



Graphic illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A selection of the most important executions

Aleksandra Giełdoń-Paszek

University of Silesia

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has aroused uninterrupted interest almost since the moment it was created¹. The reception of this ancient masterpiece started already in the Middle Ages, but the poem gained particular popularity in modern times. Secondary-level students used it with the aim to improve their rhetorical skills². Even Gallus Anonymus is reported to have known it along with works by other ancient authors. Owing to its popularity, the *Metamorphoses* was translated into modern languages, its content enriched by explanations and commentaries. In 1315–1318 Ovid was translated for Queen Joan of Burgundy. In 1333 or 1334 appeared the first Italian translation, in the Tuscan dialect, by the Florentine notary Arrigo Simintendi. Around 1340, Pierre Bersuire (Petrus Berchorius), associated with the papal court in Avignon, put out an edition of the poem which was extremely faithful to the original, adding commentaries which would set the norm for the centuries that followed. This interpretation was an attempt to adapt the content of the poem to Christian culture: moralizing commentaries Christianized the ancient mythology. According to this interpretive strategy, the myths conveyed hidden meanings. Christian interpreters sought to show that even though the ancients did not know God, the sages and the poets of the ancient era sensed his existence; therefore, they invented mythology in order to allow simple people to understand principles that can be observed in the created world³.

Called “the *Bible* of poets and painters”, the *Metamorphoses* has permeated all modern culture⁴. Over the centuries, it has been published and reprinted numerous times, becoming one of the most

1. W. Solis, *Myrmidons; People from ants for King Aeacus*, illustration for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Frankfurt 1587, Book VII, line 622–642, woodcut, 6.13 × 4.71 cm. Photo from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virgil_solis_ovid_metamorphosen7_11.png (access date: 31.03.2022)



¹ In the field of music, for example, Antonio Brescianello's opera *La Tisbe Giuseppe*. William Shakespeare, influenced by Arthur Golding's translation of 1567, wove Ovidian motifs into many of his plays. Numerous examples of this kind can be found in the history of culture.

² See D. Blume, *Visualizing Metamorphosis: Picturing the Metamorphoses of Ovid in 14th Century Italy*, “Troianalexandrina” Vol. 14 (2014).

³ See M. Wichowa, “Przeobrażenia” Jakuba Żebrowskiego i “Przemiany” Waleriana Otwinowskiego. *Dwa staropolskie przekłady “Metamorfoz” Owidiusza*, Łódź 1990, p. 30.

⁴ The term “*Bible* of poets” comes from the first French edition of the *Metamorphoses*. Bartholomeus Spranger paraphrased it, calling Ovid's work “the *Bible* of painters”.



⁵ M. Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art*, London 2005.

⁶ Aby Warburg was the first scholar the earliest research on the reception of the *Metamorphoses* was undertaken by: A. Warburg, *Dürer und die italienische Antike*, [in:] *idem, Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, Hrsg. D. Wuttke, Baden-Baden 1992, http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/1630/1/Warburg_Vortrag_Duerer_und_die_italienische_Antike_1906.pdf (access date: 31.03.2022)

popular literary works and an inspiration for artists representing various disciplines: from visual arts through theatre to music. The poem enjoyed its greatest popularity in the 15th and 16th c. in Italy. It was then that its interpretations in the form of paintings and engravings were created. Modern editions were traditionally decorated with illustrative graphics.

Written between 2 and 8 AD during the reign of Emperor Octavian Augustus, Ovid's epic poem consists of about 250 myths, which are free interpretations of bizarre transformations: of people into animals, into elements of flora, into cosmic bodies, as well as... into people. The gods are the perpetrators of these transformations: this is how they punish the mortals who have betrayed them. At the end of the poem, Julius Caesar and Octavian Augustus are found among the deities described there. Incidentally, the latter expelled the poet from Rome for an unspecified transgression.

Ovid's poetic output places him among the greatest writers of the classical era, such as Virgil, Horace, and Cicero. Although the *Metamorphoses* is a pillar of classical literature, commonly associated with edifying notions and ideals, almost every transformation depicted in the poem involves rape, acts of despair, and deeds which bear the thinly disguised marks of pedophilia or ephebophilia. For these reasons, the motif of Ovidian transformations, often taken up by artists, was in fact a camouflaged depiction of more or less perverse eroticism, as pointed out by Malcolm Bull, a researcher concerned with this issue⁵. Scenes from the *Metamorphoses* adorned the walls of early modern villas and palaces (among the most famous are: Caracci's cycle in Palazzo Farnese, Giorgio Vasari's Sala degli Elementi in Palazzo della Signoria in Florence, Correggio's Mantuan series of paintings dedicated to love affairs of the gods) and their meaning varied, from camouflaged pornography, through affirmations of nature's bountiful variety, to issues of morality and philosophy. Among the Renaissance painters who directly referred to Ovid's work poet were Andrea Mantegna, Piero di Cosimo, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Sandro Botticelli, and Titian. It is impossible to list all of the artists, as almost every mythological motif seems to have its literary source in *The Metamorphoses*⁶.

One of the most popular Ovidian themes is that of Apollo and Daphne. In the popular consciousness, this theme is firmly associated with Gianlorenzo Bernini's juvenile sculpture. Dating from 1470 to 1480, Pollaiuolo's painting *Apollo and Daphne* (probably the lid of a cassone) illustrates Ovid's text at the moment when the god has already captured the chastity-vowing nymph Daphne. She now begs her father, the god of the river, for help in these words:

“Help me my father, if thy flowing streams
have virtue! Cover me, O mother Earth!
Destroy the beauty that has injured me,

or change the body that destroys my life".
 Before her prayer was ended, torpor seized
 on all her body, and a thin bark closed
 around her gentle bosom, and her hair
 became as moving leaves; her arms were changed
 to waving branches, and her active feet
 as clinging roots were fastened to the ground –
 her face was hidden with encircling leaves⁷.

The transformation of Daphne into a tree is depicted in a rather straightforward fashion, as her hands are already leafy branches. This is the most common treatment of this subject in art. In the Polish collection (National Museum in Wrocław), there is a painting by Abraham Bloemaert, created in 1592 in the spirit of Dutch Mannerism, in which the moment of Daphne's transformation is depicted in an unusual fashion, i.e., in the background. This scene was commonly interpreted as representing a heroic victory of virtue over concupiscence.

Mantegna's 1497 painting *Parnassus* is a depiction of the adulterous love of Mars and Venus depicted in Book IV of the *Metamorphoses*, which features the figure of Apollo among the Muses. The work was intended for the studiolo of Isabella d'Este at the Castle of San Giorgio in Mantua. Only three years earlier (1500) is Piero di Cosimo's painting *The Death of Procris* from the *Bacchanalia* cycle, inspired by the works of Ovid and Lucretius. According to Ervin Panofsky, this cycle, with its references to the beginnings of human civilization, was one of the first artistic representations of the nature/culture dichotomy⁸.

In Botticelli's work, inspiration with the text of the *Metamorphoses* is manifested in arguably his most famous painting: *Primavera*, created in 1477–1482. The nymph Chloris, represented in the painting, is embraced by Zephyr and transforms into Flora. Flowers come out of her mouth as she tries to run away from Zephyr, who eventually turns out to be stronger.

Titian touched on motifs taken from Ovid in a series of mythological paintings created for King Philip II of Spain in 1554–1562. Among them were the themes of Diana and Calisto as well as of Diana and Actaeon. Diana's discovery of Calisto's betrayal and pregnancy is described by Ovid thus:

Her silence and her blushes were the signs
 of injured honour. [...]
 Quickly they
 undid their garments – but Calisto hid
 behind the others, till they knew her state.
 Diana in a rage exclaimed, "Away!
 Thou must not desecrate our sacred springs!"
 And she was driven thence⁹.



⁷Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Boston 1922, book 1, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028%3Abook%3D1%3Acard%3D525> (access date: 6.04.2022).

⁸ See D. Blume, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁹ Ovid, *op. cit.*, book 2, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028%3Abook%3D2%3Acard%3D401> (access date: 31.03.2022).



2. C. Mansion, *Mars*, illustration from the *Ovide Moralisé*, 1484, woodcut, 328 × 485 cm; Brugia, Public Library. Photo from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colard_Mansion#/media/File:Ovide_introduction.jpg (access date: 31.03.2022)

Calisto is transformed into a she-bear. In turn, Actaeon, inadvertently watching Diana's bathing retinue, is transformed by the virgin goddess into a deer. This topic was also taken up by Lucas Cranach and we can find its depiction in Parmigianino's frescoes in the castle of Fontanellato and in Rembrandt's works, these being just a few examples of numerous painterly references to the *Metamorphoses*. Ovidian motifs were taken up by almost all of the greater and lesser painters, especially in the trend characterized by the apotheosis of ancient culture, as represented, for instance, by Poussin and the Bolognese eclectics.

A peculiar illustration of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the herbarium of the Lutheran pastor Jerzy Andrzej (Georg Andreas) Helwing (1666–1748), a doctor and naturalist from Węgorzewo; it is found in the collection of the National Library in Warsaw¹⁰. Helwing was educated at the universities of Königsberg (Królewiec) and Wittenberg, so he was familiar with the ancient literary canon. The covers of the herbarium, framed in leather, are decorated with images representing the transformations of the gods into plants: Daphne into a laurel tree, Hyacinthus into a flower, Cypris into a citrus tree, the daughters of Helios into poplar trees. Helwing begins each of the two volumes of his herbarium with a watercolor image of Chloris, the goddess of flowers. This amateur work is yet another proof of the widespread reception of the *Metamorphoses*.

Although most of the painterly references to mythology can be regarded as depictions of Ovid's poem, there are works which explicitly declare a connection with the poem's content. Such undoubtedly are the graphic illustrations that decorate printed editions of the *Metamorphoses*. Before the invention of printing, illustrations were miniatures inserted in the text of the poem. The first of those are considered to be 284 miniatures for Pierre Bersuire's edition, but work on them was abruptly interrupted, perhaps due to the political situation in which his client found himself¹¹. This luxurious manuscript is stored at Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Germany. Another known illustrated version is a manuscript translated by Arrigo Simintendi, a Florentine notary, from around 1333¹². It is decorated with amateur drawings in the margins. Dating from the period 1360–1370, they were probably created to provide readers with visualizations of the poem's content.

After the invention of printing, the illustrated book is also undergoing vigorous development. The oldest illustration technique was that of the woodcut. The *Metamorphoses* was a favorite subject due to its popularity with readers, the growing interest in antiquity, and the content perfectly suited to illustrative narration. This is confirmed by the fact that from 1500 to 1599, i.e., in over a hundred years, about a hundred illustrated versions of the poem were published in print. The authors of these editions most often reworked the original by making a selection of the episodes or by providing the text with



¹⁰ See K. Spalik, *Zielnik Georga Andreasa Helwinga, część III*, <http://blog.polona.pl/2015/02/hyacinthum-in-florem> (access date: 31.03.2022).

¹¹ D. Blume, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹² The manuscript is in the collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS Panciatichi 63.

their own comments. It is worth noting, however, that the *Metamorphoses*, as a text that began to function in mass culture as a result of a huge number of editions, often differed considerably from the original. Indeed, the translation of Ovid's work is a distinct research problem, discussed in contemporary publications on the subject.

Dating from 1484, a woodcut edition of the *Metamorphoses* appeared in Bruges in the publishing house of Colard Mansion, one of the first humanist printers in the region. Unfortunately, this incunabula, in Mansion's edition, probably contributed to the bankruptcy of the publisher. The book *Ovide moralisé* (an anonymous verse adaptation of the *Metamorphoses* in Old French from the early 14th c.) in Mansion's edition gained fame as "*the Bible des poètes* [the Bible of poets]". It was subsequently reprinted as *Grand Olympe des Histoires poëtiques du Prince de poésie Ovide Naso en sa Metamorphose* and then reprinted again and again during the Renaissance. The woodcuts for *Ovide moralisé* are extremely simple, linear compositions, which lack the later finesse of French and Dutch Mannerist masters [Fig. 2].

In Italy, already in the Middle Ages, common was the practice of commenting on the *Metamorphoses* and publishing the poem under a transformed title in the form of a limited selection of source passages. The editors had a moralizing purpose in view. In 1322–1323 Giovanni del Virgilio, a school teacher from Bologna, published *Allegorie librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos prosaice ac metricae compilatae*, which is a good illustration of this tradition¹³. In 1375–1377 Giovanni dei Bonsignori, using Virgilio's text, spread this tradition. His edition of Ovid went through six reeditions. The 1497 edition was the first Italian edition to be decorated with woodcuts¹⁴. We can see in these decorations the influence of Andrea Mantegna's work from Camera degli Spozzi in Mantua, the assumption being that this painter, who was also a great engraver, contributed some scenes to the graphic version¹⁵. These woodcuts were added to each subsequent edition of Ovid's poem. They were even included in the *Metamorphoses* edited by Raffaele Regio (Raphael Regius) from 1518: the original Latin edition with critical commentaries by this eminent Venetian humanist¹⁶. Regio was member of a team of humanists gathered in the circle of Aldo Pio Manuzio's (Aldus Pius Manutius) publishing house, called Neacademia (from Greek, meaning "New Academy"). He became famous for his lectures on textual criticism and his editions of Latin literary works. Giovanni Tacuino from Tridino is named as the publisher of this edition of the *Metamorphoses*. He owned a printing press, which was not as famous as Manuzio's, but which also popularized the classics. However, versions of Ovid's poem with Bonsignori's commentary continued being published and even a verse translation by Niccolò degli Agostini appeared in 1522.

Among the many graphic illustrations of Ovid's works dating from the 15th c., we should mention above all the famous series of 53 woodcuts to the *Methamorphoseos vulgare*, published in Venice



¹³ See L. Rietveld, *The "Metamorphosis of Orpheus" in Italian Editions of Ovid's "Metamorphoses", 1325–1570*, [in:] *The Legacy of Antiquity: New Perspectives in the Reception of the Classical World*, Ed. L. Kouneni, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013.

¹⁴ See L. Rietveld, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ See *ibidem*.

¹⁶ See *ibidem*.

3. L. Giunti, illustration from *Metamorphoseos vulgare*, Venice 1497, woodcut, 29.8 × 20.6 cm; Collection Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura, Milano. Photo from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamorphoses#/media/File:Ovidius_Naso_Metamorphoses,_del_MCCCCLXXXVII_Adi_X_del_mese_di_aprile_1583162_Carta_a1r.jpeg (access date: 31.03.2022)

in the printing house of Lucantonio Giunta in 1497 [Fig. 3]¹⁷. These graphics influenced the illustrative cycles created in later times, for example, the 1545 Mainz edition of the poem with woodcuts designed by Jörg Wickram. There are three types of compositions in these woodcuts: simultaneous narration, which is considered archaic; simultaneous narration, with an accentuated central stage; and monoscenic, with emphasis placed on the main stage¹⁸. In addition to the overarching purpose, which was to illustrate the text of the poem, woodcuts which represented transformations were expected to convey a moralizing meaning. This meaning was related to the problem of man's degradation to an animal or vegetable form. The woodcuts from *Ovidio metamorphoseos vulgare* do not yet have the status of an autonomous composition; their inferiority to the illustrated text is clearly visible.

One of the most important printers who published the *Metamorphoses* in Venice in 1584 was Giacomo Franco (1550–1620). In his graphics, there is a simultaneity of the scenes depicted. This feature allowed him to include in one graphic composition many motifs described by Ovid. Simultaneism was also popular in 16th c. English book art until the 18th century¹⁹. The aesthetic theories of Shaftesbury and Lessing, inclined towards the showing of only one, selected moment, brought about a decline of this method. Previously, Hendrick Goltzius's 17th c. illustrations were an exception in that they represented one scene.

In 1563, an edition of the *Metamorphoses* with 173 woodcuts by Virgilio Solis (1514–1562) was published in Frankfurt²⁰. He gained a reputation as an illustrator (working mainly in woodcuts), although his graphics were also sold separately. Solis's woodcuts enjoyed great success, as evidenced by their reprinting in as many as 25 editions in various languages by 1652 (probably his matrices were used)²¹. Fragments of his bordure designs also appear in 1576 as decorations of the Sgraffito Haus in Retz, Austria. Each of the small scenes has a rich cartouche setting, interwoven with grotesque ornaments [Fig. 1]. This intricate ornamental decoration is the distinguishing feature Solis's works, for the figural composition and narration themselves are fairly unsophisticated. The physiognomy of the characters is almost primitive in its representation, while their gestures are very suggestive. Modeling is based on simple hatching. Some graphics bear Solis's monogram. The style is uneven, which may indicate that the works executed by the woodcutter's coworkers, as this was his common practice. We know that Solis was inspired by a series of 178 woodcuts made by Bernard Solomon, published in France (Lyon 1557) and the Netherlands (Van der Borcht – Antwerp 1591)²². A comparison of the series of the two authors shows surprising similarity, as though Solis had copied Solomon, although the formats of the former's works are larger. The compositions of the individual scenes are almost identical, but devoid of Solomon's mannerist finesse.



¹⁷ These illustrations are available at: https://www.google.com/erch?q=Lucantonio+Giunta+1497+ovid&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjs2siRms72AhUSg_0HHYCGAAQQ_AUoA3oECAEQBQ&biw=1366&bih=625&dpr=1 (access date: 31.03.2022).

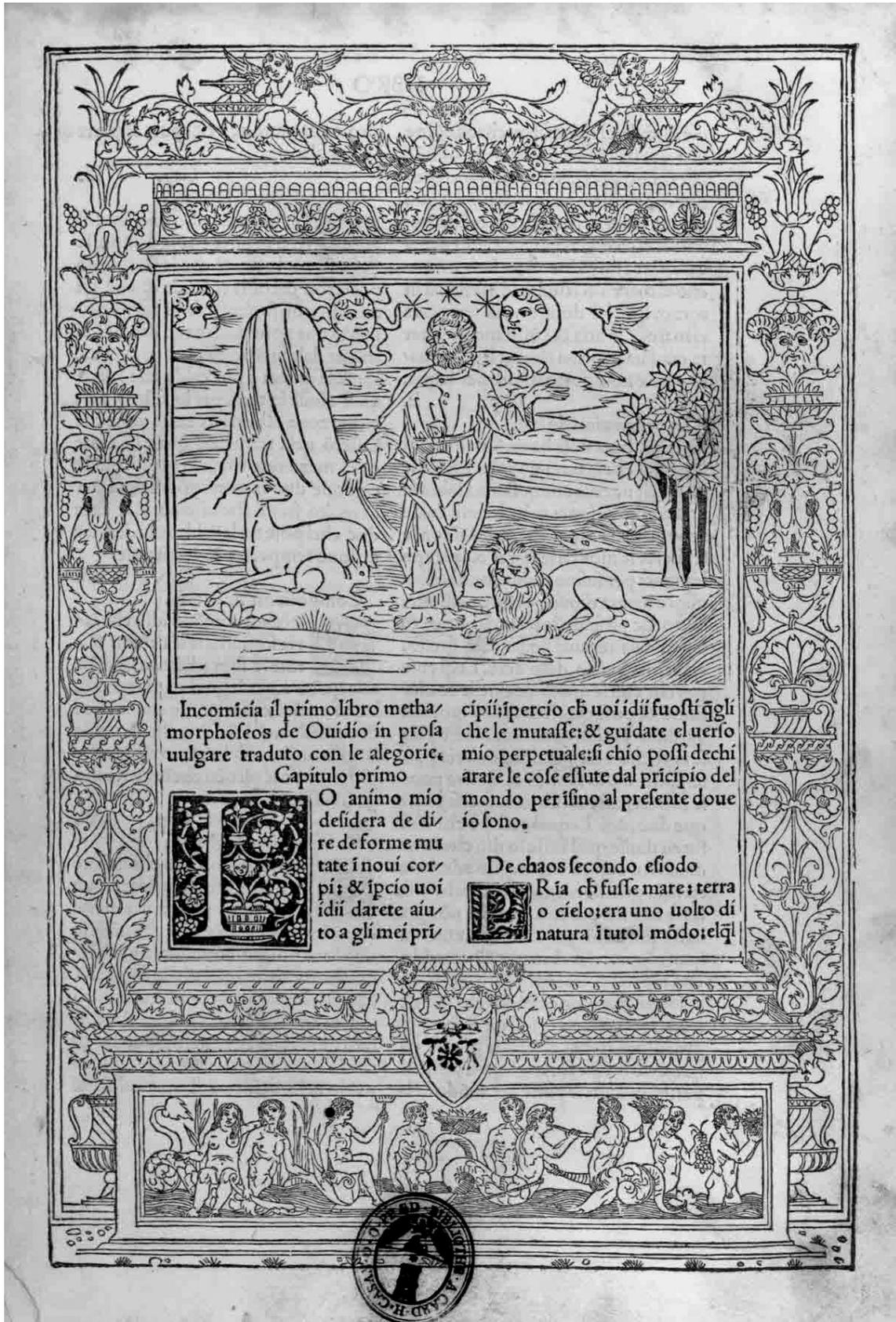
¹⁸ E. Blattner, *Holzschnittfolgen zu den "Metamorphosen" des Ovid: Venedig 1497 und Mainz 1545*, München 1998.

¹⁹ A. Śliwa writes extensively on this subject in: *Graficzna narracja. Ilustracje do paryskiego wydania "Metamorfoz" Owidiusza (1637) z trzech egzemplarzy w zbiorach polskich, "Barok" 2007, No. 1, <http://barok.edu.pl/images/Barok27-2007/10-AnnaSliwa.pdf> (access date: 31.03.2022).*

²⁰ *Metamorphoses Ovidii, argvmentis qui/dem soluta oratione, Enarrationibus autem & Allegoriis Elegiaco uersu accuratissime expositae, summaque diligentia ac studio illustratae, per M. Iohan. Sprengivm Avgvstan. Una cum uivis singularum transformationum Iconibus a Virgilio Solis, eximio pictore, delineatis, G. Corvinus, S. Feyerabend, & haeredes VVygandi Gallii, Frankfurt 1563.*

²¹ The first edition, published by the consortium of George Corvinus and Sigismund Feyerabend, appeared in 1563 and had a title page in Latin and German. It was actually an adaptation of the original text of the Roman poet.

²² Solis's works can be viewed on: http://www.latein-pagina.de/ovid_illustrationen/virgil_solis/buch5/inhalt_buch5.htm (access date: 31.03.2022).





4. H. Goltzius, *The Fall of Phaeton*, from the series *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Netherlandish 1588, engraving, 18.1 × 25.8 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Fall_of_Phaeton,_from_the_series_Ovid%27s_Metamorphoses_MET_DP108226.jpg (access date: 31.03.2022)

Bernard Salomon (1506–1561) collaborated as an illustrator with the most prominent printers of his time, such as Jean de Tournes and Robert Granjon, whose father-in-law he was. He illustrated both emblems and books on ancient and religious themes, e.g., the *Bible*. In the poses of his refined figures we can detect the influence of the Mannerists of Fontainebleau. Solis's borrowings are evidence of the great popularity he enjoyed with his contemporaries. Solomon's illustrations for the *Metamorphoses* are composed on the principle of placing the appropriate scene against the background of a grotesque ornament, which serves as a kind of wide border²³. Each of the 183 scenes has a framed, cursive allegorical inscription underneath.

In the 16th c., the popularity of ancient themes in the Netherlands spread thanks to Cornelis Floris, Carel van Mander, and Bartholomeus Spranger. In 1604, Carel van Mander published *The Book of Painters*, which contains the first translation of the *Metamorphoses* into Dutch and which was later republished 12 times over a period of 33 years. It was in this atmosphere that Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) created a set of copperplate illustrations for the 1589 edition of the *Metamorphoses*, which became a classic model for later illustrators. This graphic designer came from a family with artistic traditions. Initially associated with the Haarlem studio of Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert, he was heavily influenced, not only by Dürer's prints but also by Dutch mannerists such as Bartholomeus Spranger. Prompted by Carl van Mander – with whom, after leaving Coornhert's workshop, he founded the so-called Harlem Academy, educating students regardless of the execution of commissioned work – Goltzius embarked on an independent career. During almost 25 years of creative work, he made many printing matrices, using primarily the copperplate engraving technique. The breakthrough was a trip to Italy in 1590, after which a more classic trend appeared, first in his prints and subsequently also in his painting. He painted for the last 17 years of his life, having abandoning graphics.

The cycle of Hendrick Goltzius's *Metamorphoses* was created in 1589–1590, but was resumed as many as three times: in 1652, 1680, and in 1728²⁴. Goltzius made all the projects himself, according to his own invention, and with a little help from his students, although the work on preparing the engraving for printing was generally divided into three stages, performed by different people²⁵. It was teamwork then, although some illustrators, like Hendrick Goltzius, would combine all these functions. At the same time, Goltzius showed great innovation and did not duplicate the patterns of his predecessors, despite this being a fairly common practice. However, he could also be a skillful imitator of the style of others, which earned him the nickname *Proteus Vertumnus*, or "Face Changer" (as a reference to the Roman god). Such an attitude fits into the mannerist concept of art, with its affirmation of the superiority of creation over reproduc-



²³ Illustrations are available at: <https://www.princeton.edu/~graphics/2011/09/ovid.html> (access date: 31.03.2022).

²⁴ From 11 August to 27 September 2020, at the Historical Museum in Skierniewice held an exhibition of Goltzius's graphics illustrating the *Metamorphoses* in the 1728 edition, from the collection of Wojciech Jakubczyk, curator of the exhibition. See "Metamorfozy" Owidiusza – mity greckie w rycinach według Hendrika Goltziusa, <https://news.niezlasztuka.net/event/metamorfozy-owidiusza-mity-greckie-rycinach-wedlug-hendrika-goltziusa> (access date: 31.03.2022).

²⁵ This included composition design, the technical side of matrix development, and publication.



²⁶ Ovid's "Metamorphoses", in *Latin, Translated into Francis, with Remarks, and Historical Explanations*, Amsterdam 1732.

²⁷ See M. Biżozór-Salwa, K. Frejlich, J. Szumańska, "Metamorfozy" i ich metamorfozy, <https://www.lazienki-krolewskie.pl/pl/edukacja/programy-dla-przedszkole-i-szkol/materialy-dla-nauczycieli/materialy-dla-nauczycieli-metamorfozy-i-ich-metamorfozy> (access date: 31.03.2022).

tion. Soon he became famous throughout Europe, to which Carl van Mander, who promoted Goltzius's work and placed his biography in his *Book of Painters*, made a substantial contribution.

Goltzius planned to make 300 copperplate engravings for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (20 for each of the books), but ended up making only 52, illustrating books I and II and some episodes from books III and IV. Goltzius's graphics tell Ovidian stories using both simultaneous and monoscenic narration. The musculature of the characters and their bulk make a powerful impression. Anatomy is carefully outlined in the nudes, which are numerous. These are multi-character, dynamic compositions, with a deep chiaroscuro modeling [Fig. 4]. Their scale can be compared with that of the woodcut illustrations of the *Bible* executed by Gustave Doré 200 years later.

The literary source of the mythological motifs in the 18th c. was the edition of the *Metamorphoses* published in Venice in 1561 by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara. The most important illustrations of this time include a series of 83 drawings by Godfried Maes (1649–1700), made in 1664–1700 as preparatory sketches for an edition of the poem. After the artist's death, they were sold in 1762 and scattered, which is why they were never published as a whole collection. Some of these drawings were included in the 1732 edition of the *Metamorphoses*, whose engravers were Bernard Picart and Peter van Gunst²⁶. Maes's drawings are characterized by classical idealization; however, his Ovidian compositions are usually dynamic, and the violent gesticulation of the characters and chiaroscuro contrasts enhance the dramaturgy of the narrative [Fig. 5].

In 1767–1771 an edition of the *Metamorphoses* was published on the initiative of the Parisian publisher Pierre-François Basan with engravings in the etching technique combined with copperplate engraving by the best French artists. These illustrations gained great popularity and the book went through many publications. This collection became part of the Cabinet of Prints owned by Stanisław August Poniatowski. The king had in his possession a set of 141 illustrations (*Les métamorphoses d'Ovide gravées sur les dessins des meilleurs peintres français. Par les soins des S.rs le Mire et Basan Graveurs*, Paris 1771, Cabinet of Engravings of the University of Warsaw, Inw.zb.d. 21182/1-163, formerly Vol. 475) and acquired others. 95 graphics were used to decorate the White House in the Łazienki²⁷.

The earliest Polish edition of the *Metamorphoses*, translated by Jakub Żebrowski, comes from 1636 and was entitled *Metamorphoseon, to jest Przeobrażenia ksiąg piętnaście* (*Metamorphoseon, that is Transformations in Fifteen Books*). Not much later is the edition that contains Walerian Otwinowski's translation, which came out in 1638 under the Polish title *Księgi Metamorphoseon, to jest Przemian* (*The Books of Methamophoseon, that is, of Transformations*). This edition was republished in 1821 as *P. Owidiusza Nazonna Metamorphoseon, to jest, Przeobrażenia, ksiąg piętnaście, prze-*



5. G. Maes, *Jupiter and Io*, illustrations to the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, between 1664-1700, black chalk, pen and brown ink, brown and gray wash, 16.5 × 22 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:God-fried_Maes_-_Illustrations_to_the_Metamorphoses_of_Ovid,_Jupiter_and_Io_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:God-fried_Maes_-_Illustrations_to_the_Metamorphoses_of_Ovid,_Jupiter_and_Io_(1).jpg) (access date: 31.03.2022)



²⁸ The edition with Sabinus's commentary (Frankfurt edition of 1563) was becoming more and more popular.

²⁹ See A. Śliwa, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁰ The complete copy is in the collection of the Cabinet of Old Prints of the University Library in Warsaw (Ref. No. 28.20.3.797), the copy with the missing illustrations for book 10 is in the collection of the Czartoryski Library in Kraków (File No. 62117/III), while all illustrations have been torn from the copy from the National Library in Warsaw. See *ibidem*, p. 106.

ktádania in verse J. Żebrowskiego (P. Ovid Naso's Metamorphoseon, that is, Transformations, Fifteen Books, Translated in Verse by J. Żebrowski). In 1845, an edition in a volume of poetry by Bruno Kiciński was published under this title: *Poezye Brunona hrabi Kicińskiego, Warszawa 1845, tom VII P. Owidjusza Nazona "Przemiany" poema w XV pieśniach z przypisami objaśniającymi, przekładania Brunona hrabi Kicińskiego (Bruno Count Kiciński's Poetry, Warsaw 1845, volume VII of P. Ovid Naso's Poem "Transformations" in XV Songs with Explanatory Notes, a Translation of Bruno Count Kiciński)*. The aim of these translations was not only to make Ovid's poem available for the Polish reader, but also to familiarize the Polish audience with ancient culture, by which both translators were fascinated. Most probably they used the editions of the poem with Rafael Regius's commentary as they were readily available at the time and contained very instructive textual explanations²⁸. Neither of these earliest Polish editions of Ovid's poem has illustrations. They are decorated only with vignettes and decorative initials. Otwinowski dedicated his translation to King Władysław IV Vasa (Ladislaus IV of Poland). On the stage of the royal theatre at the Warsaw Castle in 1637, on the occasion of the king's wedding, an opera in five acts by Marco Scacchi was performed with Virgilio Puccitelli's libretto and Agostino Locci's set design (*dramma in musica*) entitled *La S. Cecilia*. The scenography, inspired by Ovid's poem, went through as many as fifteen transformations. Władysław IV Vasa's theatre also staged opera performances of *Daphne*, *Narciso Trasformato* and *L'Andromeda*. Needless to say, they had their source in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The most popular, almost canonical, illustrated edition of the *Metamorphoses* was its English 1632 edition in Georg Sandys's translation, with 15 copperplate engravings and the image of Ovid on the title page, the drawings made by Francis Cleyn and the engraving by Salomon Savery. Each of the fifteen illustrations, depicting scenes in a simultaneous arrangement, refers to one book of the poem. The illustrations were often reprinted, for example in the Paris edition of 1637²⁹. In Polish collections, there are three reprints of the London edition in that Paris reprint from 1637, but only one has a full set of fifteen illustrations (such as in the Paris edition)³⁰. As Anna Śliwa's library research has shown, three copperplate engravings torn from a copy in the collection of the National Library (which was transferred there from the liquidated Gymnasium in Nysa in the 1950s) are now stored in the Museum in Nysa. These graphics were included in the exhibition "*Metamorfozy Owidiusza – mitologia starożytna w grafice europejskiej XVII wieku ze zbiorów Muzeum w Nysie*" ("*Ovid's Metamorphoses – ancient mythology in European graphics of the 17th c. from the collection of the Museum in Nysa*") along with a series of 20 copperplate engravings by Goltzius from the Nysa Museum, signed: "*H. Goltzius juuen, A 1589*". In Poland, Goltzius's works are also found in many private collections.

Graphic editions of the *Metamorphoses* had their heyday between 16th and 18th century. However, from time to time, they also inspire contemporary artists. The most famous are, of course, Picasso's series of etching graphics. In 1931, the *Ovide, Les Métamorphoses eaux – fortes originales de Picasso* was published in 145 copies. The book contained text with illustrations and an appendix in the form of 30 etchings. Each of the poem's books is accompanied by two illustrations – a heading illustration, preceding the text of each book, and a full-page one, loosely inserted into the corresponding section of the text. Picasso had entered the phase known as his second classical period, but surrealism was a substantial component of the *Metamorphoses*. The classicism of Picasso's *Metamorphoses* had a Dionysian character, which was also expressed in the form of the works, created with a restless, thin line, composed of transformed human forms.

The *Metamorphoses* in the interpretation of contemporary artists often takes on quite radical shapes. Shocking in its brutal form is Kiki Smith's sculpture *Daphne*: no longer a woman-tree, but a body fragment, a trunk, the trace of a person with protruding dry branches in the place of arms and legs.

The last installment of the *Metamorphoses* in this article will be its queer interpretation. It is the work of Mikołaj Sobczak, who created nine objects inspired by the poem³¹. In a postmodern fashion, they mix myths, allusions to the present and to the history of culture, as is typical of this artist. The vehicle is plywood cut into various shapes. Even the form of plywood is full of allusions: a clenched fist is a symbol of Gay Liberation Front, a starfish – the logo of the Gay Revolution organization. There is also a human form – a queer activist dragged by police officers during a street demonstration. As the *Metamorphoses* treat of fluidity, it can be related to sexuality and gender identity; there are plenty of such stories in the poem. Sobczak also shows that the non-binary is inscribed in a long-lived tradition, including one with classical roots.

As Ovid keeps inspiring artists, so the *Metamorphoses* keeps taking on new shapes.

Słowa kluczowe

Owidiusz, grafika, ilustracje, *Metamorfozy*

Keywords

Ovid, graphics, illustrations, the *Metamorphoses*

References

1. **Barolsky Paul**, *Ovid and the Metamorphoses of Modern Art from Botticelli to Picasso*, New Haven 2014.
2. **Blattner Evamarie**, *Holzchnittfolgen zu den Metamorphosen des Ovid: Venedig 1497 und Mainz 1545*, München 1998.



³¹ See S. Szabłowski, *Malarz i Owidiusz, czyli queerowa metamorfoza*, <https://przekroj.pl/kultura/malarz-i-owidiusz-czyli-queerowa-metamorfoza-stach-szablowski> (access date: 31.03.2022).

3. **Blume Dieter**, *Visualizing Metamorphosis: Picturing the Metamorphoses of Ovid in 14th Century Italy*, "Troianalexandrina" Vol. 14 (2014).
4. **Bull Malcolm**, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art*, London 2005.
5. **Kinney Daniel, Styron Elizabeth**, *Ovid Illustrated: The Reception of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" in Image and Text*, <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/about.html> (access date: 31.03.2022).
6. **Rietveld Laura**, *The "Metamorphosis of Orpheus" in Italian Editions of Ovid's "Metamorphoses", 1325–1570*, [in:] *The Legacy of Antiquity: New Perspectives in the Reception of the Classical World*, Ed. L. Kouneni, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013 (access date: 31.03.2022).
7. **Spalik Krzysztof**, *Zielnik Georga Andreasa Helwinga, część III*, <http://blog.polona.pl/2015/02/hyacinthum-in-florem> (access date: 31.03.2022).
8. **Śliwa Anna**, *Graficzna narracja. Ilustracje do paryskiego wydania "Metamorfoz" Owidiusza (1637) z trzech egzemplarzy w zbiorach polskich*, "Barok" 2007, No. 1, <http://barok.edu.pl/images/Barok27-2007/10-AnnaSliwa.pdf> (access date: 31.03.2022).
9. **Thimann Michael**, *Die "Metamorphosen" in der bildenden Kunst*, [in:] *Ovid-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Hrsg. M. Möller, Berlin 2021.
10. **Wichowa Maria**, *"Przeobrażenia" Jakuba Żebrowskiego i "Przemiany" Waleriana Otwinowskiego. Dwa staropolskie przekłady "Metamorfoz" Owidiusza*, Łódź 1990.

Dr. habil. Aleksandra Giełdoń-Paszek, aleksandrageildon-paszek@us.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-7600-9824

Art historian, Associate Professor in the field of art sciences at the University of Silesia in Katowice and the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice; author and editor of books and numerous scientific articles in the field of art history and artistic didactics; author of reviews and critical essays in the field of contemporary art and on the border of fine arts and other areas of culture.

Summary

ALEKSANDRA GIELDON-PASZEK (Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice) / Graphic illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A selection of the most important executions

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has inspired artists of various disciplines almost from the very moment of its creation. The poem has been the literary canvas of many paintings. It was particularly popular in the early modern period. Its numerous editions from the Middle Ages were decorated first with miniatures, and, after the invention of printing, with illustrations, made in the technique of woodcut, copperplate engraving, and etching. The composition of scenes known from the poem was based on a simultaneous and multi-thread narration and also, later, focused on one specific moment of the selected episode. The authorship of the illustrations found in early editions remains anonymous. The graphic designers of 16th c. and later editions are known by name: Jörg Wickram, Virgilio Solis, Bernard Solomon, Hendrick Goltzius, Francis Cleyn, Salomon Savery, Godfried Maes, and in the 20th c. Pablo Picasso. Ovid's poem continues to be interpreted, as evidenced by the works of, for example, Kiki Smith and the Polish queer artist Mikolaj Sobczak.