Classical topomythopoiesis. Survival of the pagan gods during the Christian Middle Ages

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Abstract

The gardens of the Renaissance are well known for being populated by the gods and settings of Classical mythology — an iconographic tradition that originated in the cult sanctuaries of Ancient Greece and transplanted to Hellenistic and Roman gardens; a tradition of place-making that I term Classical topomythopoiesis. But, what happened in-between? Gardens from the Middle Ages are not often associated with the pagan myths, but rather with Christian symbolism. This article provides a survey of the survival of Medieval Classical topomythopoiesis. It discusses various ways in which Christians received the gods, and how the language of mythology continued to shape the beholder's share in viewing landscapes. It traces the origins of the garden of love to show how it opened the gate for the gods of love to become baptised within later Medieval garden culture. The article 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 article concludes by arguing that Boccaccio's liberation of the mythical garden as an imagined, sensual setting signals a shift towards a Neoplatonic approach to topomythopoiesis.

Keywords: Classical mythology; garden iconography; Medieval

> 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 *Classical topomythopoiesis: the origins of some spatial types* I introduced the term topomythopoiesis to denote 'a way of landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myth', and proceeded to discuss the origins of the *Classical* tradition of topomythopoeisis which is characterised by spatial (grove, grotto …) and statue (Apollo, Venus …) types that developed from natural settings for ritual and their cult statues.[1] These form the lexicon of topomyths that prompt *participation*: gardens within this tradition can be understood as real-and-imagined places, formed from the communion between the material landscape and a virtual counterpart received and shaped within the garden dweller's imagination.[2]

Whether the beholder brings their share to this somatic-symbolic experience in the form of a faint view,[3] or a richly detailed mytho-geography, this virtual landscape — Arcadia — is cultivated by verbal and visual mythography in stories, poems, paintings, illustrations, emblem books, sculptures and even scholarly studies.[4]

In this article, I am continuing my discussion of Classical topomythopoiesis by focusing on its survival 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.[5]

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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.

#gods must fall

The very presence of sanctuaries and statues of gods in Athens stirred the apostle Paul 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'[6] — 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 chisels the creator with 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.[7] Such superstition sometimes led to iconoclasm, for example a possessed public statue of naked Aphrodite in Gaza was toppled, or rather exorcised, by Bishop Porphyry (347–420) and his 'mob' in ad 402.[8] 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.[9] 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.[10] Not only were statues destroyed but also their natural haunts: for example, St. Martin of Tours (c. 316–397) felled sacred groves in Gaul.[11]

Yet, 'a systematic destruction of pagan sanctuaries was never the intention of imperial policy'[12] — 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.[13] A (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.[14] Whether or not the sanctuary was pagan before, the hagiographic text that describe it, the *Liber de apparitione Sancti Michaelis in Monte Gargano*, was a 'repackaging of pastoral discourse'[15] — 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 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.[16]

The roasting of Apollo

The presence of the anthropomorphic deities was sometimes not erased but rather exploited for apologetic purposes, as already witnessed in 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.[17] This seemingly blasphemous act of urban beautification 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:[18]

> 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.[19]

Not that the Constantinople public was always aware of the heathen identity of their statues — a group understood as Adam and Eve was, in fact, a depiction of one of the labours of Hercules.[20]

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-youtful Apollo. Neptune has blue-green eyes; Minerva eyes like a cat; Juno like an ox. Mercury has winged feet; Pan is hoofed … [21]

St. Augustine (354–430) mocked the sheer number of minor deities involved in daily Roman life. For example, in *The City of God* 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 … ?[22]

It is unknown whether Christians poked fun at gods in gardens.

Beautiful (and useful) gods

But, perhaps Constantine simply put the statues on display for urban beautification, as Curran 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'.[23]

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.[24] 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'.[25] 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.[26] 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 compares the early Christian affirmation of pagan mythology as a source for art to the Renaissance artists who equally had no scruples 'making idols'.[27] In his *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, Seznec demonstrated 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.[28] 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 Asia Minor cities), pointing outwards as a means to direct their evil energy to ward off the enemy.[29]

Allegorical gods

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 *theogony* became theology. Protagoras' (481–411 bc) opening line from his, mostly lost, *On the Gods* agnostically 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'.[30] 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 (*Republic* 2, 377d–e), thus arguing for their 'cancellation' from the curricula for the young (*Republic* 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 they are symbols of'[31] — as such, the myths were received as 'divinely inspired and truly trans-formative';[32] 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:[33] by the sixth century, both agnostic pagans and monotheistic Christians could tolerate the myths through 'the *moralising* of an amoral traditional deity'[34] — 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 *Canterbury Tales*.

Mortal gods

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.[35] 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;[36] 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'.[37] This approach was taken by writers of Late Antiquity such as Fulgentius in his *Mythologiae* who was to greatly influence Boccaccio and others centuries later.

There should thus be left 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.

Early Christian garden culture

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'[38] 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'.[39]

Again, it was not only Christians who were sceptical of the kind of garden where *voluptas* was more important than *utilitas*:[40] 'Throughout Roman culture there was a continuing debate, even criticism, of opulent and luxuriate landscaping'.[41] Kapteyn 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:[42]

> '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 … '[43]

Like the owners of the extravagant villa landscapes (with their topomyths) that were being fabricated towards the end of the first century before Christ,[44] 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 topomythopoietic gardens of Pompeii, 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).[45]

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'[46] — 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 Saint Melania the Younger converted to Christianity in 404, she sold all her properties scattered across the Empire to give to the poor.[47]

Despite the early Christians' moral misgivings and meagre monies, gardening was baptised as a legitimate Christian pursuit.[48] Even the first ascetics gardened. Meyvaert 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.[49] 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.

The language 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.[50]

For example, when Basil the Great (330–379), founder of communal monasticism in the East, writes a letter to his brother Gregory to describe his mountain retreat in Pontus,[51] he uses Homer's language of the *locus amoenus* and, specifically, evokes 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.[52]

Later in the letter, the language of the garden of Alcinous — although not stated explicitly — is 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 …[53]

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'.[54]

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'.[55] 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' which Littlewood cites as possible evidence for the influence of pagan sanctuaries on the making of Christian church gardens.[56]

The topomythopoetic spatial types of grove, meadow and spring thus had a more enduring influence on the Christian landscapes of Late Antiquity than the explicit iconography 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'.[57] To the extent that, by the dawn of the first millennium, the *locus amoenus* had become a staple of literary style guides.[58]

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)[59] described the sea-fronted gardens of the palace at Hiereia,[60] he conjured a mythopoetic 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.[61]

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 fish ponds — 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.[62]

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'.[63]

The evocation of the gods was no mere fading remnant of Late Antiquity literary style, but endured into the Carolingian era and later Middle Ages. In Strabo's *Hortulus* (*The Little Garden*, written around ad 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 … [64]

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.[65]

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.[66]

Other plant mythologies are recalled throughout, for example: the hyacinth[67] as the metamorphosed youth — after being struck by a discuss — with whom Apollo fell in love,[68] 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', the abducted Persephone.[69]

Parts of Strabo's poem, and its style, was probably based on Virgil's *Georgics* in which he extolled the virtues of farming.[70] Virgil was regarded, throughout the Middle Ages, as a prophet who predicted the coming of Christ — 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 peace[71] — a poetic version of Varro's earlier pro-farming prose.

When palaeographer Ludwig Traube (1861–1907) classified the eighth and ninth 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,[72] 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,[73] 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 lightening.[74]

In Volume 2 of the Byzantine *Geoponika*, an agricultural treatise dedicated to Constantine VII (913–59), the author provides a series of ten, short mythologies to introduce specific plants and their cultivation.[75] These recall some ancient god-plant associations, such as Venus and the rose,[76] and Apollo and the bay tree:

> 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.[77]

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'.[78] The

Geoponika was influential in Byzantine Medieval garden-culture until the fifteenth century,[79] thereby ensuring that the Classical mythopoetics of plants, to some degree, endured until the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Glimmering gods

The use of the gods to personify nature (e.g. water as nymphs, wind as Zephyrus) or provide 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 delected with greater frivolity, together with the erotic allure and strangeness of the Ovidian myths.[80]

The twelfth century witnessed two important developments for the tradition of Classical topomythopoiesis: 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:[81] 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.[82] It originated at the end of the eleventh century in the love songs sung in the south of France by the troubadours.[83] The customs of wooing was codified in the twelfth-century *Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus (the Chaplain), albeit perhaps satirically.[84] In it, Venus and Cupid are evoked throughout as an allegorical shorthand for the duo of sex and desire.[85] Phrases like 'the work of Venus'[86] and 'the darts of Cupid'[87] are not used as much to evoke myths, but simply as polite manners of talking about rumpy-pumpy.

However, in the Fifth Dialogue the God of Love makes a more concrete appearance: in the discussion between a French noble-man and woman, the former accounts of awakening from a nap within a pleasant meadow,[88] 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'[89] 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.[90]

The paridisal 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):[91] 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.[92]

This topomyth of the enclosed garden of love goes back to Antiquity: in Claudian's (c. ad 370–404) *Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria*,[93] 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')[94] 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'.[95] There the god of love dwells with his mother, Venus, but not as the living, numinous deities of mythology, but allegories of love told in celebration of marriage. C.S. Lewis cites Claudian's writing — with its 'riot of personifications'[96] — as part of an early literary trend that developed into the Medieval allegorisation of mythology, written during the 'ever-deepening twilight of the gods'.[97] 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'[98] — the gods were dead, long lived they in the Medieval 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,[99] we read of the lover's bird-filled garden (also with 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.[100] 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.[101]

This erotic novel was read in Byzantine literary circles up to the twelfth-century,[102] 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'.[103] 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;[104] a distinctly Medieval virtual landscape as a syncretism between Classical, Byzantine, Islamic and Christian sources.

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*,[105] in which Guillaume de Lorris, and then Jean de Meun, created topomyths and myth-filled episodes that also borrowed, in part, from Ovid and relied on the Medieval reader's familiarity with the Roman poet.[106] 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 … [107]

> 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.[108]

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*, widely quoted during the Middle Ages:[109]

> Poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life.[110]

Poetry must either 'profit' (*prodesse*) or 'delight' (*delectare*) or, as Reasons reveals about the *Roman*, both.[111] 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. 1425–1439). Chiselled words reveal the dark history of this seemingly life-giving source: it is here that fair Narcissus withered away to death. Like Pausanius who, upon encountering the sacred *topoi* of Greece during his travels, recounted their mytho-histories (sometimes sceptically), the Lover recalls Ovid's story (*Metamorphoses* 3.351–510) and, unlike Pausanias, preaches its moral implications.[112]

The exegesis of a topomyth

Such instructive literature was common in an age when people sought 'useful guides for thinking well and doing well'.[113] 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.[114] 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 imaginative 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 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.[115] 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 my scheme rather neatly:

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.[116] 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 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.[117]

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[118] who, throughout his treatise, also advocated for the 'profit in delight' of gardens that can restore the body and the mind.[119] A fitting title then for *The Book of Rural Benefits*.

His treatise provides no provision for figurative sculpted elements to evoke Classical (or Christian for that matter) 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 nymph[120] — the youth dwelt in the garden, but only when viewed in the imprint on the garden dweller's imagination.

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 (as suggested by David Hult),[121] and thus directs the *exemplum* at haughty ladies. 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.[122] We may view Narcissus, who fell in love with himself, as the prefigured anti-type of the Lover, who falls in love with another.

Act III: tropological participation

In the next few lines (ll. 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 terms of a Medieval understanding of optics,[123] 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 phantasm[124] — an image of the fountain that is independent of sensation and, quite literally, *more than meets the eye*. According to Andalusian scholar Ibn Rushd (Latinsed 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.[125] When not viewing the fountain as the final resting place of Narcissus, the Lover enjoys it simply for its burbling water; the fountain and its virtual counterpart remain in dualistic opposition, with the inscription functioning as mediator.[126]

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;[127] from the mid-fourteenth century a square basin[128] is preferred, and hexagonal[129] or quadrilobe[130] ones appear from the early fifteenth century. Yet, apart from the odd spouting lion-head, none of the illustrations include any sculptural references to the god.[131]

The illustrations of Narcissus at the fountain — in the manuscripts of the *Roman*, but also the *Epitre d'Othia* by Christine de Pisan (1364–c. 1430) and *Ovide moralisé* — can thus be viewed as representations of the 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.

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 mythopoiesis 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 mirror[132] as an allegory of perception,[133] propose that it also serves as an allegory of visionary topomythopoeic participation: the text cultivates the Medieval garden dweller's imagination 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 … [134]

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 Claire Nouvet put it, the ' … mirror functions as a marvellous optical prosthesis, which supplements [The Lover's] naked eye',[135] and Hult pointed out that through 'the special perception afforded by the fountain, the garden is transformed'.[136] 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':[137]

> 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':[138]

> 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.[139]

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 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.[140]

The *fons vitae* 'makes the dead live again',[141] 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.[142] In that garden, the participant arrives at a somatic-symbolic unity where the unity between 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 heaven itself.

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 (finished after his death) contained a wealth of exuberant statues and automated devices to recall the magical and illusionistic devices of romance literature[143] — perhaps prototypical of the Italian landscapes of artifice and autonomy of the sixteenth-century. Although, to our 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' with its water 'as cold as snow'[144] — 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. The fountain is crowned by a petit sculpture of Cupid shooting arrows from a gothic canopy. The artist also depicted two figures — possibly Venus and Cupid[145] — 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[146] — is paired with Cupid concretised; the waters are enchanted by the visible God of Love and the invisible God of Life.

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 as part of the poem's attempt to reconcile the Christian dilemma of sexuality: [147] 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'.[148] 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'.[149]

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 Venus was found during the digging for a foundation and placed atop a fountain:[150]

> 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.[151]

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 lessons, other-times repulsed for their vulgarity and devilry.

It also predicts the Renaissance flourishing of topomythopoiesis that started out, in the main, as 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 Gregorius reports of his encounters with Classical statues in Rome (after acknowledging that most were destroyed by Pope Gregory).[152] 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.[153]

Long 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.[154] 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 Venus fountain first-hand, but in a drawing by Ambrogio Lorenzeti (1290–1348), famous for his *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* in the *Sala dei Nove* in Siena's *Palazzo Pubblico*. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmittnoted the similarity between the 'Siena Venus' fountain, and that of an early illustration of the *Decameron*.[155]

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) as a frontispiece to the first illustrated manuscript of his *Decameron*, published around 1365 in Florence.[156] 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 lockdowned years of Coronavirus. There they dwelled in gardens, solacing to recreate a 'Saturnian model of life',[157] 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.

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.[158] 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*.[159]

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*.[160] 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'.[161] 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 topomythopoiesis of the sixteenth century in Italy.[162] 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*.

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'.[163]

I wish to speculate that Boccaccio affirmed, by implication of his defence of mythopoiesis against those who objected against its truth-value,[164] another mode of participation with the virtual landscape of Arcadia that liberated the topomythopoiesis of the Renaissance: the faithful subject may indulge in the god-haunted, sensuous, erotic landscape without concern that this voyeurism will necessarily corrupt their soul.

In his magisterial and proto-modern *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*[165] he mustered the Medieval modes of interpretation discussed at the onset of this article — euhemerism, 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 for ever, 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.[166]

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 artifact that develops over time'[167] written by *poeti theologi* (15.8) whose penetrating perception of the visible world allowed then 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'.[168] 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.[169] 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 … [170]

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 to spiritual and moral…'[171] 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:[172] visible things are not used as tokens for invisible things for their obvious resemblance (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 Boccacio's mythopoiesis. Lauretta's song starts with a metaphorical link between the beauty of her body, and the beauty of divine love:[173]

> 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 mightHave foretaste how, above,
>
> That beauty shews that standeth in His sight.[174]

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',[175] while '[o]thers construed it in a

higher, better and truer sense'.[176] The first, practically minded response limits the reception of love, and by association Venus, to its 'embodied reality', while its 'metaphysical counterpart'[177] 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[178] requires deliberate dedication and education.

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'[179] of the Middle Ages which consisted of 'structural schemas',[180] allowed those humanists influenced by a Neoplatonist such as 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.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. Johan N. Prinsloo, 'Classical Topomythopoiesis: The Origins of Some Spatial Types', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 41/3, 2021, pp. 203–224. In the essay, I focused on the grotto and mound, other spatial types include the fountain and grove.

2. I define a 'topomyth' as any landscape — physical or imagined — that is a mythical setting (e.g. Mount Parnassus), or a setting that evokes myth (e.g. the Vale of Venus at Rousham); sometimes the latter evokes the former (e.g. the Belvedere Court evokes Parnassus). Designed topomyths are often composed as a combination of a morphological and statue type, for example a statue of Venus within a grotto. A garden may thus contain any number of topomyths. Whereas 'topomythopoiesis' refers to the act or tradition of making topomyths.

3. I am paraphrasing Ernst Gombrich's term 'beholder's share' used to describe the perceptual involvement (participation) of the subject when viewing art, which he used to entitle the third part of his popular *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1956).

4. I use Arcadia to denote, for the sake of more concrete language, the virtual landscape of Classical topomythopoiesis. Obviously, I am not referring to the geographic location in Greece, but following a tradition that goes back to Virgil, of locating the gods and their haunts in the idyllic, imagined landscape of Arcadia. It does present some problems, for the mythologist will point out that not all the myths are located in Arcadia. 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, inhabited by the gods. For a discussion of Arcadia, see

Snell who demonstrated how Virgil was the first to use Arcadia as a mythic geography within which to locate the gods and mortals of Greco-Roman myth: 'Thus Virgil [in writing the *Eclogues*] needed a new home for his herdsmen, a land far distant from the sordid realities of the present', in his *The Discovery of the Mind*, translated by Thomas G. Rosenmeyer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), p. 252.

5. Here, and in the subtitle, I am echoing the phrase 'survival of the gods' from the influential book by Jean Seznec which demonstrated that Classical mythology by no means disappeared in the culture of Medieval Europe — a misconception held by many at that time — entitled *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, translated by Barbara F Sessions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

6. Joshua W. Jipp, 'Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16–34 as Both Critique and Propaganda', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 131/3, 2012, p. 581.

7. Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian attitudes toward pagan monuments in Late Antiquity and their legacy in later Byzantine centuries', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44, 1990, pp. 56–57.

8. Cyril Mango, 'Antique statuary and the Byzantine beholder', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17, 1963, p. 56.

9. The *Martyrdom of Felix and Adauctus* is written in Latin, presumably in Rome, at an uncertain date, by the ninth century at the latest. Uploaded online by Matthieu Pignot (Oxford University: The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity, 2017), accessed 27 May 2021. http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02496.

10. John Curran, 'Moving Statues in Late Antique Rome: Problems of perspective', *Art History*, 17, 1994, p. 48.

11. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1986), p.29.

12. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes', p. 49.

13. Ibid., p. 54.

14. John Charles Arnold 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, in his 'Arcadia becomes Jerusalem: Angelic Caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano', *Speculum*, 75/3, 2000, p.571.

15. Arnold, 'Arcadia becomes Jerusalem', p. 574.

16. Ibid., p. 573.

17. Mango, 'Antique Statuary', p. 55.

18. Curran 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', of statues indeed bereft them of their sacred character, see his 'Moving statues', pp. 47 and 53. Liz James notes that the paradox of a Christian emperor erecting pagan statues is a modern one, in her 'Pray not to Fall into Temptation and be on Your Guard: Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople', *Gesta*, 35/1, 1996, p. 14.

19. Eusebius, '*Vita Constantini'*, in Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (trans.), *Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), book 3, chapter 54, p. 143.

20. James, 'Pray not', p. 13.

21. Minucius Felix, '*Octavius* (22.5–23.1), Quoted in Mary Beard', in John North and Simon Price (eds), *Religions of Rome Volume 2: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998), p. 29.

22. Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God, volume 1* (6.9), translated by Marcus Dods (New York: Hafner, 1948), p. 250. Beard, North and Price speculate that the multitude of gods that Augustine ridicules as part and parcel of daily Roman life, were not necessarily actually present; that Augustine got it from some pagan scholar's work on theology, see *Religions of Rome 2*, p. 33.

23. Curran, 'Moving statues', p. 55.

24. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes', pp. 50–52.

25. *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, translated by Clyde Pharr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 473.

26. James, 'Pray not', p. 14.

27. Wolfgang Liebeschuetz, 'Pagan Mythology in the Christian Empire', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2, 1995, p.194.

28. Seznec notes that 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, in his *Survival*, p. 167.

29. James, 'Pray not', p. 16.

30. Protagoras, *On the gods* (fragment 80B4 DK). 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.

31. From Proclus, *In Platonis rem publicam commentarii* (1.198, 15–16), translated by Mikołaj Domaradzki in 'Symbolic Poetry, Inspired Myths and salvific Function of Allegoresis in Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic*', *Peitho. Examina Antiqua*, 1/5, 2014, p. 125.

32. Domaradzki, 'Symbolic Poetry', p. 123.

33. For a full account of the disbelief in the gods during Antiquity, see Tim Whitmarsh's, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016).

34. Liebeschuetz, 'Pagan Mythology', p. 199.

35. Founded by Euhemerus in late fourth century bc.

36. Seznec, 'Survival', p. 13.

37. Ibid., p. 18.

38. Paul Meyvaert, 'The Medieval Monastic Garden', in Elizabeth Blair MacDougall (ed.), *Medieval Gardens* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), p. 25.

39. Ibid.

40. 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.

41. John Dixon Hunt, *A World of Gardens* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 52.

42. Jessica Kapteyn, *All Italy an Orchard: Landscape and the State in Varro's De Re Rustica* (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2015).

43. Marcus Terentius Varro, *Cato and Varro On Agriculture*, translated by William Davis Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash (Loeb Classical Library 283, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), book 1, p. 215.

44. See Prinsloo, 'Classical Topomythopoiesis', pp. 213–216.

45. Rare examples exist of Christian gatherings in wealthy Roman households during the second century in Rome itself, as demonstrated by Peter Lampe with reference to the Valentinians, a Gnostic Christian group, in his *Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries: From Paul to Valentinus* (London: Continuum International, 2006), pp. 298–313.

46. Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 32.

47. Anthony Littlewood, 'Greek Literary Evidence for Roman Gardens', in Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, Kathryn L. Gleason, Kim J. Hartswick and Amina-Aïcha Malek (eds), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 251.

48. Some sects, like the Manicheans persisted in their opposition to gardening (and hunting). Fox 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, in *Pagans*, p. 526.

49. Meyvaert, 'Medieval Monastic', p. 25.

50. Henry Maguire, 'Paradise Withdrawn', in Antony Littlewood, Henry Maguire and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), p. 23.

51. Region on the southern coast of the Black Sea.

52. Basil the Great, *Letter 14*, translated by John Henry Newman, *Church of the Fathers* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1840), p. 126.

53. Ibid., p. 127.

54. Ibid.

55. Quoted in Meyvaert, 'Medieval Monastic', p. 44.

56. Transcribed and interpreted by Littlewood, 'Greek Literary Evidence', p. 254.

57. Marilyn Stokstad, 'The Garden as Art', in Elizabeth Blair MacDougall (ed.), *Medieval Gardens* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), p. 177.

58. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 197.

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

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

61. Quoted in Littlewood, 'Greek Literary Evidence', p. 253.

62. From the book, *The Letters of Cassiodorus Being a Condensed Translation of the Variae Epistolae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, translated by Thomas Hodgkin (London: Henry Frowde, 1886), p. 504.

63. Quoted in Meyvaert, 'Medieval Monastic', p. 28.

64. Lines 1–4 from Walahfrid Strabo, *Hortulus*, translated by Raef Payne (Pittsburgh, PA: The Hunt Botanical Library, 1966), p. 25.

65. Strabo, *Hortulus*, p. 27.

66. Ibid., p.35.

67. For more detail on the plant-mythology of the hyacinth and other species, see Annette Giesecke, *The Mythology of Plants* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2014).

68. Strabo, *Hortulus*, p.45.

69. Ibid., p.49.

70. Meyvaert, 'Medieval Monastic', p. 48.

71. 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 Inez Scott Ryberg, 'Virgil's Golden Age', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 89, 1958, p. 123.

72. See the foreword by George H.M. Lawrence to the English translation, Strabo, *Hortulus*..

73. Jerry Stannard, 'Alimentary and Medicinal Uses of Plants', in MacDougall (ed.), *Medieval Gardens*, p. 72.

74. Stannard, 'Uses of Plants', p. 90. Lightening is a drop in the level of the uterus before birth.

75. *Geoponika: Agricultural Pursuits*, translated by Thomas Owen (London: J. White, 1805).

76. *Geoponika*, section 17, p. 78.

77. Ibid., p. 68.

78. Robert Rodgers, 'Κηποποιΐα: Garden Making and Garden Culture in the *Geoponika*', in Littlewood, Maguire and Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, p. 169.

79. Costas N. Constantinides, 'Byzantine Gardens and Horticulture in the Late Byzantine Period', in Littlewood, Maguire and Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, p. 100.

80. This categorisation, to some extent, mirrors that of Joseph Addison who categorised the myths of Homer as evoking sublime landscapes; Virgil pleasant productive landscapes; and Ovid landscapes of strangeness, in *Spectator*, 417, 1712. Addison greatly influenced Classical topomythopoiesis in England during the eighteenth century.

81. From the translator's introduction to Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, translated by John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 4–7.

82. The term, 'Originally *L'Amour courtois*, was Coined by Literary Historian Gaston Paris to describe the Complex System of Courting in the Medieval Court Developed in the Twelfth Century in the South of France by the Troubadours, in his 'Le Conte de la Charrette', *Romania*, 12, 1883, p. 519. Whether developed independently from Byzantine romance remains debated.

83. For a study of their love songs, see Mary O'Neill, *Courtly Love Songs of Medieval France: Transmission and Style in Trouvére Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

84. 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. See Don A. Monson's discussion, 'Andreas Capellanus and the Problem of Irony', *Speculum*, 63/3, 1988, pp. 539–572. Nora Clark, Speculates that the Book was an Ironic and 'Covert Criticism on the Shallowness of the Courtly Love Milieu in the Middle Ages', in her *Aphrodite and Venus in Myth and Mimesis* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), p. 98.

85. For a full discussion of their role in Medieval literature, see Theresa Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

86. Capellanus, *Art of Love*, p. 32.

87. Ibid., p. 119.

88. The *locus amoenus* situated within a wild forest was to become a characteristic of romance literature, according to Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 201–202.

89. Clive S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 37.

90. Capellanus, *Art of Love*, p. 78–79.

91. For a comparison with Capellanus, see David Semah, 'The Concept of Courtly Love: A Comparison Between Ibn Hazm and Andreas Capellanus', in Isaac Benabu (ed.), *Circa 1492– Proceedings of the Jerusalem Colloquium: Litterae Judaeorum in Terra Hispanica* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1992).

92. Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love* (London: Luzac Oriental, 1994), pp. 191–192.

93. Claudian, *Panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius. Against Rufinus 1 and 2. War against Gildo. Against Eutropius 1 and 2. Fescennine Verses on the Marriage of Honorius. Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria. Panegyrics on the Third and Fourth Consulships of Honorius. Panegyric on the Consulship of Manlius. On Stilicho's Consulship 1*, translated by Maurice Platnauer (Loeb Classical Library 135, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), pp. 247–249.

94. Claudian, *Honorius and Maria*, p. 247.

95. Ibid., p. 249.

96. For example, later in the description of the garden (ibid.), we also read of gods as personifications of human traits, for example 'Licence bound by no fetters' and 'Boldness trembling at his first thefts'.

97. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, p. 73.

98. Ibid.

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

100. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, translated by Stephen Gaselee (Loeb Classical Library 45, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), book 1.15, p. 45.

101. Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, book 1.15, p. 47.

102. Alexander Max Leedom, *Pastiche and Appropriation in 'Philip the Philosopher's' Hermeneuma* (MA thesis, Washington University, 2013), p. 26.

103. Translation by Frederick M. Warren, 'A Byzantine Source for Guillaume De Lorris's *Roman De La Rose*', *PMLA*, 31/2, 1916, p. 239.

104. Whether Byzantine erotic literature indeed influenced the west remains an open question. George Saintsbury was inclined to see a positive correlation in his *The Flourishing of Romance and the Rise of Allegory* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1897), pp. 380–381.

105. *Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meun (c. 1230) and Guillame de Lorris (c. 1275). Throughout, I have used the Charles Dahlberg translation, *The Romance of the Rose* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1995).

106. John V. Fleming, 'The Garden of the *Roman de la Rose*: Vision of Landscape or Landscape of Vision?' in MacDougall, *Medieval Gardens*, p. 224.

107. De Meun and De Lorris, *Romance of the Rose*, p. 136.

108. Ibid., ll. 7176–7179.

109. Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 21.

110. Horace's instruction on the purpose of poetry from his *Ars poetica*, in *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, translated by Henry R. Fairclough (Loeb Classical Library194, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), ll. 333–334, p. 479.

111. See discussion by Olson: 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, in her *Literature as Recreation*, p. 22.

112. When describing the Narcissus fountain on Mount Helicon, Pausanias wrote, without interpretation and rather scathingly of the old, unbelievable, 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', in his *Pausanias Description of Greece*, translated by William H. S. Jones and Henry A. Ormerod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), book 9, chapter 31, section 7.

113. Fleming, 'Vision of Landscape', p. 233.

114. Lucia Battaglia Ricci 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 modelled life, in her 'Gardens in Italian Literature During the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in John Dixon Hunt (ed.), *The Italian Garden: Art, Design and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.

115. This summary of the four levels of exegesis, using Exodus and an example, is taken from Joseph A. Mazzeo, 'Allegorical Interpretation and History', *Comparative Literature*, 30/1, 1978, p. 5.

116. An exceptional example is cited by Naomi Miller: '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, ca. 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', in her *Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 141–142. Thus, perhaps mythic iconography was more common in Medieval gardens, than the available evidence suggests.

117. Pietro Crescenzi, *Ruralia Commoda* (book 8, chapter 1, section 4), in Joanna Bauman, 'Text and Translation', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22/2, 2002, p. 101.

118. Joanna Bauman, 'The Pleasure Garden', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22/2, 2002, p. 117.

119. Joanna Bauman, 'Aesthetics and Representation', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22/22, 2002, p. 135.

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

121. David F. Hult, 'The Allegorical Fountain: Narcissus in the *Roman de la Rose*', *Romanic Review*, 72/2, 1981, pp. 135.

122. Mazzeo, 'Allegorical Interpretation', p. 4.

123. 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, see Fleming, 'Vision of Landscape', p. 219.

124. Aristotle, in *De Anima*, book 3, part 3, briefly discusses the imagination (*phantasia*) from the activities of thinking and perceiving, as 'that in virtue of which an image arises for us', translated by John. A. Smith, 'On the Soul', in William D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle Volume 3* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

125. This description is based on Claire Nouvet's 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, in her 'An allegorical mirror: The pool of Narcissus in Guillaume de Lorris' *Romance of the Rose*', *Romanic Review*, 91/4, 2000, pp. 355–357.

126. In her essay on aesthetic experience in Crescenzi, Bauman 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', in her 'Aesthetics and representation', p. 135.

127. 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; *Cologny, 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*, m*s. 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).

128. 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.

129. 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.

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

131. By the mid-fifteenth century, the fountains had become more ornate, with some covered by gothic canopies. 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.

132. 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, see Hult, 'Allegorical fountain', p. 138.

133. For example: Nouvet, 'Allegorical Mirror', Fleming 'Landscape of Vision', Hult, 'Allegorical Fountain', and Kenneth J. Knoespel, *Narcissus and the Invention of History* (New York: Garland, 1985).

134. De Meun and De Lorris, *Romance of the Rose*, p. 51.

135. Nouvet, 'Allegorical mirror', p. 361.

136. Hult, 'Allegorical fountain', p. 143.

137. Nouvet, 'Allegorical mirror', p. 366.

138. See note 134 above.

139. Ibid., p. 52.

140. Ibid., p. 336.

141. See note 140 above.

142. 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. It is tempting for my argument to interpret the figure as Venus, but I cannot say for sure.

143. Anne Hagopian van Buren, 'Reality and Literary Romance in the Park of Hesdin', in MacDougall, *Medieval Gardens*, p. 133.

144. Quoted in Mary-Lyon Dolezal and Maria Mavroudi, 'Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens', in Littlewood, Maguire and Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, pp. 130–131.

145. Discussed by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and Siân Reynolds, 'The Fountain of Youth', C*lio. Women, Gender, History*, 42/2, 2015, pp. 178–188.

146. Miller, *Heavenly Caves*, p. 138.

147. Thomas D. Hill, 'Narcissus, Pygmalion, and the Castration of Saturn: Two Mythographical Themes in the *Roman de la Rose*', *Studies in Philology*, 71/4, 1974, pp. 404–426.

148. Hill, 'Narcissus, Pygmalion and Saturn', p. 420.

149. Jane C. Long, 'The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art', in Sherry C. M. Lindquist (ed.), *The Survival and Reception Venus in the Middle Ages* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 49–50.

150. 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.

151. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I Commentarii* (book 3.2), c. 1447, translated by Elisabeth G. Holt, *A Documentary History of Art, Volume 1: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 165.

152. This episode of iconoclasm — a Christian cleansing of pagan Rome — was a Medieval legend, according to Tilmann Buddensieg, 'Gregory the Great, the Destroyer of Pagan Idols: The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 28, 1965, pp. 44–65.

153. Master Gregorius, *The Marvels of Rome*, translated by John Osborne (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), p. 26; I am indebted to Long for this reference, in 'Meanings of Nudity', p. 56.

154. Long, 'Meanings of Nudity', p. 15.

155. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Corpus der Italienischen Zeichnungen 1300–1450* (Berlin: Mann, 1968), p. 135.

156. 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, see Seznec, *Survival*, p. 150.

157. Jonathan Usher, 'Frame and novella gardens in the *Decameron*', *Medium Aevum*, 58, 1989, p. 277.

158. Ibid., p. 278.

159. 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*, volume 1, book 3, chapter 22. My understanding of Boccaccio's account of Venus is based on the discussion by John Mulryan, 'The Three Images of Venus: Boccaccio's Theory of Love in the *Genealogy of the Gods* and his Aesthetic Vision of Love in the *Decameron*', *Romance Notes*, 19/3, pp. 388–394.

160. Boccaccio discussed Venus as prostitute (*Meretrix*) in his *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (volume 1, book 3, chapter 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', in Mulryan, 'Images of Venus', 1979, p. 380. 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 Robert Hollander in his book *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) which was a departure from the current at the time notion that the Decameron was an unabashed celebration of eroticism.

161. Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto, 'Writing the Garden in the Age of Humanism: Petrarch and Boccaccio', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 23/3, 2012, p. 246.

162. Giannetto 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 ' … 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', Ibid., p. 252.

163. Ibid., p. 245.

164. 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, see Michael Papio, '*Merus phylosophie succus*. Neoplatonic influences on Boccaccio's hermeneutics', *Medioevo letterario d'Italia*, 12, 2015, p. 106.

165. The work drew from earlier works on mythology like that by Albricus and the so-called Vatican mythographer.

166. Book 15, chapter 11 of Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, translated by Charles G. Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), pp. 134–135.

167. David Lummus, 'Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*', *Speculum*, 87/3, 2012, pp. 728.

168. Thomas Hyde, 'Boccaccio: The Genealogies of Myth', *PMLA*, 100/5, 1985, p. 241.

169. For a succinct history of the idea, see Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 214–227.

170. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Comedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine*, translated by Judith Powers Serafini-Sauli, *The 'Comedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine' or 'Ameto' of Giovanni Boccaccio, Translated into Modern English with a Critical Introduction* (PhD dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1970), pp. 198–199.

171. Giannetto, 'Writing the Garden', p. 242.

172. For a discussion of the Neoplatonic influences on Boccaccio, see Papio, '*Merus phylosophie succus*', pp. 97–127.

173. Lummus, 'Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology', p. 79.

174. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 3.10, translated by James M. Rigg (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1960), p. 266.

175. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 257.

176. Ibid.

177. Ibid.

178. This must not be confused with Plato's *metechein*, the partaking of an object (instance) with its Form.

179. Umberto Eco, U. 1988. *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 212.

180. Ibid., p. 213.