The Aesthetics of Violence: Myth and Danger in Roman Domestic Landscapes

This paper explores the use of art to recreate violent mythological landscapes in Roman domestic ensembles. Focusing on the Niobids found in two imperial horti it argues that the combination of sculpture and landscape exerted a powerful imaginative effect over ancient viewers, drawing them into the recreated mythological world. Mythological landscape paintings also offered a view out onto a mythological realm, fostering the illusion of direct access to the spaces of myth. However, these fantasy landscapes need to be seen in the light of the associations which natural landscapes held in the Roman imagination. Recreations of mythological landscapes in domestic art express the desire to incorporate the natural world into the domestic sphere but through the presence of violent events they also highlight the inherent powers of those landscapes and the gods who frequent them. They speak to a yearning to immerse oneself in myth and the natural realm, yet also warn of the perils of such a desire.

Messalina . . . was performing in her home a mimic grape harvest. Wine-presses were working, vats overflowing, surrounded by women capering in skins like sacrificing or frenzied Maenads. She herself, hair streaming, brandished a Bacchic wand. Beside her stood Silius in ivy-wreath and buskins, rolling his head. . .

Tac. Ann. 11.31

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The Roman villa was a place of the imagination. Anecdotes in Roman literature describe lavish entertainments hosted at elite villas, where guests adopted mythological roles, were served and attended by exotic slaves, or watched a whole spectrum of performances. Villa architecture provided places to relax and entertain, such as dining rooms, promenades, and gardens, while the decoration enhanced the luxury of such spaces and defined their atmosphere, whether it be one of Dionysiac revelry or academic debate. This paper looks at a specific aspect of the domestic environment which has so far received relatively little attention: the ways in which artworks and landscape worked in combination to create an imaginative mythological realm which reflected and engaged with tensions inherent in Roman attitudes to the natural world.

Individual statues of gods and their retinue could help to set the tone of a villa or house, but my focus here is more specific: the staging of violent mythological narratives in landscape settings, either through the display of mythological sculptural groups in real landscapes or in mythological landscape paintings displayed on the walls of houses or villas. Landscape was used in these representations in two main ways. It enhanced the naturalism of the scene, showing the events as if taking place within a “real” landscape and helping to draw the viewer into the situation shown. Yet the role of landscape could also go further. In some representations it acted as a potent force expressing the powers of nature and the gods, challenging human control of the natural world and implicating the viewer in the dangerous world of myth.

My examples cluster in the period from ca. 30 BC to the early second century AD. Starting from the use of a natural cave as the stage for the Sperlonga sculptures, probably under Octavian/Augustus, I discuss in depth two other case studies where I argue that sculptural groups were displayed within a landscape setting: the dying Niobids found in the Horti Sallustiani and the Horti Lamiani. These two groups provide convincing evidence for the recreation of mythological events in landscaped Horti, but their contribution to the viewer’s experience of these spaces has not yet received full consideration.1 The final section of the paper considers the mythological landscape paintings which emerged in the late first century BC. Like the larger-scale mythological landscapes created through sculptural tableaux in villas, these paintings provided more modest houses with a glimpse out onto wild and dangerous landscapes. Both should be seen against the backdrop of Roman beliefs about the sanctity of nature and contemporary moralizing about human incursions into the natural realm. They represent the desire to incorporate the natural world into the domestic sphere—either within the real landscapes of a villa, or on a more modest scale, as the imagined views seen as if through

1. Other accounts largely focus on their artistic merits and the issue of provenance: Geominy 1984; Moltersen 1998; Talamo 1998: 145–48; Hartswick 2004: 93–104; though Diacciati 2005 provides an important reading arguing for the display of such groups in connection with garden nymphaea. See also Spencer 2010: 162-67 raising some of the issues explored further here.
a window—but through the presence of violent events they also highlight the inherent powers of those landscapes and the gods who frequent them. They speak to a yearning to immerse oneself in myth and the natural realm, yet also warn of the perils of such a desire.

Implicit in the experience of these ensembles is a certain ambiguity over the role of the viewer, as both voyeur and potential victim. The taste for myths of death and violence suggests analogies to the broader love of violent spectacle satisfied in the public realm through gladiatorial contests or the grisly combination of myth and punishment in the form of “fatal charades” where condemned criminals acted out mythological roles. Myths were also staged as theatrical spectacles both in the public theater and as part of the entertainment at elite dinners. Sculptural representations can thus be seen as the reification of the ephemeral spectacles which took place within the home. Yet while the comparisons to public and private spectacles would have helped to set up viewers as detached voyeuristic spectators of these violent myths, the display of these images within the very landscape of the home also implicated the viewer, drawing them into the mythological situation. In villa landscapes populated with sculpted mythological figures there is a real sense of this ambiguity at play, inviting guests to enjoy the scenes staged for their entertainment, but also implicating them in the dangers through their very presence in the same mythological space. The sculptural groups play with the deceptions of art and reality through the placement of marble figures in a living landscape, enticing the viewer to take them for real and see themselves as moving within the mythological realm, while also warning of the inherent dangers. The paintings stage this encounter at a further remove; the landscapes appear beyond the boundaries of the room, like vistas onto which the guests look out. They simultaneously frustrate the viewer longing to escape into these landscapes, and protect him from the dangers of doing so.

The objects discussed here are so-called “ideal” classicizing sculptures and wall-paintings. As with much Roman art, past study of these works was long dominated by the search for origins—the Classical or Hellenistic Greek masterpieces which they are thought to copy or rework. Only relatively recently has Roman art been studied in its own cultural contexts, as offering rich insights into the imagination, values, and beliefs of those who commissioned and viewed it. My

5. For related arguments about the ways paintings in the House of Octavius Quartio at Pompeii serve as warnings of the perils of viewing and encountering the divine, see Platt 2002.
exploration here is designed to contribute to this area of scholarship; in particular I want to draw attention to the possibilities of landscaped displays of sculptures, which have been generally overlooked, and to the interplay between sculptural and painted ensembles. Examination of recreated mythological landscapes suggests that art played a crucial role in creating the theatricality and escapism of villa life, posing questions about the powers of the natural world and meditating upon the boundaries between reality and representation.

ESCAPISM, LUXURY, AND LANDSCAPE IN THE ROMAN VILLA

Before turning to my case studies, I want to set the scene with a brief discussion of myth, art, and landscape in the Roman villa. Villas were stages for various elite pursuits, from business, hunting, and philosophical discussion to theatrical dinner-parties. Yet there are two aspects of villa culture which are particularly relevant to this discussion of mythological landscapes: the villa’s place as a stage for escapist fantasies and its recreation of a range of different sorts of landscape. The recreation of mythological landscapes brought these two aspects together, enabling the viewer to enjoy the fantasy of immersion in an imaginary realm.

A common feature of Roman villa culture was the recreation of mythological masques in which guests could move freely between the roles of viewers and actors. In my opening passage Tacitus describes the downfall of the empress Messalina; just before she is arrested for her liaison with Gaius Silius, she is shown celebrating a Bacchic harvest in her home, accompanied by Silius in the garb of Bacchus himself as well as attendant maenads. Messalina’s Dionysiac simulacrum follows a long tradition of such re-enactments, first established in the Late Republic under the influence of Hellenistic court ceremonial. Octavius is credited with an infamous banquet of the Twelve Gods, where guests played the various gods and Octavius came as Apollo. At another dinner the senator Munatius Plancus dressed up as Glaucus the sea-deity with his body painted blue, wearing a fish’s tail and with his head encircled with reeds.

In some cases, slaves and performers played mythological roles, for guests to enjoy as spectators. The late-republican orator Hortensius is said to have hosted a dinner-party in a game reserve, where a performer dressed up as Orpheus blew a horn and summoned together a crowd of stags, boars, and other animals, merging mythological re-enactment with the spectacles of the arena. In Tiberius’s erotic adventures at Capri, described with such relish by Suetonius, boys and girls dressed up as Pans and nymphs, standing in front of grottoes and acting as
Dionysiac attendants. Male slaves are often described in literary texts as serving as beautiful attendants at elite dinners, valued for their aesthetic attractions and often compared to the beautiful youths of myth, such as Hylas, Ganymede, or Paris. While the literary sources can be hostile, criticizing such charades as signs of luxurious excess, there are enough anecdotes to suggest that mythological re-enactments were widespread. The theatrical events staged during the fictional dinner party of the freedman Trimalchio also suggest that a taste for lavish entertainment and play-acting went beyond the emperor to all those who could afford it.

These theatrical masques, featuring both diners and attendants, were supported and enabled by the architecture and decoration of the home. In particular, statuary displays helped to set the stage for them, defining the atmosphere of a space and supplying permanent reminders of more ephemeral spectacles. Statues of mythological youths permanently surrounded a host and his guests with eroticized bodies similar to those appreciated in beautiful slave boys. Theatrical entertainment and role-play worked together with the sculptural display to foster an imaginative blurring between reality and the represented realm, heightening the luxury of the villa experience.

As well as staging theatrical masques for its guests, inviting them into a mythological realm, another feature of the villa was its absorption and recreation of a variety of different kinds of landscape. Varro’s accounts of elite villas show that they could include wild game preserves, orchards, fishponds, and aviaries as well as pinacothecae and porticoes, all serving as potential places to receive guests. Villa owners seem to have relished their abilities to manipulate the natural world, the republican magnate Lucullus going so far as to cut a channel through a mountain to allow access to the sea for his villa and its fishponds. While our evidence for such attempts to manipulate nature often come in the form of moralizing attacks, later writers such as Statius and Pliny the Younger actively celebrate the power of man to change natural landscapes and proudly cite the different sorts of views which could be enjoyed. Along with archaeological evidence showing that villa estates included a range of porticoes, pavilions, and bath-houses spread across a landscaped terrain, these texts suggest that the experience of different sorts of landscape was an integral part of a villa visit.

This included both the landscapes which a visitor looked out onto and also those of the villa itself, through which they could wander. These ranged from

12. Suet. Tib. 43–44.
13. E.g., Stat. Silv. 4.2.11 where the waiters at Domitian’s banquet are described as “Ilian.”
19. For an analysis based on Stat. Silv. 2.2 see Bergmann 1994.
formal gardens filled with box shrubs or fruit trees to deliberate recreations of natural countryside and the incorporation of pre-existing landscape elements. A few examples can help to illustrate this: the first is Pliny’s description of the hippodrome garden at his Tuscan villa which includes among its topiary “a sudden imitation of rural countryside implanted there.”\textsuperscript{20} The second is Statius’s description of Pollius Felix’s villa where he praises Pollius’s improvements on nature: “the halls you enter were wild country; where now tall groves appear, there was once not even soil.”\textsuperscript{21} Pollius is praised for his recreation of this wild, barren site with both architectural and horticultural forms, supplanting its bare rock with new groves of trees. Elsewhere, pre-existing features of the landscape could be reutilized for villa functions; the emperor Caligula going so far as to hold a dinner-party in the branches of a plane tree.\textsuperscript{22} Throughout these descriptions there is a keen sense of the blurring of the lines between art and nature; a celebration of the ability of human artifice to trump nature, or corral it to new purposes.\textsuperscript{23} Nero’s \textit{Domus Aurea} seems particularly to have excelled at this. Tacitus declares,

its wonders were not so much customary and commonplace luxuries like
gold and jewels but fields and lakes and - in the manner of a wilderness—
woods here, open spaces and views there.

\textit{Tac. Ann} 15.42\textsuperscript{24}

In a criticism of the endless striving for novelty shown by his peers in the mid first century AD, the younger Seneca bemoaned the way that men would flit from the comforts of Campania to isolated wastes only to return soon enough to cosmopolitan delights.\textsuperscript{25} Through art, architecture, and landscaping this variety of landscapes could be evoked within the very environs of a domus or villa. Roman landscape paintings depict scenes ranging from pastoral sanctuaries and crowded sea-shores to isolated mountainous regions, satisfying the desire for novelty and variety within the views from a single room.\textsuperscript{26} The actual estates of a luxury villa were also filled with a variety of versions of the natural world ranging from tamed gardens filled with box hedges and vines, to rocky promontories leading out to cliff-top views. Sculpture helped to populate these landscapes with figures; statues of herdsmen and animals suggested pastoral scenes and the abundance of the countryside while representations of fauns,
maenads, and the god Bacchus evoked a luxurious atmosphere of revelry and sensuality.27

Often villa landscapes were named after specific areas of the Mediterranean, evoking far-flung places both natural and man-made. A watercourse could be called the Nile or Euphrates while Hadrian is famously said to have boasted the Vale of Tempe, Canopus, and an Underworld in his villa at Tivoli, as well as an Academy and Lyceum.28 These recreated landscapes allowed the villa to represent itself as a microcosm of the wider world, embodying different sorts of places and landscapes while also evoking places of historical and cultural importance. Art could extend these references into the mythological realm, transporting the viewer not just into a different geography, but also a different time.29

My focus here is on the recreation of myths concerning violence and danger, set within these landscape settings. The natural elements were integral to the effect of the sculpted tableaux. As well as increasing the naturalism of the groups through their realistic setting, thus drawing the viewer more deeply into the illusionism of the scene, landscapes could also play a direct role as agents within the narratives presented. It is essential to consider these diverse, man-made, “natural” environments in the light of the role that real landscapes played as numinous spaces in the wider Roman imagination.30 For indeed, I suggest that it was precisely this sense of nature as sacred and potentially dangerous that villa and house owners sought to evoke in the elaborate, landscaped, mythological narratives they devised.

Latin literature is full of references to the sanctity of nature, presenting the wild spaces of the countryside as the haunts of gods and demi-gods. Lucretius describes the inhabitants of the countryside as believing that the hills are inhabited by “goat footed satyrs,” nymphs and fauns, and that Pan can be heard playing his pipes.31 Some landscapes powerfully evoke the presence of supernatural powers. Ovid starts Amores 3.1 by picturing a sacred grove: ancient trees untouched by the axe, a sacred spring, and a rocky cave, of which he comments “one might believe that a spirit (numen) resides there.”32 Seneca the Younger suggests that when one enters a grove of old trees one immediately recognizes the presence of a deity.33 In Silvae 2.3 Statius plays on this association when he gives as the aetion for a tree on the Caelian a story about Pan’s pursuit of the nymph Pholoë:

31. Lucr. 4.580–94.
33. Sen. Ep. 41.3.
she dived into the pool which still lies beneath the tree.\textsuperscript{34} In all these cases the presence of divinity is recognized and asserted through natural features in the landscape, especially water, caves, and trees.

The sacred power of natural landscapes was also manifested in religious matters. Many early sanctuaries were located outside cities on mountains, or in wooded groves. In particular, the grove of Diana at Aricia remained a place of cultic worship well into the imperial period.\textsuperscript{35} Diana here was worshipped as \textit{Diana Nemorensis}, Diana of the grove, associated with hunting, warriors, and fertility. The sanctuary was set into a remote, enclosed space, a lush grove set into a volcanic crater overlooking a lake.\textsuperscript{36} Its wildness was matched by the violence of its ritual priesthood; the reigning priest (\textit{rex nemorensis}) was a runaway slave who reigned after defeating the previous incumbent in mortal combat.\textsuperscript{37}

The sanctity of such places could suggest potential danger for those who encroached upon them. This is especially clear in the myths of those who brought down the vengeance of the gods against them. In Ovid’s account of the death of Actaeon it is his accidental trespass into the realm of Diana that causes his downfall. Ovid’s description of the story starts with landscape, a mountain \textit{infectus variarum caede ferarum} (“stained with the slaughter of various beasts,” Ov. \textit{Met.} 3.143). These are the prey which Actaeon has himself been hunting, but this ominous start also presages his own later destruction. After Actaeon calls a halt to his own hunts, Ovid gives a long description of the landscape in which his death will take place:

\begin{quote}
There was a valley sharp with pine and dense cypress
By name Gargaphie, sacred to girt-up Diana.
In the furthest depths of this is a woodland cave
Worked by no human art, nature herself has imitated
Art with her own genius, for with living pumice
And soft tufa she had drawn a natural arch.
On the right a fountain murmurs, bright with clear water
Spreading into a wide pool with grassy banks.
Here the goddess, tired from hunting in the woods,
was accustomed to
Bathe her virgin limbs in the liquid dew.
\end{quote}

\textit{Ov. Met.} 3.155–64


\textsuperscript{35} See Edlund 1987: 44–62 on sacred places in nature. Green 2007 discusses the cult of Diana at Aricia.

\textsuperscript{36} Green 2007: 1–33. While the sanctuary saw architectural embellishment over time it still seems to have kept elements of the original wilderness, perhaps artificially enhanced, Green 2007: 25.

\textsuperscript{37} Green 2007: 147–84.
Ovid draws a clear visual picture. While stressing the naturalness of the grotto he explicitly compares it to the recreation of “natural” landscapes through human art, evoking the sorts of caves which were recreated in elite villas. His description depicts a place of both delight and danger. In line 155 the words *densa* and *acuta* evoke the sense of a dark, overgrown realm with prickly vegetation, underlining its hostility to the wandering Actaeon. In contrast, the sensual description of the cave with its soft arch and clear spring paints a picture of a *locus amoenus*, the private haunt of the goddess; it is when he intrudes onto this sacred natural realm that Actaeon meets his punishment. The landscape does not just provide the backdrop to Actaeon’s downfall, it is also an active player, warning him off with its prickly pine, but also drawing him and us in through the sensuous pleasures of the pool which are, however, Diana’s jealously-guarded domain.\(^{38}\)

This brief discussion of literary representations of landscape suggests the ideas and associations which the natural realm held in the Roman imagination. Recent work on landscape has underlined the extent to which landscape is both a human construction and an active force which defines our own self-image. Simon Schama asserts the role of human agency in creating meaning for landscape, commenting “the wilderness . . . does not locate itself, does not name itself,” while W. J. T. Mitchell argues for the dynamic role of landscape in forming human senses of identity: “[L]andscape . . . always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which ‘we’ (figured as ‘the figures’ in the landscape) find - or lose—ourselves.”\(^{39}\) Both sides of this equation can be seen in the Roman conception of landscape. On the one hand the landscapes drawn by poets like Lucretius, Ovid, and Vergil are as artificial as the wildernesses recreated in elite villas, reflecting idealized constructions of the countryside. Yet on the other, the very interest in landscape suggests a fascination with the power of the natural world, and with human attempts to control it.

The recreation in art of mythological landscapes, particularly those depicting violence, needs to be seen against Roman ideas about the sanctity of nature and autonomy of the natural realm. My argument is that the setting of these myths into particular villa landscapes evoked deeply seated ideas about the power of the natural world as a place inhabited by divine beings. While the villa itself embodies human control over nature, these images of danger and the punishment of hubris also suggest the perils of overstepping one’s mark and encroaching into the divine realm. Contemporary comment on villa architecture shows both a pride in human ingenuity at controlling nature, and a moralizing concern about the extent to which villascapes were taking over the countryside. I suggest that the violent myths recreated in landscape settings played against this dual concern, realizing

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38. Further on Ovid’s use of sensual landscapes as the location for violence see Parry 1964; Segal 1969; Hinds 2002: esp. 140–49 on overlaps with painting.

the numinous potential of the natural world through the imaginative effects of naturalistic imagery. Paintings and sculptures invited viewers to suspend their disbelief, enter into the fantasy world, and enjoy the frisson of being subject to the powers of divine nature while always also offering them an escape through the very artificiality of the media.

ART IN A LANDSCAPE

Among scholarly work on the display of Roman sculptures, landscape settings have been relatively overlooked. Most attention has been devoted to the display of statues in architectural settings such as porticoes and niches where they could set the tone for a particular space, or act as an art-gallery, showing off the owner’s educated taste. However, when statues were embedded into landscapes, their range of effects was extended. The combination of a dramatic representation of myth with a naturalistic landscape background enhanced the realism of the image, exerting an imaginative effect over the viewer which helped to transport him or her into the mythological situation portrayed.

A securely attested example of the display of mythological sculptures in a landscape setting is provided by the grotto at Sperlonga. The discovery here of sculptural pieces in situ, albeit fragmentary and in the basin of the cave, has allowed reconstruction of the original display (fig. 1). The sea-monster Scylla was perched in the middle of the water, seizing hold of Odysseus’s ship as it sailed past, while the Cyclops Polyphemus lay drunkenly in an inner cave with Odysseus and his men approaching to attack him (C). Two other groups stood in the foreground, showing Odysseus and Diomedes stealing the Trojan Palladion (D) and a warrior rescuing the body of a fallen comrade (A). The programme of the

40. The seminal work on sculptures in Roman villas is Neudecker 1988; pp. 39–47 discuss mythological images. Some exceptions: Ridgway 1971 (on Greek sculpture); Bergmann 2002; Sorabellla 2007: 237 suggesting a landscape setting for the Barberini Faun. Other works discuss statues in gardens but without detailed analysis of the combined effects of art and landscape, E.g., Jashemski 1979: 34–43; Hill 1981. The cave at Sperlonga has prompted further studies on sculptures in grottoes, see Mette 1992; Viscogliosi 1996; Carey 2002.


44. See Weis 2000: 117–24 for discussion of the identities of the two.
sculptures has been the subject of great debate, with scholars relating it variously to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Rather than identifying a single message for the sculptures, however, diners probably used them as a springboard for displays of erudition, relating the images to different texts and traditions.

Yet scholarship’s concentration on the erudite responses the sculptures invited underplays the effect of their illusionism which was an equally crucial element of their overall impact. The landscape setting blurs the boundaries between art and nature, inviting guests to suspend their distance and enter into the world of myth which they created. In the *Odyssey* Polyphemus’s cave is located “on the land’s edge, close by the sea,” while different traditions located this as either on Sicily, or at Cumae, on the Campanian coast. The grotto at Sperlonga fits both; the cave complex is positioned on the Campanian coast, visible to those sailing along it, while within the cave the pool with its statue of Scylla becomes the strait between Sicily and the mainland and the inner recess the cave of Polyphemus. Visitors to this grotto experienced a new dimension of familiar geography, in which the local landscape was reinvested with events of the mythological past.

The architecture of the cave invites viewers to interact with its illusionism. The dining couches were placed on a separate island in front of the main pool requiring diners to cross over the body of water dividing it from the rest of the villa. While diners may have accessed their couches via removable bridges, they could also have crossed by boat. They might have taken a detour into the inner pool to examine the sculptural display at close range. In doing so they would be crossing the same body of water which was fraught with such dangers for Odysseus’s companions, plucked off their ship by the murderous Scylla, suggesting a vicarious thrill of danger for the guests themselves. Effects of lighting and weather could have enhanced the illusion. If banqueting at night the lamplight flickering on the water or the reflections of the sculptures in the water, animated by a light breeze, would have helped to give movement to the scene, enhancing the illusion of reality.

The landscape elements here work in a number of ways. By providing the backdrop to the events illustrated—the sea from which Scylla emerges to seize her prey, or the cavernous lair of the Cyclops—they enhance the naturalism of

45. For reviews of the scholarship see Squire 2007: 115–16. For a readings of the images in different contexts see A. Stewart 1977; Kuttner 2003.
49. Kuttner 2003: 117–21; she suggests guests may also have swum in the pool; see also Salza Prina Ricotti 1987: 138–69.
the sculptures, encouraging viewers to mistake them for real monsters rather than simply their representation in art. Yet as a natural element, able to move and change, the water by reflecting the images also invests them with life and movement, further enhancing their realism. Nature itself also presented dangers, both in myth and reality. The power of the sea to bring humans to heel was well known. While Scylla represented one danger Odysseus had overcome, storms and shipwrecks were another. The power and noise of the real sea, just behind the diners, would have acted as a permanent reminder of this power, investing Scylla’s pool in the cave with some of this dangerous potential. The ability of nature to wreak havoc was also most vividly illustrated in a real episode which took place here, the collapse of the cave during a dinner attended by Tiberius at which the emperor himself narrowly avoided death.\textsuperscript{51} Diners visiting the cave after this event might have looked differently at its architecture with the sobering knowledge that it was not just the sculpted monsters which could pose a threat. This blurring of art and nature, the artifice of the sculpture and the reality of its surroundings, all helped to encourage an imaginative entering of the world represented, in which diners could take on the role of Odysseus themselves, and vicariously enjoy the thrill of some of the dangers he had experienced.

The key role which the landscape elements play in these groups was certainly recognized by a later viewer, as attested by an inscription set up in the cave, possibly as late as the fourth century AD. This is the so-called Faustinus inscription carved onto a panel which was apparently placed between the two inner recesses.\textsuperscript{52} Despite the range of other sculptures which we know were added to the cave, the inscription concentrates (like us) on the two most imposing groups, Scylla and Polyphemus. It pictures Vergil standing in wonder, \textit{miratus}, as he gazes, admitting himself defeated by the art of the cave. In its summary of the themes shown here the epigram extols both artistic and natural wonders, citing \textit{speluncas vivosque lacus, Cyclopea saxa} (“grottoes and living waters, Cyclopean rocks”), alongside the “blinded eye of the semi-beast” (Polyphemus) and the “savagery of Scylla.”\textsuperscript{53} For this viewer the natural features of the landscape were just as central to the overall effect of the cave as the sculpted works themselves, and the illusions created by both art and nature were equally applauded.\textsuperscript{54}

Other statues found in the area were added at various times, also embedded into the landscape and continuing the fantasy landscape created by the initial groups. A statue of Ganymede seized by the eagle was found in the basin in front of the cave where it seems to have fallen from a display above the entrance (E

\textsuperscript{51} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 4.59; Suet. \textit{Tib}. 39.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{AE} 1967, no. 85. For a recent analysis of the poem with discussion of date and authorship see Squire 2007, 2009: 202–38.

\textsuperscript{53} ll. 4–6.

\textsuperscript{54} The final lines of the poem are fragmentary but seem to celebrate the artifice of the artist’s hand alongside the skill of Nature herself; see Squire 2007: 104–105.
A statue of a female figure found to the right side of the cave has holes in the back, suggesting a display attached to the rock (fig. 2). It represents the figure of Andromeda (or perhaps Hesione) exposed to the sea-monster, a scene which was also popular in mythological landscape paintings. The left edge of the cave was carved into the form of a ship and labeled in mosaic as “navis Argo.” Sailors and visitors gliding past this stretch of rocky coastline would have been able to see Andromeda chained to the rock, Ganymede ascending to heaven and the ship of the Argonauts in a blurring of real and mythological landscapes which continued within the cave.

The sculptural ensemble at Sperlonga set a trend followed in a number of later imperial villas. Scenes of Polyphemus and (sometimes) Scylla reappear in Claudius’s grotto at Baiae, the Domus Aurea, the lake-side Ninfeo Bergantino of Domitian’s villa at Castel Gandolfo, and the Canopus of Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli. The emphasis on the role of the natural landscape varies in each case, playing the greatest role at Sperlonga and Castel Gandolfo, where the cave was transferred to a lake-side situation. Individual patrons had the choice of how to represent these scenes, some choosing an architectural framework which may have underscored the art-historical merits of the pieces, while others stressed instead their illusionism and the power they had to invite viewers into a mythological realm.

Appreciation of the combined effect of art and landscape is also evident in literary descriptions of art-works, suggesting that it was an aesthetic whose appeal lasted throughout the imperial period. A good example is provided by the description of a statue group given in Apuleius’s second-century AD novel, the *Metamorphoses*. On entering his hostess’ house the narrator, Lucius, is confronted with a large statue group, placed in the centre of the atrium. The lengthy description of this group, showing Diana and Actaeon, dwells on its naturalism, achieved through a blending of artificial and natural elements. The first half of the description concentrates on the sculptor’s skill, manifest in the dogs that flank the goddess who, despite being made of marble, almost seem to bark:

Their mouths opened savagely, so that if the sound of barking burst in from next door you would think it had come from the marble’s jaws.

*Apul. Met.* 2.4.

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55. Andreea 1994: 113–18, pls. 18–25 argues plausibly for this display, *contra* Neudecker 1988: 223. A range of dates has been suggested for the statue, some contemporary with the main display.
59. Liverani 1996.
60. This and the following translations are those of Hanson, Loeb edition 1989.
Behind the goddess is a cave fashioned from marble into moss, grass, vines, and little trees, importing the natural world into the architectural setting of the atrium. Again the realism of the art-work is praised, the apples and grapes rivaling nature in their likeness to reality. This realism is further enhanced by their reflection in a pool at the goddess’s feet, in which the branches seem to move as in reality:

If you bent and looked in the pool that runs along by the goddess’s feet, shimmering in a gentle wave, you would think that the bunches of grapes hanging there . . . possessed the quality of movement, among all other aspects of reality.

Apul. Met. 2.4

The description concludes with mention of the figure of Actaeon, shown emerging from the marble foliage and leaning towards the goddess, visible in saxo et in fonte, that is, both in the marble and in his reflection in the pool.

Given that the group is in an atrium, the pool is presumably that of the impluvium, over which we are to imagine the statue group placed. This real pool makes up part of the complete image, standing in for the pool in which Diana is about to bathe, and in which Actaeon’s reflection can be seen as he stares at her eagerly.61 Yet it also activates the image, its ripples imbuing the marble too, at least in reflection, with movement. The combination of art and natural element works to blur the lines between art and reality and to provide a complete retelling of the myth.

This can also be seen in a later ecphrasis by Callistratus, written probably in the fourth century AD, which describes a statue of Narcissus displayed in a grove standing over a spring of water.62 The composite image of statue and pool together recreates the myth, in which Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection.63 Here there is a double confusion in that the real element of water reflects an artificial statue. While in the myth the boy is real and the reflection an optical illusion, this recreation of the myth with statue and spring plays with the different levels of reality and illusion:

Whereas the marble was trying to change the real boy so as to match the one in the water, the spring was struggling to match the skilful effects of the art in the marble . . . and indeed the form in the water was so instinct with life and breath that it seemed to be Narcissus himself.64

Callistr. Im. 5.3–4

61. For full discussion of this passage see Elsner 2007: 291–93 with previous bibliography.
62. Callistr. Im. 5; see also 1, 4, and 7 for other statues in landscape settings.
63. On Narcissus as a topos for the deceptions of naturalism see Elsner 2007: 132–76; also Platt 2002 on Pompeii II.2.2–5, where paintings of Narcissus and Actaeon were combined with both real and painted pools.
Extant statues of Narcissus have usually been found out of their original contexts but many may have been displayed in poolside settings, evoking in their combination of art work and water the entirety of the myth, and warning viewers of the dangers of being lured in by its beautiful naturalism.

THE NIOBIDS FROM THE *HORTI SALLUSTIANI* AND *HORTI LAMIANI*

Despite the importance of the landscape setting for the sculptures of Sperlonga and the appreciation of similar effects in literary ephrases, there has been little discussion of landscape settings as one of the display possibilities for ancient sculptures. In this section I will propose a landscape setting for two groups of Niobids statues found in imperial gardens in Rome and explore the responses they would have evoked. While these reconstructions must remain hypothetical, I believe that they are supported by the clear evidence from both archaeology and literature of landscape displays for statues elsewhere, and by the inherent characteristics of the sculptures themselves. They can help us to explore one of the many resonances of Roman sculptural displays, and the ways in which art formed an integral part of the villa experience.

In these two case studies a nexus of evidence suggests that the vengeance of Apollo and Diana was dramatically envisioned within the landscaped settings of imperial *horti*. These were vast areas of parkland around the outskirts of Rome where villas, pavilions, and shrines were set into carefully constructed “natural” landscapes. They offered a world half-way between the town and the city, a place for *otium* (leisure) which could also be used for public entertaining and business. First owned by rich members of the Republican aristocracy, they soon fell into imperial hands. Recreating the sculptural display of the *horti* is complicated by a number of factors, not least the difficulty of reconstructing the excavation history of the sculptural finds which have been made. Nevertheless, impressive sculptural finds have often been made in these areas and close examination can give us some hints about how and where such statues were displayed. Groups of dying Niobids were found in both the *Horti Sallustiani* and *Horti Lamiani*; they staged for their viewers a dramatic retelling of the myth within a landscape setting which evoked that of the original events, drawing viewers into the illusionism of the representation and enhancing the impression that they were entering into a dangerous, sacred, realm.

65. The key account remains Grimal 1984. See also the papers collected in Cima and La Rocca 1986; La Rocca and Cima 1998.
68. Diacciati 2005 also discusses groups of Niobids from villas, focussing on those from the Villa Adriana at Tivoli and the *Horti Lamiani*. 
HORTI SALLUSTIANI

The Horti Sallustiani lay in the area between the Pincian and Quirinal hills, to the north-east of Rome, and seem to have consisted of the valley between the two hills and architectural structures along its sides (fig. 3).\(^{69}\) They were probably first laid out by the historian Sallust and then passed to his nephew and heir, who was a friend and counselor of the emperor Augustus.\(^{70}\) They later passed into imperial ownership, probably during the reign of Claudius.\(^{71}\) While the early gardens would also have been decorated with sculptures and buildings, many of the architectural remains date from later periods of refurbishment under the emperors.\(^{72}\) In particular, the ancient structure still visible in the Piazza Sallustio was constructed in the Hadrianic period as a monumental vestibule, linking the upper slope of the Quirinal to the valley bottom, where a lavish circular room looked out onto the gardens beyond (fig. 4).\(^{73}\) A view of the valley in the nineteenth century, before it was filled up in the course of building works, helps to reconstruct the overall impression (fig. 5). The main residential part of the gardens may have been formed by a U-shaped pavilion on the Pincian hill, shown in a sixteenth-century plan of the Gardens.\(^{74}\) However, it is the finds from the valley bottom which will primarily concern us here.

A number of sculptural discoveries made in the area suggest that the valley was decorated with sculptures evoking the presence of the gods.\(^{75}\) These included statues of the followers of Bacchus, discovered along the length of the valley, which would have added an atmosphere of sensuality and indulgence.\(^{76}\) The other dominating figures were the gods Apollo and Diana, whose powers were made manifest not just in statues of the two gods, but also through scenes of the myths associated with them. A fragment of a draped statue of Apollo, in his role as Apollo Citharoedus, leader of the Muses, was found to the north or northwest of the vestibule.\(^{77}\) A group of Artemis/Diana, Iphigenia, and a deer, now restored, came from an underground room near the Piazza Sallustio and seems originally to have decorated a nymphaeum set into the retaining wall of the Quirinal hill, overlooking the valley bottom (fig. 6).\(^{78}\) Statues of the nymphs

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69. For a comprehensive account see Hartwick 2004 with earlier bibliography.
70. See Hor. Odes 2.2 and Tac. Ann. 3.30 on the younger Sallust.
71. Hartwick 2004: 8–11.
72. On Vespasian in the gardens see Dio 66.10.4.
75. Most were found in the territory of Josef Spithoever, who owned land on the valley bottom and the Quirinal hill; Hartwick 2004: 25–7.
76. Hartwick 2004: 108–15. Most come from the area around the vestibule, though a statue of Silenus was found to the eastern end of the valley.
of Diana were also present. Two reclining female figures (the so-called Astragal players now in Göttingen and London) were found in the area to the north of the vestibule, in the vigna Verospi. On each, a bow is carved on the base, suggesting an identification of them as nymphs of the hunting goddess, taking their ease near a pool of water. The overall effect of these statues, displayed along the valley bottom, or in rooms opening onto it along the supporting walls, is to suggest a valley sacred to the gods, populated by fauns and nymphs as well as by the gods themselves.

In addition to a general aura of divinity, the group of Diana and Iphigenia added narrative, offering proof of the goddess’s power to save those she favored. Elsewhere in the gardens, her wrath was instead evoked, in a series of figures of dying Niobids. These hapless children of Niobe were killed by Apollo and Diana in vengeance for their mother’s hubris, at daring to compare her own fecundity to that of the twin gods’ mother, Leto. The excavation history of these statues is complicated, but the evidence that they did indeed come from the gardens of Sallust is, to me, persuasive.

Four statues suggest the presence of a cycle depicting the deaths of the Niobids. Three have been identified as statues made in the Greek world in the later fifth century BC, re-used in the gardens, while the fourth has been dated to the Hadrianic period. This shows the figure of the paedagogus to the Niobids, rushing to their aid, and was found in 1840 at the entrance to the vestibule structure in the Piazza Sallustio (fig. 7). The other three figures consist of two females and one male Niobid, wounded or fleeing from their attackers. A statue in the Museo Nazionale Romano, that of a wounded female Niobid sinking to her knees (fig. 8), was discovered in 1906 in an underground passageway near the via Collina, just behind the vestibule, at a depth of some 11 meters below modern street level. Two other statues, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, also depict Niobids and can be associated with the Gardens, though their exact provenances are less clear. The first is a recumbent male figure with an arrow wound in the neck. It was purchased by Carl Jacobsen in 1888 from Joseph Spithoever, the owner of this area of the Horti Sallustiani (fig. 9). It may be identical with a figure described by Lanciani as a statue of Endymion (often shown with his arm above his head), found in a “deep and narrow passage,” though conflicting reports...
make it hard to state more than the fact that it came from the Spithoever territory sometime in the 1880s.85

The other statue is a fleeing girl, now also identified as a Niobid (fig. 10).86 Reports about her findspot are contradictory. Initial reports suggested a degree of secrecy over the findspot, with one suggestion that it came from the Esquiline.87 Later, however, Wolfgang Helbig asserted that it had been found in the Vigna Spithoever, very close to the place where the Rome Niobid was later found.88 The statue is stylistically very similar to the male statue in Copenhagen, making it likely that the two statues were reused together in the Gardens. The initial misleading report about its provenance can probably be attributed to the fact that Spithoever had sold this area of land to a consortium, which may have concealed the true provenance of the statue to hide the fact that they had made a valuable discovery on the land.

While the provenances of the Copenhagen statues are less secure than the Rome Niobid and Paedagogus, the combined evidence points towards all four statues being found in the area around the vestibule (the securely-known findspots are marked on fig. 3). Three were reused from an earlier display, probably brought to Rome from Greece or Southern Italy in the wake of Roman conquest.89 They may have entered the Horti Sallustiani early on in the gardens’ history and were later reinvigorated with the addition of the figure of the paedagogus, perhaps in the Hadrianic period.90

Full details of the display of these statues are lacking, but we can suggest some likely features of it. The paedagogus was found at the base of the vestibule’s entrance, while the Rome Niobid and those sculptures discovered during building works of the 1880s were discovered at significant depths below the modern street level, at a level roughly equivalent to that of the ancient valley floor. While their theme links them together, the statues were not found in one place but scattered throughout this area of the gardens. A landscape setting would suit the details of the myth which is usually represented as having taken place outdoors, while the Niobids were either hunting or exercising.91 The statues here were probably originally set into natural plantings, though the discovery of the Rome Niobid in a

86. Copenhagen Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 520.
88. The German text is quoted in Brunn 1932, commentary to pls. 712–14 (P. Arndt).
89. For various views on the dating and provenance of the statues, as well as their display in Rome, see La Rocca 1985: 71–72, 75–78, 80–81; Talamo 1998: 146; Moltesen 1981.
90. The dating of copies is notoriously difficult; it is impossible precisely to date the redisplay of the statues or to establish the changes which the addition of the paedagogus made to any previous display. It is also possible that there were other figures which are now lost.
91. Ov. Met. 6.218–247 has the boys killed while riding and exercising. In a wall painting in the Casa del Marinaio in Pompeii, discussed below, they are shown hunting.
passageway suggests they may have been moved into covered rooms at a later point in their history. At Oplontis garden archaeology has shown that a series of statues were displayed in the garden of the villa in the first century AD.\textsuperscript{92} To the east of a large pool images including Hercules, Diana, Nike, and an ephebe were set beneath various trees while centaurs seem originally to have lined the path in the main garden. Philostratus also tells us that the second-century AD sophist Herodes Atticus set up statues of his foster sons in the act of hunting in thickets, fields, near springs, and under the shade of plane trees.\textsuperscript{93} The images facilitated Herodes’ mourning for his lost sons, providing him with vivid reminders of them.\textsuperscript{94} The landscape setting is integral to this recreation of them in the flower of youth, allowing recollection not just of their appearance but also of their joys and activities whilst alive. These two examples show that statues could be set into the natural plantings of a villa estate, placed in relationship with landscape features. Such a setting would make best sense for the Niobid statues, whose common theme suggests they there were designed to be seen as a group, while their scattered findspots indicate that they were not displayed grouped together, but rather spaced out throughout this area of the valley.

If so, they would have been encountered as if by accident by visitors wandering through the gardens, sharing the same space as their human viewers. The viewing experience might have worked as follows: as the viewer moved from the vestibule out onto the valley bottom, gleaming figures appeared amidst the plantings. On closer inspection, they revealed themselves to be Niobids (figs. 7–10). A young woman flees, another falls to her knees, her drapery slipping to reveal her naked body as she wrestles to free herself from the arrow in her back. A male youth lies on the ground, already wounded, while his paedagogus runs fruitlessly to his aid. The overall atmosphere of a divine valley, achieved by other elements of the sculptural display, set up the villa as a sacred space, peopled by the attendants of the gods. Whilst on one level this elevated the experience, allowing guests to roam freely in a Dionysiac world, the images of the Niobids lend a darker note, indicating the divine wrath which could fall upon hapless mortals. Like Actaeon intruding into the goddess Diana’s sacred valley of Gargaphie, as described by Ovid, the viewer here too may be an intruder, and the violent punishment of those who offend the gods is evident before his eyes.

These examples of the vengeance of Diana and Apollo were complemented by the representations of the gods themselves displayed elsewhere in the gardens. While the deaths of the Niobids show Diana’s jealous guarding of her prestige, another sculptural group shows her capacity to save innocent mortals, in her


\textsuperscript{93} Philostr. V S 2.1 (559). Raeder 1983: 293–94 suggests that this might be in emulation of Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli.

\textsuperscript{94} On the consolations of images see Koortbojian 2005: 191–98.
protection of Iphigenia (fig. 6). The power and authority of the goddess would have been enhanced here by the fact that the statue was originally gilded.\textsuperscript{95} Statues of the gods in non-narrative scenes, such as the fragment of Apollo Citharoedus, assert their patronage of the gardens, and help to define its atmosphere and the interests of its owner, while the representations of particular mythological events concretize the powers of those gods, asserting that they are not simply figureheads, but possess real abilities to punish and save.

The Niobids are shown struggling to free themselves from the arrows which pierce them. The viewer who pauses to look at these images in pain is put in a similar position to the spectator in the arena or theatre, where mythological re-enactments were often held, sometimes with real victims. The perfect bodies of these Niobids also allow an erotic thrill. The body of the Niobid in the Museo Nazionale Romano is fully exposed to the viewer (fig. 8). As she struggles to free herself from the arrow in her back, her dress falls to reveal her naked torso: her terror allows us to see her naked body. A similar linking of violence and erotic voyeurism can be found in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} in the descriptions of fleeing women such as Daphne or Leucothoe. As Daphne attempts to flee from Apollo, \textit{nudabant corpora venti} (“the winds bared her limbs”), making her more desirable, while Leucothoe’s terror is said to suit her: \textit{ipse timor decuit} (“fear itself became her”).\textsuperscript{96} Danger and violence can be titillating, especially when directed at women, as also seems to have been true in the arena.\textsuperscript{97} Iphigenia too reveals her body as she falls beneath her savior Diana (fig. 6). This depiction of desirable and powerless women helps to construct the viewer as a voyeur, enjoying this marble spectacle in the same way that he might later enjoy the entertainments of the \textit{cena}.\textsuperscript{98}

The statues add to the luxurious effect of the villa, inviting guests to partake of its delights and enjoy the spectacles it offered. Yet a number of features also act to break down the distance between viewer and image. These statues were displayed in the very landscape through which the viewer was himself traveling; while passing between them guests were implicated in the dangers posed by the gods who control this space. There is a tension here between detached voyeurism of erotic violence, and the imaginative pull of the setting, which encourages us to suspend detachment and enter directly into this space and the dangers it implies. As we have seen, contemporary literature sets up an image of the natural world as a place of the gods, into which men intrude at their peril, while also testifying to the frequent manipulation of the natural realm by the construction of elite villas. \textit{Horti} could encompass the full range of natural landscapes, but the figures shown here

\textsuperscript{95} Sargent and Therkildsen 2010: 14, fig. 6. Thanks to Troels Myrup Kristensen for drawing my attention to this.
\textsuperscript{97} E.g., Pasiphae’s union with the bull, Mart. \textit{Spect.} 5; also Suet. \textit{Nero} 12.2.
\textsuperscript{98} The erotic lure of the sculptural display is also evident in the sensual Dionysiac figures and in an eroticized portrayal of Leda and the swan, on which see Hartswick 2004: 136.
raise the specter of the potential for landscape and its gods to retaliate, ruthlessly guarding their own terrain.

The slippage between one’s position as a detached viewer and potential victim is a topos of much imperial literature, especially that written about despotic emperors such as Nero or Domitian. Much of this is focused on the theatre or arena, with the danger that spectators might themselves become the spectacle if they incurred the wrath of an irate emperor. Anecdotes about the theatre also suggest the danger that re-enactments of myth might break the limits of the stage, spilling over into real life, as when actors playing Heracles or Ajax meted out real violence, or a dancer playing Icarus actually fell to his death at the feet of the emperor Nero. These literary anecdotes suggest an interest in the fragility of the line between representation and reality, as well as an almost masochistic relish of the potential danger in which ordinary people might find themselves. They suggest that part of the fun of attending the spectacles was the potential for this line to be crossed, even if in reality no-one wished it to happen to them. This blurring between reality and illusion, spectator and spectacle was not confined to the world of public spectacle. Indeed, it was more intense in the private confines of the villa with its traditions of theatrical role-playing and spectacle. That this theatricality could become dangerously unsettling is suggested by Cassius Dio, who recounts a macabre dinner-party staged by the emperor Domitian in which the guests were served a funeral banquet and waited upon by slaves in the guise of phantoms, leading them to fear for their lives. A similar blurring between reality and role-play was encouraged by these illusionistic displays of statues which invited the viewer into the violent world they recreated. Part of the intended effect of this group was probably to allow guests a frisson of fear at what entering into the realm of the gods might entail, while also inviting them to enjoy the entertainment and erotic voyeurism on offer.

HORTI LAMIANI

Another, larger, group of Niobids was found in the area of the Horti Lamiani, which bordered the Horti Maecenatis to the east of the ancient city. They were probably laid out by L. Aelius Lamia, consul in AD 3 and a friend of the emperor Tiberius, to whom he may have bequeathed them. Both gardens were certainly
in imperial ownership by the time of the emperor Gaius.\textsuperscript{104} The archaeological remains from the area are scanty but some idea of the layout can be gathered from what remains. Remnants of a portico, fronting rooms decorated with garden paintings, probably represent the front of the main palace, looking down over the valley marked by the Via Merulana (17 on fig. 11).\textsuperscript{105} Behind this lay the richly decorated cryptoporticus (1 on fig. 11) which yielded the famous statues of Commodus as Hercules and the Esquiline Venus, amongst others, probably deliberately hidden to protect them at some point in the gardens’ history.\textsuperscript{106} On the lower level closer to the Via Merulana lies a structure marked on Rodolfo Lanciani’s maps as being composed of 3 concentric walls with the western side closed by a portico.\textsuperscript{107} It has been identified either as a semi-circular nymphaeum or a circular \textit{ambulatio} or walkway, possibly the “Diaeta Apollonis” which is mentioned in an inscription (14 on fig. 11).\textsuperscript{108} Both this structure and the portico were constructed in \textit{opus reticulatum} and have been dated to the early imperial period, possibly as refurbishments of the villa made by Gaius.\textsuperscript{109}

It was in the same valley as this structure, though probably further to the south, that a group of Niobid statues were found in February 1583.\textsuperscript{110} They subsequently entered the collection of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francesco I de’ Medici, and the majority are now on display in the Uffizi museum. The statues were found in the vineyard of Gabriele and Thomasso Thomasini da Gallese. This was described as lying next to a vineyard belonging to the Altieri family, close to the road leading to Porta Maggiore and near S. Giovanni Laterano.\textsuperscript{111} The Altieri possessed a vineyard in the area north of via Labicana, where the Villa Altieri was later built.\textsuperscript{112} The Thomasini vineyard probably lay to the west of it, near the area where the modern via Merulana cuts the via Labicana/viale Manzoni (see fig. 11).\textsuperscript{113}

The display of the statues in the Uffizi includes a few duplicates which were found elsewhere, while two of the original statues found are now in the

\textsuperscript{104} See Philo, \textit{Leg.} 351, 358 on a Jewish embassy to Gaius trailing him around the gardens.

\textsuperscript{105} Cima 1986: 47, 56; Cima di Puolo 1996.

\textsuperscript{106} Lanciani 1897: 104–105.

\textsuperscript{107} Lanciani 1990: pls. 23, 24.


\textsuperscript{109} Cima di Puolo 1996.

\textsuperscript{110} The key publication is Geominy 1984 with earlier bibliography; pp. 28–32 give documents relating to the finds. See also Diacciati 2005: 206–14.


\textsuperscript{113} Stark 1863: 219 and Geominy 1984: 30 suggest a findspot in this area. Lanciani 1990: pl. 31 more precisely places it just to the south of the current Piazza Dante but without further proof. See further Häuber 1991: 227–33.
Museo Archeologico in Florence. From careful study of old engravings and casts, Geominy identifies 11 statues as being those found in the vigna Thomasini.\textsuperscript{114} These show Niobe with her youngest daughter (fig. 12), three other daughters, six sons (including figs. 13 and 14) and the figure of the paedagogus.\textsuperscript{115} Apart from a couple of missing figures, we have here a complete group of Niobe and her children represented at the moment in which they met their deaths.\textsuperscript{116} The reworking of the sculptures after discovery makes them difficult to date, though scholars agree in seeing them as Roman copies of an earlier Greek group.\textsuperscript{117}

The findspot of the Medici figures is too vague to provide concrete information on their original display, though no architectural features are mentioned in the reports of the finds. Speculation as to their display must rely on the statues themselves, and what they represent. The sculptures are relatively shallow and less finished on the back, suggesting a display against something. The representation of rocks as bases and supports is a clear suggestion of a landscape setting. The poses of the figures with faces looking up and glances exchanged between them would support a loose arrangement in the open air, possibly set into rocky niches or backed by shrubbery.\textsuperscript{118} The raised eyes and turned heads help to create an anxious numinous landscape in which the viewer is prompted to look around in vain for the source of this terror. While some connoisseurs may have recognized the figures as copies of a Greek masterpiece, the dominant impression is the recreation of a dangerous mythological realm, transporting the viewer back to the world of ancient Thebes.

\textsuperscript{114} Geominy 1984: 32–39. For the engravings see de’ Cavallieri 1594: pls. 9–19; Perrier 1638.
\textsuperscript{115} In the list below M is the catalogue number in Mansuelli 1958.
1) Niobe and her youngest daughter, Uffizi inv. 294; M 70 (fig. 12)
2) Oldest daughter, Uffizi inv. 293; M 71
3) Chiaramonti type Niobid, Uffizi inv. 300; M 72
4) Lying male Niobid, Uffizi inv. 298; M 73
5) Eldest son, Uffizi inv. 302; M 74 (fig. 13; probably originally part of a group with one of his sisters, as in a copy in the Vatican, Amelung 1908: 608–10, no. 401, pl. 57; Geominy 1984: 107–11).
6) Second-eldest son, Florence Archaeological Museum (not the statue of the same type in the Uffizi inv. 304; M 76, though \textit{contra} see Diacciati 2005: 228–29, no. III.5)
7) Kneeling Niobid, Uffizi inv. 289; M 78 (fig. 14; M 77 is another copy of same type)
8) Diagonal figure, Uffizi inv. 306; M 79 (M 80 is another copy of same type)
9) Youngest son, Uffizi inv. 292; M 75
10) Paedagogus, Uffizi inv. 301; M 82
\textsuperscript{116} In Ov. \textit{Met.} 6.182–83 Niobe has 7 sons and 7 daughters, though other literary sources give differing numbers. A torso mentioned as having been left in the gardens may have been part of a missing daughter, Geominy 1984: 29, Doc. 3.
\textsuperscript{117} Geominy 1984: 233–82 dates the earlier group to the late fourth century BC relating it to that described by Pliny, \textit{HN} 36.28, though others prefer a late Hellenistic date.
\textsuperscript{118} See Geominy 1984: 211–32; 283–88. His comments on the original display are also valid for the copies. Diacciati 2005: 211–14 suggests they were displayed in the nymphaeum in the valley bottom.
As with the Horti Sallustiani group, the findspot points to the display of the statues within a valley which formed part of a wider garden complex. While the villa proper seems to have occupied the upper slopes of both horti, the valley bottom was occupied instead by water features and natural landscapes. In both gardens we can imagine viewers encountering the statues in a naturalistic setting. The fact that the Lamiani statues were found together suggests a tighter arrangement than that in the Horti Sallustiani, but still within a landscape setting, where the rocky bases could have been set into the ground, and their backs flanked by shrubs or trees in the manner attested at Oplontis. The greater number of statues included in this group would have presented an overwhelming effect on the viewer, surrounding them with images of movement and pathos. The figures are animated by their twisting poses and upturned heads, frozen as they turn to run, or are hit by divine arrows. Viewers encountering these figures entered a space of divine potential, fostering the illusion that they too could become subject to unseen threats.

The two groups of Niobids from the Horti Sallustiani and Horti Lamiani provide convincing evidence for the narrative re-enactment of the Niobids myth within villa landscapes. The reworking of the Florence statues and the reuse of earlier Greek statues in the Horti Sallustiani make it impossible to firmly date their display in the gardens, though a connection with imperial refurbishments of the Gardens seems likely. It is possible that, like Polyphemus and Scylla, the Niobids became a common type for imperial villas. However, the interplay between art and landscape in these two sets of myths sets up a number of different resonances. The Polyphemus and Scylla sculptures use the powerful forms of the Hellenistic baroque to evoke the struggles of humans against forces of nature. As guests at Sperlonga rowed past Scylla or edged around the grotto past the figure of Polyphemus in the flickering lamplight they could share in the terrors encountered by Odysseus and his men. While some may have discerned a political message in the theme or pondered on the literary models for the myths represented, other viewers could simply indulge in the imaginative effect of the cave. Accustomed to the theatrical masques which commonly took place in the villa, they could see this vicarious engagement with myth as part of the pleasures of a villa sojourn. The fact that Odysseus will be victorious over these forces also allows the diner to relax in the knowledge that the dangers will soon be past. The display here draws on the late-republican tradition of villa play-acting but also opens the way to a new engagement with myth which implicates the viewer more directly in the experience evoked.

119. Diacciati 2005 dates such groups to the second century, suggesting that they originate with a group in the Stadium Garden of Hadrian’s villa, which she suggests was displayed within a nymphaeum. Further on the fragments of this group see Hoffmann 1980: 76; Geominy 1990. A statue of Niobe and child from the Villa dei Quintilii may also come from a nymphaeum in a stadium garden, see Paris and Pettinau 2007 (thanks to Ann Kuttner for first alerting me to this statue).

120. For a political reading alluding to Octavian’s defeat of Sextus Pompey see Smith 1991: 353–54.
The absorption of the viewer into a mythological world is continued in the display of the Niobids within landscape settings. Here, however, the atmosphere is darker and more somber. Rather than the trials of Odysseus, which we know he will overcome, the viewer is faced with the victims of divine retribution, punished for their mother’s hubris. The vengeance taken against them is unremitting. This might lead us to sympathize with these figures, seeing them as hapless victims of a greater power. Yet the eroticism of the statues can also distance the viewer from them allowing them to be enjoyed aesthetically as images enhanced by their terror and pain.

Under Augustus the myth of the Niobids took on a public political message. Along with the repulse of the Gauls from Mount Parnassus it featured on the doors of Augustus’s Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, as a sign of the power of the god to punish those who acted against him. Given Augustus’s identification with the god, the myth also acted as an allegory of Augustus’s own victories against those who opposed him. Myths such as those of the Niobids, as well as Marsyas and Actaeon (both also represented in sculptured form) could act as exempla, warnings not to challenge the power of the gods and those they favored. When displayed in imperial horti the resonances of such myths might have been extended, acting as proof not just of the powers of Apollo or Diana and of the dangers of incursion into the divine realm, but also suggesting the power of the guests’ quasi-divine host, the emperor. As we have seen, the historical sources present a rhetoric of concern about the shifting boundaries between viewers and victims in imperially-sponsored public spectacles. Within the confines of the imperial gardens a viewer of the sculptures of the Niobids, particular under a despotic emperor like Gaius or Domitian, might also with some justification wonder if he could soon become a victim of similar violence.

MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES IN POMPEIAN PAINTING

The sculptural ensembles discussed here show how landscape and sculpture could work together to draw the viewer into their imagined world. In the Horti Sallustiani evidence of the wider sculptural display suggests that the valley was characterized as a divine domain, whose potential for danger was realized in the images of the Niobids, punished for their mother’s hubris against the gods. While the landscape setting of these myths exerted an imaginative pull of the viewer, they were also part of the wider culture of theatricality in villa life, where natural forms were carefully recreated by human hands, blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion. Elsewhere, mythological landscapes were also recreated in paint, in large-scale panels which formed the centerpiece of interior walls.

121. Prop. 2.31.12–14.
123. See Weis 1992: 78–79 for a reading of the Marsyas statue as a warning by Sulla.
Here I want to explore how these recreations also worked to draw the viewer into their imagined illusion, while simultaneously asserting their fictionality. My argument is that mythological landscape paintings helped to recreate the same sorts of fantasy landscapes which were also experienced in the villa, and that these landscapes were specifically encoded as numinous with divine power. This was expressed either through the presence of rustic sanctuaries which allude to the countryside as the realm of particular gods, or through the depiction of the sorts of wild, untouched landscapes which Roman thought imbued with sacred power, as expressed in the literary sources discussed at the start of this paper.

Large-scale mythological landscape paintings emerged in the third style of Pompeian wall-painting, in the final decades of the first century BC, and continued into the first century AD, with a few examples also appearing in fourth-style schemes. They are generally displayed in closed rooms, usually triclinia or cubicula, sometimes in areas which lie close to a peristyle or garden, and take the form of large rectangular panels placed in the center of the wall, piercing dark-ground wall schemes with their lighter blue-green landscapes. The illusion is that of looking through a window onto real landscapes surrounding the domus or villa. In some cases there was a direct interaction between the paintings and their placement. A room in the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscoetrecase opened onto a portico with a sea view, while on its two side walls mythological landscape paintings represented the myths of Polyphemus and Galatea and Andromeda and Perseus. The rocky landscapes of the paintings would have merged with the real views from the doorway, to suggest the presence of a mythological realm just outside the walls of the villa. In many cases, however, these paintings were displayed not on the walls of elaborate country villas, but within relatively modest houses in Pompeii. Along with villascapes, seascapes, and sacro-idyllic landscapes, to all of which they are closely related, they offered the illusion of a view out onto extensive landscapes, such as those praised and possessed by villa owners, within the confines of the townhouse. In the case of mythological landscape paintings the effect was doubly transportative, taking the viewer away from the real surroundings of Pompeii to the extensive landscapes of the countryside, which also prove to be inhabited by the figures and events of myth.

Paintings allowed the domestic house a share in the variety of landscapes recreated for real within elite villas. A cubiculum in Pompeii IX.7.16 was decorated by three landscape scenes: a coastal scene showing Perseus’s rescue of Andromeda, a densely populated scene with the Fall of Troy and a mountainous

124. The key account is Dawson 1944. On links with other landscape painting see Peters 1963. Bergmann 1992 and 1999 are thought-provoking accounts to which I am much indebted. On the earlier Odyssey landscapes see Biering 1995.
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scene with the Rape of Hylas. The variety of landscapes here—coast, city, and mountain—echoes that praised by Pliny in the views from his villa, yet here the landscapes are not those of contemporary Italy, but of myth. In the Hylas painting the landscape is remote and mountainous, transporting us away from the town of Pompeii and the cultivated fields which surrounded it. The details are best seen in a watercolor, which agrees closely with the surviving fragments (fig. 15). In the background a sharp crag and dark forest suggest the untouched spaces of nature which in literature are often the haunts of divine beings. The only sign of human activity is a half column and plinth, set in front of a tall rock and beneath a pine-tree, perhaps a simple shrine to rustic deities. In the foreground we see the figure of Hylas, standing in a pool of water and being seized by amorous Nymphs who appear almost as extensions of the natural world, wearing vegetation in their hair. The ominous tone of the crag and the sensuality of the spreading pool suggest both the delights and dangers of the mythological realm, which Hylas wanders into never to return. His appearance in the foreground, surrounded by nymphs, lends a note of haunting eroticism to this still and expectant scene.

In this painting the pool, woods and mountain are all landscape features which are elsewhere imbued with divine associations, suggesting that Hylas’s abduction by the nymphs is the result of his wandering into a divine realm. The painting has much in common with Ovid’s description of the fate of Actaeon whose intrusion into Diana’s valley was punished with death. Both poem and painting depict sensual and ominous landscapes—the limpid pool entices us in while the prickly pine and dense forestry behind hint towards the perils of such an intrusion. The painting and poem seem to express a shared aesthetic around numinous landscapes. Other mythological paintings include similar dark or foreboding landscapes as spaces within which violent events take place, often with rustic shrines which explicitly attest to the deities who reside there. Here I will consider the ensembles in two specific Pompeian houses, the Casa del Frutteto (I.9.5), and Casa del Marinaio (VII.15.2), to look at the effects they created for viewers, drawing them into a fantasy world of mythological event. As with other collections of mythological paintings, no two ensembles of mythological landscapes are exactly the same; through individual choices home-owners created their own mythological landscapes, varying the focus from violence or danger to erotic enticement.

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127. Baldassare 1990–2003: IX, 786–93. The Fall of Troy was removed to Naples, Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, inv. 120176. Another room in the houses contained landscapes showing the myths of Pegasus and Bellerophon, Actaeon and Icarus.


129. For a discussion of scenes of Hylas see Ling 1979.


131. For a discussion of mythological wall paintings see Lorenz 2008.
In the Casa del Marinaio an exedra at the end of a corridor (z’) was decorated in the late third style, though later converted to form part of a bath complex. All four walls of the room had large mythological landscapes in their central aediculae, framed by columns. These fall into contrasting pairs: the destruction of the Niobids and Dirce on the north and east walls, set into wooded or rocky inland landscapes, and the romantic myths of Perseus and Andromeda and Polyphemus and Galatea on the west and south walls, shown in coastal landscapes. The varying landscapes add atmosphere to the events, from the ominous to the erotic. The clearest example of this is in the Niobids painting, which was removed from the wall and is reasonably well-preserved apart from damage to the upper section (fig. 16). The painting is dominated by a large portal with a statue of a stag, presumably a sanctuary of the hunting goddess Diana. Two local personifications sit at its base, beside a blue pool. Behind the shrine is a shadowy forest out of which runs a large black boar. The foreground is depicted in a lighter yellowish-brown and shows a number of figures on horseback. At first we might take this for a hunting scene but closer inspection reveals that the hunters have become the hunted; no longer chasing the boar they are now in disarray, some racing to the left, others to the right, while some have fallen, wounded by the arrows which have fallen from above. These are the Niobids, punished by Diana and Apollo for their mother’s hubris. The gods themselves are lost, but probably appeared at the top of the painting to judge from the remains of a foot at the top right corner.

The setting for this violence is a rustic sanctuary in a woodland setting, identifying the space as the realm of the goddess Diana. The frozen statue of the stag and the calm poses of the personifications suggest a sense of stillness, shattered by the sudden violence turned against the hunters whose world has been turned upside down. Their dogs have abandoned them, preferring to explore the base of the shrine or drink from the pool, while the boar which should be their prey seems instead to pose a threat, bounding out of the forest as if it were the one giving chase. The shadowy depths of this forest also suggest its nature as a place out of which violence could emerge, where humans should tread with care. This dark woodland is not unlike the grove described by Vergil in his account of the harbor on the coast of Libya. There cliffs either side of the inlet “threaten/project” (minantur) while behind them “a black grove threatens with shuddering shadow” (horrentique atrum nemus imminet umbra). Vergil’s word picture of a threatening, ominous landscape shows the potential of landscape to be an active force, carrying unspecified threats. The way that poets such as Ovid and Vergil depict active and threatening landscapes suggests a construction of

133. See Bergmann 1999: n.27 on different accounts of the placements of the panels.
134. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111479.
the natural world as a place of potential violence, realized in art through the visualization of violent events within natural landscapes.

The threat posed in this painting comes both from the landscape and the divine powers which inhabit it, specifically the hunting gods Apollo and Diana, whose presence is indicated by the shrine. In the painting of Dirce, too, the events occur around a central shrine. While this painting is only partially preserved it seems to follow the same composition as one in the Casa di Iulius Polybius (Pompeii IX.13.1–3). The surviving part of the painting, best illustrated in an engraving (fig. 17), shows the figure of Dirce tied to the bull in the bottom right, and the feet of Amphion and Zethus, as they seize her, on the left. The center seems to have been dominated by a rustic sanctuary dedicated to the god Dionysus/Bacchus, as on the Polybius painting. Another room in the same house (x), which looks out onto the sunken garden, also had a mythological landscape on a similar theme. This time the myth was that of Actaeon, who appears at the left peeping over a rock to observe the goddess Diana bathing, and further down, being attacked by his hounds. Dominating the center of the scene was a rustic sanctuary with a woman pouring a libation. The prominence in all of these paintings of shrines underlines the sanctity of the landscapes in which their events take place. Just as literature suggests the numinous powers of natural landscapes, so here too those who dare to oppose the gods through hubris (Niobe and Dirce) or forbidden intrusion into the divine realm (Actaeon) will be punished by the full might of divine wrath.

The other two paintings in room z’ had a different setting and a different tone. The painting of Perseus and Andromeda showed Andromeda tied to the rock at the right while on the left Perseus swoops down to kill the large sea-monster who is threatening her. Here landscape can pose danger, in the form of a monster, but it is one which is averted through human courage. The neighboring painting had a more pastoral, erotic tone; the nymph Galatea floats on the sea, watched by the Cyclops Polyphemus whose flocks graze the nearby shore. Palace buildings appear in the top left, signs of civilization which contrast with the rustic settings of the violent myths, where the only man-made structures are religious shrines. Details of landscape thus set the tone of the myths, from idyllic to violent, but can also act as direct players in the events portrayed.

In Casa del Marinaio the divine nature of landscapes and the threats they could pose are heavily underlined. However, in the Casa del Frutteto landscape acts rather differently, providing a setting for the mythological events and drawing us into the views portrayed through its naturalism while the myths themselves are
told primarily in human terms. The house is named after the garden paintings which decorate two of its rooms, breaking down the boundaries of the walls by illusionistic displays of trees and flowers. In the enclosed space of the triclinium guests encountered a different version of the natural world, looking out onto landscapes filled with the events of myth.\textsuperscript{139} The dark black-ground decorative scheme of this room is broken on each wall by a view onto a bluish-green landscape (fig. 18). The spatial depth of the landscapes contrasts with the flat third-style decorative scheme which surrounds them, drawing the viewer into their illusions of receding space. Yet at the same time the paintings are framed by elaborate aediculæ similar to those used to frame prestigious old master paintings.\textsuperscript{140} The decoration is thus ambivalent about their status, presenting them both as if they were prestigious panel paintings to be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities and as if real landscapes out onto the countryside beyond.\textsuperscript{141} While the naturalism of the landscapes increases their illusionistic pull, the framing also draws attention to their very artificiality.

Closer examination of these landscapes reveals a sequence of dramatic events. On the wall opposite the entrance is a coastal scene. Beside a small temple and a statue of Neptune a number of figures look up into the sky, gesturing, as they spot the falling figure of Icarus flying high above his father Daedalus (fig. 19).\textsuperscript{142} The daily rituals of the group of onlookers have been interrupted by this sudden death. Opposite, the wall is pierced to reveal a bluish landscape with mountains and trees, again featuring a small temple and statue, this time of Pan (fig. 20). A large pale female figure is shown bathing, suddenly disturbed by the sight of a man viewing her from above, Diana and Actaeon. He appears again being attacked by his hounds, half transformed into a deer, punishment for his intrusion upon the goddess’s privacy. The landscapes represented here are less remote than those of the Hylas or Niobids paintings discussed above, featuring temples and statues as well as on-lookers. The landscape provides the setting for the myth, but does not feature as an active player in it. Instead the myths are told in human terms, the victims meeting their downfalls due to human failings of over-confidence and curiosity. The two paintings contain a number of compositional parallels, both featuring architectural structures on the left side and a statue to the right, as well as on-lookers not involved in the narrative. These devices may have encouraged viewers to compare them and draw out the moral lessons, responding with a detached erudite response to the paintings as well as enjoying the view out onto the mythological world.

\textsuperscript{140} E.g., Hortensius, Plin. \textit{H.N.} 35.150.
\textsuperscript{141} For the debate over whether to see the paintings as panels or vistas see Mau 1903. Bergmann (1999: 82) comments “spacious unified landscapes seem intentionally ambiguous, referring both to a painted panel and to a window.”
\textsuperscript{142} On this theme see von Blanckenhagen 1968.
The paintings on the two end walls are badly damaged but also depicted violent mythological events. The far wall shows a group of warriors fighting in city walls, now faded, possibly the attack of the Seven against Thebes. On the wall near the entrance was Dirce, supplicating Amphion and Zethus prior to her punishment tied to a bull. As elsewhere the paintings present a collection of different landscapes—city, mountains, and coast—but also invest these with the characters and events of myth. A guest in this room could enjoy the fantasy of looking out onto a mythological realm, while at the same time using compositional prompts within the paintings to compare and contrast the stories they told.

The precise details of the messages vary between depictions and ensembles. Compositional parallels such as those between the paintings of Actaeon and Icarus here, or of Dirce and the Niobids in the Casa del Marinaio, lead viewers to compare them, pondering similarities and differences. Some figures are directly punished by the gods for their actions, as with Actaeon and the Niobids, while elsewhere they meet their fates at the hands of others (Dirce) or even through their own foolish actions (Icarus). Like the later mythological scenes in fourth-style schemes, such as those in the Casa dei Vettii, Pompeii IV.15.1, such paintings could act as a spur for erudite conversation around the dinner-table, or for moralizing warnings. In some paintings, however, the greater emphasis on the landscapes in which these events take place, whose sanctity is underlined by the presence of rustic shrines, also adds a different resonance to the retellings. Landscape itself here appears as an agent of destruction, its jagged rocks, dark forests, and deep pools evoking powers which cannot be seen or controlled.

These mythological landscapes can be seen as both enticing and threatening. Through their placement as fictional views out of the house the paintings are implicitly brought into the house-owner’s own experience, evoking the types of mythologized landscapes which were recreated within elite villas and giving the house-owner a share in the villa experience. They encourage an imaginative immersion in the mythological realm and make this possible within a safe, domestic setting. However, their depiction of landscape as a place of powerful forces should be also seen against the ongoing rhetoric of concern about the extent to which natural landscapes were taken over by human control. The fact that many of these violent events occur as a result of hubris, when humans forgot their proper place in respect of the gods, undermines the illusion of safety, reminding viewers that intrusion into a sacred realm might have severe consequences. Against a background of moralizing attacks on villa building and the culture of theatricality which blurred the lines between spectacle and spectator, these scenes could act as warnings, or threats, of the potential punishment for the artistic hubris which had created them. The effect of this is a secret thrill, a sort of Schadenfreude of what

144. On the paintings in the Casa dei Vettii see Wirth 1983.
might happen if Roman control of the landscape and artistic creation were not as firm as it was believed to be.

Most of the mythological landscapes suggest entrance into a remote mythological world where the powers of landscape and the gods hold sway. In some of the later paintings, however, the alienness of this mythological world is undercut by the intrusion of features explicitly linking the paintings to contemporary villa landscapes. A painting of the death of Actaeon in the Casa di Epidius Sabinus, Pompeii IX.1.22/29, features a colonnade and tower in the background which resemble elements of villa architecture. The intrusion of real villa landscapes in the mythological world also appears in two paintings of Polyphemus and Galatea. A painting from the Casa dei Capitelli Colorati, Pompeii VII.4.31/51, dated after the AD 62 earthquake, shows their pastoral courtship taking place on a rocky seashore with a long curved colonnade lining the bay behind them, a detail which evokes the villa-lined shores of the Bay of Naples as they appeared in the mid-first century AD.

In another panel, the villa setting was extended to such an extent that little remained of an unnamed wilderness (fig. 21). Here we see a number of different architectural structures along with a vineyard in the background. The mythological figures of Polyphemus and Galatea are set into a scene reminiscent of a contemporary villa. While the earlier paintings transported the viewer away from Pompeii into the spaces of ancient myth, these paintings suggest the reverse, the parachuting of mythical figures and events directly into very landscapes of Campania. This bringing of myth into present reality coincides with a similar trend in silver age Latin, shown in Statius’s description of his patron’s Sorrentine villa where Hercules and Poseidon watch over the coast for Pollius Felix, and Galatea bathes in the sea. In these scenes the powers of the landscape are muted by its identification with the tamed coast of Campania; the illusion is of a world of safety, where myth is brought subject to human control.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In Roman houses and villas paintings and sculpture depicted violent mythological events taking place within landscape settings. They did not just visualize the events of Greek mythology, but located them within the very environs of the house or villa by depicting the mythological realm as the view out of the window in Pompeian houses or, even more tangibly, by transforming villa gardens into the spaces of ancient myth. My aim here has been to show how these visual-

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146. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 8886. Peters 1963: 133–34, fig. 113; compare Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9610; Peters 1963: 165, fig. 158.
147. Lost panel from Pompeii, VII.4.48 (Casa della Caccia Antica) garden room 13.
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izations of ancient myth used landscape to exert a powerful imaginative effect on the ancient viewer. The landscape setting of the myths helped to draw in the viewer both imaginatively and physically. It also highlighted the inherent tension between the desire to incorporate and recreate sacred natural landscapes within the domestic sphere and the belief that natural landscapes were the very places where the gods could manifest themselves to humans, overriding the limits of human control.

The decoration of villas and homes with scenes of violent mythological landscapes also worked within an atmosphere of mythological play-acting in which guests were used to taking on the roles of various mythological characters, or to watching mythological masques. This identification with the figures of myth could have led to an unsettling effect, provoking a frisson of fear as viewers moved between detached voyeurism and the awareness of their own role as potential victims. The display of sculptures in landscape settings enhanced their naturalistic effect, adding an element of surprise as viewers came upon the sculptures at random. Often the impression that a villa garden is the realm of the gods was achieved by the display of a variety of mythological and divine figures, some evoking the sensuality of the divine thiasos while others suggested the cultural pursuits associated with Apollo and the Muses.

When violent narratives were also depicted this general divine aura was crystallized into a depiction of the powers of the gods to punish or save. While it may simply be due to the accidents of discovery, it is striking that none of our sculptural groups of Niobids appear to have included the avenging gods, Apollo and Diana, though they did appear in a different guise elsewhere in the Horti Sallustiani.149 This displacement heightens the unsettling effect, leading the viewer to cast around anxiously for the source of the carnage before him, perhaps worrying that he too may become a victim. Many of the images present their characters frozen in the moment before their death will occur, adding tension to the viewer’s reception of the scene. They offered a refined frisson of fear at what one could expect to encounter within these landscapes.

This sense of danger would be particularly acute for the viewers of mythological sculptural groups, wandering amid the very evidence of divine destruction. In the paintings, the experience is staged at one remove: rather than walking through these landscapes we merely see them as if through a window. The illusion is two-fold. On the one hand we might seem to be looking out onto a villa landscape, populated by the sorts of figures recreated in sculptural groups. This is especially the case in some of the later paintings where structures seem to echo those of elite

149. Apollo and Diana were shown striding through the Villa of the Quintilii, where a statue of Niobe was also found. Note also that a statue of Apollo Citharoedus was found in a villa at Marino, at a distance from a depiction of the hanging Marsyas. See Neudecker 1988: 169, nos. 25.6, 25.8, and 195 nos. 39.52–53. Artemis/Diana often appears elsewhere in the guise of a huntress. Roccoss 2002 explores the meanings of Apollo Citharoedus in villa settings.
villas or when some figures are modeled on statuary forms. Here the paintings allow the modest house a share in the amenities of even the most lavish villa. Yet in many cases the paintings actually allow the house owner to trump the villa, by providing a view out directly onto the very characters, spaces, and events of the mythological realm, not merely their recreation in marble.

While the paintings invite us to suspend our disbelief, to understand these views as true vistas onto an exterior landscape populated with episodes from myth, they also simultaneously draw our attention to their artificiality. Where the paintings are framed by third-style forms, the flatness of the surrounding wall undermines the naturalism of these painted views at the same time as it enhances their ability to pull us outwards. The use in some landscapes of continuous narration, where events which took place at different chronological moments are represented within a continuous spatial frame, also breaks down the naturalistic lure of the painting, violating the natural laws of time and space. Thus the images simultaneously draw us into their fiction and assert that very fictionality. They thematize the blurring of art and nature, leading us to question where reality lies. When they show episodes which are proof of the enduring powers of natural forces and landscapes whose numinous nature reveals itself in violence, they also suggest what is really at stake in Roman recreations of the natural world, and the worrying prospect that nature might fight back.

The evidence I have discussed here ranges in date from the late first century BC through the first two centuries AD. While the Sperlonga sculptures focus on the adventures of Odysseus, the landscape paintings which emerge at the end of the first century BC combine interest in erotic pastoral scenes such as Polyphemus’s courtship of Galatea with the portrayal of divine punishment for acts of hubris. Scenes of the deaths of Actaeon, Icarus, and Dirce can be seen as moral warnings, linking in with the moralizing use of myth in Augustus’s public architecture. The recreations of the deaths of the Niobids which appear in imperial horti can also be read as a moral warning, perhaps reminding guests of the powers of the emperor whose status and abilities were often equated to those of the gods.

Yet the prominence of landscape in these recreations also enhances the imaginative effect, encouraging viewers to see these mythological landscapes as the real landscapes of the villa or domus. Latin literature from Vergil through Ovid to Seneca suggests the sacredness of landscape, the powers which could inhabit caves, groves or pools and the dangers of incursion into these divine realms. Sculpted and painted recreations of violent landscapes acted as proof of the enduring powers of nature and the numinous characters which populated myth.

150. The figure of Actaeon in the Casa del Frutteto painting is very close to a surviving statue in the British Museum Sc. 1568; found with a pendant in a villa at Lanuvium (Neudecker 1988: 162–63, nos. 21.5, 21.19).


152. C.f. von den Hoff 2004 for an analysis of violent images in the Severan period, though the evidence discussed here suggests that this taste had already developed in the earlier period.
of these dangers and served as warnings against human manipulations of the landscape in which they were themselves implicated.

The delight in violence and voyeurism in these portrayals can also be seen echoed in literature, from the visuality of Ovid’s descriptions of rape and transformation to the gruesome violence of much Flavian literature, as well as in public spectacle culture and the use of mythological re-enactments as a form of execution. While this might have encouraged a detached viewing of these scenes of violence, the longstanding blurring of myth and reality which was a feature of the villa lifestyle also encouraged viewers to see themselves as implicated in the dangers of this divine realm. The display of mythological episodes within domestic landscapes helped to facilitate entrance into an imaginary world which flirted with the dangers and delights of the natural realm and dwelt, self-referentially, on the dangers of intruding into the domain of the gods. Landscape, both natural and artificial, played a crucial role in these recreations and must be factored back into our understanding of the original effects of Roman domestic ensembles.

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Fig. 1: Reconstruction of the sculptural decoration of the cave at Sperlonga; courtesy of the Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici del Lazio, provided by M. Squire.
Fig. 2: Statue of Andromeda from Sperlonga. Photo: Felbermeyer, DAI Rome 1936.1299.
Fig. 3: Map of the Horti Sallustiani, after Lanciani 1990: pls. 3 & 10, combined and annotated. Courtesy of Edizioni Quasar. 1: Vestibule, 2: findspot of Paedagogus statue, 3: findspot of Rome Niobid; 4: probable display spot of Artemis and Iphigenia group.

Fig. 4: View of the Hadrianic vestibule in the Horti Sallustiani. Photo: author.
Fig. 5: View of the valley in the Gardens of Sallust: Rossini 1828/9: pl. 10. Photo: © The British Library Board. All rights reserved (Shelfmark 745f4).
Fig. 6: Statue group of Artemis and Iphigenia, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen IN 481-82a. Photo: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.
Fig. 7: Paedagogus to the Niobids, Rome Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 380382. Photo: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.
Fig. 8: Dying female Niobid, Rome Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 72274. Photo: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

Fig. 9: Dying male Niobid, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen cat. 399, IN 472. Photo: Ole Haupt, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.
Fig. 10: Running female Niobid, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen cat. 398, IN 520. Photo: Ole Haupt, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.
Fig. 11: Plan of the Horti Lamiani, extract from Häuber 1990: map 1, slightly modified. © Römische-Germanisches Museum Köln.
Fig. 12: Niobe and daughter, Florence Uffizi inv. 294. Photo: Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino.
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Fig. 14: Kneeling Niobid, Florence Uffizi inv. 289. Photo: Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino.
Fig. 15: Watercolor of a mythological landscape painting showing the Rape of Hylas, from Pompeii IX.3.16. Photo: Anger, DAI Rome 2001.94.
Fig. 16: Mythological landscape painting showing the deaths of the Niobids from Pompeii VII.15.2. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111479. Photo: Fotolabor, DAI Rome 1972.3076.
Fig. 17: Engraving of a mythological landscape painting showing the punishment of Dirce from Pompeii VII.15.2. Photo: la Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, 801.

Fig. 18: View of the triclinium, Pompeii I.9.5. Photo: Koppermann, DAI Rome 1964.2249.
Fig. 19: Mythological landscape showing the Fall of Icarus, Pompeii I.9.5. Photo: la Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei, A2007.
Fig. 20: Mythological landscape showing the myth of Actaeon, Pompeii I.9.5. Photo: Koppermann, DAI Rome 1964.2251.