745) *Iconographia Rustica* (1718).

8.2 SWITZER & LANGLEY’S RULES

Switzer (1718:39) introduces his treatise with a brief history of garden design. He lauds the type of French view-centric design as promoted by D ezallier d’Argenville and practiced

¹⁴ Sea-goddess, wife of Poseidon.

under Louis XIV's reign,¹⁵ but also refers to Milton's description of the biblical paradise as a *locus amoenus* reflecting the "innocence and beauty of a country life" (Switzer 1718:52), setting the scene for a theory of gardening that accommodates both the 'formal' and the 'informal'. He was also conscious of his indebtedness to the Homeric gardens of Adonis and the Hesperides with the "beautiful idea's they had of the pleasures of gardening" (Switzer 1718:7). We thus see one of the first *conscious* attempts to position an approach to gardening within the historic tradition of classical topomythopoiesis. Proceeding to Roman gardens, he quotes from Virgil's description of the underworld (*Aeneid* 6.637) with its "verdant fields" and "groves in which we [happy souls] live" – a landscape which Switzer (1718:24) interprets as "not content with small and diminutive scenes of flowers, greens, etc. but still carrying and prolating them to distant woods and meadows". Thus, Switzer saw, in the virtual landscape of the Roman poets (Virgil specifically) and in a selection of the "august designs" (Switzer 1718:85) of the English nobility, a ruralesque landscape free from "trifling ornaments" (Switzer 1718:xix), noting how Augustus 'saved' Rome by "improvement of agriculture" (Switzer 1718:24) – Milton's vision was coming true.¹⁶ Switzer's ennoblement of farming lead him to coin the term *fermee ornée*, the ornamental farm. But, as for Pope, this Roman rustic revival did not exclude the gods, for they were brought into the fold of the practices of the Roman Augustan farmers:

The ancient *Attick* and *Roman* Worthies erected magnificent statues, and decreed annual honours to be paid to their *rural* and *hortensial* deities and the great Augustus, after the long scene of misery, and the dismal devastation of his country, thought it a matter of worthy pub lick inscription: *Rediit cultus in agris*¹⁷ (Switzer 1718:iv).

Thus, Switzer, who is regarded as one of the earliest proponents of the English landscape garden, by no means expelled the gods in favour of fields and forests only. He situated his work firmly within the Greco-Roman lineage of topomythopoiesis by harking back to the Augustan revival of the soilfast Roman ideal of honest farming and the restrained, disciplined life of the countryside – ritually tied to the rural gods. *There* was the life and spirit

¹⁵ Some authors have taken this to show that Switzer had little concern for politics. Thus, the old argument that the English landscape garden was born as a defiant stance against French absolutism is maybe exaggerated. However, Turner (1978) argues that, although Switzer lauded French garden design, he remained in opposition politically, manifesting itself in his own (influential) taste for a more simplistic and rustic approach to gardening.

¹⁶ Poets too looked towards imitating their Roman forebears, especially Virgil, associated with the moral reforms of Augustus – rules where formulated for a Neoclassical literary style. Yet, it must be noted that not everyone shared this reverence. For example, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, many associated Virgil's association with the 'dictator' Augustus as an irreconcilable political evil (Weinbrot 1978).

¹⁷ Cultivation returned to the fields.

of the faded Republic that became corrupted, later redeemed by Augustus and Virgil. Switzer was thus grafting a Roman political ideal into England's own Augustan age in defiance against the absolute monarchy of France (Turner 1978:494), without sending the gods to the guillotine.

Switzer (1718:xv), like the French garden theorists, took a positive stance on ancient statues, especially as signifiers of “valour and renown” and “heroism and virtue”. He dedicated chapter 10 of volume 1 to statues, and reveals his stance on the myths as being metaphors for morals:

Amongst the several methods made use of to convey the memorable actions and great personages of antiquity to these times, this of *statues* is not the least, being the most publick and durable memoirs of virtue, honour, and valour (Switzer 1718:310).

His ‘instruction’ to the garden dweller is to contemplate the topomyths to “extract many useful things for the conduct of his life” (Switzer 1718:310), not to be entertained as at Versailles. As for the contents of their signification, he left to “the skilful mythologist” (Switzer 1718:311) and their formal attributes to the “ingenious statuary” (*ibid.*) themselves, presuming he advocated for the mimesis of the ancient types. Rather, his business was to provide rules for their “local distribution, magnitude, and general proportion” (Switzer 1718:311).

8.2.1 Switzer's sermon

As for Dézallier D'Argenville and Pope, there is the underlying assumption that there is a *correct* manner to employ the statue types. Hence the need for *rules* which he presents by highlighting a number of typical mistakes of emblematic topomythopoiesis, which I interpret as a list of rules of congruence:¹⁸

Congruity of dignity

It is wrong when “noble personages” (Switzer 1718:312) of the main Olympian gods are placed in positions or with accessories that are not worthy of their rank, like Jupiter on a “little pedestal” or Mars with a “pike in his hand, like a foot-soldier” (*ibid.*). According to the first rule of congruence, these gods of war ought to be placed in the “largest open centres and lawns of a grand design, elevated upon pedestal columnial, and other architectural works...” (*ibid.*).

¹⁸ It is perhaps such rules that Hubbard & Kimball (1929:212) thought of when, in the twentieth century, they wrote: “First, as we have before said, the effect and suggestion of the statue must be congruous with its location”.

Incongruity of habitat

It is wrong when gods are placed in settings foreign to their habitat in Arcadia, for example, putting Pan in a flower garden, whilst the flower goddesses “... *Ceres* and *Flora* are the silent inhabitants of woods and groves” (ibid.). According to the second rule of congruence, the settings of the gods must befit their (obvious) environmental associations, for example, Neptune ought to be placed in the largest water body, and fauns and satyrs in the “more remote and rural centres and parts of the wood-work” (ibid.).

Incongruity of action and company

It is wrong when the gestured actions and the company of the gods conflict with the message they *ought* to signify. Switzer notes a specific dislike of statues that showcase the love-lives of the gods, for these stories, even though part of their biographies, belittles their more august characters. For example, he is wittily critical of “... *Mars* in his armorial¹⁹ array in his amour with *Venus*...” (ibid.) According to the third rule of congruence, Mars ought to be accompanied by Fame, and the niches of the architectonic setting with lesser gods or heroes of war, antique *and* modern.

Incongruity of size

It is wrong when the gods are mortalised by small size, and lowly placement. According to the fourth rule of congruence, Venus and her retinue in flower gardens “ought not to be too small, but bigger than the life, especially in large gardens, and elevated upon an accumulation of architecture and masonry” (Switzer 1918:314).

By following these rules, the topomythopoesis invites the garden dweller to derive moral instruction and pictorial associations from the gods and their supportive settings. Where Switzer’s approach differed from the reception of topomyths at Versailles, is in the simplicity and seriousness of the reception. The (idealised) participation with English Augustan topomythopoeia is marked by the solemn, beholding of figures that represent ancient virtue as exemplary for a post-Restoration England, not of the foibles and sexual follies of the gods, as frothed over by the ‘frivolous French’.

8.2.2 Langley’s rules

Ten years after Switzer’s treatise, the Englishman and gardener, Batty Langley (1696–1751) published *New Principles of Gardening, or, The Laying Out and Planting Parterres, Groves, Wildernesses, Labyrinths, Avenues, Parks, & c* in 1728 as a book to self-promote his own practice. The scope

¹⁹ Heraldic.

and spirit is similar to Dezallier D'Argenville's, promoting the use of the ha-ha to create distant views, and geometric patterns (Figure 8.5).²⁰

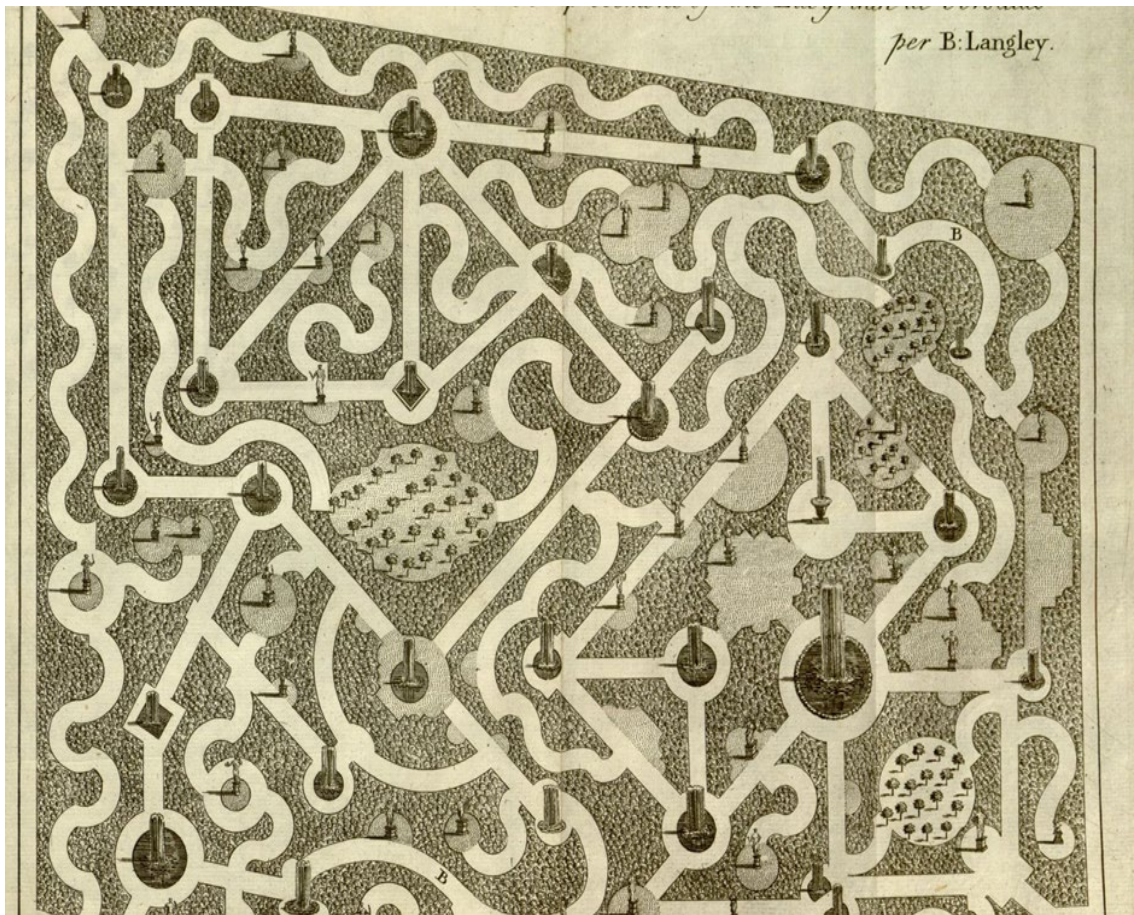


Figure 8.5. Thomas Bowles II (after Batty Langley), *An improvement of the Labyrinth at Versailles*, 1728; cropped (Langley 1728, Plate 8). The plan illustrates Langley's 'artificial' design language (see fn. 20), dotted with statues.

Of statues, he writes approvingly:

There is nothing [that] adds so much to the Beauty and Grandeur of Gardens, as fine Statues; and nothing more disagreeable, than when wrongly placed; as *Neptune* on a Terrace-Walk, Mount, &c. or *Pan*, the God of Sheep, in a large Basin, Canal, or Fountain. But to prevent such Absurdities, take the following Directions (Langley 1728:203).

Like Dézallier D'Argenville, he deems statuary as complimentary to nature and emphasises, like Switzer, the importance of their correct and appropriate location in relation to obvious god-place associations: Pan does not *belong* in the water. He then goes on to list, quite extensively, various settings with their appropriate gods, here and there with some

²⁰ His patterns were more irregular than those of D'Argenville – a wiggly irregularity that foreshadows the serpentine lines of the landscape garden movement. In *Principles*, Langley used the term “rural” to denote irregular lines (Langley 1728:11); in his earlier *Principles of Geometry* (1725), he demonstrates the setting-out of lines that he called the “running worm” (1725:32) and “artificial” (1725:38), forming the language of layout seen in his redesign of the labyrinth at Versailles (Figure 8.5).

narrative background: Neptune with fountains (Figure 8.6); Bacchus for the vineyard; Sylvanus and Diana for woods; Aeolus, God of the Winds and *Orcedes* Fairies of the Mountains for mounds (Figure 8.7); the river god Achelous with his cornucopia is fittingly illustrated on a cascade (Figure 8.8). If Switzer made the point that the gods must be placed in their native habitat, Langley informed the reader what these were. Incidentally, the *Orcedes* is an example of the addition of faeries to the family of Greco-Roman gods. In *The English Dictionarie: or, An Interpreter of Hard English Words* (Gent 1623:no pagination), they are listed under “Faeries” as “Faeries of the mountains”, together with “Naiades” as “Fairies of the waters”. The latter (taken from the Naiad nymphs) shows how, in English literature from around 1550 to 1640, authors presented beings like nymphs *as faeries* in their translations of Greco-Roman myths (Hutton 2014:1151) – we thus see the borders between Arcadia and Fairyland blurring in English culture at the time.

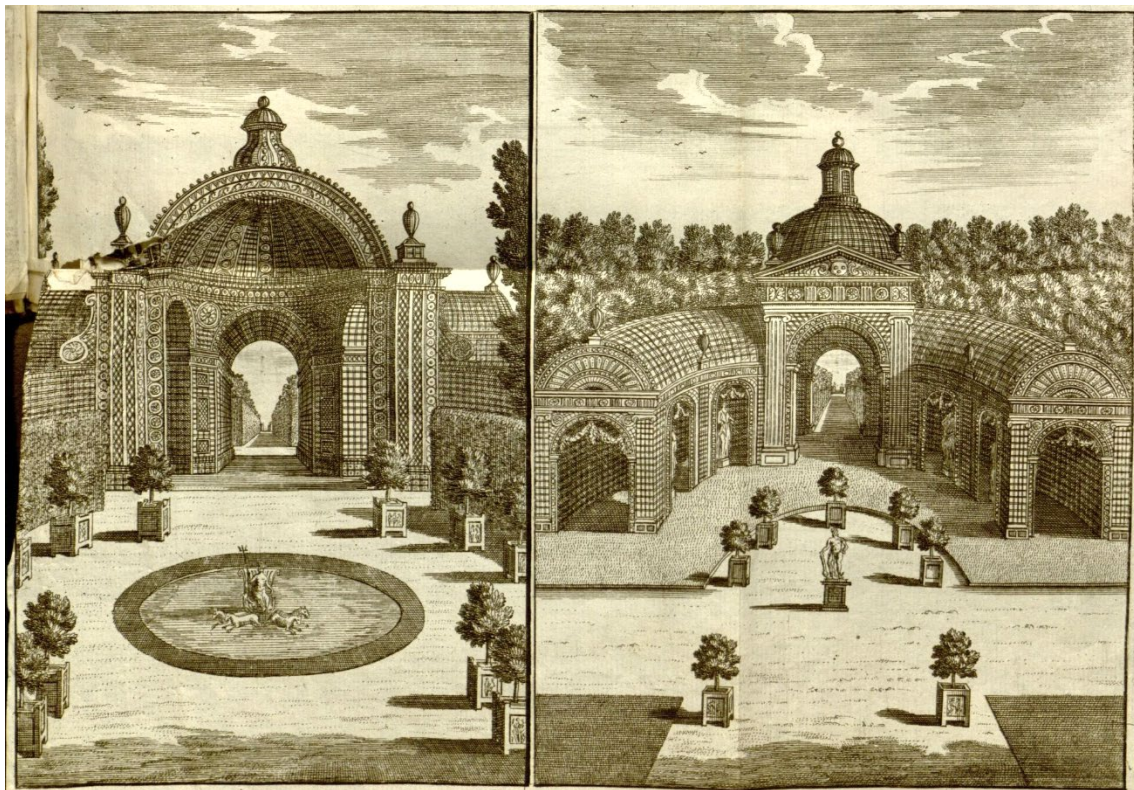


Figure 8.6. Thomas Bowles II (after Batty Langley), *Frontispieces of Trellis Work for the Entrances, Into Temples of View, Arbors, Shady Walks etc.*, 1728; cropped (Langley 1728, Plate 18). The circular pool (on the left) contains a Neptune, and to the right a Hercules with club.

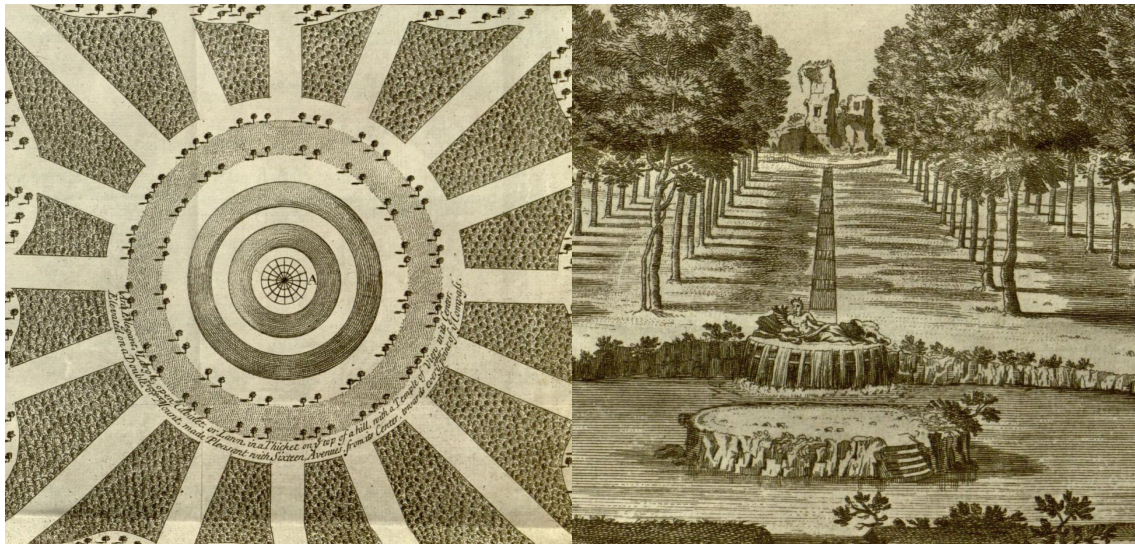


Figure 8.7. Left: Thomas Bowles II (after Batty Langley), ... *Double Terrace or Mount...*, 1728; cropped (Langley 1728, Plate 16). The proposal for an artificial, terraced mound includes a temple at the top.

Figure 8.8. Right: Thomas Bowles II (after Batty Langley), *An avenue in perspective terminated with the ruins of an ancient building in the Roman manner*, 1728 (Langley 1728, Plate 22; cropped). The cascading fountain is adorned with a reclining figure with cornucopia, probably a river god.

8.3 CASTELL'S TEMPLES IN FIELDS

As Switzer's first rule of congruence suggests, the gods were often placed in *faux* temples, not a spatial type common in earlier topomythopoiesis, but very much characteristic of the landscape gardens of the early eighteenth century. This too reverts to Roman farms.

The English ideal of the Roman villa, held by Switzer, was also propagated by Lord Burlington (Hunt 1996:194), who financed Robert Castell's *The Villas of the Ancients Illustrated* (1728).²¹ Castell (1728:89) stated that ancient Roman villas, like those at Laurentinum and Tuscum described in the letters of Pliny the Younger, contained parts that were an "imitation of the country"; *ruris imitatio*.²² Yet, Castell's depiction of the landscape (Figure 8.9 & Figure 8.11) was fictional (since no archaeological evidence existed) and was a collage of his pictorial memories of the eighteenth century Italian landscape with its "isolated temples and fields" (Hunt 1996:194), "lines of cypress trees" (Hunt 1996:194–195) and Italian gardens with their "groves, temples set on islands",²³ and other parts taken from his native English countryside. Ironically, the ruined landscape of Italy that Addison saw as a civilization in ruin, inspired an

²¹ As Liu (2019:247) shows, Castell was not the first modern to try and translate and reconstruct Pliny's garden descriptions. Examples include Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548–1616) who published a study on Pliny in 1615, entitled *L'Idée de l'architecture universelle* and Jean-François Félibien (son of André, c. 1658–1733) published a study in 1699 (with gardens looking straight from a page from Dézallier D'Argenville).

²² The quote relates specifically to the Tuscum villa. On the plan layout of the Tuscum villa, one part is labelled as "The imitation of some face of the country, in the garden" (Castell 1728:126).

²³ For example, the 'maritime theatre' at Hadrian's villa.

image that was mimicked as an exemplar of ancient Roman virtue!

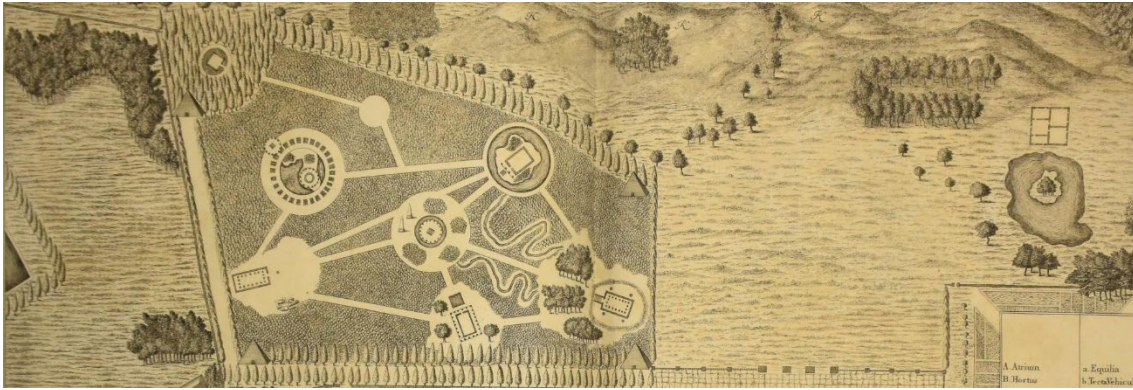


Figure 8.9. Robert Castell, *Laurentinum*, 1728; cropped (Castell 1728:54–55). Note the peripteral temples and tholos in the centre. Compare circular forest clearings, connected by straight walks, with Wray Wood (Figure 8.2).

The farming activities of Pliny’s villa were coupled with the rural deities of Rome (mentioned by Switzer), and thus enforced the inclusion of “temples to Ceres, Flora, Bacchus, Luna, Sol, Jupiter, and Venus (goddess of gardens). At such points the practical business and the mental suggestions of a garden coincide, and the authority for the disposition of similar structures in gardens at Stowe, Stourhead, Rousham, and Chiswick is advanced” (Hunt 1989:100).

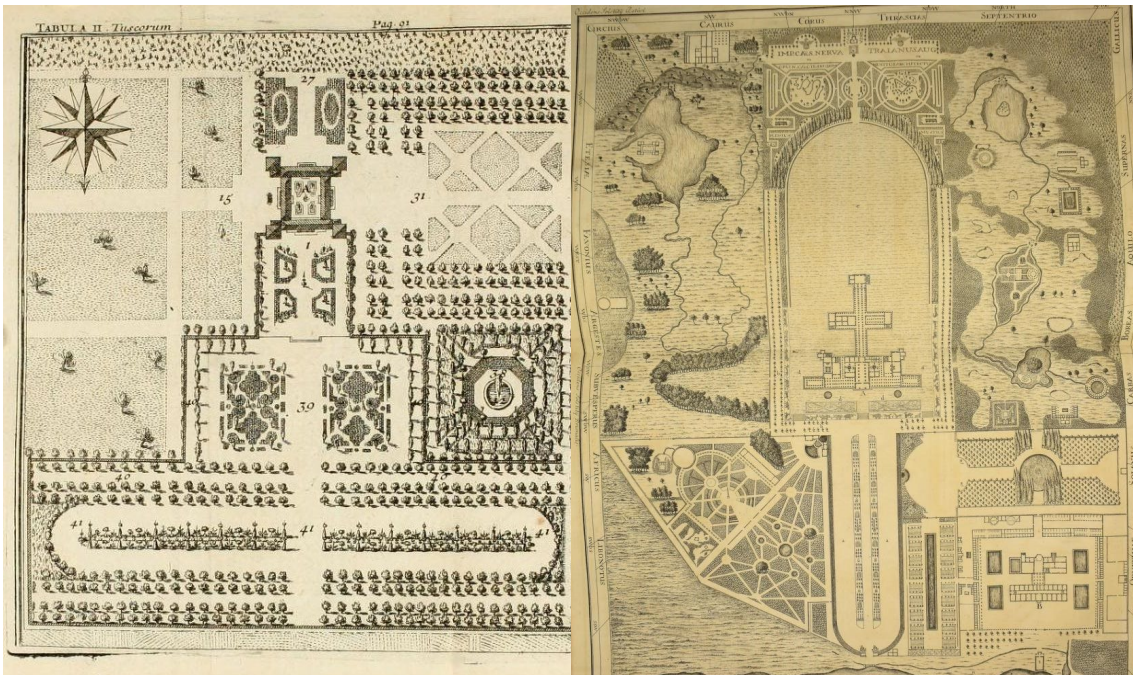


Figure 8.10. Left: André Félibien, *Tuscorum*, 1699 (Félibien 1699:91, Plate 2). Félibien’s reconstruction of Pliny’s Tuscum villa (as an ancient authority) is clearly in the French, formal manner.

Figure 8.11. Robert Castell, *Tuscum*, 1728 (Castell 1728:126–127). Castell’s reconstruction of Pliny’s Tuscum villa (as an ancient authority) is structured formally around the main buildings, but includes naturalised areas around the scattered temples on the outer edges of the landscape.

For Castell (and Switzer), productive gardening and iconography are not mutually exclusive ideals (as is sometimes assumed today). Castell’s main ambition was to publish an

English translation of Vitruvius, which he never did before dying in prison. However, the Pliny translations (his letters of his villas in Tuscum and Laurentinum) with their illustrations can be interpreted as the landscape equivalent of Vitruvius: as he (and Palladio) were authoritative voices for the architects of Augustan England, Pliny's own villa gardens – as interpreted by Castell – provided a precedent of a physical (beyond merely poetical) garden, leading to the commonplace of “temples scattered within groves” (Hunt 1996:196), a sight familiar to the Grand Tourists (ibid.). Other promoted temples too, for example Thomas Whately (with his preference for expressive over emblematic scenery) advocated the inclusion of temples, albeit with a disclaimer: such buildings must be useful, mostly for retreat, and not merely ornamental (Whately 1777:120–121). He favourably describes a temple of Bacchus at Painshill (Figure 8.12)²⁴ and lauds the “Arcadian scene” created by a Temple of Pan at Enfield Chase (Whately 1777:129–130).

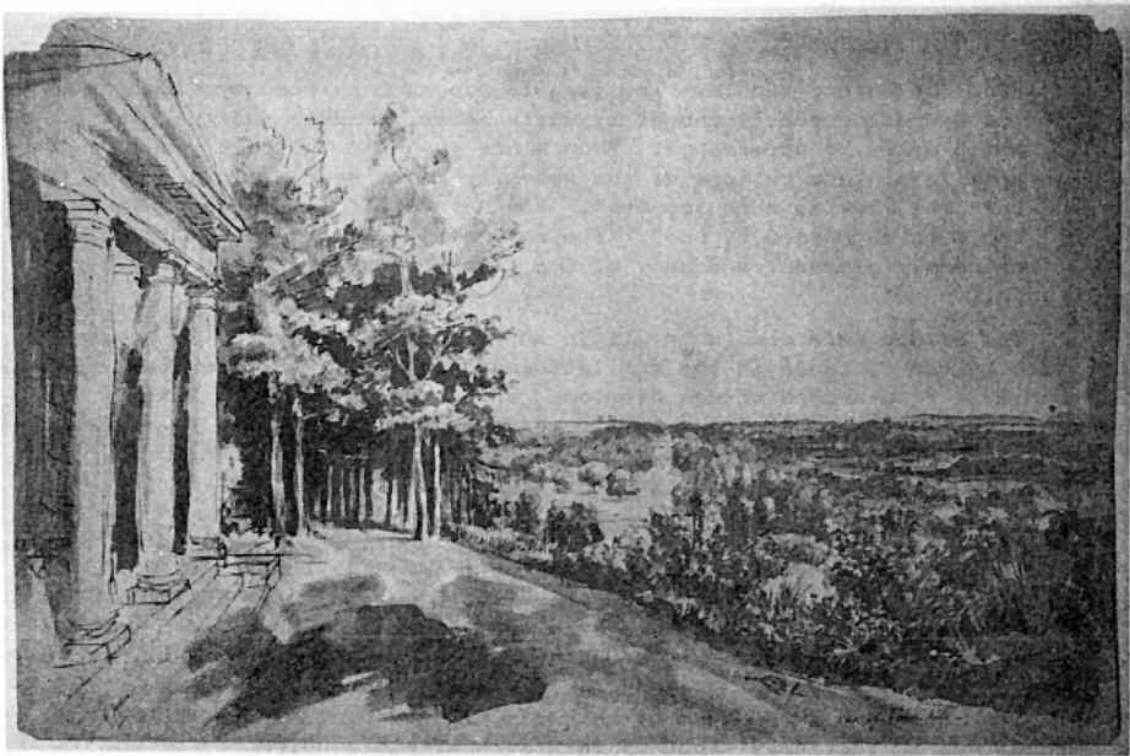


Figure 8.12. Elias Martin, *View From the Temple of Bacchus, Gothic Temple in Middle Distance*, Painshill Park, Surrey, c. 1770 (Hodges 1973:50).

He specifically mentions the “grace and dignity” (Whately 1777:129) of the Greek style: buildings in the classical orders were summoned for their associations of virtue and antiquity (Jacques 2017:298).²⁵ Yet, even such expressive associations demanded some knowledge of

²⁴ The temple was built c. 1762 and designed by architect Thomas Hardwick for Hon. Charles Hamilton (who brought the statue placed inside from his Grand Tour). The temple was recently restored.

²⁵ Yet another reason for the inclusion of temples in gardens, was that paintings such as those by Claude Lorraine, served as inspiration for garden scenery (Jacques 2017:235).

Greco-Roman mythology.

8.4 JOSEPH SPENCE

8.4.1 Polymetis

The garden design treatises of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – Mollet, Dezallier D’Argenville, Switzer, Langley – codified the rules for topomythopoiesis, specifically in terms of the correct geometric placement of mythical figures and the rules of congruence between character and setting.

Yet, as Switzer admitted of his own, the treatises provided little instruction on the appearance and meaning of the gods and heroes. As already noted, this was because such concerns were left to the garden owners (based on their statue collections and literary taste), the artists and garden visitors. These participants were not left unguided and looked towards emblem books and mythographies to guide the conception, expression and reception of topomythopoeia. Whereas Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* and guidebooks à la Félibien served this purpose in Italy and France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Englishmen of the mid-eighteenth century found guidance on the expression and reception of topomythopoiesis in Joseph Spence’s *Polymetis: An Enquiry concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists* published in 1747 (with a second edition printed in 1755). There was seemingly a need “to learn the languages of classical mythology” (Hunt 1992:125) in response to what Spence identified as a decline in classical literacy “... due to the prevailing taste of the present age; in which, we of this country at least, seem to be not near so much inclined to profound reading, as we were a half century ago...” (1747:iv). Whereas Addison and company could rely on their literacy, garden owners and dwellers from the mid-century increasingly needed a *guide*. Thus, *Polymetis* became widely read, reprinted twice and even abridged for use in schools going through six editions.

The book, written after extensive travels in Italy, sought to relate ancient texts to works of art (*ut pictura poesis*). It takes the form of a series of dialogues between Polymetis and his esteemed friends in a “rather wild” (Spence 1747:2) garden with views to the countryside, following the “taste in fashion” (ibid.). Within the gardens are temples containing Polymetis’s statue collection brought from Italy. He did not seek to emulate Ripa,²⁶ but rather criticized him (and other Renaissance emblematisers), and called to ‘return to the sources’ in Dialogue 18:

The reason why I think the allegories of the ancients might be serviceable to our modern artists and

²⁶ Kelley (1983) has pointed out the irony of his criticism, as Ripa was, in fact, one of the emblematisers that provided the greatest clarity in its meaning with his textual interpretations.

poets in general, is founded on the *clearness and simplicity* usually to be met in the former; and the *confusion and darkness* that is but too common in the latter, in their allegorical or imaginary begins (Spence 1755:292; my italics).

This preference for clarity of allegory was also promoted, as discussed before, by Addison, but also the influential Lord Shaftesbury. They had both argued for a “simpler, more sense-oriented” (Kelley 1983:29) allegorical language than that found in the Renaissance emblem books: upon sight of, say a statue, the meaning must be inherent to the mental picture formed within the beholder. This led to a topomythopoiesis that, today, may be called ‘literal’ in a design studio. For example, Polymetis divulges his unrealised plan for a garden-space denoting hell: a dark wood at the bottom of a slope, reached by an ever-narrowing path leading downwards into the darkness, terminating in a barren, dark grotto filled with gods from the underworld (Spence 1755:3). It is a topomythopoiesis of spatial atmospheres that relate *directly and somatically* to the virtual landscape it evokes, not by means of mysterious rungs on a Neoplatonic ladder (*a la* Taegio) or intricate web of intellectual references (*a la* Perrault). To avoid the modern ‘confusion’ in the interpretation of works of ancient art, Spence (1755:285) advises that the elucidation of symbolism requires a return to ancient sources, not Renaissance or contemporary interpretations. Following this premise, Spence sought to show his readers how an encounter with a statue-god can involve participation that is cultivated by commentaries on the god writ by the ancient poets – an instruction on analytical participation. His analytical (almost Aristotelean) approach informed the very organisation of the statue collection, the “mob of [Roman] deities” (Spence 1755:2), which is not informed by a metamyth or thematic narratives, but by a taxonomy of six “classes” (ibid.): gods of the sky (and human morality and mind), fire (in the form of the sun and stars), wind and air, water, earth and planets (coupled with the constellations and the seasons). Following his classification, Polymetis takes his visitors on a tour of the various statues. In the seventh dialogue, they encounter Venus in the Rotunda with the other twelve celestial (Olympian) gods, immediately identified as a “copy of the famous Venus of Medici” (1747:65; Figure 8.13).

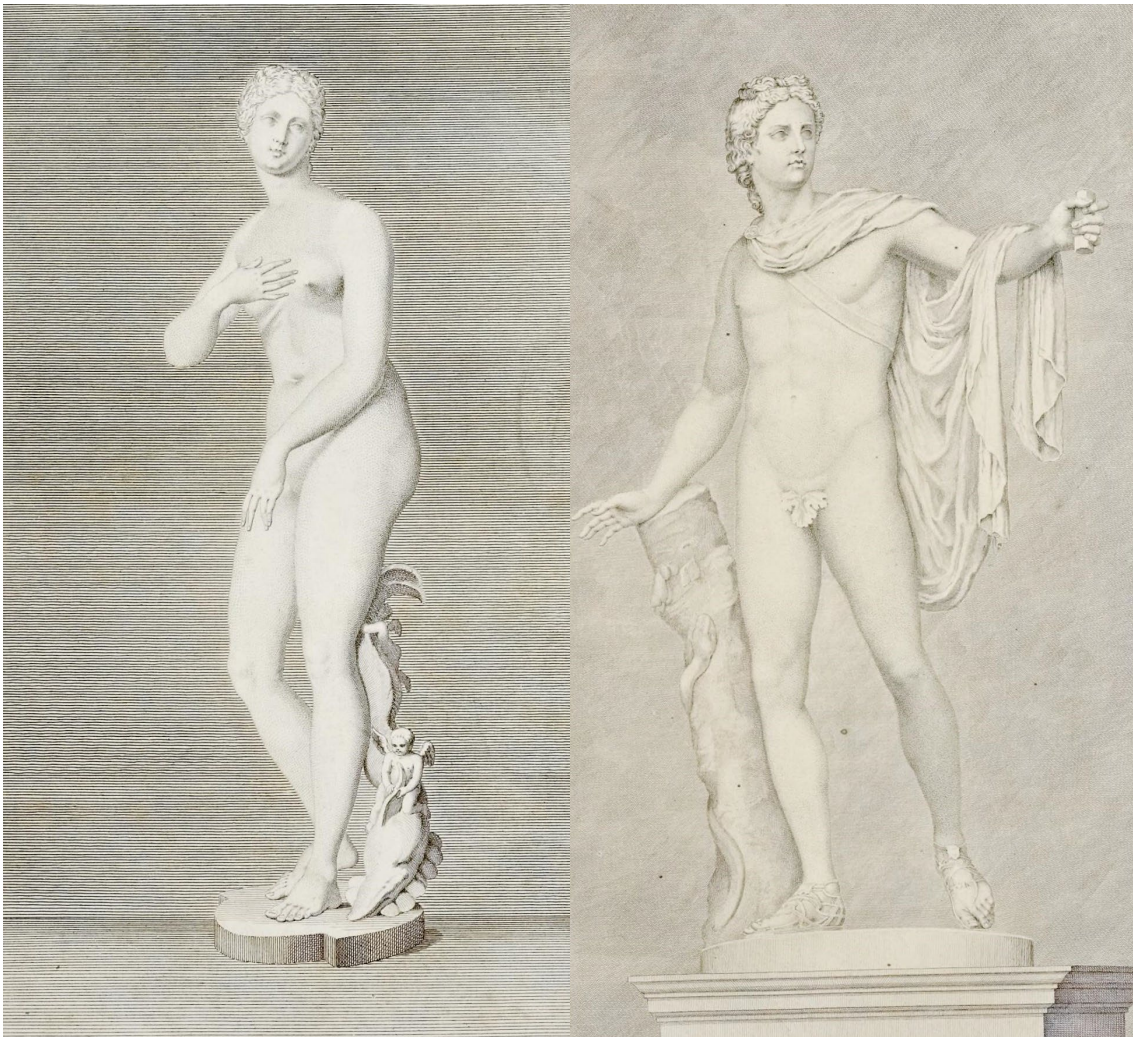


Figure 8.13. Left: L.P. Boilard, Venus de' Medici, c. 1747 (Spence 1755, Plate 5).

Figure 8.14. Right: L.P. Boilard, Apollo Belvedere, c. 1747 (Spence 1755, Plate 11).

Polymetis then describes (all on page 66) the femininity of the figure with adjectives like “prettiest”, “elegant”, “full of tenderness”, “soft”, “graceful”, “bewitching”, and “charming”. He then goes on to quote passages from ancient authors such as Statius, Plautus, Lucilius and Ovid (using footnotes to show the sources, in true scholarly fashion) that relate ancient accounts of bodily beauty to the Medici Venus standing in front of them. For example, from the comedy by Plautus, *Rudens* (*The Fisherman's Rope*, c. 200 BC), he quotes the impertinent exclamation by the slave, Sceparnio, concerning the beauty of Ampelisca, who had no time for his advances:

O ye immortal Gods! She's the very image of Venus. What joyousness there is in her eyes, and, only do see, what a skin 'tis of the vulture's tint,—rather, the eagle's, indeed, I meant to say. Her breasts, too, how beautiful; and then what expression on her lips! (*Rudens* 2.4)

This and the other passages are all to do with the figure itself, and none to do with the myths of Venus. Even when Polymetis discusses poetry's superior ability to represent the goddess, above those of the sister arts painting and sculpture, he focuses on the ability of

words to capture not myth, but movement (of the eyes specifically). He also summarises some post-ancient interpretations of the figure by critical antiquarians. For example, a common art-historical reading of the statue claimed that her tilted face expressed three, changing passions as the viewer approaches: denial at first, then compliance, but finally an insulting smile to indicate that “she has made a sure conquest of you” (Spence 1747:94). But Polymetis will not have it and admits that “I could never find out the malicious sort of smile, which your antiquarians talk so much of” (ibid.). This shows Spence’s preference for ‘returning to the sources’, and not accepting secondary, modern ekphrases of art (which his guide, perhaps, became!).

Following his brief critique of criticism, he then lists a number of other antique statues of Venus. In doing so, he does veer into the territory of story. For example, when describing a relief in Rome that depicts her enchainment for her adultery with Mars, after being caught-out by Sol (*Met.* 4.170). The narrative is stated simply to explain why Mars, and not her husband, Vulcan, is shown in the image. In short, even the mythical episodes are told through the eyes of the iconographer. He also dwells on some of the drawings that are placed within the pedestal that deal specifically with her retinue of Cupids, nymphs and graces – a further attempt to densify the reader’s representational network of Venus.

The gods are seen as artefacts within an art historical framework. For example, at one point Polymetis, positively discusses Raphael’s Parnassus (Figure 5.4), but does critique the work on the grounds that Apollo’s flute is modern and “not like any of the ancient lyres” (Spence 1755:299) – Raphael got it wrong. He extends this search for historical truthfulness to allegory: In his critique of Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*, he summarises the causes for the problems of modern allegory mentioned earlier:

They [the faults] arise either from the poet’s mixing the fables of heathenism, with the truths of christianity [no cap]; – or from his [Spenser’s] misrepresenting the allegories of the ancients: – or from something that is wrong in the allegories of his own invention (Spence 1755:302).

The distancing between the recipient and the myths is furthered, by keeping Greco-Roman mythology firmly within the historical bounds of antiquity, not to be used as characters in new myths, as the likes of Spenser, Milton, La Fontaine, Colonna, Boccaccio, De Meun and De Lorris did. Yet, Spence’s art-historical approach to topomythopoiesis did not limit it to the mere display of statues in garden-galleries. In a proposal for a garden, he shows the application of both the spatial and statue types of classical topomythopoiesis, adhering to his principle of clarity and directness of meaning.

8.4.2 Spence’s garden

In a drawing of an unbuilt garden entitled *Idea for a house and garden in 1731: set down (and*

something improv'd) April 20, 1751 he shows a diagrammatic layout of a garden (Figure 8.15). The design displays the mid-century confluence of the geometric order favoured in the previous century and the irregularity that dominated English gardens by 1800, a confluence epitomised in the work of William Kent at Rousham. To the bottom of the sketch, there is a circular fountain (that was to be inhabited by a prancing Pegasus) from which a meandering stream flows towards a naturalised area in which stands a hill, surrounded by water, and topped by a temple with Apollo – the signification is everything but ‘dark and obscure’: Pegasus’s hoof creates the fountain as a Hippocrene; Apollo is enthroned on a mount Parnassus. They are accompanied by statues in pairs of ancient and British poets: Pope²⁷ and Virgil, Homer and Milton.²⁸

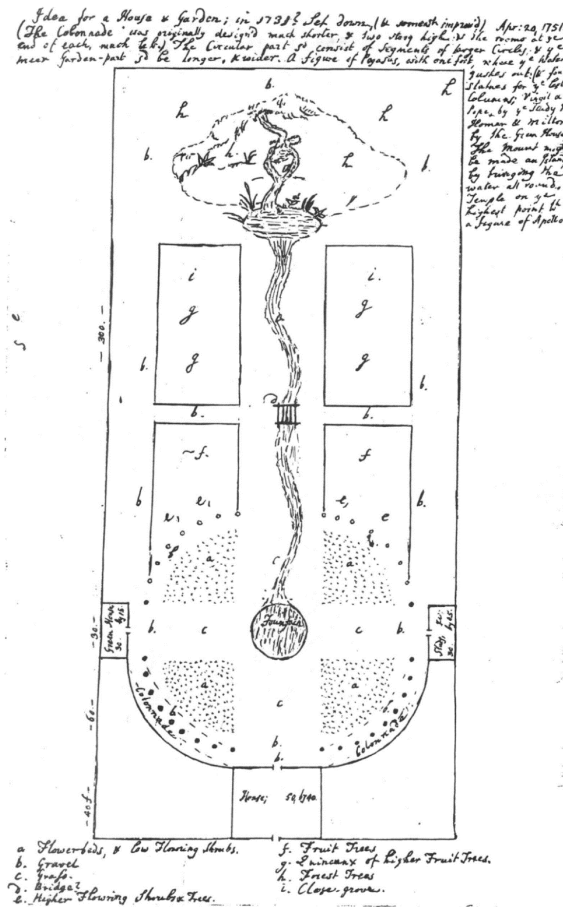


Figure 8.15. Joseph Spence, *Idea for a House and Garden in 1731: Set Down (and Something Improv'd) April 20, 1751* (King 1978:41).

Although he was maybe breaking his rule of not mixing mythologies, he stuck to simple messages: Pope was England’s Virgil, Milton her Homer. The topomythopoiesis of his ideal English garden creates a real-and-imagined place wherein Augustan poetry is tied to ancient

²⁷ A good friend of Spence.

²⁸ This is reminiscent of the Temple of British Worthies at Stowe (mentioned before) that also contained busts of, amongst others, Pope and Milton; designed by William Kent and built in 1735.

roots – before the obfuscation of the modern period – within a setting that recalls the landscape of Roman Italy in which the geometric landscape is in harmony with nature. (The layout resembles that of Pope’s own garden at Twickenham.) By comparing Spence’s garden proposals with *Polymetis*, Hunt (1996:222) notes a noteworthy paradox: “He seems, in short, to bother little with precise mythology in his gardens” and then quotes Spence himself, who stated confidently that “the figures of the things themselves speak... the clearest language” (ibid.). Yet, I do not see it as a paradox, since the lack of elaborate notes on the sculptures he proposes to include, does not exclude the possibility that Spence simply thought that the garden-maker ought to read the proposal and *Polymetis* as complimentary sources – the meaning of the figures are clear, but only if you know something about the gods.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Polymetis is exemplary of how Spence and other Augustans thought the garden dweller ought to move through wild gardens and – interrupted from looking at the landscape-patchwork of nature and countryside – encounter sculptures by studying them, as visitors to public art galleries would come to do in the early nineteenth century. Like Félibien, it cultivates topomythopoeic experience, but in a manner that detaches the viewer from the objects perceived. It takes the rationalisation of topomythopoesis of the previous century a step further, for unlike in the Grotto of Tethys, there is no moment when the work of art becomes alive to enchant the scene; the meaning that can be derived from the visual facts dominate the experience, perhaps erasing any numinous presence.

9 ROMANTIC TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

9.1 WÖRLITZER PARK

The writing of guidebooks during the eighteenth century as ekphrases of topomyths was not limited to England. In Germany, the classical scholar and translator August Rode (1751–1837) wrote one in 1788 (revised in 1798) for the German sentimental garden at Wörlitz, entitled *Beschreibung des Fürstlichen Anhalt-Dessauischen Landhauses und Englischen Gartens zu Wörlitz*. The text follows the visitor’s sequential, cinematographic ramble through the estate’s buildings and gardens, including anything from an inventory of the castle’s furniture to lists of plant species. It compliments a series of engraved inscriptions dotted throughout the park which guides the ‘Wanderer’, for example, to ‘choose your way with reason’ before entering the labyrinth.

The expression and reception of this garden, the first in Germany following the language of the English landscape garden (and containing its first Neoclassical building) were informed by the confluence of three intellectual currents prevalent in Germany at the time: early-Romanticism (*Frühromantik*), Neoclassicism (*Klassik*) and Enlightenment thinking (*Aufklärung*): Early Romanticism kindled imaginative participation, Neoclassicism promoted the appreciation and application of Greek art, and Enlightenment thinking fostered the scholarly analysis of mythology.

As at Versailles a century before, the guidebook was written whilst the garden was still being conceived, thus bearing the stamp of an *intentional* instruction. The creator of the garden, Prince Leopold Franz von Anhalt-Dessau (1740–1817), envisioned the gardens as the “aesthetic center of an exemplary principality” (Kluckert 2007:401) and a “model of an enlightened state” (ibid.) – the gardens were entirely open to the public for their education; a *locus liberalis*. Influenced by, amongst others, Rousseau, Franz’s political ideal was to create a principality in which the state was not all-powerful and meddlesome in the life of the self-

directed individual – a small state without a strong hierarchy. The gardens, lacking the strict formalities of the French and Dutch courts¹ (as seen on the plan in Figure 9.1), sought to embody the liberty that prided the Augustans in England, and cultivated the free fields of Ermenonville in France – the grave-island of Rousseau (*Îles de Peupliers*; Figure 9.7) was copied at Wörlitz as the *Rousseau-Insel*, after being seen first-hand by Franz and his collaborative architect, Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorff and court-gardener Johann Friedrich Eyserbeck (Kluckert 2007:401). Other models were those gardens encountered during their two tours to the British Isles (Curl 1995:95), including Rousham, Stowe and Stourhead (Brown 2016:26). Even more so than in these precedents, Franz avoided any grand, imposing narratives, and thus situated his topomythopoeia within “self-contained iconographical and aesthetic ‘units’: the sentimental... Wörlitz reflected Franz’s preference for thinking about the world in terms of microcosms and prototypes...” (Umbach 1998:143). The individual, guided by Rode, was to encounter topomyths and other artefacts of culture in their garden journey of self-development.

9.1.1 *Bildung* and beauty

The ethical ideal of self-realization, or *Bildung*,² defined Early Romanticism (*Frühromantik*),³ whose adherents envisioned an ideal political state in which individuals lived in community (Beiser 2003:25) – the kind of state realised at Wörlitz. For them, self-realization (guided by education) was a pursuit of unity between man and nature, reason and emotion, the body and the mind. Beiser (2003:35) thus interprets the Romantic movement not as either a rejection or affirmation of modernity, but both: it sought to enshrine modern values of freedom and reason, but in opposition to the growing disunity caused by a rationalist worldview, and therefore cultivate “... not only reason but also sensibility, not only the intellect but also feeling and sensation”. One path towards *Bildung* was aesthetic experience, that was regarded not as an end in itself, but rather a way to achieve ethical and political ideals (Beiser 2003:24). This search for unity has been interpreted by Beiser (2003:104) as a “... spiritual desire: the longing to return to that golden age when we were at one with ourselves, others, and nature” – the gardens of Wörlitz provided an aesthetic education on

¹ Wörlitzer Park was, before Franz’s influence, designed in a Baroque manner and constructed by a group of Dutchmen who were employed in 1659 to create parts of the town, palace and garden in the Dutch style.

² Notable literary works that considered the idea of *Bildung* (*éducation* in French) were Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) and Friedrich Schiller’s *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795).

³ More precisely, the creation of the gardens overlapped both the *Sturm und Drang* (c. 1760 to c. 1780) and the Early Romantic periods (1795 to 1804).

the beauty of the golden age of Arcadia, wherein the garden dweller is guided by Rode to participate in an analytical *and* somatic-symbolic mode towards the re-enchantment of the modern world, as can be found in his account of the encounter with the temple of Venus.

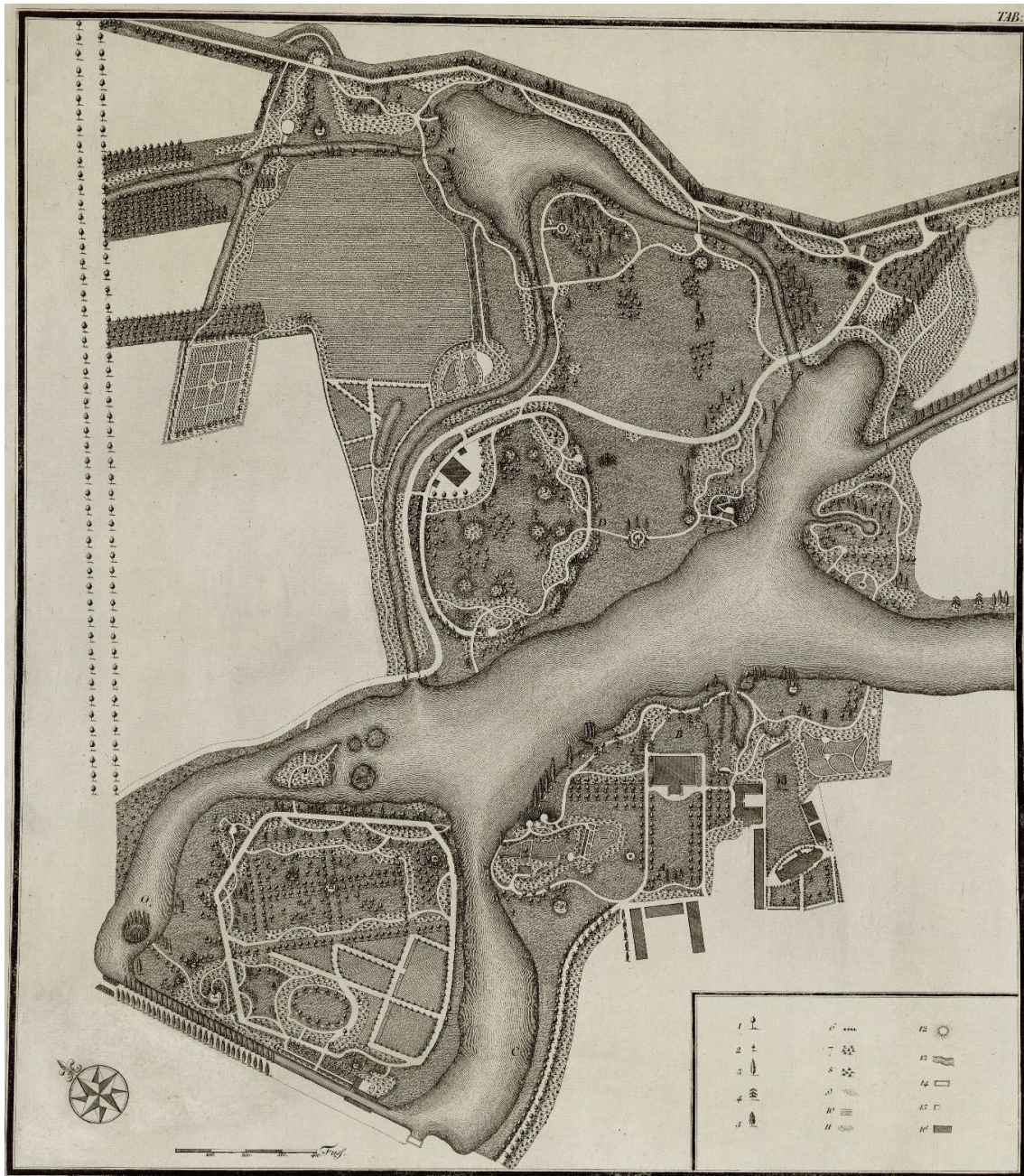


Figure 9.1. J.S. Probst, Plan of Wörlitzer Park, Anhalt-Dessau, Germany (Rode 1788, Plate 1).

The topomyth is reminiscent of the one at Stowe and is a tholos type that can be traced back to the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli: a circular temple on a rustic, conical mound (Figure 3.4). It is situated within the so-called Mystic Part of the gardens, designed by Erdmannsdorff (Becker 2009:14), as described and illustrated in the 1798 version of Rode’s guide (Figure 9.2); an aquatint by Karl Kuntz from the previous year still shows the temple without its statue (Figure 9.3) The fold-out plate in Rode also includes a Pantheon and a Temple of Flora that shows just how ubiquitous the temple-type (together with rustic, spatial grottoes)

had become for the topomythopoesis of the eighteenth century. On the *axis mundi* beneath the airy temple was a dark grotto dedicated to Vulcan, her fire-god husband.

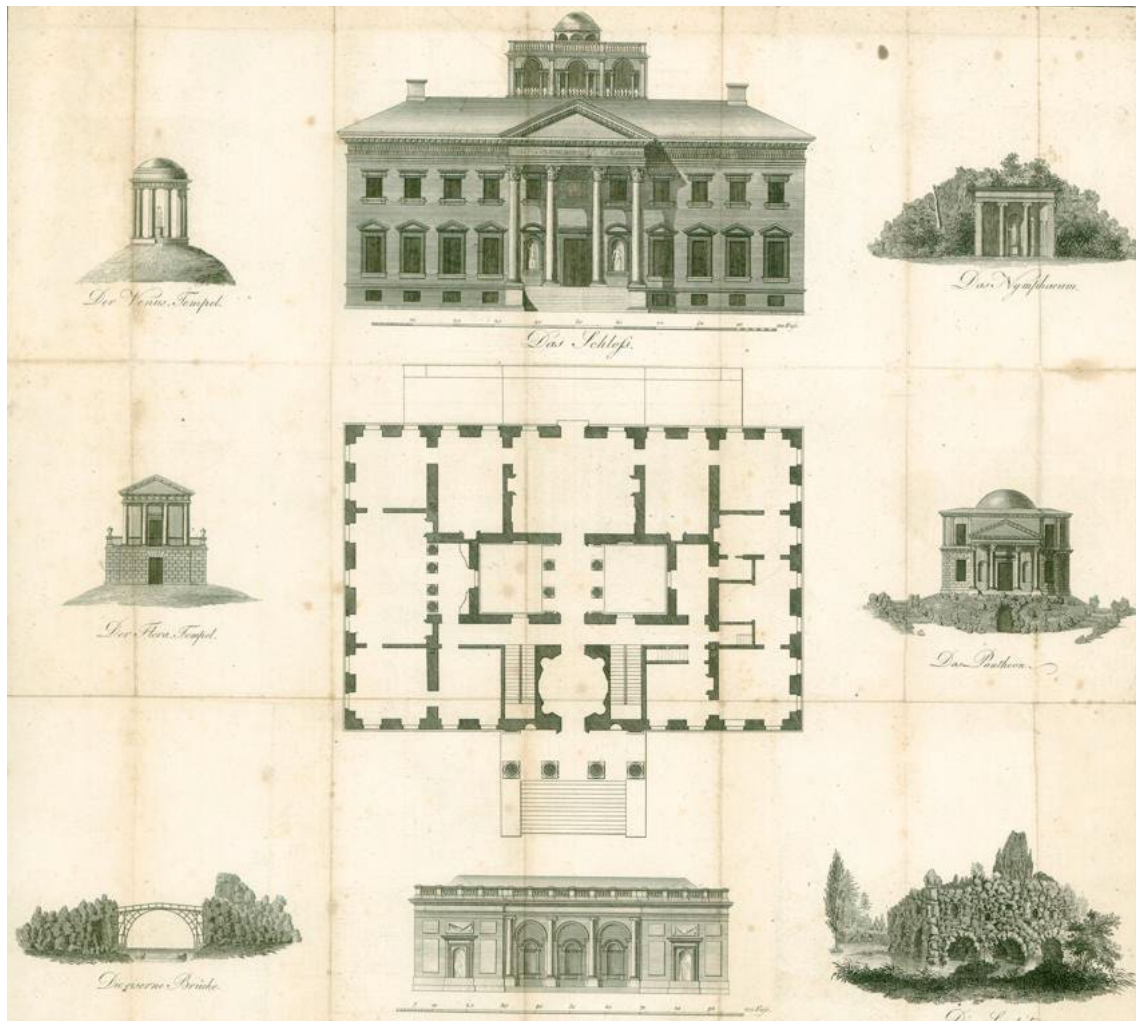


Figure 9.2. Drawings of various Neoclassical buildings, c. 1798 (Rode 1798, no page or plate number). The temple of Venus is top-left.

9.1.2 Sehnsucht for Venus

The description of the topomyth in Rode's guide starts on-approach to the temple, by immediately identifying Venus in her role as heavenly mother of procreation, not as object of bodily lust:

The first object that we glance at is a round temple at the height of a facing rock: the mystic sanctuary of celestial Venus, who in the beginning of the world did couple together all kind of things with an ingendered love, by an eternal propagation of human kind (in Becker 2009:15).

Unlike *Polymetis*, the guide does not fall into the door with a description of the figure as a statue for art-historical analysis, but leads the visitor to participate in the topomyth by imagining the sight of a numinous being. This view of the temple from afar instils in Rode's virtual garden-dweller a feeling of *Sehnsucht* – a longing felt for the unattainable:

A longing [*Sehnsucht*] to behold the goddess
 without whom naught is risen to reach the shining shores of light,

Nor aught of joyful or of lovely born,
 commands us to proceed on our way to the right without further delay, and to submit to the trial of
 going through all the elements without fear (ibid.).

Sehnsucht is a feeling characteristic of Romantic literature, expressed in the image of the blue flower (*Blaue Blume*) from Novalis' unfinished *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*⁴ which came to symbolise that yearning for the unreachable; a yearning to reach beyond the material confines of this world; a yearning which lies at the very heart of Romanticism:

The world must be romanticized. That way one finds again the original meaning. Romanticizing is nothing but a qualitative potentializing... When I confer upon the commonplace a higher meaning, upon the ordinary an enigmatic appearance, upon the known the nobility of the unknown... I romanticize it. The operation is reversed for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite (in Morton 2002:13; my italics).⁵

In the terms of this thesis, Novalis can be paraphrased as saying 'Romanticizing is participation'. The desire to step outside the profanity of the world (a desire never fully fulfilled) is entangled in landscape experience from the very origins of the term 'Romanticist' in the seventeenth century when it was "... employed to describe natural vistas, especially those that evoked distance from everyday reality, and whose scenery was wild, fantastic, and luxuriant or, alternatively, mysterious, gloomy, solitary, and stamped with the remains of past cultures" (Morton 2002:11; my italics). The imaginative, even fantastical participation evoked by distance was well established by the mid-eighteenth century. For example, in his description of the lake in Keswick, John Brown (1770:5) – who first introduced England to the charms of the Lake District – described the enchantment felt from seeing the invisible in the visible upon viewing the mountains and prospects *in the distance*:

Where active Fancy travels beyond Sense,
 And pictures things unseen.

While on a two-year trip to Italy, Goethe (1749–1832), a leading figure of the Romantic movement, contemplated the "enchanted look which distant objects like ships and promontories take on" (Von Goethe 1970:236)⁶ as he was standing atop a hill in Palermo, Sicily, gazing down at the public park⁷ near the harbour, hazed in salty diffused light, beyond which lay distant beaches and the end of the sea – a scene which evoked the Gardens of Alcinous; Goethe hurried to a bookshop to buy an *Odyssey*.

⁴ Published posthumously in 1802.

⁵ From Novalis, *Logologische Fragmente*, No. 10.

⁶ Letter dated 7 April 1787.

⁷ This is the same park, established in 1777, in which semi-domed, exedra nymphaea grottoes were constructed in the nineteenth century, referred to earlier in this thesis (3.4.7).



Figure 9.3. Wilhelm Friedrich Schlotterbeck (aquatint based on drawing by Karl Kuntz), *The Venus Temple at Wörlitz*, 1797 (Industrie-Comptoir 1800, Plate 1). The two figures emerge from the underlying grotto; the statue of Venus is not yet present, unlike drawing in Figure 9.2.

The epitome of the Romantic is the lone wanderer, like Rousseau in his *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782), who searches landscapes for atmospheres that stir and sculpt the soul. The view at Wörlitzer Park of the goddess from afar thus draws the garden dweller towards her haunt. Although oft sought for in the sublimity of nature, here supernatural Venus becomes the object of that longing – not desire for the flesh, but for an ascent to the light of the ‘mystical, infinite’. The veneration of heavenly Venus captured in the passage quoted before was lifted from Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass* (11.47), which Rode translated into German.⁸ The subsequent lines “without whom naught... lovely born” were lifted from Lucretius’ (c. 99 BC–c. 55 BC) first canto of *De rerum natura* (Becker 2009:18). Rode’s text is thus a collage of his own experience of the garden and fragments from classical texts, provided to densify the visitor’s representational network, thus enriching their participation.

9.1.3 Neoplatonic Neoclassicism

The Neoplatonic echo of the heavenly Venus, absent in Spence, betrays a characteristic of the period that is not often acknowledged, namely the Platonism of German thinking from the mid-eighteenth century onwards: Forgotten in Germany during the first half of the

⁸ It comes from the section where Lucius lays on a beach, awoken by the light of moon, evoking him to pray to the goddess of light (Isis, all along) to return him from donkey to man.

century, Plato gained a following mid-century which grew into a veritable “Platonic renaissance” by the 1780s (Beiser 2003:68). The interest was sparked when Plato, amongst other ancient authors, were read in their original languages by philologists (ibid.). Amongst those who were drawn to him was Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) whose thinking on aesthetics was informed by his reading of Plato in 1757 (ibid.). The writings of others influenced by the anti-materialism of Plato, like Rousseau, started gaining widespread influence in Europe as a counter-intellectual guard against Hobbes.⁹ Since the gardens at Wörlitz were influenced by Winckelmann’s ideas (UNESCO)¹⁰ and those of Rousseau (whom Franz visited in 1775 (Curl 1995:95)), we may infer that its conception was, in part, Platonic.¹¹

Neoplatonism serves as a bridge between the opposing intellectual currents (evident in Rode) of Romanticism (discussed above) and Enlightenment-thinking (discussed below): “The Platonic legacy of *Frühromantik* shows that its aestheticism was itself a form of rationalism” (Beiser 2003:60). The stereotypical chasm between the emotionally charged Romantics and the rationally minded followers of the Enlightenment is overcome once we interpret the works of the Romantics through Platonic eyes: the aesthetic epiphany of viewing beauty grants access to a higher form of rationalism that goes beyond intellectual understanding to intuitive reason (ibid.).

This Neoplatonic bridge between emotion and the intellect was found in the visual expression of classical sculpture. Winckelmann not only propagated Platonism, but played a fundamental role in the rise of popularity and scholarship of classical art, art that Plato expelled from his *Republic* (3.398a).¹² Winckelmann’s preference for liberalism above the despotism of his native Kingdom of Prussia, drew him to the art of the democratic Greeks above that of the imperialistic Romans. Likewise, “August Rode contrasted ‘Attic purity’ with the ‘reprehensible extravagance’ [*sic*] of the Romans” (Richards 2000:248, fn. 49).¹³ Whereas the English Augustans preferred the Romans and Virgil, the Germans were enshrining

⁹ Rousseau, specifically, opposed the materialism of Hobbes (Williams 2007).

¹⁰ Erdmansdorff, during his Grand Tour with Franz, sought out Winckelmann’s wisdom where he was leading a stoic scholarly life in the villa Albani, dedicated to the study of ancient art and literature (Harloe 2013:46).

¹¹ A further, indirect, Platonic influence can be traced to Lord Shaftesbury: Batty (2015:189–190) discusses how Shaftesbury’s Platonic ideals of landscape shaped the “idealized” mid-eighteenth century gardens of William Kent, who in turn influenced the design of Wörlitzer Park.

¹² Another important influence on the Neoclassicism of Wörlitzer Park was the work of the French architect and artist, Charles-Louis Clérisseau (Curl 1995:95), who painted a number of *capriccios* of Roman ruins.

¹³ Richards’ translation of Günther, H. 1996. Anglo-Klassizismus, Antikenrezeption, Neugothik in Worlitz. In: Bechtoldt, F.-A. & Weiss, T. (eds). *Weltbild Wörlitz*. Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 146–149.

Homer as their ideal model.

For Winckelmann, the free and healthy, beautiful-bodied Greeks within their congenial climate and with their genius for making visible their inner nobility, were able to imitate an idealised nature; their art was a copy of an Idea, as Plato defined it.¹⁴ For Winckelmann regarded himself and his northern contemporaries unable to sculpt perfected nature in marble, and had to be satisfied with *copying* ancient works – thus, good art in a cold age of illiberalism ought to copy the good copies from the past: “There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients” (Winckelmann 2001:2).

And therein lies the paradox of Neoclassical Neoplatonism: the abstract ideals of Beauty and Love are found in the aesthetics of the surface of the beautiful human body – a sublime superficiality “in which form and meaning are inseparable” (Larson 1976:395). To behold such sculpture is to engage in a somatic-symbolic participation where meaning is *felt*. Winckelmann’s famous ekphrasis of the Apollo in the Belvedere court (Figure 5.10), part of his *Die Geschichte der Kunst des Alterums* (*The History of the Art of Antiquity*, 1764), displays this Neoplatonic reception of classical art, honed by the art-historian’s attention to formal details:

An eternal spring, as in the happy fields of Elysium, clothes with the charms of youth the graceful manliness of ripened years, and plays with softness and tenderness about the proud shape of his limbs (Winckelmann 1872:312).

Winckelmann describes the bodily beauty of Apollo with the same swooning, sensual language that Spence spoke of Venus, but soon thereafter, the description veers upwards into the realm of the immaterial, Platonic universe:

Let thy spirit penetrate into the *kingdom of incorporeal beauties*, and strive to become a creator of a *heavenly nature*, in order that thy mind may be filled with beauties that are *elevated above nature*; for there is nothing mortal here, nothing which human necessities require (Winckelmann 1872:312–313; my italics).

From this flight into ideals of beauty, Winckelmann enters into an imaginative (pictorial, then fantastical) participation which locates the statue within the virtual landscape, almost as a return to the origins of classical topomythopoiesis in the sacred sanctuaries of Apollo:

My breast seems to enlarge and swell with reverence, like the breasts of those who were filled with the spirit of prophecy, and I feel myself transported to Delos and into the Lycsean [*sic*] groves, – places which Apollo honored by his presence, – for my image seems to receive life and motion, like the beautiful creation of Pygmalion (Winckelmann 1872:313).

¹⁴ The assertion that great art flows from liberal societies was contested at the time by Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), who rather countered that wealth was a prerequisite for art to flourish (Hodne 2022:195).

We find in Rode a similar act, in which the garden dweller becomes, momentarily, a participant in an imagined, mystic ritual. It comes after the visitor is guided through half-built grottoes of Neptune and Aeolus – describe as trials on the path to enlightenment – and comes to see the temple in full view, augmented by the imagination:

Imagination may now complete the work she started off! Imagine that the mystagogue, intoning the hymn with which Lucretius' poem on the nature of things begins,¹⁵ took us by the hand, guided us to the ascent of the temple, and brought us into the inner sanctum of sublime Venus, where the initiation is completed by beholding face to face the sovereign ruler of all nature. While remembering the meaningful apparitions, which passed our souls in vivacious depiction and in significant order, and delighted by the various and most charming views, which are shown to us between the columns' widths, we are easily set into a state of bliss equalling the state of one who is newly initiated (in Becker 2009:16).

This image of some mystical initiation ritual in front of the statue conjures, perhaps deliberately, those hermetic-theurgical rituals in the Renaissance during which a statue is ensouled (5.5.6). This interpretation is not too far-fetched, since German Romanticism was, in part, influenced by a “national legacy of nature mysticism” passed on by Platonic-hermeticists such as the Renaissance Paracelsus and the seventeenth-century Jakob Böhme (Morton 2002:13). The garden dweller's own soul is filled with spirit; the body is filled by the somatic delight of viewing the landscape through the shadow-lines of the fluted columns. This ecstatic-aesthetic experience rushes towards an epiphanic catharsis. But, as Becker (2009:16) points out, the immanent appearance of the celestial Venus is not found. Rather, the texts shifts to a formal description of the statue *as a work of art*:

The statue in the centre of the temple is a cast of the Venus de' Medici. The corpus of the circular and hollow pedestal consists of yellow panes of glass set between thin iron rods. The cornice and the base are made of sandstone (in Becker 2009:16).

The longing gaze of the Romantic wanderer has been replaced by the descriptive eye of the art historian in a “disturbing anti-climax” (Becker 2009:17). The enchantment of encountering the heavenly goddess of love is broken when participation – harnessing the full power of the individual imagination – is interrupted by an analysis of a mere object, a plaster copy of a statue. Rode's guide has veered, in kind, to that of Spence.

¹⁵ Rode is referring to Lucretius's so-called *Hymn to Venus*, which opens with the lines: “Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men / Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars / Makest to teem the many-voyaged main / And fruitful lands for all of living things / Through thee alone are evermore conceived...” (*De rerum natura* 1.1).

9.1.4 The Enlightenment paradox

This brings us to the third intellectual current that flowed through Wörlitzer Park, Enlightenment-thinking: The work of philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) – admirer and biographer of Winckelmann – marks a transition from the latter’s humanist art history directed at aesthetic appreciation, to scientific art history directed at understanding, and sanitised from personal reverence. Although Wolf admired Winckelmann, he doubted his “scholarly credentials” (Harloe 2013:199) and felt that he was seduced by Rome where he “lost himself in a sea of beauty” (ibid.). Wolf’s rigorous methodology set the tone for the discipline of classical studies during the latter half of the eighteenth century (Watson 2010:105–106), named *Altertumswissenschaft*. In his most influential work, *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), Wolf demonstrated that *The Odyssey* and *The Illiad* were not the unified works of an individual genius, but multi-authored fragments stitched together over time. He thus resisted the deification of hallowed Homer and dissected the texts to reveal inconsistencies of narrative-structure and language, thereby shattering “the image of godlike Homer, prince of poets, and replacing it with the prospect of an irrecoverable tradition and a set of Alexandrian editors” (Harloe 2013:136); his findings unsettled scholars and remain unsettled today. This band of scholars’ aim was to apply textual and historic criticism to the texts as historical and anthropological documents “and so learn to imagine the ancient world *as it had been*” (Grafton 1981:102; my italics). Whereas the scholars of the Renaissance, and the likes of Winckelmann, still looked back at the myths and poets of antiquity through a golden haze, Wolf saw texts and authors in a world reconstructed from evidence; Boccaccio’s project of historicising the myths had reached maturity. Although it is not certain whether Rode was influenced by Wolf, the Enlightenment approach to art history is clearly witnessed by his matter-of-factual descriptions of artefacts, scholarly treatment of ancient texts and encyclopaedic inventories of plants.

Wolf’s approach of rigorous contextualisation and analysis did not leave him unmoved by the cultural achievements of the Greeks:

Above all, he [the scholar] could follow the evolution of the Greek spirit, which was faithfully reflected in each period by language, art, social and political life. By watching the uniquely independent and creative Greeks harness the powers of their own souls, modern men could wake and harness the power of their own souls (in Grafton 1981:103).¹⁶

¹⁶ Translated from Wolf’s *Darstellung der Alterthums-Wissenschaft*.

Thus, Wolf believed, the Germans could learn ‘how to’ *Bildung* from the Greeks.¹⁷ By removing Homer from his pedestal, he by no means discouraged artists and poets to follow in his footsteps. Rather the opposite: Wolf’s approach to the Greeks put them, specifically Homer, as models to follow, but not models to imitate (as Winckelmann suggested). For example, Goethe, who was at first repelled by Wolf’s scandalous approach to Homer, only became confident in writing German literature in the vein of Homer following Wolf’s unmasking, although Goethe later reverted to his earlier unitarian regard for Homer as the ‘One’ (Wohlleben 1990:202–204).

This shift from the hyper *mimesis* of Neoclassicism to the search for a localised mythopoeia, can also be detected in the topomythopoesis formulated by a German garden design treatise, written around the same time that Wörlitzer Park was being filled with topomyths.

9.2 HIRSCHFELD ON TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

C.C.L. Hirschfeld’s *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1779–1785, in five volumes) became a popular and authoritative source for the gardening culture of continental Europe (Parshall 1993). Although it is doubtful that the author actually visited Wörlitzer Park, there is some evidence to suggest that he influenced its design (Parshall, in Hirschfeld 2001:40). Like Winckelmann and Wolf’s historicist approach to antiquity, Hirschfeld distanced himself and his time from the topomyths (temples in the landscape, specifically) of Greece by acknowledging that they are artefacts created far from Germany within a far-removed historic period and long since debunked as carriers of religious truth:

It is true that a temple dedicated to an ancient god or hero can no longer be of religious or national significance, for there is no similarity between then and now or between that country and ours (Hirschfeld 2001:287).

For Winckelmann and Wolf, the very difference of time and place is what differentiates the art of one culture from the next; art is relative to context. Yet, granted this determinist approach to art history, Winckelmann (not Wolf as much) insisted on the universal superiority of Greek art, even though it was a product of a specific bio-physical and socio-political context (Hvattum 2019:3), hence his appeal for its imitation mentioned before. Hirschfeld took a similar approach: granted the distance between eighteenth century Germany and ancient Greece, the temple topomyth has an inherent and universal *aesthetic*

¹⁷ This approach also positioned Wolf against a more extreme current of Enlightenment-thinking, that argued for educational reforms in Germany to emphasise the instrumental sciences, whereas he was “in favour of non-vocational and non-utilitarian forms of *Bildung*” (Harloe 2013:199).

value:

Nevertheless, the beauty of these structures earns them a kind of universal citizenship, makes them accepted with pleasure everywhere, so that the sight of them transports us to a place where the imagination is enraptured by beautiful images, where taste flourishes and the love of art thrives (Hirschfeld 2001:287).

Hirschfeld's argument for the inclusion of temple-topomyths is not intertwined with a Neoplatonic epiphany as in Winckelmann, but indeed echoes the latter's nostalgic reverence for the Greeks as an enlightened and cultured society: it is the very distance of the sunlit temples, across ages and beyond the snow-capped mountains to the south, made by the hands of a noble people, that invites imaginative-pictorial participation. The sight of a temple in a garden invites the secondary pleasure of seeing an associated, mental picture (*à la* Addison). The physical and virtual landscapes can then be compared and unravelled; from imaginative to analytical participation:

We ponder, we make comparisons, we concentrate on an image that seems to belong to us; from the vast store of mythological ideas we isolate one that speaks to this century, to every sensitive observer; we throw off the fable's covering and see the enlightened truth that lies disguised beneath them (Hirschfeld 2001:287).

The 'enlightened truth' is not deemed a dictated moral lesson, but an insight unique to the observer. The garden dweller undergoes personal *Bildung* upon encountering a topomyth that exists within their dense representational network ('the vast store of mythological ideas') – the temple offers a gate into a distant land of our Romantic longing; the beauty is not found in the immediate appearance of a narrative-spectacle, but in the imaginative distance that is created between the garden dweller and the virtual landscape.

9.2.1 Atmosphere, not allegory

Hirschfeld's ideas on topomythopoiesis revolves mostly around the temple-topomyth: Although he never visited England, Hirschfeld drew heavily from the English landscape gardens of the first half of the eighteenth century, referring specifically to the re-introduction of temples at gardens such as Stowe (Hirschfeld 2001:285). He also places the topomyth within a *longue durée* historic framework by noting the Roman inclusion of temples in gardens and cites the Temple of Venus in the gardens of Sallust and one to Silvanus in the garden on the Aventine Hill. Yet, Hirschfeld (again) follows Winckelmann in his purist preference for the beauty of the Greek temples for their simplicity (Hirschfeld 2001:288). He thus heeds the reader to "remain within the bonds of truth and free of all excess" (Hirschfeld 2001:285) and identifies the round temple as more apt for garden settings, as seemingly did the creators of Stowe, Stourhead and Wörlitzer Park (Figure 9.4). This was a call for a restrained

topomythopoiesis free from caprice; not Ovidian, but Homeric.¹⁸ For Hirschfeld, Greek temples (amongst other *fabriques*¹⁹ like Gothic towers)²⁰ were not introduced for their narrative role, but for the *atmosphere* they created via associations with the cultures whence they originated; different building styles elicited different emotional responses: “As harbingers of distinct spiritual content, different historical styles evoke different atmospheres” (Hvattum 2019:4). Thus, the virtual landscape, in some sense, is not that of mythical Arcadia, but historic Greece. Yet, unlike Spence’s didactic topomythopoiesis, the *faux* temples were not presented to prompt a historic inquiry (analytical participation) by, say, pointing out the various components of the Doric order, or pondering its skeuomorphism, rather “the historical content is sublimated to an aesthetic experience” (ibid). Hirschfeld was promoting a somatic-symbolic topomythopoiesis where topomyths are employed for their historicist *associations*.

Hirschfeld did not consider the temple-topomyth as an end in itself, but a means to sharpen the character of a landscape scene. He was thus interested in finding compatible combinations of topomyths and landscape character types (somewhat like Switzer’s rules of congruence), insisting that the classical imagery ought to be subordinate to nature. First, he lists those topomyths that are compatible with gardens to begin with, noting the inappropriateness of Bellona (goddess of war) in Kew gardens:

More appropriate are the Temple to the Sun and to Pan, or at Stowe the temples of Venus, the mother of creation, and of Bacchus. In today’s gardens, Diana, Ceres, Flora, Pomona, Apollo, the Muses, and the Graces can still be honored with temples places sparingly in scenes that accord with their character (Hirschfeld 2001:286).

Secondly, he stresses the importance of congruence between the character of a god and its treatment in the garden (Figure 9.5). For example, in volume 5 on Academy Gardens, he describes the apt milieu for the muses, who are “... not fond of gloomy, dusty walls, but prefer cheerful hillsides with shadowy groves, clear fountains, and flowers. Helicon, their onetime abode, was among the most fertile and wooded mountains of Greece...” (Hirschfeld 2001:381). Apollo, he thinks, would nicely compliment a spot in the garden where, in the morning, a lover of science can be inspired by the music from the god-of-reason’s lyre (ibid.) – congruence with the time of day.

¹⁸ He was also critical of Roman and later French ostentatious inclusion of “hordes” of statues in their gardens (Hirschfeld 2001:312–313).

¹⁹ *Fabrique* is a French term used in the latter half of the eighteenth century to denote pictorial buildings placed in gardens, see Symes (2014 and 2017) for a full discussion of the term.

²⁰ He was one, if not the first, to refer to a “Gothic style” (Hvattum 2019:44).



Figure 9.4. Left. Christian F. Schuricht, *A Gazebo With Half-Dome Set on Freestanding Pillars* (Hirschfeld 2001:278).

Figure 9.5. Right: Christian F. Schurict, *Flora* (?) (Hirschfeld 2001:316).

By describing the manner in which the iconography of statues need to be augmented by spatial types (hill, grove, fountain) and plants (flowers), he was propagating a topomythopoiesis that is strongly reminiscent of William Kent’s at Rousham (1730s–1740s), where Kent moulded the more formal design of Charles Bridgeman. It is a garden that, unlike Stowe, does not demand the deciphering of endless emblems (Coffin 1986:415). For example, in the Vale of Venus the emblematic signs are limited to the statue of Venus, guarded by swans, flanked on either side of the valley by a peeping Pan and sex-mad satyr, brooding half-hidden in the woods. There are no elucidating inscriptions²¹ and, as per the Augustans’ preference, the ‘meaning’ is not to be found in a complex ensemble of signs (at least not in comparison with Stowe), but in the directness of an *impression* – in this case, according to Coffin’s (1986) analysis, an impression of idyllic Arcadia with its lovelorn shepherds, or according to Hunt (1992:86), an allusion to a scene from the *Faerie Queene*, the dance of the Three Graces (*FQ* 6). Yet, the simplistic signification does not dilute the experience, since the topography of the vale itself, framed by the light-and-dark vegetation on the sides (Laird 1999:44), embody the sensuality conveyed by Venus and lustful Pan: “So at Rousham the meaning is not only conveyed by the various pieces of statuary, but by the topography or physical condition of the site with the slope down to the river involved in the meaning” (ibid.). So, at Rousham (in 2014, when this study was only a seed) is where I first experienced a topomythopoeic garden wherein meaning is *felt*, not thought; allow me a digression:

Since I knew about Coffin and Hunt’s interpretations before I visited the garden, I was able to ‘get it’. Yet, this intellectual decoding provided me with only the slightest amusement.

²¹ Apart from an inscription underneath the Venus that reveals that the site is the burial ground of Ringwood, the pet dog.

This did not mean that the place left me with cold abstractions; on the contrary, I was enchanted. The murmuring water that flow from the arched stone cascades that sit in the gentle folds of the undulating green landscape emanated all the associations of the literary tradition of the *locus amoenus*. While there, one does not *think of* Venus and her presence in the classical myths and other texts, one *senses* her. The topomyth *fits* the mythic contents. The topos participates in the symbol, yet it is not necessarily experienced *as* symbolic: the vale itself is *sensed* as a place for love. I cannot say: “the Vale of Venus *symbolises* erotic love”, or “the Vale of Venus *portrays* the myth of Venus”. Its appearances embody sensuality – the symbol and that which it symbolises loses distinction, as it does in Cassirer’s definition of myth itself (2.2.5). The experience is thus mytho-poetic, not allegorical. May it be known that her presence makes the water sound *more* sweetly, the grass banks undulate *more* lovely, and the trees protect the space *more* caringly, lest the modern iconoclasts wish to destroy the statue. Whereas Stowe’s topomyths demands exegesis, Rousham’s prompt a somatic-symbolic participation.



Figure 9.6. William Kent, The Vale of Venus, Rousham, England, c. 1730–1740 (Photo: Author 2014).

9.2.2 Towards national topomythopoiesis

Granted that Hirschfeld made room for classical topomythopoiesis in his theory on the art of gardening, he shows the signs of its imminent death in 1800. For example, he shows a weariness for the over-use of the statues of the gods that had become so ubiquitous that “they have been robbed of their power to arouse pleasant impressions” (Hirschfeld 2001:314) – their lack of strangeness dimmed enchantment. He also confronts a further reason for its decline, namely the decline of classical education and the democratisation of garden space:

... since temples of this type are understood only by those knowledgeable in mythology and by people of taste, there is a need to extend their use in ways that can be apprehended more clearly. They can be dedicated to certain effects of country life and gardens. Temples of Happiness, Repose, Forgotten Sorrows, Contemplation, and the like are all appropriate though still rarely used in gardens...The different seasons and times of day can have their temples as well... (Hirschfeld 2001:286-287).

Thus, to make participation more accessible, the gods are replaced by relatable generalisations like emotions and the flow of time, or like at Ermenonville, a temple of Philosophy or a philosopher's grave (Figure 9.7). Or a god may be replaced by "men of superior accomplishment" (Hirschfeld 2001:288), as Spence proposed busts of Milton and Pope. Hirschfeld (2001:317) goes even further: "A garden artist can avoid the problems associated with [the lack of knowledge of] antique mythological and poetic representations by turning to scenes from his own time and nation..." This signals a further departure from classical towards *national* topomythopoiesis, in this case located in the ethnoscape²² of Germany: following the Napoleonic invasion (1813) and later retreat after the Wars of Liberation (1816), there was a growing need to create a single, defensible nation (Morton 2002:9). Part of this project was forging a unified national identity which was growingly looking for inspiration away from far-off Greece, but to the "native models" (Morton 2002:10) of Medievalism and untouched nature; the southern gods from the sunwashed seas became increasingly replaced with northern myths, like the *Nibelungenlied* (Morton 2002:21).

Germany was not alone in its quest for indigeneity, and we find a similar sentiment in Scandinavia. For example, the Danish artist and garden designer, Johannes Wiedewelt (1731–1802) was an apprentice of Winckelmann "who taught him Greco-Roman mythology and style" (Lund 1997: 240). Yet, while designing memorials for a national park, Jaegerspris, he expressed in a letter his attempt to convey Danish identity by employing local myths: "Just as the monuments of the Greeks and Romans are adorned with their mythology and historical features so I have tried here to use our own" (in Lund 1997:241).

Returning to the opening argument of this thesis, the motives behind the murdering of classical topomythopoiesis – private participation, the cult of Nature and instrumentalism – may well be joined by the cult of the Nation.

²² In her discussion on the role of mythology in the establishment of ancient Roman identity, Spencer (2010:5–6) refers to French philosopher Marc Augé's term 'ethnoscape', which she describes as "a geography of meaning for a community" with its "... 'social demarcation' and a sense of belonging often rooted in 'foundational narratives'...".



Figure 9.7. *Rousseau's Grave*, Ermenonville (Hirschfeld 2001:225). Hirschfeld (2001:125–128) was deeply influenced by Rousseau's ideas and deeply moved upon encountering his grave-island (Hirschfeld 2001:223–225).

9.3 CONCLUSION

In Germany, the Romantic movement, coupled with Neoclassicism and Enlightenment thinking inspired a pictorial and fantastical participation, in search of Neoplatonic visions. The growing sense of national identity, the growing preference for natural scenery, the weariness for hollow emblematic gardens, and the increasing emphasis on private participation all led to the decline of topomythopoiesis from 1800, surviving in the shadows of modernity.

The Dutch, who longer held onto their tradition of formal gardening than the English and Germans, were slower to abandon the gods, and accommodated them in their version of the landscape garden well into the nineteenth century, as expressed in Gijsbert van Laar's (1767–1820) *Magazijn van Tuin-sieraaden* (*Storehouse of Garden Ornaments*), published as a series of issues in Amsterdam between 1802 to 1809. It is not so much a guidebook, treatise or emblembook, but a catalogue of eclectic ornaments, including the Greco-Roman gods and their haunts side-to-side with Egyptian sphinxes (Figure 9.8), Chinese pavilions (Plate 142) and primitivist huts (Plate 68), perhaps foreshadowing their fate, for there they remain today: in the online catalogue books of garden centres, copied for mass consumption.



Figure 9.8. Gijsbert van Laar, *Mountainous Arcadian Landscape*, 1802 (Van Laar 1802, Plate 46). In the description of the plate, Van Laar (1802:46) dedicates the temple to Melpomene (the Muse of music) the tomb to a Philosopher and identifies the statue in the middle ground as a priestess (in memory of ancient times when people sacrificed at altars).

10 CONCEPTUAL THEMES

The decline of classical topomythopoiesis by 1800, reduced largely to an ornamental practice of place-making, continues today. Given the minimal attention the tradition receives within the discipline of landscape architecture (1.1.8, 1.1.9, 1.1.10 & 1.1.11), attempts to evoke Arcadia in landscapes are likely to remain taboo, or confined to the outdoor placement of statues sourced from catalogue books by designers outside the discipline.

However, the preceding history reveals a long-standing tradition of garden-makers who practiced classical topomythopoiesis in imaginative and critical ways. Although the thesis does not aim to establish a set of design principles to revive its contemporary praxis, this chapter discusses a series of conceptual themes that arise from the history. These themes may serve as a springboard for future investigations into the design potential inherent within this tradition.

10.1.1 Congruence

Congruence between signifier and setting

In the few historical attempts to theorise classical topomythopoiesis, the theme of congruence is raised: when is the signifier fitting for its setting? In the twentieth century Hubbard & Kimball insisted on the importance of congruence between statue and spatial setting (1.1.7), drawing from a traditional, mostly implicit, set of principles that historically governed classical topomythopoiesis. Some of these were explicitly stated in the early eighteenth century by Stephen Switzer in what I called his ‘rules of congruence’ (8.2.1):

Scale: The persona of the god ought to dictate the scale of its surroundings. For example, a god of war cannot be cramped into a corner. For example, the heroism of Hercules in Figure 6.21 is congruent with the large, open space surrounding him.

Habitat: The beings of the classical mythology came, over time, to be associated with specific locations. These associations dictated whether a being was native or exotic to its setting. For example, the reclining river god in Figure 8.8 is at home in its surrounding cascade, but would be out of place on a hill.

Company: The mythical beings were not only typically coupled with specific settings, but also with other gods. For example, Venus is commonly represented in art in the company of dolphins that relate to her oceanic birth, as found in the fountain shown in Figure 6.27 (bottom, centre-right). As such, a god of love should not stand alongside a god of war.

Later in the century, Hirschfeld moved beyond commenting on these rather obvious emblem-context associations, to suggest that the spatial *atmosphere* must befit the signifier (9.2.1): the quality of light, the type of vegetation and the topography must work in symphony to establish a landscape environment that expresses the virtual landscape evoked by the mythical being. For illustration he described an undulating landscape with clear spring, flowery meadows and shaded groves as congruent with a place for studies, augmented by the presence of the Muses. The achievement of such phenomenological congruence leads to the kind of somatic-symbolic unity I felt at Rousham (9.2.1).

Ideological congruence

Hirschfeld did not limit his concern for congruence to the relationship between the signifiers and their immediate surroundings, but extended it to the relationship between signifier and the larger, geo-cultural context. He started questioning whether the migrant Greco-Roman gods from the Mediterranean are at all congruent with the northern, Germanic landscape. Such doubts cast over the universality of classical topomythopoiesis foreshadowed the nineteenth-century turn towards a topomythopoeia based on myths indigenous to nation-states (9.2.2).

When the question is still asked today – whether the Greco-Roman gods have a place in the contemporary world, especially outside Europe – it is a question of congruence between signifier and its cultural context; are the gods only fit for their ‘native’ contexts? This question underlies much of Chapter 4 that discussed how the Christianised society of the early Middle Ages came to accept, if tentatively, the presence of the pagan gods in art, literature and gardens. The same question was asked again and again, prominently in Renaissance Italy (5.3.5) and Puritan England (Chapter 7). In both cases, as during the Middle Ages, poets played the role of minesweeping to remove the suspicions about the gods and

recast them to fulfil legitimate roles in societies far removed – ideologically, politically, religiously, geographically – from the ancient sanctuaries whence they originated. These episodes underline how classical topomythopoiesis cannot easily exist as a self-sufficient practice of place-making limited to the ambit of landscape design. Twenty-first century attempts at employing classical myths in gardens often lack reference to that part of the representational network that imaginatively establishes congruence between them and their spatial-temporal contexts. Without poets, artists, historians... engaging with the tradition, the dense representational network stagnates, dilutes and can be forgotten.

The episodes also show that, as today, some accepted the myths' universal and inherent value, while others – like the iconoclasts of Late Antiquity and the proto-Reformists of the early Renaissance – did not. The fact that often contrary ideologies found legitimate attachment to the myths is exemplified by their application by two rulers with opposite political ideals: Louis XIV found congruence between his absolutism and the sun-god Apollo (6.1.1), whereas Prince Leopold Franz von Anhalt-Dessau employed the myths to manifest his ideal of a liberal society free from mingling aristocrats (9.1).

10.1.2 Contextualisation

The weariness for emblematic classical topomyths reported by Whately and others during the eighteenth century partly led to the decline of the tradition (1.1.2). The systemisation of topomythopoiesis that started in the previous century (Chapter 6) culminated in a catalogue book approach: statues of gods were merely placed in gardens for decorative effect and as physical versions of the illustrations found in emblem books. Shear repetition and symbolic predictability left the gods as mere visual garnishes inviting the wearisome identification of their 'meaning'. This approach to topomythopoiesis is characterised by the lack of a concern for the relation between signifier and setting, leaving experience mostly open for analytical, and not so much imaginative or somatic-symbolic modes of participation. As in the early Renaissance outdoor statue collections (5.3.1) and Spence's garden in *Polymetis* (8.4.1), statues are viewed as they would in a Victorian museum where decontextualised artefacts are labelled, categorised and described stylistically and iconographically. Yet, the history of topomythopoiesis shows a number of ways in which the specific context of the emblematic signifiers can augment experience to encourage non-analytical modes of participation. This distinguishes topomyths, even at their most artificial, from free-standing sculptures that can function aesthetically and iconographically independently from their settings. These site-specific relations can be summarised as follows, ordered here from the vast to the immediate scales of site:

Cosmic mapping

Some topomyths are considered as points on an invisible mythological map that stretches far beyond the spatial limits of the immediate site.

Axis mundi: Some of the earliest topomyths, the cult sanctuaries of the Bronze Age, are believed to be located on sites that were deemed to exist at the juncture between earth and sky, on a vertical *axis mundi* that is established by way of a conglomerate of contrasting site features, for example: cavern – mountaintop – (topomyth) – sky (see 3.3.1).

Solar axis: Other topomyths are contextualized by means of a horizontal *solar axis*, for example at Versailles, which may at first glance appear like an a-contextual collection of topomyths forcibly placed by a superimposed geometric scheme. The Apollonian-themed topomyths were contextualised by relating them to the cosmic cycle of day and night, manifested by the east-west axis connecting the King's bed-chamber in the east (where the sun-god rises in the morning) with the vanishing point on the western horizon, where the sun sets. The Apollonian topomyths are organised along this axis, although the progression of the narrative is inverted: the Grotto of Tethys, where Apollo comes to rest at night, is east of the basin from where he rises again in the west. Such organisation invites the garden dweller to bring spatially separate topomyths into relation as part of a larger narrative conceit, and relate the invisible cosmos (be it the sky-realm of the gods or the daily path of the sun-god) to sensory experience, thus affording enchantment.

Regional appropriation

A topomyth can be contextualised through the regionalisation of its mythological iconography. The rusticated Apennine statue at Villa Demidoff serves as an obvious example (5.5.9; Figure 5.13). It is not an Olympian god or typical Greco-Roman nature deity, but a site-specific personification of the regional mountain range, the Apennines. The giant pressing into the rock to produce a stream of water is a monumentalisation of the hydrological system of the region within the limits of the garden. Yet, as an appropriation of the river-god type and with literary roots in Virgil, the bearded figure remains within the fold of the mimetic tradition. In some Roman domestic gardens, similar translations of geographic features can be discerned, such as the water channels known as 'Niles'. There the topomyth is contextualised by relating it to a large, imperial-scale geography. But only in name, similar to how the reclining river-gods of the Renaissance were named after local rivers (5.3.4).

Sacred grounding

The most profound relationship between signifier and site is found when the site itself signifies. Natural signifiers like a pool of water can be added to form a topomyth, but in some cases the *existing* features of a site fulfil this role. For example, the topomythic cult sanctuaries of ancient Greece, especially during the Bronze Age (3.3.1 & 3.4.1), were created with minimal change to the natural setting. Place-making took on the form of minor built interventions to demarcate the space and facilitate ritual, and later the addition of a cult statue that served as a receptacle for the god to temporarily embody. Put in terms of landscape architecture, the selection of site played a fundamental role in creating the topomyth: the natural cave with its strange, dark recesses was spatially apt for an experience of seeking out wisdom or healing; the mountaintop with its nearness to the skies an apt setting to come closer to the gods.

Often, these sites were chosen for the hierophanies that were thought to have occurred there, thus contextualising the topomyth by relating it to a site-specific mytho-history, as is the case at the Peirene Fountain where ‘long ago’ the titular nymph sat crying and Bellerophon tamed Pegasus (3.4.6). Topomyths are also made to mark the sacred ground where a (mortal) historic event took place, like the making of mounds to memorialise the soldiers slain on the plain of Marathon (3.3.2). Such sacred ground sometimes becomes the site of a palimpsest of topomyths. For example, a cave on Mount Gargano was (possibly) a sanctuary for chthonic deities, became a Roman mithraeum and later a Christian grotto-chapel dedicated to St Michael (4.1.1), and the Belvedere Court was (possibly) the site of an Apollonian cult (5.3.2) before it later became a Christian Parnassus.

When standing on such sacred grounds, the virtual landscape evoked by the signifiers is not only constructed from fragments of imagined far-off places, but of the place underfoot, imagined as a stage of historic- and theo-drama.¹ As such, the connection between the virtual and sensory landscape is more immediate and context-specific.

Phenomenological contextualisation

The Hellenistic and Roman periods witnessed a gradual desecularisation of topomyths. In some cases, especially during the Roman period, topomyths were created for their recreational use (although we must be careful to not separate religion and recreation following contemporary norms). To this end, the natural setting was not chosen for its inherent sacredness, but its *atmosphere*. For example, the ocean-fronted cave at Sperlonga was

¹ I am borrowing the term from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s book title *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (1988).

chosen as the setting for the statue groups depicting episodes from *The Odyssey*. Participation was thus augmented by the cavernous and watery setting, and further contextualised by the sightline across the bay to where another Homeric episode took place (3.4.7). This serves as a good, if obvious, example of signifier-setting congruence, as the mythical episode of the blinding of the cyclops Polyphemus occurred in a cave, as it was here re-created. By placing the statues at some distance from the triclinium, the architect shrouded the figures in shadow to harness the in situ ambient effect rendered by the low lighting conditions. Similarly, the statue depicting the struggle with Scylla was suitably engulfed by the sea contained in the circular pool. Topomyths like these with literal signifier-setting associations tend to function as re-enactments of myths in stone, encouraging the onlooker to engage with narrative participation, like a theatre-goer watching a frozen play.

The effect of atmospheric lighting on the experience of topomyths can transcend the augmentation of narrative participation. Taegio experienced Neo-Platonic enchantment specifically at the rising and setting of the sun (5.4.5). Although he does not explain the reason for this, we can infer that the atmospheric strangeness of darkness shifting to light, and light fading, renders the signifiers with a mysterious aura that briefly stirs a change in consciousness.

Topographic contextualisation

Topography can play a role in contextualising the topomyth through the congruence between the topography of the site and its virtual landscape. For example, the topomythonym of Parnassus was used in the Renaissance to imbue the villas with an aura of learning and poetic inspiration (5.2.1) – the Parnassian virtual landscape being congruent with the hill-top settings of the estates. The hillside itself played its part in achieving a deeper congruence, namely by enabling the garden dweller to ascend the hill and watch from there the world below, thus physically re-enacting the ascent of the soul within the Neo-Platonic epistemology of Taegio and other humanists..

The Vale of Venus at Rousham is another example where the figure of Venus is placed in the undulating topographic folds that express the gentility of the *locus amoenus* landscape discussed throughout the thesis.

The geomorphological features of a site can also be employed to contextualise a topomyth. At Delos, some architectonic grottoes were built to frame in situ rock (3.4.4), thus utilised to evoke the natural cave sanctuaries.

Architectural contextualisation

Topomyths that were constructed in artificial settings like urban squares or domestic courtyards, were often related syntactically to their urban or architectural setting. The façade

type grotto of the House of Neptune and Amphitrite (Figure 3.15) was one component of a larger, spatial composition that also included the painted aedicula, freestanding fountain and triclinium. Its public counterparts of the Roman cities fulfilled the infrastructural role of terminating aqueducts, and the urban-spatial role of serving as a boundary to a civic space. The Porticus of Pomey was organised on the axis of the adjacent theatre, and programmatically linked by serving as a resting place for theatre-goers.

10.1.3 Mimesis

Notwithstanding the various ways in which topomyths were contextualised through site specific responses at various scales, their poetic role has often been to evoke virtual landscapes that lie *far beyond the boundaries of site*. This was partly achieved through the imitation of the natural environment as imagined to exist in Arcadia, expressed through the abstraction or simulation of nature.

Abstraction

The original topomyths, the sanctuaries of ancient Greece, were predominantly natural environments. In the Hellenistic period, there emerged a tendency to modify natural settings towards greater artificiality. For example, the rocky strata of the acropolis of Rhodes was hewn into vaulted and domed spaces, and the clay models of Locri suggest that the form of ceilings of existing caves were altered into vaults (3.4.3). Inside the Rhodian grottoes, decorative shell-work was used to further simulate a natural cave environment. The geometrisation of cave geomorphology to an arched structure and embellishment of surface mark the beginnings of the imitation of Arcadian nature through abstraction. Although this may appear contradictory to mimesis (the imitation of nature), Hagberg (1984) argues that an Aristotelian understanding of mimetic art does not exclude abstraction as it can be used as a means for the artist to not imitate the realistic or ‘photographic’ appearance of nature, but its deeper essence. Within classical topomythopoesis, this was achieved in various ways:

Morphological abstraction: Once public and domestic topomyths started appearing in the squares, courtyards and gardens of Hellenistic and Roman cities – wrenched from the sacred geography of the wild places – the architectonic spatial types were developed as artefacts serving as simulacra of the sacro-natural sanctuaries. Chapter 3 discussed the abstraction of mountains into conical and terraced mounds (see various types in Figure 3.10), grottoes into arched structures (see various types in Figure 3.25) and groves into grids of trees. These spatial types form a palette of universally applied signifiers used throughout the history of classical topomythopoesis. The rugged mountainscapes of Pan, Apollo and the Muses are

evoked by various geometrised mounds, such as the conical Paneion in Alexandria (3.3.3) and the mounds of some Oxford colleges during the seventeenth century (Figure 7.3 & Figure 7.4). The dark and damp caves of the nymphs are evoked by numerous arched structures like the Roman public nymphaea (e.g. Figure 3.20) and the garden sacella of Pompeii (e.g. Figure 3.16). The sacred groves are evoked by straight lines of trees as in the Porticus of Pompey (Figure 3.27). Although their appearances are highly artificial, they prompt participation with the idealised nature of Arcadia.

Stylized nature: The built spatial types were sometimes complemented by water and plants. A simple example is the vegetation of the private garden topomyths like those at Pompeii that foregrounded the sacella with plants abundant with mythological associations like olive, myrtle and laurel. These, in addition to productive plants, were planted in ordered beds, sometimes pruned and dwarfed, thus not attempting to simulate a natural environment, but rather express an idealised mythical nature.

Water was typically provided by pools or freestanding fountains. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the provision of water took on more elaborate forms (like the fountain with water organ at Villa d' Este in Figure 5.14), sometimes used purely for its aural quality as in the *hidden* water organ of the Grotto of Tethys used to simulate the ocean depths. At Kenilworth in the sixteenth century, a fake dolphin housing musicians was used to temporarily turn a castle moat into the sea (Figure 7.2).

Ornamentation: Where the restrictions of urban sites prohibited the use of actual plants, they were rendered in two dimensions on walls, such as the ornamental and flat depiction of foliage in mosaic (in the Fourth Style), as in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite (Figure 3.15). Further abstraction of the natural world of Arcadia can be seen in the use of ornamental patterns. For example, the interior surfaces of grottoes were often elaborated with decorative shell-work, like that articulating the various architectural components of the Grotto of Tethys (Figure 6.16).

Simulation

The approach to the design of topomyths as abstracted recreations of the natural sanctuaries was supplemented by one that sought to imitate the abodes of the mythological beings with greater naturalism, emerging during the Renaissance:

Background naturalism: Some of the earliest attempts to create natural-looking scenery can be found in the Belvedere statue court that housed found statues. Even though the

figures of river gods and nymphs were situated within architectonic niches, they were naturalised by the addition of stratified layers of rock, living plants and flowing water (Figure 5.7 & Figure 5.8).

Landscape naturalism: Whereas the scenic naturalism of the above mentioned example functions as a backdrop to the emblematic signifier, more expansive ways of simulating Arcadia was applied in later topomythopoeic gardens. For example, at Wray Wood, the trees were planted to form a grove within which the emblematic signifiers are encountered (Figure 8.2). In restricted settings, nature was realistically depicted in two dimensions, as in some Roman dwellings where the entire topomyth was represented in naturalistic frescoes in the Second Style (for example in Figure 3.6).

Rustication: The rocky Parnassus mounds that started appearing in Renaissance gardens are good examples of topomyths that comprise a rusticated spatial type as the setting for statues and plants as a means to simulate the indigenous habitats for the gods of music and poetry (Figure 5.16 & Figure 5.17). The one conceived by Le Brun for Versailles (Figure 6.3) developed this type further by including a grotto within the mound. A similar type was realised (as a pair) at Villa d'Este in the early seventeenth century (Figure 3.9). The rusticated grottoes within these mounds foreshadowed the attempts to create natural grotto-caves during the eighteenth century, like the one of Alexander Pope (1.1.3) or the one underneath the Temple of Venus at Wörlitz (Figure 9.3).

10.1.4 Coherence

As mentioned before, there is no equivalent to the orders of classical architecture in the tradition of topomythopoeisis that consistently informed composition. Yet, we can draw out some basic principles that were applied, varying over time.

The development of topomythopoeic syntax

The ancient topomyths, whether sacred or secularised, typically consisted of a composition of statue-figure (after the Bronze Age) and natural setting (wild, abstracted or simulated). The statue was not displayed as a free-standing figure, but one veiled behind the columned screen of a temple, or held within the recess of a rock-carved or architectonic niche. Often, the composition consists of parts that together form a singular topomyth such as a mound, grotto or grove. For example, the Fountain of Neptune in Corinth (Figure 3.17) was composed of a statue (emblematic signifier) standing on a plinth in a pool of water (natural signifier) within a sacellum (spatial signifier). The composition of the Porticus of Pompey

(3.5) is more complex, but similarly consisted of a natural setting, the grove (both natural and spatial signifier), combined with the figure – Venus veiled in her temple (emblematic signifier). Even when multiple statues started appearing in the public *nymphaea* of Rome (Figure 3.20), these remained parts of a single composition.

During the Middle Ages, the figure – erased of any trace of religious significance – was given a diminished position within a decorative fountain (out in the open), no longer situated within a sacral envelope or frame. And that only in the rare cases of their presence, usually left altogether unmaterialised, perhaps evoked by an inscription, and left to be seen within the imagination of the participating garden dweller.

The ancient and medieval topomyths – compositions of spatial, emblematic and natural signifiers – were rarely brought into a spatial relation with *other* topomyths within a larger setting. When the excavated figures of mythical beings started appearing scattered about in outdoor collections during the sixteenth century (5.3.1), there emerged a need to organise them into coherent ensembles. This followed their iconographic *organisation* by the mythographers who identified and described them with reference to the ancient sources. From these, the mythical beings, especially those associated with nature, found their way into the literature of the time as a means to give form to the stirring conscious appreciation of nature (5.3.4). They became figures fit to include in various parts of a garden where their presence prompted participation with the natural setting of the garden, as was seen in Taegio's accounts (e.g. 5.4.4). In addition to being naturalised within their garden settings, interconnections between them were established to create allegorical, narrative or thematic coherence between the various topomyths of a site by employing three main compositional strategies:²

Thematic axes: Although the use of geometry in Renaissance and Baroque gardens were not primarily derived from topomythopoiesis (fn. 10, pg. 134), they were employed to organise topomyths to create coherent ensembles within the larger garden setting. For example, the main axis of Villa Lante organises a series of topomyths related to the Ovid's story of the flood (5.5.3), as the east-west axis establishes the Apollonian theme of Versailles mentioned above (under [Error! Reference source not found.](#)).

Interpretation devices: Beyond the thematic organisation that axes can establish, they can also be utilised to augment the spatial awareness of the narrative or allegorical conceit of the

² Taegio's garden accounts must serve as a reminder that not all topomyths were experienced as part of larger, interconnected conceits, but rather as encounters of interstitial spaces.

garden. The underlying theme at Villa d'Este of the moral choice between vice and virtue was not only signified by the statues of Hercules, but also by the underlying order of the pathways in relation to the main axis (5.5.3). The visitor, walking up-hill (in itself intended as a means to provide an embodied experience of walking the high, but difficult road of virtue through life) has to make a series of choices – a crossroads spatially marked by a Hercules statue: one leading to the grotto of voluptuous Venus, the other leading to the grotto of chaste Diana. These two topomyths are thus interconnected by the path configuration to bring them into conceptual and spatial dialogue with one another.

A similar example is seen at Villa Barbaro, where the series of moral lessons were imparted by interconnecting the statues on the semi-circular plan of the nymphaeum by pairing them as opposites to the main axis (5.5.8).

Ornamental organisation: With the rationalisation of topomythopoiesis witnessed in the treatise books from the mid-seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, we find a series of examples (e.g. Figs. 6.20, 6.24, 8.5) where the emblematic figures are presented as subordinate points at the intersection of geometries and organisational lines. In these examples, unlike the interpretation devices mentioned above, the figures are brought into a coherent compositional ensemble, but without contributing to the way in which the garden dweller is expected to engage in narrative, somatic-symbolic or imaginative participation. Often in these cases, diagonal paths converge at the figure, thus spatially marking it as a visual focal point, demanding the attentive visitor to engage in academic or exegetic participation.

Distancing: With the placement of figures in the open and full light of day, something of their aesthetic numinosity was lost.³ By erasing the natural and spatial signifiers that contextualised and naturalised the mythical being within a setting that evoked Arcadia, the figure becomes celebrated as an end in itself. In the ancient topomyths, the architectural veil or frame created a spatial boundary between the profane environment of the everyday, and the other-worldly domain of the god and the virtual landscape associated with it. The strangeness of such earlier topomyths established an ontological distance between the garden dweller and the sacral-aesthetic space; a distance removed by covering entire gardens with grids of statues, erasing all difference between landscape and topomyth, topomyth and garden dweller.

In some eighteenth century landscape gardens, something of the poetic distance

³ I qualify numinosity here with 'aesthetic' since the religious experience in the presence of the beings from classical mythology had already been eradicated by the Middle Ages.

between the garden dweller and the mythological being was recovered. We see this in Rode's description of the landscape promenade at Wörlitzer Park. Moving through the landscape, we catch glimpses of Venus – veiled behind the columns of the tholos – viewed with a feeling of *Sehnsucht* (9.1.2). The longing felt over distance was very much a characteristic of Romantic landscape experience, as was seen in Goethe's poetic description of the enchantment afforded by the view across the Sicilian sea (9.1.2). For the Romantic garden dweller, the ineffable quality of the figure was regained and the topomyth thus re-enchanted.

The topomyths of Wörlitzer Park was, unlike those of the Villa d'Este, not geometrically interconnected to form an ensemble along narrative, allegorical or thematic lines. Rather they were conceived as scattered fragments of Arcadia to evoke the virtual landscapes within the recesses of the lone wanderer's imagination, free from the grand conceits of a designer – the kind of pictorial participation advocated by Joseph Addison (8.1).

Although not strictly interconnected with geometries, these fragmentary topomyths were visually connected to pull the garden dweller along a cinematographic path from one topomyth to another seen in the distance, as in Addison's dream (8.1.3). The principle is evident at Stourhead and Rousham, where topomyths are constantly viewed from *elsewhere* – when not in situ, the imagination is automatically engaged in participation, for it longs for a place beyond the next hill, around the corner and across the water; pulled by the yearning for the blue flower. Once reached, the topomyth loses its poetic potency to prompt participation, for the figure is again encountered as an unveiled object, as when Rode finally arrived at Venus (end of 9.1.3), breaking the spell by analysing it as an art-historic *thing*.

10.1.5 Conclusion

If classical topomythopoiesis is to be recovered as a poetic tool for landscape architecture it should seek to find congruence between the signifiers and their physical and cultural settings through acts of contextualisation; enter into the mimetic dialogue of the tradition to produce fragments of Arcadian nature that are both familiar and strange; and apply principles of composition to create coherently conceived and composed landscape spaces that interrupt our everyday settings.

A contemporary classical topomythopoiesis will fail to stir a poetic change of consciousness should its signifiers be mere copies of past topomyths, thus excluding strangeness. It will lack the depth of shared participation should its signifiers be wholly original, visually unrecognisable from the dense representational network. It will lack enchantment should statues of the gods merely be placed on plinths in the open as objects for gazing. It can only succeed in re-enchantment if it finds a way of establishing a spatial

and aesthetic distance between us and Arcadia, for only then are we invited to participate in its making.

11 CONCLUSION

11.1 ASPECTS OF CLASSICAL TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

This thesis aimed to fill a gap in the literature on garden history by providing a long-term account of the role of classical mythology in the design and experience of gardens from antiquity to 1800. This was achieved by answering the following research questions:

How can the role of mythology in the expression and reception of designed landscapes be understood and defined in relation to the pursuit of enchantment?

In Chapter 2, I developed a theoretical framework for topomythopoiesis that explains the role of mythology in the expression and reception of designed landscapes in terms of a virtual landscape that mediates between myths and the physical landscape-signifiers that evoke them. It is posited that this virtual landscape exists within the imagination of the individual garden dweller and is constructed from their exposure to various verbal and visual representations of myths. It is argued that when this non-sensory dimension of landscape is brought into relation with landscape phenomena through participation, the landscape becomes, momentarily, enchanted. Thus, participation is presented as a mode of landscape reception which actively and creatively involves the garden dweller to experience more than matter.

As a way of place-making, classical topomythopoiesis transcends private participation (1.1.3 & 1.1.10), because its lexicon of spatial, emblematic and natural signifiers are related to a dense representational network developed over thousands of years, still expanding and being disseminated. The history of this development was written in response to the second research question:

What role did classical mythology play in the experience and design of gardens from antiquity to the end of the eighteenth century?

In Chapters 3–9, I wrote a broad history of classical topomythopoiesis through the interpretive lens of the theoretical framework, briefly summarised as a collation of the chapter conclusions:

An abridged history of classical topomythopoiesis

Classical topomythopoiesis originated in Ancient Greece where sacred, natural sites (mountains, caves, springs and forests) were altered with minimal built interventions in service of rituals performed in the presence of a cult statue – **participation, cultivated by knowledge of myths, towards religious epiphany**. From these sites developed the prototypical combination found throughout the history of classical topomythopoiesis of natural-constructed setting (mount, grotto, fount and grove) and anthropomorphic deity (Venus, Apollo, nymph...); the signifiers of the natural milieu, and the spatial and statue types.

During the Hellenistic period such natural settings were increasingly monumentalised and recreated in cities as architectonic simulacra, whilst being appropriated for recreational use in addition to their function as settings for religious ritual. This development continued into the Roman Imperial period with the construction of monumental and public topomyths as acts of civic euergetism and beautification, and smaller imitations made in private gardens as objects of delight that prompted a **narrative mode of participation**.

With the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, the pagan iconography of topomythopoiesis came under suspicion and bouts of iconoclasm. Yet, various Christian interpretations of pagan mythology ensured that the gods remained cultural currency during the Middle Ages, mostly as allegorical figures veiling Christian and universal truths, and objects of artistic appreciation. Although the spatial and emblematic signifiers were mostly absent from gardens, the gods and especially the mythological *locus amoenus* persisted in the verbal language of landscape. The literature of courtly love absorbed into its Christian vision the gods of love (Venus and Cupid), liberating them as legitimate figures for garden iconography, especially on fountains. The widely read *Roman de la Rose* served as an example for how such mythological iconography can lead to **exegetic participation towards transcendental experience**. Through his literary and mythographic works, Boccaccio further liberated the gods for aesthetic appropriation by drawing a clear distinction between the sensual virtual landscape where Christian morality is suspended, and the moral physical garden where virtue is practiced – from the physical we can participate with the virtual, which in turn is a step on a Neoplatonic ladder taking us to divine love.

The presence of the gods blossomed during the Italian Renaissance, starting their life as

excavated artefacts in outdoor statue collections in the fifteenth century, later naturalised during the sixteenth century in purpose made garden settings following the precedent set by the Belvedere Court in the Vatican City. For the Neoplatonists, these topomyths prompted **symbolic-somatic participation leading to an experience of seeing (and feeling) the higher realm of the universe cascading into the phenomenal world.**

In aristocratic France during the seventeenth century, the reception of the classical topomyths of Versailles was cultivated and directed by official guidebooks and literary accounts, fostering **academic and fantastical modes of participation.** Towards the end of the century, the site-specific and dense metaphorical classical topomythopoiesis of Versailles became rationalised in design treatises that treated the statues as coordinates within geometric systems, governed by a set of rules for their correct placement.

While classical topomythopoiesis flourished in continental Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant England grappled with its idolatrous iconography. Yet, through the literary works of Spencer and Milton, the myths were saved by using them for moral ends. By the eighteenth century, English (and later continental) landscape gardens included topomyths that served as simple and direct emblems **to prompt pictorial participation** as part of moral edification.

In Germany, the Romantic movement, coupled with Neoclassicism and Enlightenment thinking inspired a **pictorial and fantastical participation,** in search of Neoplatonic visions. The growing sense of national identity, the growing preference for natural scenery, the weariness for hollow emblematic gardens, and the increasing emphasis on private participation all led to the decline of topomythopoiesis from 1800, surviving in the shadows of modernity.

From this history, the following generalised conclusions can be drawn:

A history of participation

Historical accounts of garden experiences and the literary works that guided reception show explicitly that classical topomyths were encountered through participation – whether analytical, symbolic-somatic or imaginative – to experience the virtual landscape of myth in the phenomena of gardens. Thus, classical topomythopoiesis serves as an example of a way of place-making and a mode of reception that pursues enchantment, and has potential to be employed in the face of the disenchanted world of modernity.

A tradition

Classical topomythopoiesis persisted as a way of landscape place-making from antiquity to 1800, *transmitted* through various means: the artistic mimesis of statue and spatial types; the dissemination

of the myths (both ancient and re-imagined, both verbal and visual); the collation and elucidation of mythical iconography in emblem books; the visualisation and theorising of topomythopoesis in design treatises; and the cultivation of participation through poetic and polemic literature and guidebooks. From this continual transmission of classical topomythopoesis has emerged a distinct landscape design *tradition*. Thus, ‘classical topomythopoeic’ is a useful descriptor for any garden or landscape designed to prompt participation with the virtual landscape of Arcadia, comparable with ‘classical’ that denotes any building that contains the classical orders.

A liberated tradition

Ever since the divinity and actuality of the gods of classical mythology came under attack by the pre-Socratic philosophers in the sixth century BC, they were gradually desacralised. Their lack of spiritual potency was affirmed throughout the history of classical topomythopoesis which liberated them as iconographic figures that could freely be employed without much concern for the strictures that normally dictate *religious* place-making traditions; the gods could be represented independently of their original religious role and without fear of idolatry or blasphemy. Thus, the gods and their *milieux* became the fertile subject matter for (sometimes whimsical and capricious) garden creations that were often bereft of the sacred and ritualistic character of the landscapes whence the tradition emerged. Their desacralisation resulted in a wide variety of applications of topomyths beyond the original function to prompt religious epiphany (during antiquity), mainly to propagate political ideals, teach moral lessons, provide whimsical entertainment, offer art-historical appreciation, tease erotic desire and manifest the transcendental. The varied and unrestricted nature of the tradition renders any attempt at deriving a taxonomy of forms and fixed meanings futile – Venus may signify sensuality here, but divine love there; Apollo signifies poetic inspiration on that hill, but royal power on the next. Yet, there is some degree of consistency in the repertoire of garden gods and their associated settings. Certain Olympian gods have been persistently presented in gardens with broad thematic consistency, namely: Venus (in grottoes and circular temples), Apollo (on mounds), Bacchus (in groves) and Neptune (in pools) along with the hero Hercules (in open spaces), Pegasus (on mounds) and the nature-rustic deities of the nymphs (in grottoes and fountains), satyrs, Pan and Flora (in groves and grottoes).

The *locus amoenus* as a literary trope is a consistent source for topomyths, to the extent that the mythical *locus amoenus* inspired the creation of the very eighteenth century landscape gardens that veered away from emblematic mythical iconography.

A language of statue and spatial types

Unlike buildings that are coherently designed according to the classical form language, classical

topomythopoiesis has not, historically, dictated the overall composition of designed landscapes. Rather, the topomyths discussed throughout the chapters typically occur in a wide range of designed settings, from regular gardens and domestic interiors to naturalised parks and public squares. Thus, the duality of descriptors like ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ that casts a wall between, say, the Baroque and the landscape garden movement, disintegrates to reveal a continuous tradition that transcends stylistic developments. Yet, there is consistency in the design language of the topomyths due to the mimesis of the statue and spatial types, which form the vocabulary of the iconographic and formal language of classical topomythopoiesis. Whereas a classical building is derived from the application of syntactic principles of composition (hexastyle, peripteral, modular...) and the ordered assembly of standardised building elements (column, capital, frieze...), a classical topomyth is derived from the inclusion of a statue type (Apollo, Venus...), whether copied or re-interpreted, located within a spatial type (grotto, mound...), whether rustic or architectonic. Sometimes, a statue is absent and the emblematic contents is signified by, for example, a verbal inscription. The mimetic nature of the language of classical topomythopoiesis has not excluded originality, and a number of examples discussed are site-specific conceits.

11.2 FROM LIMITATIONS TO FUTURE RESEARCH

As a panoramic history covering around 4000 years, this thesis is limited to a mere glance back at the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis, leaving much room for further research:

From secondary and semiotic to primary and somatic analysis

The limitation of relying on the desktop study of existing iconographic analyses of gardens exclude the important somatic dimension of topomyths that influence participation. The application of the theoretical framework to the study of gardens can thus be extended to include the first-personal experience as influenced by the plants, topography, light, air, views and bodily movement.

From canonical to lesser-known topomyths

The limitation of mostly relying on well-known topomyths excluded the topomythopoiesis of lesser known examples. Having writ the outline of its history – origins, development, systemisation – further studies can now extend to:

- The history of classical topomythopoiesis during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a tradition operating in the shadows of the landscape’s modernity.
- The history of classical topomythopoiesis outside Europe.
- The history of vernacular and public classical topomythopoiesis.

- Specific aspects highlighted by this thesis, for example the (largely un-studied) recurrence of Neoplatonic participation.
- The latent classical topomythopoiesis of contemporary landscape designers such as Fernando Caruncho.
- The topomythopoiesis of non-classical traditions.

From basic types to poetics

The identification of spatial types in Chapter 3 provides a useful but basic description of the formal components of classical topomythopoiesis. Furthermore, the references to the myths and their representations that constellate around the topomyths have only suggested the density of the representational network. In order to develop a poetics of classical topomythopoiesis that can inform its practice, the following areas of research beckon (at risk of reductionism):

- Syntax: the underlying geometry of topomyths; patterns of statue-space-site relationships.
- Morphology: detailed formal descriptions and categorisation of the spatial types; histories of specific types.
- Representational network: the *longue duree* histories of topomyths and the representations that make up their virtual counterparts.

11.3 TOWARDS A POETICS

In anticipation of grappling in future with these aspects that may inform the continued practice of the tradition, I will end with a speculative musing on the poetics of classical topomythopoiesis.

How does one sink a ‘deep-blue spring’ where can be heard the ‘choral songs-and-dances’¹ of the Muses, where poets can drink from ‘th’ inspir’d... Castalian Spring’; a ‘sacred place of some nymphs’ where they can sit ‘on the bright bank in the shade of saplings’, with depths where crystals glow that reveal the ‘whole condition’² of the world? How can ‘the beauties of a crystal rivulet’ be furrowed, with ‘murmurs invited to the softest slumbers’?³ What mound can be raised to evoke the ‘towering crags’ where Pan scurries in the shadows of the ‘glistening high mountains’?⁴ What

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 1–7. This and all the quotes in the page above, appeared throughout the thesis.

² De Meun & De Loris (1995:51).

³ La Fontaine (1774:147).

⁴ Anonymous, *To Pan*.

meadows can be seeded, ‘bejeweled with unnumbered flowers’,⁵ that will lift the imagination to ‘the happy fields of Elysium’⁶ or ‘that faire field of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flours Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie Dis was gatherd’, or grow into ‘a rich pasture to the ruminating spirit’ cooled by ‘the gentle fragrant zephyrs’?⁷ What grottoes can be dug to be ‘a perfect image of the concert of all the elements’ in which echo the ‘Harmony of the Universe’,⁸ ‘into which whoever’ looks receives the prophetic spirit’ and ‘feels filled with divinity’?⁹ What groves can be planted wherein ‘the Earth produced a tree’¹⁰ for the hunted ones? What fields can be fertilised to make ‘the fruitful earth unforced bare... fruit abundantly and without stint’?¹¹ In what garden on the edge of the ‘resounding shore’ can a voice of weeping be heard from its haunted springs and dales where the nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn?¹² In what garden can things be seen ‘so wonderful and beautiful’ that it seems ‘there could be another world’?¹³ In what garden can we see dimly that which we will come to ‘see face to face’?¹⁴

The makers of topomyths throughout the ages have attempted to manifest fragments of the mythical geography of distant Arcadia, and offer glimpses into the lives of its numinous inhabitants. Arcadia itself was made, and is continually remade, as a place existing on the ‘resounding shore’ between our bounded, earthly existence and an invisible ocean of transcendence. It is a virtual place cultivated by the hands and voices of humans where theophanies occur of flawed (and awful) gods that mirror our deeply buried emotions and desires. Since the fall of the Olympians as benefactors of cultic ritual, they have not been taken all too seriously. Yet, even as the torches of philosophy, science and theology shined brightly on them to reveal them as mere marble, they were never wholly abandoned. For they have remained as serious subjects for art, as expressions of our intuited grasp of the invisible universe that is felt to exist behind the curtain of the phenomenal world; expressions of our deepest longings for unity between the supernatural and nature, between nature and ourselves, between ourselves and others. In the garden of

⁵ Ovid, *Met.* 5.274–278.

⁶ Winckelmann (1872:312).

⁷ Hazm (1994:191–192).

⁸ Félibien (2016:120).

⁹ Taegio (2011:203).

¹⁰ *Geoponika* (1805:68).

¹¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 115–120.

¹² Milton, *Nativity* 181–188.

¹³ Taegio (2011:203)

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

topomyths we become sub-creators playing God by making gods in our own fragile image;¹⁵ we play at breaking through the material veil, perhaps in hope that something Wholly Other will break through from the other side. Part of the reason for the long enduring practice of classical topomythopoiesis, unlike truly sacral place-making traditions, is that the very hollowing-out of the gods have liberated them for aesthetic expression. Their anthropomorphism makes the charismatic human face present, providing an intimacy with infinity. Yet, their idealised forms and the strange settings they inhabit demarcate them as different from us and nature; the tragic stories they evoke shatter the cosy familiarity by distancing us from beings that are terrible and glorious, cruel and radiant, failed and perfectly Other. Their strangeness is easily erased by repetition and predictability which stifle participation. When reduced to ornaments they become mere everyday things, not needing to be imbued with the radiating brilliance afforded by our imaginations, cultivated by story. Strangeness allows our profane existence to be interrupted by a hierophany of the unseen.

The beauty of classical topomythopoiesis is to be found in a paradox: that within the superficiality of its appearances lies its depth: the spatial and statue types of the tradition cannot simply be discarded or abstracted into completely new forms in search of the invisible presences they evoke, for it is exactly within the contours of the surface of the human face that we peer into the world beyond bodily being; there in the aesthetics of the surface we can find enchantment.

¹⁵ The term ‘sub-creator’ is used by Tolkien (2001:71) to describe those makers of fantasy who create secondary worlds that, at their best, provide a “sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth”.

12 POSTSCRIPT

12.1 THE PEDAGOGIC VALUE OF CLASSICAL TOPOMYTHOPOIESIS

As discussed in Chapter 1, classical topomythopoiesis had been marginalised from the discipline of landscape architecture during the twentieth century, especially from its schools. Yet, despite private participation, the cult of nature and instrumentalism, the study of gardens like the Villa d’Este, Versailles and Stourhead continued to form a staple part of history of landscape architecture curricula. That is until recently when they have been placed under suspicion by the project of decolonisation due to their adjacency to white, patriarchal societies that enabled the creation of such places from the spoils of exploitation.¹⁶ Furthermore, for a discipline that seeks to find solutions for the pressing concerns of climate change and social justice, they appear as antiquated attempts to objectify nature for the gazing eyes of an elite few.

Yet, I argue that the teaching of the Mediterranean garden-making traditions remains a relevant educational endeavour in pursuit of a critical and syncretic, rather than a cynical and divisive, design culture – even in an African context, where I teach.

As the preceding history of classical topomythopoiesis has shown, the Mediterranean world

¹⁶ For example, in the call for contributions to the conference *Future History: Teaching History in Landscape Schools*, Woudstra (2022) acknowledges that the canon of western landscape architecture can no longer be taught without question: “As with other aspects in society the #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and decolonisation have in the last couple of years brought the focus onto landscape histories also, and aspects accepted as a matter of fact previously are now critically questioned. The houses and gardens of nobility are male and white and are now presented as an expression of colonial exploitation and suppression. Their use in historic narrative ought to be carefully considered; should it be restricted?”.

– the nexus between Africa, Asia and Europe – has been fertile ground for the cultivation of gardens, from which sprung the elite gardens mentioned earlier. These were not merely products of their ‘white and wealthy’ patrons: taking the long view back to the Bronze Age, the region’s history defies the use of contemporary categories such as ‘colonial’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘white’. Plants, technologies and ideas travelled between places and people, unpatented by vying ideologies. The Greco-Roman gods also travelled, and found themselves intertwined in the iconography and morphology of outside places. Their bodies and their haunts – grottoes, mounts, springs, groves – provided a continuity of presence that cannot be confined to political or stylistic boundaries that we employ to cast moral and artistic judgements on the past. By teaching a *longue durée* history of the role of classical myths in the design of gardens, students can encounter a tradition that serves as an antidote to some residue of modernity:

Syncretic, not monocultural

When working in a multi-cultural society, the (aspiring) landscape architect who seeks to create a place imbued with meaning is confronted with the problem of a lack of a shared semiotic system, as discussed in the Introduction (1.1.3 & 1.1.10). To avoid the problem, the student often attempts to cater for the lowest common denominator: the secular consumer searching subjectively for *their* meaning; an isolated state of being characteristic of modernity. Where symbolism isn’t shunned, novel obscurity, pastiche, or even naive cultural appropriation prevails. Classical topomythopoiesis shows another way, that of cultural and chronological syncretism: throughout its history, topomythopoiesis synthesised different myths to form a dense representational network that connects stories and gardens across time and space. This was not inevitable. As was explained in Chapter 4, the early Medieval reception of classical iconography provides a thought-provoking mirror of iconoclasm in our own time: some early Christians pulled down the statues of gods, for they believed them to be demon-possessed. Yet, the period also witnessed alternative responses: euhemeristic, allegorical and aesthetic interpretations of the gods saved their presence in gardens, albeit mostly as invisible, literary references. Later, the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose* mediated pagan and Christian symbols to envision a garden that is both a setting for the lust of Venus and the chastity of Mary; its garden descriptions drew both from the classical *locus amoenus* and the Christian Paradise – a dramatic synthesis of opposing worldviews.

Mimetic, not egocentric

The design studio is a wonderful setting filled with the collective spirit of creative pursuit; sometimes it is a stressful setting filled with the collective hysteria in pursuit of originality. Liberated from the shackles of tradition by problematising the past, students are shackled by the

expectations imposed by liquid modernity's¹⁷ thirst for novelty. Students go on studio binges in search of the never-before-seen, and to forge new futures. From the tumult rises inspiring works, but also mediocrity and mental burnout. By studying the history of classical topomythopoiesis, the student encounters a way of working in which the ego of the designer is brought into a humble dialogue with a dead community of story-tellers, illustrators, emblematisers, philosophers, sculptors and gardeners. The burden of originality is replaced by an inherited language of landscape with its lexicon of spatial and statue types, and landscape myths. The visual language of classical topomythopoiesis is both consistent and varied across its history, for in it we witness a dance between imitation and innovation, from the hyper-mimesis of mass-produced sculptures of Venus to her fantastical and original garden-island, Cythera, in the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*.

Dramatological, not ocularcentric

In response to project renderings, I sometimes tell students: 'There is more to life than picnics, jogging and bird-watching' to express my suspicion that we tend to work with a narrow band of human experience. The drama of human existence that ranges between the comic and the tragic is reduced to a generic, pastel-pixelated 'happiness'. Within the history of classical topomythopoiesis, the student will find that such pleasantries are only one of many human responses prompted by gardens: the monstrous, marvellous creatures of Bomarzo were experienced as wonderful curiosities (5.4.3). Taegio's accounts of Renaissance gardens provide an insight into Neoplatonic reverie: an experience of the universe in which meaning cascades from the higher realms of reality into the sensory world. Upon seeing the reflection of Venus in a pool, he was not overwhelmed by erotic desire, but by an overwhelming vision of an invisible world; an experience of beauty beyond being (5.4.4). Others felt moral disgust upon seeing her naked body in the Vatican (5.3.5). The experience of eighteenth century visitors to Wörlitzer Park were cultivated by Rode's guidebook, which led them towards the goddess through a series of narrated moments that elicited an eclectic set of experiences from *Sehnsucht* to mystic rapture, from charming views to art historical analysis (9.1).

Re-enchantment

To study the history of classical topomythopoiesis does not imply its approval, nor its rejection as a living tradition. Some may be inspired to draw myths from the well of ancient traditions (classical or others) to create landscapes that evoke representational networks densified over generations. If

¹⁷ 'Liquid modernity' is a metaphor used by the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000) to describe the current phase of modernity that is characterised by incessant change and instability.

nothing else, students will encounter stories about the strife of love, and the beauty of nature surrounding the joy and fragility of being human.

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14 APPENDIX: EXAMINERS' COMMENTS AND CANDIDATE'S RESPONSES

This appendix is a record of comments received from the three examiners and my responses. I wish to thank all of them for their attentive reading of the text, generous sharing of insight and knowledge, positive remarks and constructive criticism. I have quoted their reports (in the order they were sent; green text), to which I have added my own sub-headings as a means to structure the feedback and my responses. All references to page and section numbers refer to this, the revised edition of the thesis.

14.1 EXTERNAL EXAMINER ONE

Dr Stephen Whiteman (PhD, Stanford University), The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

14.1.1 Summary

“This dissertation addresses a perceived gap in the historiography of gardens and designed landscapes for a coherent narrative describing the deployment and experience of Classical mythology in European gardens from antiquity to ca. 1800. In doing so, the author advances the concept of ‘topomythopoiesis’, or the process by which classical myths were interpreted and deployed through the forms and elements of landscape (both designed and culturally signified), and by which these mythic narratives were encountered and processed by visitors to, or dwellers in, the garden. Beginning with an introduction and theoretical explication of these concepts, the dissertation then unfolds over seven subsequent chapters, which carry the reader from antiquity to the (broadly) Romantic period.

There is much to recommend this dissertation, and in my view it certainly meets the

requirements for granting of the doctorate. At the same time, it reflects a methodological and conceptual conservatism that, while not disqualifying or even necessarily requiring revision, is of concern to me as both an examiner and a colleague in the field of landscape studies”.

Response: The acceptance of the thesis is noted with appreciation. My response on the “methodological and conceptual conservatism” is noted below under 14.1.5.

14.1.2 Contribution

“As a whole, the dissertation is deeply researched, exceptionally well written, and highly readable. The author is particularly concerned with the relationship between topomythopoiesis and enchantment of the landscape and its visitors, an argument considerably advanced by his own enchanting writing style. The dissertation makes a considerable contribution in its balance between the rhetorical framing of the landscape and how visitors encountered it physically, conceptually, and sensorially. This goes well beyond typical use of accounts of landscape to explore the psychological experience of the site, and the author is to be applauded for this”.

Response: These remarks are noted with heartfelt appreciation, especially since I endeavoured to read widely and deeply, and (as stated in the research methodology) employ narrative and imaginative language to convey not only the story of how classical topomythopoiesis developed, but capture something of its spatial poetics.

14.1.3 Limitations

“There are some concerns about limitations of the research, though they are clearly acknowledged (if not fully recognized as concerns) in the introduction. These include heavy synthesis of secondary literature, the reliance wholly on translated sources, and the lack of engagement with the physical landscapes themselves. Certainly, the fact that the dissertation was written during the period of the COVID pandemic must be acknowledged and accounted for, and in the conclusion, the author notes a desire to engage with physical sites as an element in his future research plans. COVID may also, to a degree, account for the choice of sources. Their effect is more profound, however, as they either lead to or reinforce what feels to me like a fundamentally conservative position in the dissertation, one in which the author seems to call for a return (to enchantment, but also to earlier historiographic modes, whether in landscape, literature, or art history), rather than a way forward”.

Response: I thank the examiner for his understanding of the limitations, as stated in 1.9.

Regarding the conservatism of the research methodology, I had admitted (in 1.8.2) that my historiography has much in common with earlier “more aesthetic-orientated approaches”. However, I argue that my approach does not hinder ‘a way forward’ as I (partly) approached the historical landscape subject with greater interdisciplinarity and emphasis on sensory experience than did the garden historians of the twentieth century (as I had indicated at the end of the section). My theoretical framework also marks a departure from these earlier approaches, and includes concepts that have much in common with postmodern theories of space, embraced by contemporary garden historians and theorists such as Katharine T. von Stackelberg who wrote on the lived experience of Roman gardens in *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense, and Society* (2009), and Diane Spencer who, amongst other things, investigated the interplay between Roman text (including myths) and landscape in *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity* (2010). These studies employ concepts that echo those developed in my framework. For example, the understanding of gardens as a combination of physical and non-physical dimensions, resonates with Edward Soja’s ‘thirdspace’ and ‘real-and-imagined space’ (acknowledged in footnote 14, pg. 64). The reference to the somatic dimension of place was strongly influenced by Spencer via her doctoral student, Miriam Bay (acknowledged in footnote 58, pg. 31), as the use of ‘simulacrum’ (acknowledged in footnote 26, pg. 49).

14.1.4 Potential of theoretical framework

“This is, on the one hand, a dissertation that fills a perceived gap. The author is correct, in my view, in saying that there is no single account that covers the chronological breadth of this work on the subject of mythology in the garden (though as his bibliography shows, there is ample work on landscape and myth across the full chronological range that he covers). More importantly, it offers the interpretive lens of mythopoiesis, which, with its potential for drawing together literature, art, design, psychology, and embodied experience of space, offers the inherently interdisciplinary field of landscape studies a powerful tool”.

Response: The acknowledgement of the gap in literature that the thesis fills and the recognition of the value of the interpretative framework of topomythopoiesis are noted with appreciation.

“It is not, however, [a thesis] that breaks significant new methodological ground or addresses pressing concerns of the field. While there is perhaps no coherent account of the subject matter in question, much of it is very well trodden territory, and what most differentiates the dissertation—the theory of mythopoiesis—is not (yet) applied to new questions or fields. I say

‘yet’ because the author offers, in the conclusion, intentions for exploration of these concerns in modern landscape, outside the classical world, and in the migration of classical imagery to other cultural contexts. All these are exciting questions, and indeed ones that I think could have been pressed here quite productively. Certainly, as someone who shares a strong interest in the author’s understanding of landscape experience, I look forward to seeing how it unfolds in the future”.

Response: I thank the examiner for showing interest in my future work, and for recognising the potential of the theoretical framework. Indeed, I regard the thesis as a *foundational* account of classical topomythopoiesis that establishes its broad history, theoretical concepts, principal myths and their sources, iconographic leitmotifs, themes and morphological components. Having thus set the scene, I am looking forward to answering more “exciting questions”.

14.1.5 Conservative approach

“More troubling, however, is what seems to this reader as the author’s minimisation of the current concerns of the field, including broadening of the field beyond its Eurocentric core, landscape’s response to environmental crisis and sustainability, and the effects of modernism and postmodernism on our experience of landscape. Indeed, he explicitly positions his project ‘against’ what he characterises as a modern, instrumentalist view of landscape. This appears most strongly in the introduction, which, intentionally or not, resonates strongly to me with the rhetorics of champions of ‘Western civilisation’ as not just a core field of study in the modern university, but as essential to reclaiming something modern society has lost. This is not a question of whether studying or appreciating the classical tradition is an important strand within the field of landscape architecture or landscape history. But, given all the spilled ink of the past, is it the place of greatest urgency in our studies? And does it need to be set up in opposition to new ways of thinking?”.

Response: Thank you for pointing out a potential misreading of my position. I made it more explicit in a newly created section ‘position’ (1.3). I accept that the thesis does not answer the commonly asked questions within contemporary landscape studies. Yet, I do hold that the aspects of place-making with which I grappled in this thesis – notably the beauty found at the intersection between the visible and the invisible landscape – are timeless concerns that deserve continuous attention, if only at the margins of the discipline.

Regarding the positioning of classical topomythopoiesis *against* the modern view of landscape, I had stated: “Topomythopoiesis is by no means proposed as a mode of design to replace current practices” (1.7). Thus, I regard topomythopoiesis (oclassical or otherwise) not as

an *alternative* approach, but as one that can *supplement* our modern landscapes by encouraging the making of interstitial places that “can interrupt our quotidian existence with glimmers of the world beyond the visible landscape” (1.7). Simply put, I maintain that classical topomythopoiesis is a legitimate tradition that need not be forgotten or neglected, but I am not advocating in the thesis for a widespread renaissance. Admittedly, I did position topomythopoiesis against autopoiesis, a specific strand within the modern, but have now deleted the statement in responses to this recommendation to avoid misunderstanding (I still mention ‘autopoiesis’ in the footnote on the rationale for the neologism of ‘topomythopoiesis’).

Nevertheless, in 12.1 (now moved to a postscript) I had briefly suggested some ways in which the study of classical topomythopoiesis *can* provide some insight to the pressing questions of the day. In short, it is exemplary of a way of design that transcends the ego-centric and ocular-centric objectification of landscape; can syncretise different (even opposing) cultural narratives; and can serve as inspiration for those who seek to “draw myths from the well of ancient traditions (classical or others) to create landscapes that evoke representational networks densified over generations”.

“My recommendation of ‘minor revisions’ stems from this concern, and is in any case a qualified recommendation. As both an examiner and a colleague in the field, I find the author’s work both inspiring and concerning. I applaud the creativity and passion with which the concept of mythopoiesis has been explored and developed, even as I am dismayed by the conservative impulse that seems to define what the author understands as the dissertation’s larger stakes. As such, what I would like to see is a rewriting of the introduction and methods chapter to rethink the ‘positioning against’, and an expansion of both methods and concluding chapters to further articulate future potential (including a more qualified expression of the theory’s potential beyond Europe and the classical tradition, e.g., p. 36, n. 1). I am hopeful that the aspirations for the work expressed in the conclusion reflect the author’s ideal intentions, and that the tone of conservatism is not the author’s aim—in other words, that when presented with this critique, the author will see something he would like to reconsider in how he frames the project. If nothing else, I hope that perhaps I have misunderstood. If that is the case, I hope the author will accept my apologies but also seek ways to clarify his meaning so that the same misunderstanding is avoided with other readers in the future.

That said, the author’s intellectual politics are ultimately his own. I mean to critique what I understand them to be, but I am not willing (or able) to say that he must change them, either in the context of the dissertation or more broadly. If the author is confident that he has expressed

himself as he intended, I do not seek to place any requirement for change. I therefore leave that question to discussion between his supervisor and himself.”

Response: I appreciate the examiner’s magnanimity in finding the thesis “inspiring” despite his personal misgiving over the general approach and tone of the work. For my response to clarifying that I am not positioning topomythopoiesis against current practices, and made its potential application beyond Europe explicit, see my response above.

For an example of the latter, I shared some ideas developed in the thesis with a group of Nigerian architects and academics at a seminar on ‘Decolonization: Indigenous architecture at the realm of metaphor and thought’ (2021). I (hopefully fruitfully) discussed the role that myth can play in place-making by drawing from indigenous myths in the search for localised idioms of design. Through my studies I have also been able to assist African students in our master of landscape architecture studio in drawing from their heritage to design contemporary landscapes rooted in indigenous culture and myth, namely Sarah Tuke (*Mountainbound: exploring the dialect of the Magaliesberg as landscape*, 2018) and Leo Sebotsi (*Tsela-Tshweni*, 2020). Being able to provide such direction for design, stems from my own frustrations when working as a young landscape architect on Freedom Park (Pretoria, South Africa), being called to translate indigenous myths to landscape spaces, without any theoretical framework to guide the process. I am thus hopeful that the thesis is of value beyond the tradition which itself unpacks.

14.2 EXTERNAL EXAMINER TWO

Professor Luke Morgan (PhD, University of Melbourne), Monash University

14.2.1 Summary

“This is an ambitious thesis that seeks to survey the representation and reception of ancient Greek myths in designed landscapes from their origins in cult sanctuaries down to the nineteenth century. Prinsloo invents a new term to describe what he regards as ‘a distinct genre of landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myths’ (p. ii): ‘topomythopoiesis.’ The neologism is a compound of ‘mythopoeia’ and ‘topos,’ meaning the ‘making of mythrelated places’ as he explains on p. 26. The thesis aspires to present, not just a history of an important theme in landscape architecture, but a foundation upon which contemporary practice might be renewed. A key claim of the thesis is that topomythopoetic place-making elicits ‘enchantment’ in the recipient (or ‘garden dweller’ (p. 44) to use Prinsloo’s preferred terminology) that has the potential to counteract the condition of ‘disenchantment’ that is stated to be the legacy and ongoing lived experience of ‘modernity’”.

Response: I appreciate the acceptance of the thesis, and the recognition of the neologism and the ambition of writing a *longue durée* history. Furthermore, I appreciate the understanding of the examiner that the thesis is aimed to be a foundation on which practice *may* be built (by those who choose to do so), but does not aim to propose how such contemporary topomythopoeic practice can look like.

14.2.2 Defining enchantment

“The thesis begins with a definition of enchantment that draws on the subjective personal experience of the author. Prinsloo claims to have experienced enchantment in both natural and artificial landscapes such as the South African Karoo, Rome, Oxford, and Rousham, but never in a contemporary designed landscape. Yet the specific character of the experience of enchantment remains vaguely defined. It is said to involve beauty, to be ‘poetic and transformative,’ but it is not an intellectual or interpretative experience. Is it perhaps something like Michael Fried’s concept of ‘absorption,’ leading to transcendence, in eighteenth-century French painting (see *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1988))? Or does it resemble the experience of the sublime, definitively theorised in the eighteenth century by Edmond Burke and Immanuel Kant, but with deep roots in European thought? Another possibility is that it has something in common with the condition of *stupore* that sixteenth-century Italian writers ascribe to highly regarded works of art (especially those of Michelangelo). To some extent the problem here is the same one that bedevils all ‘reception histories’ (on which, see Michel Conan, *Baroque Garden Cultures* (2005) and John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (2004)): namely, how to reconstruct the *mentalité*, ‘horizon of perception’ (as Conan calls it) or interior experience of historical (and contemporary) actors. Admittedly, there are not many good models in landscape history for an approach along these lines despite the widespread acknowledgement in a discipline that has traditionally emphasised design intentions that more attention needs to be paid to reception. Even so, I would have liked to have seen Prinsloo grapple with ‘enchantment’ as a modality of landscape experience to a greater extent, to devise at least a working definition of the concept. In revising the thesis, I suggest that he develops and deepens his comments on enchantment further with reference to comparable modes of experience and their theoretical literatures”.

Response: I thank the examiner for their recommended readings and suggestions. In response, I have expanded my definition of enchantment with reference to its ancient origins (pg. [xix](#)), specifically in Homer, related it to the concept to beauty (pgs [xviii](#) & [xix](#)) and have referred to the

terms ‘sublime’ and ‘*stupore*’ (pg. [xix](#)). Yet, I maintain that “[e]nchantment defies precise definition” (as within the literature on the topic, and its opposite ‘disenchantment’) since it covers a range of experiences (including, but not limited to, the sublime) that only loosely share the feeling that there is ‘something else out there’. Also note that the prefatory definition is briefly expanded in [1.1.1](#) with references to the works of Benjamin (1968; especially his concept of ‘aura’), Barfield (1988) and Brown (2004).

14.2.3 The classical tradition

“The Introduction offers a critique of modernity drawing on familiar thinkers such as Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer. In the case of landscape architecture, the disenchantment of modernity is felt in a loss of ‘participation’ in the landscape, which for Prinsloo amounts to an inability to see the ‘invisible in the visible’ (p. 2). Greek mythology provides an example. Prinsloo argues that what had once been a collective experience of the landscape as a numinous environment of myth started to become atomised into subjective individual responses during the Enlightenment. This shift to ‘private participation’ in the experience of landscape fatally undermined a previously shared symbolic language leading to what is emotively characterised as the ‘murder of mythology’ (p. 15). According to Prinsloo, the ‘final blows’ (p. 13) against the old idea and experience of landscape were struck in the twentieth century by modernist designers in thrall to abstract art and the environmentalist movement (represented here by the influential figure of Ian McHarg). Postmodernism failed to halt this tide, despite its preoccupation with narrative and meaning, notwithstanding the notable exception of Ian Hamilton Finlay whose garden *Little Sparta* seeks to bring Greco-Roman myth back into dialogue with contemporary concerns.

Against this critical backdrop, Prinsloo provides a rationale for his thesis. He correctly states that there exists no study of the relationship between landscape architecture and classical mythology in the *longue durée*. Prinsloo sees classicism as a unified tradition that might be exploited to ‘reenchant’ landscape experience today, but this hypothesis provokes some troubling questions. For example: it is not clear that what Prinsloo understands as ‘classicism’ was ever a unified or, as he implies, a *universal* symbolic language. Our ideas about classicism remain indebted to the early art historians, from Johann Joachim Winckelmann onwards, for whom the ‘classical’ represented a kind of utopian ideal. But this was only ever a partial (not to mention retrospectively imposed) view of a complex and variegated phenomenon, as later scholars such as Ernst Kris and Eugenio Battisti made clear”.

Response: I appreciate the succinct and accurate summary of the background presented in

1.1 and confirmation that there is a gap in the literature. I have added a list of definitions upfront (pg. xvii) to clarify that I simply use 'classical' (like the scholars of the Warburgian tradition) to denote the body of Greco-Roman myths. I have also added an expanded definition under the rationale for the study that acknowledges the heterogenous nature of the tradition (pg. 23). In 'A tradition' (pg. 290), I had provided reasons, based on the research, for why classical topomythopoiesis can be considered a tradition, albeit far from being a homogenous one. There is certainly a substantial difference between how, for example, a neo-classicist of the nineteenth-century gazed upon a (decontextualised and monochromatic) Greek statue as an ideal of aesthetic beauty, versus how the participant of a religious ritual in ancient Greece regarded the statue as a potential receptacle for a god. This is similar to the loose definition of classical architecture as any building including elements of the orders, granted the massive ontological difference between, say, a multi-coloured Hellenic temple as the house of a god, and a stark bank building as the house of money, built in the nineteenth century.

14.2.4 Western meta-narrative

"Although postmodern critical theory and landscape design receive short shrift in this thesis, it is precisely postmodern philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard who argued that the grand- or meta-narratives of the past, of which 'classicism' is prime example, were always in service of ideology or capital. (See Lyotard's remarkably succinct definition of postmodernism as, simply, 'incredulity towards metanarratives.')

We are also much more aware today of the continuous existence of non-Western systems of knowledge in which landscape and landscape phenomena are conceived in entirely mythological terms (in North America, Oceania, etc) though not those of European traditions. The writing of an apolitical history that attempts to revive or reinstate a Western meta-narrative today thus requires very careful justification and argumentation. I am not suggesting that the attempt is illegitimate; rather that it can no longer be embarked upon in an unexamined or unreflective way.

To summarise this point: although I would not want to rule out the potential benefits to knowledge of a history of Greek myth in landscape design from antiquity to 1800, the key concepts – of classicism, enchantment, etc – need to be more carefully defined and developed than they are in this thesis for its necessity to be convincing. We do not write history in a vacuum and whatever one's personal investment, or lack thereof, in contemporary concerns (such as decolonisation, the politics of identity, or whatever they might be), it is good scholarly practice to acknowledge one's unavoidable 'situatedness' in time and place. In order to begin to rectify this problem, I suggest that Prinsloo inserts a more explicit statement at the beginning of the thesis defining its scope, his

own position vis-à-vis the ‘tradition’ of ‘classical’ topomythopoesis, as he sees it, and how such a study can be justified given its divergence from current conventions of historical scholarship. Prinsloo is not unaware of this issue, but his largely dismissive comments about the ‘cultural turn’ in the late twentieth century do not serve as sufficient justification for his approach. He simply states without further comment that he will not ‘follow the critical theoretical approach that led historiography to taking a “cultural turn” during the last quarter of the twentieth century by moving away from sweeping narratives’ and that his thesis will not ‘reveal dormant issues of gender and power’ (p. 29) But why not? What could justify turning a blind eye to these documented realities of historical experience? No compelling reasons are provided”.

Response: I thank the examiner for the suggestions. I have added a section to clarify my position (1.3) regarding the classical tradition. In the section on research methodology (1.8.2), I have clarified the reason for not studying the ‘dormant issues’ (pg. 30). This had also been argued where I discussed my approach to the study of mythology (1.5). The scope of the thesis is defined in 1.9. The motivation for writing a meta-narrative (or long-term history) is provided in 1.8.2, where I refer to Hunt (1999) and Birksted (2003) in support of the ‘metahistory’ approach.

14.2.5 Theoretical framework

“Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework for the historical study. It includes interesting discussions of the ‘modes of participation’ in topomyths, the notion of virtual landscapes (a version of Ernst Gombrich’s ‘beholder’s share’), and the ‘dense representational network’ that attends and informs landscape perception and experience, with diagrammatic representations that help to elucidate the theoretical points (e.g. Figure 2.4). Prinsloo works to schematise and define the ‘modes of participation’ in topomyths, which are broadly categorised as ‘analytical,’ ‘somatic-symbolic,’ and ‘imaginative.’ A range of corollary ‘emotions’ are said to be provoked by the encounter with topomyths, ranging from ‘the epiphanic, revelatory, even visionary moments’ to ‘lingering delight’ as well as ‘a sense of wonder and marvel (even disgust).’ I found this part of the thesis to be thought-provoking despite some reservations about the implied stability and trans-historicity of the categories. Prinsloo might find it useful to read Gustave Flaubert’s satire *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881). The eponymous protagonists of the story decide to install an ‘Etruscan tomb,’ a ‘Rialto,’ a ‘Chinese pagoda,’ a mount, and various topiary works in their garden. However, when they proudly unveil the garden for the first time at dinner, their guests fail to respond as they should; that is, according to the categories of response prescribed in Boitard’s *The Architect of the Garden*, which include the Melancholy or Romantic, the Exotic and the Pensive, and the Mysterious

and the Fantastic. Flaubert implies that specific responses cannot be predetermined or engineered, which has implications for Prinsloo's subsidiary argument – that the tradition of classical topomythopoesis offers a foundation for 'reenchanting' contemporary landscape design in specific ways".

Response: The recognition of the value of the theoretical framework is appreciated. I also note (and share) the caution with which such reductionist categories of emotional response must be taken and applied. Yet, I did find the categories useful in discussing the various responses to topomyths, and consistent with the modes of reception testified by the historical accounts. Following the examiner's recommendation, I look forward to reading Flaubert's apt satire (and find myself tempted to pen one myself!).

14.2.6 The history

"The remainder of the thesis traces a history of classical myth in the landscape, from Antiquity to the eighteenth-century, incorporating the Middle Ages, Renaissance villa gardens, Louis XIV's Versailles, and the literary gardens of Spenser and Milton, among others. This is reasonably well done, even if the theoretical discussions of the earlier chapters recede into the background and at times seem only tangentially relevant to the (familiar) narrative of the historical development of European landscape design".

Response: Please refer to my response for a similar concern regarding the application of the theoretical framework raised below in 14.3.2.

14.2.7 Errors and questions

"In the rest of this report, I will take up specific points of interpretation, many of which are relatively minor, and itemise the few errors that I noticed. (The text is, on the whole, impressively clean and well-edited.)"

Response: I thank the examiner for taking the time to highlight the typo's and grammar mistakes. All of these have been corrected in the revised version of the thesis. I also thank him for the suggested readings and pertinent points throughout – I have learnt much. Below follow those comments that demand specific responses:

"p. 27: Thesis statement 1 and p. 28: Thesis statement 2: What is meant by 'mimetic' and 'mimesis' here?"

Response: I have added an explanatory footnote on page 28. I have also added ‘mimesis’ as a conceptual theme in a newly written chapter (10.1.3). The term had also been discussed with reference to Philostratus under 2.3.3.

“p. 29: On the assertion that ‘much of landscape history from the late twentieth century is also written...through the interpretative frameworks of feminism, Marxism, post-colonialism and post- structuralism’: this may be true of some periods of study but not all. See Mirka Benes’s essay on ‘Methodological Changes in the Study of Italian Gardens from the 1970s to the 1990s,’ in *Clio in the Italian Garden* (2011)”.

Response: Thank you for the suggested reading; I referred to the Beneš essay (under 1.8.2) after the summary of common interpretive frameworks to summarise how garden historiography also followed trends in art history.

“p. 30: On the somatic dimensions of garden experience, which are – I agree – crucial, Prinsloo misses some key texts. See, for example, D. Fairchild Ruggles, ed., *Sound and Scent in the Garden* (2017)”.

Response: Thank you for the recommended source. Unfortunately, I was unable to acquire a copy timeously to include it in the revised thesis. I hope to refer to it when expanding the theoretical framework as a future research project.

“p. 32: Prinsloo states that in the thesis ‘gardens will only be studied from the desktop.’ Although I acknowledge the often-prohibitive cost of travel for research, given the spatial and somatic dimensions of designed landscapes, which are not reducible to two-dimensional images or textual descriptions, this seems a major limitation. Further to this: how can the point on p. 33 about autoethnographic reflections be reconciled with the exclusive reliance on desktop research?”

Response: I fully agree that the desktop nature of the study is a major limitation (as stated in 1.9). However, since the thesis is mainly a historic account of topomythopoiesis I do regard the value of my personal encounters with the topomyths as only marginally relevant, since my reception may differ from that of the historical subjects. Also, my methodology does not include the formal analysis of the artefacts, which would certainly have been enriched by in situ investigations. Going

forward in deriving a 'poetics of topomythopoiesis' to inform its practice, site visits will become more important. Please note that the 'autoethnographic' approach was only applied as part of the development of the theoretical framework and not to the writing of the history of topomythopoiesis (see explanation of method followed for Chapter 2 under 1.11).

“p. 60: Which ‘garden statues’ were ‘viewed with suspicion’? Is this a reference to automata?”

Response: I have added a cross reference (pg. 61) in the text to clarify that I was referring to the Venus Felix statue in the gardens of the Belvedere that was viewed by proto-Reformists as idolatrous (discussed in 5.3.5).

“p. 149ff: Prinsloo is over reliant on Taegio throughout this chapter. Note that other writers of the period stress the iconographical meanings of gardens. See, for example, Francesco de Vieri on the Medici garden at Pratolino: *Delle maravigliose opere di Pratolino* (1587)”.

Response: Thank you, I agree. Taegio was chosen as a means to bring focus to the Chapter since the scholarship on the iconography of Renaissance gardens is so vast. I have now clarified in the conclusion to Chapter 5 (pg. 171) that Taegio's accounts do not (necessarily) represent the widespread reception of Renaissance topomyths, but a distinct, Neoplatonic, one. Although I did not focus on Francesco de Vieri's account, I had briefly referred to it at 5.5.6.

p. 157-58: Lazzaro's analysis of the Villa Lante is mentioned but accounts of gardens from the period might also have been noted here – e.g. Vieri on Pratolino (as above) or Vasari on Castello (in his biography of Niccolò Tribolo in *The Lives of the Artists*).”

Response: Thank you for the suggestions. Following the recommendations I have read Vasari's account, and have noted with interest his reference to the statue representing the Asinao mountains which I have now noted in the section on geographic topomythopoeia (5.5.9).

“p. 170: Another useful account of sensual experience in gardens, from the period, is a letter of 1543 by Claudio Tolomei (Reproduced in: *Lettere del Cinquecento*, ed. G. G. Ferrero (Turin, 1967).)”

Response: Noted with appreciation.

“p. 189: Tethys appears in one of the grottoes of Pratinolo.”

Response: Thank you for the reference. I have added the Pratinolo grotto to the footnote (pg. 190) where I provide other examples of topomyths that depict Tethys. The uniqueness that I referred to (based on Berger 2016:97), concerns the pairing of Apollo and Tethys which is, as far as I am aware, not part of the Pratinolo grotto iconography.

“p. 275 and earlier: On Neoplatonism: the extent to which Neoplatonic ideas influenced early modern landscape design is debatable. There have been some attempts to understand particular gardens in this way (e.g. the Hortus Palatinus in Heidelberg or the Sacro Bosco in Bomarzo), but these seem less convincing today as the influence of Frances Yates and other mid twentieth-century scholars of Renaissance hermetic and occult traditions has waned. Umberto Eco’s work on ‘hermetic drift’ offers a useful corrective to the methodological approach that underpins some of these earlier interpretations. In any case, it is difficult to avoid the fact that a fundamental theme of early modern gardens in general is the complex relation between art and nature, on which topic Aristotle and the tradition of Aristotelianism is historically of much greater relevance than Neoplatonic thought. (See, again, Falguières.)”

Response: I appreciate that a Neoplatonic reception to gardens may have been a marginal mode of garden experience, and have now clarified this in the conclusion to Chapter 5. As I hope to return to the topic of Neoplatonism within garden history, I will certainly refer back to these comments and suggested literature.

14.2.8 Potential for publication

“A final note on the potential publication of the thesis: the early theoretical material could potentially be published as an article if it were to be developed further along the lines that I have suggested (although some of this has, I think, already been published). In addition, there is potential for the main body of thesis to become a stand-alone, book length introduction to the representation of Greek myths in European landscape design, but in my opinion this material would need to be framed differently. One possibility would be to present it as a straight history of an important theme, rather than as a way to rethink contemporary landscape architecture”.

Response: I appreciate the examiner’s confidence that parts of the thesis can be re-worked into

articles beyond those already published. I hope to write a book based on the thesis, and fully agree that it should be framed as a 'straight history'. As a side note, I plan to write three volumes in future: one – the history based on the main body of this thesis; two – a philosophical expansion of the theoretical argument; and three – a poetics (not addressed in the thesis) that seeks to analyse and theorise the morphological and syntactical language of topomythopoesis.

14.3 EXTERNAL EXAMINER THREE

Dr Saskia de Wit (PhD, TU Delft), TU Delft

14.3.1 Summary

“As any mature profession needs to know its history, it is applaudable to venture into researching such an underappreciated aspect of the history of landscape architecture, and to ‘look afresh into histories well-trodden’, as you write.

- The thesis is a carefully elaborated narrative of several developments through time.
- The structure is clear and appropriate to the topic.
- The theoretical framework is interesting and helpful in understanding and working with to the topic”.

Response: Noted with appreciation.

14.3.2 Implicit conclusions

“However, too much remains implicit, hidden within the carefully crafted readings of the literary sources, but without explicitly extracting what this means for landscape architectural theory and praxis. For example, I think the author argues that the value of topomythopoesis is not about providing a singular meaning or explanation but to provide a portal to a range of experiences: wonderful, delightful and epiphanic. But I extracted that from a sentence within the text, so I am not even sure whether it is my own interpretation or the author’s... E.g., it would be helpful if the author could communicate to the reader what conclusions can be drawn from each period you describe at the end of each chapter.

Also, the conclusions remain rather implicit. What learnings can be extracted from all this? E.g. what can be learned from the understanding of the theoretical framework as applied to the developments through time? How can the findings from this thesis be extended to our present time and the possibility for mythical iconography?

For example, the thesis describes an essential development to take place from the Middle

Ages onward: in the Greek and Roman times signifiers had a use in ritual and ceremony and were thus not so much representational, but rather instrumental, functional and ‘real’. When in the Middle Ages Christianity had wiped out the belief in the gods but more or less kept the imagery, they became truly representational and mythical. Although the conclusion ‘a liberated tradition’ backs up this reading I have, throughout the thesis choice of words such as ‘*hollowed* of their divinity’ (p. 228) suggests the opposite. Even in the paragraph ‘a liberated tradition’ it is not stated explicitly, since it moves to naming examples rather than deriving generic conclusions from the studied examples, so I keep finding myself searching for them in the text and getting confused in that search.

Also, some layers of analysis are not addressed or implicit. Therefore, I recommend major changes. Not to discredit anything of what is written, but as an added layer of interpretation to what is written that is missing from a landscape architectural perspective. Below, I will elaborate”.

Response: Thank you for the helpful suggestions. They have certainly helped me to improve the thesis. In response, I have made additions including a new chapter and chapter conclusions. I have elaborated on these and other revisions under some of the points below.

Regarding the phrase “hollowed of their divinity”: it is used at the end of Chapter 7 to refer to the way in which Milton’s *Paradise Lost* presented the gods as mere emblems of moral ideas. This, I argued, played a role in preparing the English imagination for the use of classical iconography in gardens which had been deemed blasphemous. In ‘a liberated tradition’ I wrote that the gods’ “lack of spiritual potency was affirmed throughout the history of classical topomythopoiesis”, meaning that the early Christian (and even pre-Socratic) ‘wiping out of belief’ did not, once and for all, make their inclusion in gardens acceptable. There remained questions about the inclusion of pagan deities in Christian societies, as there remain questions today about their legitimacy. I have now briefly commented on this in the new section ‘ideological congruence’ on pg. 276.

14.3.3 Use of language

“The tone of the first chapter (1.1) is strangely deviating from the main body of work. Where the thesis shows care and precision, the introduction as given in chapter 1.1. is suggestive and biased, suggesting all kinds of judgments without substantiation by use of popular language such as ‘murder of mythology’, and suggesting a (false) dichotomy between ‘bad’ instrumentalism, cult of nature and private participation, and ‘good’ mythology. This is truly unnecessary.

In 1.2 you point out the lack of study on the relationship between classical mythology and

landscape architecture, which makes sense. I would suggest reframing/rephrasing (maybe moving to a later point in the thesis so the reader understands the notions you are discussing here?) the complete chapter 1.1., so that this knowledge gap on representation and meaning (and more specifically classical mythology) is exposed as a missing layer of landscape architecture, next to function, perception, ecology, etc. You do propose this point of view yourself later in the introduction: 'towards a landscape architecture that enfolds private *and* shared participation, a concern for nature *and* a celebration of humanism, instrumentalism *and* beauty beyond function.' (p. 23) but this is not supported by chapter 1.1".

Response: Thank you for pointing out that section 1.1 can be misunderstood as positioning topomythopoiesis *against* contemporary approaches of landscape architecture that enfold concerns like functionality and ecology. Please refer to my response to a similar concern raised above in 14.1.5.

"It starts with the polarity you introduce of the 'object in their own right' of modernity, versus the representational, in which only the latter includes 'participation'. Too easily you collate the non-representational into one coherent 'belief system' in opposition of your point of view, creating a non-existing black-and-white world.

You describe 'the loss of participation in the landscape as the inability to see the "invisible in the visible" perpetuated by the objectification of landscape architecture's reductionist graphic notation system.' (p. 2) However, the representational needs to be framed, embedded in a much more nuanced context, in which representation is one of the layers of understanding designed landscapes. Again, in the main body of work, this is elaborated but here it is suggested as if participation by representation is the only option. Participation (and enchantment) involves much more possibilities".

Response: I acknowledge that section 1.1 lacks the in-depth and nuanced treatment of the main body of the thesis. The purpose of the section is to provide a *brief overview* of the reasons why classical topomythopoiesis waned as a serious concern within the discipline of landscape architecture from around 1800. I have provided three main reasons, based on studies such as Hunt (1992) and Myers (2013), and my own interpretations informed by various sources cited throughout. I have tried where possible to note exceptions to my line of argumentation, for example by admitting the enduring classicism of the Beaux Art well into the twentieth century (1.1.7) and highlighting those twentieth century designers like Ferdinand Bac that did employ

classical topomythopoiesis in their work (1.2). Furthermore, the section provides the reader with the necessary *background* to understand why there is a gap in the literature that this thesis seeks to fill by answering the research questions. Given its place and limited extent within the thesis, I hope the lack of depth and complexity can be forgiven.

I also agree that a dualistic ‘black-and-white’ world wherein some see it is merely objective and others as representational is an over simplification. This I acknowledged upfront on pg. 1 where I had written: “Any such generalised claims about history are bound to fall flat in the face of the complexity of life: many still find enchantment, even in the wonders of science itself” and had added a footnote (no. 2, pg. 1), for the sake of balance, on the work of Snell (2006) who provides a critique of the ‘disenchantment-enchantment’ dichotomy. Yet, I maintained that the discourse of disenchantment (e.g. Weber, Horkheimer, Barfield, Brown) is sufficient to serve as an *assumed* philosophical problem for which a landscape-centred investigation may provide some, if only small, answers. The thesis does thus not delve into the philosophical problem of disenchantment *per se*, but is written in response to it. As explained above (14.1.5), I do not propose to extend such a polarity to practice where topomythopoiesis (classical or otherwise) is pitted against other approaches to landscape architecture.

I acknowledge that a comprehensive understanding of designed landscapes need to address various layers, not only its virtual counterpart (formed by representations) and participation therewith. Yet, the thesis is focused on this aspect and does not present itself as a comprehensive study of designed landscapes. Please also refer to my response under 14.3.6 which clarifies the foci of chapters.

14.3.4 Intellectual vs corporeal perception

“I name the two most important [layers of understanding designed landscapes]:

This statement bypasses the subjective relationship of immediate, bodily perception (not related to the symbolic meaning of the perceived), which involves different ways of contact, involvement and participation. The ‘invisible in the visible’ might mean the concepts, meanings, myths, that are evoked by the signifiers, but also the experiences that are evoked by the perception (as in, ‘I feel calm and relaxed because I feel the sun on my skin, it smells so nice, and the birds are singing’). The corporeal awareness of the presence of the garden dweller in combination with the action/reaction characteristic of kinaesthetic experience. The author opposes the representational to the instrumental, but one might also oppose the representational to the affective, a return to the emotions, the body, the material and the experiencing, and from that standpoint is in its immediacy maybe even more participatory than the representational: the body

can only perceive by its interaction with its surroundings. From the point of view of affect theory the landscape is not a distant prospect to be looked at, or painted or be written about as something removed and external, but an environment to immerse in and to internalize. You do dwell on bodily perception in relation to representation, e.g. in chapter 1.1.3 'private participation' and in the rest of the thesis ('place-making should fundamentally be concerned with perception.' (p. 44), but to leave it out here is only sustaining this polarity.

It also bypasses the participation involved in production, nurturing and care for landscapes: the value of the act of gardening?.

Response: I fully agree with this stance: landscapes most deeply affect us when they are not received as abstract symbols within the intellect, but as immersive environments that impress upon our perception – both through the body and the mind – in a holistic manner. I called this mode of reception (which happens to be my personal ideal) somatic-symbolic participation (2.3.4) where “meaning is *felt*”. I was therefore rather pleased to find resonance with a similar scholarly approach followed by Bay (2019) in her study of the Villa d’ Este, and historical testimonies of such experiences in, for example, the letters of Taegio (5.4.4), some sections of Rode’s guide to Wörlitzer Park (9.1.1) and in Hirschfeld’s preference for mythical ‘atmospheres’ (9.2.1). In the only personal account of a topomyth that I provided (apart from the preface), I wrote of Rousham (9.2.1): “The murmuring water that flow from the arched stone cascades that sit in the gentle folds of the undulating green landscape emanated all the associations of the literary tradition of the *locus amoenus*. While there, one does not *think of* Venus and her presence in the classical myths and other texts, one *senses* her. The topomyth *fits* the mythic contents. The topos participates in the symbol, yet it is not necessarily experienced *as* symbolic: the vale itself is *sensed* as a place for love”. Thus, the sensory experience afforded by the topography, water and vegetation (components of the topomyth that I referred to as ‘natural signifiers’ in the theoretical framework) is *augmented* by the virtual landscape evoked by the emblematic signifiers – the symbolic dimension of the landscape is not experienced as removed from the sensory dimension.

Granted my own personal position, I deliberately took care to not *read into* the history my own personal preferences, or make judgements about modes of participation and ways of designing topomyths that do not agree with my own views. The result is that the importance of the sensory dimension of the topomyths were not discussed throughout, only where it was relevant to the discussion. Even in cases where a symbolic-somatic participation could not, from the sources, be verified as a mode of participation, I did try to cover this in my analysis. For example in characterising the climax of Félibien’s (otherwise analytical) description of the Grotto of Tethys

(6.2.2) as a “somatic simulation”. In my future attempt to write a ‘poetics of topomythopoiesis’ I will certainly place much greater emphasis on this aspect of the tradition.

Regarding the ‘participation’ of the garden-maker with the garden, I acknowledge the importance of this relationship which can fruitfully be explored within this history, perhaps along the lines of Julian Raxworthy’s concept of the ‘viridic’.

“Parallel to this polarity between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, values and judgments are implied without proper substantiation. E.g. without explanation, I don’t see why the representation of concepts (such as ‘philosophy’ or ‘nature’) is less valuable as mythological substance than the representation of gods? (p. 8) E.g. Japanese gardens very successfully create symbolic representations of ‘nature’, expressing a nature worship akin to the classical European mythology”.

Response: I agree fully that mythological substance should not be limited to gods. Within the tradition that I studied – namely that related to the Greco-Roman myths – it so happened that the gods and their representations were a common way to evoke the myths. Part of my argument is that these representations don’t simply evoke the deities, but the larger myths and associations they are a part of. So, for example, the presence of Hercules may evoke the moral concept of virtue. Yet, throughout the thesis I do refer to other ‘substances’ of myths, specifically the *locus amoenus* as a mythologised nature that was commonly evoked by meadows, streams and other pleasant environments, arguably more often than the gods themselves. All of the spatial types mentioned throughout – grotto, mound and spring – are also examples of mythologised topoi which were evoked by non-theistic signifiers.

14.3.5 Theoretical framework

“The theoretical framework as explained in chapter 2 is interesting and relevant to the topic. But it remains abstract since you only occasionally, and only in the later chapters, refer back to it in the following chapters. (E.g. the author makes an explicit reference to the dense representational network, and its role in relating the virtual and the physical landscape, on p. 234, which makes it all fall in place). It would be very helpful if you could explicitly link this theoretical framework to how the different modes are expressed in the different time periods that you describe, e.g. in a reflecting paragraph at the end of each chapter”.

Response: Noted with appreciation, and thank you for the constructive proposal. I have added conclusions to Chapters 3–9 to relate each period to the theoretical framework more explicitly. I

should also note the theoretical framework had been applied throughout the history, as it provided me with the conceptual terms used throughout: 'participation', 'virtual landscape', 'dense representation network' and 'topomyth'.

14.3.6 Phenomenal landscape

“This brings me to a central aspect of the theoretical framework that is hardly addressed in the earlier chapters: that of phenomenal landscape itself. The author describes the methodological limitation of not being able to visit the gardens himself, and thus using existing literary accounts and textbooks as your source.

But an essential consequence of this is not addressed. Textbooks such as discussed in chapter 6 are basically part of the dense representational framework, so here the thesis only addresses the dense representational network as fed by the instructions of how the garden-dweller should read what they perceive (specifically in chapter 6), but not the phenomenal landscape of the topomyth in the physical, built gardens that the garden-dweller might perceive and participate with.

Only in chapter 8 and 9 the phenomenal landscape is treated with the same emphasis as the other components of the theoretical framework. E.g. in chapter 9: ‘There are no elucidating inscriptions and, as per the Augustans’ preference, the ‘meaning’ is not to be found in a complex ensemble of signs (at least not in comparison with Stowe), but in the directness of an impression’ (p. 268) Linking this to the theoretical framework would mean that the inscriptions and the signs relate to the dense representational network and the impression to the phenomenal landscape. This imbalance needs either to be solved throughout the thesis (and not only implicitly in the last chapters), or a good explanation of why and how the phenomenal landscape itself is not addressed in the earlier chapters, although it is such an essential part of the theoretical framework”.

Response: Thank you for this comment, as it shows that I did not adequately explain the rationale for selecting areas of focus for each chapter. I have expanded the outline of chapters (pg. 33) to clarify that not all aspects of topomythopoiesis, including that relating to the phenomenal landscape, were addressed throughout with equal attention.

“A sentence in the conclusion reads ‘*As a way of place-making, classical topomythopoiesis transcends private participation*’ (p.273) However, both parts of this sentence I find debatable as a conclusion:

- 1.I still have not found substantiation in the thesis of the statement that classical topomythopoiesis is a way of place-making.

2. The relation individual and collective participation is mentioned often, but not made clear”.

Response: I suspect that the lack of an explicit definition of place – as stated below – may be a reason for this shortcoming. I thus hope that by addressing the next point, I will clarify my argument. I hoped that the many examples provided throughout the thesis of landscape-places made to include the spatial, emblematic and natural signifiers that evoke the virtual landscape of classical myth suffice as substantiation that such endeavours constitute a distinct and recognisable way of place-making. For my response to the issue of collective participation, please see my response under 14.3.9.

14.3.7 Place

“Although the aspects of phenomenal topomyths are described clearly, the essential related notion of place (and place-making) could have many meanings, but without proper explanation or contextualisation it remains obscure what it means in the context of the dissertation. ‘Topomythopoiensis’ promises a discussion on the role of myth in place-making, and/or the relation between myths and place. E.g. on p. 3: ‘images drawn from a millennia-old tradition of mythography, representation and place-making that originated in ancient Greece and Rome’. However, I do not see directly how iconography adds to ‘place’. It rather suggests the contrary, since symbols represent something other than themselves, they point away from the place itself. And how is classicism ‘a way of outside place-making?’ (p. 22) Therefore, a carefully elaborated argument is needed on:

The meaning of the notion of ‘place’. See e.g. Casey, E. S. (1998). *The fate of place; a philosophical history*. To my understanding ‘place’ is always bound to the specific, geographically defined location, so a sentence like ‘... subjects for poetry and, by extension, the art of place-making’ (p. 63) does not make sense. How is place making derived from poetry? So, the author’s your specific interpretation of place within the framework of the thesis needs to be explained and theorized”.

Response: Thank you for the constructive suggestion and recommended reading. I have added a list of definitions upfront, including one for ‘place’ (pg. xviii). My definition is very general, since it has to be applicable to all the periods of history and subject-matter under consideration. The implication of my definition is that place-making that aims at evoking myths can range from adding a simple inscription to an existing garden all the way to creating a meta narrative across an entire, vast garden like Versailles. In other words, the iconography (whether only a word or an entire

visual spectacle) is that which evokes the virtual landscape. When the virtual is related to the physical place through participation, a real-and-imagined place is experienced. In terms of geographic specificity: indeed, the physical space (the topomyth) is fixed to a specific site, but the virtual place it evokes is not. As argued above, the historical accounts (and my own reflections) of topomythopoeic reception shows that iconography does not *necessarily* 'point away from the place itself', although this is indeed the case when a topomyth is experienced in analytical (and even imaginative) modes of participation. Regarding the line "... subjects for poetry and, by extension, the art of place-making" (p. 63), I mean in that context that the Greco-Roman gods remained fertile subjects for artists and, by extension, garden-makers, even if they were no longer (from the Hellenistic period onwards) thought of as beings with a divine ontological status. I was thus not commenting there on the geographic specificity of place.

"Since topomythopoiensis is considered as an act of place-making, it is necessary to understand more about the relation between the iconography and the particular place: the 'morphology and syntax, and 'texture' of materials and plants' (p. 49) of the phenomenal landscape as expressive for the virtual landscape of the mythological world it represents, in relation to that which belongs to, and/or expresses the specific place. Sometimes snippets of information are provided. E.g. in chapter 3 the relation between geographic identity and the addition of artefacts is described, but this is not part of the theoretical framework. In chapter 4 the reference to Parnassus (and its associated representational network) is related to the fact that villas were indeed often built on higher grounds, but it remains a separate characteristic. And in chapter 9 the author describes how Hirschfeld questions the relation between Greek temples and the German landscape.

The thesis needs to move beyond these almost casual examples. In how far does the location of the garden and the expression thereof in the design have a relation to the representation of the mythology?

Possibly this is related to the notion of strangeness. Throughout the thesis you mention the relevance of 'strangeness', but without really dwelling on it. Strangeness might refer to the idea of an 'other place' than the place itself'.

Response: Thank you for pointing out this shortcoming. I have added (also in response to the next comment) a Chapter 10 as a series of conceptual themes that arose from the history (Chapters 3 to 9), including one entitled 'contextualisation' (10.1.2), to answer these questions.

Please note that the research methodology followed is that of interpretive history, which does not emphasise compositional analysis. This had been identified as an (extremely) important

part of future work (under 11.2). Thus, the in-depth morphological and syntactical analyses of specific artefacts (and deriving general compositional principles from these) fall outside of the scope of this thesis. I have clarified this under the delimitations (pg. 32).

14.3.8 Components vs. spatial relations and narrative structure

“Related to this question on the interaction between the components (and their accessory meaning) and their specific location, is the question of the interaction between the components. An interesting conclusion is that the use of the topomyths does not dictate the overall composition of designed landscapes. However, the role of the overall composition is discussed inconsistently throughout the thesis. Chapter 3 to 9 provide a sequence from discussing the components as stand-alone objects to discussing gardens as spatial and narrative compositions where these components work together. This poses the problem that the developments that are discovered (e.g. towards a rationalisation of topomythopoiesis) suggest being connected with this shift from separate artefacts to spatial compositions. Is this shift due to the source material that was available, or was it intentional? If it was intentional, why? If it was due to the available material, this needs to be made very clear... The role of these spatial and narrative relations throughout the history that the author gradually unveils need to be explained. Preferably throughout the work, but at least in the conclusions. As it is, discussion of emerging spatial relations alongside a discussion of a move towards a hollowing out of topomythology, suggests that they go hand in hand...

In the first half of the thesis the iconographic components or vocabulary are discussed in-depth, but on their own. It suggests that just placing together in a handful of statues and grotto a topomythopoiesis, and in extension place, enchantment, is already created. Is it enough that they are simply there, and does a statue in a garden have the same value as a statue on the mantelpiece? What is the role of the garden as a container? What is necessary to move from a collection of iconographic components to a ‘myth-infused environment’? There is rarely a discussion on the landscape architectural aspect of these iconographic components: their spatial composition or interrelation, combination, sequence, scenography, their position in the relation between house and landscape, etc.

At some point the author seems to suggest that these relations do not really matter. E.g. in 5.5.7 the author describes that in Renaissance gardens often the iconographic contents were simply based on what sculptures were available. That might have been the case there, but is that also overall true for topomythopoiesis? Also, where you write in chapter 6: ‘the figures no longer played a role in a larger, cosmic, topomyth, but became ornaments placed to anchor points within the geometry of the gardens.’ (p. 200) it seems to be one-directional: the elements are described as

playing an (ornamental) role for the larger composition, but there is no mention of the composition playing a role in the iconography. If so, that begs the question what is the value for the field of landscape architecture? Because then it would be more a matter for sculptors than for spatial designers. And, to go back to my earlier point, what then would be the contribution to place-making?"

Response: As a landscape architect and educator of design, I fully agree that aspects of site and composition are of immense importance, granted that the formulation of a set of applicable design principles lies outside the scope of this thesis. Following your suggestion, I have added a Chapter 10 as a series of conceptual themes that collate my insights gained (some prompted by the points you raise) regarding the inter-relation of components (10.1.4), and the merely ornamental versus the contextualised (10.1.1 & 10.1.2) and naturalised (10.1.3) use of the emblematic signifiers. I added it at the end of the thesis so that I can freely refer to any of the examples previously discussed.

Concerning the extent to which the composition of elements matters, is rather tricky. In providing an example where the iconography of a garden was dictated largely by the available statues, I again refrained from making judgements based on my ideals, and simply pointed out such a case to illustrate that *some* Renaissance topomyths were created without any pre-determined iconographic schemes (as I expected before undertaking the research). The same goes for the eighteenth-century treatise books discussed in Chapter 6 mentioned above: granted that the relationship between statues and composition was largely geometric, this does not imply that this is the case in all historical (or future) topomyths.

“Yet from chapter 6 onwards the author does describe (the lack of) relations, such as ‘no spatial or natural signifiers augment the perception, thus inviting an analytical mode of participation’ (p. 180), and ‘He does not propose any larger narrative schemes that thematically draw together topomyths.’ (p. 204) ‘Mollet leaves the iconography of the statues for the garden owner and sculptors – he prescribes the location for the gods, but not their identity. This implies that the statues are not naturalised, and their identity independent from setting.’ (p. 202) However, in the previous chapters the identity has been described as independent from setting. . . The author criticizes the ‘English gardens of the eighteenth century wherein the gods remained, but as forlorn figures amidst vast rolling fields and forests, not cast in narrative conceits’ (p. 228). So, where are these narrative conceits then in the previous periods? To me it seems that only now interrelations are slowly emerging”.

Response: Examples of ‘narrative conceits’ discussed prior to the part on Mollet and the eighteenth century English garden include Roman domestic nymphaea, the (albeit fictional) Narcissus fountain in the *Roman de la Rose*, the topomythopoeic ensembles of Villa Lante, Bagnaia and Villa d’Este, Tivoli; and the Apollonian axis at Versailles mentioned above (including the Grotto of Tethys which in itself presented a narrative of the resting king). It is worth re-stating here a central argument of the thesis, namely that the narrative contents of a topomyth is often not solely manifested within the phenomenal landscape, but rather held within the virtual counterpart (formed by the dense representational network). As such, most of the gardens are not to be understood as ‘stories-cast-in-stone’. It is also worth restating that the topomyths were often interstitial spaces within larger landscapes, for example during the Hellenistic period: “mythopoeic spaces became subsumed as delineated *encounters* within larger designed landscapes” (3.3.3).

My description of the ‘forlorn figures’ of the English landscape garden was not meant as a criticism, but a means to describe the difference between how the statues were often isolated within larger ruralised or naturalised environments, evoking a virtual landscape formed (in part) by Milton’s mythopoeia .

14.3.9 Private participation

“The author argues that the cult of nature, instrumentalism, and ‘the privatisation of participation’ are partly guilty to a disenchanting view of the world, and the ‘murdering of classical topomythopoesis’. Especially for the latter notion I fail to see why. I understand that you are building up an argument that collective participation is more beneficial for topomythopoesis, than private or individual participation. At the end I still fail to understand why. How is it a problem? Is it that enchantment and mythology only work as a collective experience? Why so? E.g. in chapter 2.4 and chapter 8 it is described exactly as a private matter (dependant on the personal inclination and previous experiences of the garden dweller). It is not so much that I disagree with this statement, but throughout the thesis time and again the opposite is suggested: that private participation allows for the experience of the topomyths. In the conclusion the author even writes: ‘this virtual landscape exists within the imagination of the individual garden dweller.’(p. 273)

From the definition of participation as “the extra-sensory relation between man and his phenomena”, in the first place this seems to be a personal matter, so where does the collective come in? What part of the participation is collective? (the conclusion that the dense representational network is developed over thousands of years does not make it collective. The author seem to mean that the perception of the garden can be enjoyed privately but needs to be

backed up by an understanding of the mythology that is collective. Is that the case? It is necessary to explicitly and clearly elaborate on this”.

Response: Thank you for the suggestion. I have added a list of definitions (pg. xvii), including for ‘participation’, to clarify that both indeed constitute an experience within the self. Thus, the reception of a classical topomyth remains within the percipient garden dweller, but the outlines of the virtual landscape evoked by it may be shared by others versed in the myths of Greece and Rome.

The difference between private and shared participation is also explained in the theoretical framework, using the olive tree of my childhood (as opposed to one ‘outside my personal sphere’) as an example (2.2.3 and 2.2.4). Earlier, in the background section, I referred to Myers (2013)’s analysis of the change in the mode of landscape reception brought about by the Scientific Revolution, after which “meaning [is created] in terms of private association rather than shared understanding” (Myers 2013:17).