LISA A. HUGHES

SCULPTING THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE AT POMPEII'S *CASA DEGLI AMORINI DORATI*[*]

ABSTRACT: Pompeii's *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI.16.7) is noteworthy for the opulent and theatrical treatment of its wall decorations, sculpture and architectural layout of the garden. Typically, however, interest in this house has concentrated on the theatrical elements of the Fourth Style wall paintings found inside. This paper argues that the patron of this *domus*, possibly a member of the *gens Poppaea*, chose an architectural layout for the garden area suitable for performances such as pantomime and other small-scale productions that generated interest amongst spectators, especially in the time of the emperor Nero. The paintings, sculptural program, and the elevated western end of the garden area of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* are not only appropriate for the decor of the *domus* as a whole, but, more importantly, have a more functional element: they may serve as a suitable theatrical backdrop for both performers and audience alike.

I. INTRODUCTION

A SCHOLARLY PENCHANT FOR PAINTING has potentially skewed how we have visualized the decorative treatments at Pompeii's *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI.16.7).[1] The Fourth Style paintings from this *domus* have drawn particular interest to scholars for two main reasons. First, the theater serves as a direct line for the subject matter and overall composition of these paintings.[2] Second, the theatricality of the paintings seems to suggest evidence that the artistic predilections of the imperial household, namely those of the

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1. House numbers correspond to those cited in L. Eschebach, *Gebäudeverzeichnis und Stadtplan der antiken Stadt Pompeji*, Köln 1993.

2. In general, see E. R. Varner, "Grotesque Vision: Seneca's Tragedies and Neronian Art", in G. W. M. Harrison (ed.), *Seneca in Performance*, London 2000, 119-20; J. R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Everyday Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2003, 130-43; E. W. Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*, Cambridge 2004, 93-122.

emperor Nero (54-68 CE), trickled down to the patrons of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*.[3] It is within the context of this particular *domus*, however, that strong theatrical themes are present in not only the paintings, but also the sculptural collection in and the architectural layout of the main peristyle garden.[4] These theatrical connections, moreover, are also suggestive that theatrical performances carried over into areas other than those delegated specifically for dining. More often than not, however, a full analysis of the sculpture and the garden in relationship to theatrical performances is lacking. If references to these two features do appear they are usually treated as secondary to the theatrical nature of the wall paintings found throughout the house.[5] Following a suggestion initially proposed by Della Corte,[6] it is my contention that the patron of this *domus*, possibly a member of the *gens Poppaea*, chose an architectural layout for the garden area suitable for performances such as pantomime and other small-scale productions that generated interest amongst spectators, especially in the time of the emperor Nero. The sculptural program and the elevated western end of the garden area of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* are not only appropriate for the decor of the *domus* as a whole, but, more importantly, have a more functional element: they serve as a suitable theatrical backdrop for both performers and audience alike.[7] This has two important implications in that small-scale performances are not restricted solely to dining rooms per se, and that both sculpture and

3. Koloski-Ostrow also has mentioned the significance of the theatrical nature of this house and the *Casa del Menandro* especially in view of the patron's possible connections to the imperial household. She has not discussed the possibility that the sculpture could have been used as a backdrop in theatrical performances. O. Koloski-Ostrow, "Theatrical Tastes in Two Pompeian Houses: The Staging of Owners and Emperors", *American Journal of Archaeology* 95.2 (1991): 305; O. Koloski-Ostrow, "Violent Stages in Two Pompeian Houses" in C. Lyons and A. Koloski-Ostrow (eds), *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality, and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, London 1997, 246-52.

4. For the architectural layout of the garden and a catalogue of the sculptural collection, see F. Seiler, *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*, Munich 1992.

5. Leach has most recently suggested this possibility that the garden area could serve as a theater but provides a full discussion of neither the sculptural program nor the patrons of this *domus*. Leach (n. 2), 105.

6. M. Della Corte, *Case ed Ambitanti di Pompei*, 3rd ed., Naples 1965, 77; Leach (n. 2), 105.

7. See, for example, K. M. D. Dunbabin, "Convivial Spaces: Dining and Entertainment in the Roman Villa", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996): 67; 78-9. Marshall focuses on the *triclinium* but mentions briefly the possibility of garden performances. C. W. Marshall, "Location! Location! Location! Choral Absence and Dramatic Space in Seneca's *Troades*" in Harrison (n. 2), 32-3; G. W. M. Harrison, "*SEMPER EGO*

painting serve as visual markers for performance.[8] In order to demonstrate the theatrical function of the sculpture and garden, the paper addresses four main issues. First, it outlines Nero's prediliction for the theatre to provide a link between performances and garden spaces. Second, it suggests that the patron was a member of the *gens Poppaea,* relatives of the emperor who may also have emulated imperial theatrical performances. Third, the discussion turns to a general overview of both the layout and the overall decorative scheme of the house to provide a context for the theatrical overtones. Finally, the analysis closes with an overview of the sculptural collection itself to illustrate its suitability for theatrical performances in and around the peristyle garden.

II. NERONIAN PERFORMANCES

To better understand why a *domus* may have a sculptural collection with strong theatrical overtones, a good place to commence the discussion is with an outline of the emperor Nero's performances within garden settings. Doing so allows for two themes to play out. First, in general, there was a taste for theatrical performances in domestic settings and, second, more specifically, that select house owners in Pompeii may also have put on similar performances in which they themselves took part as either audience members or performers alike.

Our ancient sources provide strong clues that the emperor Nero took part in specific types of theatrical productions (e.g., pantomime) that could be set within domestic settings.[9] For example, Tacitus (Tac. *Ann*. 14.15) informs his readers that Nero in 59 CE established and acted in the Youth

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AUDITOR TANTUM? Performance and Physical Setting of Seneca's Plays", in Harrison, (n. 2), 142-3; 148, n. 22.

8. As Bartman has demonstrated in regards to statuary and decor, one immediately recalls Cicero's requests to Atticus for statuary suitable for his palaestra and gymnasium (Cic. *Att*. 1.6.2; 1.9.2; 1.10.3). For a further discussion of the themes and aesthetic criteria inherent in sculptural collections in the decor of a Roman household, see E. Bartman, "Sculptural Collecting and Display in the Private Realm", in E. K. Gazda (ed), *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives in the Private Sphere*, Ann Arbor 1991, 74-89. The conclusion for staged productions performed outside the realm of dining rooms and the covered porticoes of the peristyle will have important implications for other houses in Pompeii that have similar sculptural programs and architectural layouts in their gardens (e.g., *Casa dei Vettii, Casa del Fauno, Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, and the *Casa del Menandro* to name a few).

9. Tacitus' treatment of Nero's theatricalilty is treated thoroughly in S. Bartsch's, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

Games, or *Iuvenalia*, because he was not ready to be disgraced by public theater.[10] At this point we are not clear exactly to what degree the emperor participated in these performances, but we do get a sense of the genre they may have been. Tacitus (Tac. *Ann*. 14.15.20-23) reveals that in these productions people from all walks of society performed the art of the Greek or Latin actor (*histrio* — a term also equated with a dancer or pantomime[11]) and used "less manly" gestures and songs.[12] Here, Tacitus could be referring to a hybridized form pantomime productions (a point that will be further elaborated upon below) since hand and arm movements govern the roles that the pantomime would play.[13] In the same passage (15.33), we learn that Nero was anxious to appear on public stages (*promiscas scaenas*), for, up until that point, he had recited in the home or in the gardens.[14] Tacitus (*Ann*. 15.39) further reaffirms Nero's performances within a residential setting when he discusses the fire of 64 CE. When the city of Rome was ablaze, Nero opened not only the Campus Martius and the buildings of Agrippa, but also his own private gardens to the public, areas that were all filled with works of sculpture.[15] While he did so, he also performed the "Destruction of Troy" on his own residential stage (*domesticam scaenam*).[16] Whether or not Tacitus exag-

10. *Ne adhuc publico theatro dehonestaretur* (Tac., *Ann*. 14.15).
11. E. Champlin, *Nero,* Cambridge 2002, 62.
12. *Non nobilitas cuiquam, non aetas aut acti honores impedimento, quo minus Graeci Latinive histrionis artem exercerent usque ad gestus modosque haud virilis* (Tac., *Ann*. 14.15.20-23).
13. R. C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience*, Cambridge, MA, 1992, 143. Beacham thinks it highly unlikely that Nero actually acted the role of the pantomime because literary sources do not point us in that direction. He does suggest, however, that Nero may have accompanied such a performance with his cithara. R. Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome,* New Haven 1999, 234-5.
14. *nam adhuc per domum aut hortos cecinerat Iuvenalibus ludis* (Tac., *Ann*. 15.33).
15. *sed solacium populo exturbato ac profugo campum Martis ac monumenta Agrippae, hortos quin etiam suos patefecit et subitaria aedificia extruxit quae multitudinem inopem acciperent* (Tac., *Ann*. 15.39).
16. *quae quamquam popularia in inritum cadebant, quia pervaserat rumor ipso tempore flagrantis urbis inisse eum domesticam scaenam et cecinisse Troianum excidium, praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*. Pliny (*HN* 37.19) also speaks of a theater: *idem in reliquis generis eius quantum voraverit, licet aestimare ex multitudine, quae tanta fuit, ut auferente liberis eius Nerone exposita occuparent theatrum peculiare trans Tiberim in hortis, quod a populo impleri canente se, dum Pompeiano proludit, etiam Neronis satis erat*. Beacham 1999 (n. 13), 212. Griffin makes the important observation that Dio (62.18.1) and Suetonius (*Ner.* 38.2) place the reading on a public stage. She believes that "Suetonius and Dio represent a developed tradition in which the perfromance had been moved out of the palace which was in flames." M. T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*, New York 1984, 270, n. 57.

erates Nero's behavior at the time of the fire is not the issue. What is highly suggestive is that Tacitus is mocking Nero's personal enthusiasm for performance in Alexandrian setting — a quality seen, both in Tacitus' eyes and those of the senatorial élite, as unequivocably unsuitable for an emperor.[17]

Suetonius (*Ner.* 10), too, informs his readers of Neronian theatrical productions in stressing that the emperor recited his own poems both at home and in the theater.[18] The emperor, moreover, preferred to sing in the gardens and he even thought about performing in private performances among the professional actors (Suet. *Ner.* 21).[19] He would do so bearing masks in the likeness of himself or of others.[20] Suetonius and Tacitus both reinforce the idea that Nero had a preference for playing out various theatrical roles at his home and especially in his gardens.[21] Not only were the public theaters conducive to such performances, but so, too,were the emperor's homes and expansive gardens.[22]

Not only were the emperor's performances well-suited for his homes and gardens, but also similar productions were likely performed on a smaller scale by pantomimes in the houses of other members of Roman society. For example, Pliny in *Ep.* 7.24, albeit reproachfully, informs the reader how Ummidia Quadratilla, the grandmother of Quadratus, used to have her own private company of pantomimes that would perform in her house.[23] Pantomimes,

17. Beacham 1999 (n. 13), 209. Also relevant here is Woodman's discussion of the Tacitus' description of the Golden House after the fire as acting a metaphor for Nero's desire to transform Rome into Alexandria. T. Woodman, "Nero's Alien Capital: Tacitus as Paradoxographer (*Annals* 15.36-7)" in T. Woodman and J. Powell (eds), *Author and Audience in Latin Literature*, Cambridge 1992, 182, 184.
18. *Cum magni aestimaret cantare etiam Romae, Neroneum agona ante praestitutam diem reuocauit flagitantibusque cunctis caelestem uocem respondit quidem in hortis se copiam uolentibus facturum…; recitauit et carmina, non modo domi sed et in theatro, tanta uniuersorum laetitia, ut ob recitationem supplicatio decreta sit eaque pars carminum aureis litteris Ioui Capitolino dicata* (Suet. *Ner.* 10)
19. *Dubitavit etiam an privatis spectaculis operam inter scaenios daret* (Suet. *Ner.* 21).
20. For the significance of Nero wearing masks bearing the likeness of himself or those close to him see N. W. Slater, "Nero's Masks", *Classical World* 90 (1996): 33-40.
21. Champlin stresses that "concert tragedies" are brief monologues and performed much like pantomime. Champlin (n. 10), 79. For a further discussion of the "concert tragedy" see H. A. Kelly, "Tragedy and the Performance of Tragedy in Late Roman Antiquity", *Traditio* 35 (1979): 34-8.
22. Performances occurred in the imperial household as early as Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 74) Beacham 1999 (n. 13), 200.
23. *Habebat illa pantomimos fovebatque, effusius quam principi feminae convenit.Hos Quadratus non in theatro, non domi spectabat, nec illa exigebat.* Franklin notes that an inscription from Pozzuoli, *CIL* 10. 1946, preserves the name of one of Ummidia's

who came from all walks of life (slave, freedman, and freeborn), performed a wide array of genres both in large scale monumental theaters and within the Roman domestic contexts.[24] Performance comprised of a solo dance performer and could include backup of musicians and singers.[25] These productions could also incorporate Dionysiac ritual dances, solo performances of Greek tragedy, or multiple actors engaged in dance, athletics, and song.[26]

III. THE *GENS POPPAEA* AND THE *CASA DEGLI AMORINI DORATI*

Through his epigraphic analysis, Della Corte specifically ascribed the house, albeit problematically, to one Gnaeus Poppaeus Habitus.[27] He first collected the names of supporters of a particular candidate from electoral programs (*programmata*) found on the façades of homes.[28] These names found within close proximity to or on the wall of these facades typically are believed correspond to the owner of the house.[29] On the basis of a graffito (*CIL* 10. 6682) found near a doorway to the home, Della Corte deduced that the owner of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* was a member of the *gens Poppaea*. The inscription reads:

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pantomimes. J. L. Franklin, Jr., "Pantomimists at Pompeii Actius Anicetus and his Troupe", *American Journal of Philology* 108 (1987): 97; D. H. Sick, "Ummidia Quadratilla: Cagey Businesswoman or Lazy Pantomime Watcher", *Classical Antiquity* 18.2 (1999): 330-348.

24. The emperor Augustus clearly played a fundaental role in kindling the interest in pantomime to the Roman audience. See the important comments of Y. Hunt, "Roman Pantomime Libretti and their Greek Themes: The Role of Augustus in the Romanization of the Greek Classics", in E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds), *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford 2008, 170; E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theatre*, Hoboken, NJ 2010, 168-204.
25. I. Lada-Richards, "Becoming Mad on Stage: Lucian on the Perils of Acting and Spectating", *BICS* 49 (2006): 145. See the informative article of Dodson-Robinson. that provides a hybrid approach to staging Senecan tragedies that involved actors, speaking and non-speaking as well as pantomimes. E. Dodson-Robinson, "Performing the "Unperformable" Extispicy Scene in Seneca's *Oedipus Rex", Didaskalia* 8.27 [On-line] (2011), Available from:http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/8/27/
26. E. Wüst, "Pantomimus", *RE* 18.3 (1949): 834-69; W. J. Slater, "Pantomimes", *Didaskalia* (1994) [On-line] 1.2. Available from: http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol1no2/wslater.html. See the informative work of Hall and Wyles (n. 24).
27. Della Corte (n. 6), 77.
28. On the controversial nature of Della Corte's analyses and for further bibliography, see P. Allison, "Placing Individuals: Pompeian Epigraphy in Context", *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 14.1 (2001), 57.
29. See, especially, J. L. Franklin, Jr., *Pompeii: The Electoral Programmata, Campaigns and Politics, A.D. 71-79* (1980).

Poppaeenses facimus

"We the Poppaeenses support...."[30]

This graffito has special significance if we are to understand the political and social mindset of Neronian Pompeii. A faction known as the Neropoppaeenses composed largely of the Poppaei and other leading families of Pompeii supported Nero since his adoption into the imperial family and maintained support for him both after the Poppaea Sabina's unfortunate death and the emperor's own suicide.[31] One may immediately question that if the Poppaeenses refer to families other than the *Poppaei* how then does this domus belong to one of the Poppaei?

Della Corte then turned to additional graffiti from the house help to confirm that that the owner was a member of the Poppaeus household. A second graffito, *CIL* 10. 6817, this time found on the entrance to the fauces suggested to Della Corte that perhaps Poppaea Sabina, wife of the emperor Nero graced the halls of this very domus. The graffito reads:

Campylus Poppaeae sal(*utem*)

Campylus greets Poppaea

One could also quickly conjecture that a salutation to "a Poppaea" could simply refer to one of the female inhabitants of the household. A third graffito (*CIL* 10. 6828), this time written in Greek and found in the entrance to room N-O off the garden, counters such a claim. The graffito indicates that the salutations do indeed refer to the empress and that they may coincide with the emperor Nero's visit to Pompeii in 64. This example reads:

[*Ἐ*]*μνήσθη Πρειμ*(*ογ*)*ένης πόπλεικος Καίσορος*

Primogenes, the public slave, remembered Caesar.[32]

The naming of Caesar likely coincides with the imperial visit of Nero to Pompeii after the earthquake in 62 CE, but not specifically a visit at this particular domus.[33] Epigraphic evidence from Pompeii exists for the emperor visiting the town in 64 CE and this was perhaps in deference to Pompeii's inhabitants

30. Della Corte (n. 6), 76.
31. J. L. Franklin, Jr., *Pompeis Difficile Est. Studies in the Political Life of Imperial Pompeii,* Ann Arbor 2001, 128.
32. Della Corte (n. 6), 79.
33. S. de Caro, "Sculpture at the Villa at Oplontis", in E. B. MacDougall (ed), *Ancient Roman Villa Gardens* Washington 1987, 132.

who were still recovering from the earthquake two years before. Sabina, it must be stressed, did not accompany the emperor. Salutations invoking the empress, however, are found in several houses in Pompeii and likely were made to thank her for the gifts she sent to the city's patron deity, Venus Pompeiana, so that the goddess would favor the inhabitants of the city.[34]

Della Corte sealed the attribution of the *Poppaei* to this domus on the basis of a final archaeological find.[35] For him, a gold signet ring with the inscription *Cn*(*aius*) (*Poppaeus*) *Ha*(*bitus*) was strong enough evidence that the owner was a *Cnaius Poppaeus Habitus* and this designation has held ever since. The specific designation of *Habitus*, however, is problematic as there is no other evidence within this domus to support such a claim. It is more likely that the owner was as a member of the *gens Poppaea*, a prominent family from the city of Pompeii and relatives of the emperor Nero's second wife, Poppaea Sabina. [36]

An elaborate *domus*, a patron who was a member of the *gens Poppaea* are factors that may have contributed to possess an elaborate the statuary collection found in the garden peristyle. It is my contention that the stage-like layout of the eastern end of peristyle along with the sculptural collection rich in theatrical motifs served as a suitable backdrop for theatrical performances such as pantomime or other genres in vogue at the time of Nero. As a *Poppaeus* and in turn a *Poppaeenses*, an avid supporter of the emperor's rule, it will come as no surprise that such décor was suitable for an enterprising patron of a *domus* that set the perfect environment for both business and pleasure in Neronian Pompeii.

IV. OVERVIEW OF THE *CASA DEGLI AMORINI DORATI*[37]

Excavated between 1903 and 1905 this two-story domus is large and measures approximately 830m^2. There are two entrances off the northeast side of the Strada Stabiana (Figure 1). One is through a small entrance (A), the

34. Franklin, Jr. (n. 31), 125.
35. Della Corte (n. 6), 77.
36. Several *Poppaei* appear at Pompeii. For example, *Quintus Poppaeus Sabinus*, aedile of Pompeii in 40, lived at the *Casa del Menandro*. See Della Corte (n. 6), 74. De Caro illustrates some of the problems associated with linking Poppaea Sabina to Pompeii. De Caro (n. 33), 131-3.
37. Here, I follow P. Allison's system for the designation of rooms and refer to designations found in specific site reports highlighted by her. P. Allison, *Pompeian Households: An Analysis of the Material Culture*, Los Angeles 2004 as well as her observations on the the layout and functions of specific rooms found in P. Allison, *Pompeian Households: An On-line Companion* (2004). http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/house?id=21.

other a larger direct entrance to the garden peristyle. Having passed through the entrance at A, one enters an atrium and then gains access to the garden area through room G or through another doorway leading out of the atrium. Rooms on the south, west, and east sides (D, C, E, G) further surround the atrium. A colonnaded garden accessible from its own fauces, the atrium or room G, has fluted Doric columns on its north, south, and east sides (F). On the western side of the colonnaded porticoes one sees the wide intercolumniation formed by Corinthian pillars with engaged columns that flank the central stairway from the garden (Figure 2). The stairs lead to an upper level platform that compensates for the natural slope of the northwestern side of the house. On this upper level there are three rooms (Figure 1): Room O, which perhaps served as the main dining area, as well as two smaller rooms flanking it on either side (Q and R). One can see readily from the plan that the garden and porticoes occupy the most space in this part of the house. Additional rooms (I, J [storage/*cubicula*], K, L [storage/*cubicula*]), service areas (S, T, X, V [kitchen], Y) and dining rooms/*cubicula* (?) (M, N) surround the main garden on the north and west sides. Finally, there may have been a garden/light well at P. It would seem that the layout of the house with its extensive garden and colonnaded porticoes indicates that the patron sought both pleasure and profit with respect to design.[38]

Wall decorations and floor coverings indicate that the owner of the house took pride in his surroundings. The wall decoration comprises an ornate mixture of frescos, semi-precious stones and metals, as well as marbles. There are examples of wall paintings in the first, third and fourth styles. Of note are Room G and R's fresco panels attributed to the Homeric cycle, which as Koloski-Ostrow has argued may hint to Nero's composition of *Iliupersis*, but were clearly tied to staged performances in the Julio-Claudian period as a whole.[39] Room G, for example, includes Achilles with Briseis and Patroclus; Jason stepping in front of Peleus, and Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus.[40] Room R retains poorly preserved panels of Diana and Actaeon as well as Leda and the Swan.

Other decorative materials such as precious metals, gemstones, as well as black and white mosaics, point to the elaborate tastes of the patron. For example, on the walls of Room I, one finds blue glass medallions with gold

38. A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum,* Princeton 1994, 139.
39. Koloski-Ostrow 1997 (n. 3), 246, 249.
40. Seiler, for example, dates these particular Third Style frescoes as pre-Neronian with repair work done in the Fourth Style after the earthquake of 62. Seiler (n. 4), 32, 35, 97-99.

eroti (I), hence the name *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* or "House of the Golden Cupids." Moreover parallels in this wall decoration are found in the imperial palaces at Rome. Diamond-shaped obsidian and rectangular figural marble panels (*pinakes*) appeared in the east and south walls of the peristyle, respectively and imitated décor found in the Esquiline Hill Palace and the *Domus Transitoria*.[41] Moreover, the use of the such décor in the peristyle only served to distinguish this area from the rest of the house.[42] Floor coverings comprise black and white mosaics with vine and geometric patterns (G, I) as well as polychrome mosaics (E).[43] In short, the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* is a *domus* that is defined by opulent rooms with rich wall and floor treatments, and, as will become more apparent shortly, an elaborate colonnaded garden.

V. SCULPTURE, STAGES, AND VANTAGE POINTS

Besides elaborate wall paintings and floor coverings, a large sculptural collection (50 pieces of relief and sculpture in the round both locally made and imported works) decorate the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*.[44] Unfortunately, many pieces suffered damage prior to the eruption and were likely awaiting restoration.[45] From the 50 pieces, 27 date approximately to the Claudian and Neronian periods and most of these come from the garden area (Figures 3 and 4).[46] Examples include double-headed Dionysiac herms, relief plaques (*pinakes*) resting on bases or set into walls with theatrical masks that may in

41. A. Sogliano, *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* (1908), 35; Seiler (n. 4), 105, n. 549.
42. Jessica Powers provides an excellent synopsis of the use of obsidian, gold and marble panels. Powers, "Beyond Painting in Pompeii's Houses: Wall Ornaments and their Patrons", in E. Poehler, M. Flohr and K. Cole (eds), *Pompeii. Art, Industry and Infrastructure*, Oxford 2011, 16-17.
43. For a detailed account of the wall and floor decorations with excellent color photos see Seiler (n. 4).
44. For descriptions of the sculpture see, A. Sogliano, *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* (1907), 554-93; W. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius*, vol. 1, New York 1979, 38-9; ibid., vol. 2, 158-64; Seiler (n. 4), 117-21. Unfortunately, a detailed marble analysis is lacking in these reports. Further investigation of the marble types may lead to a more fruitful discussion regarding the amount of imported goods found in the collection. For local workshops see T. Kraus, *Pompeii and Herculaneum: The Living Cities of the Dead*, New York 1975, 31.
45. Seiler notes that similar chisel marks are found on the hairstyles of Neronian portraits carved in the round. Seiler (n. 4), 127-8. For Neronian carving techniques see U. Hiesinger, "The Portraits of Nero", *American Journal of Archaeology* 79 (1975): 113-29.
46. P. Allison, "Garden F in Casa degli Amorini Dorati" in *Pompeian Households: An Online Companion* (2004). http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/house?id=21

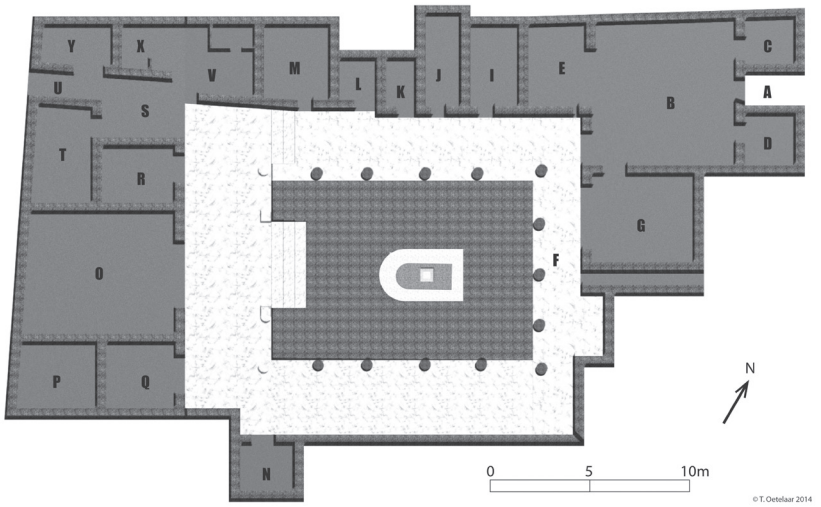

Figure 1. Floor Plan of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI.16. 7), Pompeii. Drawing by Taylor Oetelaar.

Figure 2. View of the Stage Structure from the Garden in the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI. 16.7), Pompeii. Reproduced with permission from the Minestero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, MPI 325843.

Figure 3. View of Garden and Room G from Stage. Reproduced with permission from the Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome, FU 2584.

Figure 4. View of Garden and Northern side of Colonnaded Court from Stage. Reproduced with permission from the Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome, FU 4927.

certain instances represent pantomimes,[47] *oscilla* (discs with maenads, centaurs, and masks),[48] masks, as well as portraits. Noteworthy is the portrait herm of Menander — a favorite playright at Roman banquets.[49]

Some points that pertain to the date and quality of the pieces are worth outlining. First, that over half of the pieces in the collection from the garden area date to the Claudian and Neronian periods is significant. The purchase of a substantial proportion of pieces from these periods may have to do with the function of the garden area.[50] Second, the lavish sculptural collection also complements other forms of decorative arts in the home such as the wall paintings and floor decoration.[51] The overall care to lavish detail especially in regards to material and craftsmanship of the sculptural decoration needs further elaboration. As indicated above, many of the works have been imported and display a high degree of craftsmanship. For example, Dwyer in his study of the theatrically-themed *oscilla* at Pompeii states that local workshop production is indicative of carvings in low relief, errors in carving, poor quality marble and lack of detail and that most of the pieces date to the late third and fourth quarters of the first century CE.[52] The opposite holds true

47. Dwyer initially proposed that they would have been carved on both sides and Seiler confirms this. See E. J. Dwyer, *Pompeian Domestic Sculpture: A Study of Five Pompeian Houses and their Contents*, Rome 1982, 118-19; Seiler (n. 4), catalogue numbers 37, 39, 42. Jory notes in his analysis of masks in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias that representations of pantomime masks show mouths entirely closed or lips semi-parted. Examples at the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* also display these characteristics. Pantomimes were also known for their elaborate dress and gestures. They could perform in the nude or in long flowing robes of silk or heavy quilted garments that hung down to the ankle. They also could wear "minimalist" masks which likely were represented with closed or slightly mouths and believed to be modeled after classical tragic masks. J. Jory, "The Masks of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias" in P. Easterling and E. Hall, *Greek and Roman Actors. Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, Cambridge 2002, 241-3.
48. J.-M. Pailler, "Les *oscilla* retrouvés (Du recueil des documents à une théorie d'ensemble)", *MEFRA* 94.2 (1982): 807.
49. (Plut. *Mor.* 711) Beacham 1999 (n. 13), 198; C.P. Jones, "Dinner Theatre" in W.M. Slater (ed), *Dining in a Classical Context*, Ann Arbor 1991, 192-3. For the herm of Menander (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 20526), see C. Mattusch, *Pompeii and the Roman Villa. Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, Washington 2008, 184, fig. 3; S. Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity: The Contexts of Reception*, Cambridge 2013, 134.
50. On the nature of theme-driven sculptural collections, see Bartman (n. 7), 71-88.
51. It should be noted here that much of this house was damaged during earthquake in 62. Allison notes, however, that the garden area was restored and functional by the time of Vesuvius' eruption in 79. Some rooms surrounding the garden were still under restoration. Allison (n. 37), 72, 195-6; Allison n. 45, "Room G".
52. Dwyer notes that the subject matter for these pieces shared simillarities to contempo-

for most of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* examples ascribed to the Neronian period — most are carved in high relief and out of imported marble.[53] This interest in fine quality pieces clearly has an aesthetic dimension to it, but it could also have a functional one.

The functionality of the pieces is related to the possibility of performance in and around the colonnaded portico. It is important to note Dwyer's observation that the finely crafted imported *oscilla* are easier to see from a variety of vantage points and distances.[54] In contrast, locally made examples hanging from the beams of the colonnaded garden are difficult for the viewer to see. At the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* not only the *oscilla*, but also the theatrical masks, tondi, and *pinakes* are carved in higher relief than most examples at Pompeii. A work carved in higher relief would also have benefits for the viewer who could see the sculpture better from a distance. It would seem that perhaps that some particular activity in or near the garden area necessitated this.

Because of the popularity of pantomime and other small-scale productions in the Neronian period, the well-crafted pieces with theatrical themes found in and around the colonnaded garden have a more functional purpose in addition to serving simply as fine collectibles — they provide a backdrop for staged productions within this particular *domus*. The focal point of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*, the large-scale garden abutting onto the raised stage-like structure on the garden's western end provides a space suitable for the viewing and performing of theatrical productions. Della Corte initially suggested that this was indeed the case, but Richardson readily dismissed this theory on the basis that the main garden does not provide a suitable area to seat an audience for performances.[55] But does the audience necessarily have to sit in the garden proper? On the contrary, they would have had optimal viewing of productions from a number of the rooms surrounding the garden as well as from the colonnaded porticoes (Figure 1). If the stage was not limited to the higher elevation from the western portico but extended down the stairs into the garden area the viewers would have had excellent vantage points from a variety of rooms.

The *Casa del Fauno* (VI.12.2) and the *Casa di Marcus Lucretius*

rary mime productions. E. J. Dwyer, "Pompeian *Oscilla* Collections", *MDAI(R)* 88 (1981), 249.

53. Pailler (n. 48), 768.

54. Dwyer (n. 47), 130, 134.

55. Della Corte (n. 6), 77. Koloski-Ostrow also maintains that this area was likely used for recitations and performance. Her analysis concentrates on the theatrical nature of the wall paintings. Koloski-Ostrow (n. 3). Richardson, Jr. (n. 41), 315.

(IX.3.5.24) also indicate the presence of both stages and gardens replete with sculpture that could have been venues suitable for theatrical performances at Pompeii. The placement of stages at strategic points in the colonnaded portico promotes optimal viewing of a production from key locations. The colonnaded court, for example, in the *Casa del Fauno* possesses wider intercolumniations and evidence for an elevated stage area on its northern end.[56] The *Casa di Marcus Lucretius* is of interest since its sculptural collection is very similar to the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*.[57] This house, like the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* contains high quality deeply carved oscilla, double-faced herms, and *pinakes* that have strategic locations in the garden.[58] The arrangement of the statues corresponds to the optimal viewing points from the various dining rooms and porticoes. Not only could the viewer appreciate the statuary while seated in the various dining rooms, but also while strolling through the porticoes. For example, the double-sided composition of the *pinakes* and herms force the viewer to walk around and admire the works from different spots within the garden or from the porticoes. The wall-inserted pinakes also emphasize the nature of the peristyle and as Powers has observed, "must have impressed guests arriving for dinner parties there."[59]

This deliberate setting of stage and sculpture within the peristyle is not coincidental: strolling, sitting, sculpture and stage production all go hand in hand with permanent Roman freestanding theatre complexes. The antecedents go as far back as the late Republic in Rome. For instance, the Theatre of Pompey with its porticoes and gardens richly decorated with sculptural decoration provided the perfect setting for the complete theatrical experience. A similar scenario plays out in Pompeii. The Large Theatre, for example, has a park with colonnade nearby known to modern viewers as the *Foro Triangolare*. This park came complete with a temple falling into ruin, statuary, and a fountain that allowed the audience to stroll, converse, and relax between performances.[60]

The setting of the garden area of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*, too,

56. For the drawn out columns in the *Casa del Fauno* see the plan in M. Grahame, "Public and Private in the Roman House: the Casa del Fauno", in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology (Supplementary Series* 22), Portsmouth, RI 1997, 152, fig. 9.
57. Dwyer (n. 47), 119; Dwyer (n. 52), 257.
58. Unlike the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* or the *Casa del Fauno*, this garden does not have a stage-like structure nor does it contain a peristyle, but its overall layout could be conducive for performance.
59. Powers (n. 42), 16.
60. Richardson, Jr. (n. 41), Beacham 1999 (n. 13).

could also be an optimal setting for audience and actors alike in terms of representing a compressed theater complex with stage and porticoed gardens. The western elevated end could serve as a stage upon which actors could perform. The size of the stage (approximately 6 m x 15 m) at the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* is well suited for such productions, especially the small-scale performances in fashion during the Neronian period. Stairs that lead into the garden area proper also ostensibly lengthen the space of the stage and could be compatible for musicians and extra actors involved in a specific type of performance.

If Dwyer's theory on vantage points in the *Casa di Marcus Lucretius* is applied to the garden area of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*, it does reveal some telling information. The prime vantage points for sculpture appear to be from rooms O and G (noteworthy for its Homeric cycle panels) (pl. 1). The placement of the statuary and the stage are therefore carefully construed for the audience's optimal viewing. In the case of the *Casa Degli Amorini Dorati*, the raised elevation from the western portico promotes optimal vantage points of the stage: this is especially evident from Room G, the placement is skewed to acquire an optimal sightline of the stage between the pillars. The sculpture, too, could be seen from prime vantage points throughout the house.

The setting of the garden area of the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati*, too, is optimal for audience and actors alike. The western elevated end could serve as a stage upon which the pantomime troupe could perform. The size of the stage (approximately 6 m x 15 m) at the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* is well suited for such productions, especially the small-scale performances in fashion during the Neronian period. Despite the two large pillars on the elevated western end, viewers still could see the stage from multiple vantage points which included the colonnaded porticoes as well as from Room G. The best view of the stage with no obstruction was from Room O, which unfortunately was under renovation at the time of eruption of Vesuvius. I would also like to emphasize once again that the vantage points for the viewing of the stage also coincide with the vantage points used for the viewing of the sculpture as discussed above. Stairs that lead into the garden area proper also ostensibly lengthen the space of the stage and could be compatible for musicians and extra actors involved in a specific type of performance. Or, much like the peristyles gardens of Roman theater complexes simply may have been used as a backdrop for the audience to contemplate further the productions.

The garden sculpture at the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* is also indicative of a distinct thematic program that is theatrical in nature. As mentioned above, the garden's sculptural program is predominantly Dionysiac. For some, the

presence of Dionysiac imagery within a garden represents a Dionysiac-bucolic setting. Advocates of this theory see the garden as a reflection of the correlation between religious practice and nature.[61] Van Stackelberg believes, for example, that because "Dionysus is also the god of altered states, variable personas, and boundaries, Dionysiac imagery indicates an awareneness … of garden space as other from the norms interior domestic space."[62] This analogy becomes problematic, however. when we take into account that garden imagery could also be both incorporated into an interior domestic space and aligned with the garden area.[63] One should not take away the possibility of the garden

For others, the religious Dionysiac leitmotif simply coincides with theatrical stage settings and serves as decoration for decoration sake, or a fashionable trend.[64] However, if we take Dionysus at face value as the god of the theatre and wine, his presence as well as that of his retinue in the visual representations in and around the dining areas the *domus* does indeed serve to unify the decorative program of the house as a whole. The characters are associated with tragedy, comedy and satyr plays in the Greco-Roman world. More specifically and significantly, these theatrical motifs appear in pantomime productions especially during the reigns of Augustus and Nero.[65] It is within this vein that the sculptural program should now be considered: the pieces function as a collection to complement theatrical productions in Neronian Pompeii.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The *Casa degli Amorini Dorati,* likely owned by a member of the *Gens Poppaea*, supplies evidence that visual markers other than painting con-

61. M. Mastroroberto, "La Scultura dei giardini" in B. Conticello and F. Romano, eds., *Domus-Viridaria Horti Picti* (1992), 40; Dwyer (n. 38), 118; Seiler (n. 4), 133; P. Zanker *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*, D. L. Schneider (transl.), Cambridge, MA 1998, 168-9; S. Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity*, Cambridge 2003, 156; Nervegna (n. 49), 134.
62. K. T. von Stackelberg, *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense and* Society, London and New York 2009, 88.
63. See, for example, "The House of the Golden Bracelets," in B. Bergmann, "Staging the Supernatural: Interior Gardens of Pompeian Houses" in C. Mattusch et al., *Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, Washington 2009, 57-59.
64. Dwyer emphasizes a theatrical setting but does not elaborate on the idea that the sculptures could also serve as a suitable prop and/or backdrop for the stage. Dwyer (n. 52), 249.
65. The Augustan pantomime Pylades, for example, was renowned for his performance of the god Dionysus. Beacham 1992 (n. 13), 142, 146; Jory (n. 47), 249, n. 46.

tribute to the theatricality of the house. The raised platform conforming to the natural slope of the house denotes the presence of a stage for theatrical productions. The architectural features — viz., the wide intercolumniations and the colonnade and placement of the various rooms — draw the viewer's attention to this end of the house. The Neronian pieces from the sculptural collection also give authority to performances taking place on the west side of the garden because the subject matter of these pieces did fit into the pantomime's repertoire. I have attempted to use the *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* as a case study to suggest a specific motivation behind the preference for visualizing theatrical subjects in the sculptural collection of the colonnaded garden area – that is, for the purpose of private theatrical performances. Scholarship to date has focused on wall paintings to illustrate these points, but there has yet to be an in depth analysis of the sculpture and stage-like garden. Further studies of other Pompeian domestic contexts as well as those in the Bay of Naples area will help to take sculpture beyond the role of the "collection for art's sake," thereby showing that sculpture could serve as props in the ever-expanding Roman stage.

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
lahughes@ucalgary.ca