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Boston University

THE VANISHING GARDENS OF PRIAPUS

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The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.

T. S. Eliot *The Waste Land*¹

IN POEM 33 OF THE *CARMINA PRIAPEA*, Priapus is masturbating. With affected awkwardness, the garden god—symbol of both natural fertility and hyperphallic male sexuality—pleads that he has stooped to this level only as a result of straitened circumstances, though he admits the shameful of being caught making love to his hand.² He has come upon dark days. Whereas, as he says, olden day Priapi (*antiqui ... Priapi*) had no shortage of Naiads and Dryads with whom to satisfy their lust, nowadays there is nothing (*nunc adeo nihil est*). In fact, Priapus' lust is so insatiable that he can only surmise that “all the nymphs have passed away” (*ut nymphas omnis interiisse putem*). O'Connor notes how ridiculous Priapus' apologizing seems in this context—the god is synonymous with shamelessness, and, more usually, “after the example

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¹ Lines 175–179, Eliot 2001:43–44.

² *Priap.* 33.5–6: “It’s shameful to do it, to be sure, but if I’m not to explode with lust / I should set my sickle down and let my hand become my girlfriend” (*turpe quidem factu, sed ne tentigine rumpar | falce mihi posita fiet amica manus*). I use the text of Bianchini 2001.

of the ill-bred ithyphallic satyrs, Priapus acts ‘according to his nature’” (1989:129). But there is also a kind of absurd pathos in Priapus’ realization of the loss of the idealized pastoral landscape of which he was once a part. The garden god whom Theocritus once imagined chasing after Daphnis, founder and constant muse of the pastoral genre (and son of a nymph), is now stranded in the urbanized, infertile landscape of the *Carmina Priapea*, a world of prostitutes, pederasts and profiteers—but of very few gardens. Like the sad nut tree in the pseudo-Ovidian *Nux*, which laments its loss of fruitfulness, having grown too close to a busy road, Priapus finds himself caught at an impasse between city and country, longing for the Golden Age fertility of both the idealized countryside and his own literary past.

Aside from the prophetic echo of *The Waste Land*, Priapus’ suspicion that the nymphs have taken leave of his world provides a key programmatic cue for the *Carmina Priapea*. The poems of the *Priapea*³ deliberately reverse agricultural and pastoral motifs present in the earlier Greek and Roman priapic tradition. In the *Carmina Priapea*, Priapus is described as part of a semi-urban environment characterized by vegetative infertility and populated by stock characters from the city. Together, through these inverted allusions to the earlier tradition, the poems create a communal narrative tracing the history of the genre. The *priapeum*⁴ has moved from the realms of pastoral and dedicatory epigram

³ I do not rehearse here the major incidents in the scholarly controversy over authorship and date of the poem collection. Suffice to say that there are two major schools: Buchheit 1962 influentially argued for a single author and a date after Martial; he finds support with Kloss 1998. O’Connor 1984, Richlin 1992:141–143, and Tränkle 1998 argue for the poems’ being an anthology of different writers’ work, collected in the early Empire (Richlin, Tränkle) or before the death of Martial (O’Connor). Goldberg 1992:35–36 is a convenient summary of previous views. I have not pursued the matter here, since the arguments presented in this article do not hinge on the authorship issue. Although it would, as always, be helpful to know a more specific date, the social phenomena to which I suggest the poems are a reaction can be traced from the late Republic throughout the first century AD, certainly the time frame within which the poems were written.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I define *priapea*, with Parker, as “poems written about the phallic god Priapus, or addressed to him, or spoken by him, or invoking him” (1988:1). I have excluded from consideration literary accounts of Priapus’ exploits that fall within larger texts of other genres, such as Ovid’s *Fasti* and Petronius’ *Satyricon*. My argument concerns not Priapus himself as a literary character, but rather the codes governing that tradition of poems written specifically about him.

to the more urbane genres of invective and satire, and the vanishing of Priapus' gardens becomes an index for this development. Moreover, although this generic narrative tells a story about literary history, it reflects a parallel narrative propounded by moralists of the first century AD, which also fixes on the semantic capacities of the "garden." To these writers—Pliny the Elder chief amongst them—the popularity of decorative urban *horti* in the Empire represented a violation of moral and societal rectitude in their extravagant non-productivity and focus on leisure. The persistent connections drawn in the *Carmina Priapea* between gardens and sex, play, infertility and urbanity represent the galling, farcical underside of this moralizing discourse. In this way, the *Carmina Priapea* participate in the wider project of ascribing social meaning to the natural world in an urbanized early Imperial Rome.

When Priapus first appears as a literary character, he comes with all the trappings of the pastoral genre. Priapus is programmatically connected with pastoral through his association with Daphnis, the mythic inventor of pastoral song. Indeed, in Theocritus' first *Idyll*, Priapus is metapoetically imagined as a part of the setting of pastoral song: at lines 19–23, the goatherd invites Thyrsis, who has "come to mastery in pastoral song," to sing of Daphnis, "facing Priapus and the springs, where there is that shepherds' seat and the oaks." In the song itself, Priapus is one of the divinities who appears to the ailing, wandering Daphnis, and he is represented as having insight into the object of Daphnis' lovesickness. In the third epigram ascribed to Theocritus,⁵ Priapus is himself one of Daphnis' amorous pursuers. It is Theocritus' fourth epigram, though, in which we see Priapus most elaborately written into a pastoral landscape. In this poem, a goatherd is instructed to ask Priapus to grant him freedom from his love for Daphnis. Priapus is located in a "sacred precinct" (σακός δ' εὐίερος, line 5) amidst an elaborate *locus amoenus*, complete with springs, bays, myrtles, cypress, vines, "springtime blackbirds," and "melodious night-ingles."

⁵ Gow argues that Theocritus' authorship of the series 1–22 "cannot be convincingly refuted" (1952:527); Rossi 2001 suggests that the third and fourth epigrams are the work of Theocritean imitators, albeit ones intimately familiar with Theocritus' corpus and style.

In direct contrast to this pastoral idealization is the tradition of minatory Priapic epigrams, which also begin in the third century BC. These epigrams are also set in the countryside, but embody a different vision of the country. This tradition begins with Leonidas of Tarentum and has its ideological origins in that writer's interest in representing more "realistically"⁶ the hard work and solitary existence of individuals of the lower classes. As Gutzwiller puts it, "Leonidas represented himself as an active participant in the poverty-stricken existence of the lower classes and as an advocate for the lived philosophy of the poor" (1998:114). So, although the humorous threat of Priapus is the central poetic feature of Leonidas' minatory Priapus epigrams (*Anth. Plan.* 236 and 261), these poems also incidentally embody the humble existence of the farmer, with its emphasis on thrift, toil, and self-sufficiency. In *Anth. Plan.* 236, a prospective thief is incredulous that Priapus' trademark punishment is offered for the sake of a few vegetables, and the incredulity of the stranger is preserved as the essential element of the epigram in later imitations.⁷ But central to Leonidas' ideological concerns are the incidental details of the threat. Priapus is protecting "greens," suggesting the self-sufficiency of the poor farmer, and there aren't even very many of them (ὀλίγων λαχάνων, line 4), suggesting the extreme parsimony of the farmer's lifestyle. Moreover, Priapus is described as "watchful" (ἀγρυπνοῦντα), and in *Anth. Plan.* 261 Leonidas describes him as "trusty" (πιστόν): Priapus seems less the lusty libertine than faithful guard-dog (a rustic motif in its own right).⁸

The Theocritean and Leonidean versions of the priapic poem differ not merely in their descriptions of Priapus, but, crucially, in their descriptions of nature. The picturesque, "pastoral" association between

⁶ As many have pointed out, Leonidas' poems employ the oddest of reality effects, since their elaborate phraseology is deliberately juxtaposed with the "humble" subject matter—a "typically Hellenistic literary endeavor," as Gutzwiller 1998:90 observes. The difference between Theocritus' and Leonidas' epigrams has been described by Rossi 2001:29–64 as between "bucolic" and "rural" epigram; see also Stanzel 2007 for an overview of both Theocritus' and Leonidas' epigrams as "bucolic epigrams."

⁷ Cf. *Anth. Plan.* 237 [Tymnes]; *Priap.* 24—on which more later.

⁸ Cf. Columella's praise of rural guard-dogs: "What more faithful companion can be found? What guard more incorruptible? What night-watchman more vigilant?" (*quis fidelior comes? quis custos incorruptior? quis excubitor inveniri potest vigilantior?*, 7.12.1).

Priapus and verdant greenery—and particularly the springtime landscape—reappears in the somewhat surprising tradition of poems featuring Priapus as a marine god. In a series of epigrams stretching from the third century BC to the sixth century AD (but almost identical in content),⁹ Priapus announces to sailors that the season for sailing has arrived, an announcement always accompanied by a stock description of springtime fertility—the meadows blooming, the roses flowering, the swallows building their nests, and so on. Lush pastoral catalogues of fruits, plants and wine also typically feature in the tradition of dedicatory epigrams to Priapus (*Anth. Pal.* 6.22, 102, 232). But here, Leonidas’ “rural” worldview also has its inheritors: so, in *Anth. Pal.* 6.21, for example, a retiring farmer dedicates the farming equipment with which he worked his vegetable garden. Even Priapus himself is addressed here as a “gardener” (κηπουρός, line 9), and the whole is as much an ode to the thrift and hard work of the farmer as it is to Priapus’ position as a god of fertility.

Writing about Priapus is, then, from the beginning, a way of writing about nature and the countryside. Descriptions of plants and landscape, be they the lush scenes of fertility of the Theocritean tradition or the thrifty garden scenes of Leonidas’ tradition, assume a very prominent place in many of the Greek priapic poems, and may be considered almost a generic prerogative of their own. But, more than this, the choice of which tradition to follow carries with it a set of ideological allegiances relating to the countryside and its social and poetic meaning.¹⁰ Poets writing in the tradition choose between the idealized pastoral vision of Theocritus or the designedly “realistic” agricultural vision of Leonidas as the genre’s *modello codice*, “code model” (to use Conte’s term).¹¹ The contrast between the two ensures that the question of what values are

⁹ *Anth. Pal.* 10.1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15, 16.

¹⁰ Of course, as always, the accidents of transmission may be affecting our picture here. It is hard to assess from this distance the contributions of other Hellenistic poets such as Euphronius, who reportedly composed an entire book of *priapea* (Herter 1932:18), or Hedyllus, whose one surviving *priapeum* and other epigrams suggest the possibility of a more urbane or satirical version of Priapus (see Gutzwiller 1998:170–182). But if (as always) the full intertextual matrix is lost to us, the pervasive influence of Theocritus and Leonidas in the later tradition is, at least, clear.

¹¹ Conte 1986:31; Hinds 1998:41–42.

attached to the natural world remains at the foreground of the *priapeum*. Ultimately, although these poems center upon Priapus' *mentula* as the dominating presence in the gardens of Priapus, it is the gardens themselves in which shifts in the tradition are registered.

The three *Priapea* preserved in the Vergilian Appendix (84–86 Bücheler) represent a significant step in the development of the Greco-Roman priapic genre: they continue the overarching metapoetic concern of the priapic tradition with poetic representations of the countryside, but also exploit the parodic potential of self-consciously examining those representations. The most remarkable aspect of these poems is the way in which they react to each other, and specifically the way in which the second poem thoroughly deconstructs and demystifies the romantic image of the countryside in the third. Expanding upon the thematic focus of the earlier Priapic tradition, the third Pseudo-Vergilian *priapeum* is taken up almost entirely by a lengthy, romantic evocation of rural piety and the pleasures of the countryside.¹² Priapus here guards a little thatched villa (*villula*, line 1), while he himself has a “little shrine” (*sacellum*, line 8). Despite the poverty of its occupants, the “masters of the meager hut” (*domini ... pauperis tuguri*, lines 5–6) piously observe Priapus' rites. Lines 7–16 are an elaborate description of those rites, incorporating a lush catalogue of fertile vegetation familiar from Greek epigrams describing offerings to Priapus.¹³ We see here a melding of Leonidas' and Theocritus' traditions: this *priapeum* has as its characters poor, self-sufficient farmers, but the world they inhabit is an idealized vision of a boundlessly fertile earth. The contradiction finds symbolic expression in line 9: the young, pious son of the farmer is “constantly bearing copious gifts in his small hand” (*parva manu ferens semper munera larga*). This *priapeum* is a vision of aesthetic and moral beauty. Frankly, what is missing is *mentula*. Priapus' otherwise ubiquitous phallic threats are completely elided here in favor of rural idealization, both figuratively and literally: at the end of the poem, when

¹² Cf. here Holzberg's interesting suggestion (2004:37–38) that the poet of these *Priapea* deliberately evokes the “countrified” world of Vergil's *Eclagues* and *Georgics* in order to create a credible “debut” for a young Vergil still living at home on his father's estate.

¹³ Cf. e.g. *Anth. Pal.* 6.22, 102, 232.

Priapus addresses boys contemplating “ill-minded thefts” (*malas rapinas*, line 19), his usual hyperphallic threat of rape is replaced by the (perhaps humorously?) meek suggestion that the boys try next door instead.

This idealized vision is dismantled in the second poem of the Pseudo-Vergilian *Priapea*. Where the third poem begins with a picturesque ekphrasis of the little villa, here Priapus fixes attention at the beginning firmly on himself, announcing his appearance with all the hubris (and halting syntax) of New Comic lowlife: “I’m the one—me! made with rustic art!—yes I, dried-up poplar wood—look!—I protect ...”¹⁴ ... what? This Priapus also protects a poor man’s house, but something is awry. His description of their poverty seems over-exaggerated and farcical: “[I protect] this really little block of land which you saw just now on the left, and this little villa and this little garden of my poor master.”¹⁵ *Agellulus, villula, hortulus*: the three diminutives in quick succession seem ridiculous in their over-determined littleness, and although *agellus* can have a sentimental ring to it in idealized descriptions of rustic life,¹⁶ the double diminutive *agellulus* is almost certainly a coinage here for comic effect.¹⁷ In lines 6–15, Priapus provides a picture of the produce of the farm he protects—in complete fulfillment of the generic demand for descriptions of vegetative fertility—but his claims for the landscape of the *agellulus* become more and more extravagant, and his boasts become more and more fanciful. He starts by describing the year-round dedications of garlands, wheat, vines and olives (the fourfold anaphora of *mihi* in lines 6–9 continues Priapus’ hubristic emphasis on himself). But then we hear about the goat and the lamb, which Priapus claims fantastically have come from “my pastures” (*meis ... pascuis*, 10) and “my sheep-pens” (*meis ... ovilibus*, 12), which bear their milk to the city and send back a “right hand laden with cash”

¹⁴ [Verg.] *Priap.* 2:1–2, 5: *Ego haec, ego arte fabricata rustica, | ego arida, o viator, ecce populus | ... tuor.*

¹⁵ Lines 3–4: *agellulum hunc sinistra et ante quem vides, | erique villulam, hortulumque pauperis.*

¹⁶ So, see Verg. *Catal.* 8.1, of which this might even be a parody: *Villula, quae Sironis eras, et pauper agelle.* (For a different theory as to the relationship between the two poems, see Holzberg 2004:36–38.) Cf. also Lucr. 5.1367, Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.71, Ov. *Fast.* 5.499.

¹⁷ This is the first datable attestation. The instance at *CIL* 10.6720 cannot be dated. The word becomes more frequent in late antique authors.

(*gravem domum remittit aere dexteram*, 13).¹⁸ Picturesque images of the countryside aside, Priapus' story is now openly contradictory: surely they are not *his* pastures and sheep-pens if he has a master (*erus pauper*, line 4), and if he has sheep-pens and pastures at all, his master's land-holdings hardly fit within the exaggerated humbleness of *agellulus*, *villula*, *hortulus*.

Finally, having ascended at the height of his reverie from the halting comic syntax of the opening of the poem to high-flown epic diction, Priapus warns the passing traveler that he should revere "this god" (that is, himself), because a "tender calf" from the property "pours out her blood while her mother moans before the temples of the gods."¹⁹ That, and his *mentula*, which Priapus says stands savage and prepared.²⁰ But just as the traveler starts to say something, the *vilicus* arrives:

"velim pol" inquis. at pol ecce vilicus
venit, valente cui revulsa bracchio
fit ista mentula apta clava dexteræ.

[Verg.] *Priap.* 2:19–21

You say "by God, I'd like to—" But look! By God, the bailiff is coming! He breaks off that cock of mine with his strong arm, and it becomes a truncheon fitted to his right hand.

This hubristic and pompous Priapus is made to look ridiculous at the end of the poem, as will become a common motif in the *Carmina Priapea*.²¹ Priapus has his fanciful and self-flattering reveries interrupted,²²

¹⁸ The cash seems to suggest that Priapus is over-exaggerating the poverty of the farm, though he may also be humorously echoing the persona of the humble farmer of the *Moretum*, who is described as selling his best produce to the city and "returning home laden with cash" (*gravis aere redibat*, line 80). Both lines derive from Verg. *Ecl.* 1.35. For further parallels, see Kenney 1984:41.

¹⁹ Lines 14–15: *teneraque matre mugiente vaccula | deum profundit ante templa sanguinem*.

²⁰ Line 18: *parata namque trux stat ecce mentula*.

²¹ See on this Holzberg 2005; Uden 2007:9, 21–22.

²² The aposiopesis *velim pol* adds immeasurably to the sense of a flight of fancy being abruptly cut off by an interruption from the real world. The effect is not dissimilar to Catullus' abrupt arrest of his mounting reverie in the closing line of *Catullus* 8; just another, then, of the many Catullan connections in this *priapeum* (cf. Salvatore 1963:161–166).

and his threat of rape is rendered impossible through the loss of his famed *mentula*. Moreover, the contrast between Priapus and the strong-armed *vilicus* (who presumably now does Priapus' job for him and chases away the curious traveler with his club) exposes Priapus' inadequacies: he is wooden and immobile. But the appearance of the *vilicus* breaks off Priapus' fanciful boasting in another way. A bailiff (*vilicus*), the chief-of-staff on a land-owner's estate, simply does not belong in any of the poetic landscapes into which Priapus fancifully inserts himself. The *vilicus*, a position much discussed by Roman writers because of its centrality to the efficient running of rural properties, is part of the real life economics of estate management: he has no place either in picturesque evocations of humble rural life or in pastoral landscapes of idealized superabundance.²³ Indeed, guardianship of a master's property from theft was an important part of a *vilicus*' responsibilities²⁴: the poet here has Priapus, the poetic garden guardian, ousted by his real-life equivalent. The abrupt intrusion of this figure from the "real" agricultural world ultimately exposes both the rustic and the pastoral visions of the countryside at the heart of the *priapeum* as fantasies, poetic mystifications of agriculture, mere mythmaking for an elite audience. If their haphazard combination in the poem was humorous for its obvious inconsistency, it was only a parodic over-exaggeration of a combination already present in the third Pseudo-Vergilian *priapeum*, and, indeed, in the previous priapic tradition in general.

Priapus is placed even closer to the realities of urban life in the best known of the Latin *priapea*, Horace's *Satires* 1.8. The poem stretches the boundaries of the form: it is much longer than other surviving *priapea* and is largely concerned with a narrative account of Priapus' encounter

²³ The sense of intrusion into a poetic landscape is buttressed by the fact that *vilicus* is itself an unpoetic word, appearing in Classical Latin poetry only in the *Epistles* of Horace and the fables of Phaedrus. It may also be significant to consider the opposition of *vilicus* to *cultor agelli* ("worker of a small field") in the opening couplet of *CIL* 5.2803 = *CLE* 861 [Tibullus?], although *vilicus* is here used in its more general sense of "overseer" rather than in its specific agricultural sense. In this poem, Perspectus (or perhaps, more likely, Perpetuus: Dahlmann 1988:437–438), a former city-dweller, now rural farmer, dedicates a temple to Priapus: *Vilicus aerari quondam, nunc cultor agelli, | haec tibi Perspectus templa, Priape, dico.*

²⁴ See Varro *Rust.* 1.13.2.

with witches in his garden. True to generic tradition, though, the nature of the garden that Priapus is guarding is crucial both to the outlook and scenario of the poem as a whole, and as an index of how the priapic poet (here, Horace) has developed the poetic tradition. Here, for the first time, Priapus is located in a garden of topographical specificity and political significance. Priapus in Horace's poem is on the Esquiline—previously the site of, amongst other things, a plebeian graveyard, but now the site of Maecenas' luxury pleasure gardens. Horace makes Priapus the witness and commentator on this dynamic transformation of urban space. What was "previously" (*prius*, 8) a graveyard is "now" (*nunc*, 14) a habitable and salubrious garden. The process is doubled in Priapus himself, who was "once" (*olim*, 1) useless wood but, having been crafted into his present form by his maker, "from that point on" (*inde*, 3) has been a god. This emphasis on transformation in the poem may be interpreted self-consciously to reflect Horace's new use of the priapic form: when Priapus describes his setting as "new gardens" (*novis ... in hortis*, 7), the newness may reside not only in these physical changes but also in the generic changes wrought in the poem.

The topographical changes to which Priapus refers in Horace, *Satires* 1.8, also obliquely allude to changes in the ideological significance of gardens, a theme which will become more explicit in the *Carmina Priapea*. As Lowell Edmunds examines in a recent article, descriptions of the Esquiline and the surrounding area before Maecenas' renovation make mention of small gardens (*hortuli*) as well as tombs, and Edmunds sets out the evidence for the possible existence of tomb-gardens and market-gardens on the site.²⁵ All of these would have been suitable locations for Priapus, either in his customary generic position as the guardian of vegetable or flower gardens or in his epigraphically attested position as the guardian of tombs. But Priapus is now, for the first time in his generic career, located in elite pleasure gardens. In fact, it is precisely these gardens, together with the gardens of Lucullus and Sallust, which set a trend for luxurious gardens in urban or semi-urban parts of Rome in the late Republic and into the early Empire.²⁶ Unlike

²⁵ Edmunds 2009, citing Cic. *Clu.* 37, Livy 26.10.5–6.

²⁶ So, Wallace-Hadrill 1998 (see especially at 4 for Maecenas, Lucullus, and Sallust

earlier haunts of Priapus, here the rustic god finds himself not in gardens noted for their verdant greenery or agricultural produce, but in pleasure gardens noted rather for their sunny aspect and pleasant places to walk.²⁷ Priapus himself seems to be aware of the ill fit at lines 17–20, where he says that he is not troubled by thieves or wild animals (typical garden pests), so much as by the witches—here associated with the city²⁸—who come to the gardens to dig up herbs and bones. The sense of incongruity between Priapus and his luxury surroundings is a signal of the transformation of this urban space. But, when we recall Priapus' garden surroundings earlier in the tradition, it also becomes a signal of the distance between the earlier, humble garden ideal (as in, for example, Leonidas' Priapus poems) and the luxury pleasure gardens of contemporary Rome.

This sense of incongruity between Priapus and his new, more urbanized surroundings is an integral part of the *Carmina Priapea*. This juxtaposition is, first, evident in the frequent collocation of the figure of Priapus with typical figures from Roman estates. The appearance of the *vilicus* was part of the surprise ending of the second Pseudo-Vergilian *priapeum*, but it becomes a kind of running motif in the *Carmina Priapea*, which are, by contrast, shot through with the language of elite land ownership. The simple, rustic figure of Priapus (as he is still characterized in the poems) sits, with deliberate and jarring incongruity, side by side with typical figures from Roman estates. Instead of the old stereotype of “the old man and his Priapus,” populating *this* garden are a *circitor* (‘guard’),²⁹ a *stator* (‘sentry’),³⁰ and an impecunious *inquilinus* (‘tenant’).³¹ The incongruous appearance of both Priapus and realistic

as “trend-setters, the ones who developed the new model in the most conspicuous and memorable way”).

²⁷ *Sat.* 1.8.14–15. See further Welch (2001:186–187) on the ill fit between Priapus' humbleness and crudeness and his luxurious new surroundings.

²⁸ We do not hear where precisely the witches have come from, but they run back into the city when Priapus eventually expels them from the garden (line 47).

²⁹ *Priap.* 17.1. A *circitor* can be the guard of a private garden, but the term is also used of the guards of aqueducts and in the military; see Goldberg 1992 ad loc.

³⁰ *Priap.* 52.3, here used certainly with sexual double entendre (*stator* = *mentula*; for Priapus' *mentula* threateningly described as “standing,” cf. [Verg.], *Priap.* 2.18).

³¹ *Priap.* 70.1.

guard-staff in the same poem is something of which Priapus himself seems metapoetically aware; so, in *Priap.* 17, he complains that the *circitor* is taking his job.³² Moreover, in the *Carmina Priapea*, it is often the *vilicus* of an estate who sets up Priapus in the first place, rather than, for example, the old man in his vegetable garden, as in Leonidas' code-model.³³ Indeed, *Priapea* 24 challenges the reader, in the most direct way possible, to contrast the new presence of staff-members with the rustic self-sufficiency of Leonidas' original paradigm: the Latin poem is a provocatively inaccurate translation of Leonidas' Greek. In Greek, the first couplet of *Anth. Plan.* 236 [Leonidas] says that "Deinomenes set me up here on the garden wall, wakeful Priapus, as a guard of vegetables" (Αὐτοῦ ἐφ' αἰμασιᾶσι τὸν ἀγρουπνοῦντα Πρίηπον | ἔστησεν λαχάνων Δεινομένης φύλακα). In the *Carmina Priapea*, this becomes "The bailiff of the fertile garden here ordered me to take care of the place entrusted [to me]" (*Hic me custodem fecundi vilicus horti | mandati curam iussit habere loci*). The language used here—*vilicus*, *mandati*, *iussit*—gives the humorous impression that Priapus has become part of the staff of an estate, with responsibilities doled out by a bailiff (this was, indeed, one of the *vilicus*' duties).³⁴

These passages beg the question of what exactly we are to imagine as the setting of the *Carmina Priapea*. But the poems do not offer a consistent picture of where we are to imagine their action being set; rather, poetic traces of the city and the countryside are intermingled. Most often, of course, Priapus is simply in a "garden" (*hortus*),³⁵ which tells us little, both because of the semantic breadth of the word—it could refer to the humble pauper's plot or (especially in the plural) to the luxury pleasure gardens of the city's elite³⁶—and because Priapus' location in a "garden" had, by then, become ossified as a basic poetic

³² *Priap.* 17: "What's your problem, you troublesome guard? Why do you stop the thief coming to me? Let him come to me: he'll go away looser!" (*Quid mecum tibi, circitor moleste? | ad me quid prohibes venire furem? | accedat, sine: laxior redibit*).

³³ *Priap.* 10.4, 24.1, 42.1.

³⁴ See especially Columella 11.1.7–9; also Cato *Agr.* 1.5.1–5.

³⁵ So, at *Priap.* 1.5, 5.3, 24.1, 28.2, 51.2, 52.2, 62.1, 65.4, 67.3.

³⁶ See the article in the *TLL* by Ehlers. *Hortus* can be used, like the Greek κήπος, to refer to household gardens (s.v. *hortus* II.A.1.a.α). Alternatively, like the Greek παράδεισος, it can be used to refer to the luxury gardens found on estates (s.v. *hortus* II A.1.a.β). Cf. Beard

building block of the *priapeum*, a poetic signal as much as a geographic descriptor. Foregoing the generic tendency towards landscape description (an omission which would have made itself felt to those familiar with the tradition), the setting of these poems is established in mere glimpses of a landscape: Priapus is “amongst fruit trees in a remote spot”;³⁷ he is beside the vines, guarding grapes;³⁸ he is “entrusted” with the care of an orchard;³⁹ he is guarding the gate of a pig sty.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the poems’ most notable innovation is the combination of these details with similarly fleeting glimpses of Roman urban life. Priapus is visited by a prostitute, “a star amongst the Subura girls.”⁴¹ Dancing paraphernalia is dedicated to him by a celebrity dancer, “a true star in the Circus Maximus.”⁴² A prostitute, Telethusa (a stock character in Martial, and herself a Spanish export to the city, Mart. 6.71), arouses Priapus in another poem.⁴³ The substitution of an agricultural for an urban setting is made particularly explicit in poem 21. In this poem, the apples that are being dedicated to Priapus were, this dedicator confesses, not grown in his own garden (as in his poetic models), but instead bought on the Sacra Via.⁴⁴ This poem lingers precisely on the counterfeit nature of this rural produce: the fruit is described in line 3

on “the ambivalence, the tricksiness” of uses of the word in these two different senses (1998:28).

³⁷ *Priap.* 15.5: *inter frutices loco remoto.*

³⁸ *Priap.* 30.3–4.

³⁹ *Priap.* 71.1: *commissa meae ... pomaria curae.*

⁴⁰ *Priap.* 65.3–4.

⁴¹ *Priap.* 40.1: *Nota Suburanas inter Telethusa puellas.*

⁴² *Priap.* 27.1: *Deliciae populi, magno notissima circo ... On magno circo*, see Goldberg 1992 ad loc. The *priapeum* type in which erotic paraphernalia is dedicated to Priapus is not an innovation of the *Carmina Priapea*; indeed, it originates in the third century BC with Hedylus (*Anth. Pal.* 6.292). What is remarkable here is the specificity with which the *priapeum* is linked to urban life in Rome.

⁴³ *Priap.* 19. We might make mention here of *Priap.* 68, in which Priapus provides a “rustic” reading of Homer, whom he hears his master reciting. Although there are no explicit mentions of the city in the poem, the associations of rusticity with boorishness and crudeness obviously only exist within an *urbs* : *rus* dichotomy. See Rosen 2006:230 on the *Carmina Priapea* (and poem 68 in particular) as “a type of comedy better suited ... to the city than the country.”

⁴⁴ *Priap.* 21.3–4: *quaeque tibi posui tamquam vernacula poma, | de sacra nulli dixeris esse via.* Mart. 7.31 and 10.94 have similar punch-lines.

as “*tamquam vernacula*”—“just like home-grown.” Priapus is surrounded by a mere simulacrum of the greenery of his genre’s beginnings. More than this, the exchange of home-grown apples for a commercial product of the *Sacra Via* (known for sex as much as for produce)⁴⁵ is a potent symbol for the shift in poetic focus in the *Priapea* away from descriptions of the natural world and more explicitly onto sexual threat and invective.⁴⁶

Indeed, poem 21 is one of many poems in the *Priapea* in which the lack of images of vegetation—a lack surely felt by those familiar with the genre and its overarching metapoetic concern with how to describe the natural world—seems itself to become a self-conscious trope in the verse. There is an immanent feeling of deflorescence in these poems. The greenery in the *Carmina Priapea*, if it is present at all—and it frequently isn’t—tends to be infertile, hostile or fake. The crux of the matter is nicely stated in poem 60, in which a farmer laments the fact that his Priapus has more poems than *poma*. “If you were to have as many fruits as you have verses, Priapus, you would be richer than old Alcinous,” says the farmer.⁴⁷ He has a point: the *Carmina Priapea* as a whole is long on descriptions of Priapus’ sexual antics, desperately short on descriptions of the vegetative fertility which Priapus used to inspire and represent. The point of poem 60 is exemplified in poem 61, in which a fruit tree laments its current infertility. “Why,” it asks its farmer, “do you complain in vain in my presence? Because for two autumns I have stood infertile, an apple tree once abounding in good fruit?”⁴⁸ In lines 4–12, the fruit tree elaborates a series of natural causes which might

⁴⁵ For the *Sacra Via* as a place to obtain fruit: *Ov. Ars Am.* 2.264–265; for the *Sacra Via* as a red light district: *Prop.* 2.23.15; *Mart.* 2.63.2.

⁴⁶ Cf. here those poems in which nature is replaced by sex at the elementary level of individual words’ signification. The dried grapes, boxwood, and beeswax described in catalogue form at the beginning of poem 32 turn out to refer to the *viscera* of a repulsively desiccated old woman. In poem 5, *hortus* itself is a metaphor for *nates*; the metaphor is elsewhere unattested (although the *TLL* records one instance each of *hortus/hortulus* = *cunus*: *Anth. Lat.* 712.18, 885.2, *TLL* vi/3.3015.19–21, 3018.71–76 Ehlers), and it is particularly loaded here, given the rejection of literal garden imagery elsewhere in the *Carmina Priapea*.

⁴⁷ *Priap.* 60.1–2: *Si quot habes versus, tot haberes poma, Priape, | esses antiquo ditior Alcinoos.*

⁴⁸ *Priap.* 61.1–3: *Quid frustra quereris, colone, mecum, | quod quondam bene fructuosa malus | autumnis sterilis duobus adstem?*

have stemmed its fruitfulness—hail, the cold of the late spring, wind, rain, drought, or ravenous birds. In the *Palatine Anthology*, one of Priapus' roles is announcing the coming of spring and the blossoming of new life and growth in the natural world; in poem 61, by contrast, the benevolent earth has given way to a hostile and unfruitful vision of nature. The fruit tree seems grounded not so much in agricultural realism as in a deliberately anti-pastoral dystopia—less *Georgics* than George Crabbe.⁴⁹ Eventually, though, the tree says that it has been destroyed rather by “the poems of an awful poet” (*carmina pessimi poetae*) being hung on its “hard-worked” branches (*ramis ... laboriosis*).⁵⁰ It would be attractive here to interpret the poet in question as the author of this very poem. Especially given the prevalence of Catullan stylistic buzzwords elsewhere in the programmatic passages of the *Carmina Priapea*, this poet may well have identified (with a knowing intertextual wink) with Catullus' ironic description of himself as *pessimus omnium poeta*.⁵¹ The suggestion that this poet is himself rendering vegetation infertile would be a neatly self-conscious way of acknowledging the new absence of the usually verdant Priapic natural world in the *Carmina Priapea*.

In other poems, received poetic motifs or clichés describing vegetable fertility or harmony with the natural world are perverted, reversed or otherwise emptied of their usual significance. In poem 25, Priapus' *mentula* is described as a “scepter, cut from a tree,” which “will now no longer be flourishing with leaf.”⁵² The joke of the line lies of

⁴⁹ In this respect, the poem is similar to *Priap.* 63, in which Priapus complains that he is oppressed by scorching heat, torrential rains, hail, excessive labor—not to mention his own shoddy construction. Crabbe's greatest work, *The Village* (1783), fashions a realist view of country life in deliberate opposition to pastoral idealization. “Fled are those times, when, in harmonious strains / The rustic poet praised his native plains: / No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse, / their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse ... Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains, / Because the Muses never knew their pains” (1.7–10, 21–22).

⁵⁰ *Priap.* 61.13–14.

⁵¹ *Cat.* 49.5. The *laboriosi rami* of poem 61 may also recall Catullus' use of the same adjective (also ironically?) to describe the work of Cornelius in his first poem (1.7); cf. also the allusion to this line in *Priap.* 2.3, in which the Priapic poet says that his poems are not written *nimum laboriose* (“as a result of excessive labor”). On Catullan influence on the *Priapea*, especially at its programmatic moments, see Buchheit 1962:11, Hallett 1996.

⁵² *Priap.* 25.1–2: *Hoc sceptrum, quod ab arbore est recisum, | nulla iam poterit virere fronde.*

course in the reapplication to Priapus' *mentula* of Homer's description of the staff upon which Achilles swears in the *Iliad*, which will "never again produce leaves and twigs" (τὸ μὲν οὐ ποτε φύλλα καὶ ὄζους | φύσει), a phrase which afterwards becomes a topos in Latin epic.⁵³ Such obscene travesties occur elsewhere in the *Priapea*, most strikingly in poem 68. At the same time, though, the image of the tree no longer bearing leaf constitutes a striking reiteration of the theme of infertility in the work. The Homeric allusion transforms the body of the *hortus*' guardian into the very embodiment of vegetative infertility. Moreover, the fact that it is Priapus' *mentula* that symbolizes this infertility is particularly fitting in light of this same Priapus' own sexual impotence. The increasing awareness of this impotence is, as Holzberg argues, a narrative progression within the *Carmina Priapea* as a whole, developing throughout the poems and climaxing (so to speak) in the closing sequence.⁵⁴ It is at this moment of the work that the garden and its guardian are most strongly identified in a kind of pathetic fallacy, with the infertility of the garden linked with the impotence of its guardian god.

Nature is replaced by its simulacrum in poem 42, in which the *vilicus* Aristagoras makes a dedication of the *do ut des* type, offering Priapus "fruits of pliant wax" (*de cera facili ... poma*, 42.2) and asking him to cause real fruit to grow in exchange. In an earlier poem of the *Priapea*, an image of a *mentula* was dedicated to Priapus in his role as a healing deity,⁵⁵ and waxen effigies are attested elsewhere in magical rituals.⁵⁶ Thus Herter (1932:272) also assumes that farmers dedicated images of produce to Priapus as part of an agricultural ritual. But there is no other evidence for such a ritual, and we are clearly meant to be humorously surprised: the dedicator tells Priapus to be "content with the image of fruit" (*contentus imagine pomi*) in line 3, as if preempting Priapus' annoyance at the attempted exchange. His misgivings may

⁵³ *Il.* 1.234–235. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 12.206–208, Val. Flac. 3.707–709 (see Goldberg 1992 ad loc).

⁵⁴ Holzberg 2005. Cf. also Hörschele 2008.

⁵⁵ 37.1–2, 11–12. See also Goldberg 1992:201 on the Greek and Roman tradition of memorial tablets (*Gedächtnistafel*), which greatly helps to illuminate poem 37.

⁵⁶ On the use of waxen effigies in magic ritual, see Faraone 1993:62–65.

well have been justified: the description of Aristagoras as “happy with his well-grown grapes” (*laetus ... natis bene uvis*, 42.1), certainly seems to imply that he already had some fruit to spare. But the joke here is in the fruits being *de cera*.⁵⁷ Specifically, the fruits here literally made of wax seem to constitute an allusion to the frequent approving description of fruit (often but not invariably plums) as “waxy.” Corydon in *Eclogues* 2 promises “waxy plums” (*cerea pruna*, 53) to Alexis as part of his pastoral bounty, an epithet explained by Servius as referring either to the color or texture of the fruit. His description is echoed in the pseudo-Vergilian *Copa*,⁵⁸ in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,⁵⁹ in Calpurnius Siculus’ *Eclogues*,⁶⁰ in Martial,⁶¹ and in the *Priapea* itself, where plums are described as “yellower than fresh wax.”⁶² In poem 42, then, the picturesque pastoral cliché of waxy yellow fruits is humorously replaced by fruits which are actually made of wax. Furthermore, by sending the reader back to pastoral images of nature, and then inverting them, the poem reiterates the central motifs of the work as a whole. The fruitfulness of old has been replaced by a new artificiality.

In yet other poems, the departure from the genre’s pastoral/agricultural code models is registered through the inversion of typical motifs with which past poets had expressed praise or affection for the countryside. Poem 51 is perhaps the best known example of this. The poem constitutes one of the few substantial catalogues of vegetation in the *Priapea*, as Priapus, in seventeen detailed lines, lists the produce from the garden he is guarding. An allusion to Arete in line 6 sends our minds back to the praise of Alcinous’ garden in the *Odyssey*, the founding example of the *laus horti*. Moreover, the rather anomalous casting of Priapus as not only the guardian, but also the worker of the garden (*mihi laboratum locum*, he calls it, in lines 25–26, and refers to the garden and its trees as his own at lines 2 and 11) adopts the popular

⁵⁷ See Goldberg 1992:174 on the use of *de* where we might expect *ex*, which occurs in both pre- and post-classical Latin.

⁵⁸ *Copa* 18: *sunt autumnali cerea pruna die*.

⁵⁹ *Met.* 13.817–818: *prunaque ... novasque imitantia ceras*.

⁶⁰ 2.91: *cerea ... cydonia* (“quinces”).

⁶¹ 10.94.6: *mittimus autumnni cerea poma mei*.

⁶² 51.9: *magisque cera luteum nova prunum*.

topos of the idealized “old man and his garden.”⁶³ But, rather than praising the produce of his farm, Priapus systematically disparages his produce, which, he says, cannot compete with that of his neighbors’ gardens. This Priapus is, quite deliberately, the antitype of the Corycian gardener of *Georgics* 4, showing disdain rather than pride for his humble garden: *nec gloriator*, he says at line 14.⁶⁴ Priapus’ occasional scatological comments (line 10) and incidental threats to would-be thieves (line 8) also serve to debunk the typically romantic and idealized tone of the *laus horti*. At the end of the poem, Priapus concludes that the *improbissimi fures* invading his territory must actually like the punishment he doles out, since the garden could not possibly be an attraction in itself. Priapus’ diagnosis is all too likely. Readers and thieves who enter Priapus’ haunts in the *Priapea* in expectation of his trademark punishment will not be disappointed; his garden, though, may indeed prove to be rather less of an attraction.

We have traced the genre to its two code models, Theocritus and Leonidas, and their competing conceptualizations of Priapus in terms of the idealized pastoral or the more realistic rustic landscape. The contrast between the two ensures that the presentation of the natural world in Priapic poetry is always a live issue, an immanent indication of how the particular poet is negotiating a position in the poetic tradition. The pseudo-Vergilian *Priapea*, a kind of mid-point in our survey, combine and also self-consciously deconstruct these two artistic and ideological approaches to the representation of nature in Priapus’ world. The *Carmina Priapea*, though, represent a thorough departure from the code models in setting Priapus in a semi-urbanized world, and this departure from the tradition finds metaphorical expression in the imagery of infertile or fake vegetation and the reversal of pastoral motifs.⁶⁵ Taken together, and read with the code-models in mind, the

⁶³ Thibodeau 2001 has a helpful account of the tradition.

⁶⁴ Buchheit 1962:96–97 has a discussion of the poem in relation to the *laus horti* topos.

⁶⁵ One exception to the general pattern might be objected—poem 16, a dedication poem to Priapus seemingly celebrating abundance and fertility. But this poem too is a parody. In six lines, the offering of fruits being made to Priapus is grandiloquently compared to the fruits in the “*nobilis hortus*” of the Hesperides and Alcinous’ garden in *Odyssey* 7, and to Acontius’ love-pledge apple. These grandiose mythological comparisons are so humorously excessive that they crowd out literal description of the offerings. This

poems of the *Carmina Priapea* participate in the creation of a communal narrative of their genre's own development. This generic narrative moves from country to city, from fertility to infertility, from a focus on the natural world, its cultivation and productivity, to a focus on lust, leisure and impotence. The sense of narrative progression is particularly strong in poem 33, with which we began, with its very strong temporal juxtaposition: the ancient Priapi (*antiqui Priapi*), says Priapus, had Naiads and Dryads to satisfy their lust, but now (*nunc*)—in his current generic incarnation—he has to masturbate because “all the nymphs have passed away” (*Nymphas omnis interiisse*), a vivid metaphor for the development of the genre. Indeed, as we have already seen with Horace's *Satires* 1.8, the epigrams of the *Carmina Priapea* in general have a very pronounced sense of temporality, and often reflexively stress the newness of the situation Priapus finds himself in. This is a specific adaptation of the “then/now” structure popular in ancient epigram and (naturally) in aetiological poetry.⁶⁶ So, the tree from which Priapus' *mentula* is fashioned will “now” (*iam*, 25.2) no longer bear fruit; the very lusty sentry will “now for the first time” (*iam primum*, 52.3) open up the gate purposefully to enjoy the spectacle of the thieves' punishment; Priapus can still perform even though he is “now older” (*iam senior*, 76.1).

The communal narrative created by the self-conscious transformation of the Priapic code models in the *Carmina Priapea* is, by its very nature, a literary narrative, charting the development of a genre. But poetic self-consciousness is never purely inward-looking. It is, rather, a reflection and reapplication of paradigms—often social and political paradigms—found outside the literary sphere and presented with the mere pretense of insularity. This is especially so in this case, since a poet who decided to write about gardens (even tangentially, as in the *Carmina Priapea*) could not help but participate in the discourses being

grandiosity is then abruptly contrasted with the humbleness of the speaker of the poem, described as the “pious master of a little field in flower” (*pius dominus florentis agelli*, line 7). The description of Priapus as “naked” (*nudus*) in the last line, a detail usually emphasized in more explicitly sexual contexts (1.6, 9.13, 14.8), also serves to lower the tone at the end. For possible sexual innuendo in the final two lines, see O'Connor 1989:115.

⁶⁶ See Coleman 2006:15–18 on use of the “then/now” distinction as a structural device in epigram.

developed around the image and reality of gardens in the Imperial era. Recent commentators have traced the development by which the prominent private gardens of the late Republic such as those of Lucullus and Sallust came to represent a withdrawal from political life, and then, consequently, were targeted specifically in the Imperial era as symbols of decadence, urbanization and artificiality.⁶⁷ Varro had already noted that, whereas the ancient Romans built farms *ad fructum rationem* (“in accordance with the rationale of productivity”), Romans of his time built farms *ad libidines indomitas* (“in accordance with their unrestrained lusts”), and Horace had similarly depicted unproductive flowers being sown in contemporary gardens where the “earlier owner” (*prior dominus*) had planted fertile olive trees.⁶⁸ In Tacitus’ *Annales*, *horti* function in the text as symbols of imperial rapacity and female lack of restraint. Messalina lusts after (literally “gapes for,” *inhians*, 11.1.1) the gardens of Lucullus and, later, Agrippina will “gape after” (12.59.1) the gardens of Statilius Taurus. Nero neglects the affairs of state in order to dedicate himself to decadence “shut up in his gardens” (*hortis clausus*, 15.53.1). In his gardens he will luxuriate while the Pisonian conspiracy is fomented against him.⁶⁹ Of course, Nero’s own Golden House epitomized for Imperial writers both the emperor’s libidinous architectural expansionism and a decadent, monstrous artificiality—Suetonius says that it encompassed within its urban grounds “the countryside in its variety, with fields and vineyards, pastures and woods”⁷⁰ in order,

⁶⁷ On the Republican gardens symbolizing a detachment from public life, see especially Wallace-Hadrill 1998:4. Boatwright 1998:76, although stressing the fact that gardens come to represent decadence in the Imperial era, also notes that emperors did use *horti* for a variety of official purposes; cf. the famous account of Caligula’s reception of Philo’s embassy in *horti*, recounted in that author’s *Legatio ad Gaium* (351–359). One of Philo’s own exegetical works suggestively contrasts the luxury of contemporary pleasure gardens with the Garden of Eden (*De opificio mundi* 153).

⁶⁸ Varro *Rust.* 1.13.6, Hor. *Carm.* 2.15.5–8. On the “Dekadenzmotiv” in Varro, see Diederich 2007:329–337. Cf. Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.3.8), who compares a flower-bed of lilies and violets to productive vines and harvests in order to condemn a kind of speech over-reliant on ornament. Beauty, he reminds us, is never separate from usefulness (*numquam vera species ab utilitate dividitur*).

⁶⁹ See Boatwright 1998:77–80, Pagán 2006:65–87.

⁷⁰ Suet. *Ner.* 31.1: *rura insuper arvis atque vinetis et pascuis silvisque varia*. For the resentment aroused by Nero’s Golden House, see Purcell 1987:198, citing the lampoon preserved

as Tacitus puts it, to “attempt through art what nature had denied.”⁷¹ The artificiality suggested by Tacitus is the target of reproach in other moralists’ condemnation of urban gardens. So, for example, Seneca the Elder, in his *Controversiae*, dramatizes moralizing rants decrying the imitation of the countryside in such gardens—men take such pleasure in these debased simulacra (*pravis imitamentis*), he says, that one wonders whether their connoisseurs have ever actually seen nature for themselves.⁷² Seneca the Younger characterizes vice as the rebellion against nature, and rails especially against luxuriant perversions of nature in urban *horti*, citing the fashion for rooftop gardens and flowers blooming out of season.⁷³

The most extended protest against the new luxuriousness and fruitlessness of Imperial gardens comes in book 19 of Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History*. In a digression during his discussion of agriculture, Pliny compares gardens of his own time to those of the hardy early Romans, effectively transforming the kinds of gardens cultivated in each period as an index of their moral standards. The hard work of the earliest Romans is epitomized by the fact that the kings of Rome cultivated their gardens themselves.⁷⁴ A certain kind of sanctity (*sanc-titas*), he says, attached to those gardens. Moreover, the thrift of the early Romans is demonstrated by the fact that they were entirely self-sufficient with their gardens. *Ex horto plebei macellum*: the lower classes’ provisions market came entirely from their garden (19.52). Pliny also eulogizes the love of earlier Romans for simpler vegetables: Cato sang

in Suetonius *Nero* 39.2: “Rome will become a single house: move to Veii, Quirites, if that house doesn’t take over Veii as well” (*Roma domus fiet: Veios migrate, Quirites, | si non et Veios occupat ista domus*). Although recent approaches have begun to stress Nero’s intentions for public access to its grounds, as Coleman points out, “to a people who felt that their city had been taken from them, the ostentatious luxury of Nero’s palace would have been insupportable” (2006:29).

⁷¹ *Ann.* 15.42.5: *quae natura denegavisset per artem temptare.*

⁷² *Contr.* 2.1.13; cf. 5.5. Wall paintings of gardens also enjoyed popularity in the period: see Jashemski (1993:313–404) for surviving instances from Pompeii. Pliny the Elder makes reference to *imagines hortarum*, “imitations of gardens,” which, he said, offered the plebs a daily dose of the countryside (*HN* 19.59). These could be paintings, but may also be references to small window gardens (Linderski 2001).

⁷³ *Sen. Ep.* 122.5, 8.

⁷⁴ *HN* 19.50: *Romani quidem reges ipsi coluere.*

the praises of cabbages (19.57) and a branch of the Valerian family took “Lettuce” (*Lactucinus*) as a cognomen (19.59). Men judged a household’s upkeep by the maintenance of its garden and deprecated the wife who had to depend on the market (19.57). Pliny sharply contrasts this reverence with the decadence of his own day. Instead of the household gardens personally maintained by the earliest Romans, “now, under the name of gardens, people own, as luxuries, gardens and villas within the city itself” (*iam quidem hortorum nomine in ipsa urbe delicias agros villasque possident*, HN 19.50–51), a corrupt and unnatural intermingling of city and country. The word *deliciae* here has vivid sensual overtones which damningly suggest the kind of libidinous self-indulgence with which Pliny associates pleasure gardens. The nearly absurd juxtaposition of *deliciae* with *agri* also farcically evokes the ridiculousness (as Pliny sees it) of the urban smart set’s pretensions to country life. Whereas those earlier gardens epitomized the hard work and thrift of the ancients, Pliny attributes the new popularity of urban pleasure gardens to Epicurus, the *otii magister* (“master of leisure”). Moreover, the simple delight in home-grown vegetables has been transformed into a desire for exotic foreign foods in order to sate “the lust of the gullet” (*voluptatem gulae*). In Pliny’s aetiology of horticultural decline, we see the movement from thrift to indulgence, from productiveness to idle sensuality, from hard work to leisure.

Pliny’s moralizing discourse fixes on the *hortus* as its subject, using the symbol of the *hortus* as an index of broader cultural tendencies. It is a discourse that depends on the semantic flexibility of the word *hortus*. As already noted, *hortus* can refer both to the rustic vegetable plot and (typically in the plural) to the urban pleasure gardens of the late Republic and early Empire. This polysemy is made use of by other writers of the Empire. The poetic tenth book of Columella’s *De re rustica*, which takes *horti* as its topic, is a very instructive text to compare with the *Carmina Priapea*, since its vision of gardens is a reconfiguration of the same social strands of garden discourse to which the *Carmina Priapea* also alludes. The *horti* of this work also exist in the space between moralistic evocation of humble agriculture and urban Imperial garden-lust. Columella’s entire work is framed by the familiar moralistic aetiology of Roman social mores as a movement from rural agriculture to urban

decadence.⁷⁵ Indeed, the poem of the tenth book is claimed to be a song for the *holitor*, the “cabbage-gardener” (a very humble word), to sing amongst his “flourishing gardens” (*viridantibus hortis*, 10.229). Yet, as Gowers points out, “Columella’s rural idyll is patently tailored to urban life, a world of bijou suburban farms, handy for the city, and part-time landlords ...” (2000:136). Moreover, the monstrous, burgeoning vegetables presented in the poem, in an exotic array of different kinds, are just the kind of thing which Pliny mocks in his excoriation of modern vegetables grown to extraordinary size and pretentiously classed into different grades (*HN* 19.54). Meanwhile, the sexual overtones which surface elsewhere when discussing the desire for urban gardens (and which are perhaps made farcically over-explicit in the *Carmina Priapea*) find expression in this text in its fetishistic sexualization of both the act of gardening and the gardens themselves—here, ploughing is described as rape (10.68–76), cucumbers snake as they swell in unmistakably sexual fashion (10.94–95), and the menstrual blood of a naked woman is recommended as an insecticide of choice (10.357–366).⁷⁶

To this complex of Imperial texts that figure themselves in the space between rural and urban *horti* we should also add the second *Eclogue* of Calpurnius Siculus. Like the *Carmina Priapea*, these *Eclogues* also situate themselves chronologically and ideologically in the history of their genre by way of a spatial narrative moving from country to city and from the natural to the artificial. So, in *Eclogue* 7, Corydon, who has visited the city for the first time, deprecates the gaucheness of his interlocutor Lycotas, who prefers “the old beech trees” (*veteres*

⁷⁵ So, at 1.pref.15: *omnes enim (sicut M. Varro iam temporibus avorum conquestus est) patres familiae falce et aratro relictis intra murum correpsimus, et in circis potius ac theatris, quam in segetibus et vinetis manus movemus* (“For all of us who are *patresfamiliae*, as Varro has already lamented of our forefathers’ age, having left behind the sickle and plough, crept together inside city walls, and we put our hands to use not in cornfields and vineyards, but in circuses and theatres”). On this preface, see Milnor 2005:263–267, Diederich 2007:372–374.

⁷⁶ For the sexualization of horticulture in Columella’s text, see Gowers 2000:137–138, Henderson 2002:128, and Milnor 2005:279–282, who stresses instead as a rationale the displacement of sexuality from the *vilica* (whose duties are discussed in book 11) onto the natural world. Unsurprisingly, also making an appearance in Columella’s gardens is Priapus, “awesome of appendage” (*terribilis membri*, 10.32), both in his sexual guardian role (10.29–34) and in a discussion of aphrodisiacs (10.108–109).

fagos, a clear metapoetic reference to Vergil's *Eclogues*) to the *nova spectacula* of Neronian (?) Rome.⁷⁷ The movement from country to city recounted in the poem is simultaneously a narrative of the text's own innovation within the pastoral tradition. As Carole Newlands observes, Calpurnius Siculus innovates by creating a kind of "urban pastoral," subverting pastoral values in favor of a "new set of values that affirm the supremacy of the city over the country, and of imperial themes over rural subjects" (1987:230). In Calpurnius' second eclogue, the poet innovates by inserting horticulture—civilization's technology for reordering the natural world—into the pastoral vision, a vision which idealizes precisely a world without that intervention. The second eclogue is an amoebian singing contest on the model of Vergil's third, fifth and seventh eclogues. Here, though, one of the competitors is not a shepherd (the usual singer in such competitions), but a *dominus horti* (line 2), who attempts to match his companion's claims of shepherding expertise by boasting of his ability to graft "unknown leaves and non-native fruits" onto trees (41),⁷⁸ confound nature by "compelling grafted peaches to supplant plums" (42–43),⁷⁹ irrigate his gardens with canals (35—though someone else does the actual work of irrigation, 96), and generate quality produce such as Chian figs (81).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Calp. Sic. 7.4–6. Although the poems unquestionably presuppose a Roman imperial context, attempts to link the eclogues with Neronian society in particular are somewhat vitiated by suggestions, most influentially by Champlin, that the poems are, instead, Severan in date; see Fugmann 1992 for a survey of perspectives on the issue. Horsfall 1997 argues for a late date on linguistic grounds, while the Neronian date maintains staunch adherents—cf. Schubert 1998. For beech trees as the quintessential "tree of the *Eclogues*," see Ross 1975:72.

⁷⁸ *ignotas frondes et non gentilia poma*. Calpurnius alludes to a verse of the *Georgics* (*miratastque novas frondes et non sua poma*, 2.82) in which Vergil expresses the artificiality and "violation of the natural" which grafting entails (so, Ross 1980:68).

⁷⁹ *cogit | insita praecoquibus subrepere Persica prunis*. The sense of compulsion in the verb *cogere* leads us to imagine the so-called *dominus horti* attempting to exercise a master's authority over the growth of the plants of his garden. The metaphor is much-developed in other garden texts and reaches a kind of apex in Palladius' fourth-century didactic poem, *De insitione*, which begins with a discussion of masters' control over their slaves, a discussion which prefigures and exemplifies at a social level the grafter's control of his plants.

⁸⁰ The Chian fig, an imported variety transplanted to Italy (Varro *Rust.* 1.41.6), was held in particular esteem: see Ath. 3.75e, Mart. 7.25.8, 12.96.9–10.

Part of the reader's pleasure in Calpurnius' second eclogue comes from the ambiguity of this garden. This could no doubt be a *hortus* in a pastoral landscape, and the gardener may not necessarily be an incongruous participant in a rustic singing contest. But, given the allusions to the city and the creation of a kind of "urban pastoral" in Calpurnius' poems, it is tempting also to see the Imperial interest in urban gardens here, with the farmer's pride in horticultural technology and luxury produce signaling to the knowing reader the eclogue's occupation of a space between town and country. Pliny, for his part, is more explicit than this in his treatment of *hortus*. When he says that *agri villaeque* are being introduced into the city "under the name of gardens" (*hortorum nomine*, 19.50), he highlights the fact that the word *hortus* is being stretched to accommodate an entirely different social phenomenon. Pliny draws attention to the semantic flexibility of the word *hortus*—a semantic flexibility which facilitated his own moralizing discourse.

This flexibility is also very much a part of the garden imagery in the *Carmina Priapea*. We have seen that the rather sketchy settings of poems in the *Carmina Priapea* are suggested by flashes of imagery of the countryside and the city, but Priapus is most often merely depicted as being in his *hortus*. This indeterminacy and variation in the possible significance of *hortus* in the work is extremely significant at a period in which the slippage in the word has become pivotal in other social discourses being woven around gardens. It is precisely the breadth of the possible referents in the *horti* of the *Carmina Priapea* which allows the work to connect to the moralizing discourse focused on the transformation of different kinds of *horti* in the late Republic and early Empire.

Indeed, Pliny's dire image of urbanites' gardens, cultivated for pleasure not produce, is thoroughly and farcically brought to life in the gardens of the *Carmina Priapea*, where produce is in desperately short supply and visitors go (if we are to believe Priapus) explicitly to satiate their lusts. With galling insistence, *horti* in this text are not associated with work or productivity, but with sex and sexual desire. Adding to the pervasive sense of leisure and indulgence in the work is the programmatic (neoteric?) emphasis on play in the text; metaphors advertising a lack of literary cultivation may easily be transferred to the garden as well. So, in the very first line, the poet describes his work as "the wanton

play of disordered [unkempt, untrimmed] verse” (*carminis incompti lusus ... procaces*, 1.1); he wrote the verse “at play, without too much labor” (*ludens ... non nimium laboriose*, 2.1,3), and scribbled the poems on walls “at leisure” (*otiosus*, 2.9).⁸¹ Replacing the *sanctitas* that Pliny claims was associated from earliest times with gardens is the sham sanctity of the garden of Priapus, the “little shrine of the horny god” (*dei salacis ... sacellum*, 14.1–2). Whereas Pliny claims Plautus as authority for Venus’ guardianship of gardens, the *Carmina Priapea* offers a vision, both nightmarish and comic, of gardens in which Venus’ guardianship has been entirely ousted by that of her misshapen, unruly offspring.⁸²

When we read the *Carmina Priapea* with the moralizing discourse about gardens in mind, other details in the poems come to life. Those poems in which natural produce is replaced by the artificial or bought, for example, assume new significance in a discourse which idealizes self-sufficiency as an index of moral rectitude. In poem 21, as we have seen, the dedicator of some apples enjoins Priapus not to reveal that he has bought them on the Sacred Way. This sheepish admission acquires its humor from its lack of fit with the ideal of *ex horto macellum*, as Pliny put it—a common man’s garden should be his provision market. Indeed, in romanticized images of rustic thrift, produce is praised precisely for being “unbought” (*inemptus*). So, in *Georgics* 4, the Corycian gardener, after a hard day’s work, can load his tables with “unbought feasts” (*dapibus inemptis*, 4.133) and the dutiful wife in the romantic vision of country life in Horace’s second *Epode* “serves feasts unbought” (*dapes inemptas apparet*, 2.48).⁸³ This kind of praise is, in fact, parodied in poem

⁸¹ Cf. Pliny’s deprecation of the influence of Epicurus, the master of leisure (*magister otii*), on the contemporary fashion for leisure gardens (*HN* 19.51) and Columella’s condemnation of urban dwellers as “consuming their days with play or sleep” (*dies ludo vel somno consumimus*, 1.pref.16). On the careful cultivation of a kind of unobjectionable intellectual *otium*, balanced by accounts of public service, in accounts of gardens by Pliny the Younger and Statius, see Myers 2005.

⁸² *HN* 19.50.

⁸³ That “bought” vegetables were, on the other hand, a source of particular moral concern arises from the discussion at Horace *Epist.* 2.2.167–174: there Horace says that a man who bought a property long ago, the produce of which he claims to be homegrown, is still dining on *emptum holus* (168; the participle is repeated twice in the line, underscoring the particular force of the word).

23 of the *Carmina Priapea*, in which *inempta poma* (23.2) is used of fruits that are “unbought” because they are stolen.

The generic narrative that is developed for the *priapeum* moves from the fertile and productive visions of nature in the genre’s code models to a partially urban landscape suffused with artificiality, leisure, indulgence and infertility. This narrative is not a merely literary one, but is instead an ironic and farcical mirror of the parallel narrative expounded by moralists such as Pliny—a narrative also centered on gardens, which similarly moved from fertility to infertility, city to country, from the natural to the artificial. That these writers use gardens as a locus for exploring (or gleefully depicting) moral decadence is no accident in the Imperial era. The intermittent presence of the natural world offered by elite pleasure gardens in Rome must have served as a constant reminder of the reconfiguration of city and country in burgeoning and populous cities, and, increasingly, of the ability of the Imperial government to arrogate space in order to sate its own libidinousness. The anxiety caused by such massive edifices as Nero’s Golden House, with its monstrously artificial gardens and menageries in the middle of the city, attests to a particular sensitivity amongst Imperial Romans about this use of urban space.

The *Carmina Priapea* are about a lot of things: they are about sex, and about sexuality; they are about the character of Priapus; they are about the transformation of the epigrammatic tradition. They are also about gardens. In fact, as I have sought to show, where such poems take Priapus as their central subject, the depiction of the garden is always a live issue, since the question of the representation of nature is so central to the genre’s code models, and thus at the forefront of the priapic genre as a whole. Nor could these poems be about gardens without participating in the wider field of Imperial cultural discourse centering on the *hortus*, even, again, where the poems are marked more by the absence (or artificiality or infertility) of gardens than their presence. So often, indeed, it is the lack of gardens which is notable: many of the *Carmina Priapea* present bare accounts of Priapus’ threats of violent rape and not much else. These poems replace flowers and farming with fucking, in all its provocative monotony. It is precisely this absence of nature which makes these poems such a poignant entry in the tradi-

tion of Imperial horticultural writing. The nymphs had departed. This emptiness, these skeletal, shadowy gardens amidst the celebration of decadent self-indulgence, make the *Carmina Priapea* Rome's most powerfully parodic garden text.

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