

NATURAE MIRABOR OPUS: AUSONIUS' CHALLENGE TO STATIUS IN THE MOSELLA

CAROLE NEWLANDS

University of California at Los Angeles

Ausonius is chiefly known for his poem on the Moselle river, composed around 370 A.D. while Ausonius was on an expedition with Valentinian to the Rhine frontier.¹ Generally, the *Mosella* has been admired for its few "purple passages" in what was otherwise rated the work of an uninspired schoolmaster.² But in 1984 the poem received fresh critical appreciation in two articles, one by M. Roberts, the other by E. J. Kenney.³ Kenney shows that Statius' *Silvae* are an

¹ For a full discussion of the date of the *Mosella*, see the commentary of C. Hosius, *Die Moselgedichte des Decimus Magnus Ausonius und des Venantius Fortunatus* (Marburg 1926) 17–23. I have used this commentary extensively and that of Ch. M. Ternes, *D. Magnus Ausonius "Mosella"* (Paris 1972).

² Thus F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1934) I, 56–57: "For Ausonius was always the professor of rhetoric, and intellectually he never looked beyond the school." Such an attitude is persistent. See E. J. Kenney, "The *Mosella* of Ausonius," *G&R* 31, 2 (1984) 190–202, p. 190: "He was a professor of Latin, and it shows in his work." Kenney, however, does think more highly of a Latin teacher than Raby does of a rhetoric teacher.

³ Kenney (above, note 2); M. Roberts, "The *Mosella* of Ausonius: An interpretation," *TAPA* 114 (1984) 343–53. I shall refer to these two key articles by page number and name. Roberts addresses the vexed problem of the poem's apparent lack of unity. F. Marx, "Ausonius' Lied von der Mosel," *RhM* 80 (1931) 368–92, initiated this debate by his criticism that the poem lacked final polish ("dem Gedicht fehlt die letzte Feile," 386). He was answered by L. Deubner, "Zum Moselgedicht des Ausonius," *Philologus* 89 (1934) 253–58; W. John, "Zur Gliederung der *Mosella* des Ausonius," *Hermes* 78 (1943) 97–105; and D. Korzeniewski, "Aufbau und Struktur der *Mosella* des Ausonius," *RhM* 106 (1963) 80–95. All three critics attempt to show, in different ways, the meticulously crafted structure of the poem. Roberts builds upon their work. J. Fontaine, "Unité et diversité du mélange des genres et des tons chez quelques écrivains latins de la fin du IV^e siècle: Ausone, Ambroise, Ammien," *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 23 (Vandoeuvres 1976) 440, compares the *Mosella* to a collection of individual tesserae in a late antique mosaic, each part lacking connection to the other and to the work's overall theme. Roberts, however, pushes the analogy with late antique art further by pointing out that the poem's individual parts, like those of a late mosaic, may seem to have little connection with one another but are in fact united at a higher level of abstraction. Spanning and uniting the different sections of the *Mosella* is Ausonius' concern with boundaries. Roberts sees this concern as ultimately political in its aim. The Moselle river, as a harmonious boundary between the upper earth and water, man and nature, provides a model for

important model for the *Mosella*.⁴ This varied collection of short poems first introduced to Latin literature entire poems devoted to praise of man's ability to dominate and reshape his environment through artistic and technical skill.⁵ Hence, according to Kenney, they had special appeal for Ausonius, who drew upon them to affirm his "conscious acceptance of Statius as an authority for important cultural values"; these values embraced "a conception of the civilizing mission seen in terms of the imposition of man-made order and beauty on the wild."⁶ Thus Statius envisages the work of landscaping a patron's estate as a military conquest, the imposition of the Pax Romana on a grateful subject, untamed nature:

domuit possessor, et illum
formantem rupes expugnantemque secuta
gaudet humus. nunc cerne iugum discentia saxa
intransesque domos iussumque recedere montem.⁷
(*Silvae* 2.2.56–59)

As I shall argue in this paper, however, Ausonius does not accept such "cultural" values without question. In the *Mosella* he praises a landscape whose beauty appears man-made, but in fact owes little to human skill or domination. Ausonius' mode of imitation is neither mechanical nor eclectic but rather heuristic. In the *Mosella* he challenges Statius' view of nature as a passive, ornamental adjunct of human needs. Rather, he praises nature for qualities that are independent of man and his works and are superior to them. Ausonius uses imitation in order to revise classical values, not to perpetuate them.⁸

peaceful assimilation of the German tribes across the Rhine. See particularly Roberts 351–53.

⁴ Kenney 195–96.

⁵ Thus Z. Pavlovskis, "Man in an Artificial Landscape," *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 25 (Leiden 1973) 1: "Statius may well have been the first to devote whole poems to the delights of a life spent in a setting not natural but improved by man's skill."

⁶ Kenney 195.

⁷ I quote Statius from the second edition of J. S. Phillimore, *P. Papini Stati Silvae* (Oxford 1967).

⁸ I here adopt the terminology of T. M. Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven and London 1982) who offers for the ways in which humanist writers embraced the past four types of imitation (33–58): "sacramental," or strictly faithful to the word and spirit of the original; "eclectic" or randomly heterogeneous; "heuristic"; and "dialectic," or critically destructive, in a way that reflects back on itself, of the subtext. I shall quote Greene's definition of the type that concerns us here, "heuristic":

Heuristic imitations come to us advertising their derivation from the subtexts they carry with them, but having done that, they proceed to distance themselves from the subtext and force us to recognise the poetic distance traversed. (40)

I have found particularly helpful two articles on Ausonius that do groundbreaking work in exhibiting the subtlety of his practice of imitation, that of M. R.

At the end of his paper on the *Mosella*, Kenney shows that Ausonius is able to go beyond mechanical adaptation of Statius in at least one passage, the description of the reflection on the water at sunset:

illa fruenda palam species, cum glaucus opaco
respondet colli fluuius, frondere videntur
fluminei latices et palmite consitus amnis.
quis color ille vadis, seras cum propulit umbras
Hesperus et viridi perfundit monte Mosellam!
tota natant crispis iuga motibus et tremit absens
pampinus et vitreis vindemia turget in undis.
adnumerat virides derisus navita vites,
navita caudiceo fluitans super aequora lembo
per medium, qua sese amni confundit imago
collis et umbrarum confinia conserit amnis.⁹ (189–99)

In his perceptive analysis, Kenney demonstrates how through skillful verbal manipulation—for instance the chiasmic arrangement of the adjectives and nouns in lines 189–90—Ausonius, unlike Statius, develops the notion of “exact but inverted responson.”¹⁰ Yet Ausonius does not simply develop the images he found in Statius to a point of greater artistry and beauty; rather, comparison with his model reveals that Ausonius’ perspective on the landscape is strikingly different.

Ausonius’ treatment of reflection here is particularly indebted to a passage in Statius’ poem on Pollio’s villa in *Silvae* 2. 2:

haec domus ortus
aspicit et Phoebi tenerum iubar. illa cadentem
detinet exactamque negat dimittere lucem,
cum iam fessa dies et in aequora montis opaci
umbra cadit vitreoque natant praetoria ponto. (45–49)

Statius, typically, represents the house as the controlling medium of the landscape’s special effects. The sunrise is seen from the house (45–46); the house *detains* the sun as it sets. In addition to the mountain, the wealthy mansions of the estate are reflected in the water: *vitreoque natant praetoria ponto* (49). In Ausonius’ version, only the natural features of the landscape are reflected; thus he substitutes hills for mansions: *tota natant crispis iuga motibus* (194). Although he describes the waters too as glassy, *vitreis...undis* (195), and therefore a perfect medium for reflection, at the same time Ausonius emphasises

Posani, “Reminiscenze di poeti latini nella ‘Mosella’ di Ausonio,” *SIFC* 34 (1962) 31–68, and that of W. Görler, “Vergilzitate in Ausonius’ *Mosella*,” *Hermes* 97 (1969) 94–114. My concern with imitation here is chiefly limited to Ausonius’ use of Statius, although he drew heavily upon Vergil, Ovid, and Pliny the Elder also.

⁹ I quote the *Mosella* from the Teubner edition of S. Prete, *Ausonius Opuscula* (Leipzig 1978).

¹⁰ Kenney 199–200.

the movement of the water with *crispis...motibus* (194), *tremis* (194), and *turget* (195).¹¹

Whereas Statius' reflection is controlled by the house and presents a static picture, Ausonius' reflection is full of natural life. Nowhere in the *Mosella* does Ausonius describe the houses that border upon the Moselle as reflected in the waters. Rather they look down upon the waters (283–84), emblem of a realm that is quite separate from the river.¹²

Admittedly, Ausonius delights in the reflection of a cultivated nature, of hills that have been planted with vines. He is not concerned, however, either with the skill of the human planter or with the utility of the product. Rather, he is fascinated by how the Moselle, not man, is able through its special powers of reflection to make these planted hills an entrancing spectacle, one that eludes human control. Man in this river landscape is a peripheral character, the sailor floating in his flimsy boat, mocked by the illusionary vines (196–99). The sailor functions as a gauge of the river's power to charm and also control his vision.¹³

As Kenney points out, in the last two lines Ausonius emphasises with his play upon words beginning with *co-* how mirror and mirrored in the end blend peacefully and imperceptibly together.¹⁴

¹¹ Likewise, in an earlier passage describing the glass-like clarity of the water (55–67), Ausonius animates the scene: the sand is furrowed (*crispatur*, 63); the grasses tremble (*tremunt*, 66) and are stirred into motion (*agitatae*, 65); the waters quiver (*vibrantes*, 66). The play of light upon the underwater stones (*lucetque latetque / calculus*, 66–67), moreover, suggests not a static underwater scene like a painting, but one full of subtle movement, ambiguously clear and illusive at the same time.

¹² I will discuss this further on pp. 410–12.

¹³ Roberts makes a distinction between this passage and a later one about youths engaged in mock sea-battles who ponder their reflections in the river (228–39):

The phenomenon of reflection is benign, provided that the observer accepts the appearance and does not attempt to break the surface illusion. In the earlier passage (196) it is only when the sailor attempts to count the vines reflected in the water, a kind of violation, that he finds himself mocked. (347)

On the contrary, this second passage about the sham sea-battles suggests a greater mockery on the part of nature. A grandiloquent comparison between the sport of the boys on the Moselle and the games that were established by Augustus to celebrate Actium and Mylae (200–21) is finally reduced by the river to crooked shadows (*pandas umbras*, 224) and false shapes (*fallaces...figuras*, 229). Moreover, the comparison of the sailors contemplating their reflection to a girl seeing herself in a mirror for the first time (230–39) is hardly complimentary to the sailors engaged upon heroic display. Again too Ausonius slips in a subtle suggestion of the detrimental effects of human art, for the girl shows a narcissistic obsession in trying to kiss what she thinks is her sister in the glass (234–35). Nature's glass, the brilliant water of the river, is ever changing and encourages no such perversion.

¹⁴ Kenney 200, 202 note 15.

The river brings together and blurs the boundaries between human and natural, between earth and water. By using *conserit* in the final line of this passage, a word that looks back to *consitus* 191), Ausonius emphasises once more that it is nature, not man, that is here the creative agent, the "sower."¹⁵

Since Ausonius is most heavily indebted to Statius' two villa poems, *Silvae* 1.3 and *Silvae* 2.2, his most thorough revision of his predecessor's values occurs, naturally enough, in the passages dealing with the villas along the Moselle. In a programmatic passage near the poem's start, Ausonius explicitly interjects his aversion to the type of lavish adornment characteristic of Roman-style villas:

I nunc et Phrygiis sola levia consere crustis
tendens marmoreum laqueata per atria campum.
ast ego despectis, quae census opesque dederunt,
naturae mirabor opus, non dura nepotum
laetaque iacturis ubi luxuriatur egestas.
hic solidae sternunt umentia litora harenae,
nec retinent memores vestigia pressa figuras.
spectaris vitreo per levia terga profundo,
secreti nihil, amnis, habens. (48–56)

Skillfully, Ausonius frames the bold statement, *naturae mirabor opus*, by means of a contrast with the works of art. By his choice of the word *opus* here, he makes clear that although nature has a comparable type of beauty, it surpasses art in its freedom from moral taint. The denunciation of luxury is a commonplace of Roman poetry. But unlike Vergil, Horace, and Tibullus, the chief Augustan proponents of this theme, Ausonius does not use his condemnation as a basis for praise of the simple life modelled on the virtuous way of life of the Italian *colonus*. His vision is directed purely towards nature, not man.

Ausonius begins by scornfully dismissing panelled atria and marble pavements, the type of adornment that made Statius marvel in the villas of his patrons.¹⁶ By choosing an agricultural metaphor, *consere...campum*, to describe the piecing together of the slabs of the marble floor, he ironically suggests the sterility of art's attempt to imitate nature. The Moselle alone, not man, fruitfully employs the task of "sowing" or "joining."¹⁷ His particular reference to Phrygian marble reinforces the idea of sterility in a grisly fashion, for the two passages in Statius' *Silvae* which mention this red-flecked marble associate it with the castration of Attis; in *Silvae* 2.2.87–88 we are told it is cut *per Cybeles lugentis agros*, and according to *Silvae* 1.5.37–38, the red flecks originate from the blood of Attis himself, scattered over the marble.¹⁸ Human art, so the text suggests, is tainted from its source. This passage too may be loosely

¹⁵ My attempt to reproduce the play of meaning made possible by *consero*, which refers to two separate verbs that mean "sow" and "join" (or "sew").

¹⁶ For instance, *Silvae* 2.2 contains a catalogue of marbles to be found in one room of Pollio's house (85–94); in *Silvae* 1.3 Statius exults over the mosaic floor that reflects the light from the ceiling (52–57).

¹⁷ Cf. note 15.

¹⁸ *ipse cruentavit maculis liventibus Attis* (38).

based upon Pliny's catalogue of precious building materials in Book 36 of the *Natural History*. There Pliny begins with marble—condemning its private use in the strongest terms¹⁹—and ends with glass. Similarly Ausonius moves from marble through sand (53–54)—an ingredient of glass—to nature's glass, the smooth surface of the water, *vitreo per levia terga profundo* (55). The *levia terga* of the river openly correspond to the *sola levia* of the villa (48), but unlike the latter, the river's polished surface is not associated with any shameful secret.²⁰ Ausonius praises the river for virtues that were conventionally attached to the honest *colonus*.

Ausonius prefaces his extended passage on villas (283–348) with a passage on fishing. This juxtaposition is not simply arbitrary, for, as Roberts has shown, both fishing and villa architecture are presented by Ausonius as arts that disrupt the harmony of the landscape.²¹ Thematically the two passages are linked. Ausonius does not glorify the fisherman's skill. Rather he emphasises the aggressive role of the fisherman with his cruel arts of deception; the fish are innocent victims, *ignara doli* (250).²²

Similarly, the catalogue of architects (298–320) which occurs soon after the opening of the main passage on villas is not an ornamental digression, but rather offers another set of paradigms illustrating the unwelcome consequences of human art and technological skill. Although Ausonius bases this catalogue upon the catalogue of architects in Pliny *N.H.* 7.125 and upon a lost section of Varro's *Hebdomades*,²³ his attitude to the famous architects of the classical world is again at variance with his sources. Pliny lists people he regards as

¹⁹ E.g., *N.H.* 36.48. Mamurra, Julius Caesar's subordinate detested by Catullus (c. 57), was the first man in Rome to cover with marble veneer whole walls of his house. At 51 Pliny calls the inventor of the process of cutting up marble for luxurious purposes a person *importuni ingenii*.

²⁰ Ausonius' claim at verse 56 that the river has no secret, *secreti nihil amnis habens*, does not really contradict his later reference to the river's secrets (187–88). We need to understand *secreti* here as limited to something shameful, for the contrast Ausonius is making at this point of the poem is between human riches, that involve furtiveness and deceit, and nature's riches, that lie open for all to see, but not to grasp. With his play on *lucetque latetque* to suggest the darting of light among the stones Ausonius indicates that nature too practises deception, but in a harmless and pleasurable form.

²¹ Roberts 345–46.

²² The earlier catalogue of fish (82–149) prepares us for their treatment here. Ancient writers on fish generally emphasise fish's ability to defend themselves from predators. This is a major theme, for instance, of Ovid's *Halieutica*; Pliny begins Book 32 of the *Natural History* by calling fish the greatest of nature's works, and he cites the example of tiny fish which were able to block the flagship of Antony at Actium (*N.H.* 32.3). Ausonius, on the other hand, avoids any mention of fish's defensive mechanisms, either in the catalogue or in the section on fishing, even where it would be most obvious to do so. The pike alone is given some hostile attributes (120–24), but it is a low-grade fish which is a menace only to frogs!

²³ Vitruvius in his preface to Book 7 of *De Architectura* 16–17 also mentions several of these architects.

benefactors of mankind; the overall theme of Ausonius' catalogue is man's perversion of nature.²⁴ It begins with Daedalus, grieving for the son he lost because he tried to challenge the laws of nature (300–2) and ends with Dinochares, who constructed a magnetised statue to commemorate the incestuous union of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe (314–17). Ausonius' reference to incest, a detail omitted by Pliny, and his description of the statue as Arsinoe herself (315) and as a girl suspended and then dragged by her iron hair (317), suggests the cruelty and unnaturalness of the device, and punishment rather than celebration.²⁵ Even Dinochares' apparently more reputable work of building a pyramid is presented in negative terms (312–33). Described as the consumer of its own shadows (313), this proud building is an antitype to the river whose shadows diffuse the reflected beauties of nature and forge a creative link between the upper air and water.²⁶

Ausonius could have mentioned painters and sculptors, the interior decorators of villas, but he chose instead to frame his catalogue with illustrations of the negative aspects of art. There is another striking omission in Ausonius' catalogue of architects. Ausonius can give no names of the villa builders along

²⁴ See Roberts 348–49:

In at least three cases technical skill is capable of an unfavorable interpretation. Daedalus' art only brings him grief (300–302); Ictinus uses his craft to construct not only the Parthenon but also a magical mechanical owl which lures birds to their death as the fisherman lures fish (308–10); and Dinochares, to celebrate the incestuous union of Ptolemy II and his sister Arsinoe (*iussus ob incesti ... foedus amoris*, 314) suspends a statue of the queen in the roof of a temple by a magnet (311–17). These last two are not entirely reputable exploits. The craftsman cannot in the last resort be distinguished from the practitioner of magic arts.

We could perhaps add a fourth cases, Archimedes, whose art, we are told, prolonged (*traxit*, 304) the Sicilian War. These four cases take up thirteen of the eighteen lines; the most detailed, Daedalus and Dinochares, occur at the beginning and the end and so, although we cannot tell what association Ausonius wished to convey with his mention of the three others, the predominant impression is a negative one.

The exact centre of the catalogue refers to *clari... Menecratis artes* (307). A man of this name is not mentioned by Pliny, but Varro refers to a Menecrates who wrote on agronomy (*De Re Rustica* 1.1.9; 3.16.18). Such an art would obviously meet with Ausonius' approval. If this then is Ausonius' Menecrates, he perhaps earns the one unambiguous compliment to art and the place of honour in the centre of the catalogue.

²⁵ Pliny, *N.H.* 34.148, says that the statue was never completed and an obelisk was raised in its stead. By suppressing this information, Ausonius makes the architect's more sinister work predominate.

²⁶ Cf. verses 189–91:

illa fruenda palam species, cum glaucus opaco
respondet colli fluvius, frondere videntur
fluminei latices et palmite consitus amnis.

the Moselle, although he claims that their work rivals that of the famous seven he cites from antiquity (318–20). Whether Ausonius knew the names of the villa builders or not is scarcely the point.²⁷ Rather, with *hos...aut horum similes* (318), he implicates them in the kind of corrupt arts those famous names practised. Fishermen and architects are then linked in their irreverence for nature; their treatment prepares us for Ausonius' special handling of the villas themselves and their landscape.

Since, however, villas bear the hallmark of Roman culture, Ausonius' description has been seen as serving propagandistic purposes, in particular the promotion of real estate in a region that is deliberately presented as peaceful.²⁸ If so, it is strange that Ausonius mentions only the grand villas and not any of the modest country houses or farms that were more typical of the region. His method here, as elsewhere, is subtly allusive. Through skillful alteration of models in Statius, Ausonius suggests a new set of values that question one of the most visible signs of the Pax Romana on the German frontier.

Ausonius describes two main types of villa, those situated on top of a hill and those situated directly by the river. With the first, the note of the villa's intrusive relationship to the land is clearly marked:

Talia despectant longo per caerula tractu
pendentes saxis instanti culmine villae,
quas medius dirimit sinuosis flexibus errans
amnis et alternas comunt praetoria ripas. (283–286)

The rooftop bears the epithet *instanti*, expressive of an ambitious urgency that is out of keeping with the peacefulness of the lower landscape. As if from a great height these villas look down upon the river; one of them sees the Moselle only through a darkening mist (335). At the same time the precarious position of the houses, perched high on rocks above the delusive calm of the river, ironically suggests, perhaps, the liability of buildings to collapse, and humans and their constructions to be washed downstream. There is no possibility of the joyful blurring of boundaries in the villas' interaction with the river,

²⁷ Cf. Ch. M. Ternes, "Paysage réel dans la 'Moselle' d'Ausone," *RÉL* 48 (1970) 376–97, particularly 397:

Pouvait-on, valablement, établir un parallèle entre les grands bâtisseurs des merveilles du monde et ceux qui érigèrent nos métairies, nos palais? N'y a-t-il pas dans l'excès même de la comparaison la manifestation du scepticisme du poète qui n'a pas le moindre nom à citer et promet de revenir sur tout cela dans un opus ultérieur qu'il n'avait peut-être pas l'intention de jamais écrire?

Ausonius is not so much sceptical here as critical of certain kinds of artistic endeavor. Contrary to what Ternes says here, Ausonius excludes architects from the subject matter of his future poem. Cf. verses 382–414.

²⁸ Thus E. M. Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treveri* (London 1970) 165: "The *Moselle* of Ausonius, in addition to providing a literary description of the countryside, was also attempting to restore confidence among the cultured and wealthy classes who could afford to invest heavily in land."

and, as I have already said, their separation is clearly marked by their absence from reflection in the waters.²⁹ The epithet used of the river, *errans*, strongly contrasts with the epithet used of the rooftop, *instanti*. The river's calmness and lack of urgency is reflected by the spilling over of its description into the following line describing the villas on the river bank. These are presented at first as unthreatening, *alternas comunt praetoria ripas* (286). Note, however, that they are viewed as an adornment of the river banks; the phrase which Ausonius has adapted from Statius here, *alternas servant praetoria ripas* (*Silvae* 1.3.25), presents the villas in a proprietary role as guardians of the river banks. In Statius' villa poems the landscape characteristically is an ornamental, subservient adjunct of its patron, the villa. Ausonius then reverses the characteristic relationship found between villa and landscape in the *Silvae*.

As Ausonius develops his description of the villas at verses 321–34, both types of villa emerge as unharmonious presences on the land:

haec est natura sublimis in aggere saxi,
haec procurrentis fundata crepidine ripae,
haec refugit captumque sinu sibi vindicat amnem.
illa tenens collem, qui plurimus imminet amni,
usurpat faciles per culta, per aspera visus
utque suis fruitur dives speculatio terris.
quin etiam riguis humili pede condita pratis
compensat celsi bona naturalia montis
sublimique minans irrumpit in aethera tecto,
ostentans altam, Pharos ut Memphitica, turrim.
huic proprium clausos consaepto gurgite pisces
apricas scopulorum inter captare novales.
haec summis innixa iugis labentia subter
flumina despectu iam caligante tuetur.

Ausonius' militaristic language conveys his ambiguous feelings towards these buildings.³⁰ One river-bank villa captures the river and appropriates it for itself (323); another captures the fish, shutting them up in an enclosed pool (341–42). One of the hill villas threatens its large bulk over the stream, usurping the view (324–25); another bursts threateningly into the air, like the lofty lighthouse on Pharos. This simile links the villa with Dinocrates' statue of Arsinoe, hung *Pharii .in aere templi* (315). Both, then, suggest a violation of nature's order through misplaced pride. The patronising relationship between villa and landscape found in Statius' villa poems assumes in this passage a sinister edge.

Unlike Statius, Ausonius describes the villas in terms of their geographical situation, not in terms of their appearance; in this way he can bring out their uneasy relationship with the landscape. He gives only two lines to the luxurious architecture of the villas:

atria quid memorem viridantibus adsita pratis
innumerisque super nitentia tecta columnis? (335–36)

²⁹ See above, page 000.

³⁰ I am closely indebted to Roberts' remarks on this passage, 349.

Ausonius does not expatiate at length on the gleaming marble halls. The fact that the atria are situated beside green growing meadows is just as important as their polished radiance. To emphasise the balance here between the beauty of burgeoning nature and the beauty of human artifacts, Ausonius places *viridantibus* and *nitentia* in the same metrical position, the end of the third and entire fourth foot. Ausonius may seem to be redressing the balance here from the previous lines by putting the works of man on a seeming level with the works of nature. But his use of the device of *recusatio* with *quid memorem* draws attention to the fact that he does not lavishly extend praise on the architecture and art of the villas. Statius' villa poems are punctuated by similar personal questions such as *quid canam*, *quid mirer*, *quid referam*.³¹ Such questions are not simply rhetorical, for Statius answers them at length in detailed description of the luxuries of the villa. Ausonius' obvious silence, on the other hand, marks his departure here from the material values of his predecessor. He is willing to give just over one line to the villas' ornamentation.

Ausonius' reticence is all the more noticeable because he does answer the immediately following question at some length. The only architectural structure that Ausonius describes in any detail is the baths, but even here, what provides true pleasure is not the man-made amenity but the refreshing water of the natural stream that flows outside:

quid quae fluminea substructa crepidine fumant
 balnea, ferventi cum Mulciber haustus operto
 volvit anhelatas tectoria per cava flammas,
 inclusum glomerans aestu spirante vaporem?
 vidi ego defessos multo sudore lavacri
 fastidisse lacus et frigora piscinarum,
 ut vivis fruarentur aquis, mox amne refotos
 plaudenti gelidum flumen pepulisse natatu. (337–44)

In this passage Ausonius draws again on *Silvae* 1.3 as he elaborates on Statius' description of the baths of Manilius Vopiscus:

an quae graminea suscepta crepidine fumant
 balnea et impositum rivis argentibus ignem?
 quaque vaporiferis iunctus fornacibus amnis
 ridet anhelatis vicino flumine Nymphas? (43–46)

In Statius' description, the contrast between the natural environment of the river and the baths imposed upon it is emphasised through the antithetical juxtaposition at the end of each line of *crepidine fumant*, *argentibus ignem*, *fornacibus amnis*. Again Statius hints at the resistless domination of human technology, for the chiasmic arrangement of *impositum rivis argentibus ignem* suggests that the fire, imposed upon the river, has enveloped and conquered the water's cold. The central position of *iunctus* in the following line, and then *ridet*, however, imply that the river is benefited by the change and that the violence man's works entail is therefore justified. Tamed through its service to art,

³¹ *Silvae* 1.3.34, 1.3.57, 1.3.64, and 2.2.63 respectively.

the river laughs at the less fortunate Nymphs gasping in the nearby stream. Statius' rural gods like to feel they are keeping up with the Joneses.

Ausonius, on the other hand, praises the river over the baths. The baths do not dominate the river and deprive it of its independent powers; its heat is *inclusum*, self-contained, not *impositum*. Indeed, swimmers, exhausted with the artificial heat, scorn the man-made pools and find pleasure and refreshment in the living waters of the river outside, which retain their icy coolness (*gelidum*, 334), despite the efforts of Mulciber nearby. Moreover, Ausonius does not glamorise the technical workings of the baths. Instead of speaking of the nymphs and a benevolent river god, like Statius, he presents the far less attractive picture of Mulciber laboring amidst the steam and flames. Ausonius says nothing of the marbles and mosaics which other poets praise in their descriptions of Roman baths,³² and his depiction of the hypocaustic system emphasises not the wonders of technology but rather the toilsome nature of the work. Both in vocabulary and image the passage is loosely based on portrayals of Mount Aetna, the home of Vulcan (Mulciber), which is most fully described in *Aeneid* 3.570–82. *Fumant, flammis, glomerans, aestu, spirante*, words of violence and terrible heat, all occur in similar form in the Vergilian passage, in which Vergil identifies Aetna as a frightening prison akin to the underworld. Similar language is also found in Lucretius' description of a volcano in 6.639–79, where he explains volcanic eruption as a disease of the earth's crust.³³ Ausonius' association of the hypocaustic system with the interior of a volcano or the Underworld has sinister overtones of the monstrous and the diseased.

Thus the importance of the epithet *vivis* (333) applied to the waters of the river is underscored by the contrasting infernal associations of the bathhouse. Debilitated by the heat, the bathers spurn the artificial cold pools and are refreshed instead by the living stream. In a way, they are brought back to life, for

³² The locus classicus is Statius' description of the baths of Claudius Etruscus in *Silvae* 1.5. Martial *Ep.* 6.42 makes an interesting comparison with Ausonius' passage here. Both contrast the warm baths with the cool water outside (in Martial's case an aqueduct). But unlike Ausonius, Martial praises the lavish trappings of the baths, and he describes the heating process through the attractive picture of exotic stones breathing *moderate* heat: "siccus pinguis onyx anhelat aestus / et flamma tenui calent ophitae" (14–15). Later epigrams on bathhouses emphasise the marvels of technology; the conventional personification of Vulcan is used to suggest the wonderful safety and efficiency of the hypocaustic system. Cf. for instance *Anthologia Latina* 389 (Baehrens): "Expavit subitas Vulcanus surgere thermas / Et trepida flammis subdidit ipse manu" (11–12). See also *A.L.* 390–93, 531.

³³ Cf. *Aeneid* 3, *fumantem* (573); *flammarum* (574); *flammam* (580); *glomerat* (577); *exaestuat* (577); *exspirare* (580); Lucretius 6. 640, where fires breathe out (*exspirent*) through the jaws of Aetna; and Ovid's *Fasti* 4. 42, where Aetna's ground burns with the exhaled fires (*anhelatis ignibus ardet*). Moreover, Silius Italicus associates Mulciber with the Underworld, specifically the sweltering heat of the Styx, as he describes the burning of a Carthaginian ship in language that is again similar to Ausonius' here: "qua nondum Stygios glomerabat Mulciber aestus" (*Punica* 14.450).

refovere generally means to reanimate through warmth;³⁴ thus with *refotos* (333) Ausonius suggests that the river's cool waters paradoxically contain the true life force. Ausonius has expanded Statius' comparison between the cold river and the heated baths to include a latent contrast between art and life; thanks to its revitalising properties, nature does not merely complement the baths but emerges superior.

Furthermore, unlike Statius' mythological personification of the river and the nymphs, Ausonius' reference to the fresh water has the charm of direct observation, for it is emphatically introduced by *vidi ego* (341). *Vidi egomet* is used one other time in the poem, in the preceding passage where Ausonius talks of the cruelty involved in fishing. Here the phrase (270) occurs in a graphic "personal" account of fish seen gasping for life, yet who miraculously summon enough strength to plunge back into the Moselle and swim to freedom.³⁵ Specific words in this passage about dying fish establish a link with the baths: *anhelatis* (262) and *anhelatas* (339); *haustas* (265) and *haustus* (338); *expirans* (266) and *spirante* (340); *ignes* (267) and *flammas* (339). Moreover, the gasping fish are compared to furnaces that desperately need fanning (267–69), and their gills work like bellows, images that look forward to Mulciber's workshop inside the baths.³⁶ The connection between the stifling bathhouses and the suffocating fish emphasises the claustrophobic, deathly atmosphere of one of Roman civilization's most popular amenities. At the same time, the role of the river as the revitalizing agent of both bathers and the dying fish reinforces the symbolism of its life-giving properties, even for human beings who are in fact out of their natural element.³⁷

³⁴ See, for instance, Ovid *Met.* 8.537, where Ovid uses *refovent* to describe the futile attempts of Meleager's sisters to bring life and warmth back to their brother's corpse. It is tempting to read Christian significance into Ausonius' association of the river with the words *vivis* and *refotos* in line 333, and to see the river as water of baptismal purity. This allegorical reading, while not the prominent one, may well add force to Ausonius' depiction of the river as a revitalising agent. *Vivus*, however, is an epithet conventionally attached to water; e.g. Vergil, *G.* 2.469.

³⁵ Roberts has pointed out that the exact centre of the *Mosella* is the graphic, sympathetic description of the dying fish (345).

³⁶ The simile may well be drawn from *Aetna* 562–65, where the eruption of volcanic fire is compared to the fanning of flames by bellows. Ausonius perhaps strengthens the link by describing the bellows as *cavernis* (269), a word that commonly means volcanic hollows (*Aetna* 426).

³⁷ The myth of Glaucus with which the passage on fishing ends (176–282) testifies likewise to nature's revitalising powers, though in a different way. Ausonius' version of Ovid's tale (*Met.* 13.917–65) is not simply a warning exemplum of a fisherman who gets his just deserts:

ille hamis et rete potens, scrutator operti
Nereos, aequoream solitus convertere Tethyn
inter captivas fluitavit praedo catervas. (280–82)

The association of *praedo* with *praeda* skillfully emphasises the poetic justice of Glaucus' fate, captor made captive. But in describing Glaucus at the end not as a

The passage following Statius' description of the furnaces in *Silvae* 1.3 likewise begins with *vidi* (47) but continues with quite a different object of admiration, "artes veterumque manus variisque metalla / viva modis" (47–48). In describing the artistic adornments of the villa, Statius applies *viva* to the *metalla* which through artifice give the appearance of life. The contrast between Statius' *metalla / viva* and Ausonius' *vivis...aquis* illustrates Ausonius' radical shift in perspective. Unlike his predecessor, Ausonius recognises that pleasure, and indeed moral benefit, can be found in nature unadorned and unaltered by man; nature therefore deserves our awe and respect.

The section on the villas concludes with a comparison between the bath-houses of the Moselle valley and Baiae :

quod si Cumanis huc adforet hospes ab oris,
crederet Euboicas simulacra exilia Baias
his donasse locis: tantus cultusque nitorque
adlicit et nullum parit oblectatio luxum. (345–48)

Ostensibly, the reference to the famous bathing establishment on the Bay of Naples is intended to exalt the present environment and to acknowledge Ausonius' debt to Statius, whose home was Campania. It also serves, however, as a concluding reminder of the disreputable uses to which art has been put. The very name of Baiae of course conjures up ambiguous associations with luxury and moral decadence,³⁸ and Ausonius reinforces that ambiguity. He makes a couple of significant modifications to Statius' phrase in *Silvae* 1.5.60 praising the baths of Claudius Etruscus, "nec si Baianis veniat novus hospes ab oris, talia despiciat." First, by referring to *Euboean* Baiae, Ausonius recalls his earlier reference to Daedalus in his catalogue of architects, *aedis conditor Euboicae* (301), and thus immediately reminds us of the negative light in which artistic achievement was portrayed there. It is, then, scarcely a compliment to describe the baths of the Moselle as tiny images of Baiae. Moreover, Ternes, who translated *simulacra exilia* as "models reduced in size," overlooks the derogatory associations of both words.³⁹ *Simulacra* are commonly false, sham, or insubstantial; at lines 227–29 Ausonius interprets *simulacra*, the images of themselves that the boatmen see on the water, as *fallaces...figuras*. *Exilia* usually has the connotation of "feeble" or "worthless." It occurs only one other time in this poem, nineteen lines later, in a clearly derogatory context, for Ausonius uses it to refer to a river he will not bother to say anything about, *exilem Lesuram* (365).

The comparison, then, initially is not a flattering one. Only Ausonius' concluding statement, that the charm of the scene begets no luxury, can be seen

high-ranking sea-god, his fate in Ovid's account, but as an anonymous, wretched member of captive shoals of fish, Ausonius hints at the power of nature to reclaim and even reabsorb human life.

³⁸ Martial's epigram on the virtuous wife who went to Baiae says it all in one neat line: "Penelope venit, abit Helene" (*Ep.* 1.62.6). Cf. also Propertius *T.* 11; Ovid, *A.A.* 255–58; Juvenal, *Sat.* 11.49.

³⁹ Ternes (above, note 1) 83.

as a sort of backhanded compliment, for he praises the Moselle bathhouses for their lack of the very quality that made Baiae the most famous bathing establishment in the Roman world, *luxus*. Ausonius has not provided any details of material opulence in his description of the baths; his interest has chiefly been in the moral value of the scene. His reference to *cultus* and *nitor* does not cancel the unpleasant impression conveyed by the image of Mulciber. Rather, Ausonius here describes the external scene as a traveller arriving from afar. Furthermore, throughout his poem the qualities of *cultus* and *nitor* distinguish the Moselle in particular rather than buildings, for the river is praised for its dazzling, reflective radiance and its ordered calm. Ausonius' concluding statement on the baths, therefore, is general enough to encompass the natural landscape in which they are situated, and it draws attention to the moral value of the river as well as its visual brilliance.

That this moral influence extends beyond the individual to the public, political sphere is made clear by the extended comparison which opens the passage on the villas. Ausonius compares the Hellespont unfavourably to the Moselle, for in the former human beings' attempts to challenge nature finally failed; Leander was drowned, the bridge of Xerxes collapsed in a storm:⁴⁰

Quis modo Sestiacum pelagus, Nepheleidos Helles
aequor, Abydeni freta quis miretur ephebi?
quis Chalcedonio constratum ab litore pontum,
regis opus magni, mediis euripus ubi undis
Europaeque Asiaeque vetat concurrere terras?
non hic dira freti rabies, non saeva furentum
proelia caurorum; licet hic commercia linguae
iungere et alterno sermonem texere dictu.
blanda salutiferas permiscunt litora voces,
et voces et paene manus: resonantia utrimque
verba refert mediis concurrens fluctibus echo. (287–97)

This comparison is closely based upon verses 27–33 of *Silvae* 1.3, where Statius compares the narrowness of the Hellespont (rather incredibly) to the Anio. He praises human triumphs over nature through the example of Leander, emphasising the heroic aspect of his swim and omitting all word of his ultimate failure:

Sestiacos nunc fama sinus pelagusque natatum
iactet et audaci victos delphinas ephebo!
hic aeterna quies, nullis hic iura procellis,
numquam fervor aquis. datur hic transmittere visus
et voces et paene manus. sic Chalcida fluctus

⁴⁰ Although Ausonius refers directly only to the Great King's bridge across the Bosphorus, he probably also has in mind Xerxes' more famous bridge across the Hellespont. Ausonius' reference to *proelia caurorum* (293) may in fact then be a subtle allusion to Juvenal's depiction of Xerxes as "in corum atque eurum saevire flagellis / barbarus" (*Sat.* 10.180–181), particularly since *cauri* is a rather rare word for northwest winds.

expellunt refluī? sic dissociata profundo
 Bruttia Sicanium circumspicit ora Pelorum?

Unlike Statius, Ausonius uses these geographical parallels as a basis of contrast rather than comparison. His Leander earns no such heroic epithet as *victos* but rather a rhetorical question, *quis miretur*, which suggests the dubiousness of his exploit. The narrow channel between Europe and Asia is associated with such moral evils as *dira rabies* (292) and *saeva furentum / proelia caurorum* (292–93). It prevents the lands from coming together, *concurrere* (291); without human aid, on the other hand, the Moselle can achieve harmony between man and nature, between water and earth, and between opposite banks, for it possesses its special features of echo and reflection.⁴¹ Ausonius devotes four and a half lines to developing Statius' statement *datur hic transmittere visus / et voces et paene manus* (30–31). Whereas Statius uses only the word *transmittere*, which suggests communication but not union, Ausonius uses *iungere*, *texere*, *permiscere*, *concurrens*, *resonantia*, and *refert* to emphasise the important notion of harmonious response and intermingling of different elements. Moreover, although Statius uses the impersonal verb *datur*, Ausonius makes nature the active agent, for *permiscet litora* (295). He omits Statius' *visus* and repeats *voces* twice (295–96), for speech, in the form of alternating words (294) or echo (297), provides an image of harmonious interchange and response. He thus adds the adjective *salutiferas* to *voces* (295) as a means of contrasting this morally beneficial form of communication to the hubristic forms associated with *rabies* and *proelia*. *Concurrens*, used to describe the echo (297), is itself an ironic echo of *concurrere* (291), a reminder that the Moselle, without the troublesome aid of human technology such as Darius' bridge, can produce its own peaceful forms of bridging the waters. Through this comparison, Ausonius dissociates the Moselle from the madness of war and the savage contest with nature engendered by empire builders.

Statius uses this comparison to draw attention to the wonderful situation of his patron's villa and the skillful building involved, for the villa straddles the Anio. In Ausonius' passage no villas are directly involved. His focus is on the river alone as the agent of human delight and harmony. The contrast that Ausonius draws in his poem between the works of art and of nature seems particularly to reflect Ausonius' response to conditions on the Rhine frontier at that time. This region had not yet recovered from the devastation of invasion one hundred years previously, or even before that.⁴² At the start of the *Mosella* Ausonius refers to Gaul's "Cannae," a terrible defeat against the Romans which he treats as if it had happened only yesterday instead of three hundred years

⁴¹ Cf. Roberts, 350: "...the equivalent of reflection on the horizontal dimension is echo."

⁴² During the invasion of the Franks in 276 A.D. many of the villas were destroyed and the region never fully recovered. See E. M. Wightman (above, note 28) ch. 4, and Ch. M. Ternes (above, note 27), who portrays the region of the Moselle as one of heavily fortified towns, 389–97. At 377 he characterises Trier as "dernier bastion de l'Empire menacé de plus en plus de male mort."

before (3–5).⁴³ The region then bore visible scars of its turbulent past, and once again the Romans, under Valentinian, were doing little to improve its stability with their forays across the Rhine.⁴⁴

Ausonius' awareness of the fragility of Roman imperial designs and achievement perhaps prompted him to suggest in the *Mosella* that the most visible aspects of the Pax Romana might not in the long run be the most important or enduring ones. More valuable than an aggressive military presence and grand buildings was a countryside at peace and free from destructive interference.

To conclude, in the *Mosella* Ausonius sets up the *Silvae* in particular as a foil to his communication of admiration for nature. The *Mosella* is not a poem that nostalgically tries to recreate the classical past by adopting Statius' enthusiasm for the achievements of Roman technology. Rather, Ausonius skillfully uses allusion to Statius in order to show his suspicion of those values and to assert the potency of nature.

Ausonius' attitude to nature seems to me new. The rural poetry of Vergil, Horace, and Tibullus, for instance, placed man at the centre of their landscapes; Ausonius here removes him to the periphery. Moreover, in his eye for the particularities of a real historical landscape, Ausonius stands apart from his contemporaries such as Claudian, who favoured allegorical descriptions of landscape. As the writer of a "travel poem," Ausonius also differs from writers of this genre in late Antiquity, Sidonius Apollinaris in *Epistle* 1.5, Rutilius Namatianus in *De Reditu Suo*, and Venantius Fortunatus in *De Navigio Suo*. Beginning with Horace's *Satire* 1.5, this type of poem characteristically celebrates towns or, at any rate, signs of human habitation which offer comfort as the writer journeys through an unfamiliar and often unthreatening world. One hundred years after Ausonius, Venantius Fortunatus took a similar journey down the Moselle. His poem about this trip, *De Navigio Suo*, is in some ways a much reduced version of Ausonius' *Mosella*.⁴⁵ But unlike his predecessor, Venantius Fortunatus does not see the independent beauty of the landscape. His eye is for the signs of human cultivation amidst what he perceives as general barrenness, *culta nitent inter horrentia saxa* (35). His poem concludes with the poet enjoying the luxuries of the king's table.

Ausonius moved in no less frightening or dangerous a world than Venantius Fortunatus. Yet in an age when poets were turning away from the material world and, if they praised landscape at all, divorced it from a historical context, Ausonius boldly sought to alert his readers' eyes to the independent beauties of the natural world as well as its value as a moral and political paradigm. He thus tried to suggest a consolation for the dangers and corruptions of his time.

⁴³ Note the use of the present tense to describe the corpses, still unwept and unburied: "infletaeque iacent inopes super arva catervae" (4).

⁴⁴ See Ammianus Marcellinus 29.41. Valentinian failed in his attempts to gain control of the right bank of the Rhine.

⁴⁵ The poem is only 82 lines long. The text is found in Hosius (above, note 1) 104–9.

Ausonius' commitment to a peaceful settlement on the Rhine frontier is shown in his refusal to subscribe to the traditional hierarchy of genres and make his sequel to the *Mosella* a poem about war. At the end of the *Georgics* Vergil announces that he is now turning his back upon the rural poetry he wrote *studiis florentem ignobilis oti* (G. 4.564). Ausonius' projected continuation of the *Mosella* will, however, be sponsored by *studiis ignobilis oti* (392). His new subject matter will concern neither war nor the luxuries of civilisation he regards as potentially harmful, such as extravagant buildings. Rather, it will concern the peaceable accomplishments in the social and moral sphere of good judges, orators, teachers, and leaders (399–408); the buildings he will describe will be not camps but granaries, symbols of a beneficent nature (*non castra, sed horrea*, 457). Significantly, this poem was never written. He could not include such subject matter in his existing poem on the Moselle because, presumably, such men and such peaceful conditions did not exist. The works of man on the troubled German frontier were symbols of mutability rather than of a noble Roman tradition. Ausonius found consolation instead in the timeless beauties and independent power of nature. Ausonius' praise of the Moselle could be expressed in terms only of those natural attributes which could not be destroyed by human acts of aggression: the reflection of a mountain on the river at sunset, the play of light upon stones.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ C. Hosius, "Die literarische Stellung von Ausons Mosellied," *Philologus* 81 (1925) 192–201, criticises the *Mosella* for lacking geographical specificity: "Wir wissen nicht, an welchem Punkte des Stromes wir stehen und schauen" (200). Ausonius' refusal to name or describe towns makes it difficult to localise the landscape. Nor was he interested in doing so, for he strives for specificity of natural, not topographical, detail. Ausonius had two main purposes, first to record the impression of a journey down the Moselle, for which there would obviously be no fixed viewpoint; and secondly, to describe the virtues of a countryside at peace. His idealising, selective treatment of the region is illuminated with his particular observation of the individual details of nature, details that show that nature's beauties and creative potential are available to all, if we can only learn to appreciate them.