The blossoming of classical topomythopoiesis

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Abstract: A cursory glance at Italian Renaissance gardens reveals that they are populated by the beings of classical mythology. Venus, Apollo, Pegasus, Hercules, … are frozen figures in stone that have come to characterise the iconography of the verdant villas they inhabit. Were they included as devices to narrate myths? Or, did they serve as intricate symbolic ensembles to be decoded like the garden artefacts of the *Hypnerotomachi poliphili*? I visit these questions in this article (as part of a series on the history of gardens that evoke Greco-Roman myths) by investigating the expression and reception of Renaissance topomythopoeic gardens through the eyes of a contemporary chronicler of gardens, Bartholomeo Taegio (1520–1573). Extracts from his dialogue, *La Villa* (1559), are used throughout to frame a general discussion of Renaissance topomythopoiesis: the rhetoric of the *locus amoenus* and Parnassus, the appropriation of statues, and Neoplatonic reception and conception. Whereas the gods survived the Christian Middle Ages as beings that animated the ekphrastic language of landscape (and seldom adorned emblematic fountains) there emerged in sixteenth-century Italy a trend to *concretise* their presence. Yet, as Taegio's account shows, not everyone encountered these as stories to be read or hidden codes to be deciphered.

Keywords: myth; Neoplatonism; Renaissance garden; Taegio; topomythopoiesis

The Renaissance villa

This article continues the panoramic history of classical topomythopoiesis that I have been tracing on the pages of this journal, here focusing on the Italian Renaissance.[1]

Since the scholarship on the iconography of gardens from this period is so vast, I discuss aspects of Renaissance topomythopoiesis in relation to the garden descriptions of a contemporary chronicler, Bartholomeo Taegio (1520–1573).[2] His *La Villa* (1559) bears testimony to the role of classical mythology in the gardening culture of the period: the rhetoric of the *locus amoenus* and Parnassus, the appropriation of statues, and Neoplatonic reception and conception.

Throughout the dialogue between the characters Vitauro (a veiled Taegio) and Partenio, Taegio makes an argument for the superiority of living *in villa* as opposed to in the city, coupled with descriptions of the estates of a number of Milanese noblemen (with the requisite Renaissance penchant for hyperbole and aggrandizement). These country estates intentionally harked back to the Roman ideals of rustic Republican living: simplicity, hard work and a strife for 'scholarly and philosophical *otium*'.[3] Much of the garden descriptions lack specificity and echo the tropes of the *locus amoenus* of antique[4] and medieval literature with clichés like 'sweet smells',[5] 'pleasant place',[6] 'clear waters'[7] and 'gentle breeze'.[8] Albeit stereotypical, such descriptions already draw the estates into the tradition of classical topomythopoiesis by evoking the myth of a Golden Age landscape, grafted from the Greco-Roman and Christian images of paradise.[9] Within some descriptions we find a wholly modern, observational account of gardens, possibly written from first-hand experience. These provide some insight into how a contemporary visitor experienced topomythopoeic gardens. For Taegio, the figures of gods did not function as still-standing characters in a mythical narrative, nor as prompts to untangle the meaning of myths. Rather, they served to imbue the *sensory* experience of the gardens with momentary visions of an invisible world.

This is somewhat surprising, at least to those of us habituated to think of Renaissance gardens as visual spectacles that provoked intellectual interpretations. This partly stems from the early to mid-twentieth century art historical studies of Renaissance gardens that tended to emphasise the geometric ordering and iconographic programmes of gardens,[10] or their 'style and aesthetic intentionality'.[11] This approach has been propagated in the history of landscape design courses through history-survey books like *The Landscape of Man*.[12] The intricate descriptions of symbol-laden artefacts in the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* have, at least personally, made me imagine every Renaissance garden-visitor as a kind of Dan Brownian code-hunter. Indeed, the Medici court philosopher Francesco de' Vieri's account of Pratolino (*Delle maravigliose opere di Pratolino*, 1587) is filled with moral-allegorical interpretations. Yet, the emphasis on formal composition and symbolic meaning eschews a complete understanding of the Renaissance garden. This is acknowledged by 'post-aesthetic' interpretations[13] that veered from earlier studies that tended to rely on visual representations that reduced 'Renaissance landscape environments as objects of the aesthetic gaze … '.[14] The gardens were the result of the interaction between nature and human know-how[15]; gardeners formed gardens with their skills accumulated over many generations, not from the mind of the sole, artistic genius.[16] They were mainly created to provide, as Edward D.R. Wright argued, *pleasant* places outside the cities as refuges for healthy living: fresh *air* especially ('gentle breezes'), filled with fragrance ('sweet smell') and birdsong ('sweet songs'), were highly prized.[17] Thus, the clichéd language of breezes, smells and songs was no mere lazy and empty rhetoric, but a way to cultivate a somatic topomythopoiesis. Taegio's account confirms this interpretation, as he spends very little time musing on the *emblematic* meaning of the gardens. Rather, his experience is focused on taking-in the *sensory* delights of the estates, and leisurely observing and partaking of its agricultural pursuits: sowing, hunting and harvesting.

Does this lack of emphasis on iconography mean that classical topomythopoiesis played only a marginal role in the conception and experience of Renaissance gardens? On the contrary, topomythopoiesis was employed, or at least received by Taegio, not as a symbolic code to be unravelled as a storybook or treatise on morality, but as a way to conceptualise and enrich the *sensory* and *edificatory* experience of the estates where quiet contemplation and active farming happily lived side-by-side.

Villa as Parnassus: the rhetoric of poetic inspiration

> But where are you, Signor Giovanni Battista Rainoldo, very worthy senator? It's your turn to honor this dialogue of your most devoted Taegio with the splendor of your name. It's your turn to adorn this your villa, or rather Parnasus [*sic*], you who are (if your modesty allows me to say it) the supreme ornament of the sacred choir of the muses, and dearest friend of the villa.[18]

Throughout *La Villa*, Taegio refers to the villa estates as Parnassus[19] — a metaphor to evoke that mountainous virtual landscape inhabited by Apollo and the Muses. As a topomythonym (mythical place-name) Parnassus is used as a rhetorical device to imbue the place with the numinous presence of the creative gods that inspire lofty thoughts and poetry. This followed an old tradition of associating villas with the 'home of the Muses' as Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 1.9) had done in the second century by referring to his seashore villa in Laurentum as his 'private Helicon'.[20]

The villa owners in Taegio's circle approached (and, often, literally ascended) their estates as the ancients used to ascend Mount Parnassus to seek wisdom from the oracle, or like those Roman poets who sought to find poetic inspiration by the Castalian spring. The villa owners became participants in the ritual of seeking poetic and intellectual epiphany, perhaps seeking the kind of experience attested by a visitor to a sixteenth-century garden-party in Rome, who reported seeing an apparition of 'the Muses, led down from Parnassus and Helicon'.[21]

The poetic awakening of the early Renaissance

Indeed, the Muses dallying around the Hippocrene spring was a central image in the earliest conscious awareness of a creative stirring in the fourteenth century: Colucci Salutati (1331–1406) described the poetry of Francesco Nelli (? −1363) and Petrarch (1304–1374) as reviving the flow of the Hippocrene Spring.[22] Boccaccio, in his *Vita di Dante* (1357–1359), gave that honour to Dante whom he said paved the way for the return of the Muses and imagined the laurel-crowning of Petrarch taking place on Parnassus (in a letter, 1372, to Iacopo Pizzinga).[23] Indeed, during the actual crowning on the Capitoline in 1341, Petrarch boldly stated that

he would scale the deserted summit of Parnassus and lead the way up to poetic revival.[24]

Taegio's use of the Parnassus metaphor for landscape did not merely originate from an image used to conceptualise the spirit of the age, but from one used to describe Petrarch's own gardens in the south of France, which he named his 'transalpine Helicon' (*Familiares* 8.8).[25] Quoting from Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* (10.5–9), Taegio himself evokes the poet laureate's villa life as exemplar:

> No palaces, no theater or loggia
> But in their stead a fir, a beech, a pine —
> Amid the green grass and the lovely mountain nearby,
> From which one descends rhyming and rests —
> Lift our intellect from earth to heaven.[26]

This image of a Parnassus under a Christian heaven echoes Dante. In *Purgatory* (28.139–41), he ascends Mount Purgatory and finds atop the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden. To render this topomyth of an unfallen state, Dante draws Parnassus into the description as a foreshadowing of mankind's true prelapsarian home:

> Those ancients who in poetry presented
> the golden age, who sang its happy state,
> perhaps, in their Parnassus, dreamt this place.

Dante's literary topomythopoiesis, like Petrarch's, thus involved a syncretism, as throughout the Middle Ages, of the topomyths of the Ancients (Parnassus and the Golden Age) and Christianity.[27] Although Parnassus, Apollo and the Muses survived the Middle Ages in the writings of Dante and Chaucer,[28] and within the illustrated manuscripts of Ovid,[29] they were hardly (if ever) evoked in designed landscapes. Rather, the medieval ideal of the garden as an enclosed and communal setting for spiritual and amorous retreat called for references to the Biblical Paradise and the classical *locus amoenus*. The mountain was treated in the literature of the Middle Ages as a hostile place and part of the threatening wilderness *outside* the garden wall.[30] However, such generalisations must be tempered by examples of positive reception, such as Basil the Great's (330–379) description of his mountain retreat.[31]

To higher planes[32]

Apparently, medieval man did not scale any mountains to take in the view until 1336, when Petrarch climbed Mount Ventoux near Avignon: an act which was famously (and controversially) interpreted by historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) as evidence for the poet-geographer's sensitivity to the beauty of nature — his 'favourite accompaniment of intellectual pursuits'.[33]

A few years later, in writing the *Vita Solitaria* from 1346 onwards on his rural property outside Vaucluse, Petrarch's ideal of solitary thinking within nature led him to script the garden milieu away from the medieval idea of the garden as a communal retreat for spiritual edification and courtly love (enclosed from nature), towards a retreat for the individual seeking poetic inspiration and self-improvement (opened to the wild). He achieves this by opening the gate of landscape experience to natural *topoi*, but (sometimes) humanises the wilderness by evoking mythical beings, like Muses, to suggest their numinous and inspiring presence:

> Let provision first be made that, after the prosperous conclusion of his mental toil, one may be enabled to put off the burden of his weariness by having easy access to woods and fields and, what is especially grateful to the Muses, to the bank of a murmuring stream, and at the same time to sow the seeds of new projects in the field of his genius, and in the very interval of rest and recuperation prepare matter for the labor to come. It is an employment at once profitable and pleasant, an active rest and a restful work.[34]

The encompassing of natural settings like 'woods and fields' passed on a 'spirit of … naturalism'[35] to the humanists, clearly visible in Taegio's favourable comparison of the natural to the artificial, including the natural setting of villa gardens:

> Even greater delight arises from the beautiful things that nature produces, which does not [arise] by virtue of those that imitate them. For clearly the difference between a natural fountain and an artificial one is apparent, and between a painted landscape and one that is real.[36]

> … in the gardens of the cities one enjoys only the view of the dwellings domestic and cultivated by masterful hand; but in the villa one also enjoys seeing the wild plants produced by nature in the high mountains …

Furthermore, Petrarch's emphasis on the garden as a setting for the *self* passed on a 'spirit of individualism'[37] to the ensuing age and sowed the seed for the wholly subjective orientation of the early nineteenth century.

Yet, in his conception of the garden, Petrarch did not wholly break from the medieval model.[38] Rather, he synthesised the monastic (not courtly) ideals of 'solitude, chastity, celibacy' with the Ciceronian ideal of *otium* which Petrarch characterised as 'a state defined by simple habits, self-restraint, proximity to nature, diligent study, reflection, writing, and friendship'[39] — a life removed from the rushed public affairs of the city (*negotium*); a life where one could 'conveniently attend to the cultivation of the field and the mind, because these two activities are not incompatible'.[40] Taegio's account continues to oppose the city as the site for *negotium* and the villa as the site for *otium*: Parnassus as a topomythonym is thus a repository of all the associations of reflection, lofty thoughts and poetry that cling to its virtual landscape.

Home of Apollo and the Muses

Taegio invariable draws in the iconography of the peak of poetry's most famous inhabitants, Apollo and the Muses:

> Doesn't he frequently leave the city of Milan in order to enjoy the very sweet countryside of Apollo, and of the Muses in the pleasant and very happy villa of Torresella, where he is often visited by brilliant scholars and judicious visitors for the sweetness and splendor of his eloquence?[41]

Petrarch too evoked Apollo, and his opposite — Bacchus — at Vaucluse: he juxtaposed two of his gardens by associating them with these gods,[42] albeit in an unexpected manner: a forested space for Apollo and a well-kept island in a stream for Bacchus. To explain the apparent paradox that the wilder, dark space of the forest is associated with the god of the sun and reason, is simply to note that topomythonymy is not limited to the association of landscapes to myths that share a visual or atmospheric character, but can include an association of *function*: Petrarch *used* the shaded space for studies (an obvious escape from heat) — an activity enchanted by its association with Apollo. It is thus an example of topomythonymy as a means to ritualise space and give direction for how it is

to be inhabited. Similarly, Taegio and his circle employed 'Parnassus' to conduct the activities of villa visitors towards poetic and intellectual edification.

A place for the mind

Such mindful experience of gardens was specifically cultivated by the Neoplatonists. For example, Cosimo d' Medici (1389–1464) wrote a letter from his villa at Careggi to the Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499):

> I came to the villa at Careggi not to cultivate my field but my soul. Cometh to us, Marsilio, as soon as possible. Bring with you our Plato's *De summo bono* … I desire nothing more ardently than to know the route that leads most conveniently to happiness. Farewell, and come not without the Orphean lyre.[43]

The spread of Neoplatonism through the likes of Medici and Ficino was widespread amongst the humanists and affected their perception of landscape.[44] The Platonic ideal of the ascent of the mind is entangled with the Parnassus metaphor. Taegio elaborates the theme by describing the ascent of a hill — echoing Ventoux — on one of the estates as an ascent of the body *and* mind:

> Then, climbing to the top of the hill, we would be able to recognize everything around. The forest is this our inferior world, the steep path is the heavens; and the hill the supercelestial world. And in order to understand well these inferior things, it is necessary to ascend to the superior, and by looking down from on high, we can have more certain knowledge of these [inferior things].[45]

Taegio's description of the view is rooted in Petrarch and reveals his Neoplatonic pursuit of moving from the visible world to the invisible. The dense representational network evoked by a name, Parnassus, helps to map the landscape as a place where this ideal can be realised: topomythonymy is thus a means to inform the garden-dweller of the topomyth's ontology even before any visible iconography is encountered. The villa is thus a setting for the physical activities that a farm demands, but also the intellectual and creative pursuits demanded by Apollo (and Plato).

The return of the gods

Renaissance topomythopoiesis was not limited to the evocation of invisible spirits of place. Taegio reports the presence of antique artefacts, including statues, in the garden of the Signor Pietro Paolo Arrigono:

> … it is known that Greece and Latium themselves were despoiled of Doric columns, of very wide arches, and of antique statues, in order to clothe again and to adorn this royal dwelling.[46]

This anecdote illustrates the (initial) way in which the villa gardens of the Renaissance became more populous settings for the gods of antiquity in comparison to their medieval forebears: during the fifteenth century, in Rome and Florence, the flourish of interest in antiquities led to the excavation of reliefs and sculptures, often misidentified,[47] that were hoarded in the gardens of their aspiring collectors, often associated with the Church[48]; Italian soil was dug to recycle the 'litter of antiquity'.[49] By this time, artists such as Ghiberti lamented the 'whitewashing' of ancient art and welcomed the return of subjects and techniques from antiquity.[50] Not everyone was impressed, and Taegio himself warns against the empty pomp that could underlie such collections if their owners did not seek out the virtue of the ancients, the original owners of the statues.[51]

A famous example of such a sculpture garden was that of Lorenzo (the Magnificent) de' Medici (1449–1492) near the convent of San Marco in Florence, reported by both the biographers Condivi (1525–1574) and Vasari (1511–1574), and probably in existence from around 1455.[52] Vasari admired it as a repository of ancient and Renaissance art, and an outdoor academy for young artists under the mentorship of Bertoldo di Giovanni (*c.* 1420–1491).[53] Both Michelangelo and Leonardo are said to have cultivated their skills amongst the broken bodies and heads of the gods lying on the grass.[54]

Other artists also passed through the garden gates of that and other such gardens to meet the gods face to face and recast them for the villa gardens of Italy and beyond — the visible presence of classical mythology was thus spread from collections to gardens.[55]

Eventually, the sculptural items were classified and catalogued. The first to do so was Ulisse Aldrovandi in his *Delle statue antiche* (1556), and visually only by Cavalieri in his four books from 1561 to 1594 which was 'something like a comprehensive repertoire of mythological figure types'.[56] Mythological imagery, due to the incomplete authentic, visual record from antiquity, was often based on verbal descriptions, such as those by Pliny the Elder. Yet, artists felt by no means compelled to simply mimic ancient models and allowed themselves the freedom to create their own imagery.[57] In other cases, statues were renamed: for example, a statue of a river god (now in the Vatican Museum) was called *Arno* — a type that did not exist in antiquity.[58] The statue was further modified by Renaissance artists by adding a new head and emblems like a Medici ring around the vase.

The Belvedere, a built Parnassus

One of the first garden settings that was purposefully designed, at least in part, to accommodate the statues of the gods was the Belvedere Court. Designed by Bramante (1444–1514), it included a sculpture garden with herbs and orange trees (figure 1) to house the statue collection of Giuliano della Rovere (1443–
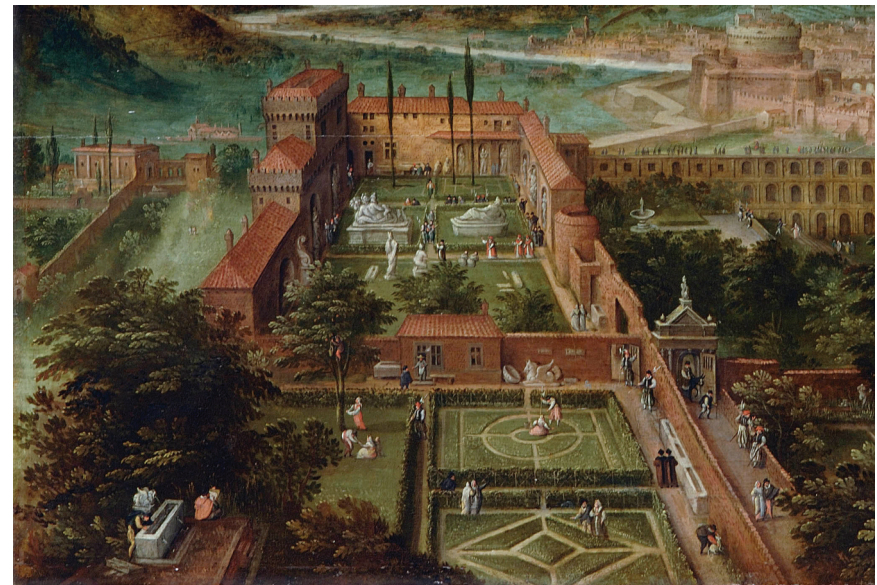

FIGURE 1. *Hendrik van Cleef III, view of the Vatican Belvedere Sculpture Gardens, c. 1525–1590; cropped. Note the uppermost court with river gods, torso of Ajax and statues in niches.*[61] Source: Fondation Custodia, collection Frits Lugt, Paris, with permission.

1513) when he became Pope Julius II in 1503 (and reigned until 1513). It was soon emulated by others, and its statue collection became a veritable gallery of statue types for topomythopoiesis from whence they found their way, by means of imitation and appropriation, to the gardens of Italy and beyond[59]: the river gods (reclining in figure 1), the Apollo, the Ariadne (then known as Cleopatra), the torso of Hercules/Ajax and the Venus Felix.

The sculpture court formed part of the *Cortile*'s overall topomythopoeic programme, which was especially revealed when looking through a window in the *Stanza della Segnatura* within the apartment of Julius II on the third floor of the Vatican Palace:

> Now, on the wall facing the Belvedere, where he painted Mount Parnassus and the fountain of Helicon, Raphael surrounded the mountain with a deep and shadowy laurel wood, where the trembling of the leaves in the sweet winds can almost be seen in the greenery, while in the air countless naked cupids with the most beautiful expressions on their faces are gathering laurel branches and making garlands of them, throwing and scattering them about the mountain.[60]

The upper part of the window-frame was in the centre of Raphael's fresco of Parnassus (1509–1511) as the craggy and laurel covered throne of Apollo, overseer of the Muses and poets, ancient and modern, with the air infused by the sounds of the Christ-like god's *lira da braccio* and the burbling of the Hippocrene Spring.

The view towards the terraced mount of the *Cortile* – modelled on the Praeneste[62] — was thus framed by a visual representation of the virtual landscape of Parnassus. The painted iconography foregrounds and augments the view towards the stepped mountain, complete with its own Castalian springs.[63] This dialogue between the painted and spatial representations of the virtual Parnassus results in a real-and-imagined topomyth celebrating Julius's Rome as the peak of poetic inspiration.[64] The invisible evocation of Parnassus by Taegio, here became manifest.[65]

In the ancient past, the Vatican Hill was the setting for the veneration of Apollo, a practice that continued with Renaissance pageants held in the court,[66] and thus an apt place to conceive a Parnassus; the site is a palimpsest of Parnassian topomythopoeia. The Belvedere became not only the home of some of the most common sculptural types of classical topo-mythopoiesis, but in itself a spatial type — the terraced mount with arched
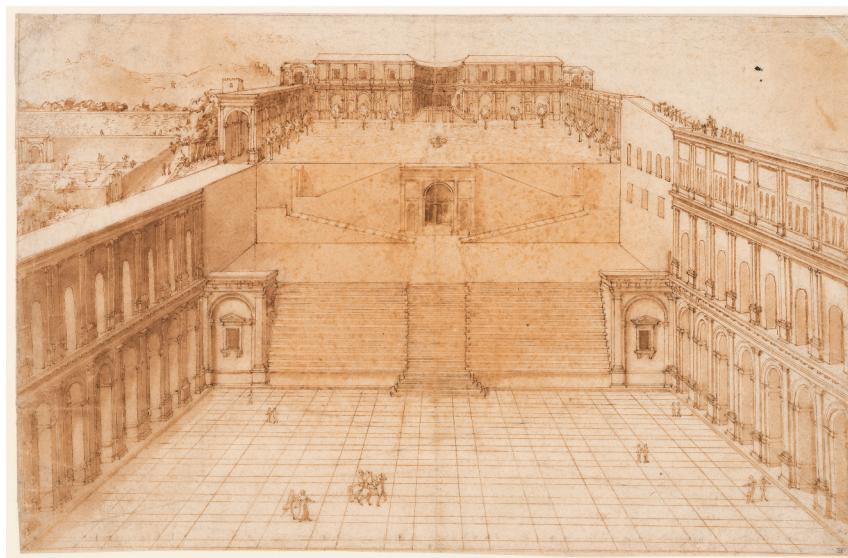

FIGURE 2. *Giovanni S. Peruzzi, Belvedere Court, Vatican City, c. 1590. The court was designed by Bramante, constructed from 1506 and completed in 1558. Source: Canadian Centre for Architecture.*

niches and double staircases (figure 2) — imitated at numerous hillside villas such as Villa'd Este and Villa Mondragone (figure 3). The latter's water theatre itself became a model for other European gardens.[67]

In the same vein that Augustus scripted a mythical genealogy and employed topomythopoiesis to cast himself as the torch-bearer of the ancient Greek civilization and the protector of the soul of Rome, so did Julius II present himself as the new Julius Caesar (of the *gens Julia*)[68] and created the Belvedere Court as 'a re-embodiment of the Roman Villa — or Palace-Garden'[69] as part of his grand project to reconnect Christian Rome with its ancient glory. Much like Constantine, he proudly paraded pagan statues within a Christian setting.

The naturalisation of statues: river gods and nymphs

The statues of the gods in the Belvedere Court were displayed in architectural frames — arched niches mostly — reminiscent of the way in which Roman
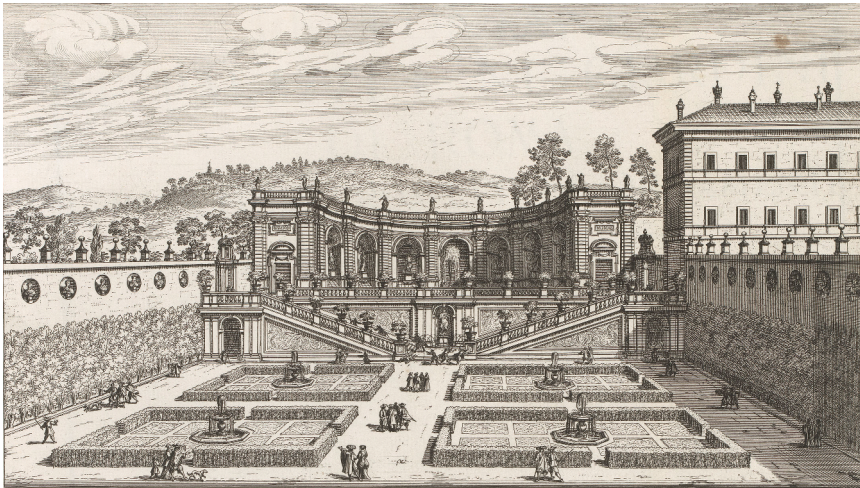
FIGURE 3. *Giovanni Battista Falda, fountain in the gardens of Mondragone at Frascati, in Le fontane delle ville di Frascati, 1653–1691. The water theatre was designed by Giovanni Fontana, 1618. Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (public domain).*

personify aspects of human-nature (Apollo, Venus, Hercules and the Muses); gods of nature and gods of culture. However, as is often the case with dualisms, the one opposite contained something of the other, for example: Venus both embodied natural procreation *and* romantic love.

The fear of idolatry: Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola

Not everyone welcomed the sudden physical presence of the gods in gardens nor received them as mere personifications of nature and personality or objects of art. Walking through the grand Parnassian spaces of the Belvedere Court on a diplomatic visit to the Vatican in 1512, Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) was so shocked by the sight of pagan gods, especially lustful Venus and Cupid (so-called Venus Felix),[72] that he wrote a poem railing against this idolatry in the heart of Christendom. *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis* is a poetic warning against idolatry, and paints a proto-Reformation vision of a corrupt and beast-infested Rome — a Babylon — under the spell of its whore, Venus. Pico, at that time stripped of political power, knew he had no influence in having such statues removed. Instead, he wrote the poem as a guide, especially for young men, to resist the temptation of lust that the goddess of Love arouses in all that gaze at her near-naked body. Thus, Pico did not believe that images of gods were mere innocent vessels that allegorised nature or mere archaeological and artistic curiosities, but that they held power over those — of weak faith — who viewed them.

This attack on the goddess, echoing the iconoclastic reception of gods during the early Christian period, is set against the growing movement that called for renewal within the Catholic Church, culminating in the Reformation led by Martin Luther (1483–1546) who, two years before Pico, was equally appalled by Rome's paganism on display in places like the Pantheon.[73] Both Luther and Pico were influenced by Girolamo Savonarola's (1452–1498) preaching against the inner decay of the Church, and what he saw as a pagan revival witnessed by the mythological imagery that adorned buildings and public spaces. Savonarola did not call for a complete iconoclasm, but rather for the replacement of pagan with Christian imagery.[74] Although Pico's poem is not explicit about whether he would rather the statue of Venus be replaced by a Christian one, he does call on Mary to exorcize Venus:

nymphaea made a spectacle of the gods. However, some of the statues were (partly) naturalised[70] by enveloping them with suitable artificial nature. The deliberate juxtaposition between art and nature was a common theme of the Renaissance. Claudia Lazzaro has discussed the ways in which the river gods of the Vatican (Tiber, Nile and Arno), and the sleeping nymph (later identified as Ariadne) were given apt natural milieux within fountain-settings to heighten the viewer's awareness of these gods as the personifications of nature: a combination of irregular (often stratified), multi-coloured stone and the flow of water rendered simulacra of the gods' watery and stoney haunts, all juxtaposed with an architectural plinth or niche.[71] A drawing by Portuguese court-painter Francisco de Holanda (1517–1585), *The fountain of Cleopatra/ Sleeping nymph* from 1538–1539 suggests living fern-like plants further contributed to the conceit. These gods were not viewed like the cult statues of antiquity as containers for the deities, but rather as personifications of nature: the gods became part of a lexicon to conceptualise nature, not supernatural beings within it. We thus witness a distinction between those old rustic gods used to personify nature (the nymphs, river gods and satyrs) and those used to

virgin, eternally virgin, you who alone, with the sacred birth,
restrained the sacrilege of fools;
now grant me, I beg you, to chase twofold Venus away
and those winged brothers whom mad antiquity forged
as foolish gods; grant me to cast them out with this new song.[75]

In Pico's eyes, the Virgin of the medieval *hortus conclusus* is a more appropriate female presence within a Christian garden. Taegio was, a few decades later, equally unimpressed by the idolatry he saw in the cities where ' … I do not see anything but pride, ambition, greed, hatred, falsehood, and idolatry'. [76] Yet, elsewhere in *La Villa*, Taegio himself took pleasure from seeing the sculptures of gods in the gardens of his friends: 'This one [garden], by being adorned with better works than Praxiteles and Phidias … '[77] revealing a paradoxical reception of the presence of pagan deities during the period (enduring from the Middle Ages): from Pico and Luther's iconoclasm to the iconography of the Medici, Taegio's text contains both a Christian critique of idolatry *and* a poetic swooning over the poetic role of statues in the experience of gardens. How was he and the other humanists (including Julius II) able to reconcile their Christian faith with overt pagan art? Their exact relationship to the visual language of the Greco-Roman myths remains a subject for debate,[78] but it seems certain that the humanists did not reject Christian belief in favour of paganism in a religious sense[79]; the statues did not play the same role as they did for the Greeks in the cult sanctuaries.

Neoplatonic encounters with topomyths

But this does not mean that the statues of the gods in gardens were merely received as archaeological curiosities or autotelic *things* (art for art's sake). Rather, those influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophers (notably, Marsilio Ficino)[80] regarded the statues of gods as a means to a greater end; as a step on the path leading upwards to the realm of the invisible Ideas. Already witnessed in Boccaccio, the Christian Neoplatonists of the Renaissance (influenced by the fifth century Proclus and Plotinus) experienced the world within Plato's ontological hierarchy of the universe: the superior, spiritual world at the top (experienced through our intuition and imagination), and the inferior, material world at the bottom (experienced through the senses).[81] The upper and lower realms of this universe are connected by chains of meaning (*seirai*): each link is devised by God

(not humans) and, if contemplated upon, will lead to the higher. *Symbola* are those visible links that partake (*metechein*) in the chain — they are thus not to be understood as our 'symbols' which, through resemblance, *represent* something a–part, neither are they and the higher links to be conflated. By encountering *symbola*, humans are invited to participate in the ascent to the invisible.[82]

If devised by God, how are humans to know what on earth serves as *symbola*? One explanation was that the poets of antiquity, the authors of mythology, were like sages who passed onto us a symbolic lexicon of the gods that existed high upon every chain. Homer was read by the Neoplatonists as 'divine Homer', a sage who dwelled high upon the chain and, through his words, were able to translate divine ideas through his *Odyssey* and *Illiad*.[83] The topomythopoiesis derived from such texts can thus be interpreted as spatial-temporal *symbola* that lead up to the virtual landscape of mythology, up to Homer, up to the gods, up to God. Thus understood, the gazing at gods in gardens was saved from blasphemy.

For example, in the extract from Pico's poem quoted above, he shuns the 'twofold Venus'. This refers to Ficino's conceptualisation of Venus in Neoplatonic terms, similar to Boccaccio's *Venus meretrix* and *Venus magna*.[84] There is the earthly Venus (*Venus pandemia*) of the flesh and procreation, and then there is heavenly Venus (*Venus urania*) — love for the first can *lead up* to love for the latter. While looking at a statue of a Greco-Roman goddess of sex, the viewer — in a state of imaginative participation[85] — can ascend towards an experience of eternal Beauty and pure love within a Christian universe, beauty beyond being.

The chains of meaning are not always straightforward, and the twenty-first century viewer should not expect to find simplistic 'meanings' like 'Venus equals sex'. Thus, the *symbola* are not always visually mimetic of their invisible counterparts: in Proclus' *On Hieratic Art*, a lion and laurel are *symbola* for the Sun, and in Ficino's *Three Books on Life* sugar is, rather inexplicably, a *symbolon* for Jupiter[86] — we must not expect an obvious similarity between signifiers and the signified.

Ernst Gombrich (1948) was one of the first art historians to acknowledge that this 'un-scholastic aesthetics' must affect our analysis of the iconography of Renaissance art: we should not try to decipher or unlock Renaissance works of art with eighteenth and nineteenth century eyes — eyes that looked to find neat allegorical messages encoded in everything; one must not look with Aristotelian eyes at Platonic works of art.

Indeed, Taegio did not seek to provide his readers with a 'neat' interpretation of the topomythopoiesis of estate gardens, nor does he dwell on the visual contents of the iconography. This is very much unlike fictional Poliphilo's laborious descriptions of the garden-artefacts of his dream in the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* (1499). It is revealing that the first two villas described in *La Villa* are that of two prominent Neoplatonists: Ficino and his pupil Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), who is not to be confused with Gianfrancesco mentioned before, his younger and proto-Reformist nephew. Taegio's writing, filled with Neoplatonic ideas such as a hierarchical scheme of the universe in which the intellect can take flight, was influenced by Mirandola and French mathematician and philosopher Carolus Bovilus (1479–1566)[87]: 'Don't you know that the intellect is a divine thing and that man is the link in the chain that binds mortal things with the divine?'.[88]

I have already noted that the topomythonym of Parnassus established the ontological orientation of the visitor towards the villa gardens as congenial places for the ascent from the material to the immaterial world, through participation in the chain of meaning. The first-hand experience of such participation is illustrated in Taegio's description of an encounter within the garden of Signor Cesare Simonetta, a villa of Castellazzo. The description provides us with a rare, first-hand account of the reception of classical topomythopoiesis, and thus quoted at length:

> I say nothing of the thousand hidden recesses of the very pleasant garden, beside which near the hedge with soft murmur runs a rivulet of water, flowing from a clear fountain that springs forth in the middle of a grotto that lies to the left side of the garden. And of the water that overflows from the fountain; part goes around the garden and part into a very beautiful fishpond surrounding a parapet of whitest marble ornamented with wonderful carving, marble figures, and countless very beautiful antique [statues] that seem to contemplate the beauty of the notable fishpond, where the fish are seen playing in schools and sometimes coming up to the surface splashing. And the water is so pure, calm and clear that the eyes by looking without any impediment gaze on the diversity of the pebbles that are on the bottom. And the statues that are around it are seen likewise in the water as in a well-polished mirror. For I promise and swear to you that sometimes in the rising and the setting of the sun I have seen things so wonderful and beautiful in the aforementioned fishpond that it seems to me there could be another world, and so sweet to me was this delusion that there is no certainty that compares with it. I say nothing of countless other miracles of

this place. And if it were not that I would not want to mingle fables with the truth, I would say that there and not in Cypress would be the reign of Venus and of her son Cupid.[89]

From this description, we can infer some important characteristics of the experience of topomythopoiesis during the Renaissance, at least for those with a Neoplatonic bent, summarised as follows (quotes from Taegio are from the passage above, unless otherwise indicated):

Liminal encounters

Such topomyths that contain spatial and statue types are rarely described in Taegio. Thus, they interrupt rather than dominate the rural ambience and relaxed *otium* of the estate: they are *encountered* as liminal spaces that offer poetic (and mental) interludes amidst the bodily pleasures of experiencing the fertility and sensual graces of the landscape. The 'recesses' are syntactically separate from the meadows, groves and open skies of the estate-at-large, which is *not* experienced as a sequence of iconographic-laden spaces that, together, form the script of a mythical narrative.[90]

One can thus identify two levels of topomythopoiesis: the first, as established by 'Parnassus' and the language of the *locus amoenus*, provides the productive landscape with a numinous presence of the Golden Age and its rustic gods, whereas the second level provides moments where visual fragments of the virtual landscape prompt participation towards seeing glimpses of the universe that exists above the phenomena.

Marvellous encounters

The tone of the passage betrays an experience of awe at inexplicable things; an experience of marvel that Taegio elsewhere associates with the spirit: 'The other [type of pleasure] is only of the spirit, which is that one of them that contemplating the marvelous effects of nature passes through the better hours'.[91]

Luke Morgan has compared the experience of the marvellous in sixteenth century gardens with the *Wunderkammeren*, or 'cabinets of curiosities' that were fashionable at the time: collections of strange natural objects that defied rational understanding, thus instilling a sense of wonder (*meraviglia*) — if

something is comprehensible it is not wonderful.[92] At the *Sacro Bosco* in Bomarzo, for example, we find some standard classical statue types of Pegasus, the Muses and a river-god. Yet, these mimetic gods are accompanied by a troop of marvellous, phantastical beings.[93] These hybrid human-animal creatures were influenced by the grotesques (*grottesche*) found at the grotto (from where the term) of the Domus Aurea, rediscovered at the end of the fifteenth century. Inspired by these is the nymphaeum *Fontana Papacqua* (1561–1579) at the Palazzo Chigi Albani in Soriano nel Cimino.[94]

Giannetto has also drawn similarities between the wonderment found in gardens such as Bomarzo and books such as the *Hypnerotomachia*: in the former, it is the tension between comprehension and incomprehension that creates wonder, for example, the semiotic 'break' of the leaning house with its promise of rest unfulfilled by its leaning floor.[95] Giannetto argues that the aim of such phantastical imagery was to provide visitors and readers with images that provoked thought and meditation by their mere strangeness and not to provide any 'single specific concepts' for interpretation.[96] Such participation, which leads to contemplation, can be interpreted as a continuation of the monastic tradition of the cloister garden: strangeness 'stimulates curiosity and leads to wisdom, wonder is the appropriate passion for a philosopher'.[97]

Taegio's description befits these interpretations as he almost stumbles upon strange things that escape his understanding — echoing the dream-like experiences of Poliphilo, albeit pruned of exaggerated language and emblematic analysis. In this, we find a synthesis between the Aristotelian, analytical mind who seeks to collect and organise the natural world, and the Platonic mind that seeks to see above the natural world — Taegio can both contemplate the wonders of nature, make sense of it,[98] *and* allow such experiences to ascend his soul towards the divine. In this intellectual-intuitive experience there is no room for exegetic participation. He comes with analytical eyes but does not analyse. He is a modern observer of the world, but participates in it towards finding enchantment.

Epiphany: somatic–symbolic unity

As stated, Taegio's experience of a garden setting inhabited by statues, possibly Venus and her son,[99] is far from being an allegorical exegesis.

Nothing in this garden is experienced as representing something else. We cannot here use the words employed by Lazzaro in her analysis of Villa Lante at Bagnaia to describe what each element 'allegorizes',[100] 'represents'[101] or 'refers to'.[102] Rather, we should interpret the elements as an ensemble of *symbola*, not a collection of symbols.

The experience of epiphany is infused with the somatic delights cultivated in the *locus amoenus* literature that flows from Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid and Boccaccio. In her phenomenological interpretation (influenced by Taegio's definition of the three pleasures of landscape) of the Villa d'Este, Bay demonstrates that Renaissance gardens ought to be understood as immersive topomythopoeic environments in which the sensory experiences offered by water and plants augment the symbolic contents offered by iconographic elements.[103]

In Taegio too, the incantation is achieved through an ensemble of various topomythopoeic statues and spatial types working as a symphony of sensory and symbolic impressions: things in the garden are not individual objects for focused contemplation. The atmosphere of the *locus amoenus* is achieved by the fusion of nature and artifice — third nature[104]: natural-artificial elements of water ('rivulet', 'fountain'), plants ('hedge') and contained animals ('playing … fish') and the artificial-natural elements of 'grotto' and anthropomorphic statues ('marble figures'). The somatic experience then moves, only momentarily, to the imaginative realm where the higher spheres are seen: '*it seems to me there could be another world*, and so sweet to me was this delusion that there is no certainty that compares with it' [my italics]. It is a vision that appears when Taegio is peering into the pool and seeing the *reflection* of the statues,[105] revealing a beatific vision of Venus.[106] This upward experience from the world of the senses to the intellect is captured in the move from hearing ('soft murmur'), seeing ('the fish are seen'), imagining ('it seems to me there could be a higher world') and reasoning ('I would not want to mingle fable with truth') — a hierarchy of experience that strikingly resembles Ficino's 'five pleasures':

> … but I promise you with the kindness of a father and a brother five pleasures, and five I give, pure, perpetual, and wholesome, of which the lowest is in smelling; the higher, in hearing; the more sublime, in seeing; the more eminent, in the imagination; the higher and more divine in the reason. (*De Vita* 2.15).[107]

The mirror of the imagination

The analogy of the pool as a 'well-polished mirror' has significance in a Neoplatonic text. For example, in Plato's *Timaeus* (71a3–d4), the liver is described as that part of the lower body used to reflect the higher soul as a means for rational thinking to have some sway over the lower body. Later, Neoplatonists were influenced by Plato's mirror analogies, albeit reworked as an analogy for the imagination, 'presented as something positive: the mirror reflects a higher psychological and ontological level and the sight of them turns the soul back towards that higher level'.[108]

By seeing the statue *as a reflection*, Venus is immediately cast *as a representation* — a reminder that all things are mere dim reflections. Thus, the encounter with the topomyth, composed of the statue and spatial type (the pool), mimics the Platonic mechanics of the universe wherein the viewer is pulled into its depths where the higher ontological level is seen. Taken further, we can say that the reflection is a *representation of a representation*, since the statue *itself* is a work of art that represents the virtual existence of Venus in both her earthly and celestial guises. The strangeness that begets a change of consciousness is intensified by the somatic experience of the change of light, whether during dusk or dawn. (Topomyths are best seen early in the morning or just before dark, when dappled by shade, or veiled by mist.)

The mirroring of the divine within the phenomenology of the garden setting is revealed by a form of somatic-symbolic participation that witnesses the intelligible world cascading down into the sensible world from which, in turn, the soul floats upward.

It achieves an experience of psychosomatic unity within the garden-dweller: the Platonic conception of the relationship between the material and the virtual landscapes, otherwise as may be expected, is not world-denying: the encounter with a topomyth does not invariably lead to a dualism between body and mind, and the physical garden is not dematerialised into a virtual abstract landscape. Such a conception of garden experience also defies an interpretation of the Renaissance period as one pre-occupied by the aesthetics of the surface, as found in Harbison's analysis of the garden-based narrative in the *Hypnerotomachia* as 'an extended experience of emptiness' and thus 'a prime document for understanding the Renaissance attitude towards artifice'.[109] If such an interpretation is true of Poliphilo's encounters, it certainly is not true of Taegio's.

Medieval confluence

Indeed, there is no radical break in Taegio's garden experience with that of the Late Middle Ages. The act of peering into the depths of clear water (and the garden description in general) echo that of the Fountain of Love in the *Roman de la Rose* (ll. 1423–1652): that fountain, wherein Narcissus froze in a permanent selfie of death, was equally clear ('fresh and new'), like a 'mirror' (albeit 'perilous') and fed by 'cavernous conduits' (presumably grottos). At the bottom are 'two crystal stones' that incite 'marvel'.[110] The 'pebbles' in Taegio are not described as crystals, but indeed draws onto them a deep 'gaze'. Perhaps, the similarities cast some suspicion as to whether Taegio's description was based on an actual garden experience, especially granted that much of garden writing, before and during the Renaissance, was mimetic and rhetorical. Yet, the description does contain those elements of Renaissance gardens, statues specifically, that were *not* found in the medieval literary garden, and the sensory experiences are, throughout Taegio, much more descriptive. In Taegio, we have not reached a modern nihilism as Harbison suggested in relation to the *Hypnerotomachia*, but neither is an intellectualised allegorisation of the garden — meaning is *felt*.

Neoplatonic intentions: Pirro Ligorio

The Neoplatonism of Taegio's account raises the question whether the authors of gardens *intended* their topomythopoiesis to be experienced as such — epiphanies of the invisible in the visible — or whether Taegio was merely responding in this way due to his personal, esoteric, philosophy. One account from a designer's perspective that does reveal at least a Neoplatonic sensibility, albeit inferred, was written by an antiquarian and architect that was highly influential in the development of the Renaissance garden, Pirro Ligorio (1512–1583).[111] In his description of the grotesque paintings of Nero's Domus Aurea, he describes the Muses and Apollo (and others) in the following terms:

> The good Muses, Clio, Calliope, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Therpsicore, Thalia and Urania, their mother Mnemosyne, Apollo, Minerva and Hercules were all painted there to signify the labours and happy days of

those who are dedicated to higher things, and who lead man to the everlasting pleasures of the greatest knowledge, to high and profound meditation on seeing with the eyes of the mind how wonderful is the Prime Mover who made the heavens and the earth, so varied in its inspirations. Thus the force and the essence of the divine light can be recognized in plants and animals.[112]

Ligorio describes these figures from myth, all popular in the iconography of Renaissance gardens,[113] as guides towards the upper reaches of the invisible, intelligible, realm of God. Ligorio himself often employed them, in his design of the Casino for Pius IV in the Vatican. In his interpretation of the meaning of the topomythopoiesis of the Casino, Smith quotes from the passage above to argue that the iconographic programme, dominated by Apollo and the Muses, was intended to be experienced as a water-themed ensemble, grouped around the vase of Truth, to render the Casino as a setting congenial for a soaring mind and — in the opposite direction — for higher beings to dwell.[114] Thus, the garden was not intended as a place for deciphering allegories or taking moral lessons, even though Ligorio, as an antiquarian, was well versed in the *individual* narratives and associations of the figures.[115] Indeed, in his analysis Smith distinguishes between the 'iconography' of individual figures, and the 'meaning' of the whole.[116] There is more evidence for a Neoplatonic bent in Ligorio's thinking, although Smith does not refer to it: for example, Occhipinti has argued that the quadripartite geometry of Ligorio's Villa d' Este in Tivoli was an attempt to manifest Plato's conception of an invisible, numeral order of the universe.[117] Also, Ligorio acknowledged Plato's dualistic account of love — carnal and spiritual — in his description of earthly and heavenly Venus; *terreste Venere* and *celeste Venere*.[118] In the spirit of Ficino and Pico, he characterises the love embodied in earthly Venus as lustful, and that within the celestial Venus as chaste and divine. Elsewhere in the Turin manuscript he reports on a Venus *pudica* statue that was mocked by religious onlookers as obscene and lists it as a statue type not suited for public viewing.[119] Yet, he included a Venus *pudica* within a private grotto at Villa d'Este (no longer extant), interpreted by Bay as an encounter within the garden for male voyeurism: catching the goddess unawares undressing — or fulfilling a male 'scopophilic fantasy'[120]; a frozen peep-show in the garden. Indeed, Ligorio described the Grotto of Venus as being 'dedicated to appetite and voluptuous pleasure'.[121] At face value, it may thus seem that Ligorio (and by extension, his client cardinal Ippolito II d'Este) abandoned his moral critique of lustful Venus when designing the grotto.

However, if interpreted in Neoplatonic terms, the inclusion of the goddess of sex may have been intended — although perhaps not always experienced as such[122] — to evoke an enchanted experience of the celestial in the material, as felt by Taegio at the pool. Thus, this interpretation of Ligorio's Neoplatonism reveals at least the possibility that some such lofty encounters as described by Taegio were *intended*.

Cheerful things

However, MacDougall, who did not analyse gardens through a Neoplatonic lens, warns against looking for deep meanings in sixteenth-century gardens.[123] They were, in her estimation, more apt for *cose allegre* (cheerful things): 'It [the garden] was not the place to contemplate the deep philosophical or religious questions that painting cycles evoked'. Rather, she contends the meanings of gardens, even to the literate elite, focused on basic concepts, mainly 'contrasts of art and nature', 'pride of family and place' or 'evocation of the pastoral heritage of classical antiquity'.[124] Although Taegio's account confirms that, as argued, allegorical readings were not the main purpose of the gardens' topomythopoeia, 'deep philosophical or religious questions' were certainly not excluded from his experience within the liminal encounters discussed before. From Morgan and MacDougall's analyses, and my reading of Taegio, we may conclude that participation in Renaissance gardens took on various forms and lead to a wide range of experiences: wonderful, delightful and epiphanic.

Meta-narratives

Granted that some garden designers held a Neoplatonic conception of experience and others troubled little with complex symbolism, it can be asked whether garden designers intended to create gardens with a coherent, narrative-like topomythopoeia. As Taegio's encounters illustrate, classical topomythopoiesis was not often employed to narrate a meta-myth. There are, unlike I expected to find when embarking on this research, very few examples of gardens that attempted to be a material translation of a specific myth. In general, the myths remain 'in their place', that is within the virtual landscape. It is up to the garden dweller, consciously or not, to step into the dense representational network, prompted by the signifiers — emblematic, spatial and natural — and be drawn

into a landscape of story. Thus, the gardens were not regarded as substitutes for the myths, but material fragments that form part of the physical–virtual dynamic. The topomyths can be likened to the illustrations in manuscripts of mythology: they accompany stories but do not tell them. Indeed, Inden speculates that the reliefs at Villa d'Este in the Alley of the Hundred Fountains showing episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were based on illustrations from the period, and, on viewing them, 'prompted recitation of the text illustrated'[125] — reminiscent of the Roman memory games played while dining on triclinia.

Yet, during the latter half of the sixteenth century there were created some gardens that did not merely contain encounters with scattered fragments of the virtual landscape, but attempted to, at least to some degree, 'tell a story'. A famous example of an iconographic analysis of a Renaissance garden that reveals its narrative structure, is that of Claudia Lazzaro's study of the Villa Lante at Bagnaia[126]: it demonstrates how that garden, as a commentary on the nature-art trope of the period, is a manifestation of the story of the flood as told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (1.143–1.384): the very form and syntax of the garden allows the story to progress along an axis, establishing a juxtaposition between the Golden Age and the postdiluvian Age of Jupiter.[127] David R. Coffin's study of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli reveals a similar substructure of narrative.[128]

MacDougall points out that such 'elaborate *concetti*' first started appearing in the 1540s,[129] preceded by fountains (from around 1530) that told stories through a 'complicated allegorical program'[130] — sometimes multiple fountains worked together to 'unravel the significance of the tale'.[131]

The iconography of such gardens — within which the virtual landscape is highly *presenced* – can be 'unlocked' through analysis *a la* Lazzaro and Coffin. Although this may be true for Lante and D'Este, such solid, overarching semantics was not the rule.

Part of the reason for this, especially during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is that the process of making gardens and designing them was not yet separated[132] — there was no *a priori* conceptualisation of a project within a single mind and on paper which got implemented on site.

Gardens as *poesia*, not *istoria*

Another reason for the lack of meta garden narratives can be found in the Renaissance distinction, as applied to the visual arts, between *istoria* and *poesia*.

Although the uses of these terms shifted from the fourteenth to later centuries, and varied from one author to the next, the essential differences can be explained as follows[133]: *istoria*, used by Alberti in *De pictura* (1435), referred to those works of art that sought to depict 'historical' events (whether Biblical or mythological) with multiple figures, often within a landscape. The artist's job was thus to translate, truthfully and in good taste, an *invenzione*. These were typically in the format of paintings and reliefs.

There stood, between the artist and the myths, an iconographic adviser: someone who consulted mythographies, ancient texts, sculptures and handbooks of mythologies. Such an adviser was in effect translating the virtual landscape of myth, using classical conventions and contemporary commentaries, to a verbal iconographic programme which the artist needed to imitate visually. An example of such an adviser was Annibal Caro (1507–1566) who, amongst others, wrote an *invenzione* for the relief of the *loggia* above the nymphaeum at the Villa Giulia in Rome.[134] For his *invenzione* (some for Vasari), he consulted various sources: from the Hellenistic pastoral poetry of Theocritus, handbooks of mythology such as Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagini delli dei degl'antichi* (1556) and his own, small collection of antique sculptures and texts. Paintings thus derived are visual recreations of an event via an *invenzioni*, into which the viewer can step. Decorum dictated that such istoria belonged to architectural settings where serious contemplation of the subject matter was demanded.[135]

Poesia,[136] on the other hand, as used by Titian (1488–1576) to describe his group of mythological paintings for Phillip II of Spain, referred to those works of art that depicted scenes from myth that did not have a historical character, but rather portrayed individual characters faced with personal situations. The artist of *poesia* was allowed, like the poet, much greater freedom for *phantasia* in creating inventive subject matter, often of a more frivolous, capricious and even sexual nature.[137] Writing in defence of such works in *De' veri precetti della pittura* (1587), art historian and critic Giovanni Battista Armenini (1530–1609) stated that they serve the purpose of delight and to prevent boredom — as long as they were relegated to the less important parts of a palace, such as the *loggias*, and, by extension, the gardens. There, amidst the verdure, the garden designer could create inventive topomyths that were 'not bound by the same rules of realism and literalness that governed *istorie*'.[138] In short, the topomyths did not serve the role of depicting mythical events as stories, but rather as

pastoral, poetic encounters with '*di ninfe … fauni, satori, silvani, centauri, mostri marini con altre cose acquatiche e selvagge*'.[139] Thus, the garden designer did not seek to translate a predetermined *invenzione* with political or religious gravitas, but create one himself, often by using statues (ancient and modern) to create 'new scenes and narratives'.[140] MacDougall also notes another difference between topomythopoiesis and painting and relief: there is in the former a near-complete absence of Christian imagery, which she attributes to *decorum* that dictated myths as appropriate subject matter for garden settings.[141] Topomythopoiesis was thus, during the Renaissance, not aimed at depicting mythical narratives, but rather at creating myth-infused environments in which the garden-dweller could immerse themselves in a numinous other-where place of enchantment; the topomyth became a mythical milieu in itself.

Semantic ambiguity

Furthermore, it seems that the iconography of gardens was not always deemed very important by their creators. For example, the Italian sculptor Baccio Bandinellei (1493–1560) described the project for a fountain in the Boboli gardens in a letter to a ducal secretary without mentioning its iconography.[142] Although silence does not equate absence, it does reveal that the creators of topomyths were not always engaged in complicated 'meaning-making' schemes, but perhaps took for granted that their audience would be able to participate in their creations at will and according to their knowledge of the virtual landscape. Using the contemporary visitor's accounts of the Medici gardens at Pratolino (completed between 1569 and 1581) as an example, Jonietz states that 'Quite often, the single specifications of the art work's metaphorical meanings differed from one viewer to the next … It almost seems as if arrangements of mythological sculptures provoked *letterati* to prove their knowledge and capability to deliver interpretations'.[143] In other words, the *invenzione* is not supplied, but subjectively derived. Thus, the meaning and association of topomyths were, to some extent flexible and semantically ambiguous.[144] For example, at Villa d' Este in Tivoli, the presence of Hercules evoked a multitude of associations to the virtual landscape: the Garden of the Hesperides,[145] his choice between virtue and vice at the Crossroads, and the familial descent of the D'Este family.[146] We have seen above how a Venus could both signify lust to one, and a path to divine love for another.

MacDougall lists a number of examples of the associations of the Parnassus imagery which have shifting (although not wholly different) meanings within a number of gardens.[147] The associations drawn were, to some extent, dependent on the visitor's ekphrasis of a garden, or the owner's intent, sometimes indicated by a text accompanying a sculpture.[148] This, together with the mysterious and elusive chains of meaning of the Neoplatonists, show that even for the Renaissance, the scholar will attempt in vain to provide a schematic taxonomy of myths and their (fixed) meanings. Rather, the meaning is carried by the virtual landscape, existing within the imagination of the garden dweller. Although a shared semiotic system ensured some consistency in the interpretations, there was some room for private participation.

Living marble

From travellers' accounts, it was mostly not the iconography that drew attention at Pratolino, but rather the 'sheer mechanical virtuosity'[149] of the automated statues.[150] Yet, this does not imply that contemporary visitors stood with unenchanted eyes to decipher technological trickery. The strangeness of witnessing moving statues was no mere marvel induced by wonder, but (for some) an experience of seeing a statue ensouled. From the account of Vieri mentioned earlier, with its allegorical exegeses and Aristotelian attempts to explain the 'science' of the automata, we can glean a current of Neoplatonism that sought to magically bring statues to life,[151] following the rediscovery of Hermetic texts.[152] Thus, the Greco-Egyptian tradition of breathing life into inanimate statues was revived.[153] The art of statue ensoulment is related to the pre-Christian 'theurgical practice of telestikè (τελεστική), which concentrated on the consecration and animation of statues so as to obtain oracles from them'.[154] Vieri's account can be interpreted as a synthesis between the empirical, Aristotelian understanding of mechanics with a magical, Platonic understanding of some hidden life-force[155]; a synthesis between mind and soul that invites marvel at the limits of rational understanding.

Story follows stock

Often, the iconographic contents of topomyths was simply based on what sculptures were available to include in them. For example, when Cosimo

Bartoli (1503–1572) described his *invenzione* for a garden for Giovan Battista Ricasoli (1580–*c*. 1620), described in his *Ragionamento primo*, he did so by, in part, recycling, two existing fountains by sculptor Camilliani and dedicated the one to Venus and the other to Neptune. The *concetti* was thus not based on the designer's imaginative attempt to convey a mythical narrative, but on the pre-defined iconography of available sculpture stock.

Moralising allegory

The examples throughout this article that emphasised the Neoplatonic and phenomenological experience of topomyths, does not mean an exegetic approach to topomythopoiesis did not endure from the medieval period. As Gombrich, who stressed the importance of analysing Renaissance art through Neoplatonic eyes, stated:

> … it is well to remember that for all its fascination Neo-Platonism never held un-disputed sway in this field [religious philosophy and art reception] any more than in other fields. Though it may have encouraged an irrational confusion between the functions of the image there always remained scope for the application of 'discursive reason' and the exercise of rational distinction grounded on Aristotelian logic.[156]

In short, some topomyths, and other forms of art, were received and conceived as allegories to be intellectually analysed. A case in point is the nymphaeum at the Villa Barbaro at Maser, designed by Palladio and built between 1554–1558. It is simultaneously a facade and spatial type, both architectonic (outside) and naturalistic (inside). The curved, pediment-covered facade contains niches with statues of mythical figures from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[157]

According to Kolb & Beck's analysis, the figures are displayed as opposites across the main axis (that originates from the villa) as a means to signify cautionary moral tales, elucidated by texts that accompany each statue.[158] For example, reading from left to right, the first statue is that of Pan, paired on the farthest right niche with a female satyr. Underneath Pan are the words:

> Whoever is slow to do good works
> Will be left with his hands full of wind,

And beneath the female satyr:

> Wine from fruits or serpent's venom:
> Tell me: do you know which was the most powerful in this World?

Both epigrams impart ironic 'lessons': a slothy Pan warns against idleness in charity, and a drunkard satyr heeds against the 'poisonous' power of wine.[159] It can be inferred that the owner of the Villa wished to use mythological figures for didactic purposes, evoking the medieval tradition of the *Ovide moralise*.

Of course, any garden dweller of the time could interpret mythological figures in this moralising way, based on the contemporary moralising handbooks on mythology. So, for example, in his analysis of Villa d'Este, refers to the Ferranese mythographer Lelio Gregorio Giraldi's biography of Hercules that define the hero's virtues as 'not irascible', 'not avaricious' and 'not pleasure-living'[160] — moderate attributes befitting a Cardinal. Coffin infers that the cardinal and his guests would, with their knowledge of myths and their contemporary interpretations, make these intellectual associations through exegetic participation. Coffin, in reference to the Hercules statues mentioned before, identifies an overarching moral theme that holds the iconography together in this case, that of Virtue and Vice, juxtaposed with the lust and chaos signified by the statues of Jupiter and Leda.[161] Furthermore, the Christian visitor can moralise the classical iconography in Christian terms, as Coffin speculates how the Hercules behind the fountain of the dragon would have suggested 'the well-known image of Christ trampling the dragon'.[162]

Coffin's meta-moral scheme is extended to interpret the presence of the already mentioned voluptuous Venus with the grotto of chaste Diana as the subjects of Hercules' choice between *volutpas*, on the one side of the axis, and *virtue*, on the other side.[163]

In her analysis, Lazzaro is more wary of interpreting the Hercules statues as part of a pre-planned iconographic programme: 'The unnecessary repetition of Hercules and this unilluminating interpretation seemed

occasioned more by the desire to display the antique statues than by thematic necessity'[164] — another possible example of story following stock. She also notes that the other statues in the gardens, mostly female and from antiquity, only has 'loose formal and iconographic parallels'.[165]

Geographic allegory

Another layer of symbolic intent can be found in the topomyths that relate to a site's location, which will only be mentioned here in brief. Suffice to mention three examples: In the Parisian manuscript (f. 256 v) concerning the Oval Fountain of the Villa d'Este, it is revealed that it was then known as the 'Fountain of Tivoli … so called because it represents the mountains and rivers of the countryside of Tivoli'.[166]

In Vasari's description of the works of the artist Niccolò Tribolo (1500–1550) at the villa of Castello, he refers to an unrealised project for an architectural grotto.[167] In one of its three niches, Tribolo planned to include a bearded figure representing Mount Asinao. From its mouth, water would flow, eventually reaching a river-god statue representing the River Mugnone, all to represent the hydrological reality of the region around Florence.

Then, there is the famous Appennino sculpture by Giambologna: a giant emerging from a rustic freestanding mount in the Villa Medici at Pratolino (figure 4), renamed Villa Demidoff from the late nineteenth century. This topomyth is a rare example where statue and naturalised space become completely inseparable.

The giant-mountain is a personification of the Apennine mountain range, from whence its cold peaks water flows to irrigate the dry valleys of Tuscany; the geomorphology of the region is frozen in rock: 'The contorted tension-filled pose dramatizes the difficulty in bringing water to a harsh environment'.[168] A contemporary ekphrasis of the garden by Raffaelo Gualterotti (1544–1638) in his *Vaghezze* cultivated participation:

In the farthest part [of the garden]
Sylvan Apennine remains lying
And the hardest stones
He seems to push and press to draw forth waves:
He freezes utterly and shivers

FIGURE 4. *Stefano della Bella, colossal statue of the Appennino by Giambologna to left, represented as a giant crouching at the entrance of a Grotto … Villa Medici, Pratolino, Italy, in* Vues de la villa de Pratolino, *c. 1653. The sculpture dates from 1580. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (public domain).*

For his veins, of ice and snow,
Close themselves to foggy and brief days.[169]

The cold-blooded giant, hard-pressing water from rock, is in stark contrast with the rest of the paradisal landscape and thus encountered as a strangeness. The iconography is rooted in earlier literary references to the Apennine in Virgil's *Aeneid* (12.697), and in visual representations: Hunt notes the resemblance of the statue Apennines to illustrations of Ovid,[170] and D'Elia cites another garden sculpture as precedent, namely that made by Ammanati following Vasari's *invenzione* for Duke Cosimo's Villa Medici in Castello.[171] Such geographic and mimetic-phantastic topo-mythopoeia draws from the general iconography of the tradition (e.g. the river god statue type) and *localises* it through association with local deities and geographic features.

The anthropomorphism of topomythopoiesis

A mythopoeic encounter with a living, anthropomorphic god sitting on an artificial mount is also found in Taegio, who stumbles upon Apollo sitting on Parnassus:

> And in the middle of this very pleasant place there is an Apollo of very white marble, which sits on top of a rough and damp rock, from which a fountain goes up, so that it sprays with very clear water everyone who is near it. And this god, the love that he shows on his face points out that for the sweet memory of his beloved Daphne he still enjoys contemplating some young laurel trees that rise around him like a crown. And even as in the past in a chasm on Mount Parnassus a cave was found into which whoever looked received the prophetic spirit, so here he who marvels at the aforementioned Apollo and feels the coolness of the breeze that softly blows here suddenly feels filled with divinity and, waxing poetical, says marvelous things in honor of the spirit of the breeze and of the charm of the Nicola … [172]

This description of a topomythopoeic encounter supports the argument that, at least for Taegio, the mythopoeic contents of gardens were not experienced for the sake of intellectual decoding. Here, as before, the mythopoeic contents is not limited to the iconography of Apollo and Daphne, but immanent in the ensemble-milieu of statue, spatial type, plants, water and literary references — a dense network of somatic and symbolic impressions; meaning is felt not thought.

The spatial type as naturalising milieu

The 'rough and damp rock' fountain (with its water-tricks reminiscent of those at Pratolino) probably resembled the rustic conical mound type, for example, the Pegasus Fountain at Villa d' Este. The type first appeared in the Italian Renaissance garden as a translation of the *Metamorphoses* (5.250–268) as a fresco depiction (*c.* 1525) on the facade of the Casino of Antonio del Bufalo in Rome, and then (in the same garden) as an artificially constructed, rustic fountain.[173] An even earlier Parnassus, of the *Meta Sudans* type topped by the Apollo Musagetes, was built in Rouen, France, in 1518.[174] Although it is not typical to find an Apollo on a rocky fountain, the scene has obvious references to Parnassus, here translated as a miniature simulacrum of the natural site (in

comparison with the monumental and architectonic Parnassus of the Belvedere court).

Apollo is commonly found in architectonic niches for example, in the statue court of the Belvedere (as the archer, *Pythian Apollo*), the Fountain of the Organ, Villa d' Este (there holding a lyre, thus the *Apollo Musagetes* type; figure 5, left) or in a grotto, as in the Villa d' Este on the Quirinal.[175] Rocky fountains more typically served as pedestals for Pegasus, as at the villas D'Este
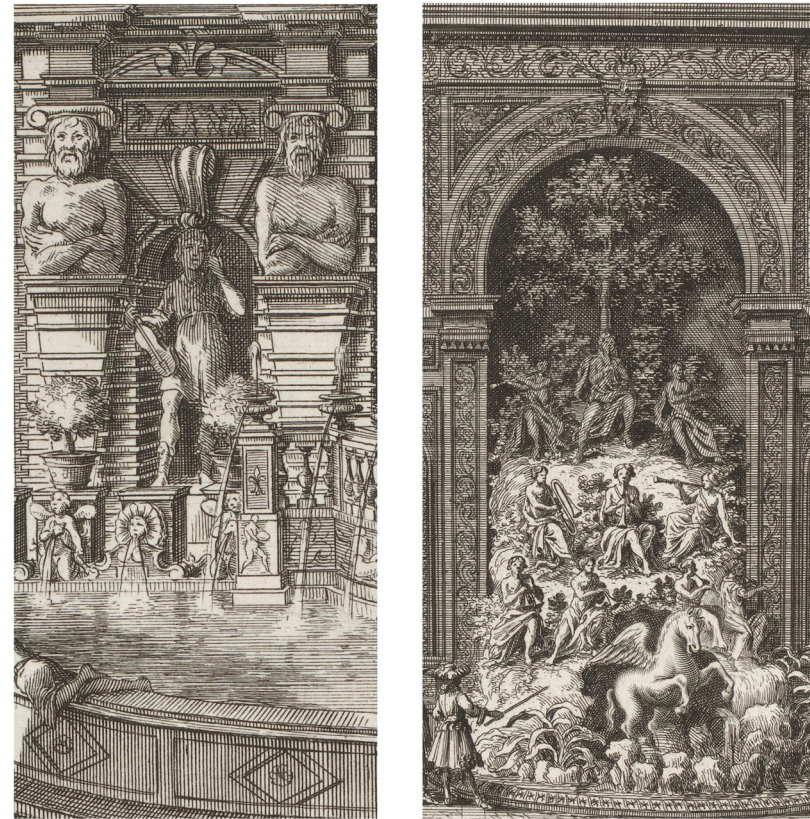

FIGURE 5. *Left: Francesco Venturini, Apollo Musagetes, fountain with water organ, Villa d' Este, c. 1685; cropped. Source: Rijksmuseum (public domain). Right: Giovanni Battista Falda, Apollo Musagetes, fountain in the Hall of Parnassus, Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati, c. 1653–1691; cropped. Source: Rijksmuseum (public domain).*

(Tivoli and Quirinal) and Villa Lante at Bagnaia. Yet, in the early seventeenth century *Sala del Parnasso* at Villa Aldobrandini Apollo is seated on a rustic simulacrum of Parnassus overlooking, with lyre, the Muses and Pegasus, set within an apsidal niche — a combination between the architectonic and rustic abodes of the god (figure 5, right).

The mound type was later monumentalised in gardens such as that of the Medici in Rome and Pratolino, or the elaborate Parnassus designed for Queen Anne at Somerset House (1609–1612; similar to figure 6, right) by the engineer Salomon de Caus which, according to a German visitor in 1613, outdid the one at Pratolino[176]; figure 6, left). According to Johnson, De Caus (and his brother Isaac) may have seen (and delighted in) the Rouen fountain

as small boys[177] — classical topomythopoiesis includes both invention, but also imitation; one topomyth influences another.

The figure of Apollo in Taegio is thus naturalised, unlike the universalising context of the statue of the Apollo Belvedere, for he engages with his immediate setting by gazing at the laurels surrounding the fountain, the trees into which Daphne was transformed (*Met.* 1.452). In Taegio's account the tree is not a symbol but a living avatar of Daphne. Laurels had special significance in Renaissance gardens, especially for their associations with Parnassus and poetry, as indicated by the grove of laurels at Villa d'Este where the cardinal's literary circle could come for inspiration.[178] Cosimo Bartoli, mentioned previously, thought that the mere planting of laurels on a natural mount, without any other signifiers, could evoke Parnassus.[179] Here, in the garden of Signor Novato, Taegio also relates the laurel to the tragic love story in which the chaste nymph Daphne is transformed to forever escape Apollo's lust, manifested in the tension between the statue's lover-gaze and the surrounding trees; a frozen memory of the beloved. The tree and statue are thus animated through participation: Daphne's invisible presence and Apollo's unrequited love is seen via Taegio's imaginative participation, cultivated by the literary tradition of classical mythology disseminated at the time. He was not the only one, and the poet of the Apennine, Gualterotti, reported on the laurels and myrtles of the Villa Medici in Pratolino as growing from the metamorphoses of nymphs and gods[180] — nature animated by numinous presence of the gods. The allegory of plants during the Renaissance must, however, not be overstressed. MacDougall noted that 'there is little evidence that they [plants] were allegorized'[181] yet notes that 'many associations were known from antiquity, such as the metamorphoses of Narcissus, Iris and Hyacinth … Oak with Jupiter or grapevines with Bacchus'.[182]

The encounter is again described as a 'marvel' and evokes the Delphic grotto of Parnassus[183] which steers Taegio's participation to a vision — augmented by the feeling of water on the skin and the breeze — culminating in an epiphany in which Taegio suddenly 'feels filled with divinity'.

FIGURE 6. *Left: Giovanni Guerra, drawing of Mount Parnassus, Pratolino, Italy, 1598; cropped. Source: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike). Right: Salomon du Caus, design for Mount Parnassus, Raisons des forces mouvantes, 1624, Plate 13. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France (public domain).*

Conclusion

The sculpted beings of Greco-Roman mythology and their strange haunts populate the lavish images of Italian Renaissance gardens that gloss pages of

history-survey and coffee-table books. These pictures may imply that mythical iconography formed part of an ocularcentric gardening culture that relished in making and deciphering myths-told-in-stone. Contemporary fictional and analytical accounts of the reception of mythical garden artifice support this impression — Poliphilo describes and interprets the topomyths encountered in his *Hypnerotomachia* like a pedantic emblematist, and Francesco de Vieri wrote an analytical account of the iconography of Pratolino.

Yet, the contemporary accounts of Taegio suggest an alternative, if esoteric, mode of reception. He spends more time describing the agricultural and natural areas of the estates than he does recalling stories or symbolism evoked by the topomyths. In one section, he enters into a series of rhetorical questions that elaborates on the various aspects of the estate landscape from which one can gain pleasure, not to mention once the pleasure of intellectually untangling statues, inscriptions and reliefs. Rather, he lists the sights of water, meadows, woods, flowers, animals, branches waving in the air, farm-work and the smell of fragrant air … all as the stuff of beauty in the landscape.[184] Thus, most of the time he took a kind of pleasure that he identified as 'only of the body and is called sensual'.[185] However, his garden experiences did not stop there: as he characterised three kinds of nature, he characterised three kinds of pleasure. (As landscape architects still speak of the three natures, we should perhaps start reviving the three pleasures). The second type of pleasure is purely intellectual: 'only of the spirit, which is that one of them that

contemplating the marvelous effects of nature passes through the better hours'.[186] Yet, such acts of the disembodied mind is not where his reception of topomyths is found. Rather, it lies in the third pleasure which 'participates in the sensual and the intellectual, as is that of poetry, of rhetoric, of music, for reason of which it gladdens the spirit and the ear'.[187] The topomyths momentarily infuse the phenomenology of place with visions of a world beyond, heightening — not distracting away from — the garden of things. Classical topomythopoiesis, during the Italian Renaissance, was received in gardens through symbolic-somatic participation: an approach to place-making that delighted, evoked marvel and enraptured; enchantments that were to be codified in the pages of the guidebooks and treatises of the seventeenth century.

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NOTES

1. For antiquity, see Johan N. Prinsloo, 'Classical topomythopoiesis: the origins of some spatial types', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 41/3, 2012, pp. 203–224. For the Middle Ages, see Johan N. Prinsloo, 'Classical topomythopoiesis: Survival of the pagan gods during the Christian Middle Ages', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 43/1, 2023, pp. 1–22.
2. As a note of caution, I have not delimited my discussion to the northern Italian gardens that Taegio frequented. The connections drawn

between his accounts and the gardening culture of central Italy is thus open to scrutiny, especially since the gardens of the north were more rural in character. Yet, as will be shown later in the article, aspects such as his Neoplatonism are detected in writings on garden conception and reception revolved around Renaissance Rome.
3. James S. Ackerman, 'The Belvedere as a classical villa', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14/1–2, 1951, p. 110.
4. For example, Taegio borrowed liberally from Virgil's *Georgics*, see Thomas, E. Beck, 'Gardens

as a "third nature": the ancient roots of a Renaissance idea', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 22/4, 2012, p. 327.
5. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 175.
6. Ibid., p. 157.
7. Ibid., p. 179.
8. Ibid., p. 155.
9. The syncretism of the classical Golden Age landscape and the Christian Eden is already found in the fourteenth century. For example, in Dante's *Purgatory* (28.139–41), according to Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'Gardens in Italian literature during the

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', translated by Lucinda Byatt, in John Dixon Hunt (ed.), *The Italian Garden: Art, Design and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 33.

10. The American-European studies of the early part of the century focused on aesthetics, for example Edith Warton's *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (1904) and Georgina Masson's *Italian Gardens* (1966). Then followed the iconographic studies, influenced by Erwin Panofsky and Rudolf Wittkower. For example, David R. Coffin's *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (1991) and *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* (1979); and Elizabeth Blair MacDougall's *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers: Studies in Italian Gardens of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1994).

11. Edward D.R. Wright, 'Some Medici gardens of the Florentine Renaissance: an essay in post-aesthetic interpretation', in Hunt, *The Italian Garden*, p. 58.

12. In their summary of the Renaissance garden, Geoffrey & Susan Jellicoe wrote 'The proportions gave him [mankind] peace: the form was therefore crucial', in *The Landscape of Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 155. The emphasis on composition is not misdirected, but tends to oversee the role of agricultural practice and the pursuit of health.

13. 'Post-aesthetic' is taken from the title of Wright's chapter referred to above, 'Some Medici gardens'.

14. Wright, 'Some Medici gardens', p. 34.

15. Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto notes that this know-how was propagated through treatises such as Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum* (1306, translated to Tuscan in 1350) in which 'labour was emphasized more than the setting itself', in *Medici Gardens: From Making to Design* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 88.

16. Giannetto provides some balance between Wright's emphasis on know-how and earlier author's emphasis on the geometric design of layouts: although the pragmatics of gardening dominated the fifteenth century, it alone cannot account for the mature Renaissance gardens of the sixteenth, see *Medici Gardens*, p. 97.

17. Such places offered respite from the foul air (*miasma*) of cities, such as Florence, that resulted from insanitary practices, like using open ditches to carry raw sewerage. Criteria for such places were described in agricultural treatises: higher lying areas at the foot of wooded mountains, away from the cities and sea. See Wright, 'Some Medici gardens', p. 35.

18. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 159.

19. Ibid., p. 159, 169, 175, 181, 183.

20. Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus. Volume 1*, translated by Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

21. Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 323.

22. Berthold L. Ullman, 'Renaissance: the word and the underlying concept', *Studies in Philology*, 49/2, 1952, p. 108.

23. In Ullman, 'Renaissance', p. 109.

24. Louis Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects of the Renaissance villa and garden: Mount Parnassus, Pegasus and the Muses', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 23/1, 2003, p. 53.

25. The distinction between Helicon an Parnassus was blurred ever since antiquity; see Bull, *Mirror of the Gods*, p. 310.

26. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 153.

27. Ricci, 'Gardens in Italian literature', p. 33.

28. For example, in the opening prologue of the Franklin's Tale, the Franklin admits his ignorance by stating that 'I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso', in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 1400, available on Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website, https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/franklins-prologue-and-tale.

29. Jean Seznec, *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), p.178.

30. For example, see Albrecht Classen, 'Terra Incognita? Mountains in medieval and early modern German literature', in Sean Ireton & Caroline Schaumann (eds), *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), pp. 35–56.

31. Basil the Great described his mountain retreat near Pontus in a letter to his brother, Gregory, *Letter 14*, translated by John Henry Newman, *Church of the Fathers* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1840), p. 126.

32. A phrase from Francesco Petrarch's letter to Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro, in 'Familiar letters', translated by James H. Robinson, *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1898), p. 316.

33. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated by Samuel G.C. Middlemore (New York: Dover Publications, 2010), p. 180. Some scholars doubt whether Petrarch actually did climb the mountain. For example, Donald Beecher argues that the content of the letter is an allegory of a spiritual conversion, in 'Petrarch's "conversion" on Mont Ventoux and the patterns of religious experience', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 28/3, 2004, pp. 55–75.

34. Francesco Petrarch, *The Life of Solitude*, translated by Jacob Zeitlin (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1924), pp. 156–157.

35. Julia C. Bondanella, 'Petrarch's rereading of "otium" in "De vita solitaria"', *Comparative Literature*, 60/1, 2008, p. 27.

36. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 215.

37. Bondanella, 'Petrarch's rereading', p. 27.

38. James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 64.

39. Bondanella, 'Petrarch's rereading', p. 14.

40. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 151.

41. Ibid., p. 165.

42. This Apollo *vs.* Bacchus opposition follows that developed during the Middle Ages: reason and temperance *vs.* licence and passion.

43. Undated letter, in Ackermann, *The Villa*, p. 73.

44. Horst Bredekamp was not impressed by the twentieth century scholars in the Warburgian tradition who attempted to analyse Renaissance works of art in Neoplatonic terms. He declared that these studies were retrospective readings of Neoplatonism into works of art, like the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* and the sculptures at Bomarzo. Rather, he argues, philosophies like Epicureanism was more influential. See 'Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus', *kritische berichte*, 14/4, 1986, pp. 39–48. However, the Neoplatonic language of Taegio indicates that, at least to some extent, garden experience during the Renaissance was influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy.

45. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 167.

46. Ibid., p. 195.

47. For example, during the Middle Ages the statues of Castor and Pollux, located on the Quirinal in Rome, were thought to be of the 'sages' Phidias and Praxiteles, until Petrarch noted these inscribed names may actually refer to the sculptors!

48. See Elizabeth B. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention: language and decoration in Roman Renaissance gardens', *The Journal of Garden History*, 5/2, 1985, p. 120; Elizabeth B. MacDougall, *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers: Studies in Italian Gardens of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), p. 23; and Bull, *Mirror of the Gods*, p. 9.

49. Bull, *Mirror of the Gods*, p. 7.

50. In Ghiberti's *Second Commentary*, he laments the destruction of ancient art due to Christian iconoclasm, in Elizabeth G. Holt, *A Documentary History of Art, Volume 1: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 153.

51. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 213.

52. Ludovico Borgo & Ann H. Sievers, 'The Medici gardens at San Marco', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 33/2/3, 1989, p. 242.

53. Borgo & Sievers, 'The Medici Gardens', p. 237.

54. Vasari provides a mytho-historic 'origin story' of a young Michelangelo in Lorenzo's sculpture garden: upon touching a chisel and marble for the first time, he sculpted a faun's head from an antique model. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, translated by Julia C. Bondanella & Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 419. Leonardo is related to the garden by the anonymous biographer Anonimo Magliabechiano, writing a few years before Vasari, see Caroline Elam, 'Lorenzo de' Medici's sculpture garden', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 36/1/2, 1992, p. 42.

55. Although some twentieth century scholars have cast doubts on Vasari's emphasis on the role of the garden, Elam, in 'Lorenzo de' Medici's sculpture garden', has demonstrated its role (together with its patron Lorenzo) in fostering the arts during the early Renaissance (including the training of Michelangelo) and serving as a model for later sculpture gardens created to showcase antiquities and accommodate philosophical musings.

56. Bull, *Mirror of the Gods*, p. 9.

57. Ibid.

58. Claudia Lazzaro, 'River gods: personifying nature in sixteenth-century Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 25/1, 2011, p. 73.

59. For a full discussion of the statue court, see Hans H. Brummer, *The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970). John Dixon Hunt (1996:24) cites two examples that emulated it, namely Cardinal Cesi's garden near the southern entrance of the Vatican, and the Villa Capri, in *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination 1666–1750* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 24.

60. Vasari, *Lives*, p. 315.

61. The identification of the torso on the painting is based on a drawing that was made by the Phillips Galle workshop (after Van Cleef III) where the figure beneath the river gods is clearly a torso (The British Museum, 1950,0306.2.15). However, on the painting it looks more like a reclining figure (possibly Venus), but I cannot verify whether such a statue was ever housed in the Belvedere Court.

62. Ackerman, 'The Belvedere', p. 85.

63. Paul F. Watson suggests that the fountains of the Belvedere were intended as counterparts of the real-and-imagined Castalian spring, in his 'On a window in Parnassus', *Artibus et Historiae*, 8/16, 1987, p. 142.

64. Poetry was so highly regarded in the Renaissance that Ficino declared it one of the seven liberal arts, replacing geometry.

65. Another example is found to the west of the Belvedere Court, namely the Casino of Pope Pius IV, designed by Pirro Ligorio and begun in 1558. For is Parnassian iconography and possible use as an *Academia*, see Louis Cellauro, 'The Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 63, 1995, pp. 183–214. Also, the Pegasus in the Oval Fountain at Villa d'Este at Tivoli has been interpreted to signify that the hill of the villa is a Parnassus, by Ronald Inden, 'Classics in the garden: suppers in an earthly paradise', in Rudolf G. Wagner & Sarah C. Humpreys (eds), *Modernity's Classics* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), p. 65.

66. Watson, 'Window in Parnassus', p. 142.

67. Carl L. Franck. *The Villas of Frascati 1550–1750* (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1966), p. 65.

68. The self-representation of Julius II as Julius Caesar is accepted by Ackerman, 'The Belvedere', but disputed by Christine Shaw, 'The motivation for the patronage of Pope Julius II', in Martin Gosman, Alasdair A. MacDonald & Arjo J. Vanderjagt (eds), *Princes and Princely Culture 1450–1650, Volume 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 43–61.

69. Ackerman, 'The Belvedere', p. 88.

70. A term used by Bull to denote the provision of figure-specific settings for statues; to make the gods at home, in *The Mirror of the Gods*, p. 75.

71. Lazzaro, 'River gods'.

72. The Venus Felix was sculpted in the second century AD and, unlike the earlier Aphrodite of Cnidus, is partially dressed.

73. Martin Luther, *The Table-talk of Martin Luther*, edited and translated by William Hazlitt (London: Bell & Daldy, 1872), p. 85.

74. Marco Piana, *Fallax Antiquitas: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's Critique of Antiquity* (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2017), p. 235.

75. Translated by Piana, *Fallax Antiquitas*, p. 267.

76. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 85. This anti-city trope is echoed in other late Renaissance authors such as Falcone, Lollio and Gallo, see Ackerman, *The Villa*, p. 113.

77. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 197

78. For a brief summary of the varying viewpoints, see the introduction in Kocku von Stuckrad, 'Visual gods: from exorcism to complexity in Renaissance studies', *Aries*, 6/1, 2006, pp. 59–85.

79. Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (Boston, MA: Weiser, 2002), p. 1.

80. Ficino, in his *De vita coelitus comparanda* (book 3 of *De Vita Libri Tres*) revived Plotinus's idea (*Ennead* 4.3.11) that divine images and statues 'must be understood according to an emanative continuum that converges in the world soul that is present in all things', Piana, *Fallax Antiquitas*, p. 232.

81. More specifically, this ontological hierarchy consisted of four levels, starting at the top: The One (akin to Aristotle's Prime Mover), Mind, Soul and the world of the senses, including Nature and Matter.

82. Ironically, Plato himself insisted on the unbridgeable chasm between our sensible world and the higher reaches of Truth — not so his followers from late antiquity onwards; see Peter T. Struck, 'Allegory and ascent in Neoplatonism', in Rita Copeland & Peter T. Struck (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 57.

83. For a full exploration of Homer and Neoplatonism, see Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

84. See Prinsloo, 'Classical topomythopoiesis: Survival', p. 15.

85. Participation is used throughout to refer to the garden dweller's share in constructing the phenomenal garden by evoking the virtual landscape of Arcadia, at the individual, group or collective level.

86. Sarah I. Johnston, 'Animating statues: a case study in ritual', *Arethusa*, 41, 2008, p. 455.

87. Thomas E. Beck, in Taegio, *La Villa*, pp. 39–40.

88. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 89.

89. Ibid., p. 163.

90. In Wright's analysis of the Villa d'Medici at Castello, he identifies a syntactical dualism between enclosed spaces for 'mental recreation' and open spaces for 'physical exercise', in 'Some Medici gardens', p. 40. We find this opposition in Taegio's accounts too, where the topomyths can be interpreted as those enclosed encounters for mental experience.

91. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 249.

92. Luke Morgan, '"Bizzarrie del boschetto del Signor Vicino": the figurative language of the Sacro Bosco', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 41/2, 2021, p. 92.

93. Ibid., p. 26.

94. Ibid., p. 82.

95. Raffaella F. Giannetto, '"Not before either known or dreamt of": The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the craft of wonder', *Word & Image*, 31/2, 2015, pp. 112–118.

96. Giannetto, 'Not dreamt of', p. 117.

97. Ibid., p. 114.

98. Taegio evokes Virgil's call to understand the natural world, by paraphrasing from *Georgics* (3.475–482), in his *La Villa*, p. 249 & 251.

99. Perhaps similar to a statue group of Venus and Eros (and Anteros) that was found within the naturalistic grotto-fountain at the Villa d' Este on the Quirinal in Rome, captured in an engraving in Cavalieri's *Antiquae statuae*, in MacDougall, *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers*, p. 31.

100. Claudia Lazzaro-Bruno, 'The Villa Lante at Bagnaia: an allegory of art and nature', *The Art Bulletin*, 59/4, 1977, pp. 553.

101. Ibid., p. 555.

102. Ibid., p. 559.

103. Miriam Bay, *Cultivating Myth and Composing Landscape at the Villa d'Este, Tivoli* (PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2019).

104. This recessed garden is thus third nature (*terza natura*) as meant by Taegio and Bonfadio, namely the grafting between nature and art. For a full discussion of the history of the term, see Beck, 'Third nature'. The term gained popularity in landscape architecture theory following John Dixon Hunt's formulation of the three natures, in *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 33.

105. During the Renaissance, reflected images in water and mirrors became emblematic of painting itself: nature represented accurately on a flat plane. For example, Alberti wrote in 1436, echoing Ovid (*Met* 3.402): 'For this reason, I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting … What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?', in Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 64. For a full discussion of the role of the mirror image in Renaissance art, see Genevieve Warwick, 'Looking in the mirror of Renaissance art', *Art History*, 39/2, 2016, pp. 255–281.

106. Although he does not explicitly identify the reflection as that of Venus, her identity can be inferred from the line: 'And if it were not that

I would not want to mingle fables with the truth, I would say that there and not in Cypress [sic.] would be the reign of Venus and of her son Cupid', Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 163.

107. Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, translated by Carol V. Kaske & John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998), p. 211.

108. Ann Sheppard, 'The mirror of imagination: the influence of "Timaeus"', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 78, 2003, p. 212.

109. Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 76–77.

110. All quotations from the *Roman de la Rose* are taken from Guillaume de Lorris & Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*. Translated by Charles Dahlberg (New Jersey, NY: Princeton University Press, 1995). For my interpretation of the topomythopoiesis of the *Roman*, see Prinsloo, 'Classical topomythopoiesis: Survival', pp. 9–12.

111. Gardens attributed to him include some of the most famous and influential of the Renaissance, namely the Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican, the Sacro Bosco in Bomarzo and the Villa d'Este in Tivoli.

112. Translation by Graham Smith, *The Casino of Pius IV* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 56.

113. MacDougall cites the same passage and lists Hercules, the Muses and Apollo as being some of the most frequent divine inhabitants of Renaissance gardens, in her *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers*, p. 121.

114. The Vase of Truth is at the centre of the casino's façade. Smith derives its iconography from Ligorio's identification of water as the source of truth, following Democritus, see *The Casino*, p. 58–59.

115. For example, elsewhere in the Turin manuscript, Ligorio provides detailed descriptions of mythical figures.

116. Smith, *The Casino*, p. 61.

117. Carmelo Occhipinti, *Giardino dell'Esperidi: le tradizioni del mito e la storia della Villa d'Este a Tivoli* (Rome: Carocci, 2009).

118. Discussed by Bay, citing both from Ligorio's Naples and Turin manuscripts: *Naples ms.* 8.B.3 f. 316 and ff. 322–23 and *Turin ms.* a.3.6, vol. 4, f. 35 v — see *Cultivating Myth*, p. 255.

119. Discussed by Bay, *Cultivating Myth*, p. 259, citing *Turin ms.* a.2.16.J.29, f. 4 v.

120. Bay, *Cultivating Myth*, p. 257.

121. Ligorio, MS f. 251 v Zc., quoted in Ibid., p. 253.

122. Bull provides examples from antiquity and even the Middle Ages that illustrate the erotic power that statues of Venus instilled in onlookers, in *Mirror of the Gods*, p. 199.

123. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', pp. 131–132.

124. All quotations from Ibid.

125. Inden, 'Classics in the garden', p. 67.

126. First conducted in her doctoral dissertation at Princeton University, submitted in 1974 and condensed in her article 'The Villa Lante'. Note the use of the word 'allegory' which, I argue, is not necessarily a term one can apply to all gardens of the time, since, at least for the Neoplatonists, gardens (and other works of art) was not deciphered as allegories.

127. See Bay, *Cultivating Myth*, pp. 24–34, for a summary of the scholarship on Villa d' Este and alternative interpretations to Lazzaro, including a Neoplatonic one by Gérard Desnoyers, *La Villa d'Este à Tivoli ou Le songe d'Hippolyte. Un rêve d'immortalité héliaque* (Paris: Myrobolan Éditions, 2002).

128. Coffin, *The Villa d'Este*.

129. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 131.

130. MacDougall, *Fountains, Statues, and Flowers*, p. 71.

131. Ibid.

132. Giannetto, *Medici Gardens*, p. 88.

133. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 131, introduced me to the relation of these terms to garden iconography. My discussion is based on the entries for *istoria* and *poesia* on *Grove Art Online* (2003) by Patricia Emison, available respectively at https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T042646 and https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T068247

134. Based on the entry 'Caro, Annibal', in *Grove Art Online* (2003) by Clare Robertson, available at https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T014193.

135. David R. Coffin speculates that examples of such an adviser for a garden is Marc-Antoine Muret or Francesco Bandini Piccolomini (Archbishop of Siena) for Villa de' Este, working with Pirro Ligorio. See his *The Villa d'Este at Tivoli* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 94–95.

136. Alberti made no distinction between *istoria* and *poesia*.

137. Vasari used *capriccio* to describe the fanciful, *flying* Peter and Paul in Raphael's *Repulse of Attilla* (*c*. 1514, Rome). Thus, meaning that Raphael created not an *istoria*, but a *poesia* as his imagination veered from the historical accuracy of the scene, explaining: 'Raphael nevertheless may have wanted to depict it in this manner as an invention [*capriccio*] of his, for paintings, like poems, stray from their subjects in order to embellish the work without departing in an inappropriate way from the original idea', in Vasari, *Lives*, p. 323.

138. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 131.

139. Although this list of Armenini, quoted in MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 131 (note), is not definitive, it does illustrate that there was some kind of agreement as to what mythical figures belong in gardens — many myths found in paintings, are never seen in gardens. The latter contain those pastoral and wild myths involving nymphs, fauns, satyrs, centaurs and sea creatures. Of course, as has been shown throughout, figures such as Apollo, Hercules and Venus were also frequently placed in gardens.

140. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 120.

141. Ibid., p. 122.

142. Fabian Jonietz, 'The semantics of recycling: Cosimo Bartoli's "invenzioni" for the garden of Giovan Battista Ricasoli', in Francesco Paolo Fiore & Daniela Lamberini (eds), *Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1572)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009), p. 329.

143. Jonietz, 'Semantics of recycling', p. 330.

144. Ibid., p. 329.

145. To where, for his eleventh labour, he journeyed to steal Zeus' golden apples.

146. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 128.

147. Ibid.

148. Jonietz notes that such in situ descriptions could include anything from the meaning of a sculpture, or even from where it was translocated in the case of 'recycled' statues, in 'Semantics of recycling', p. 301.

149. John Dixon Hunt, 'Ovid in the garden', *AA Files*, 3, 1983, p. 9.

150. Automated statues included those that spouted water on people as tricks (*giocchi d'aqua*), and others that played music (for example a Pan playing his pipe, and Muses on a Parnassus playing an organ).

151. Luke Morgan also uses this account of Vieri to further his argument about the experience of marvel in the Renaissance garden, in 'Bizzarrie del boschetto', p. 91–92.

152. Notably, the legendary Hermes Trismegistus' *Asclepius*, written *c*. AD 100–300 in Alexandria.

153. Lily Filson, 'Magical and mechanical evidence: the late-Renaissance automata of Francesco I de' Medici', in James A.T. Lancaster & Richard Raiswell (eds), *Evidence in the Age of the New Sciences* (Cham: Springer, 2018), p. 177.

154. Piana, *Fallax Antiquitas*, p. 230.

155. Filson, 'Magical and mechanical evidence', pp. 177–206. In her doctoral thesis, Filson discusses Vieri's philosophical works as a reconciliation between the then dominant Aristotelian focus of the Italian universities, Platonic thought and Christian doctrine. Vieri, who taught philosophy at the University of Pisa, introduced lectures on Plato in 1576, although

these were soon cancelled; see Lily Filson, *Engineering gods: Renaissance theurgy and the sixteenth century automata of Francesco I de' Medici* (PhD dissertation, Università Ca'Foscari Venezia, 2018), pp. 65–76.

156. Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae: the visual image in Neo-Platonic thought', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11, 1948, p. 183.

157. According to Margherita A. Visentini, the nymphaeum recalls the Belvedere exedra, in her 'The gardens of villas in the Veneto from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries', in Hunt, *The Italian Garden*, p. 108.

158. Carolyn Kolb & Melissa Beck, 'The sculptures on the nymphaeum hemicycle of the Villa Barbaro at Maser', *Artibus et Historiae*, 18/35, 1997, pp. 15–40.

159. Kolb & Beck, 'The sculptures', p. 25.

160. Coffin, *The Villa d'Este*, p. 79.

161. Ibid., p. 82.

162. Ibid., p. 89.

163. Ibid., p. 82–83.

164. Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden: From the Conventions of Planting, Design, and Ornament to the Grand Gardens of Sixteenth-Century Central Italy* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 225.

165. Ibid.

166. In Coffin, *The Villa d'Este*, p. 85.

167. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects Volume 7*, translated by Gaston du C. de Vere (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1912), p. 20.

168. Una R. D'Elia in 'Giambologna's giant and the cinquecento villa garden as a landscape of suffering', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 31/1, 2011, pp. 2.

169. Translated by D'Elia, in Ibid.

170. Hunt, 'Ovid in the garden', p. 9.

171. D'Elia, 'Giambologna's giant', p. 5.

172. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 203.

173. Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects', p.43.

174. Paige Johnson, 'Producing pleasantness: the waterworks of Isaac de Caus, outlandish engineer', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 29/3, 2009, p. 177. There are also two *mete sudanti* fountains at the fish pools at Villa De' Este, Tivoli.

175. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 122.

176. Claire Eager, 'A fountain for the countess: co-creating paradise in Donne's "Twicknam Garden"', *Studies in Philology*, 117/3, 2020, p. 566.

177. Johnson, 'Producing pleasantness', p. 177.

178. Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects', p. 45.

179. Ibid., p. 43.

180. D'Elia, 'Giambologna's giant', p. 1.

181. MacDougall, 'Imitation and invention', p. 119.

182. Ibid., p. 132, note 10.

183. Delphi was sacred to Gaia, whose Python-son protected its oracle. Apollo slew the Python and went to clean the blood off himself in the valley of Tempe. From there he came back victorious with a wreath of laurel (growing in the valley) on his head. The laurel-wreath thus became symbolic of victory and purification, and was used to sweep holy places and purify houses after death. See Annette For more detail on the mythological associations of the laurel, see Annette Giesecke, *The Mythology of Plants* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2014), p. 35.

184. Taegio, *La Villa*, p. 207–209.

185. Ibid., p. 250.

186. Ibid.

187. Ibid.