SUPPLEMENTI

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

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

Supplementi 15 / 2023

eum

Il capitale culturale
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Supplementi n. 15, 2023

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

© 2010 eum edizioni università di macerata
Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

Direttore / Editor in chief Pietro Petraroia

Co-direttori / Co-editors Tommy D. Andersson, Elio Borgonovi, Rosanna Cioffi, Stefano Della Torre, Michela di Macco, Daniele Manacorda, Serge Noiret, Tonino Pencarelli, Angelo R. Pupino, Girolamo Sciullo

Coordinatore editoriale / Editorial coordinator Maria Teresa Gigliozzi

Coordinatore tecnico / Managing coordinator Pierluigi Feliciati

Comitato editoriale / Editorial board Giuseppe Capriotti, Mara Cerquetti, Francesca Coltrinari, Patrizia Dragoni, Pierluigi Feliciati, Costanza Geddes da Filicaia, Maria Teresa Gigliozzi, Chiara Mariotti, Enrico Nicosia, Emanuela Stortoni

Comitato scientifico - Sezione di beni culturali / Scientific Committee - Division of Cultural Heritage Giuseppe Capriotti, Mara Cerquetti, Francesca Coltrinari, Patrizia Dragoni, Pierluigi Feliciati, Maria Teresa Gigliozzi, Susanne Adina Meyer, Marta Maria Montella, Umberto Moscatelli, Caterina Paparello, Sabina Pavone, Francesco Pirani, Mauro Saracco, Emanuela Stortoni, Carmen Vitale

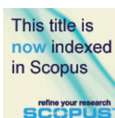
Comitato scientifico / Scientific Committee Michela Addis, Mario Alberto Banti, Carla Barbati †, Caterina Barilaro, Sergio Barile, Nadia Barrella, Gian Luigi Corinto, Lucia Corrain, Girolamo Cusimano, Maurizio De Vita, Fabio Donato †, Maria Cristina Giambruno, Gaetano Golinelli, Rubén Lois Gonzalez, Susan Hazan, Joel Heuillon, Federico Marazzi, Raffaella Morselli, Paola Paniccia, Giuliano Pinto, Carlo Pongetti, Bernardino Quattrociocchi, Margaret Rasulo, Orietta Rossi Pinelli, Massimiliano Rossi, Simonetta Stopponi, Cecilia Tasca, Andrea Ugolini, Frank Vermeulen, Alessandro Zuccari

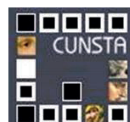
Web http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult, email: icc@unimc.it

Editore / Publisher eum edizioni università di macerata, Corso della Repubblica 51 – 62100 Macerata, tel. (39) 733 258 6081, fax (39) 733 258 6086, http://eum.unimc.it, info.ceum@unimc.it

Layout editor Oltrepagina srl

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico





Rivista accreditata AIDEA
Rivista riconosciuta CUNSTA
Rivista riconosciuta SISMED
Rivista indicizzata WOS
Rivista indicizzata SCOPUS
Rivista indicizzata DOAJ
Inclusa in ERIH-PLUS

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

edited by
Giuseppe Capriotti, Fátima Díez Platas,
Francesca Casamassima

This publication is part of the research project PID2022-141345NB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ "FEDER Una manera de hacer Europa"

Koncz C., Identification and Transgressive Gazing: Paola Gonzaga's Fontanellato Frescoes
«Il capitale culturale», Supplementi 15 (2023), pp. 293-326
ISSN 2039-2362 (online); DOI: 10.13138/2039-2362/3289

Identification and Transgressive Gazing: Paola Gonzaga's Fontanellato Frescoes

Caroline Koncz*

Abstract

Of all the early modern depictions of Diana and Actaeon, one of the most unusual is located in a small room inside the Rocca Sanvitale, the castle of Fontanellato in northern Italy. On the ceiling, Parmigianino frescoed scenes featuring the Ovidian tale. While much of the imagery is typical of the period, the most famous scene from the myth, in which the goddess Diana catches Actaeon beholding her nude form, is strikingly less so. This article provides an alternative reading of the ceiling's iconography, one that considers how the room's primary user, Paola Gonzaga, might have interacted with the frescoes. Through the use of methodologies such as gender and sexuality studies and iconography, I argue here that Parmigianino's imagery was specifically crafted for a female beholder, Gonzaga, granting her the ability to not only identify with the figures depicted, receiving moral instruction from them, but also to sensually enjoy them in private.

* Assistant Professor of Art History, Angelo State University, Visual and Performing Arts Department, 243 Carr Education Fine Arts Building, 2602 Dena Drive, San Angelo, TX 76902, e-mail: caroline.koncz@angelo.edu.

I wish to thank those present at the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference in Minneapolis as well those at the Ovidius Pictus virtual conference who heard parts of this article and provided me with generous feedback. I am also grateful to Francesca Casamassima and Bar Leshem for their motivation and aid throughout the writing and editing process.

1. *Introduction*

«But what shall I say to you about Francesco Parmigianino? The man endowed his creations with a certain loveliness which makes whoever looks at them fall in love with them»[1].

Tucked into a small, rectangular room on the lower level of the Rocca Sanvitale in Fontanellato, one finds a sumptuously decorated ceiling depicting the Ovidian tale of Diana and Actaeon by Parmigianino (fig. 1)[2]. Barely even twenty years old when he completed the project (the artist lived from 1503-1540), Parmigianino's frescoes continue to baffle scholars, due to several iconographical oddities in the program[3]. Yet because no documents survive from the commissioning of this project (the earliest primary sources we have on this work derive from 1696), art historians have struggled to explain the meaning behind the curious narrative cycle[4]. While perhaps funded by the count of Fontanellato, Giangaleazzo Sanvitale, I will argue in this article that the primary user of the room was more likely Sanvitale's wife, Paola Gonzaga. Indeed, other scholars have suggested that Gonzaga's *camerino* might have served as the woman's *stufetta,* her bathing quarters, or her *studiolo,* a room for private contemplation[5].

In what follows in this article, I wish to reconsider the meaning behind Parmigianino's frescoes, as viewed through the period eyes of Paola Gonzaga. As such, I claim that Parmigianino depicted the Ovidian myth specifically for the pleasure and moral instruction of its primary viewer[6]. Consequently, Parmigianino strayed from certain parts of the tale in his decoration to allow a female viewer the ability to better identify with the room's pictorial narrative. Furthermore, beyond relating to the figures of Diana and Actaeon, Paola could also salaciously gaze upon the naked flesh of the painted women's bodies, akin to Actaeon's own fateful encounter. Yet while the images in Gonzaga's *camerino* might have incited Paola's gaze, Parmigianino's paintings ultimately warned her of the dangerous effects of transgressive looking.

[1] This derives from a translation of Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogue on Painting,* which was first printed in 1557. Roskill 2000, p. 183.

[2] The room measures at around 4.35 by 3.5 meters and the ceiling measures at 3.9 meters. Gould 1994, p. 185.

[3] Arasse 1996, p. 257.

[4] Dall'Acqua *et al.* 2019, p. 37.

[5] McIver 2006, p. 125; Quintavalle 2004, p. 8; Tassi 1994, p. 129.

[6] Mary Vaccaro has suggested similarly that the images were for the reception of Gonzaga. Vaccaro 2004, p. 178.

2. *Diana and Actaeon in Fontanellato*

Just before Parmigianino left for Rome in 1524, he completed, among a number of other projects around Parma, the frescoes for Paola Gonzaga's *camerino*, which first deserve a close formal description before further analysis[7]. Upon entering the room, one is encouraged to gaze upward towards the young Mannerist artist's depiction of a lush and verdant trellised garden space. Among the flora, a number of chubby putti cheekily pose, squeezing their nude, winged forms in front of the greenery and surrounding golden pendentives. Above these cherubic figures, the beholder may gaze upon a painted oculus where a wreath of white roses reaches up towards a blue sky[8]. Curiously, at the very center of the ceiling, Parmigianino places a round, planar mirror into his otherwise frescoed composition. Encased in a gilded wooden frame, the circular, reflective object evokes in one's mind the image of the sun in the sky. Using this reflective surface in his composition, Parmigianino makes viewers aware of their own presence in the space, seemingly placing them into the frescoed program when they gazed up, erasing momentarily the boundary between art and life[9].

Below the fictive oculus, one may next view fourteen lunettes, which are topped by pendentives decorated with garlands and vegetal wreaths. In the surrounding edges of the ceiling, Parmigianino illustrates a continuous frieze featuring a rather loose rendition of the myth of Diana and Actaeon. Arguably the most famous rendition of this tale, as known to Parmigianino and his contemporaries, was the version composed by the ancient Roman author Ovid in Book Three of his *Metamorphoses*[10]. In this retelling, the young hunter Actaeon was out one day with his friends in the woods hunting for wild game. After a particularly successful morning, Actaeon decides to stop for the day and takes refuge from the midday sun. Making his way to a grove, the hunter innocently, as Ovid asserts, stumbles upon the nude goddess Diana and her nymphs at her grotto[11]. Outraged and embarrassed to be spotted unclothed by the young man, the virginal deity flings water into the hunter's face, crying out, «Now you may tell of how you saw me naked, tell it if you can, you may!»[12] In fear, Actaeon flees the scene[13].

[7] Dall'Acqua *et al.* 2019, p. 10.

[8] Ekserdjian identifies these flowers as roses. Ekserdjian 2006, p. 93.

[9] As McIver and others have noted, Mannerist artists of Italy around this period favored this illusionistic trick, in which reality and fiction (art) blurs. McIver 2006, p. 126.

[10] For the full rendition of the myth, see Bonsignori 2001, pp. 189-191; Ovid 2004, pp. 95-100.

[11] As Barkan has shown, a number of versions of this myth claim that Actaeon purposefully wished to spy on the goddess and view her nude body. Barkan 1980.

[12] Ovid 2004, p. 97.

[13] A similar version of this tale was told by Boccaccio. Boccaccio 2011, p. 667.

Stopping shortly afterwards at a pool of water, Actaeon looks down and finds that his reflection no longer casts that of a man's face, but of an antlered stag's. In terror, he cries out, but immediately finds that he can no longer form any words. As Actaeon stands there paralyzed, taking in his metamorphosed state, his fellow huntsmen and hounds come upon him. Immediately taking off from his predators, Actaeon runs for his life, but alas, he is not quick enough. Jumping upon him, Actaeon's own pack of dogs tear into his flesh, now matted with fur, as he again attempts to speak, «It's me! Actaeon! Recognize your master!»[14] Yet again the words form only as a stag's bays, and the unlucky hunter is torn alive by his hounds, all due to his fateful encounter with the virginal goddess of the hunt.

While a number of depictions of this Ovidian tale might have been available to the young Emilian artist, such as Correggio's painting of *Diana* that I closely examine in this article's following section, another work that Parmigianino might have looked to for influence is a woodcut print from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (fig. 2)[15]. In this illustration, which was designed circa 1497 and reprinted twice in Parma around 1505, the artist depicts a continuous narrative of the myth. On the left, a young man bearing a bow and arrow enters a forest space where he unknowingly stumbles upon three nude women, one of whom is the goddess Diana. The nude figure in front (likely Diana) is pictured cupping her hands in the pond, ready to fling the enchanted water onto the unfortunate hunter. The right half of the composition, meanwhile, depicts the aftermath of Diana's curse, illustrating Actaeon fully transformed into a stag, being torn apart by his hounds. Helpless to call the dogs off him, the hunter is subsequently ripped to pieces while his friends stand nearby, seemingly cheering on Actaeon's violent demise.

Returning to the version painted by Parmigianino, which was last renovated extensively in 1997-1998, one finds a slightly different narrative at play than the one pictured in the woodcut[16]. If we direct our gaze to above the north wall of the *camerino*, we discover a young, pale woman in classical garb, perhaps a nymph or huntress, fleeing from the pursuit of two young men chasing after her (fig. 3). Smiling coyly back at them, the woman, who holds in one hand a leash for her nearby hound and a hunting horn tucked into her dress, seems to tease the figures who follow her. One of these men reaches out in vain towards the huntress, trying to snare her by her cloak. The other male figure beside him appears perhaps less focused on the huntress and more so on the dogs behind him, who glare menacingly at the pair in the corner of the ceiling.

[14] Ovid 2004, p. 98-99.
[15] Brown 1981, p. 44.
[16] Bandini *et al.* 2000, p. 13.

Viewers of this room will also notice that a band of text trails below these figures and, in fact, wraps around the rest of the ceiling's perimeter. In whole, the Latin text roughly translates to, «Tell O goddess, if it is fate that led the unhappy Actaeon hither, why was he delivered by you to his hounds as food? It is not right for mortals to suffer punishment except in respect of a crime. Such anger is not seemingly for goddesses»[17]. The verse does not derive from Ovid or any known ancient source, but is perhaps by, as Katherine McIver has claimed, the visiting humanist Benedetto Albineo di Bianchi, one of the many intellectual figures whom Paola Gonzaga invited as a distinguished guest to the Rocca[18].

Moving ninety degrees clockwise from the image of the huntress and her two male pursuers, viewers next encounter a more readily recognizable scene from the Ovidian myth above the room's east wall (fig. 4). Here framed beneath the center lunette, Parmigianino paints the ancient Roman goddess Diana, nude except for her crescent moon tiara. She appears to be in a bath rather than a natural body of water, her clothes placed nearby at the corner of the tub. Pictured in profile, Parmigianino captures the goddess with her hands still cupped just above the surface, perhaps done to allude to the action that has just taken place. We may surmise that Diana has already splashed the hunter with water, for Actaeon bears the transfigured head of a stag, the rest of his body still very much human. To the right of the goddess, the artist also includes a pair of nymphs snuggled up against one another, none too interested in the metamorphosis occurring before them.

Turning clockwise again and looking up above the south wall, one next beholds the completed transformation of Actaeon and his ultimate demise (fig. 5). At left, one of Actaeon's hounds turns his gaze upon us, reminding the beholder of the dangers of looking that caused his own master his untimely death. In the next lunette, one of Actaeon's comrades blows his horn, which calls the hounds to fall upon Actaeon's transfigured body. On the far right, another two male figures rush towards the commotion, anticipating the kill of their latest game. In between these figures stands Actaeon as a stag, mere moments before he is to be viciously ripped apart by his hounds. While one dog seems to already bear a bloody snout, it is difficult to tell exactly where he bit the stag. At most, mere dashes of red are present on Actaeon's ruddy form, suggesting that the hunter was recently bitten on the neck. Meanwhile the hound to the right of Actaeon seems to gently nibble on him, making it difficult to imagine that these dogs will anytime soon devour the stag into bits, as Ovid's text states[19]. What is more, Actaeon as a beast seems devoid of any great pathos, his snout turned to the side, his mouth kept shut. This Actaeon

[17] McIver 2006, p. 127.
[18] Ivi, p. 37.
[19] Ovid 2004, pp. 99-100.

does not resist his end; instead, he appears to contemplate something beyond himself in the image, perhaps turning his gaze towards the east wall where the artist represented his fateful encounter with Diana.

Ending out the ceiling, above the west wall, which one would view upon exiting the space, is a rather different image from the rest of the frescoed program (fig. 6). On either side of a set of hounds, Parmigianino paints a woman in a classicized dress that shows off her decolletage and pale, luminescent skin. Staring down towards the viewer's space, she fingers a piece of grain in her left hand while in her right, she bears a vessel, perhaps an antique cup filled with wine. Scholars have previously suggested that this woman might be Pomona, Abundance, Autumn, and Demeter/Ceres, among other aliases[20].

Taken in whole, the ceiling of Gonzaga's room in the Rocca Sanvitale provides a startlingly unique take on the Ovidian myth. Due to the strangeness of this imagery, a number of explanations have been given by scholars on how to understand the frescoes[21]. Ute Davitt Asmus, for one, provides a Neoplatonic reading of the imagery, exegetically deciphering the tale through its Christian symbolism[22]. Maurizio Fagiolo Dell'Arco meanwhile considers the transformations depicted in the frescoes as representative of alchemical changes, a science which endlessly fascinated Parmigianino and, apparently, many in the court of Parma[23]. Closer to my reading of the room, however, is the work of Katherine McIver, Augusta Quintavalle, and Mary Vaccaro, all of whom consider Paola Gonzaga's involvement, to some degree, in the *camerino*[24]. Building upon their scholarship, I attempt to confirm Gonzaga as the primary user of the space, claiming that the uniquely painted figures in the room were arguably crafted for her pleasure and moral instruction.

3. *Paola as Primary User of the Camerino*

Up until the turn of the twenty first century, most scholars have suggested that Giangaleazzo Sanvitale was the one who had the decorative cycle created

[20] Vaccaro 2004, p. 181.

[21] An earlier analysis of the room by Freedberg claimed that the room served as an allegory of summer followed by its "dog days," a theory perhaps that best counts for the Demeter/Ceres figures on the north side of the wall. Freedberg 1950, p. 51.

[22] Asmus argues that the frescoes were used exegetically by Gonzaga as a way to understand eremitic mysteries in Christian theology. She reads various elements in the fresco as being symbolic of Christian iconography, such as the horned stag being read as Christ and the dogs as Christ's aggressors. Asmus 1987, pp. 18, 24. According to Neoplatonists, Christians did read Actaeon's transformation akin to Christ's death and resurrection. Barkan 1980, p. 329.

[23] Fagiolo Dell'Arco 1970, pp. 36-40.

[24] See especially McIver 1997; Quintavalle 1968; Vaccaro 2002; Vaccaro 2004.

for the *camerino*[25]. Such a postulation seems fair, considering that the Sanvitale family were known patrons of the arts and that Giangaleazzo had served as the head of the estates in Fontanellato since 1513, making him a prominent commissioner of works at court[26]. Indeed, around the same time that Parmigianino was working on the frescoes in the Rocca, he was also painting a portrait of Giangaleazzo, which today resides in Naples (fig. 7)[27]. In this piece, Parmigianino dresses the young count in the latest French fashions, sporting a long, full beard and tapering moustache[28]. Seated in a chair that faces to the side, Giangaleazzo turns his body perpendicular in order to meet the viewer's gaze, although he appears altogether none too thrilled to be entertaining us[29]. With light colored eyes and golden brown hair, Giangaleazzo stares pensively outward as his gloved right hand presents the beholder with a bronze medal, which has also puzzled scholars, due to it being inscribed with the number seventy two[30]. Behind the count, Sanvitale shows off his glistening armor as well as a gleaming handle of a sword, which sports the family crest's symbol of the shell[31].

While I agree that Sanvitale might very well have paid for Parmigianino to have painted his portrait alongside the *camerino* frescoes, I would contend that, as other scholars have noted, the room was created for his wife's personal enjoyment[32]. Along these lines, Daniel Arasse has argued that the room was made as a gift for Paola, representing Giangaleazzo's love for her, perhaps done in celebration of the memory of their first meeting[33]. Of all those who have analyzed these frescos, it is perhaps McIver who has been most insistent on

[25] Arasse 1996, p. 264; Franklin 2003, p. 6; Popham 1963, p. 7.

[26] His father died in 1511, making Giangaleazzo ultimately become ruler of Fontanellato as well as Noceto and Belforte shortly after. Guadalupi, Ricci 2019, pp. ix, 10, and 24.

[27] At one time, the portrait was believed to represent Christopher Columbus. Asmus 1983, p. 3.

[28] Giangaleazzo and his father, Jacopo Antonio, were known Francophiles, having supported the French and their occupation of Northern Italy at several points during the early-sixteenth century. Guadalupi, Ricci 2019, p. 24.

[29] Freedberg 1950, p. 107.

[30] The most compelling reading of the number comes from Asmus, who argues that it related to Christian Kabbalist thought, which was practiced in the Parmese courts at this time. The name of the Hebrew God (YHWH) could be expressed as the number seventy two, if translated numerically. Asmus thus reads the portrait as representing Sanvitale being made in the image of God. Asmus 1983, pp. 6, 8, 18.

[31] Guadalupi, Ricci, 2019, p. 46. Ekserdjian says that the armor too could have served as a pun on the sitter's name. The word for helmet in Latin is *galea*, relating to his first name. Ekserdjian 2006, p. 129. The helmet was also a symbol for Saint Vitalis, another possible pun on his surname. Periti 2014/2015, p. 295.

[32] Vecchia argues that the room was likely for Gonzaga's private amusement. Vecchia 1996, p. 288.

[33] Arasse 1996, p. 261.

emphasizing Gonzaga's role in the commission, believing that she might have even helped select the iconography in the room[34].

Negating other scholars' previous descriptions of Gonzaga, who cast her as a meek woman, McIver argues instead that, coming from a notable family herself, Gonzaga certainly had the intellectual prowess and power to have commissioned the decorations. For one, she had received a high education at court while growing up in Sabbioneta, where her father ruled. In further advocation for her intellect and agency at Fontanellato, McIver sites one chronicler who in his writings praised Paola's great education in letters, song, and embroidery, claiming that her talent was "almost divine"[35]. What is more, Gonzaga was in charge of inviting a number of humanist and literary figures to Fontanellato, such as Tiberio Rosselli and Benedetto Albineo di Bianchi, the latter of whom she believes composed the inscription on the walls of the *camerino*[36].

While I agree that Gonzaga certainly had the intellectual capacity to have helped invent the narrative within the frescoed room, I am hesitant to assert this claim, due to the lack of documentary evidence we have on the program in general. However, from the imagery that is depicted within this space, one can propose that Gonzaga was the room's intended and primary user. As a whole, scholars have noted the difficulties in ascertaining how often women actually commissioned works of art in early modern Italy. This is especially tough to determine in cases in which the woman, like Paola Gonzaga, was married or if she were financially dependent on another male figure in her household[37]. At this time, many women had to have a *mundualdo* to act as their proxies when creating legal documents like art contracts, although this law varied in its enforcement throughout the Italian peninsula[38]. While one might assume that most secular women of the period did not have the financial or legal means of obtaining commissions, due to said lack of documentation, that does not necessarily mean that they held no role in the patronage process[39]. As David Wilkins has demonstrated, the individual who pays for the commission (or whose name is on the contract) should not always be assumed as the primary patron or user of a work. Likewise, I am in favor of using his broader definition of patronage here, which considers the potential users of the art as important benefactors in commissions[40].

[34] McIver 1997, p. 101.
[35] McIver 2006, p. 36.
[36] McIver 1997, p. 106; McIver 2006, p. 37.
[37] Anderson, 1996, p. 136.
[38] McIver 2006, p. 5.
[39] Anderson names Parmigianino as an artist who worked for a number of female clients. One of his most famous works, the *Madonna of the Long Neck*, was created for a woman. Anderson 1996, p. 135.
[40] Wilkins, 2001, pp. 1-2.

Returning to Parmigianino's decorations in Fontanellato, I would first suggest that the subject matter painted in the room points to Gonzaga's involvement in the project, at least as the primary user of the frescoes. Indeed, the myth of Diana and Actaeon was a commonly commissioned subject for women viewers to enjoy in the period. As noted by Roger Crum, esteemed female figures like the Virgin Mary, St. Margaret of Antioch, and the goddess Diana, who were all known for their virtuous behavior, were popularly requested subjects for women patrons[41]. While Diana was a pagan goddess who disdained mortal man, she was still uplifted in early modern society for her devotion to her chastity, making her a prime figure for women to admire[42]. Indeed, a woman in the Renaissance was told to value her chastity above all other virtues[43]. In Francesco Barbaro's treatise on love and marriage, for one, he claims that while an ideal wife should have good manners, be beautiful and wealthy, it was most important for her to be virtuous[44]. Alongside her chastity, Diana was the goddess of childbirth and motherhood, making her again an apt model for young Paola, who would birth nine children at Fontanellato[45].

In further support of reading Gonzaga as the primary viewer of the *camerino*, I would note that Parmigianino likely had in mind, when creating his frescoes, the nearby decorations of a Diana and Actaeon program that was also created for a female viewer[46]. In 1519, Correggio painted scenes loosely related to the virginal goddess Diana for Abbess Giovanna Piacenza's apartments at the monastery of San Paolo nearby in Parma (fig. 8)[47]. Giancarla Periti has written compellingly on this site, arguing that the patrician nun's palatial apartments portrayed Piacenza's crafted identity as abbess, boasting her wealth and authority. Filled with visual elements of splendor and magnificence, terms often associated with the decoration of a princely "pleasure palace", Correggio painted much the same for a woman patron to enjoy in her private quarters[48].

When comparing the two programs to one another, one finds that Parmigianino was clearly influenced by the older artist's design, which was finished less than five years prior to the Fontanellato commission. Both programs contain a fictive trellised ceiling filled with mischievous putti gazing down

[41] Crum 2001, pp. 37, 41.

[42] Vincenzo Cartari notes how Diana avoided all men to keep intact her virginity. Cartari 2012, p. 77.

[43] Such advice is given one conduct book by Leon Battista Alberti, which was published in the fifteenth century. Alberti 1971, p. 221.

[44] Barbaro 1677, p. 9.

[45] Vaccaro 2004, p. 181.

[46] This has been suggested in Brown 1981, p. 43; Ekserdjian 2006, p. 22.

[47] Periti 2016, p. 108. Gould also notes that they were working alongside each other around this time in the church of San Giovanni Evangelista. Gould 1994, p. 14.

[48] Periti 2016, pp. 124, 127, 128.

impishly at viewers. While Correggio has these figures peek through sixteen portholes, Parmigianino places his above the lunettes, their nude, chunky bodies fully visible from the ground[49]. Likewise, at the very edges of his ceiling, Correggio featured grisaille paintings of the ancient gods and legendary figures to classicize the lush, garden space[50]. In contrast, Parmigianino painted the entire narrative of Diana and Actaeon throughout the edges of his ceiling, relaying the myth in bold color[51].

Although Correggio does not depict Diana or the story of Actaeon explicitly on the ceiling, he does feature the virginal goddess prominently above the abbess's fireplace. Akin to the literary inscription found in Gonzaga's *camerino*, underneath Correggio's goddess, the cautionary phrase "IGNEM GLADIO NE FODIAS" (stir not the figure with a sword) looms, warning Giovanna and her fellow visitors to maintain one's prudence[52]. This *Diana*, painted by Correggio in 1519, bears golden blonde locks and wears a crown topped with her famous crescent moon insignia, a symbol also notably found in the patrician Piacenza's coat of arms[53]. Gazing confidently out towards the viewer with a smile on her face, Diana holds a piece of drapery behind her with one hand while the other gestures towards the right, pointing in the direction that her chariot faces. Decorously clad in robes of white which further boast her purity, the goddess has her bow and arrows tucked behind her, appearing ready to take off, perhaps for a hunt[54]. This Diana is both beautiful and assertive, making her, as Periti claims, a fitting allegorical representation of the abbess herself. Like Diana, the abbess had her own flock of nymphs, the nuns of the convent, whom she was charged to look after.

As one drawing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art demonstrates, Parmigianino seemed to have been quite taken with Correggio's Diana, for he rendered a sketch of the goddess that closely matches the older artist's frescoed version in San Paolo[55]. Captured in red chalk, Parmigianino depicts a goddess whose pose varies just slightly from Correggio's Diana, her gaze cast down and more muscular body covered partially in drapery. Regardless of

[49] Periti argues that the putti might have symbolized the nuns' own secret enjoyment in viewing these images. Periti 2016, pp. 183-184.

[50] Bolognesi describes the ceiling as a shaded place for the abbess's own regeneration. Bolognesi 2018, p. 20.

[51] Vaccaro 2004, p. 178.

[52] This is an aphorism of Pythagoras, according to Periti. Periti 2016, pp. 124, 168. Panofsky roughly translated this phrase as well to «Thou shalt not poke a fire with a sword». He and Periti also mention the inscription above the door leading to this room, which translated to «All is accessible to virtue». Panofsky 1961, p. 13.

[53] Periti 2016, p. 174.

[54] Furthermore, Periti argues that Diana's gesture is meant to suggest to the viewer to leave the room and not to intrude upon the business of the convent. Periti 2016, pp. 174–177.

[55] For more on this drawing, see Bambach *et. al.* 2000, pp. 19, 80.

the initial influence that this program had on the artist, it appears as though Parmigianino ended up taking a different approach to painting his virginal goddess. In his fresco at Fontanellato, Diana is depicted nude, as Ovid and other sources of the myth have asserted was her state when discovered by the hunter. She is also captured from the side, her gaze fully fastened on the partially metamorphosed Actaeon in front of her. Despite her vulnerability in this situation, the virginal deity appears calm, her cupped hands steady as she looks ready to splash the semi transfigured hunter with water, perhaps to fully metamorphose Actaeon. At her side in the pool, two nymphs lounge together comfortably, appearing confident that their goddess has the power to eradicate their unwanted guest.

While we may never be able to prove whether Paola Gonzaga had a financial or intellectual role in designing these paintings, the remainder of this article will suggest that the finished works and their unique iconography were created to fulfill her individual needs, as the room's primary user. Consequently, the following sections will consider how Paola might have identified with certain figures in the fresco, all the while gleaning moral lessons from the cautionary tale.

4. *Identification and Moral Instruction*

Before fully processing some of the stranger iconographical depictions that Parmigianino created for the episodes across the ceiling, I first wish to address one issue that has arguably confused scholars' readings of the frescos for the last several decades. These works were arguably not created, as Asmus and others have posited, to represent Gonzaga's sad fate at the supposed loss of an infant son[56]. As Mary Vaccaro has proven, no document exists to point to the passing of one of Gonzaga's children around the time in which this room was painted[57]. Instead, Vaccaro's reading of the frescoes suggests that Parmigianino's paintings center around issues of gender and motherhood rather than mourning or death, and that these works ultimately portray Gonzaga's concerns around being *contessa* and progenitor of the Sanvitale line[58]. Following her lead, I would also assert that Gonzaga's *camerino* was not a place for

[56] Asmus 1987, pp. 23-34. Other scholars, such as McIver, have also staunchly argued that the myth of Diana and Actaeon was depicted because of the unjust passing of this child. McIver 1997, pp. 101, 106; McIver 2006, p. 127.

[57] The cited baptismal document listed the birth of a son, not the death of one. Gonzaga and Sanvitale were named as godparents. The original document analyzed resides in the Archivo di Stato di Parma, Fondo Sanvitale, *busta* 875. Vaccaro 2004, pp. 177, 189.

[58] Vaccaro 2004, pp. 177, 185.

Paola to grieve or solemnly meditate; rather, it was one where her imagination could be incited through the viewing of these dazzling frescos[59].

While the pictorial program does seem to evoke ideas of motherhood and generation, I do wish to consider how else Gonzaga, a young woman around the age of twenty when the work was commissioned, might have considered these sensual paintings[60]. For one, might she have seen herself depicted in the guise of Ceres or Hecate above the *camerino*'s west wall[61]? Several scholars have already concurred as much, viewing the iconographically elusive figure as at least symbolically representative of the *contessa*[62]. What is more, some have pointed out that Ceres shares a keen physical likeness to Gonzaga, as is supported by a sketch of Parmigianino's in a private collection, which depicts two figures seated on a bench[63]. The fellow with the full beard and fashionable outfit almost certainly depicts Sanvitale, leading several scholars to assume that the woman at the edge of the sheet, who does look quite similar to the painted Ceres in the *camerino*, represents his wife[64]. If Paola was indeed meant to identify with this female figure pictured above the doors of the *camerino*, then one might rightfully wager that the images surrounding the rest of the ceiling were equally made for Paola to relate to, even if none of the other figures shared her physical likeness.

Thus, if we turn once more to face the north wall of the room and look up, we find ourselves again viewing Parmigianino's huntress escaping from the pursuit of two muscular men. As scholars have noted, the image has seemingly little to do with the story of Diana and Actaeon, beyond generically depicting a bucolic scene of the hunt or a *caccia d'amore*, in which, upon first sight, a lover metamorphoses into the hunters' beloved[65]. The scene, Arasse argues, might have derived from Petrarch's poem «Nel dolce tempo», in which the author in his *Canzoniere* espies his own beloved nude in a pool[66]. Akin to the fate of Ovid's Actaeon, Petrarch is transfigured into a stag, forced to run from his own hounds[67]. Regardless of this connection, the depiction of the huntress

[59] Dall'Acqua et al. 1994, p. 11. Vaccaro has also suggested viewing the works in relation to Gonzaga, especially in terms of gendered vision and childbirth. Vaccaro 2004, p. 184.

[60] According to McIver, Gonzaga was born in 1504. McIver 1997, p. 102.

[61] Ekserdjian is one scholar who goes against this reading, finding Ceres/Demeter to portray Paola too farfetched. Ekserdjian 2006, p. 93. She has also been read as a figure of Hospitality, Pomona, or Abundance or an allegory of a season. Vaccaro 2004, p. 181.

[62] Arasse 1996, p. 259; Brown 1984, p. 145; Guadalupi, Ricci 2019, p. 44; Quintavalle 1968, p. 91.

[63] Those that have viewed Ceres above the west wall as largely representative of Gonzaga include Bandini *et al*. 2000 p. 18; Guadalupi, Ricci 2019, p. 44; McIver 1997, pp. 103-104; Sgarbi 1983, p. 206; Tassi 1994, p. 129.

[64] For the work's provenance, see Franklin 2003, p. 90.

[65] Asmus 1987, p. 11; Vaccaro 2004, p. 184.

[66] Arasse 1996, p. 260.

[67] Petrarch 2001, pp. 43-48.

in the program is still quite variant when compared to the canonical, Ovidian version of the myth of Diana and Actaeon. Why, then, might have Parmigianino included this scene in Gonzaga's *camerino*?

To explain this, we must return to the east wall, where arguably the most famous moment from the myth is depicted above: Diana's punishment of Actaeon. As previously noted, Parmigianino's illustration of this scene is quite straightforward, at least when compared to the remaining walls of the *camerino*. Still, one detail of this fresco stands out, which has rightfully confused scholars for decades[68]. On the left, Parmigianino depicts his Actaeon with the recognizable head of a stag, in the midst of metamorphosis. While such a detail was fairly common, the rest of Actaeon's form is, in a word, unusual. From the neck down, when one takes in the hunter's fuller figure, ancient clothing, and pale skin, a viewer might rightly want to compare "Actaeon" to the young huntress painted above the north wall (see figs. 3 and 4). What is more, this Actaeon bears the same hunting horn as the young woman, although she lacks the quiver and arrows[69]. While viewers might read the two figures' formal similarities as merely coincidental, it becomes more difficult not to relate the two together when beholders find the name Actaeona scribed directly underneath the female huntress! Although this is correctly composed in the Latin accusative, the name, at least to Italian speakers like Gonzaga, might have appeared to her and other Italian readers as a pun, a feminized version of the noun[70]. Consequently, Parmigianino seems to go out of his way to have beholders connect the two figures to one another[71]. Literally, the stag-headed Actaeon(a) turns his/her head back towards the north wall, seemingly pointing in the direction of the huntress to further align these figures together, the two sharing the plight of the hunted[72].

One might rightfully question why Parmigianino decided to change the gender of this hunter in the first place. The artist certainly could have given Actaeon a more muscular form, darker skin, and different clothing to mark him as a man. In a drawing in the Morgan Library by the artist, it appears as though the painter initially had planned to make Actaeon not only masculine in appearance but clad in contemporary clothing (fig. 9)[73]. This well dressed

[68] Several scholars have noted this strange Actaeon, including Brown 1984, p. 142; Guadalupi and Ricci 2019, p. 41; Quintavalle 2004, p. 45; Vaccaro 2004, pp. 180, 83.

[69] Arasse notes these issues but does not read the figure as representative of Actaeon. Arasse, 1996, p. 258.

[70] Vaccaro reads this as a verbal pun done purposefully, which explains for Actaeon's gender in the east wall. Vaccaro 2004, p. 183.

[71] Tassi reads Actaeon as achieving a double metamorphosis: first from hunter to nymph, then from nymph to stag. Tassi 1994, p. 135. Ekserdjian also sees these two figures as the same person in this revised Ovidian narrative. Ekserdjian 2006, p. 93.

[72] Vaccaro 2004, p. 180.

[73] Bambach 2000, p. 88; Ekserdjian, 2006, p. 94.

hunter has yet to transform, as he is pictured with a human visage bearing a hat and beard, appearing more akin to a gentleman at court than an ancient hunter. From the time in which Parmigianino drafted this preparatory drawing to him finishing the fresco, it appears as though the artist vastly changed his mind on how to depict Actaeon. To explain the reasoning behind this compositional alteration, we must consider the primary viewer of the *camerino* and how her needs were better met with a remarkably female Actaeon. As such, I claim that Parmigianino purposefully created these frescoes for Gonzaga, allowing her to identify with a number of the figures depicted. This would include not only Ceres and Diana, but also figures like the huntress and her alter-ego, Acteon(a).

As mentioned earlier, Diana was a prime figure for women to look to for moral guidance in the early modern period. While a woman was not expected to hold as many talents as her male compatriots, due to the alleged weakness of her sex, keeping her chastity, as Diana aggressively did, was the most important job for her[74]. Although not published until a few years later in 1528, Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* similarly preaches on the importance of ladies guarding their virtue, stating that an early modern lady at court could only fail if she lost her chastity[75]. Likewise, one character in the book, Cesare Gonzaga, redundantly states, «It is their [women's] love of true virtue which is for most women the strongest bridle, along with their anxiety to guard their honor, which many I have known myself hold more dear than their own life»[76]. In addition to her devotion to her purity, Diana was known as the goddess that was called upon when giving birth, making the deity an ideal figure for a young wife and new mother to emulate[77]. By getting to view Diana as well as Ceres, the allegorical female figure atop the west wall, Gonzaga was given the chance to compare herself to either of these two deities and look to them for moral guidance. Alongside viewing these figures, Gonzaga would simultaneously take in the numerous painted putti and lush vegetation surrounding them, which might have further prompted Gonzaga of her need to bear healthy heirs for her husband[78].

Following this line of interpretation, Gonzaga could also have looked up at the painting of the virtuous huntress, who runs from the embrace of two young men, as yet another didactic model for the countess to follow as a vir-

[74] Kelly 1984, p. 21. Kelly also notes that, like the female figures in these frescoes, «the Renaissance lady is not desired, not loved for herself. Rendered passive and chaste, she merely mediates the courtier's safe transcendence of an otherwise demeaning necessity». Kelly 1984, 44.

[75] Castiglione 1967, p. 241.

[76] Ivi, p. 244.

[77] Cartari 2012, p. 83. Gonzaga had her first child, Eucherio, in 1523, who lived until 1571. Quintavalle 2004, p. 45.

[78] These images might have even held apotropaic powers, she claims. Vaccaro 2004, p. 185.

tuous woman. But what might she have gleaned from looking upon the form of the female Actaeon, now pictured with the head of a stag? I will propose in the following section that Actaeon's regendering provided Paola Gonzaga with the opportunity to not only identify with the hunter's fateful plight, but also punish her own act of gazing, not to mention any sensual feelings that might have arisen when she viewed the erotic frescos.

5. *Transgressive Gazing and Surveillance in the Camerino*

While many have written on the iconography within the *camerino* of the Rocca Sanvitale, fewer have yet to consider how Gonzaga might have interpreted these frescoes, especially in relation to transgressive viewing. For one, Parmigianino's regendering of Actaeon surely made it easier for the countess to identify with the hunter. However, in relating to Actaeon(a), Gonzaga would also run the chance of being subject to punishment for viewing (and possibly enjoying) what was meant to be hidden from all prudent eyes in early modern society: the nude female form. After all, a room filled with erotic images of nude women certainly had the power to delight both the male and female gaze, as several scholars have argued[79]. Like Jupiter who would transform his figure to take on lovers, Gonzaga, when viewing the fresco, was given the chance to take on the form of a transfigured, now female Actaeon. In her imagined state, Gonzaga as Actaeon(a) could be sexually incited by Diana and her nymphs above the east wall and later, when she turned her gaze towards the south wall, be reprimanded for said desires[80].

While I am not arguing that the imagery within the *camerino* necessarily demonstrated Gonzaga's own sexual identity or specific attraction towards women, I would claim that the frescos within the space certainly allowed for homoerotic viewing. Patricia Simons, for one, has commented on the queer potential of the *camerino*, writing that Gonzaga herself might have enjoyed «the decoration in ambiguous, fantasizing ways»[81]. Indeed, it seems quite possible that Paola might have envisioned herself as Actaeon, perhaps first as a huntress above the north wall who flees from her male pursuers. In escaping these men, however, she would then next fall prey to eyeing the virginal goddess of the hunt nude, possibly taking pleasure in this transgressive exchange. Denied the pleasure of joining Diana and her beautiful nude nymphs in the bath, Gonzaga is instead fully transfigured into the form of a stag above the

[79] Burke 2018, p. 54; Simons 1994, p. 84.

[80] Barbaro mentions Jupiter's amorous pursuits in relation to his metamorphoses. Barbaro 1677, p. 32.

[81] Simons 1994, pp. 101-102.

south wall, her final metamorphosis, where her one time companions, her hounds, are prepared to tear her apart limb from limb.

While such an interpretation might seem farfetched, it should be noted that in the early modern period, Europeans were largely aware of the possibility (and reality) of female-female desire. However, as Simons and James Saslow have claimed, sex acts or desire between women at this time were far less documented and penalized than cases that occurred between men[82]. For reference, literally thousands of cases on male homosexuality were tried by the lay and ecclesiastical units of Europe, while only a few featured women[83]. Yet while female-female desire went unnoticed (often willingly by men), authors and artists of the period certainly made light of the possibility of female homoeroticism in their own creations[84].

Laura Giannetti Ruggiero for one has shown that a number of early modern Italian comedies expressed desire between women, especially in cases in which women dressed as men. Ruzante's *Anconitana*, which was written in 1520 and staged in 1525, involves two women named Ginevra and Ghitta who both cross dress as men and eventually end up falling in love with one another[85]. Ruggiero also notes that in Ludovico Ariosto's famous *Orlando Furioso*, the Spanish princess Fiordispina also falls for a woman, the female knight Bradamante, before realizing she was not a man[86]. The princess, out one day hunting in the woods, came across Bradamante asleep in her armor. Awaking her, the two went off to search for game, resulting in Fiordispina eventually expressing her love, giving Bradamante a kiss. While Bradamante admitted that she was a woman to Fiordispina and could not «satisfy her needs», initially, «these revelations did not abate lovestruck Fiordispina's passion one jot», leaving the princess's love unrequited[87]. Indeed, her lust was not quelled until at last Fiordispina met Bradamante's male twin, Richardet[88]. One last example of female-female desire is articulated in Agnolo Firenzuola's *I Ragionamenti* from 1525. In the text, several of his female characters debate on how best to protect their honor. Ironically, one option that was brought up was for the women to be with one another rather than with a man[89].

This type of homoerotic writing in the early modern period also has, perhaps more implicitly, its parallels in the genre of art. One popular subject to

[82] Saslow 1989, p. 95; Simons 1994, pp. 67, 69.
[83] Simons 1994, p. 68.
[84] See also Traub 1994, p. 69.
[85] Giannetti 2010, p. 105.
[86] She then ends up marrying Bradamante's brother. Ariosto 1998, pp. 298-299; Giannetti 2010, p. 10.
[87] Ariosto 1998, p. 299.
[88] Ivi, pp. 297-300.
[89] Firenzuola 1958, pp. 54-67.

depict in the Renaissance that portrayed female homoeroticism of course revolved around the goddess Diana and her nymphs who were usually depicted nude and bathing together[90]. In her article «Lesbian (In)Visibility», Simons claims that Diana and her retinue were often featured on the elites' palatial interiors, pictured touching one another, and thus provided erotic material for both male and female beholders to enjoy[91]. Bringing up a number of examples of early modern homoerotic art for the female gaze, Simons points in one instance to the presence of the two female nymphs in Fontanellato who caress one another above the east wall[92]. Like Diana, the nymphs' clothes are placed aside so that the women can enjoy their bath in the clear waters that their mistress also uses[93]. The two women stare adoringly into each other's eyes, one of whom drapes her arm over her female companion's shoulder while playing with her hair. Pressed up against each other's nude forms, the nymphs appear nonplussed at Diana's plight. One might imagine that, before Actaeon entered the space, Diana accompanied the pair, and all were enjoying one another's embraces. Indeed, the nymph nearest Diana seems to reach her arm out toward the goddess, ready to receive her embrace once more.

Returning, then, to Gonzaga and her experience with the frescos, I would claim that the rather blatant homoeroticism in the program, not to mention the regendering of Actaeon in the transformation scene, were all created to satisfy the needs of the *camerino*'s primary user. The artist's figures allowed Paola to take on the role of a goddess or mortal, depending on how she wished to respond to the frescoes that day. Perhaps, to feel empowered, she might have viewed herself in light of Diana or Ceres. However, she could not have missed the sensual elements of the work and very likely might have been turned on by the naked flesh of these women.

If she indeed wished to identify with Actaeon(a) and enjoy the nude figures surrounding her, then it would follow suit that Gonzaga would have to ultimately share in the hunter's punishment when she turned to look above the south wall and find the stag being devoured. Yet, as several scholars have mentioned, the stag's fate here hardly appears deadly, as the dogs surrounding the transfigured Actaeon barely nip at the beast[94]. Indeed, Arasse notes that the stag looks as though he is being kissed rather than torn alive[95]! What is more, roughly above Actaeon are two young wingless figures, perhaps a toddler and an infant, one of whom might represent Paola's eldest child, Eucherio[96]. From these subjects'

[90] Simons 1994, p. 94.
[91] Ivi, pp. 96-97.
[92] Ivi, p. 101.
[93] Traub also mentions this image of the nymphs. Traub 1994, p. 32.
[94] Asmus 1987, p. 2; Brown 1984, p. 142.
[95] Arasse 1996, p. 258.
[96] Vaccaro 2004, p. 185.

close placement to one another in the fresco, it appears as though Parmigianino ultimately excuses Gonzaga of any transgressive gazing she performed in the room, for the erotic imagery could have also assisted Paola in her prime responsibility as a woman in patriarchal society: conceiving children. In other words, Paola was encouraged to feel enticed by the nude Diana, fleeing huntress, and libidinous nymphs in her *camerino*, if they incited her to ultimately procreate with her husband Giangaleazzo and extend the Sanvitale line[97].

To fully unpack the meaning behind the *camerino*'s decorations, I wish to end this section by considering a few other elements in the room and how each possibly added to Gonzaga's experience. While the images themselves do not provide much chastisement for Gonzaga's potential erotic enjoyment, we should recall once more the inscription which lines the top of the room's perimeter, «Tell O goddess, if it is fate that led the unhappy Actaeon hither, why was he delivered by you to his hounds as food? It is not right for mortals to suffer punishment except in respect of a crime. Such anger is not seemingly for goddesses»[98]. The text, which might have been composed by a visiting humanist at court like Albineo di Bianchi, ultimately chides Diana for her unfair castigation of Actaeon[99]. But could the inscription also have addressed the primary user of the room?

While Gonzaga was not a goddess like Diana, she was a countess and maintained an active role at court, which came with some authority over her subjects. Perhaps, then, the text was meant to warn her against ruling unfairly over the townsfolk of Fontanellato. Of course, if she were to identify with Actaeon rather than Diana when viewing the paintings, Paola would be the one who was unjustly punished. In this instance, the text again clears Gonzaga of any blame for her transgressive gazing: she is merely a victim of fate like the hunter before her. Afterall, as Francesco Barbaro enquired to his early modern readers «Who is so void of humanity that beauty itself may not delight him [or her]?»[100]

If Gonzaga was able to look upon the erotic imagery rather guiltlessly in her *camerino*, then, upon her exit, she would be confronted with Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and thereby fruitfulness above the west wall. This figure, who shares the most physical likeness with Gonzaga, arguably served as a reminder to the countess that she would soon leave this sensual and imaginative space and needed to return back to normal life where she would be constantly surveyed, met with the gaze of many at court, akin to the staring

[97] It was believed that for a couple to have an attractive baby, an erotic work of art before them helped actualize the child's attractiveness. Freedberg 1989, pp. 2-4. According to Galenic thought, a woman's erotic pleasure could help conceive offspring. Goffen 1997, p. 78.

[98] Translation provided from McIver 2006, p. 127.

[99] McIver 1997, p. 106.

[100] Barbaro 1677, p. 33.

Medusa/Erinys corbels that line the room's walls[101]. It seems as though regardless of who Gonzaga might have imagined herself to be or interact with in the frescos, she was reminded to take on this goddess's guise upon her exit.

Besides the Medusan masks that proliferate the space, the mirror at the very center of the ceiling also arguably ties into the *camerino*'s dealings with identification and transgressive gazing. While mirrors and other illusionistic painting techniques were commonly employed in Italian Mannerist ceilings to question or play with the line between art and reality, arguably here, Parmigianino's mirror held another purpose for Gonzaga[102]. Circular in shape and reflective, the mirror had the power, akin to the sun god Sol who caught the goddess Venus adulterating with Mars, to illuminate and capture Gonzaga's reactions while in the room[103]. In general, mirrors conveyed a number of different connotations in the early modern period, serving as symbols of social status and wealth to signs of prudence or vanity, especially when held by women. Yet Parmigianino did not place this mirror in reach of the countess: it instead hangs at an impractically high level for viewing (the ceiling measures at 3.9 meters)[104]. Consequently, Parmigianino's mirror seems to have served less of a practical purpose than a symbolic one, reminding Gonzaga of the many eyes surveying her at court when outside this private space.

Those familiar with Parmigianino's *oeuvre* are likely aware of the artist's unique penchant for mirrors, as demonstrated in a self portrait he created around the same time he painted the *camerino* (fig. 10). Round in shape as well, Parmigianino depicts himself as a young man of stature, clad in a nice fur jacket, seemingly gazing at himself in a mirror (the portrait is painted on a convex wooden surface). What is arguably most impressive about this work is that the artist appears to distort his "reflection" in the composition, elongating certain pictorial elements to appear as if they were similarly being warped by the mirror's curved shape[105]. With his ringed hand brushing up against the foreground of the picture, the artist shows off his premier limb, which was responsible for making the illusionary piece[106] While the portrait indubitably served as a calling card for his artistic talents, as it was later given as a gift to Pope Clement VII, the painting that presented itself as a mirror also cleverly portrayed the artist's keen awareness of being the subject and object of one's gaze[107].

[101] Asmus 1987, p. 15.

[102] McIver 2006, p. 126. For more on the Mannerists, see Friedlander 1990.

[103] Bonsignori 2001, p. 220.

[104] Mirrors were still quite expensive in the sixteenth century and fairly rare. According to Melchior-Bonnet, a mirror that was framed with a border of silver could cost more than a painting by Raphael in the period! Melchior-Bonnet 1994, pp. 22, 24, 28, 30; Werness 1999, pp. 6-7.

[105] Quintavalle 2004, p. 41.

[106] For more on this portrait, see Periti 2014/2015, pp. 284-309.

[107] Franklin 2003, p. 11, 13.

Similarly, I would argue that the mirror in the *camerino* reminded Gonzaga of her own subjectivity and objectivity at Fontanellato. In her privacy, Gonzaga could enjoy the frescos and identify with the figures depicted on the ceiling, including her own reflection that was cast by the all-seeing mirror. Yet even as she admired herself from afar, Gonzaga also likely considered the Latin inscription on the mirror's gilded frame, reading «respice finem» or contemplate the end[108]. Although this might be understood as a *memento mori*, a reminder of one's mortality, I would claim that it conveyed a more personal message to Gonzaga[109]. In reading the inscription, Paola might have been reminded that, in the end, when she left the security of her *camerino* for the day, she too had to metamorphose. Before exiting the room, Gonzaga must transform herself; she the viewer must now become the one being viewed, the object of many people's gaze at court. With this final metamorphose, Gonzaga had to leave behind in her *camerino* any queer thoughts or desires that might have disturbed her social and gendered status, lest she herself wished to end up like Actaeon(a)[110].

6. *Conclusion*

While Paola Gonzaga might not have funded or designed the decorations inside the Rocca Sanvitale's *camerino*, she was arguably the intended primary occupant of the space and therefore deserves to be named as the primary beholder of the program[111]. Whether she used the room as a bath, study, or for some other purpose, the *camerino*'s ornate decoration likely encouraged Gonzaga to find some sort of reprieve. Here, she could take the time to gaze above her, even on a cloudy day, the beautiful blue sky and trellised garden. She could take in the plight of the fleeing huntress, who is later caught spying on the virginal goddess Diana and her nymphs. She might sadly look upon the stag, who is surrounded by his traitorous hounds, and feel pity for Actaeon's fate. But Paola could also take delight in the playful putti and watchful dogs that fill the composition, not to mention enjoy the sensuous female figures surrounding her.

Due to the strange iconography in this space, Parmigianino's decorations in the Rocca Sanvitale have likely held a number of meanings and served several

[108] McIver 2006, p. 127; Sgarbi 1983, p. 206.

[109] This comes from the *Gesta Romanum*, which Ekserdjian states was a known source at the time. Ekserdjian 2006, p. 93.

[110] Arasse 1996, p. 259. Sgarbi also notes it might have served as a nod to Actaeon seeing his own reflection as a stag in the pool before being devoured by his hounds. Sgarbi 1983, p. 206.

[111] McIver also suggests as much in her book. McIver 2006, p. 125.

purposes over time, depending on who was looking upon the frescos. To the artist, for one, the room might have reflected the painter's interests in alchemy and the mutable qualities of the elements[112]. To Giangaleazzo Sanvitale, who might have occupied the space from time to time, the room could have reflected in his eyes his affection for his wife[113]. Guests of the Sanvitales also might have viewed the decorations in light of Neoplatonic thought, as the tale of Actaeon was famously moralized to convey Christian meanings in the period[114]. Yet to Paola Gonzaga, the primary user of the room, the frescos surely had other, more personal, associations. Gonzaga could have identified with a number of figures depicted in the composition, including a female Actaeon. However, she also had the chance and privacy here to become aroused by the female nudes depicted. Regardless, upon her exit, Paola would always be prompted by Ceres, the panoptic mirror, and the Medusa corbels to refashion herself, resuming her proper social guise as *contessa* of Fontanellato at the early modern Italian court.

References

Alberti L.B. (1971), *The Alberti's of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia*, translated by G.A. Guarino, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

Anderson J. (1996), *Rewriting the history of art patronage*, «Renaissance Studies», 10, 2, pp. 129-138.

Arasse D. (1996), *Parmigianino au miroir d'Actéon*, in *Andromède ou le héros à l'épreuve de la beauté*, edited by A. Laframboise, F. Siguret. Paris: Klincksieck, pp. 257-279.

Ariosto L. (1998), *Orlando Furioso,* translated by G. Waldman, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Asmus U.D. (1983), *Fontanellato I. Sabatizzare il mondo. Parmigianinos Bildnis des conte Galeazzo Sanvitale,* «Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz», 27, no. 1, pp. 2-40.

Asmus U.D. (1987), *Fontanellato II. La trasformazione dell'Amante nell'Amato Parmigianinos Fresken in der Rocca Sanvitale*, «Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz», 31, pp. 2-58.

Bambach C., Chapman H., Clayton M., Goldner G.R. (2000), *Correggio and Parmigianino: Master Draughtsmen of the Renaissance,* London: British Museum Press.

[112] Fagiolo Dell'Arco 1970, p. 36.

[113] Arasse 1996, pp. 260-261; Quintavalle 2004, p. 8.

[114] Asmus 1987, p. 24; Brown 1981, p. 49; Ovid 1954, pp. 115-116.

Bandini F., Danti C., Fornari Schianchi L., Lanfranchi M.R., Viola L. (2000), *Parmigianino a Fontanellato. Il restauro delle 'storie di Diana e Atteone*, «OPD Restauro», 12, pp. 13-47.
Barkan L. (1980), *Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis*, «English Literary Renaissance» 10, no. 3, pp. 317-359.
Barbaro F. (1677), *Directions for Love and Marriage: In Two Books*, London: Printed for John Leigh and Tho. Burrell.
Boccaccio G. (2011), Volume 1 of *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, edited and translated by J. Solomon, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Bolognesi R. (2018), *Correggio e la camera di San Paolo: Svelamenti inediti*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale.
Bonsignori G. (2001), *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, edited by E. Ardissino, Bologna: I Testi di Lingua.
Brown D.A. (1984), *Parmigianino at Fontenellato*, «FMR», 1, pp. 140-147.
Brown D.A. (1981), *A Print Source for Parmigianino at Fontanellato*, in *Per A.E. Popham,* Parma: Consigli arte, pp. 43-53.
Burke J. (2018), *The Italian Renaissance Nude*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Cartari V. (2012), *Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythography*, translated by J. Mulryan, Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.
Castiglione B. (1987), *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by G. Bull, London: Penguin Books.
Crum R. (2001), *Controlling Women or Women Controlled? Suggestions for Gender Roles and Visual Culture in the Italian Renaissance Palace*, in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, edited by S. Reiss, D. Wilkins, Kirksville: Truman State University Press, pp. 37-50.
Dall'Acqua M., Guadalupi G., Maria Ricci F. (2019), *Fontanellato: Rocca Sanvitale*, translated by J. Landry, Parma: Franco Maria Ricci.
Dall'Acqua M., Guadalupi G., Maria Ricci F. (1994), *Fontanellato,* Milan: Franco Maria Ricci.
Ekserdjian D. (2006), *Parmigianino*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Fagiolo Dell'Arco, M. (1970), *Il Parmigianino: un saggio sull'ermetismo nel Cinquecento*, Rome: Mario Bulzoni.
Firenzuola A. (1958), *Opere*, edited by Adriano Seroni, Florence: Sansoni.
Franklin D. (2003), *The Art of Parmigianino*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Freedberg D. (1989), *The Power of Images*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Freedberg S.J. (1950), *Parmigianino: His Works in Painting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Friedlander W. (1990), *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Giannetti L. (2010), *Ma che potrà succedermi se io donna amo una Donna:*

Female-Female Desire in Italian Renaissance Comedy, «Renaissance Drama», 36/37, pp. 99-125.
Goffen R. (1997), *Sex, Space, and Social History in Titian's Venus of Urbino*, in *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, edited by R. Goffen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gould C. (1994), *Parmigianino*, New York: Abbeville Press.
Kelly J. (1984), *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
McIver K.A. (1997), *Love, Death and Mourning: Paola Gonzaga's Camerino at Fontanellato*, «Artibus et Historiae», 18, no. 36, pp. 101-108
McIver K.A. (2006), *Women, Art and Architecture in Northern Italy, 1520-1580,* Burlington: Ashgate.
Melchior-Bonnet S. (1994), *The Mirror: A History*, translated by K. H. Jewett, New York: Routledge.
Ovid (2004), *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, translated by C. Martin, New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Ovid (1954), *Ovide Moralisé en Prose (Texte du Quinsième siècle)*, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.
Panofsky E. (1961), *The Iconography of Correggio's Camera di San Paolo*, London: The Warburg Institute, University of London.
Periti G. (2016), *In the Courts of Religious Ladies: Art, Religion, and Pleasure in Italian Renaissance Convents*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Periti G. (2014/2015), *Regarding Parmigianino's Early Portraits*, «Source: Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome», 59/60, pp. 284-309.
Petrarch F. (2001), *The Complete Canzoniere: A Translation into English*, translated by A.S. Kline, Delaware: On-Demand Publishing LLC.
Popham A.E. (1963), *Drawings by Parmigianino for the Rocca of Fontanellato*, «Master Drawings», 1, no. 1, pp. 3-10.
Quintavalle A.G. (1968), *Gli Affreschi Giovanili del Parmigianino*, Parma: Cassa di Risparmio di Parma.
Quintavalle A.G. (2004), *Parmigianino,* Milan: Rizzoli.
Roskill M.W. (2000), *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Saslow J. (1989), *Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Behavior, Identity, and Artistic Expression*, in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, edited by M.B. Duberman, M. Vicinus, C. Chauncey, Jr., New York: NAL Books, pp. 90-105.
Sgarbi V. (1983), *El baño de Diana*, «Art FMR», 14, pp. 192-210.
Simons P. (1994), *Lesbian (In)Visibility in Italian Renaissance Culture: Diana and Other Cases of donna con donna*, «Journal of Homosexuality», 27, pp. 1-2, 81-122
Tassi R. (1994), *La Corona di Primule: Arte a Parma dal XII al XX secolo*, Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore.

Traub V. (1994), *The (In)Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England*, in *Queering the Renaissance*, edited by J. Goldberg, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 62-83.
Vaccaro M. (2002), *Parmigianino: The Paintings*, Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C.
Vaccaro M. (2004), *Reconsidering Parmigianino's Camerino for Paola Gonzaga at Fontanellato*, in *Drawing Relationships in Northern Italian Renaissance Art*, Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 177-198.
Vecchia V. (1996), *Tre donne Sanvitale nel primo Cinquecento a Parma: Susanna, Laura, Paola*, «Avrea Parma: rivista quadrimestrale di storia, letteratura e arte», 80, no. 3, pp. 287–295.
Werness H.B. (1999), *The Symbolism of Mirrors in Art from Ancient Times to the Present*, Lewiston, NY: The Ewin Mellen Press.
Wilkins D.G. (2001), *Introduction: Recognizing New Patrons, Posing New Questions*, in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, edited by S. Reiss, D. Wilkins, Kirksville: Truman State University Press, pp. 37-50.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Parmigianino, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1523-1524, Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 2. Italian printmaker, *Diana and Actaeon*, ca. 1497. British Library, London. Reproduced with permission from the British Library

Fig. 3. Parmigianino, detail of *Diana and Actaeon* (above north wall), 1523-1524, Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 4. Parmigianino, detail of *Diana and Actaeon* (above east wall), 1523-1524, Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 5. Parmigianino, detail of *Diana and Actaeon* (above south wall), 1523-1524, Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 6. Parmigianino, detail of *Diana and Actaeon* (above west wall), 1523-1524, Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 7. Parmigianino, *Portrait of Giangaleazzo Sanvitale*, ca. 1524, National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples. Image in the Public Domain, from Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 8. Correggio, *Camera di San Paolo*, 1519, San Paolo, Parma. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 9. Parmigianino, *Diana and Actaeon*, ca. 1523-1524, Morgan Library, New York. Photograph provided by Art Resource, New York

Fig. 10. Parmigianino, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, ca. 1524, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Image in the Public Domain, from Wikimedia Commons

JOURNAL OF THE DIVISION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

Direttore / Editor
Pietro Petraroia

Co-direttori / Co-editors
Tommy D. Andersson, Elio Borgonovi, Rosanna Cioffi, Stefano Della Torre, Michela di Macco, Daniele Manacorda, Serge Noiret, Tonino Pencarelli, Angelo R. Pupino, Girolamo Sciullo

Edited by
Giuseppe Capriotti, Fátima Díez Platas, Francesca Casamassima

Texts by
Jonathan Barnes, Giuseppe Capriotti, Francesca Casamassima, Claudia Cieri Via, Erin Daly, Fátima Díez Platas, Rieke Dobslaw, Gyöngyvér Horváth, Barbara Hryszko, Caroline Koncz, Anne-Sophie Laruelle, Bar Leshem, Patricia Meilán Jácome, Elena Moscara, Radka Nokkala Miltova, Brianda Otero Moreira, Ilaria Ottria, Pablo Piqueras Yagüe, Laura Stagno

http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult/index

eum edizioni università di macerata

ISSN 2039-2362