

Marcin Fabianski: Correggio. Le mitologie d'amore (*Quaderni della Fondazione „Il Correggio“, Letture Allegriane 2*); Correggio: Silvana Editoriale/Fondazione Il Correggio 2000; 182 S., 45 Farbtafeln, 45 SW-Abb.; ISBN 88-8215-166-2; Lit. 25.000

When CAROLYN SMYTH complained in her recent monograph on the decoration of Parma Cathedral that it „has become customary on the part of many recent writers, [...], to set Correggio against the cultural ambiance of Parma“, she cannot have been alluding to Fabianski's book on the painters' allegories of love¹. This book indeed puts Correggio's works in the context of painting from northern and central Italy, making comparisons with artists from Leonardo, Mantegna and Perino del Vaga to Raphael, Giulio Romano and Michelangelo.

Although the text was published in 1998 in an english edition, the better quality and availability of this italian translation merits a new review². The discussion of all paintings labelled „erotic poesie“ touches upon most aspects of these paintings, and in the study of Correggio's paintings, this book cannot be passed over – without saying that it is faultless. Discussing the known facts of the provenance of the paintings and their patron(s), it is proposed to consider Federico Gonzaga as the commissioner of all works. The rest of the book supports this thesis by investigating their composition and meaning.

In the second and main part of the book, Fabianski elucidates the artistic exchange between Correggio and a number of other artists, and their common fascination for anything antique discovered during those early decades of the sixteenth century. Former studies on the influence of Leonardo on Correggio and the Emilian background of the painter are expanded into a wider artistic context³. Between Rome, Mantua and Venice there was a lively exchange of themes and motifs. It is suggested, that the artists were urged to incorporate antique references by their patrons, and in the case of Correggio the figure of Gonzaga again turns up. His sojourn at the papal court of Julius II brought him into contact with other collectors of antiquities, and with artists using those new discoveries in their current works, especially Michelangelo and Raphael. Not only in the case of Correggio, but also the famous exchange of letters with Titian shows the involvement of the patron with his artists⁴.

In the *Education of Amor*, Fabianski contrasts the position and expression of each protagonist with quite a number of comparisons. The figure of Venus is set against Leonardo's Leda, but its far more classical impression is traced, by analogy with an-

1 CAROLYN SMYTH: Correggio's Frescoes in Parma Cathedral; Princeton 1997.

2 MARCIN FABIANSKI: Correggio's Erotic Poesie; Kraków 1998.

3 DAVID ALLEN BROWN: The young Correggio and his Leonardesque Sources; Diss. Yale, 1973 (New York, Garland Publ. 1981); and HEINRICH BODMER: Correggio und die Malerei der Emilia; Wien 1942.

4 On the relation between Federico and Titian two books have recently been published: DIANE H. BODART: Tiziano e Federico II Gonzaga: Storia di un rapporto di committenza; Rome 1998; and LISA ZEITZ: „Tizian, teurer Freund ...“ : Tizian und Federico Gonzaga : Kunstpatronage in Mantua im 16. Jahrhundert; Petersberg 2000.

tique and some Seicento sculptures, to a presumed roman prototype. In the figure of Mercury references are seen to diverse examples as a seated Madonna in a *cartone* by Leonardo, but also a Neptune by Polidoro da Caravaggio in the Villa Lante in Rome. As in the case of the Venus, also here antique prototypes are presumed, and recognized in the *Hermes* of Lysippos and an anonymous torso of a satyr. The actual theme of the painting, the reading Cupid (also the only figure for which a preparatory design exists) is linked to the description of the scene in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*; but preceding designs by Giulio Romano and Raphael of analogous subjects are deemed more important, being visual, examples, then the poetic evocation in Colonna's book.

Fabianski's search for analogous motifs in other works can be exaggerated. The traditional comparison of the *Jupiter and Io* with the *Ara Grimani* is here nuanced, because in the opinion of Fabianski, the hand behind the back of the nude female figure differs in the two scenes⁵. After noting this fact, a number of other works containing a view on the back of a nude female figure is consulted, which leads to the conclusion that none of the antique models nor the contemporaneous roman designs could furnish Correggio with the exact idea for his composition⁶. Likewise difficult remain the three figures in the *Leda*, of which has been assumed that they represented three different phases of the same story. One of them is however 'disqualified' by Fabianski on the grounds of another facial type⁷. The turn of the face in another direction makes this comparison problematic, but more importantly, there is no indication why she should be another figure.

The third part of the book traces the iconography of the paintings to the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, but also beyond that, to antique texts as Ovid's *Ars Amandi* and works by Lucianus, Pliny and Plato. Mario Equicola, Federico Gonzaga's secretary, wrote the treatise *Libro de natura de amore*, and is held responsible for the theme of the two first paintings, as well the inspiration of the four *Amori di Giove* – he died in 1525, when those paintings had probably not been commissioned. Correggio did not follow the given texts literally, but turned the subjects into *poesie d'amore* – and in this respect, the discussion in the second part of the book had explained earlier just how inventive these compositions were devised.

The significance of the ensemble of paintings – whether they were hung together or not in Federico's palace in Mantua or not – is related by Fabianski to the personal circumstances of the patron. In the years during which the paintings were executed, approximately from 1527 and the death of the painter in 1534, Federico Gonzaga's amorous lifestyle became ever more complicated until he had to leave his mistress Isabella Boschetto for an official marriage to Margherita Paleologa. The changing tone of the paintings, especially in the *Amore di Giove*, is interpreted here as expressing the patrons' remorse during these events. Although this is merely suggested by the con-

5 This comparison was first made by JOSEF STRZYGOWSKI: *Das Werden des Barock bei Raphael und Correggio*, Strasbourg 1898 p. 107 and followed in all subsequent publications.

6 FABIANSKI (wie Anm 2), p. 78.

7 CECIL GOULD: *The Paintings of Correggio*; London 1976, p. 133f.

temporaneity with the paintings, this conclusion is not to be turned down immediately. The private nature of the subjects and formats of the series definitely points at a patron involved in more than superficial ways in the iconography, which argues against the supposition that a number of them were commissioned as official gifts to Charles V of Spain.

On the other hand, however, the dichotomy between the second part where antique motifs are regarded as motifs without significance, and the third part where the duke's love-life was transformed into allegorical representations, becomes most apparent. Fabianski leaves aside the discussion on Renaissance-culture, where word and image were not studied separately but in relation. Like the antique works of art were transformed into new compositions that emulated but also reformulated them for a new age, antique texts were neither translated straightforwardly, but often rewritten for a new public⁸. In Correggio's case, it can be expected that those aspects were indeed related – that the pose and context of the figures was adjusted to the painting's meaning. Collecting antique objects, as Gonzaga did, was more than just a pass-time, as the letters between his nephew Cesare and the antiquarian Garimberto suggest⁹. Why did Correggio use the *Ara Grimani* for his composition of the *Io*? Not only to heighten the attraction for the male viewer, as Fabianski seems to suggest, but because the *Ara* represented the kiss of Amor and Psyche. It would be interesting to know, whether the fifteenth-century viewer would have had another interpretation, that set this in specific relation to the subject of Jupiter and Io.

Lastly, the representation of the theme of love should be regarded in the context of the revival of petrarchan amorous ideals¹⁰. The *Ars Amandi* by Ovid was not read only as a manual of „how to love“, it was at the same time a treatise on correct behaviour – and those kinds of books ultimately resulted in the famous *Il libro del cortegiano* by Castiglione – with whom Federico was in contact from 1519 on¹¹. In those treatises, the function and meaning of earthly as opposed, or in other instances, aligned with celestial love, is the main topic¹². A comparable theme must have been underlying the cycle of paintings that Correggio developed during the last two decades of his life; and that reflected at the same time the maturing patron – in intellectual sense.

Although Fabianski set out to present the six paintings as a coherent series commissioned by Federico Gonzaga for private enjoyment, its conclusion that they pri-

8 BODO GUTHMÜLLER: Studien zur antiken Mythologie in der Italienischen Renaissance; Weinheim 1986, p. 121, referring to the iconography of Giulio Romano's Sala dei Giganti in Mantua.

9 CLIFFORD M. BROWN and ANNA MARIA LORENZONI: ‚Our accustomed discourse on the antique‘. Cesare Gonzaga and Gerolamo Garimberto. Two Renaissance Collectors of Greco-Roman Art; New York – London 1993.

10 FLORA A. BASSANESE: „Petrarchism“ in: *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, PAUL F. GRENDLER ed., New York 1999, vol. 4, p. 459; a more specific study is MIA COCCO: *La tradizione cortese ed il petrarchismo nella poesia di Clement Marot*; Firenze 1978.

11 CLIFFORD M. BROWN, GUY DELMARCEL, ANNA MARIA LORENZONI: *Tapestries for the Courts of Federico II, Ercole, and Ferrante Gonzaga, 1522–63*; Seattle – London 1996, p. 43 f.

12 See for an introduction on this theme VICTORIA VON FLEMMING: *Arma Amoris. Sprachbild und Bildsprache der Liebe*; Kardinal Scipione Borghese und die Gemäldezyklen Francesco Albanis; Mainz 1996, p. 90 f.

marily reflect the events in the life of the patron seems only a part of the explanation. The merit of this study is the artistic contextualization of Correggio's works, and the many influences he absorbed from Roman and Mantuan culture, and the individual use he made of them. The reception of the paintings, and their intended meaning, must however have been more than just a pun on the private affairs of the Duke – they will have offered a visual counterpart on the discussion of love, in which antique and modern arguments were used to define the behaviour of the courtier.

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Kurt Löcher: Barthel Beham. Ein Maler aus dem Dürerkreis (*Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien*, 81); München – Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 1999; 260 S. mit 148 überwiegend farb. Abb.; ISBN 3-422-06261-0; DM 148,-

Allzu festgefügt erscheint mitunter das geläufige Bild von der Malerei im Heiligen Römischen Reich, die nach dem Tode Dürers 1528 und mit der zeitgleich auf breiter Front eingeführten Reformation auf ein mittelmäßiges Niveau herabsank. So sehr dies fallweise auch zutreffen mag, desto überraschendere Perspektiven tun sich auf, wenn das Schaffen eines Meisters der Dürernachfolge in einer bislang unbekanntem Breite dargeboten wird. Dies ist bei Löchers Monographie über den Maler Barthel Beham (1502–1540) in mancher Hinsicht der Fall, denn auf dem Gebiet des Kupferstiches ebenso wie in der Portraitkunst leistete der Nürnberger Bemerkenswertes, vielfach Vorzügliches. Mit seinem Buch löst Löcher ein Forschungsdesiderat ein, daß er selbst im Jahre 1967 formuliert hatte, als er seine Studien zur oberdeutschen Portraitkunst veröffentlichte¹. Auch war Beham im gleichen Jahr ein Teil seines Beitrages zur Festschrift für den Freiburger Lehrer Kurt Bauch gewidmet². Sieben Jahre zuvor hatte sich Löcher bei ihm mit seiner Dissertation über den habsburgischen Hofportraitisten Jakob Seisenegger erstmals als Spezialist für das oberdeutsche Bildnis im 16. Jahrhundert ausgewiesen³.

Die Monographie setzt mit einem Kapitel über die wenigen Lebensdaten Behams ein, wobei hier naturgemäß das Hauptaugenmerk dem gut überlieferten und mehrfach untersuchten Prozess von 1525 gilt, von dem aus sich der Bogen zum Werk des Künstlers freilich nur schwer schlagen läßt. Alle folgenden Kapitel sind nun künstlerischen Fragen gewidmet: zunächst Holzschnitt und Radierung (S. 21), ab den Nürnberger Jahren (S. 55) dann – bis auf zehn Seiten zu den Zeichnungen (S. 107) und sechs zu den Bildnisstichen (S. 123) – dem malerischen Werk Behams, das damit

1 KURT LÖCHER: Studien zur oberdeutschen Bildnismalerei des 16. Jahrhunderts, in: *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg* 4, 1967, S. 50.

2 KURT LÖCHER: Nürnberger Bildnisse nach 1520, in: MARGRIT LISNER und RÜDIGER BECKSMANN (Hrsg.): *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien für Kurt Bauch zum 70. Geburtstag von seinen Schülern*; München-Berlin 1967; S. 115–124.

3 Gedruckt: KURT LÖCHER: Jakob Seisenegger. Hofmaler Kaiser Ferdinands I. (*Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien*, 31); München – Berlin 1962.