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*Ovidius Pictus: Afterlives
of the Metamorphoses
in Europe, from Books
to the Arts*



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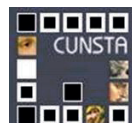
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*Ovidius Pictus: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts*

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Narcissus and Echo in Liguria. The Embodiment of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina

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Abstract

This paper explores the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina, Liguria. It examines the interplay between text, materiality, and space, focusing on the *Galleria delle Stagioni* and its mythological decorations. Through textual and visual analysis, as well as material examination, the study reveals, how mythology becomes embedded in the physical environment of the villa, immersing viewers in the narrative conveyed through artistic objects. The Villa Durazzo Faraggiana is situated amidst the Ligurian landscape, and its decoration, including the mirror depicting Narcissus by Filippo Parodi, showcases the interaction between Ovidian text and visual art. By comparing the text and the mirror, the study uncovers additional elements not explicitly depicted in the mirror, highlighting the narrative structure of the artwork. The paper concludes by emphasizing the contrast between naturalism and artificiality in both Ovid's text and the mirror's representation, underscoring the villa's role as an Arcadian place and a site of artistic creation and representation.

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I sincerely thank the Museo Villa Faraggiana for granting permission to use the photo of the gallery here.

1. Introduction

Filippo Parodi's *Mirror with the myth of Narcissus* is one of the most outstanding pieces of furniture from the Genoese *Seicento* (fig. 1)¹. In a remarkable manner, it not only illustrates Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but almost brings them to life. This paper explores the role of Ovid's poetry in the decoration of the Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola, with a particular emphasis on the interplay between text, materiality, and space. Based on the mythological decorative elements of the *Galleria delle Stagioni*, this study aims to demonstrate, through a textual and visual comparison, as well as material analysis, how the imaginary realm of mythology becomes integrated into the physical space of the Ligurian villa, immersing viewers in the storytelling conveyed through artistic objects.

Since the Renaissance, Genoese nobles have erected villas in the outskirts of the city, utilizing them as second residences alongside their urban palaces². In relation to the humanistic concept of *negotium* and *otium*, the urban *palazzo* represented the *negotium*, encompassing civic duties and business life. On the other hand, the villa symbolized the *otium*, representing free time dedicated to study and the Muses³. The villa played a crucial role in defining the identity of the Genoese nobility, as it distinguished them from mere merchants through their engagement in *otium*⁴. Particularly, the staged view from the villa over the landscape became an important aspect of villa construction, as it asserted the owner's claim of dominion over the surroundings⁵.

In the 18th century, the concept of the villa as a place of representation and contemplation persisted. However, villas were now often constructed at a greater distance from the city: members of the Durazzo family built villas in Romairone, Pino, and along the coast in Santa Margherita Ligure⁶. The Durazzo, originally from Albania, were important protagonists of the Genoese *Settecento*⁷. They commissioned and supported the arts, resulting in numerous magnificent palace and villa decorations, frequently adorned

¹ Bissell 2017, pp. 346-347; Bruno 2015, pp. 348-351; Bruno, Sanguineti 2014, p. 414; Collu 1992, pp. 34 and f., 75; González-Palacios 1996, pp. 77-80; Magnani 1988, pp. 130 and f.; Magnani 1992b, p. 297; Magnani 2000a, pp. 138-141; Magnani 2006, pp. 100-106; Preimesberger 1992, p. 231-233; Ratti, Soprani, 1769, p. 59; Rotondi 1959, pp. 46-49; Rotondi Briasco 1962, pp. 29-31.; Sanguineti 2012, pp. 74, 83 and f.; Sanguineti 2013, pp. 171 and ff.; Simonetti 1992, p. 391.

² Hanke 2008, pp. 22-26; Magnani 1987, 1992a; Priarone 2004.

³ Collu 1992, pp. 18 and f.; Magnani 1987, p. 109.

⁴ Collu 1992, p. 15; Magnani 1987, p. 104.

⁵ Collu 1992, p. 17; Magnani 1987, p. 16; Magnani 2022, pp. 10 and ff.

⁶ Barbieri 2013, pp. 115-117; Collu 1992, p. 15, 18; Collu 2004, p. 115; Magnani 1987, pp. 199-208; Valenti Durazzo 2004, pp. 319 and f.

⁷ Barbieri 2013, p. 115; Puncuh 1981, p. 19; Valenti Durazzo 2004, pp. 60-63.

with mythological themes⁸. In contrast to a heavily politically focused iconography, the 18th century, particularly in villa decorations, favored more sensual themes⁹. This inclination was also influenced by the establishment of the *Colonia Ligustica d'Arcadia* in Genoa in 1705, which dedicated itself to poetry, natural philosophy, and the concept of an Arcadian world¹⁰. The Durazzo family had ties to the *Colonia*, as Paola Franzone Durazzo, the wife of Gio Luca II Durazzo and mother of the later doge Marcello (Marcellino) Giuseppe Durazzo di Gian Luca, was considered one of the foremost muses and patronesses of the Arcadians¹¹. The incorporation of Arcadian ideas in 18th-century Genoese art has been explored in a recent exhibition by Daniele Sanguineti and Laura Stagno¹²: during the *Settecento*, innovative approaches were frequently employed to allow nature to invade buildings as an invasive force, thus blurring the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces¹³. Likewise, the Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina can serve as an example of how, through mythological depictions, a delicate interplay between materiality and immateriality as well as imagined and real space is created.

2. Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina

The Villa Durazzo, later Faraggiana, was erected in Albissola Marina, near Savona by the Durazzo family during the course of the 18th century (fig. 2)¹⁴. R. Collu has provided a foundational work on the architectural history and furnishings of the villa, relying on archival materials and visual sources¹⁵.

Located amidst the Ligurian mountains, the villa was surrounded by an estate that stretched from the coast to the banks of the Torrente Sansobbia during the 18th century, as depicted in contemporary drawings¹⁶. Initially, the

⁸ Barbieri 2013, pp. 118 and f.; Collu 1992, p. 36; Leoncini 2022, p. 47; Magnani 1987, pp. 199-204; Magnani 2000b; Morozzo della Rocca e di Bianzè 2004, p. 119; Stagno 2022, p. 48.

⁹ Griseri 1967, p. 255-257; Magnani 1987, p. 185; Magnani 2000a, pp. 138-141; Magnani 2006, p. 108; Sanguineti 2022, p. 31.

¹⁰ Beniscelli 1976, 2000, 2007; Magnani 1987, p. 195; Magnani 2000a, p. 153; Piccinno 1995; Rotondi 1959, p. 46; Sanguineti, Stagno 2022, p. 122; Stagno 2022, p. 46.

¹¹ Magnani 1987, p. 9, p. 113; Magnani 2000a, pp. 148 and f.; Magnani 2006, p. 108; Musso Casalone 2023; Sanguineti, Stagno 2022, p. 122; Stagno 2022, p. 46.

¹² Sanguineti, Stagno 2022; see also Barbieri 2013, pp. 117-119; Magnani 1987, p. 195; Magnani 2000b; Magnani 2006, pp. 106-108; Piccinno 1995.

¹³ Magnani 1987, p. 157; Magnani 2000a, p. 138; Magnani 2006, p. 100; Stagno 2022, p. 52.

¹⁴ Collu 1987, p. 12, 17; Magnani 2000a, p. 141.

¹⁵ Collu 1987, 1992, 2004.

¹⁶ Collu 1992, p. 16.

building consisted only of the central cube in 1740, as shown in a drawing from that year. The two side wings were later added, one to the east and the other to the west, as evidenced by a 1772 plan depicting the villa with these additions, indicating their construction in the mid-18th century¹⁷.

The construction of the actual villa was probably initiated by Gerolamo Ignazio Durazzo in 1736¹⁸. In 1734, Gerolamo's daughter, Maria Maddalena Durazzo di Gerolamo, married her cousin, the later doge Marcellino Durazzo, who was the son of the renowned Arcadian muse, Paola Franzone Durazzo¹⁹. Marcellino Durazzo is believed to have completed the west wing of the villa in 1751-1752²⁰, where the opulently adorned *Galleria delle Stagioni* (Gallery of Seasons) is located. This chamber is renowned as the most splendid and emblematic area within the villa (fig. 3)²¹. The gallery and its decoration have already been the subject of several studies: in addition to Collu's work, L. Magnani deserves mention, as he has already produced extensive works on the relationship between art, nature, and myth²².

The *Galleria delle Stagioni* owes its name to the four sculptures by the Genoese sculptor Filippo Parodi that adorn the side walls of the room, representing allegories of the *Four Seasons*. The sculptures were created in the 17th century, predating the construction of the gallery²³. While the floor is adorned with majolica tiles painted with floral patterns, the ceiling and walls are painted with frescoes depicting bucolic and genre scenes. The frescoes, which were previously attributed to Carlo Giuseppe Ratti²⁴, were probably painted by Rocco Costa, Giovanni Agostino Ratti and Giuseppe Galeotti²⁵, depicting scenes involving Apollo, Diana, Bacco and Proserpina²⁶. These nature-related deities align with the location of the gallery, as several large French doors provide direct access from the interior to the garden (fig. 4).

The culmination of the decoration is found at the end of the gallery: a large mirror (fig. 1), also created by Filippo Parodi. The mirror, a wooden object entirely covered in gilding, was created in the second half of the 17th century, most likely in 1667, to commemorate the wedding of Gio Agostino Durazzo

¹⁷ Ivi, pp. 23 and f.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 100.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*; Valenti Durazzo 2004, p. 358.

²⁰ Magnani 1987, pp. 206 and f., n. 7.

²¹ Collu 1992, pp. 33-37.

²² Especially Magnani 1987, 1992a, 1993, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2006, 2015.

²³ Cataldi Gallo, Simonetti 1986, pp. 20-22; Collu 1992, p. 36; González-Palacios 1996, pp. 88-92; Magnani 1988, pp. 131-134; Magnani 2000a, p. 138; Magnani 2006, pp. 10-104; Simonetti 1986, pp. 10-13; Zimmermann 1975, pp. 148-151.

²⁴ Collu 1992, pp. 35-36, 82.

²⁵ Collu 2004, pp. 114 and f. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for the reference to Giovanni Agostino Ratti provided by S. Roettgen.

²⁶ Collu 1992, pp. 35 and f., 82; Collu 2004, pp. 114 and f.

and Maddalena Spinola²⁷. It depicts the myth of Narcissus, who discovers his own reflection in the water of a lake. In Book III of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of the young man who falls in love with his own image on the bank of a lake. This love ultimately leads to his demise as he destroys the reflection of his face whenever he attempts to touch it²⁸.

3. *Parallels between Text and Visual Art*

To examine the extent to which the mythological narrative is transposed to Liguria through the visual arts, a close reading of the Ovidian text is conducted. Ovid describes the space in which the myth takes place with the following words:

fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis, / quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae / contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris / nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus; / gramen erat circa, quod proximus umor alebat, / silvaque sole locum passura tepescere nullo.²⁹

At first glance, the described place seems to be a perfect *locus amoenus*³⁰. However, a closer look reveals that the idyllic place seems almost too ideal: it has never been touched by an animal, the surface of the water is as silver as a plate, and the sun cannot warm the place. Instead of emanating an inviting coziness, the described location appears rather sterile³¹. Although a place untouched by humans in nature is described, the place appears lifeless: the untouched and rigid nature of the place makes it seem more like an unreal, constructed art world; instead of a natural clearing, Ovid describes more of an artificial place.

This impression is reinforced in the description of Narcissus: Ovid writes about the young man that he looks «ut e Pario formatum marmore signum»³².

²⁷ Collu 1992, p. 34; Collu 2004, p. 114; Sanguineti 2013, p. 171. The mirror was likely originally installed in a palace within the city. It was possibly commissioned for the Palazzo Reale for Eugenio Durazzo; Leoncini 2022, p. 53. It might also have been created for Carlo Emanuele Durazzo and his wife Paola Francesca Balbi around 1673; Bruno 2015, p. 348; Leoncini 2012, p. 250.

²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 344-510.

²⁹ *Ivi*, III, 407-412: «There was a clear pool with silvery bright water, to which no shepherds ever came, or she-goats feeding on the mountainside, or any other cattle; whose smooth surface neither bird nor beast nor falling bough ever ruffled. Grass grew all around its edge, fed by the water near, and a coppice that would never suffer the sun to warm the spot.», translated by Miller 1916, p. 153.

³⁰ Darab 2018, pp. 108 and f.

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 109.

³² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 419.

The poet describes his «eburnea colla»³³ and his «marmoreis [...] palmis»³⁴. Ovid compares Narcissus's body to materials typically used for sculptures – he describes the young man as a work of art³⁵. With this text-immanent *ekphrasis*³⁶, the poet establishes a connection between text and visual art; the materialization of the myth as art is already presented to the reader in the poetry. This shows that the interaction between the written myth and the material artwork is not one-sided, but rather text and image interact with each other in both directions.

The analysis of the text will now be applied to the mirror of Villa Albissola. With its size of 4.5 meters, the golden mirror occupies almost the entire height of the wall and undoubtedly represents the centerpiece of the room decoration. Enclosed within a massive wooden frame, entirely adorned with gold leaf, the central vertical mirror surface commands a prominent position. The structural base of the frame is modeled as a sharp-edged rock, jutting into the room at certain points. Various plants embellish the entire rock structure, some of which break through the hard surface of the stone as leafy vines, flowers, and grass. The base of the mirror consists of two massive stilts, which are also covered with the rock structure and appear to grow out of the ground due to the absence of a pedestal. At approximately hip height, the bulky rock protrudes towards the viewer, creating space for a semi-circular horizontal mirror surface that strongly resembles a filled water basin due to its position. On both stilts, between the floor and the horizontal mirror surface, are the sculptures of two dogs (fig. 5). The left one, covered in shaggy fur, stands on all fours, stretching its head upwards and opening its mouth filled with pointed teeth as if barking. The right one, on the other hand, a creature with smooth fur, stands on its hind legs, allowing its front paws to almost touch the horizontal mirror surface and cast a curious gaze into the presumed water basin. The detail and distinctiveness of the two dogs give them a lively movement, contrasting with their golden color.

Above the horizontal mirror surface, the rock structure becomes the frame of a significantly larger vertical mirror. While the lower edge of the surface has a rectangular shape with right angles, the upper edge is semi-circular, overgrown at certain points by the golden rock and plant structures. Towards the top, the rocky frame becomes more massive, with increasingly large rocky elements protruding into the room. Above the mirror, the rock forms a sufficiently large protrusion that serves as a pedestal for the sculpture of Narcissus (fig. 6). The young man, like the rest of the object completely covered in gold, kneels on the upper rock, supporting himself with his right hand on the stone, while his gaze is directed downwards towards the mirror surface. Framed by

³³ Ivi, III, 422.

³⁴ Ivi, III, 481.

³⁵ Darab 2018, pp. 109 and f.

³⁶ Kurman 1974, pp. 1-3.

magnificent curls, his face seems to suggest a smile. His youthful body is only loosely covered by a cloth, which is slightly blown upwards at his left hip and right upper arm – possibly indicating that the young man has just settled down by the shore in that very moment.

His quiver full of arrows and the bow to the right of the young man indicate the preceding hunt, as does the spear held by Narcissus in his left hand. Like the two dogs at the bottom of the sculpture, Narcissus also appears to be depicted in mid-movement. The flowing folds of his garment, the modeling of his skin and muscles, as well as the supported hand and kneeling posture, which seems to cautiously yet determinedly approach the water's surface, give the sculpture a lively and dynamic appearance.

Despite the complete gilding, Parodi models the surfaces according to the different materials: the rocky frame appears hard and angular, while the young man's skin seems to have a softer texture³⁷. Notably, the delicate structure of the plants, some of which hang limp over the stone while others forcefully emerge through the few gaps in the rock, creates a strong contrast between the naturalism of form and the artificial coloring of the artwork. Magnani perceives this contrast as rendering the scene «metareale»; the combination of naturalistic representation and simultaneously unifying, transcendent coloring is «propria esclusivamente della creazione e della rappresentazione artistica»³⁸.

As stated above, the interplay between naturalism and artificiality is also inherent in Ovid's text; *ut pictura poesis*³⁹ succeeds in both poetic and visual representation of the scene in portraying the location as shimmering between vibrant naturalism and frozen artificiality.

4. *Picturing the Invisible*

Through the method of comparing text and image, two elements of the mirror become apparent that are not explicitly mentioned in Ovid's poetry: this concerns, firstly, the two dogs at the foot of the mirror. Since Ovid emphasizes that the clearing has never been touched by an animal, there must be another explanation for their presence; because they are not part of the described clearing, they must instead belong to Narcissus.

³⁷ This ability can be attributed to Filippo Parodi's two stays in Rome, during which he diligently studied and assimilated the Berninian models; Bissell 2017, pp. 346-347; Bruno 2015, pp. 346-351; Leoncini 2022, p. 47; Magnani 2006, p. 110; Prei-mesberger 1992, p. 232; Rotondi 1959, p. 46.

³⁸ Magnani 2000a, p. 138. This «ispirazione fantasticamente naturalistica» is typical for Parodi; Rotondi 1959, p. 49; Rotondi Briasco 1962, p. 30.

³⁹ Kurman 1974, p. 1; Lee 1940, pp. 196-199.

Ovid describes the young man as «seductus ab agmine fido», which means that he has become separated from his companions⁴⁰. The term «agmen» can refer to a group of people, but also to a herd of animals. Regarding the spear in Narcissus's hand as well as the bow and arrows that he is holding, it appears that the young man was in the midst of hunting in the forest when he became separated from his hunting party, which presumably included dogs. By depicting the two dogs, Parodi shows the beginning of the story, when Narcissus is running through the woods. Like a text, the mirror thus presents us with a chronological sequence of events; the artist thereby transfers the narrative structure of a story to a visual artistic object. This emphasis on transferring storytelling elements into sculpture – a technique more commonly associated with painting – is a characteristic feature of Parodi's works⁴¹.

The second element of the mirror that is absent in the description of the woodland clearing is the rocks that frame the entire mirror: in Ovid's text, the body of water is described as framed by grass and bushes. Nevertheless, Parodi highlights the rocks so prominently that they determine the object much more than the depicted plants. Perhaps a comparison with the written text can also provide an explanatory possibility, as Ovid mentions the rocks elsewhere: before Narcissus catches sight of his reflection in the water, he is observed by the nymph Echo as he roams through the woods. The nymph, cursed to only repeat what others say and unable to form her own sentences, communicates with Narcissus in this manner. When she confesses her affection to him and approaches him, he rejects her. The nymph then retreats into the woods – only her voice remains, while her bones transform into stone: «vox manet, ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram»⁴².

Applying this observation to the mirror, the rocky frame could represent the transformed nymph. In this way, the frame would depict a chronological progression that aligns with the chronology of Ovid's text: while the two dogs at the foot of the mirror symbolize the hunt that leads the young man into the woods, the rocky structure of the frame would represent the middle part of the story, in which Narcissus walks through the woods accompanied and observed by Echo. Narcissus's rejection ultimately leads to the transformation of the nymph, leaving only her voice and her bones turned to stone⁴³. On the

⁴⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 379.

⁴¹ Bruno 2015, p. 356. As another example of Parodi's translation of a story into sculpture, one may consider the frame depicting the *Judgment of Paris*, which is located in the Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola. The frame may have originally been created for a mirror as well; Magnani 1988, p. 131.

⁴² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 399.

⁴³ This consideration fits with M. Bruno's observation that the frame represents the «idea [...] of representing matter in the process of becoming, of constant evolution, which is evident [...] in the motif of the sea rocks»; Bruno 2015, p. 348.

top of the mirror, the final scene of the story is depicted: the moment when Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection. The storytelling begins at the bottom end leads to the climax at the top.

It therefore seems reasonable to consider the theme of the mirror not only as Narcissus, as previously assumed, but also as Echo. While it may be logical to adorn the decoration of a mirror primarily with Narcissus, it should be noted that the story of Echo is also a myth revolving around reflection. Just as Narcissus falls victim to the visual reflection of his own image, Echo is destined to audibly reflect the voices of others. Both protagonists are simultaneously bodies and reflections. Ovid repeatedly explores the interplay between corporeality and disembodiment, both in the case of Narcissus and Echo⁴⁴. At the beginning of the story, he emphasizes, through the impactful positioning at the beginning of the sentence, that the nymph initially has a body: «Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat»⁴⁵, while later only her voice remains (see above). On the other hand, Narcissus mistakes the image of a form, «*imagine formae*», for a body: «*spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod umbra est*»⁴⁶. While Echo ultimately becomes only a voice, Narcissus's beloved remains only an image – here, too, a connection can be made to the aforementioned *ekphrasis*. It can be concluded that the mirror, as a reflecting object, is suitable not only for representing Narcissus but also for depicting Echo. It is noteworthy how brilliantly Parodi translates Echo's story into visual art – since there is no substance left of Echo, Parodi masterfully integrates the depiction of the disembodied nymph by incorporating her as rocks into the mirror. This complies with the requirements of *decorum*, as Parodi avoids depicting the nymph's body deforming or dissolving⁴⁷. Nonetheless, the artist manages to bestow upon the rock such a prominent role that it not only appears as a mere frame but rather as a dynamic substance, a three-dimensional entity, and an autonomous actor⁴⁸.

Regarding this ingenious design solution by Parodi, it seems likely that the Genoese artist Paolo Gerolamo Piola drew inspiration from the mirror for a fountain design, incorporating the remarkable depiction of the rock into a drawing⁴⁹.

It becomes evident that the viewer is not only drawn into the scene and placed in the position of Narcissus through the reflection in the mirror. In addition to

⁴⁴ Á. Darab compares the story of Narcissus to the one of Pygmalion; Darab 2018, p. 110; Rosati 1983, pp. 25-28.

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 359.

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 416-417, «He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks that substance which is only shadow», translated by Miller 1916, p. 153.

⁴⁷ Thimann 2003, pp. 64-67.

⁴⁸ Bruno 2022, p. 210; Rotondi 1959, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Genoa, Palazzo Rosso, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Inv. N. 4406; Franchini Guelfi 1988, p. 49, 52; Magnani 1987, p. 206 (with attribution to Domenico Parodi); Magnani 2000b, p. 120.

this immersive experience through materiality, the myth is also brought to life through the storytelling incorporated by Parodi. By representing the temporal progression and giving the object a narrative structure similar to a text, the viewer is also narratively drawn into the story. Like in a play, the mythological narrative unfolds before the viewer, inviting them to participate⁵⁰.

5. *Locating the myth*

After illustrating how the Ovidian text is transferred into the mirror by Filippo Parodi through materiality and storytelling, attention is directed towards the *Galleria delle Stagioni*, where the mirror is located. As a piece of furniture is designed to be arranged in a room with other objects, it can be assumed that the mirror was not conceived as an isolated object⁵¹. However, in the case of the *Galleria delle Stagioni*, a special situation arises: the room was created later than the piece of furniture.

The mirror was already created in the 17th century, but was transferred to the *Galleria delle Stagioni* in the mid-18th century⁵². Given its prominent position in the gallery, it is possible that the rest of the gallery was built with reference to the mirror, as suggested by Lauro Magnani⁵³. Assuming this hypothesis, the story of Narcissus and Echo thus becomes the starting point of the gallery. While the frescoes on the ceilings and walls are no longer fully reconstructable due to frequent overpainting, and the sculptures were also created before the construction of the gallery, the flooring most likely still retains the original pattern from the 18th century (fig. 7). The tiles were likely delivered in 1751, as suggested by the mention of six hundred «quadretti» in a delivery note from the same year⁵⁴. These tiles, or majolica, display a floral and geometrical decoration that covers the entire gallery floor. Similar to the place described by Ovid as well as the scene depicted by Parodi, this design is inspired by natural forms; but due to its geometric nature, it is evident that it does not depict real flowers, but artificial ones. Thus, the ambivalence of the mythological realm, which oscillates between illusory realism and constructed artificiality, is reflected in the floor decoration.

⁵⁰ Bruno 2015, p. 348-351; Bruno 2022, p. 120; Gavazza, Magnani 2000, p. 7; Magnani 2006, p. 106; Rotondi 1959, p. 46.

⁵¹ Although Magnani emphasizes that the furniture is conceived as part of the architectural decoration and therefore has the same conceptual status as sculptures; Magnani 2000b, p. 120; Rotondi Briasco 1962, p. 31.

⁵² Collu 1992, p. 34.

⁵³ Magnani 2000b, p. 120.

⁵⁴ Collu 1992, p. 33.

A noteworthy aspect of these tiles is that they are a typical local product: Albissola and the neighboring town of Savona are renowned for their majolica⁵⁵. By utilizing this local craftsmanship, the entire scene establishes a connection to the region of Albissola, creating a material relationship with the space in which the gallery is situated. When the viewer steps out of the gallery into the garden, the interplay continues: behind the sculpture of Diana, which also dates back to the mid-18th century and is positioned gracefully above a fountain, a breathtaking vista unfolds, revealing the Ligurian mountains (fig. 8). This enchanting scene creates the illusion that the goddess of the hunt is traversing through the nearby surroundings⁵⁶.

Whether through the reflective surface of mirrors, the storytelling, the local materials, or the positioning of mythological figures within the Ligurian landscape, the decoration of Villa Albissola intertwines mythological narratives with the environment and engages the viewer in various ways. Instead of simply depicting mythological stories, it employs a sophisticated game that enables educated audiences to envision themselves in a mythical realm⁵⁷. By orchestrating this distinguished play, the patrons not only assert their power but also demonstrate their pursuit of knowledge, creating not just a place of leisure but their own personal Arcadian sanctuary⁵⁸. In doing so, the realm of myth hovers between naturalism and artificiality, inviting spectators to participate in a theatrical performance while remaining conscious of the deliberately staged artificiality of the scene⁵⁹. Like Narcissus, the spectator can never fully immerse themselves in the myth and bring it to life but is perpetually halted by the ostentatious display of artifice.

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⁵⁵ Collu 1992, p. 97; Farris 1992, p. 366.

⁵⁶ Bruno 2022, p. 210; Collu 1987, p. 9; Collu 1992, pp. 18, p. 81; Sanguineti 2022, pp. 30 and f.

⁵⁷ Bruno 2022, p. 210; Magnani 1987, p. 190-192; Magnani 2006, p. 106; Sanguineti 2022, pp. 31 and f; Stagno 2022, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Magnani 1987, p. 113.

⁵⁹ Magnani 2006, p. 106, Rotondi 1959, pp. 46-47.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. Filippo Parodi, *Mirror with the myth of Narcissus*, 17th century, wood with golden colour, 450×170×70 cm (Photo R. Dobsław 2023)



Fig. 2. *Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina, 18th century* (Photo R. Dobslaw 2023)

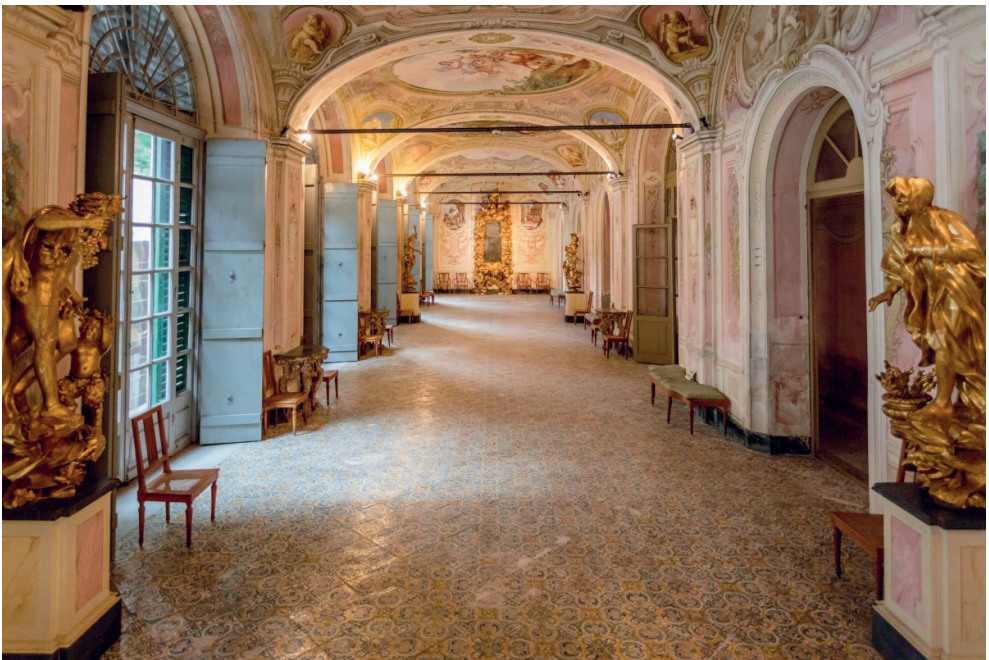


Fig. 3. *Galleria delle Stagioni, mid-18th century* (Photo Museo Villa Faraggiana)



Fig. 4. *Garden of the Villa with the Galleria delle Stagioni*, mid-18th century (Photo R. Dobsław 2022)



Fig. 5. Filippo Parodi, *Mirror with the myth of Narcissus* (Detail) (Photo R. Dobsław 2022)



Fig. 6. Filippo Parodi, *Mirror with the myth of Narcissus* (Detail) (Photo R. Dobslaw 2023)



Fig. 7. Ligurian manufacture, *Tiles on the floor of the Galleria delle Stagione*, 18th century, polychrome maiolica (Photo R. Dobsław 2023)



Fig. 8. Unknown Ligurian sculptor, *Fountain with the sculpture of Diana*, 2nd half of the 18th century, marble and stucco, garden of the Villa Durazzo Faraggiana in Albissola Marina (Photo R. Dobsław 2022)

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