

Saepibus hirtis claudatur: Gardens as Enclosed Metapoetic Spaces

Gardens are special places set off from the rest of the landscape: “A garden is a three-dimensional space within a clearly-defined boundary” (Pagán 2006, 6). In *Res Rustica* 10, Columella instructs the prospective gardener, as one of his first tasks, to enclose the plot with a clear boundary: *Talis humus vel parietibus, vel saepibus hirtis / Claudatur* (Col. 10. 27-28), “Let a plot of this sort be enclosed, either by walls or by bushy hedges.” Thus the garden is a distinct space, separated from the rest of the farm. Much like a framed painting, a garden is defined by its limits.

Poetic gardens are not only demarcated physical spaces but also serve as metapoetic spaces, whose enclosure suggests the verbal and formal boundaries of the poem. Columella’s garden book, *Res Rustica* 10, was inspired by Virgil’s digression on the Corycian gardener in (*Georgics* 4. 116-148). Virgil begins to describe the old man’s garden, but then breaks off, claiming want of space: *Verum haec ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis / Praetereo* (*G.* 4. 147-148), “But indeed, shut out by insufficient space, these things I pass over.” The garden digression is a demarcated space, like the garden itself; Virgil, lacking the room to pursue the topic, is shut out from the garden topic just as one might be physically excluded from the garden. “The digression, separated so markedly from the rest of the narrative, vividly demonstrates the separateness of the garden” (Pagán 2006, 34). The Corycian gardener is a metapoetic stand-in for the poet: “his horticultural skills reflect themes of the *Georgics* as a whole” (Harrison 2004, 109-110). Farmer/gardener and poet are similar in their striving for order: “Virgil’s farmer reacts to physical and emotional chaos by trying to recreate order on both levels ... Virgil’s poet figures initially strive for a similar, ordered understanding of the world (Kronenberg 2009, 157).” As a garden is enclosed, so too is the garden digression set off from the rest of *Georgics* 4.

Columella, inspired by Virgil (Col. 10. Pr. 3), goes further: his garden poem forms a separate poetic enclosure in its own separate poetic book, distinct and marked off from the surrounding prose books of *Res Rustica*.

Martial complains of the tiny size of his garden plot, *in quo nec cucumis nec iacere rectus / nec serpens habitare tota possit* (11. 18. 10-11), “in which a cucumber cannot lie straight, nor an entire snake dwell.” Like the tiny garden, epigram is a genre marked by severe limits: “epigram is the most closed of forms” (Fitzgerald 2007, 3). Succinctness, Martial notes, is its principal feature: *Disticha qui scribit, puto, vult brevitare placere* (8. 29. 1), “He who writes a couplet, I think, wishes to please by brevity.” Martial’s tiny garden is thus emblematic of his epigrams: both are constrained by their restrictive formal boundaries. Martial’s complaints on the limits of what his little garden can produce suggest that his choice of the shorter epigram form prevents him from exploring certain topics at length.

Horace in *Sermones* 1. 8 depicts an overgrown plot containing a statue of Priapus – a feature Columella (10. 31-34) acknowledges as an essential garden scarecrow – in a part of Rome where Maecenas was creating his *Horti* (DuQuesnay 1984, 38). The “ithyphallic Priapus” of this satire is perhaps a playful etymological gesture to those who – wrongly – derive *satira* from *satyr* (Gowers 2013, 11). Horace remade the satiric genre: “By his own account, H[orace] turned satire from a bursting, angry genre into a slim and contented one” (Gowers 2013, 11). By chasing away the witches, Priapus has dispelled unsavoriness from his garden in favor of quiet order, thus reflecting Horace’s preferred style of satire. The satire itself, entirely consisting of Priapus’ address, forms its own enclosed space, set off from the rest of the book.

These and other examples illustrate the metapoetic use of the garden as image of the poem, set off and defined by its boundaries.

Bibliography

- DuQuesnay, I. M. "Horace and Maecenas: The Propaganda Value of Sermones I" in Woodman, Tony and David West, ed. *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*, 19-58.
- Fitzgerald, William. 2007. *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. Chicago.
- Gale, Monica, ed. 2004. *Latin Epic and Didactic Poetry: Genre, Tradition and Individuality*. Swansea.
- Gowers, Emily, ed. 2012. *Horace: Satires Book I*. Cambridge.
- Harrison, Stephen. 2004. "Virgil's *Corycius senex* and Nicander's *Georgica: Georgics* 4. 116-48" in Gale, Monica, ed. *Latin Epic and Didactic Poetry*, 109-123.
- Kronenberg, Leah. 2009. *Allegories of Farming from Greece and Rome: Philosophical Satire in Xenophon, Varro, and Virgil*. Cambridge..
- Pagán, V. E. 2006. *Rome and the Literature of Gardens*. London.
- Woodman, Tony and David West, ed. 1984. *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*. Cambridge.