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

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

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Conspectu legar populi: An Introduction to the Iconic Life of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe and Beyond

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1. *Introduction*

Almost all the published works of the Latin poet Publius Ovidius Naso have, at one time or another, captured the attention of the visual arts, especially book illustration. However, the epic poem *Metamorphoses* has undoubtedly occupied

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the central place in the production of images that represent a transposition, a sort of "translation" – *stricto sensu* – of Ovid's remarkable achievements into different expressive languages. The stories, episodes, exploits, transgressions, forms and colours of Ovid's epic have fuelled the imagination of visual artists, musicians and poets, and have thus been incorporated into the imagery of the Western world under multiple new guises[1].

In the last verses of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid foresaw his survival as a poet and imagined hearing his poem read from the mouths of all people (*Ore legar populi*[2]), but from very early on his words were reflected in images, and the Roman people began to read Ovid with their eyes. This is the reason behind the manipulation of Ovid's verse, which we have transformed into "*Conspectu legar populi*": "I will be read by the people's gaze" – the motto of our approach to the *Metamorphoses* through art and images.

It is well known that over the centuries of its reception, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has been regarded as much more than a mere literary work, much more than a poem. Its fame and uses have ranged from a Companion to Antiquity, a scholarly guide to mythology and a scientific and philosophical encyclopaedia, to a Bible for poets and a Renaissance handbook for artists. Probably because of its length and its compositional characteristics, the epic poem has been perceived as a complex container of mythological information, presented in the guise of a skilfully and consistently interwoven narrative. Despite this (or perhaps because of it), the *Metamorphoses* has been treated as a body to be dismembered in order to be digested and understood since its editorial inception. Consequently, in its reception, the original text has been atomised into numerous types of syntheses, narratives, explanations, summaries, or commentaries. Moreover, as Hélène Cazes has put it[3], regarding the *Metamorphoses* there has been a constant tendency to subsume unity into multiplicity, reducing the unitary poem to episodes, moments, and figures.

Consequently, Ovid's work, undergoing its own metamorphosis, was in fact transformed into what Lina Bolzoni calls a book-*cornucopia*[4], a vast archive in which hundreds of separate elements of knowledge of the physical world, history, Antiquity and myth could be deposited and organized. On the other hand, the *Metamorphoses* became an intentionally expanded ensemble of contents and meanings, rather than a fixed and static text. It incorporated new elements and could be regarded and interpreted from many different points of view. Finally, the poet's *magnum opus*, the *Ovidius maior,* underwent its

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[1] On Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the visual arts: Llewellyn 1988, pp. 157-166; Allen 2002, pp. 336-368; Bull 2005 and Barolsky 2014, pp. 202-216. For useful insights on the topic of Ovid and images see: Redford 2010, pp. 23-26.

[2] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV, 878.

[3] Cazes 2003, pp. 263-264.

[4] Bolzoni 2001, p. 219.

definitive transformation when it became fully identified with its own author, and was finally termed and recognised simply as *Ovid*.

At the same time, both Ovid and his *Metamorphoses* irrevocably became images: *Ovidius pictus*. Ovid as an almost inexhaustible source of images, of figures, of proposals to interpret, to suggest: to explain the world. As Sara Brown has summarised, «The history of Ovid's reception may be seen as a series of individual metamorphoses, not simply of Ovid's masterpiece itself, but of the productions of all the intervening artists who have helped shape our own conception of the poem – artists, composers and novelists as well as poets»[5].

It is with this in mind that we present this monograph, which once again aims to showcase the continuous transformation of Ovid's verses into images across different time periods, environments, and media – from books to physical objects, from everyday items owned and displayed to grand frescoes in opulent residences and palaces, from the exuberant Italian production to the reception in the European periphery, from the iconographic tradition to the proposals of a new artistic exegesis.

Under the title and banner of *Ovidius Pictus*, the nineteen works in this issue of the journal offer a varied range of insights into Ovid's legacy, from books to arts[6]. Departing from the concept of the book and the illustrations that have played a pivotal role in disseminating the *Metamorphoses*, the collected studies stem from the initiative that, under the auspices of the *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana*[7], the University of Santiago de Compostela and the University of Macerata, brought together a group of scholars who agreed to share papers that showcase the metamorphosis of the *materia ovidiana* into iconic and artistic proposals.

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[5] Brown 1996, p. 12.

[6] On March 7-8, 2013, the Warburg Institute held a conference entitled *The Afterlife of Ovid*, organized by Philip Hardie (Cambridge), Peter Mack (Warburg Institute) and John North (Institute of Classical Studies) to investigate the Medieval and Renaissance reading of Ovid and his influence on poetry and painting. Selected papers were published as a supplement to the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 2015. In 2019, on the bimillenary of Ovid's death, the Department of Human Sciences of the University of L'Aquila held the conference *Dopo Ovidio. Aspetti della ricezione ovidiana fra letteratura e iconografia*, published in 2020 in the volume *After Ovid*, edited by Franca Ela Consolino.

[7] The *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (Ovidian Digital Library) research project, which is located on the following web address: <http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/en/proyecto.php>, 20.01.2024, is the result of a series of research projects of the same title, funded by the Spanish Ministries of Science and Technology, Science and Innovation, Economy and Competitiveness, and Science, Innovation and Universities, which have been developed at the University of Santiago de Compostela since 2007. As a global project, it aims to create a large website dedicated to the illustrated works of Ovid, containing the data and the images of all the copies of printed editions published between the 15th and 19th centuries kept in all the Spanish public and private libraries.

The monograph that has emerged from this multifaceted research is divided into four thematic and chronological areas. These sections explore the survival of the content of the *Metamorphoses* in medieval illuminated manuscripts, its domestication in physical objects that made it available for individual and collective private use from the 15th century onwards, its depiction in Ovidian iconographic cycles that, from the central position occupied by Italy to the northern and eastern peripheries, enriched the houses, palaces and minds of the cities of modern Europe, and, finally, its interpretation in contemporary contexts that gave new meanings to the poet's proposals, amid new situations and new research questions.

2. *Latin and vernacular Ovid: textual contexts and iconic responses to the 14th-century* Metamorphoses

Throughout the Middle Ages, and particularly in the 14th century, Ovid's poem underwent a significant transformation, culminating in the expansion and interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. The recognition of Ovid as a poet in Italian academic circles resulted in the production of a series of manuscripts – symbols of a literate culture and prized possessions of influential and powerful figures. These manuscripts incorporated the image to complement the text, establishing new dialogues with the meaning of the text and the author's status. At the opposite end of the spectrum of the 14th-century's appreciation of the poem, the *Metamorphoses* underwent a transformation into a more expansive and widely disseminated moralizing text. This adaptation employed imagery to intricately illustrate the significance of comprehending the Ovidian message within the context of the Christian vision and to reconcile the past with the present.

The essays in the first section, *Transformative Ovid:* Metamorphoses *in Medieval Manuscripts*, delve into this unique reception of Ovid and his poem. The exploration focuses on two sets of 14th-century miniatures: those that became pieces of knowledge in manuscripts intended for scholarly and literary reading, and those reflecting the vernacular realm seen in the French *Ovide Moralisé* and within the encyclopaedic framework of Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus*.

Four essays explore the transformations to which the relationship between image and text is subjected within the codex, giving rise to new textual and iconographic elements which are associated with different versions of the *Metamorphoses* and serve as manifestations of the enduring spirit of Ovid's legacy.

The first paper, by Brianda Otero Moreira, examines the phenomenon of the 14th-century Italian manuscripts. The author analyses the fifteen scenes

enclosed in capital letters selected to introduce each of the books of Ovid's poem in an exceptional Venetian manuscript (Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a). The sequence and choice of various mythological episodes, as well as their iconographic formulation, offer a visual narrative that goes beyond a mere decoration of the lettering and proposes a dialogue between text, image, and the illuminated page itself.

The most radical transformation of Ovid's text into a vernacular and moralized adaptation – the *Ovide Moralisé* and the *Ovidius Moralizatus*, which preserve not only the fundamental content of the *Metamorphoses* but, more importantly, use the author's name as the substitute for the title of the work itself – is the focus of other three papers in this section.

In their respective articles, Pablo Piqueras Yagüe and Elena Moscara focus exclusively on Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus*. Both papers explore the unconventional aspects in the analysis of Ovid's reception in both image and text. Piqueras's work, grounded in philological exegesis, delves into the visual sphere by utilizing the images present in the miniatures accompanying two passages studied in manuscripts of the *Ovidius Moralizatus* from Bergamo, Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, Cassaf. Ms. 3.4, and Treviso, Biblioteca Comunale, 344. This approach aims to identify potential textual sources in Bersuire's work, revealed through visual formulations. Moscara's work provides a glimpse into this *materia ovidiana*, moulded over time through the incorporation of elements which were not present in the poet's original text but were incorporated into the *Ovidius Moralizatus*. Focusing again on two relevant manuscripts of the work – Gotha, Forschungs bibliothek Ms. I 98, and Bergamo, Biblioteca civica Angelo Mai Cassaf. Ms. 3 4 – the iconographic formulation of the double parthenogenesis of Pallas and Vulcan is analysed in relation to the text, posing the problem of singularity of figurative versions of the story that appear in the manuscripts.

Patricia Meilán Jácome's work combines the examination of Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus* with that of the anonymous *Ovide Moralisé*. The focus is on an episode related to the iconography of the god Bacchus within the Ovidian milieu. By analysing the visual formulation of Bacchus' entry into Thebes through the images from the two moralizations, the exercise of comparison and interrelation between text and image not only reveals the differences between the Italian and French worlds in which the respective texts were produced but also underscores the absence of visual sources for this peculiar staging of the god's iconography. This absence results in a varied, diverse, and individualized range of formulations.

3. *Insightful objects: owning, moving and using the* Metamorphoses *since the 15th century*

Over the course of its reception throughout centuries, Ovid's continuous poem, resembling a flowing river with distinct transitions between books, eventually unfolded as a compendium of separate stories that became individualized, generating their own visual worlds. Consequently, Ovid's poetry underwent a process of reduction to episodes, moments, or even atomization into figures. This transformation allowed images to elicit a similar response, giving rise to a series of pictures and engravings that have accompanied various editions and versions of the *Metamorphoses* since the Middle Ages.

The initial visual responses to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, potentially found on the walls of Pompeii, appeared to follow this tendency. Instead of presenting a synthesis of thematic and metamorphic images, as later modernity attempted to do, these paintings focused on different individual stories, such as those of love, transgression, error, mistake, or punishment. It is probably fair to say that Ovid's poem was perceived as an ensemble of individual stories projected onto the visual arts.

Nevertheless, the *Metamorphoses* remains essentially a book. The images originated within the pages of the book and were subsequently translated into the visual realm of art and objects. In other words, Bernini's Apollo and Daphne would not have been possible without the pictorial suggestions of the engravings in the illustrated books. The visual image, in the form of an illustration, has thus been incorporated into the transformative journey of the poem, providing a figurative counterpart to the text.

The essays in the second section, *Ovidian Materiality: Movable* Metamorphoses, explore a trajectory that unfolds through a sequence of objects embodying Ovidian materiality, delving into the domestication process of transforming stories from the poem into everyday experiences, which subtly conceal cultural reflections. Reality is interpreted through the lens of the familiar myth, carrying the meaning intended by the poet and simultaneously engaging with the current reality, taking on additional layers of meaning that highlight the remarkable adaptability of the Greek myth and the effectiveness of Ovid's formulation. However, it is the medium that enables the stories and meanings to influence the lives in which they are integrated: the visual language that immediately conveys the meaning and emotion and is instantly recognizable, even when it is adorned with details and additions that introduce new contexts and suggestions. Combined with materiality, the visual formulation engages in a privileged dialogue with the surrounding reality, blending time, space and movement to create an experience that is not only repeated, inherited, and transmitted but also remains 'alive' even beyond its era, as Ovid himself predicted at the end of his work.

The five essays transition from the book as the key medium for conveying

Ovidian content through images to the transformation of the real environment into a virtual space of reflections; a transformation that mirrors the Ovidian episode that embodies them *par excellence*: the story of Narcissus. First, through Ilaria Ottria's work, we step into the pages of the illustrated editions from the 16th century, the *Aetas Metamorphoseos*, thus initiating an iconographic journey which focuses on the thematic relationships centred around the compelling story of Proserpina's abduction, with the aim of pinpointing the moments of the story that unveil the Ovidian expression and ignite the artists' imagination. Finally, the voyage ends with Rieke Dobslaw's essay which analyses the role of the *Metamorphoses* in the aristocratic setting of an 18th-century pleasure villa, revealing another kind of mediated interaction between naturalism and artificiality, between real space and the illusion created by a mirror and its mythical reflections.

The three essays in between take us on a journey through household environments of the 16th and 17th centuries. In her work, Bar Leshem, focusing on the 16th-century carved *cassoni*, helps us understand the suggestive function of the stories of love and punishment in married life, conceived by Ovid to show the interaction between gods and mortals, while through the essay by Anne-Sophie Laruelle, who studies Renaissance tapestries decorated with the *Labours of Hercules*, we are able to contemplate the story of Hercules' struggle with the river-god transformed into a human-bull, threaded through multiple successive metamorphoses developed in Ovid's tale. Moving to the 17th century, in Fátima Díez Platas' work, we travel from Europe to America – Santiago de Cuba – to open the drawers of a forgotten piece of Baroque furniture, whose hidden secrets are revealed by the protagonists of the *Metamorphoses*, taken from the engravings of different illustrated editions of the poem published in the Low Countries, to be transformed into meaningful decorative devices.

4. *Prints and pages. Women's and men's patronage in the decoration of central and peripheral areas across Europe*

Books similar to those discussed in the previous section could be found in the libraries of noble families, forming part of the tangible world crafted from manuscripts, printed volumes, and furniture that adorned their residences, be they town palaces or countryside villas. These houses were adorned with paintings, frescoes, stucco, and reliefs that transform walls, ceilings, and façades into elaborate expressions of the owners' ideologies and power. Mythology, with its tales of potent gods and semi-divine heroes, emerged as a prominent theme through which the nobility conveyed their ideals and influence outwardly.

Among the most influential tools for disseminating knowledge of Greek and Latin mythology were the editions of the *Metamorphoses* published across Europe from the late 15th century to the end of the 18th century. Exploring inventories documenting the books owned by noble families sheds light on the pervasive presence of these texts in the libraries of those who commissioned mythological decorations for their residences. While the inclusion of certain books does not necessarily imply the owners' familiarity with or reading of them, it serves as a reflection of their cultural milieu and the type of knowledge they aspired to showcase[8].

In some instances, a direct correlation emerges between the books kept in the noble families' libraires and the thematic decor adorning the walls and ceilings of the owner's house. This connection is evident not only in major centres such as Genoa, exemplified by the 16th-century Palazzo del Principe owned by the town's preeminent figure, Andrea Doria, but also in places like the Ràday Family palace in Pecel, Hungary. In her analysis of the stucco decorations by Marcello Sparzo for Giovanni Andrea I Doria (Andrea's heir), Laura Stagno notes the presence of Italian vernacular translations of the *Metamorphoses* in the Doria library's 17th-century inventory. Gyöngyvér Horváth draws attention to the 17th and 18th century editions of the *Metamorphoses* and other Ovidian works in the library owned by Gedeon Raday, who commissioned the late baroque decorations featuring various episodes from the *Metamorphoses* in Pecel. Notably, artists themselves were avid collectors and readers of these books, as highlighted by Radka Nokkala Miltová. Libraries of artists from the 17th and 18th centuries indeed contained Ovid's writings, further underscoring the widespread appeal of these literary works.

These examples, explored extensively in the publication, provide insights into the classic taste of both patrons and artists. The close relationship between the Latin and vernacular editions that shaped the reception of the *Metamorphoses* and the decorative elements in various residences is a central theme of these contributions. Authors demonstrate not only the artists' familiarity with Ovid's poem but also with the accompanying illustrations, often used as graphic models for their creations: at times, artists reproduced the engravings with great fidelity, while on other occasions they chose to maintain a higher level of creative autonomy.

This section spans examples from the 16th to the 18th century, encompassing renowned centres like Genoa and influential Italian courts like the Sanvitale family's one. Additionally, it explores peripheral areas such as some provinces of the Papal State (Ancona, Matelica, and Macerata) and provides unique perspectives on residences owned by prominent families in Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, and Moravia, where research on the diffusion of the *Metamorphoses*

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[8] On this kinds of studies in Italy and in particular in Genoa, see Montanari 2015.

is still in its early stages, with these authors playing a pivotal role in advancing those studies. In Italy, the exploration of the influence of the *Metamorphoses* on the decorations found in palaces and villas is making remarkable headway, especially in relation to the vernacular translations published in the 16th century. A notable case is the one examined by Bodo Guthmüller for Palazzo Te in Mantua, where Giulio Romano illustrated the so-called *Sala dei Giganti*, depicting the corresponding episode from the first book of Ovid's work. In the 16th century, this theme enjoyed exceptional iconographic popularity, both for the countless artistic solutions it provided to painters and for the moral, political, and religious implications it could convey. On the walls, Giulio Romano depicted the Giants either falling or trapped among enormous masses. Some details allowed Guthmüller to demonstrate the role of Niccolò degli Agostini's translation – published for the first time in 1522 and widely read in the 1530s, when the frescoes were made. What first caught his attention was the artist's choice to portray the giants with the features of ordinary men, distinguished only by their significantly larger size, whereas Ovid describes them as snake-footed and with a thousand arms. Moreover, monkeys are visible among them, characters not mentioned by the Latin poet. These details are perfectly understandable in the light of Agostini's words. In his text there is no description of the Giants, so the artist imagines them as humans of gigantic proportions; furthermore, monkeys are mentioned, which, according to this version, would have originated from the blood of the Giants. The addition of monkeys in the narrative is already present in the translation by Giovanni Bonsignori (first published in 1497). From these details, the importance of Agostini's text in shaping the iconographic program of the Fall of the Giants becomes evident[9].

All the papers in this section explore the textual connections, function and meaning of selected episodes and myths, their correlation with prints, and the role of individuals inhabiting these spaces.

Caroline Koncz provides a compelling analysis of an intriguing iconography found in a room at Rocca Sanvitale in Fontanellato (near Parma), decorated by Parmigianino for the Sanvitale family around 1523-1524. This space features a ceiling depicting the story of Diana and Actaeon. Koncz suggests that, given Paola Gonzaga's role as the primary user of this room, the frescoes were tailored for her personal viewing pleasure. Examining the represented episodes through Paola Gonzaga's eyes provides a convincing interpretation of the entire cycle, particularly the central episode of the myth – Diana punishing Actaeon – a subject debated by scholars for decades. The author proposes that Parmigianino intentionally rendered Actaeon's gender ambiguous. This ambiguity potentially allowed the user of the *camerino*, Paola Gonzaga, to identify

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[9] Guthmüller 1997, pp. 291-305.

not only with Diana but also with the hunter/huntress. While in the early modern period Diana was traditionally viewed as a paragon of virtue and purity, scenes depicting her bathing with nymphs could also be interpreted from a homoerotic viewpoint, as this article proposes. Furthermore, Koncz posits that the (homo)erotic function of these frescoes suggests that they may have served as a potential source of arousal for the room's primary viewer. As such, Paola Gonzaga might have been encouraged to feel enticed by the depicted scenes, yet simultaneously reminded of her transgressive viewing as she turned to gaze upon the re-gendered, and later punished, Actaeon. Although this type of viewing might have been deemed as illicit in the period, it could have been tolerated or overlooked in the light of the belief that her desire helped Gonzaga in her primary function as a married woman in early modern Italy – that of procreating with her husband.

While it remains uncertain whether Paola Gonzaga played a role in selecting the theme, the paper sheds light on the significance of female patrons. As Koncz demonstrates, Paola Gonzaga was likely a well-educated woman, as evidenced, for instance, by her invitation of humanists like Tiberio Rosselli and Benedetto Albineo di Bianchi to Fontanellato. Thus, she may have been able to suggest the theme of the frescoes herself. From this perspective, this paper constitutes a significant contribution to the ongoing research that, particularly in the last two decades, has sought to explore the intricate and concealed realm of women's patronage in Renaissance art. Some women wielded the "power" to affirm and advance patriarchal ambitions, as exemplified, for instance, in the Castello di Carbognano (Lazio), where Giulia Farnese commissioned a decorative cycle intricately tied to the celebration of her family and her brother[10]. Similarly, at Palazzo Doria Spinola all'Acquasola in Genoa, Maria Spinola, following her husband's death, engaged Giovanni Carlone to create a frescoed cycle depicting the military achievements of her brother-in-law, Ambrogio Spinola[11]. In contrast, other women utilized their patronage to subvert the patriarchal structure, and Paola Gonzaga's case serves as an exemplar of this latter scenario, albeit subtly veiled by her promotion of the dynasty's continuity[12].

Moving forward a couple of centuries, Giuseppe Capriotti emphasizes how room decorations differ based on the gender of the inhabitant. He examines two 18th-century palaces, illustrating how, in these instances, even places designated for women convey a male perspective. Using Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a lens, the author explores how Greek and Latin classics can serve as a space for discussing contemporary social issues. By critically interpreting and appro-

[10] Capriotti 2020.
[11] Boccardo 2011, pp. 122-23.
[12] On this distinction in female patronage see Reiss, Wilkins 2001, pp. xv-xx.

priately contextualizing the themes found in these poems, avenues for debates on gender equality and decolonization are opened.

Capriotti delves into the depicted cycles within two palaces in Macerata, a town in the province of the Papal States: Palazzo Vico and Palazzo Costa. Both palaces predominantly feature mythological episodes, largely derived from the *Metamorphoses*, created for the occasion of weddings. In both instances, the contrast between the social roles of men and women is vividly portrayed through images. A notable example in Palazzo Vico is a room dedicated to celebrating the marital alliance between the De Vico and Filippucci families. The frieze depicts two scenes where the love of two goddess is thwarted, while two other episodes show men rescuing a maiden in peril and subsequently "earning" her love. In Palazzo Costa, the author focuses on two halls on the main floor. One showcases the life of Phaeton, concluding with his fall from Apollo's chariot, while the other represents the myth of Ariadne, culminating happily in her marriage to Bacchus. It becomes evident that the two rooms are respectively designated for the groom and the bride: the first illustrates the behaviour that a man should avoid, while the second highlights the virtues a good wife should possess.

While these examples demonstrate the affirmation of social models that are currently deemed unacceptable, their study provides an exceptional opportunity for critical reflection on our present.

In her paper, Laura Stagno's approach closely aligns with the methods employed by Guthmüller in the study of the *Sala dei Giganti*. Stagno focuses on a recurring theme in Palazzo del Principe in Genoa, which proves to be both enduring and significant across generations: the myth of Prometheus, as narrated by Ovid in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* and various other ancient sources. This myth holds particular importance for both Andrea Doria, the first owner of the palace, and his successor, Giovanni Andrea I. In the case of Andrea Doria, Prometheus is featured in the bas-relief of a fireplace designed by Perino del Vaga. The chosen episode depicts the Titan stealing fire and bestowing it upon mankind. Stagno notes that this early example of using the myth in fireplace decoration goes beyond its apparent contextual relevance, resonating with the broader theme woven throughout the palace's decor: the hero as the bringer of civilization. This notion is epitomized not only by the tales of Furius Camillus on the atrium ceiling but also through various myths, including those of Perseus, Hercules, Cadmus, and, of course, Prometheus himself. Collectively, these stories contribute to the portrayal of Andrea Doria as the *pater patriae* and the re-founder of the Republic.

Prometheus assumes a similar significance in the stucco decorations crafted by Marcello Sparzo for two rooms commissioned by Giovanni Andrea I in the mid-1590s. Stagno meticulously analyses these images, providing insight into the diverse sources recounting the story of Prometheus and explaining that many of them converged in the various vernacular translations disseminated

in Italy from the late 15th century onward. Stagno highlights the differences between these texts and Ovid's poem, emphasizing their importance in elucidating the meaning attributed to the myth of Prometheus in the Early Modern Age. Several of the texts identified by Stagno as sources for the decorations are found in a 17th-century list of Doria family books. Although it cannot be conclusively demonstrated, these editions could have been in the family's possession since Giovanni Andrea's time. The commentary written by Giuseppe Horologgi to accompany the myth in Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's translation, describing Prometheus as a benevolent prince who establishes order and laws, encapsulates the meaning Giovanni Andrea attributed to this character, in continuity with his predecessor's interpretation.

Francesca Casamassima employs a similar approach in her study of two frescoed cycles located in peripheral areas of the Papal States, showcasing the effectiveness of this method even in regions that were not considered artistic centres, unlike Genoa and Mantua in the 16th century. Specifically, Casamassima highlights the crucial role of prints as models for artists operating in peripheral locations. She focuses on two palazzi in Marca di Ancona, now known as Marche, specifically in Ancona and Matelica, both decorated in the 16th century. The scholar directs her attention to a room in each palazzo, both featuring episodes from the *Metamorphoses* in the frieze.

Casamassima's analysis reveals a close relationship between the iconography employed in these frescoes and the prints circulating during that period. Most apparent is the connection with the illustrations found in vernacular translations published in the 16th century, serving as models for the majority of the scenes depicted in both friezes. However, in some instances, the artists turn to freely circulating prints which reproduced popular works of art from the period. For example, in the Coat of Arms Room at Palazzo Ottoni in Matelica, the artist depicts Venus and Cupid following the popular iconography found in the painting created by Pontormo after Michelangelo. This particular example also highlights the usefulness of such comparisons in dating frescoes, as it allowed Casamassima to place the cycle after 1533.

Through the analysis of both friezes, the author suggests that they likely did not adhere to a specific iconographic program and were not intended to convey a particular message from the clients. Instead, the choice of myths seems to have been guided by a decorative purpose, aligning with the theory of *decorum*, which posits that specific themes correspond to each room in a house. The use of prints as models indicates that artists and clients were familiar with popular models from cultural centres, and employed them to showcase their modern taste. However, the derivative use of prints and limited originality suggests that, stylistically, the periphery lagged behind the cultural centres.

Gyöngyvér Horváth presents an extraordinary example of *Metamorphoses* decorations in another peripheral region – the Hungarian countryside in the

18th century. Here, prints from the *Metamorphoses* play an essential role in disseminating well-known models. The author examines a baroque mansion owned by the noble Ráday family in Pécel, focusing particularly on the Ceremonial Hall. This room was adorned with 16 scenes (15 surviving today) in grisaille, inspired by two illustrated editions published in Amsterdam in the 1730s. These decorations, along with others in prominent parts of the palace, form a complex iconographic program intended to convey an encyclopaedic knowledge of the era and to provide moral lessons. One notable element of originality is the presence of inscriptions accompanying the mythological scenes in the Ceremonial Hall. These inscriptions, written in vernacular Hungarian by Gedeon Ráday, summarize the moral meaning of each story. What makes this element intriguing is that, as the author convincingly demonstrates, the client's intent was to legitimize the vernacular language, which was not the official language at the time.

This study brings to international attention a neglected and interesting case, which the author thoroughly analyses through archival documents and the stylistic and iconographic interpretation of the decorations. Even though the Ráday family transformed their house into a cultural hub, their distance from the cultural centres of the time and the small size of the village of Pécel placed the family in a marginal position. The author highlights how this contradiction is reflected in the decorations, where the good and bad examples emerging from the mythological and rhetorical program mirror Gedeon's own situation as a patron of arts and culture living in a peripheral area.

This situation aligns with Alessandro Nova's distinction between "peripheral" and "provincial". While the term "peripheral" refers to artists and/or patrons who consciously propose alternative solutions, "provincial" denotes those who are fully aware of the developments in the centre and seek to assimilate those models without questioning them[13]. Gedeon was likely aware of the innovations from the centre, yet, given his provincial position, he probably recognized the limitations to which he had to conform. The editions that inspired the Ceremonial Hall were present in Gedeon's library, emphasizing the close correlation between the books clients read/owned and the decorations that adorned their homes.

In a similar vein, Barbara Hryszko's case study explores the Royal Bath Palace in Warsaw, where one of the most distinctive elements involves the decision to decorate the walls of certain rooms with prints derived from a 1771 Paris edition of the *Metamorphoses*. One hundred prints were framed in gold and displayed on walls adorned with floral patterns. According to the author, these floral patterns complemented the mythological scenes, which focused on the origin of various plants, serving as a reminder of the house's function as

[13] Nova 2006, p. 49.

a summer villa in a park. The inclusion of the edition of *Metamorphoses* in the king's personal library, from which the illustrations were drawn, further underscores that every element of the house – decorations, books, furniture – contributed to the overall message the patrons sought to convey.

Hryszko's paper begins with a captivating legend according to which Ovid lived with the Sarmatians, ancestors of the Poles, and was buried near the Black Sea, which makes him the first Polish poet. This legend contributed to Ovid's popularity in Poland, both in literature and in visual arts. The author provides two crucial late 17th-century examples: the decorations of the Royal Palace in Wilanów and the Royal Baths Palace in Warsaw. King John III Sobieski's library at Wilanów contained several copies of Ovid's works, which influenced the themes chosen for the decorations. These themes were thoughtfully positioned in relation to the places and objects they adorned. For instance, a virginal belonging to the queen was lavishly painted with mythological scenes related to music, such as *Mercury playing the flute to put Argus to sleep*, the *Duel between Apollo and Marsyas,* etc.

In the Royal Baths Palace, the connection between the place's function and its decorations is even more apparent, as seen in the example related to prints. Furthermore, in the Bath Room, the walls feature reliefs depicting myths associated with water, such as Arion, Andromeda, Diana and Actaeon, reinforcing the link between the decor and the purpose of the space.

In the cases studied and analysed by Radka Nokkala Miltová in Baroque art in Bohemia and Moravia, illustrations also play a pivotal role. The author identifies the use of prints as models as one of the distinguishing features of 17th- and 18th-century Central European art. Contrary to suggesting a lack of artistic inventiveness, this approach, according to Miltová, demonstrates the profound influence of literary works like the *Metamorphoses*. The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of Ovid's poem on the art of this region.

During the 17th century, engravings by Hendrik Goltzius gained great popularity. The author cites examples from the paintings in the Rosenberg Kratochvíle villa, demonstrating their connection to these illustrations and positing that this link was crucial for dating these works and attributing them to specific patrons. However, the most influential graphic model in the second half of the 17th century was Johann Wilhelm Baur's cycle of 150 engravings. Indeed, the author presents numerous examples of paintings and decorations derived from these illustrations. All these prints, along with others used as models by artists of that period, were included in editions often found in the inventories of aristocratic libraries in Moravia. The author illustrates that these engravings were selected as models not only because of their stylistic attributes, but also because of their content. A notable example highlighted by Miltová is the patronage of Olomouc bishop Karl von Lichtenstein-Castelcorno. The choices made by the patron align with the theory of *decorum*. For instance, the dome

of the pavilion's central hall in the garden is adorned with mythological scenes from the *Metamorphoses*, particularly focusing on abduction episodes. The theme of "love" was deemed highly suitable for garden decorations.

This thematic thread weaves through contributions that showcase the *Metamorphoses*' versatile deployment, from communicating political perspectives to exalting the glory of noble families or commemorating individual successes. Whether in cultural hubs or peripheral areas, among royal patrons or the nobility of small provincial locales, the myths served as a potent means of expression. Beyond mere stylistic considerations, the *Metamorphoses* became a conduit for patrons to articulate their ideals, contributing to the cultural and intellectual milieu of the spaces they inhabited. The *Metamorphoses*, thus, emerges not only as a literary work, but as a dynamic and enduring source that transformed the visual landscape of palatial residences, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural history of the regions. The poem, along with its visual interpretation, serves as a valuable tool not only for exploring and decoding the past but also for actively engaging with contemporary issues, contributing to the shaping of the present in contrast to the patriarchal values and colonizing perspective conveyed by Ovid.

5. *A controversial polysemy: the destiny of Ovid's* Metamorphoses

The overarching European theme that spans across all sections is affirmed in the last section of the publication, entitled *Ovidian Polysemy: The Meaningful Search*, in which the protagonists are a French painter, Gustave Moreau, a German art historian, Aby Warburg, and three Danish artists, Maja Ingerslev, Sif Itona Westerberg, and Uffe Isolotto.

The concept of polysemy is taken from the first essay in the section, written by Erin Daly and dedicated to *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra* by Moreau. This work is polysemic as it has been interpreted not only as a metaphor for the Franco-Prussian War but also as a tool to illustrate a meaningful gender polarity: the masculine virtues of Hercules against the feminine vices of the Hydra. This reading is possible thanks to a reference to the source used by the artist, namely the translation and interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* by Pierre du Ryer in 1660. The polysemy of this work is massively amplified by the dialogue between *Hercules*, *Salome Dancing before Herod*, and *The Apparition*, conceived together as a meaningful triptych to offer a misogynistic rumination on vice, gender and death. Ovid is thus in dialogue with the Gospel and the polysemic Hercules hides a polysemic Ovid.

Aby Warburg's interpretation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is also polysemic. As Claudia Cieri Via has shown in her essay, in 1927, on the occasion of a lecture by Max Ditmar Henkel on the European illustrated editions of the *Meta-*

morphoses, Aby Warburg organised an exhibition at the Kulturwissenschaft-liche Bibliothek Warburg. The illustrated books, which had arrived from the major European libraries, were opened and displayed on panels containing numerous photographs of reproductions of artworks taken from *Metamor-phoses*. In this way, images representing Ovidian episodes physically and metaphorically emerged from the open books. Indeed, in his notes on the exhibition, Warburg claimed that the Latin poet and his translators and illustrators were the main vehicle for the survival of the ancient gods, their myths, and their passionate nature in European culture. Warburg works thematically, extracting homogeneous pathetic nuclei from the text: 'pursuit' and 'transformation', 'abduction', 'sacrificial death', 'human sacrifice', 'sacrificial dance' and 'funeral lament', 'victory'. Each of these themes is embodied in a few paradigmatic mythical figures (Daphne, Proserpine, Medea, Orpheus, Meleager), but is then pulverised into numerous other homologous figures who have suffered a similar fate. The polysemy of these themes manifests itself in the images through gestures that can have an inverse polarity: the defeated gesture of the Niobidian pedagogue is transformed into the triumphant pose of Andrea del Castagno's David, while the bent knee of the defeated and dying Orpheus can be transfigured into the dominant stance of Mithras slaying the bull.

If Moreau's Ovid is a device for expressing gender polarities, and Warburg's is a treasure trove of pathetic emotions reactivated over time, the Ovid of the Danish artists analysed by Jonathan Barnes is a useful tool for thinking about the relationship between humanity and the environment. As many of the essays in this issue show, Ovid's poem has had a significant historical influence on the visual arts since the Middle Ages. This life has a long history that continues to this day. The importance of the text reemerges for Maja Ingerslev, Sif Itona Westerberg and Uffe Isolotto, who reactivate some of Ovid's myths or characters today to explore contemporary concerns about anthropogenic climate change, environmental degradation, and post-human futures. These artists bring out themes that are truly central to Ovid's text and that dramatically reflect the urgencies of our own time. Maja Ingerslev uses the transformations told by Ovid to explore the boundaries between human and non-human; Sif Itona Westerberg deals with the ecological aspects of Ovid's myths to raise the issue of global warming; Uffe Isolotto reactivates the spectre of the apocalypse, a violent ecological catastrophe due to dependence on exhaustible resources.

In the three essays in this section, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* continue to be an instrument of meaningful inquiry, serving to make sense of the past and the present. Ovid provides an exhaustive store of positive and negative models that can be used and reactivated in times of need, in situations of crisis. In our own time, when Ovid is put on trial for his misogyny, real or supposed, I would like to conclude this introduction by recalling two cases in which Ovid is used as an intellectual resource, from the Italian Renaissance to contemporary Israeli photography.

In 1557, Benvenuto Cellini was accused of sodomy for having a homoerotic relationship with Fernando da Montepulciano, one of his young apprentices. During his relationship with the boy, Cellini restored a naked Roman torso as *Ganymede* and sculpted *Apollo and Hyacinth* and *Narcissus*, now in the Bargello Museum in Florence. With these three statues, depicting explicitly homoerotic themes, Cellini responded to the accusation of sodomy made against him by Baccio Bandinelli in the presence of Duke Cosimo I: on this occasion, according to his *Vita*, the artist showed that sodomy was "such a noble art", practised even by the ancient gods and heroes. In this context, the three statues with homoerotic subjects should be seen as a defensive shield, as a strong and illustrious alibi, as an intellectual strategy to legitimise his illegitimate relationship and behaviour[14]. It is curious that the interest in antiquity and young boys is closely linked to Cellini's knowledge of ancient mythology, particularly from his reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which in the 16th century was synonymous with nudes and eroticism[15].

In 2000, the Israeli photographer Adi Nes conceived an astonishing series of images entitled "Boys", evoking the gods and heroes of Greek mythology, mostly taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, although the images could not be seen as mere illustrations of myths. Many of these photographs focus on Ovid's tales, which are associated with homoeroticism. Also, in an earlier series entitled "Soldiers", made between 1994 and 2000, some of the pictures exude homoeroticism, suggesting the Greek idea of amorous solidarity between warriors, such as Achilles and Patroclus or Harmodius and Aristogeiton[16]. The artist says that as a young boy in a peripheral Israeli town like Kiryat Gat, where he grew up, the only way he could find the words to give his homosexuality a name was in the library where his mother worked, and in particular in the stories of Greek mythology[17]. All these images are staged in peripheral areas inhabited by Mizrahi (Jews from the Middle East and North Africa), who are the protagonists of the pictures, playing the roles of Greek gods and heroes[18]. As previously observed, the photo with Narcissus (fig. 1) recalls the painting in Palazzo Barberini in Rome[19]. By the side of a road, after the rain, a young boy in modern clothes looks at his reflection in a puddle. He is wearing the sandals that Adi Nes wore as a child and is

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[14] Capriotti 2017.

[15] Capriotti 2021.

[16] LeVitte Harten 2007, p. 137.

[17] I am grateful to Adi Nes for this information, which I obtained from him during an interview in Tel Aviv on April 3, 2023, during my stay as a visiting professor at Tel Aviv University. In a forthcoming essay, I will further explore the relationship between Adi Nes's art and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

[18] Cf. Gal 2023.

[19] LeVitte Harten 2007, p. 132.

therefore his double[20]. The reference to the Ovidian myth is obvious, but there is also a similar story in the Talmud: a young and beautiful shepherd, with attractive curls, is reflected in a pond and, after seeing his reflection, decides not to give in to pride and cuts off his beautiful tuft of hair[21]. Unlike his Greek counterpart, the Jewish Narcissus saves himself. The second photograph with a homoerotic mythical subject is the boy with a raven on his shoulder (fig. 2). Although Adi Nes cited Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian* and the statue of *Nimrod* by the Israeli sculptor Yitzhak Danziger as references[22], some scholars have also noted a subtle allusion to Ganymede and the eagle[23]. For two other pictures (figs. 3 and 4), Adi Nes himself cited the myth of Apollo and Hyacinth[24], as a couple of Greek *erastes* and *eromenos*[25], but he also declared that by them he meant to express «the inability of the city's residents to rise above, to escape from the place»[26]. In fact, these photographs have been interpreted as a criticism of the Israeli establishment, which marginalises the Mizrahi, who are oppressed because of their ethnic identity (not European culture and a slightly different skin colour) and considered backward and pre-modern[27]. This reasonable interpretation confirms Ovid's incredible polysemy. Although he has recently been accused of being a misogynist propagator of patriarchal culture, his *Metamorphoses* have for centuries provided the words to express not only controversial feelings but also thorny socio-political problems.

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[20] This information was provided by Adi Nes.

[21] This reference was suggested to me by Adi Nes. For the story of the Jewish Narcissus, cf. Sinensky 2017.

[22] Gal 2023, p. 36, note 6.

[23] LeVitte Harten 2007, p. 134; Gal 2023, pp. 38-39.

[24] The information can be found in Gal 2023, pp. 40-41.

[25] Cf. LeVitte Harten 2007, p. 133.

[26] Gal 2023, p. 40.

[27] Cf. Gal 2023.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. Adi Nes, *Untitled*, 2000, Color Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

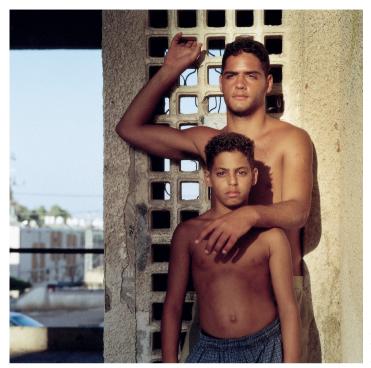Fig. 2. Adi Nes, *Untitled*, 2000, Color Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 3. Adi Nes, *Untitled*, 2000, Color Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 4. Adi Nes, *Untitled*, 2000, Color Photograph, Courtesy of the artist