

Introduction

A guide for *reading* the decoration of Roman houses: this, in many ways, is the modern view of the role of rhetoric with regard to Roman wall painting. Wall painting is not the only artistic genre thus connected to rhetoric as an explanatory framework.¹ But it represents, perhaps more prominently than others, the conflicting relationship that can ensue from using ancient rhetoric as a manual for ancient visual art.

The interpretative framework of rhetoric with its topographical powers has proven a blessing in the field of Roman domestic interior decoration. Accounts such as those by Quintilian and others, which show the reader how to store the different parts of a speech as imaginary objects lining an equally imaginary walk through a house, have provided a means to consider how this decoration, and specifically how this decoration with regard to its location, helps to create specific atmospheres in specific parts of the house and thereby contributes to what is perhaps best called social zoning.²

And yet the application of rhetorical theory to the decoration of Roman houses has also triggered new problems: the rhetorical manuals of the first centuries BCE and CE applied to the study of interior decoration are primarily concerned with the construction of speeches. The mechanisms championed in order to sustain and exploit the linearity of a speech, as the course of an argument unfolding over time, have a tendency to localize and linearize content, not least when applied as interpretative tools to other evidence than the flow of words, such as the visual arts.

The Roman house, however, does not offer a linear experience; or, to state the obvious, while it is true that certain rooms can only be reached by cutting across others, once inside the house more than one route is

¹ For Roman sculpture, see e.g. Hölscher 1987: 54–61; also cf. Preisshofen and Zanker 1970–1; Varner 2006. For Roman sarcophagi, see e.g. Giuliani 1989.

² The rhetoric passages most often cited in this context are: *Ad C. Herenn.* 3.16–24; *Cic. de orat.* 2.86.351–54; Quint. *Inst. or.* 11.2.17–22. Examples of their application in the scholarship of the Roman domestic context: Brilliant 1984; Leach 1988: 23; Rouveret 1989; Bergmann 1994; Elsner 1995: 77–87.

possible, including ultimately a return to the entrance that is also the exit. In many ways, therefore, the Roman house functions like B. S. Johnson's novel *The Unfortunates*, in which the twenty-seven chapters, bar first and last, can be rearranged at leisure to create ever-new narratives.³

In such a setup, the actual location of individual elements is of lesser importance than the way in which these elements gain meaning in relationship with whatever other elements surround them.⁴ In short, it is their topology, and not their topography, that is crucial to an understanding of the decorative elements of a Roman house. And herein lies a problem: interpretative frameworks solely derived from a mnemonic technique bound to the topographical such as those canvassed by the rhetoric manuals will struggle to account for this topology – something that, as we will see, Quintilian for instance is happy to acknowledge.

In the following, after a brief survey of the use of two aspects of rhetorical writing – mnemonic systems and descriptors of modes of transmission – in the study of Roman wall painting, the Casa del Menandro in Pompeii (Regio I 10.4) will serve as a case study to examine the usefulness of interpretative frameworks derived from these elements of rhetoric and to explore how Roman rhetoric can be harnessed to account for the visuality of early imperial Roman interior decoration.

Rhetoric and Roman wall painting

Ancient rhetorical writing of the kind applied to Roman wall painting is mostly devoted to rhetoric as a practical skill. In essence, the works that survive are mainly teaching manuals concerned with the art of managing the voice, and – more broadly – organizing thought in order to deliver content most successfully to audiences. This type of rhetoric can thus offer valuable insights in particular with regard to the formal appearance and arrangement of content. In addition, it forms an important source for our understanding of ancient expectations with regard to perception, and cognitive processes more generally.

The consequent use of rhetoric as an interpretative framework is a comparatively recent phenomenon in scholarship on Roman wall painting.

³ Johnson 1969/2008.

⁴ This sits in parallel to the social structure of Roman houses, which has been aptly described as the layers of an onion: their status (as public or private) is not absolute, but emerges from the relationship of layer to layer. See Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 17.

The work of Bettina Bergmann in particular has established ancient rhetorical writing as a means for understanding the decorations that adorn the walls of Roman houses.⁵ Bergmann starts from the proposition that memory is an important factor bearing upon the pictorial decoration of the Roman domestic context of the first centuries BCE and CE.⁶ She applies the mnemonic systems described by the author of the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero and Quintilian (written roughly within the same window of time between the first centuries BCE and CE, in which the layout of the house provides the mental topography for the placing of individual parts of a speech)⁷ to argue that the pictorial decorations of Roman houses should be approached as an interrelated network of content. Decoration elicits flexible content that is prone to semantic changes: it is dependent on the movements and mentality of its audiences, and the combinations and sequences in which they experience specific decorative features.

The application of these mnemonic systems as an interpretative framework for Roman wall painting offers a clear advantage to the text-hermeneutical argument of old scholarship because it enforces a focus on what individual decorations display, and refuses simply to reduce their meaning to what can be derived from the labels given to them, such as 'decorative pattern', 'Dionysian scene', or 'Zeus and Hera'.⁸ But the approach implicit in Bergmann's emphasis on the 'semantic flexibility' of decorations spread across the house, and their 'thematic polyphony',⁹ reaches further. It does so, however, by following not so much the mnemonic template but the criticism Quintilian brings against the system he himself champions.¹⁰

Quintilian argues that his mnemonic system is workable for remembering a large set of data in a specific sequence such as people recalling sales; but he doubts its usefulness for learning a continuous speech, and indeed 'verbal structure'.¹¹ In order to remember such a network of ideas within the

⁵ Bergmann 1994. See also Brilliant 1984; Leach 1988: 23; Rouveret 1989 for previous essays in this field. For an alternative application of rhetorical theory to Roman wall painting, as a means to assess form and style, see Tybout 1989.

⁶ Bergmann 1994: 225.

⁷ *Ad C. Herenn.* 3.16–24; *Cic. De orat.* 2.86.351–54; *Quint. Inst. or.* 11.2.17–22. – On ancient mnemonic techniques, see also Rossi 1960; Blum 1969; Yates 1966: 1–49; Rouveret 1989: 303–79; Elsner 1995: 77–81; also Small 1997: 81–140, esp. 95–116.

⁸ For a discussion, see Lorenz 2008: 8–11.

⁹ For the terms, see Bergmann 1994: 245–51.

¹⁰ Bergmann mentions the existence of the critique in a footnote, but does not discuss it; see Bergmann 1994: 225 no. 2.

¹¹ *Quint. Inst. or.* 11.2.23–6, esp. 11.2.24–5: 'This may well have been an aid to those who, at the end of the sale, repeated what they had sold to each buyer, precisely as the cashiers' records testified. [...] But the technique will be less useful for learning by heart what is to be a

confines of the mnemonic system that Quintilian elaborates one would have to turn the ideas into symbols by inventing an object as place-holder for each idea, in order to position these imaginary objects within the house that serves as mnemonic container. Effectively, therefore, these imaginary – but, within the confines of the mnemonic framework, visible and tangible – objects are ideas turned into symbols for the sake of data storage. But Quintilian is quick to point out the problems of retrieval linked to this type of storage: because the ideas feature no longer as themselves but as symbolically loaded signs, as ideas-turned-objects, the rhetor not only has to memorize the route through the house but, separately, also the relevant relationships between ideas and denoting objects. This makes additional demands on one's mnemonic facility, but also, as Quintilian notes, adds extraneous data. That is, it engages other (symbolic) meanings already linked to the chosen objects, which can potentially interfere with the mnemonic network, alter its trajectory and send the rhetor – along with his argument – onto a differing pathway.

Whilst Quintilian's mnemonic system is concerned with the topography of objects and content, his excursus on the system's limitations is devoted to a topology of meaning. He acknowledges that ideas turned into visible objects (his signs, essentially) might in turn trigger ideas different from those that originally marshalled the symbols. For Quintilian, the main problem here is the cognitive overload this can cause on the part of the rhetor, who might find himself lost between different strata of meaning.

This potential for interference between things and ideas, described by Quintilian, is at the conceptual core of what allows Bergmann's approach not simply to focus on the decoration (with regard to what is visible where), but to reach beyond the linearity enforced by the mnemonic template and unlock a dynamic way of looking at Roman wall painting. That is, it shows how decorations can be perceived on the grounds of what is visible around them. With his critique, Quintilian points to a distinction that in modern art-historical scholarship would be described as the difference between the visible and the visual: that is, the visible of a picture as what we see, and the visual as what makes for its overall efficacy, a fluid agglomeration of associations, and a multi-stability created in 'the intertwinings of

continuous speech. For on the one hand, ideas do not have the same images as objects, since we always have to invent a separate sign for them, but a Site may none the less somehow remind us of them, as it may of a conversation held there; on the other hand, how can a verbal structure be grasped by this art? [...] For suppose that, like shorthand writers, we have definite Images for all of these things and (of course) infinite Sites for them [...] – and suppose we remember them all, as if they were safe in the bank: will not the run of our speech actually be held up by this double effort of memorizing?' (trans. Russell).

transmitted and dismantled knowledges'.¹² And it is this that helps to lead beyond a mere topography of domestic decoration – a list of what appears where – to its topology, an assessment of the meanings of objects produced through and for their location.

In this sense, then, and following Quintilian's critique, it is by offering a means to leave the linearity of rhetoric behind that rhetoric helps to appropriate a new framework for the study of Roman wall painting. But this also opens up a new set of questions with regard as to how we are to tackle this topology, and whether the apparent 'thematic polyphony' could be disentangled again for analysis. This is an area in which scholarship has once more relied on rhetorical writing: on the basis of stylistic figures and rhetorical tropes, Bettina Bergmann and others have specified modal principles according to which especially mythological pictures are combined in the Roman house: parallelism, intensification and contrast (*similitudo*, *uicinitas* and *contrarium*).¹³

These categories can help to distinguish different modes of transmission at play in different parts of the house – transmission here used both in the narrow sense of conveying content by means of visual depiction and in the wider sense of partaking in the communication of cultural knowledge and protocols.¹⁴ And yet they also create a crucial problem: for Quintilian, the tropes bolster an overarching system of transmission for verbal content, facilitating the specific requirements of speech. Adopting this framework without adaptation for the analysis of pictorial decoration risks boxing up the visual in the same way – without testing out whether the verbal and the visual answer to the same requirements, and indeed whether shared stylistic characteristics produce comparable effects in the two media. In short, it takes the individual rhetorical building blocks for full-blown aesthetic concepts without examining whether they can actually fulfil this role.¹⁵

The Pompeian evidence points to the scaffolding of visual argument as an overriding category to which tropes such as contrast and intensification contribute. Within this setup, however, the combinations of mythological

¹² Didi-Huberman 2005: 16.

¹³ Bergmann 1999: 101. See also Brilliant 1984: 71 (himself pointing back to Barwick 1957); Descoedres 1994: 163 (parallelism, intensification, contrast); Strocka 1997: 130 (complementing and antithetical combinations).

¹⁴ Transmission here is used following Régis Debray's concept of *transmettre*: Debray 2000: 9–44; Debray 2004.

¹⁵ The argument has been made that rhetorical theory shapes Roman perception, which indeed would give rhetorical tropes a comprehensive stake in contemporary aesthetics: Brilliant 1984: 53–89; Leach 1988; Rouveret 1989: *passim*; Bergmann 1994: 226; Elsner 1995: 77–84. Cf. also Elsner 1995: 78 on the role of the house in Roman thought.

pictures within the rooms of Pompeian houses are characterized not by whether they are based on parallelism, intensification or contrast. Instead, they are defined by the ways in which these modal relationships are combined in individual rooms, and within the domestic space as a whole, in order to generate an overall experience.¹⁶ Once again, rhetoric provides the tools – in this case, formal descriptors – to reach beyond its linear limitations, but these are in need of being appropriated and conceptualized for an interpretative framework that can account for the visual nature of the evidence.

The Casa del Menandro (Regio I 10.4)

The Casa del Menandro is one of Pompeii's most prominent houses (Figure 5.1).¹⁷ Its size and features confirm it as the dwelling of a financially potent owner: covering an impressive 1,800 m² and including both living quarters and an extensive work tract, it was among the first Pompeian houses to be equipped with a private bath, added around 30 BCE and a clear marker of the house's exclusivity. It also contains the largest banqueting room in Pompeii, Room (18), part of the remarkable two three-room groups located around the peristyle which vouch for the owner's ample need for entertaining guests.¹⁸

The architectural layout is matched by the luxuriousness of the interior decoration. The pavements in all central areas are lavishly adorned with mosaics from the period of the Second Style, including three figural *emblemata*.¹⁹ The wall paintings are of high quality throughout, and they feature a whole series of topics that are either exceptional or seem to mark the beginning of specific decorative trends in Pompeii: the mythological scenes of the Second Style in the *atriolum* (46) of the bath suite are among the

¹⁶ Cf. Lorenz 2008: 41–4.

¹⁷ *PPM II* 1991: 241–397; Ling 1997: 47–144; Dickmann 1999: 317–18, 355–6; Ling and Ling 2005: 3–106.

¹⁸ This setup is facilitated by the double assignment of *tablinum* (8), both in its traditional function as passageway between *atrium* and peristyle and as the central part of the three-room group that comprises Room (11) to the west and Room (12) to the east. Pompeian houses have generally only one three-room group, as suite for reception and entertainment; see: Tamm 1963: 128–33; Förtsch 1993: 110–15; Leach 1997: 59–62; Ling 1997: 223–7; Dickmann 1999: 313–31, esp. 317–19. However, multiplication of this room configuration can be used to signal wealth and social standing: Wallace-Hadrill 1988: 92–3.

¹⁹ The mosaic flooring covers 80 sqm of the overall 1,800 sqm, see: Ling and Ling 2005: 95; cf. also Pesando 1997: 221–47, esp. 236.

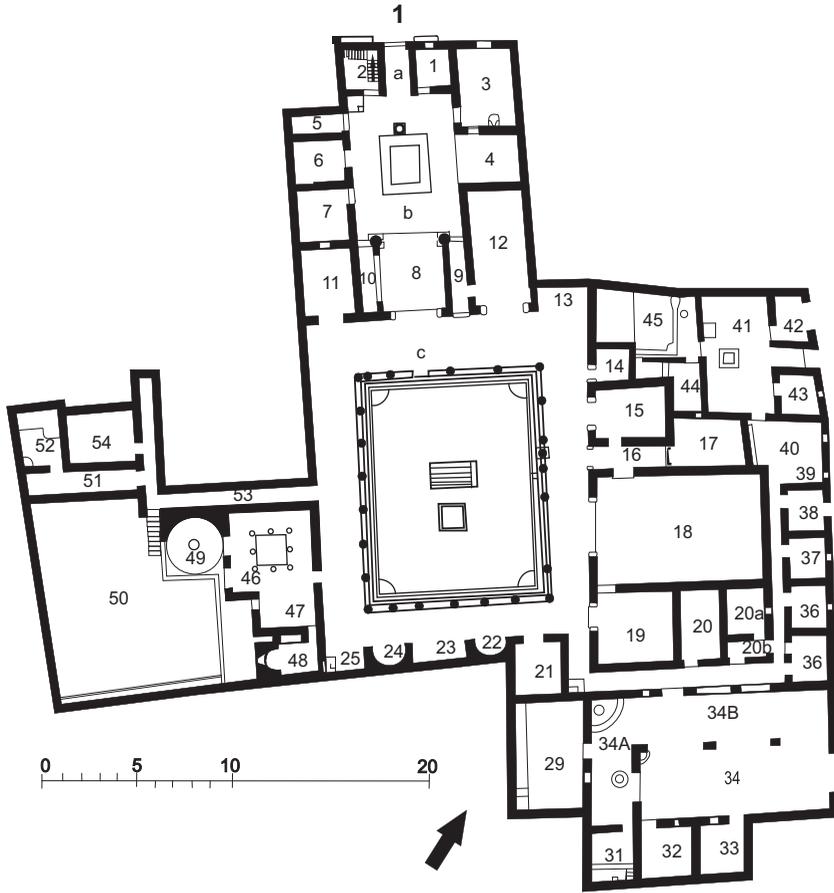


Figure 5.1 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4).

earliest, if not the first appearance of mythological topics on Pompeian walls;²⁰ the painting of the dramatist Menander in the peristyle, from which the name of the house is derived, constitutes the only representation of a specific poet on Pompeian walls;²¹ the scenes of the *Iliupersis* of the Fourth Style in *ala* (4) are among the few Fourth Style cyclical depictions of myth; and the picture of Perseus and Andromeda of the Fourth Style in Room (11) possibly constitutes the first Roman depiction of this particular episode.

Its apparent role as a trendsetting dwelling renders the Casa del Menandro a good case study, and this is further backed by its exceptionally thorough

²⁰ Beyen 1938/1960: 147–8; Maiuri 1932: 127–32; Binsfeld 1956: 31–3; Cèbe 1966: 362–3; Tybout 1989: 348 no. 1268; Ling and Ling 2005: 20–3, 64–5, fig. 81; Clarke 2007: 134–40.

²¹ Ling and Ling 2005: 85–8, esp. 87.

scholarly exploration, with Roger Ling's comprehensive and exemplary study of the *Insula* of Menander forming the culmination.²² A particularly important product of this extensive engagement is that the chronology of the individual decorative phases of the house is well established. Hence it can facilitate a discussion of the individual decorative phenomena both within the sequence of their appearance and in relation to the use and overall development of wall painting in Pompeii and its embeddedness in wider socio-cultural activities and historical events.

The decoration of the house falls into two main phases, the first in the late Second Style around the third quarter of the first century BCE, when most pavements (and all of the mosaic pavements) were laid down and the bath suite was decorated.²³ The second phase took place in the Fourth Style between the 40s and the 60s CE, when the house underwent a comprehensive redesign, but with most pavements remaining. Ling argues convincingly that this redecoration was executed in three stages, the first early in the Fourth Style in the 40s; the other two during the mature Fourth Style, with the second before and the third after the earthquake of 62.²⁴ It seems that the same workshop continued its work over this extended period, from before until after the earthquake; whence Ling establishes a date between 61 and 65 CE for the second and third phase of redecoration.

Despite this robust chronological framework the dominant interpretation of the decoration is less conclusive. The image of Menander in the south of the peristyle, along with its companion piece, possibly a painting of Euripides,²⁵ has channelled assessment in one direction, to read the whole decoration as evidence for the cultural and specifically literary ambitions of the owner, whom Ling calls an 'aficionado of epic and drama'.²⁶ The decorations of Rooms (4) and (15) are marshalled in support of the 'literary feel' that

²² Ling 1997–2007.

²³ Ling and Ling 2005: 3–4.

²⁴ Ling and Ling 2005: 4. A first burst of work in the 40s sees the redecoration of Rooms (3) and (11); then, in the 50s and early 60s CE Room (15) is redecorated and, after the earthquake, work is executed in the whole *atrium* area and in Rooms (18) and (19), with repairs in Rooms (11) and (15).

²⁵ *PPM II* 1991: 367; Maiuri 1932: 107. Clarke (1991: 188) argues that *exedra* (23) with the image of the poet forms the 'visual and iconographical focus' of the house, providing the end-point to the axis that reaches from the *fauces* through the house. Menander reads the comedy 'The Twins' (*Didumai*), as explained by the inscription (cf. Maiuri 1932: 112).

²⁶ Ling and Ling 2005: 104–5. Clarke (1991: 170) follows the interpretation that the house belonged to the Poppaei, because of a seal found in Room (43), bearing the name of the freedman Quintus Poppaeus; but he also agrees that the owner had a 'taste for highly dramatic pictorial cycles or individual paintings illustrating climatic moments in myths' (Clarke 1991: 176–7).

seemingly characterizes the house, because of their decoration with cyclical scenes,²⁷ and because Room (15) displays pictures of the Muses. And Ling takes it further, identifying the owner as interested particularly in scenes of a Dionysian nature, or in scenes with a religious flair, devoted to the goddesses Artemis and Aphrodite.²⁸

Layers of paint

The Casa del Menandro is evidence for the sophistication of its owners; but it is evidence more complex, and more powerful, than merely signalling learnedness by means of literary portraits. There is a strong element of continuity that characterizes the design: despite being executed in different phases, the pictorial decorations share in a set of conceptual stratagems. This points to a strong hand behind the execution – in terms of both financial means and intellectual reach – that potentially extends beyond a single generation.

Four rooms around *atrium* and peristyle are decorated with mythological panels in the centre of their walls [Rooms (4), (11), (15), (19)]. Three of these – Rooms (11), (15), (19) – are part of the two three-room groups that surround the peristyle, but in each case the mythological designs are not chosen to decorate the central rooms of these configurations – *tablinum* (8) and Room (18) respectively – but their wing rooms. These decorations, within each room and in their interplay across the *atrium* and peristyle areas of the house, provide a promising basis for testing the applicability of interpretative frameworks derived from mnemonic systems and modes of transmission as championed in the rhetorical manuals of the first century BCE and CE.

Ala (4)

The decoration was executed together with that of the rest of the *atrium* area, after the earthquake of 62 CE.²⁹ The rooms in this part of the house, including the *atrium* (b) and the *tablinum* (8), share a similar colour scheme, with black dado below and large fields of yellow or red in the

²⁷ Ling and Ling 2005: 104; cf. Lippold 1951: 83–4. Clarke goes so far as to interpret these pictures as based on the poem of the Fall of Troy, which Nero sang on the occasion of the fire of Rome of 64 CE (Clarke 1991: 177–80, esp. 179).

²⁸ Ling and Ling 2005: 102.6, esp. 104–5. ²⁹ Ling and Ling 2005: 41–6.

middle zone.³⁰ But *ala* (4) stands out from the neighbouring spaces because of its decoration with mythological panels, which do not appear in any of the other rooms around the *atrium*. In the centre of each of the three walls sits an almost square panel, each depicting events and people connected with the Fall of Troy: Priam, Ajax and Cassandra, and Menelaus and Helen in the north; Laocoon in the south; and the Trojan Horse on the central east wall (Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4).³¹

The panels are unusual. First, there is their place on the wall: they sit in the white-ground intervals between the large fields of the wall's middle zone, not within these fields, as would be standard. And they are integrated into the architectural vistas which adorn these intervals, each sitting on an architrave as if an actual wooden panel had been put up against the wall. Second, there is their content: the combination of individual panels depicting scenes of the same epic cycle has very few parallels in Fourth Style decorations.³² Similarly, each subject individually is rare in Pompeii.³³

Their combination in *ala* (4) offers various pathways for reception: first, the panels can be experienced by following the consecutive narrative – from right to left, and progressing in narrative time towards the actual Fall of Troy; or from left to right, to unpick the reasons for Troy's fate retrospectively.³⁴ But the arrangement also offers parallel and contrasting statements, beyond this consecutive narrative.

³⁰ Ling and Ling 2005: 42.

³¹ *PPM* II 1991: 276–86; Ling and Ling 2005: 72–5; Lorenz 2008: 291–3.

³² Lorenz 2008: 28–41; Lorenz 2013. The best parallel is the stuccoed frieze in the Casa del Sacello Iliaco (Regio I 6.4), which presents five individual episodes of the *Iliad*, rigorously selecting a few central scenes to create a prominent filter for the epic as a whole (Casa del Sacello Iliaco: *PPM* I 1990: 280–329; Brilliant 1984: 63–4; Croisille 2005: 160). Other examples include the *Iliad* scenes in Room (3) and (4) of the Domus Transitoria in Rome, probably of Claudian date (Domus Transitoria: *LTUR* II 1995: 199–202 [M. de Vos]; Richardson 1992: 138–9. See also Croisille 2005: 165; Strocka 2007: 317); and scenes in the Temple of Apollo in Pompeii, decorated after the earthquake of 62 CE (Temple of Apollo (Regio VII 7.32): *PPM* VII 1997: 286–304). In addition, Pliny reports the presentation of wooden panel paintings of the Trojan War by the Greek painter Theorus in the Porticus Philippi in Rome (Plin. *Nat.* 35,144).

³³ Laocoon: MANN inv. no. 111210; from the Casa di Laocoonte (Regio VI 14.30), *atrium*. Third Style. *PPM* V 1996: 352–4, figs. 15–17. Trojan Horse: MANN inv. no. 9893. Dawson 1944: 86 no. 14; MANN inv. no. 120176; from Regio IX 7.16. Third Style. *PPM* IX 1999: 792 fig. 18; MANN inv. no. 9010. Fourth Style. *PPM* VII 214 fig. 7; one further picture described in an excavation report but not extant (*Notizie degli Scavi* (1880): 492). Sack of Troy: Ajax and Cassandra were featured in a painting which is no longer extant (Helbig 1868: 293 no. 1328; *PPM* II 1990: 277); Menelaus and Helen: Casa dell'Efebo (Regio I 7.11). *PPM* I 1990: 690 fig. 120.

³⁴ Ling and Ling 2005: 72.



Figure 5.2 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Ala (4), north wall: Priam, Ajax and Cassandra, and Menelaus and Helen.



Figure 5.3 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Ala (4), south wall: Laocöon.

The juxtaposition of Laocöon in the south and the Sack of Troy in the north opens up a specific angle on the Fall of Troy: the differing fates of two fathers – Laocöon and Priam – each depicted in the centre of the picture, and both watching the demise of their children (Figures 5.2, 5.3).



Figure 5.4 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Ala (4), east wall: the Trojan Horse.

This correspondence is further extended by the intermeshing of Helen's and Cassandra's lot in the north, which is without parallel in Pompeii (Figure 5.2): the two women, each similarly nude in appearance and each facing their respective fates, frame the figure of Priam left and right. This arrangement emphasizes the parallel between these three characters, and Laocoon with his two sons on the other side. At the same time, this parallelism puts Menelaus and Ajax on a par with the snakes attacking Laocoon's family, emphasizing their powers and their divine backing.

The mythological decoration of the space thus unfolds its content on different levels: most prominent is the consecutive narrative that connects the pictures, with all of them contributing to key episodes in the Fall of Troy. Then there is the affirmative parallelism of Laocoon and Priam with their respective families, and this is presented with an added complementary element, focusing on the fate of females as well as males in the wake of the city's destruction.

The central panel is both incorporated and excluded from these mechanisms (Figure 5.4): whilst quite literally a transit stage in the consecutive narrative – the scene of the Trojan Horse marks the point at which the Greeks finally enter Troy – it is not concerned with the parallelism of familial fate; and in contrast to the successful assault of the snakes, and that of Menelaus and Ajax, Cassandra's attempt at attacking the wooden prop is stopped in its tracks by two attendants who hold her back.

Cassandra and the Horse make for the focus of the scene, and this differentiates this version from the other Pompeian depictions of this topic.

The confrontation of seer and other-worldly horse condenses the Fall of Troy to a clash of powers beyond the grasp of mere humans. Yet again, in doing so, the panel reaches out to the neighbouring pictures, each of which is centrally concerned with the worship of a god: Poseidon and Athena respectively; with each depicting how the discounting of the specific religious spheres referenced in the picture marks a step towards the destruction of the city.

In addition, the central panel also joins forces with the picture in the north in a relationship that goes beyond mere chronological sequence to highlight Cassandra's fate. The Trojan woman is depicted in both scenes – in the centre marching against, in the north seeking refuge from the Greek attack. And this contrasting presentation captures the spectrum of Troy's demise, thus adding to a panorama of destruction simultaneously also mapped by the two scenes of fathers and offspring.

Despite the peculiarities with regard to the individual panels, and their consecutive arrangement, the layering of different, even interfering correspondences across the decoration of the room – comprising consecutive, parallel, complementary and contrasting connections, and shutting out the central panel on some levels whilst involving it on others – is characteristic also for other decorations of the Fourth Style.³⁵ But it is uncommon in this part of the house: normally, these types of highly charged decorative scenes are found in the area of the peristyle, in rooms devised for longer durations of stay on a visitor's part.³⁶ And yet the subject matter on display here, the Fall of Troy, is in line with the penchant for epic stories to be found around the *atrium* in those cases where this area is decorated with mythological panels at all.³⁷

Room (11)

This room receives its decoration in the first phase of the Fourth Style refurbishments in the 40s CE. Referred to as the *Green Salon*, it is predominantly decorated in a lush green.³⁸ The Second Style mosaic pavement with an *emblēma* depicting pygmies hunting in a Nilotic landscape identifies the room as a lavish dining space.³⁹

A mythological panel sits on each of the three walls. Central in the arrangement, albeit not on the central wall in the north, is the scene of

³⁵ See Lorenz 2008: 325–8. ³⁶ Lorenz 2008: 361–79. ³⁷ Lorenz 2008: 354–60.

³⁸ For the decoration, see: Ling and Ling 2005: 67–71. Versluys 2002: 108–9.

³⁹ This function might have ceased after the narrowing of the doorway (from 3.32 to 1.84m), which took place possibly after the earthquake: Ling and Ling 2005: 30.



Figure 5.5 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (11), west wall: Perseus and Andromeda (reconstruction).

Perseus and Andromeda on the west wall (Figure 5.5). It depicts the two in a scene generally referred to as the *Happy End Type*, an episode that does not occur in any of the literary sources: there, Andromeda is first presented as a sacrifice, to appease Poseidon and the sea monster he sent to lay waste to the Aethiopian lands in response to the arrogance of Andromeda's mother, Cassiopeia, who had boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids. Then, Perseus catches sight of Andromeda on his return from slaying the Gorgon; he asks Andromeda's father, Cepheus, for the hand of her daughter in return for slaying the sea monster. And, finally, after having successfully disposed of it, he takes Andromeda as his bride to Tiryns.⁴⁰

Here, in the *Happy End Type* in Room (11) the two protagonists are sitting next to each other and Perseus, having killed the sea monster and freed Andromeda, embraces her; and both gaze upon the reflection of the Gorgon's head in a pool in front of them, its deadly powers thus defused. Scenes of this type are characterized by two aspects in particular: that is,

⁴⁰ For the myth, see *LIMC* I 1981 s.v. *Andromeda* I [K. Schauenburg]; *LIMC* VII 1994 s.v. *Perseus* [L. Jones Roccos]. The literary treatments: Apollod. 2.43–9; Ov. *Met.* 4,663–7. On the visual representations, see Schauenburg 1960: 68–74; Phillips 1968; Maaskant-Kleibrink 1989: 39–41; Schmaltz 1989; Muth 1998: 200–2; Lorenz 2007; Lorenz 2008: 124–49, esp. 142–6. Schmaltz (1989) differentiates three types in the Campanian corpus: the first, the *Landscape Type* (late Second to Third Style), shows Andromeda chained to a rock, set within an extended landscape and under attack from the Cetus, whilst Perseus approaches. In the second, the *Liberation Type* (Third and Fourth Style), the Cetus is dead and Andromeda is about to step down from the rock, only chained with one arm, while Perseus assists her. The third, the *Happy End Type* (Fourth Style), displays the two protagonists in close embrace and watching the reflection of the Gorgoneion.

the two heroes meet around a pledge of love, in this case the Gorgoneion; and they are shown in a close relationship which emphasizes notions of *coniugium*.⁴¹

The presence of the Gorgon's head ties Andromeda to her partner differently from the way pledges of love are employed in other Pompeian scenes of mythological relationship, e.g. in those of Theseus and Ariadne with the dead Minotaur; or Meleager and Atalanta with the dead boar.⁴² Andromeda has to abide by Perseus' moving of the prop. That means that the narrative baggage embedded in the scene by means of the Gorgoneion defines the relationship on display: Perseus is the active partner, and their relationship asymmetrical. And Perseus' seductive charisma, in this particular picture, is further underlined by the fact that, with the wings on his head, he is depicted in clear analogy to the Gorgoneion itself – a unique iconographic move which seemingly equips him with irresistible gaze-attracting powers.

The scene is put in parallelism with the worn panel on the opposite east wall, where a satyr pours a liquid (wine?) from what appears to be a mask onto a child or cupid:⁴³ the dangers spreading from the mask on the west and east walls are rather different, but in each case the prop is used to steer the relationship between the two figures. In contrast to that, the panel on the central wall in the back of the room appears not to have featured a mask, but instead probably showed a woman or maenad feeding grapes to a cupid or Baby Dionysus.⁴⁴ In this sense, then, the central wall – similar to the arrangement in *ala* (4) – is cut off from elements that connect the other two pictures, whilst at the same time featuring yet another variation of the depiction of asymmetrical relationships, and adding a complementary aspect because here it is a woman, not a man, who controls the relationship.

In the combination, the north wall is set off, and a connection between east and west wall is created through the use of the mask prop. Yet again, the design harbours more heterogeneous elements: the panel of Perseus and Andromeda on the west wall is differentiated from the other two because it displays a specific mythological episode, whereas the others are of generic Dionysian character. If seen alone, Andromeda is Perseus' admiring consort; but if set in parallel to the two child-like figures in the other two pictures, the playfulness of the Gorgoneion scene is emphasized, but so also is Andromeda's vulnerability.

⁴¹ Schmaltz 1989: 266. ⁴² Lorenz 2008: 147. ⁴³ Ling and Ling 2005: 68.

⁴⁴ Ling and Ling (2005: 69) link this depiction convincingly with the following: Casa di Meleagro (Regio VI 9.2.13), peristyle (16), west wall: *PPM* IV 716 fig. 122; Casa di Fabius Rufus (Regio VII 16.22), Room (58), north wall: *PPM* VII 1065 fig. 236.

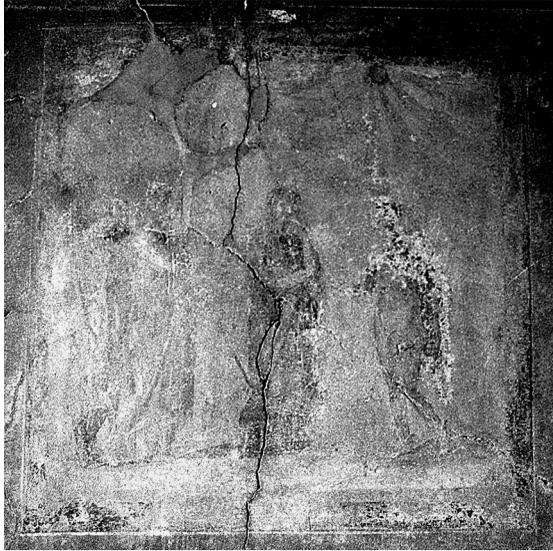


Figure 5.6 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (15), north wall: Perseus and veiled figure.

Room (15)

Located in the east of the peristyle, and part of the three-room group that has Room (18) at its centre, this room was redecorated about one decade after Room (11), with repairs – including new central panels on north and east wall – after the earthquake.⁴⁵ The room is larger than Room (11), and it stands out because of its predominantly red colour scheme.

The decoration with three mythological panels displays elements of both the consecutive arrangement in *ala* (4) and the subject choice in Room (11): two walls feature scenes from the story of Perseus and Andromeda. The panel in the north shows the hero equipped with his trademark short sword, the *harpē*, and Gorgoneion and winged boots (but no wings on his head!) within a grand interior setting, as indicated by the curtains framing the upper part of the panel (Figure 5.6). He is reaching out with his right towards a veiled figure depicted in thoughtful pose in the centre of the picture; and further to the right stand three figures watching the scene – among them at least two men, one of them dressed in long garments and also in thoughtful pose.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ling and Ling 2005: 76–81. The pavement here also dates to the Second Style, but does not feature an *emblemā*.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ling and Ling 2005: 79–80.

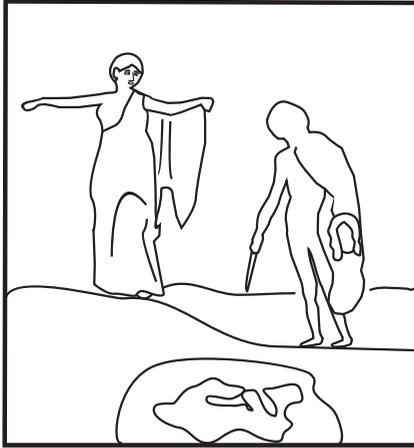


Figure 5.7 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (15), east wall: Perseus and Andromeda (reconstruction).

This scene must be set in the palace of Andromeda's father, Cepheus – a setting which also features in two representations of the *Landscape Type*.⁴⁷ The scene here, however, is adjusted considerably: whilst in these other representations Perseus is about to shake hands with Cepheus, who is characterized as king by his long garment and Phrygian cap, the central figure here shows the white flesh tone of a woman, and the king stands aside (assuming he is the character with dark face and long white garments). Roger Ling has argued that the central figure here must be Cassiopeia, Andromeda's mother.⁴⁸ If this was the case, it would put considerable emphasis on the queen's *hybris*, boasting about her own beauty, and her responsibility for Andromeda's situation. The formal act of marital agreement between Perseus and Cepheus that seems at the centre of the palace episode in the landscape pictures, however, would then here appear to have been pushed into the background.

On the east wall, the second episode from the myth also breaks with previous templates, in this case modifying the *Liberation Type* (Figure 5.7): the scene is set after Perseus has killed the sea monster, and the hero points with his *harpē* to its dead body in the foreground. In the back, Andromeda

⁴⁷ Boscotrecase: Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1962: 43–6; 1990: 33–5; Casa del Sacerdos Amandus (Regio I 7.7), Room (b), west wall. Third Style. *PPM* I 1990: 602–3. This moment is otherwise in Pompeii not chosen for a stand-alone depiction, except perhaps for a now lost panel in the house Regio VI 11 6.38. See *PPM* VII 1997: 214; Ling and Ling 2005: 79 no. 463. For the myth in general, see n. 40 above.

⁴⁸ Ling and Ling 2005: 79.

is still chained to the rock – and, in contrast to most other versions of the liberation, Perseus is not looking or engaging with her. With the key action of this type missing from the scene – the unchaining of the heroine – the emphasis is put entirely on Perseus. And his role is further redefined: pointing to the sea monster with his *harpē*, it appears Perseus killed the monster not with the magic Gorgoneion, but with a close-combat weapon. This puts his fighting *uirtus* centre stage – a remarkable divergence from the usual tone of the liberation pictures, which normally take the struggle as closed and instead highlight the union of the two protagonists with a view to their prospective *coniugium*.⁴⁹

The two panels are connected consecutively like those in *ala* (4), even if there remains some uncertainty around which episode occurs first.⁵⁰ In their combination, and with the woman as central figure in the panel on the north, a reaccentuation of the female characters in the myth takes place which in the liberation scene is otherwise reduced in favour of emphasizing Perseus' deed.

This parallelism, then, forms the only element related to the picture on the south wall, which otherwise shows considerable formal and compositional differences: here, Dirce is shown tied to the bull, which is held by Amphion and Zetus (Figure 5.8).⁵¹ An immediate explanation for the differing appearance is that this scene is older than the other two pictures, which were inserted at a later stage. And yet, this version of Dirce's punishment diverges also from other Campanian versions of the myth, primarily because of three additional elements within the scene: Amphion is shown in communication with Hermes, who otherwise does not appear in these scenes; three dead boy soldiers lie in the foreground, again not normally part of the scene; and in the background, a Dionysian thiasus descends from the mountains.

Dirce, a follower of Dionysus and wife of King Lycus, mistreats her niece, Antiope. The latter eventually flees the grip of the former and encounters Amphion and Zethus, her twin sons, whom she had to abandon after their birth. The twins fail to recognize their mother, but when Dirce appears and commands her niece to be killed, they are eventually

⁴⁹ Lorenz 2008: 131–40, esp. 139–40.

⁵⁰ Ling argues that the scene on the north wall must be second (Ling and Ling 2005: 80). However, as with the multi-episode landscape pictures in Boscotrecase and in the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus, the scene could form both the overture, and the conclusion, to the liberation. See Lorenz 2008: 128–9.

⁵¹ Ling and Ling 2005: 76–7, including a full discussion of the oddities of the picture; cf. also Leach 1986: 166–7.



Figure 5.8 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (15), south wall: the Punishment of Dirce.

persuaded to help Antiope and instead tie Dirce to a bull to kill her in recompense for her mistreatment of their mother.⁵²

The other Pompeian scenes of the punishment show Dirce either in the process of being tied to the bull, or being dragged by it across the countryside. Especially in the three examples of the last from the Third Style more characters appear in the scene, all pointing to moments in the myth leading to and/or following Dirce's punishment.⁵³ The Fourth Style pictures, on the other hand, zoom in on the figures of Dirce and the twins; only the scene in the Casa del Granduca (Regio VII 4.56) also features the twins' mother, Antiope, and a shepherd, possibly the foster-father of the twins.⁵⁴ The picture on the south wall displays a form of dramatic violence

⁵² For the myth, see: *LIMC* III 1990 s.v. *Dirke* [F. Heger]. The literary treatments: Hyg. fab. 7–8 (after Euripides); Apollod. 3.43–4; Petron. 45.8. On the myth in Campanian wall painting, see Lauter-Bufe 1967: 29–33; Leach 1986.

⁵³ Casa delle Quadrighe (Regio VII 2.25). Third Style. *PPM* VI 1996: 717 fig. 61; Casa del Marinaio (Regio VII 15.2), Room (z'), west wall. Third Style. *PPM* VII: 1997: 762–5, fig. 94–5; Casa di C. Iulius Polybius (Regio IX 13.1–3). Third Style. *PPM* X 2000: 256–61 fig. 114–21.

⁵⁴ Casa dei Vettii (Regio VI 15.1), Room (n), south wall. Fourth Style. *PPM* V 1996: 531–3 fig. 111; Casa del Granduca (Regio VII 4.56). Fourth Style. *PPM* VII 1997: 55 fig. 18.

similar to those other pictures of the Fourth Style, with an emphasis on the merciless destruction of the evil aunt. But the additional elements in the scene widen this focus considerably, again touching upon different points in the extended narrative.

This seemingly cumbersome combination yields connections after all, and it does so on two levels: first, there is the aspect of consecutive narrative, expressed both in the Perseus panels and in the synoptic scene of Dirce, albeit in different ways. Second, there is the parallelism of different female roles, for which the figure of Dirce provides a reference point: her character shows iconographic parallels to the figure of Andromeda in the east, not least because the latter here is still chained with both arms. This parallelism, first of all, emphasizes the contrast between the two women: whilst both are bound, Andromeda will be rescued and Dirce killed. Yet again both are also shown at the mercy of men; and this offers a potentially negative twist on the happy ending of the Andromeda narrative, since in this specific version in the room she remains bound.

When seen together with the picture set in Cepheus' palace, the scene of Dirce can stimulate more parallels. Both scenes show women at the centre who – through their arrogance – caused demise to their kin: Dirce to Antiope, and Cassiopeia to Andromeda. Yet again, both actions are contrasted by their outcome: for Cassiopeia a son-in-law, for Dirce death. Still, their combined appearance sustains an element of suspense in the picture in the north, a reminder that the woman there – if it is Cassiopeia – not only receives a suitor for her daughter, but also has to face up to her own guilt.

As with the combination in *ala* (4) the decoration of Room (15) provides a rich offering of consecutive, parallel and contrasting connections, again shutting out one of the pictures on some levels whilst involving it on others – as indeed is common in this part of the house and in rooms for longer sojourns.⁵⁵ In view of all this, it is unlikely that the mythological decoration in this room was simply meant to replicate a set of pre-existing Greek masterpieces.⁵⁶

Room (19)

Also in the east of the peristyle, forming the corresponding wing of the three-room group around Room (18), and decorated after the earthquake, this room's decoration is predominantly yellow.⁵⁷ The two preserved central figure panels on the north and south walls take up the theme of the mask

⁵⁵ Lorenz 2008: 299–302, 361–79.

⁵⁶ So Clarke 1991: 182.

⁵⁷ Ling and Ling 2005: 82–4.

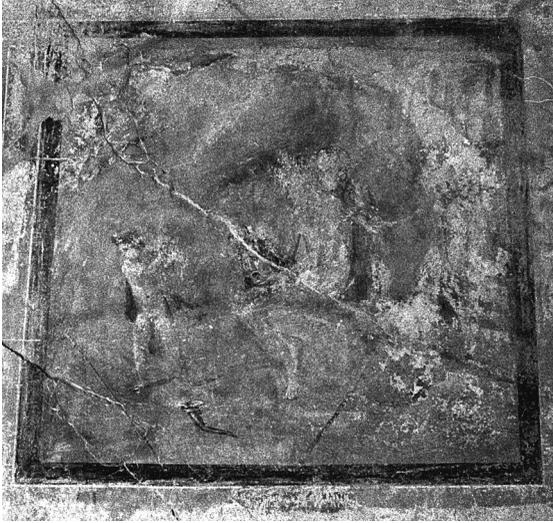


Figure 5.9 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (19), north wall: Cupid and couple.

prop also played out in Room (11), to generate connections similar to those in that room, albeit with a stronger emphasis on loving couples. A third picture existed in the east but is no longer extant. In the north, a seated woman accompanied by a man behind her uses a theatre mask to scare a cupid, who is turning away in surprise and horror (Figure 5.9). In the south, a seated satyr plays the syrinx, with a maenad standing next to him (Figure 5.10). In addition, small Gorgoneia decorate the side fields of each wall.

Despite their generic Dionysian appearance, it is difficult – as in Room (11) – to pinpoint exact parallels for these two scenes. The figure of the scared cupid finds a parallel in the bystanders in those scenes where Hermaphroditus' identity is revealed, but not the motif of the mask as a scare.⁵⁸ For that, the only iconographical parallel is offered by the scenes of Perseus and Andromeda dealing with the petrifying power of the Gorgoneion – in the scenes of the *Happy End Type*, such as in Room (11), and most prominently in an unusual version of the liberation from the house Regio I 3.25, where Andromeda appears to shy away from the Gorgoneion in Perseus' hand.⁵⁹ On the basis

⁵⁸ For the myth, see: *LIMC* V 1990 s.v. Hermaphroditos [J. Ajoitian]. – Good examples, each featuring a surprised Pan, are: Casa di Meleagro (Regio VI 9.2.13), Room (13), east wall. Fourth Style. *PPM* IV 1995: 692 fig. 65; Casa dei Postumii (Regio VIII 4.4.49), Room (31), east wall. Fourth Style. *PPM* VIII 1998: 499–501 fig. 89.

⁵⁹ House Regio I 3.25, Room (i); now lost. Fourth Style. *PPM* I 1990: 103 fig. 18. – See Lorenz 2008: 141–4, cat. no. K2aO.



Figure 5.10 Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10.4). Room (19), south wall: satyr and maenad.

of this, the picture can be interpreted not so much as a statement about tragedy's adverse effects on love, but as a play on the myth of Perseus and Andromeda. It employs a similar asymmetrical relationship – albeit not between man and woman, but couple and cupid; and the pun is played out on the basis that any viewer in this house will know about the petrifying potential of the Gorgoneion by the time they enter this room.

Similarly, in the picture of the satyr and maenad: whilst scenes of Marsyas teaching Olympus the flute are close in terms of iconography (notwithstanding the apparent gender difference),⁶⁰ the action as such finds parallels in the way in which Perseus uses the Gorgoneion in order to channel Andromeda's attention – in both cases, man and woman are displayed in an asymmetrical relationship dominated by the male.

Mythological connections: from topography to topology

A topographical reading derived from the mnemonic systems championed by the rhetorical manuals cited in this short survey of mythological

⁶⁰ For the myth, see: *LIMC* VII 1994 s.v. *Olympos* [A. Weis]. – The Pompeian representations: Casa della Regina Margherita (Regio V 2.1), Room (p), west wall. Fourth Style. *PPM* III 1991: 784 fig. 15; Casa di Meleagro (VI 9.2.13), Room (25), east wall. Fourth Style. *PPM* IV 1995: 756–7 fig. 197.

decorations in the Casa del Menandro would throw into relief two different areas in the house: an *atrium* adorned with scenes of epic, and a peristyle around which themes loosely based on Euripidean tragedy are on display. Hence, from the vantage point of such a topographical approach, the decoration of the Casa del Menandro would stand out as displaying the literary aspirations of its owners, neatly differentiating between literary genres.⁶¹

A crucial factor, however, cannot be captured in this topographical reading, and this is the apparent ‘thematic polyphony’ of the decoration: if the purpose of the decorations was to showcase literary veneration, and cultural prowess at large, then why muddy the waters with those capricious reinterpretations of the Perseus and Andromeda myth to be found around the peristyle? Why include panels such as those of satyr and child in Room (11), and couple and cupid in Room (19)?

In order to approach these questions around the thematic scope of the decoration, one needs to abandon the topographical reading in favour of a perspective that assesses the rhetorical tropes employed in the picture combinations. Yet again, the evidence of the Casa del Menandro suggests that this is not a simple case of pigeonholing the decorations in the individual rooms as ‘parallel’, ‘intensified’, or ‘contrasting’. And this, in turn, leads towards an assessment of the rhetorical tropes, and their specifically visual employment, marking the turn from a topographical to a topological perspective.

The analysis of the picture combinations within each of the four rooms shows that a range of different modal relationships bears simultaneously upon the meaning of the individual pictures, their combination, and their connection across the house as a whole. A viewer might make a conscious choice to concentrate on the consecutive connections or the contrasts between pictures. But the fact that other potential routes coexist can bring about interference, and indeed change the way in which each of the individual trajectories on offer in a room is eventually followed.

In the Casa del Menandro, this phenomenon is most pronounced in *ala* (4): here, the parallelisms and contrasts interfere with the consecutive structure to an extent that, even as one follows the narrative, one continuously encounters elements – the double appearance of Cassandra, the parallelisms between the north and south panels – that loops one backwards and forwards in narrative time. This layering feeds on the flexibility of the pictures. But it channels this flexibility into distinct trajectories within the parameters provided by the

⁶¹ Cf. the overall assessment of Ling: Ling and Ling 2005: 104–5.

different modes of transmission. And these trajectories no longer follow the independent modes of transmission but come together to form new, visual ways of conveying content.

At the same time, a second process provides a corrective for the flexibility of the individual pictures: the distribution of pictures across the house as a whole. In the Casa del Menandro, this process is facilitated by two mechanisms, which serve to highlight the connections between pictures in individual rooms. The first mechanism is the consecutive arrangement of scenes from the myth of Perseus and Andromeda across Rooms (11) and (15). Together, these capture three moments of the myth: the killing of the sea monster, including Andromeda's liberation, the union of the protagonists, and a scene of marital negotiation set either before or after the liberation. The second is the repetition and emulation of the mask motif across Rooms (11), (15) and (19), encompassing the Gorgoneion of the Perseus scenes as well as theatre masks. And this filters even into Room (18), the large reception hall, which – although devoid of central mythological panels – displays Gorgoneia and Zeus Ammon masks in its parapets.⁶²

If the chronology of internal decoration is correct, the Casa del Menandro provides a unique picture of how these mechanisms are built up over time. It emerges as an elaborate score of answer and response: first, the decoration of Room (11) introduces both the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, in the novel version of the *Happy End Type*, and a playful theme around the mask motif. Then, at the latest after the earthquake, Room (15) is appropriated to offer an extended consecutive narrative of the Perseus myth, tracing the events before the moment depicted in Room (11).

At the same time, Room (19) is turned into an extended musing around the mask motif, with direct references to the pictures in Room (11), in the shape of the theatre mask employed in the panel in the north; and to the Perseus myth in the decorative Gorgoneia adorning the room.⁶³ In addition, the decoration continues the theme of asymmetrical relationships which also originated in Room (11). And, finally, the theme of consecutive narration is appropriated for *ala* (4), and here condensed into one room. One of the foci chosen, the figure of Cassandra, yet again sits in parallel with one of the prevalent topics in Room (15): that is, examples of female fate.

⁶² Ling and Ling 2005: 38.

⁶³ This connection is further manifested by the reoccurrence of decorative attributes, a tambourine and rhyton. In Room (11) these are depicted underneath the central panels, in the west and north respectively; in Room (19) they appear within the mythological scenes, in the south and north respectively.

Whilst, from a chronological perspective, the connections between the individual parts of the house branch out from Room (11), the experience for viewers entering the house in the later phase of the Fourth Style redecoration offers a different picture: then, it is the paintings in *ala* (4) which set a framework for perception. They provide a well-known storyline that exudes venerability and can allude to notions of a glorious Greek past and luxurious Hellenistic ambience. And because of its epic veneer, this decoration might also serve as a reference point for the decorations to come.⁶⁴

In this function the decoration in *ala* (4) sets a tone particularly concerned with the sequence and interconnectedness of action, and with female demise, and family fate more broadly. This, reciprocally, can accentuate the experience of the other mythological decorations: for one, it draws attention to the decoration in Room (15), which picks directly up on these themes, notwithstanding its potentially earlier date. And it presents them at a high level of complexity as indicated by the underlying consecutive narrative matrix, and the synchronous picture of Dirce. This, in turn, renders Rooms (11) and (19) subordinate satellites, because they show derivatives of these themes, reappropriated in pleasant and joyous surroundings, and again notwithstanding the chronology in which they are created.

In comparison with *ala* (4), and indeed with most of the house, another aspect of these three rooms around the peristyle is emphasized: that is, their monochrome décor. The comparable design, albeit on different ground colours, enhances their appearance as a joint configuration; and it puts yet again emphasis on Room (15). Rooms (15) and (19) provide each a different solution to the themes triggered in Room (11): the former by hammering out the myth, the latter by diffusing it further into Dionysian genre. But whilst Room (11) serves as a relay with regard to content, Room (15) presents its mythological offerings in specific reference to male *uirtus* and female *dignitas*, whereas in Rooms (11) and (19) the asymmetrical relationships are presented in a more generic, playful tone, and without this emphasis on specific role models. In addition, the scenes in Room (15) are set within grand settings – a palatial interior, or mythologized landscapes – which are in stark contrast to the diffuse sacral backdrops of the scenes in Rooms (11) and (19).

These differences render Room (15) a reference point in the house with regard both to the myth of Perseus and Andromeda and to the presentation

⁶⁴ For the functioning of the Iliad decoration in Room (h) of the Casa di Octavius Quartio, which in many ways is comparable, see: Lorenz 2013; Casa di Octavius Quartio: *PPM* III 1991: 42–108; Spinazzola 1953: 1026–7. On the frieze: Aurigemma 1953; Clarke 1991: 203–7; cf. Squire's discussion in this volume (Chapter 11).

of behavioural role models. This introduces a clear hierarchy between the three rooms, despite all their similarities. And it is a hierarchical design associated with the decoration of three-room groups in the Fourth Style, where content and tone of the mythological pictures is nuanced across the configuration: the central, most important room features myths celebrating male *uirtus*, *dignitas* and *auctoritas* within grand settings, frequently tied into complex narrative relationships; the side rooms offer more open frameworks for status representation, with discourses around emotional conditions, beauty and erotics, and thus an altogether more intimate dialogue with what is on display.⁶⁵ In adopting this hierarchy, Rooms (11), (15) and (19) are turned into a *virtual* three-room group, adding yet another entertainment suite and status indicator to the two physical configurations in existence around the peristyle [Rooms (11), (8), (12) and (15), (18), (19) respectively].

The topics chosen for the central room of this virtual suite are, however, unusual for a room of this category. More commonly, these units of the configuration are decorated with themes such as Theseus as slayer of the Minotaur, Dionysus rescuing Ariadne on Naxos, or the Judgement of Paris.⁶⁶ In contrast, the decoration in Room (15), the virtual centre unit in the Casa del Menandro, opts for a more muted tone with regard to the presentation of male virtues. The reason for that must be that, after all, physically it is the wing room of the three-room group around Room (18) – and the presence of this, the largest reception hall in all of Pompeii, appears to be a status indicator of a strength to render further messages in this direction by means of mythological panels superfluous.

Wall painting and rhetoric: a topology

Roman wall painting and rhetorical writing of the early imperial period display parallels which demonstrate their stakes in a shared aesthetic: for

⁶⁵ Lorenz 2008: 361–79. A good example is provided by Rooms (58), (62), (64) in the Casa di Fabius Rufus (Regio VII 16.22): the two wing rooms reject the grand topics of the central reception room (62) in favour of themes of bodily beauty and emotional conditions. Interestingly, the combination in Room (58) bears great resemblance to that of Room (11) in the Casa del Menandro: it combines the picture of a mythological couple (Heracles and consort, east) with two depictions showing an adult with a child consort, including Narcissus (south) and a panel (north) depicting the same scene of grape feeding that features in the north of Room (11). Casa di Fabius Rufus: PPM VII 1997: 947–1125; Kockel 1985: 507–51; Dickmann 1999: 235–41. On the decoration of the three-room group: Leach 1989; Lorenz 2008: 361–8.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lorenz 2008: 377–9.

one, the stylistic figures and tropes recommended across the manuals also cut across designs such as those observed in the Casa del Menandro. And this house in particular provides an ideal context in which to study this relationship because the information we have about the chronology of decoration allows us to read it in sequence of its appearance, as we would read or listen to a speech.

This similarity, however, also throws the differences most profoundly into relief that exist between a decorative ensemble such as the Casa del Menandro and a speech: the rooms may have been decorated one after the other; but, once in place, there is more than one sequence available in which they can be experienced. Whereas the individual units of a speech, and its stylistic modes, could only be employed one after the other, in a setting such as the Casa del Menandro they operate simultaneously. What is more, the design of the house seems to feed precisely on this fact.

This layering of interfering, even conflicting messages is fuelled, and kept in check, by two correctives, one operating on the level of content, the other with regard to stylistic tropes or modes of transmission. These two correctives are lines of consecutive narrative, constructed by means of episodes and motifs taken from the myth of Perseus and Andromeda; and the blending of consecutive, parallel, complementary and contrasting combinations which can bear on each other and modify their respective powers. This *visual rhetoric* differs from the advice of the rhetoric manuals not so much in its components, but in its effect. And it is this effect that a topological approach helps to capture: it facilitates an understanding of the interrelationship of the individual elements of decoration within its specific context. The case of the Casa del Menandro demonstrates that rhetorical theory can provide powerful tools for an exploration of Roman interior decoration, as long as its tendency to linearize is kept in check. Here, in particular, it provides insights into the strategies behind the overall design, and the understanding of space that informs it.

The way in which the rooms with mythological panels are brought in interplay with each other, within the individual rooms and across the house, is a pervasive manifestation of the sophistication of those who commissioned and lived in these spaces, and confounds the notion that the owners were merely interested in epic and drama, and adverse to Ovidian love stories.⁶⁷ There is no denying that the house displays one of the rare Pompeian Iliadic cycles, and that indeed the pictures in Room

⁶⁷ Ling and Ling 2005: 104–5.

(15) of Andromeda, Perseus and Dirce are all connected by the fact that the tragedian possibly depicted in the peristyle, Euripides, wrote tragedies about each story: *Andromeda* and *Antiope*.⁶⁸ But this alone opens more questions than it answers; and it cannot be the endpoint of the interpretation, for it leaves the obvious emulation and splicing of motifs and themes across the house unexplained.

Then, with regard to matters of space, the Casa del Menandro appears initially as a counter-project to the taste for villas so popular in the period of the Fourth Style – a fashion expressed in the layering of different architectural and decorative features even in the most restricted spaces in an attempt to recreate large Roman country villas in modest dwellings.⁶⁹ In contrast, here, the design verges deliberately on the excessive in order to differentiate the house from contemporary mainstream fashion, multiplying status-relevant features and extending their expanse as in the case of the triple three-room group.

And yet on closer inspection, with regard to space and narrative, it seems that the design of the Casa del Menandro quite happily follows strategies not at all unlike those also governing the construction-kit villas of the lower echelons of society. This is the conflation of strands of mythological narrative, and specifically the story of Perseus and Andromeda, with other types of content – either other myths, as with the picture of Dirce, or more generic roles and atmospheres, as in the case of the scenes of Dionysian genre. In both cases, space is approached as a framework to generate not absolute and static but relative and dynamic relationships between objects and ideas. And indeed this topological perspective makes the Casa del Menandro appear much more standardized with regard to decorative strategies of the period than the list of its unique decorative features would allow us to assume.

⁶⁸ Leach 1986: 161–2; Ling and Ling 2005: 104.

⁶⁹ Zanker 1979 (Engl.trans. of parts: Zanker 1998: 145–56).