

The Roman house was a segregated space constructed on an axis of increasing privacy. The fauces or entryway lead into the atrium, a waiting room of sorts for the clients of the head of the household. From here the clients traveled down the axis into the tablinum where the Dominus, the head of the household, would sit and conduct business. This area, made up of the fauces, atrium, and tablinum, was dedicated to work and was a more public space. Located behind it on the axis was a much more private space reserved for the family and their close friends. Here one would often find a garden space surrounded by rooms for dining and sleeping.

It is generally assumed that the inclusion of a garden space in the plan of a Roman house was an attempt by the homeowner to create a space of peace and relaxation. This may be true in part. However, there is an intriguing connection in classical myth between the landscape and horrific events. In his Metamorphosis Ovid describes scenes of rape and tragedy, many of which take place in an outdoor setting. Similarly, there was a pervading idea in antiquity that the wild landscape needed to be tamed. Nature and the natural landscape were beautiful but they could also be dangerous, and therefore were anxiety producing. In the Roman house they represented a liminal or marginal space which produced ambiguity in addition to anxiety.

In my thesis I will attempt to prove that the anxiety surrounding the natural landscape can be traced through ancient poetry, myth, Greek art and finally through the Roman House itself. In bringing nature indoors, the Roman homeowner was acutely aware of the anxiety this space could create in the home. This anxiety is juxtaposed with a desire to tame the wild character of nature through geometric planting, statuary, and waterworks in the garden.

A prime example of this tension between the danger of nature and the desire to tame it is the House of Octavius Quartio at Pompeii. In order to prove that the Roman homeowner was not only aware of the anxiety of the garden space but also desired to convey that anxiety through the decoration of the house, my thesis will consider the frescoes and statuary which surround the garden space and mark the transition from the house/business space to the garden/leisure space. This transitional space at the House of Octavius Quartio is decorated with twelve frescoes. Every one of these frescoes references an unsettling mythological event that took place in the wilderness or natural landscape. Thus the homeowner has surrounded his supposedly peaceful garden space with images which remind the viewer of the dangers of the outdoors. However, the garden space itself is, in part, a testament to the desire of Romans to domesticate nature and to create a space of organization. The garden of the House of Octavius Quartio is best known for its system of water channels which create a sense of organization and man-made, taming influence. In opposition, this desire to tame the natural world in these garden spaces is also coupled with a pointed attempt to cause anxiety through the simple

inclusion of nature in the home. Thus there is a tension created which makes the garden space much more complicated symbolically than is often suggested.

My thesis will analyze these frescoes in light of the anxiety concerning nature which has already been suggested in myth and Greek art. I hope this will challenge assumptions about the purpose of the garden space in the Roman House and call into question the reading of the space as one of purely rest and relaxation.