

*'Et latet et lucet': Ovidian intertextuality and aesthetic of luxury in Martial's poetry*

1) *An ecphrastic eye: Ovid, Martial, Ausonius*

In the Roman debate on luxury, as it is well known, Ovid's voice sounds quite provokingly dissonant with the moralistic-archaicizing guidelines of the Augustan regime. In the climate of ethical and cultural restoration promoted by the prince, Ovid challenges the political myths of his propaganda (*Ars* 3.121-2, 127-8):

Prisca iuvent alios: ego me nunc denique natum

gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.

.....

Sed quia cultus adest, nec nostros mansit in annos

rusticitas, priscis illa superstes avis.

[Let ancient times please others: I am glad to have been born

now; this age suits my temperament

.....

but because refinement is with us, and rusticity, which survived

until our grandsires, has not lasted to our days]

Ovid also treated the cultural myth of the golden age - especially celebrated by Virgil and, during the Augustan era, politically charged as well – with offhand, almost brash irony (*Ars* 2.277-8):

aurea sunt vere nunc saecula: plurimus auro

venit honos: auro conciliatur amor.

[Now truly is the Golden Age: for gold

high honour is purchased, by gold is love gained]

The obsessive moralistic condemnation of the *fames auri* (echoing from Virgil, *Aen.* 3.57 down to Pliny, *nat.* 33.72 and beyond) is here stripped of all its harshness, and the novel association of luxury and love is effortlessly absorbed into an unequivocal celebration of modernity, and of Augustan society as the theater of a refined lifestyle, finally consonant with the cosmopolitan prospects opened up by the principate's conquests.<sup>1</sup> Analogously, in the introduction to the *Medicamina*, the most audacious manifesto of ethical modernism in all of Latin literature, the encomium of the *cultus* (3 ff.) openly lampooned the antiquated cultural models proposed by Augustan ideology (such as the matron engaged in the laborious chores of peasant life) and the demonization of wealth and ease.<sup>2</sup>

Only with this glaring restriction (at least in his production before the exile Ovid clearly dissociates from the moralistic-archaicizing attitude of Augustan ideology) one can accept the claim that “prior to Statius, nearly all of our textual evidence concerning

material goods derives from a clearly marked tradition of moralizing that applied negative values to material objects, condemning visible manifestations of economic prosperity as symbols of declining moral standards in society”.<sup>3</sup> And, if, as the same scholar maintains, “Statius’ voice represents an abrupt divergence from this tradition” (76), in reality, the last great Augustan poet had already paved the way to an appreciation of modernity and its comforts, in addition to rendering a lifestyle inspired by aesthetic principles and values a dominant tenet of elite social life in his day. This particular aspect of ancient Ovidianism – i.e., the impact of the taste promoted by his poetry and the aesthetic models it proposed on Julio-Claudian and especially Flavian culture – is what I wish to focus on here, in an attempt to grasp the importance of the social dynamism and intellectual and literary power of the phenomenon.

One of the authors offering some of the most interesting documents of the ‘culture of display’ that was a distinguishing trait of the first century of the Empire is Martial. His poetry serves as a valuable document of the material culture of the period, and – despite the image of this poet is too one-sidedly linked to a taste of unsophisticated life and rustic simplicity – many of his epigrams contain descriptions of the décor and furnishings of villas and gardens, or of refined art objects and luxury items.<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the description of an amber containing a characteristic embedded small insect (4.32):

*Et latet et lucet Phaethontide condita gutta,*

*ut videatur apis nectare clusa suo.*

Dignum tantorum pretium tulit illa laborum:

credibile est ipsam sic voluisse mori.

[Shut in Phaeton's drop, a bee both hides and shines, so that she seems imprisoned in her own nectar. She has a worthy reward for all her sufferings. One might believe that she herself willed so to die.]<sup>5</sup>

The epigram is a tour de force of concentration and refinement – almost the poetic equivalent of the precious amber it portrays.<sup>6</sup> It describes the object, using the mythological periphrasis recalling the Ovidian tale of Phaethon, which identified amber's origins in the tears of his Heliades sisters (*Met.* 2.340-66),<sup>7</sup> and thus immediately constructs its ideal reader, crediting him with a literary knowledge that is an essential requisite for appreciating the culture of luxury and the social, aesthetic and psychological assumptions that fuel it. Like a sort of precious casing, the amber both contains and displays its little bee nucleus, enhancing it by wrapping it in luminosity, just as the epigram does with the name in the middle of the second verse. Based on that inclusion, the epigram further develops the idea of the “monument in memory” of the little insect<sup>8</sup> which, immortalized in its tomb (the image of nectar clearly associates it with the divine sphere),<sup>9</sup> is thus rewarded for its industriousness in life.<sup>10</sup> The interplay between ‘big’ and ‘small’ is exalted by the idea of a sepulchral monument to an insect (suggested in the first line by the grand *Phaethontide*, and confirmed in the last line by the tiny *mori*), which also alludes to the epitaphic origins of epigram; while a tension seems to emerge between the aesthetic

appreciation of the play of light and colour, and the idea of the creature's death, between art and nature, we will return below.

The paradox of *latere* and *lucere* together (an oxymoron, marked by alliteration, isosyllabism and iteration of the phonic cell *et... et et... et*) highlights the external casing as something that lends value to what is contained within the amber; the humble little creature is thus exalted and held up to be admired by observers. The effect is also fostered by the brief parable of its life, almost a mythical little tale told through the epigram, further enriching the object's meaning. Thus the epigram becomes not only an equivalent (*apis* is the key word "included" in the text), but also a complement of the art object at the literary level, an integration of sense that, while not necessary, certainly favors visual enjoyment, or even replaces it (the epigram so clearly depicts the object described – a "type" with which the Roman reader would certainly have been familiar – as to render its concrete presence, and even its very existence, almost superfluous).

In this way, as well as through the circulation of books as sophisticated luxury objects,<sup>11</sup> literature secured an essential role alongside other forms of this culture of display, becoming its key as well as its capstone: we might say that literature lent a poetics to material culture, completing and ennobling it. But it is apparent that the image developed by the epigram presupposes not only the poet's and readers' familiarity with objects like amber – which we know aroused a fervent and (at least according to Pliny) irrational passion, especially among women<sup>12</sup> – , but also a capacity to perceive and appreciate the play of light and color, the tones and shadings that lent value to amber as well as to other gems and stones. In short, it presupposes familiarity with the culture of

luxury, and an eye accustomed to looking at and appreciating the material objects with which that lifestyle surrounded itself – I would call it an *ecphrastic eye*. And it is this expert eye, well acquainted with the subtleties of an aesthetic pleasure engendered by the experience of material culture and everyday private life (such as paintings, statues, architectural structures, villas, gardens, furnishings, various types of art objects, and of course literature as well), that Martial's language is intended for.<sup>13</sup>

In recent years studies on ecphrasis in Roman poetry have emphasized its tendency to combine a similar duplicity: the subject position of the viewing poet is often elusive, and his words want both to reveal and hide (the same dialectic of *lucet et latet*).<sup>14</sup> Martial too, with his use of myth and of paradox, in these artistic epigrams provides a shifting focalization, and the interplay between art and nature, greatness and smallness sometimes seems also to include a tension between power and powerlessness.

This is quite evident in another epigram, where Martial addresses readers with this same sort of ecphrastic eye. 4.22 describes the image of a young woman who, to elude her husband's sexual ambushes, throws herself into the crystalline water of a lake, which, rather than shielding her nudity, further exalts her beauty and excites his ardor:<sup>15</sup>

Primos passa toros et adhuc placanda marito  
merserat in nitidos se Cleopatra lacus,  
dum fugit amplexus. Sed prodidit unda *latentem*;  
*lucebat*, totis cum tegetetur aquis:  
condita sic puro *numerantur* lilia vitro,

sic prohibet tenuis gemma latere rosas.

Insilui mersusque vadis luctantia carpsi

basia: perspicuae plus vetuistis aquae.

[Cleopatra, new to the marriage bed and not yet reconciled to her husband, had plunged into a gleaming pool, fleeing embraces. But the water betrayed her hiding place; covered by all of it, she still shone. So lilies enclosed in clear glass are counted, so thin crystal does not let roses hide. In I leapt and plunged in the pond snatched reluctant kisses. You, pellucid waters, forbade more]

The analogy with the previous epigram is clear: here, the idea of the body that both *latet* and *lucet* through water – a sheath that, rather than hiding, “exposes” what it encloses to others’ desire - is applied to a woman, whose erotic potential (already exalted by a name that is an antonomasia of female power and seduction, Cleopatra) is further heightened by the simile of flowers (lilies and roses, both traditional symbols of the object of desire) protected and at the same time rendered more desirable by the glass screen of the vase containing them. *Gemma*, the metaphor that designates the glass or, as at 8.68.5 (cf. below), the *specularia*, that is the glass shield of the greenhouse (a technical term implying the idea of “looking at” the object inside), clearly evokes a precious stone, suggesting a comparison of the female figure immersed – I would say “incorporated” – in the water to an enticing jewel<sup>16</sup> that stirs desire and at the same time frustrates it with its unattainability. Once again art enhances the seductive potential of nature but at the same time inhibits (since

waters act as a moral agent) the fulfillment of desire. Transferring the meaning of the obstacle (the glass-shield as *gemma*) to the object it shields from contact (the woman), the metonymy thus produces a suggestion of meaning that enhances the communicative potential of the epigram (leaving aside, for the moment, the gendered nature of the desirous gaze – that of a man towards a woman -, as well as the social authority that qualifies it – the man is a husband [cf. *passa, placanda*]).

The situation Martial describes (and also the tension between desire and its impossible fulfillment) would be quite familiar to readers of Ovid, in whose work the schema of a female figure – a nymph or a mortal woman – who *fugit amplexus*, i.e. tries to evade an erotic assault by a male, often a god (and thus the bearer of higher authority), recurs very frequently (Daphne, Syrinx, Arethusa etc.).<sup>17</sup> There is one scene in particular that represents the “role-reversal” version of this schema, and which Martial’s reader is invited to recall: the expression *luctantia carpsi basia* is in fact a clear allusion to the mythical model of Hermaphrodite who, while bathing in the waters of a spring, tries to evade the erotic advances of the nymph who lives there, Salmacis (*met.* 4.356-60):

"Vicinus et meus est" exclamat nais, et omni  
veste procul iacta mediis inmittitur undis,  
pugnantemque tenet, *luctantiaque oscula carpit*,  
subiectatque manus, invitaque pectora tangit,  
et nunc hac iuveni, nunc circumfunditur illac...



[‘I win, and he is mine!’ cries the naiad, and casting off all her garments dives also into the waters: she holds him fast though he strives against her, steals reluctant kisses, fondles him, touches his unwilling breast, clings to him on this side and on that]<sup>18</sup>

The reader will also recall how Ovid depicts the seductive body of Hermaphroditus, which immediately, the moment he is surprised in his serene solitude, appears to the nymph’s eyes an irresistible fruit (thus stimulating a perception that is not only aesthetic but also gustatory), with an ivory complexion that makes him akin to a work of art (331-5):

hic color aprica pendentibus arbore pomis  
aut *ebori tincto est aut sub candore rubenti*,  
cum frustra resonant aera auxiliaria, lunae.  
Poscenti nymphae sine fine sororia saltem  
oscula iamque manus ad *eburnea colla ferenti*...

[such colour have apples hanging in sunny orchards, or painted ivory; such has the moon, eclipsed, red under white, when brazen vessels clash vainly for her relief. When the nymph begged and prayed for at least a sister’s kiss, and was in act to throw her arms round his snowy neck]

And it is this vision of his boyish nude body, exalted by the transparency of the water into which he slips, thinking himself alone, that arouses Salmacis’ desire (346-7 *tum vero placuit*,

*nudaeque cupidine formae / Salmacis exarsit* [then was the nymph as one spellbound, and her love kindled as she gazed at the naked form]):

ille cavis velox adplauso corpore palmis  
desilit in latices alternaque bracchia ducens  
*in liquidis translucet aquis, ut eburnea si quis  
signa tegat claro vel candida lilia vitro.* (352-5)

[He, clapping his body with hollow palms, dives into the pool, and swimming with alternate strokes flashes with gleaming body through the transparent flood, as if one should encase ivory figures or whites lilies in translucent glass]

The mythical-literary model of Ovid's Hermaphrodite is thus suggested to Martial's reader as a paradigm of elusive love, perfectly paralleling the situation described (and probably not even reproduced in the epigram as a real event, but only imagined), and a cogent illustration of the mechanism that sparks and fuels desire.<sup>19</sup> That mechanism is based on the function – or, I would say, on the *necessity* – of an obstacle, an impediment, as Ovid, perhaps more lucidly than any other ancient poet, identified and defined: *nitimur in vetitum semper cupimusque negata* (“we ever strive for what is forbidden, and ever covet what is denied”, *Am.* 3.4.17).

But what I wish to focus on is the association of eros and artistic worthiness that characterizes the object of desire: not only is Hermaphrodite expressly compared to an

ivory statue, but the glassy, opal-like transparence that envelops and illuminates his body seems to evoke the glyptic technique, which entails the engraving and layering of various layers of precious materials, such as gems and glass, to obtain a gradation of color contrasts: in short, it makes the body into a living cameo.<sup>20</sup> A work of art, then, surrounded by a halo of both light and desire, as occurs with the body of Martial's Cleopatra, which the allusion compares it with. The Cleopatra described by Martial thus appears almost the symbol of a superior lifestyle based on the combination of artistic taste and sophisticated eroticism, mediated by models of myth and literature (which are ideally blended in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*): an ethos that qualifies the *otium* exclusive to a social and cultural elite.

But let us return to Martial who, to the specific theme of the hothouse cultivation of grapes – brought into play due to its similarity to the epigram discussed just above -, dedicates a third composition, in which this technique distinguishes the excellence of Entellus' garden, more beautiful than that of Alcinous, the Homeric king of the Phaeacians (8.68). Here again, the text visualizes the delicate shoot which the glass (*gemma*) protects from the cold of winter, but at the same time offers it up to the gaze of whoever wishes to admire it, likening it to a female body (a body that is exalted, even though – or rather, *precisely because* – it is apparently covered, by the diaphanous swathe of an exotic fabric), or to pebbles revealed at the bottom of a crystalline stream:

Qui Corcyraei vidit pomaria regis,  
rus, Entelle, tuae praeferet ille domus.

Invida purpureos urat ne bruma racemos

et gelidum Bacchi munera frigus edat,

condita perspicua vivit vindemia gemma,

et tegitur felix nec tamen uva *latet*:

femineum *lucet* sic per bombycina corpus,

calculus in nitida sic numeratur aqua.

Quid non ingenio voluit natura licere?

Autumnus sterilis ferre iubetur hiems.

[He who has seen the orchards of Corcyra's king will prefer the country inside your city mansion, Entellus. Lest envious winter bite the purple clusters, and chill frost devour the gifts of Bacchus, the vintage lives enclosed in transparent glass and the blooming grape is covered, yet not hidden. So a woman's body shines through silk, so pebbles are counted in clear water. What licence has nature not willed for ingenuity? Barren winter is bidden to bear an autumn]

The same dialectic of *latere-lucere*, of hiding/exhibiting, that we saw in the previous two epigrams, is also applied here to the object of desire - a female body, or shiny, gem-like pebbles at the bottom of a stream. The idea of polished river stones as precious gems, suggested here as well by the contiguous *gemma* metaphor and by the sophisticated elegance of the image, thus makes those hothouse grapevines into a true work of art, and lends an ecphrastic quality to the description of an object that is not properly artistic, but is

rendered so by the eye (the ecphrastic eye) of the observer; that is, by the perception of the poet, which in turn stimulates that of the reader.

The process of aestheticization triggered by Martial - unequivocally in Ovid's wake (as we shall see here below) - is made fully explicit in the verses of a later poem, in which Ausonius (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) exalts the spectacular transparence of the waters of a river in his homeland of Gaul, the *Mosel* (vv. 55-72):

spectaris vitreo per levia terga profundo,  
secreti nihil amnis habens: utque almus aperto  
panditur intuitu liquidis optentibus aer  
nec placidi prohibent oculos per inania venti,  
sic demersa procul durante per intima visu  
cernimus arcanique patet penetrabile profundi,  
cum vada lene meant liquidarum et lapsus aquarum  
prodit caerulea dispersas luce figuras:  
quod sulcata levi crispatur harena meatu,  
inclinata tremunt viridi quod gramina fundo,  
usque sub ingenuis agitatae fontibus herbae  
vibrantes patiuntur aquas *lucetque latetque*  
*calculus* et viridem distinguit glarea muscum.  
tota Caledoniis talis *pictura* Britannis,  
cum virides algas et rubra corallia nudat

aestus et albentes, concharum germina, bacas,

delicias hominum, *locupletibus atque sub undis*

*adsimulant nostros, imitata monilia, cultus.*

Haud aliter placidae subter vada laeta Mosellae

*detegit admixtos non concolor herba lapillos.*

[Thus beneath your smooth surface you display all the treasures of your crystalline depths, o river that conceals nothing of itself; and just as the beneficent air lies clear and limpid before us, and the winds, when calm, let our sight travel unfettered through infinite space, so may we clearly behold what is submerged far below, and discover the secret of your mysterious depths when you flow gently and your transparent waters reveal the shapes of scattered objects in the cerulean light; here the rippling sand is furrowed by a slight current, and there, along your green bottom, bowed water-grasses wave, continually tossed from their beds by the buffeting waters; a pebble gleams and then is hidden once again, and green moss peeps out amid gravel. Just as the Caledonian shore shows itself to the Briton's gaze when the ebbing tide lays bare green seaweed and red coral and the bright white pearls sprung forth from shells, which are man's delight and, amid the sea's treasures, seem the very necklaces that are our most opulent adornments, so beneath the sparkling waters of the placid Moselle, the green hue of an aquatic meadow sets off the pebbles scattered in its midst]

River stones are seen here as polished gemstones shining on the green bed of the Mosel, just as on the coast of Caledonia, low tide reveals beds of algae, in which pearls and coral stand out. These latter elements, completely natural in themselves, are viewed as the product of nature's imitation (*adsimulant*) of the human *cultus*; that is, as "imitated jewels,"<sup>21</sup> almost as if nature intentionally took inspiration from human culture and its artistic manifestations: the use of a term like *pictura*, which emphasizes the artistic character of the medium that links nature and culture and the fundamental principle of this anti-mimetic aesthetic (in the sense that the direction of imitation is reversed, from nature to art), is certainly not accidental.

But the intertextual chain that links the three poets, and Ausonius' intention, should be explored in greater detail: the marker *lucetque latetque* recalls the nearest model, Martial, but the image he merely suggests – pebbles on the riverbottom seen as precious stones – becomes fully perspicuous in Ausonius' version. Thus it seems that Ausonius, acting as both a poet and a critic, wants to expressly indicate the generative matrix of that idea, i.e. the origin of the intertextual sequence through which it is transmitted, by tracing it back through Martial to the more remote Ovidian model.

Martial had in effect drawn the image - so productive both in his work<sup>22</sup> and in Ausonius'<sup>23</sup> - of pebbles shining like gems at the bottom of a limpid stream<sup>24</sup> directly from Ovid. That image is part of the Ovidian scene, already in itself charged with erotic potential,<sup>25</sup> of Arethusa who, just like the Cleopatra of Martial's epigram 4.22, bathes in the still crystalline water of the river Alpheus. She, like Hermaphrodite, unaware of the risk she is running, thus involuntarily offers herself up to erotic assault by the divinity who

inhabits those waters: thus does the nymph herself recount the moments just prior to her dramatic experience (*met.* 5.587-9):

invenio sine vertice aquas, sine murmure euntes,  
perspicuas ad humum, per quas numerabilis alte  
calculus omnis erat, quas tu vix ire putares.

[I came upon a stream flowing without eddy, and without sound, crystal-clear to the bottom, in whose depths you might count every pebble, waters which you would scarcely think to be moving]

This, then, is the Ovidian text to which Ausonius, through the “window” of Martial, refers; but along with that text, Ausonius also recalls the process of aestheticization of natural reality that the Augustan poet had initiated (and Martial had built on). In Ausonius’ version, the pebbles described by the ecphrastic eye of Ovid, who suggests their intrinsically artistic nature, become true art objects, products of the material culture in which the Bordeaux poet lived.<sup>26</sup> The process begun by Ovid is further developed here: the term of reference for the reader, the familiar, everyday *comparandum* that allows for comprehension of the comparison with the *comparatum*, is an inversion of the “normal” logical process that guides similitude (the less-known, or even the unknown, is rendered comprehensible through reference to the known): in the “culture of display,” the *lapilli* of a



transparent river bring to mind the precious stones the reader knows from everyday experience.

But this also completes the intertextual chain connecting Martial and Ausonius' texts to Ovid's: the final link in that chain (Ausonius) draws on the preceding one (Martial) to refer back to the first one (Ovid), to that was not only the point of origin of the idea that engendered the image of the pebble-gems beneath the transparent stream, but that also posited the anti-mimetic aesthetic the two poets shared in these verses. Here, a consideration arises spontaneously: if, as we have seen the *latere/lucere* dialectic can serve as a figure/symbol of the mechanics of desire (the obstacle kindles desire rather than inhibiting it, rendering it more alluring even while apparently obscuring the view of it), this same dialectic also seems applicable to the dynamic of the intertextual relationship. In this case, a text incorporates (at least) one other text, camouflaging it and at the same time making it shine through – like something encased in amber -, exalting it while in the very act of impeding direct contact with it. The incorporated text (for example, Ovid in Martial's text, or Ovid and Martial together in Ausonius') lends prestige to the one that contains it, and the two texts reinforce one another reciprocally, rendering each other more attractive in the eye of the reader, who is invited to recognize the complex stratification of the final product (a sort of poetic "cameo") which the poet has shaped and offered for the reader's admiration.

2) *From luxury to nature, or nature as luxury*

Let us now return to the passage from Ausonius and the anti-naturalistic aesthetic it presupposes. The image of polished pebbles as gems, i.e. the comparison of *lapilli* to *gemmae*, or to pearls, is a common metaphor in Augustan-age Latin poetry.<sup>27</sup> Early examples of it include Horace's definition of pearls and emeralds as jewels dear to matrons (*sat.* 1.2.80 *inter niveos viridisque lapillos* [among snow-white and green pebbles]), and Propertius complaining of Cynthia's passion for costly oriental stones (1.15.7 *nec minus Eois pectus variare lapillis* [and as eagerly adorn your breast with oriental gems]), although the frequent re-evocation of the real meaning behind the metaphorical one seems to presuppose an awareness of the ease of shifting between the two planes (and the disparity of value between the two extremes).<sup>28</sup> Thus Propertius can exalt the beauty of natural "pebbles" (1.2.13 *litora nativis praeferunt picta lapillis* [shores shine brightest if painted with natural pebbles]), common along the Italian coast as well as in the grotto of Phoebus (3.3.27 *hic erat affixis viridis spelunca lapillis* [here was a green grotto covered with pebbles]); and Horace, juxtaposing artificial stones with the excellence of nature, deliberately uses that term, as it is common to both spheres (*epist.* 1.10.19): *deterius Libycis olet aut nitet herba lapillis?* [is the grass less fragrant or beautiful than Libyan mosaics?]. This is the same shift from the precious context<sup>29</sup> to the naturalistic one that Ovid himself ironically makes when he warns Corinna, a lover of luxury like any elegiac *domina*, against risky sea voyages: *Am.* 2.11.13-4 *nec medius tenuis conchas pictosque lapillos / pontus habet; bibuli litoris illa mora est* [and mid-ocean does not offer delicate shells and painted pebbles; those amusements belong to the thirsty beach].<sup>30</sup>

So, common literary language already contained the presuppositions according to which the “civilization process” by which a natural element like *lapilli* becomes the object of imitation by artisans/artists and transformation into a luxury object should be reinterpreted (as Ausonius expressly does) in the opposite sense, i.e. as nature imitating the *cultus*, with jewels as an obvious symbol. The bed of the Mosel described by Ausonius is a completely artificial landscape (the sea bottom of Caledonia, to which it is compared, is even defined as a *pictura*, 68), an accumulation of opulent jewels, described in an equally “bejeweled”, almost Apuleian style:<sup>31</sup> it is a triumph of luxury attained by means of a nature that imitates art, or rather, imitates luxury itself (*adsimulant nostros ... cultus*), and thus fully achieves the aesthetic we discussed above and will now return to focus on.

The idea of an element of nature that imitates a work of art, like the river stones here imitating jewels – the symbolic expression of the *cultus* – has its matrix in a famous passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* which describes a grotto of Diana with a natural structure that seems derived from an artistic model (3.157-60):

... in extremo est antrum nemorale recessu

arte laboratum nulla: *simulaverat artem*

*ingenio natura suo*; nam pumice vivo

et levibus tofis nativum duxerat arcum.

[In its most secret nook there was a well-shaded grotto, wrought by no artist's hand. But Nature by her own cunning had imitated art; for she had shaped a native arch of the living rock and soft tufa]

Here we find a clear formulation of the fundamental principle of an anti-naturalistic aesthetic that overturns the traditional axiom of mimesis – i.e., that art imitates nature, and thus the more the subject reproduced by a work of art was similar to natural reality, the more worthy it was of admiration. Now, this audacious aesthetic principle constitutes a crucial and highly innovative part of Ovid's poem,<sup>32</sup> inspiring a significant imperial-era taste trend that went beyond the literary, and beyond Rome.<sup>33</sup>

Ausonius' assertion (formulated in a passage imitating the Ovidian episode devoted to the "aquatic myth" of Arethusa) that the pebbles at the bottom of the Mosel, "imitating jewels, model themselves after our tastes," goes a step further than Ovid: while in Ovid, nature imitates art, in Ausonius, nature actually imitates luxury, an "extreme" product of art, and above all its translation into the concrete material culture in which his readers were immersed. But the remarkable thing is that Ausonius refers back to Ovid, indicating him as the theoretical precedent of this aesthetic principle and the declarer of the full legitimization of the *cultus* and thus of luxury.

The most significant signs of the anti-mimetic aesthetic developed by Ovid can be found above all in his most important poem. The intrinsically ecphrastic language he employs in describing, for example, the bodies of certain characters lends them an "artistic" aspect, aestheticizing them and making them into works of art, like the ephebic

body of Narcissus, expressly compared to a marble statue (3.418-9 *adstupet ipse sibi vultuque inmotus eodem / haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum* [He looks in speechless wonder at himself and hangs there motionless in the same expression, like a statue carved from Parian marble]), and that of the Centaur Cyllarus (12.397-8 *cervix umerique manusque / pectoraque artificum laudatis proxima signis* [his neck, shoulders, breast, and hands, and all his human parts you would praise as equal to an artist's perfect work]). In the world of the *Metamorphosis*, the resemblance between nature and art is so strong that the possibility of confusing the two spheres (a confusion the poet's readers might experience) is attributed to the characters of the world of myth, for example, when Perseus, seeing the extraordinary beauty of Andromeda, nearly mistakes her for a statue (4.673-5 *nisi quod levis aura capillos / moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu, / marmoreum ratus esset opus* [save that her hair gently stirred in the breeze, and the warm tears were trickling down her cheeks, he would have thought her a marble statue])<sup>34</sup>.

After all, the reader's artistic knowledge as a necessary key for comprehension of the object of his narration is an explicit theme in Ovid. The reader is invited to collaborate in this sense, with an appeal to his understanding of iconography, expressed in the sort of figures of speech that Philip Hardie called "approximative similes":<sup>35</sup> the "add or remove this" formula regarding iconographic models familiar to readers, such as Adonis (10.515-8 *qualia namque / corpora nudorum tabula pinguntur Amorum, / talis erat, sed, ne faciat discrimina cultus, / aut huic adde leves, aut illis deme pharetras* [he looked like one of the naked loves portrayed on canvas. But, that dress may make no distinction, you should either give the one a light quiver or take it from the other]), or the nymphs to which Philomela is

compared (6.451-4 *ecce venit magno dives Philomela paratu, / divitior forma; quales audire solemus / naidas et dryadas mediis incedere silvis, / si modo des illis cultus similesque paratus* [when lo! Philomela entered, attired in a rich apparel, but richer still in beauty; such as we are wont to hear the naiads described, and dryads when they move about in the deep woods, if only one should give to them refinement and apparel like hers]), presupposes an artistic and literary background through which the reader “imagines” what the text merely suggests. This is another way of asserting art’s primacy over nature, and Ovid’s lesson, with its peculiar tendency to spectacularize reality while at the same time stimulating a visual perception of it and predisposing the reader’s eye to “artistically” see the objects and personages of myth, had a profound impact on later poetry. But it must also have stimulated artists and artisans to translate the imagery of the world of myth and fantasy described in his poetry into various forms of visual culture, including frescoes, interior décor and objects of the material culture.

I would now like to go back to Martial and some of his other epigrams focusing on the dialect between art and nature.<sup>36</sup> After 4.32, let us look, as an example, at another of the epigrams dedicated to amber objects, 6.15:

Dum Phaethontea formica vagatur in umbra,  
inplicuit tenuem sucina gutta feram.  
Sic modo quae fuerat vita contempta manente,  
funeribus facta est nunc pretiosa suis.

[As an ant was wandering in Phaethontic shade, a drop of amber enfolded the tiny creature. So she that was despised but lately while life remained has now been made precious by her death]

Strictly speaking, this epigram is not truly ephrastic: the artistic object – the jewel – is not properly described, but presupposed by the telling of its genesis. Here, in fact, Martial quickly sets the scene of the miraculous formation of a jewel, an amber (one of the most sought-after *deliciae* in Rome, according to Pliny, *nat.* 37.30), which is not the product of a craftsman's skill, but is *formed by chance*, by nature and its *ingenium*.<sup>37</sup> While the first couplet contains a reflection on the randomness of the formation, the second extols the preciousness of the object and what it encases. The conclusion that the poet draws from this little miracle, thanks to which nature unexpectedly renders precious something that previously had no value whatsoever (a miracle made possible by 'art of nature'),<sup>38</sup> implicitly invites one to reflect that there is no limit to the "greatness of the small," of an insect as well as of the epigram, the smallest of genres (*quid minus esse potest?*, 12.94.9); but what interests Martial is the discourse on nature's astounding potential for artistic creation.<sup>39</sup>

The birth of the amber-object through the random combination of a drop of resin and a little reptile accidentally imprisoned within it (thus undergoing a sort of metamorphosis) is also described in 4.59, with greater attention to the details of the event and the psychological effect produced on the little creature, a viper:

Flentibus Heliadum ramis dum vipera repit,

fluxit in obstantem sucina gutta feram:

quae dum *miratur pingui se rore teneri,*

concreto *riguit* vincta *repente* gelu.

Ne tibi regali placeas, Cleopatra, sepulchro,

vipera si tumulo nobiliore iacet.

[While a viper crawled among the weeping branches of the Heliads a drop of amber flowed onto the creature in its path. As it marveled to find itself stuck fast in the viscous liquid, it stiffened, bound of a sudden by congealed ice. Be not proud, Cleopatra, of your royal sepulcher, if a viper lies in a nobler tomb]

As we know, in this case as well, Martial's epigram reprises – or rather, I would say, “includes,” as per the *et latet et lucet* technique – the passage from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in which the metamorphosis of the eldest of the Heliades - the sisters of Phaethon (in the myth the *incipit* recalls) -, overcome with weeping at the loss of her brother, occurs (2.346-55):

e quis Phaethusa, sororum

maxima, cum vellet terra procumbere, questa est

*deriguisse* pedes; ad quam conata venire

candida Lampetie *subita* radice *retenta* est;



tertia, cum crinem manibus laniare pararet,  
avellit frondes; haec stipite crura *teneri*,  
illa dolet fieri longos sua bracchia ramos,  
dumque ea *mirantur*, complectitur inguina cortex  
perque gradus uterum pectusque umerosque manusque  
ambit, et exstabant tantum ora vocantia matrem.

[the eldest, Phaëthusa, when she would throw herself upon the grave, complained that her feet had grown cold and stark; and when the fair Lampetia tried to come to her, she was held fast as by sudden roots. A third, making to tear her hair, found her hands plucking at foliage. One complained that her ankles were encased in wood, another that her arms were changing to long branches. And while they look on those things in amazement bark closes round their loins, and, by degrees, their waists, breasts, shoulders, hands; and all that was free were their lips calling upon their mother]

Martial transfers the experience of the metamorphosis of Phaethon's sister to that of the little viper, dissociating it from traumatic aspects and limiting it to the wonderment of the subject, who physically experiences an event as sudden as it is inexplicable. What counts, and what lies at the heart of the epigram, is not so much the jewel in itself, but rather the miracle of its production: the text inspires the reader's admiration for the poet who, with an Alexandrine taste for detail (like the psychology of an insect), is able to reconstruct the spectacle of nature's artistic productivity. The Flavian poet *mythically interprets* everyday

reality: in the case of the amber, the literary myth of Phaethon substitutes the “real” myth of the insect which, through nature’s intervention, contributes to the creation of a precious object. We might say that Martial adds a “natural” metamorphosis to Ovid’s poem, and juxtaposes his little text – the few verses of an epigram – with the Augustan poet’s grand fresco (almost an essay on how one can create a more modest, everyday sort of myth, more in keeping with the realistic and “minimal” poetics of the epigram than the classical text of the “official” myth and of great literature). What I would like to highlight here above all – also because it is an important aspect of his poetry – is that Martial drew on his creative imagination to lend the allure of myth to certain aspects of everyday reality, and to various natural phenomena that created the wonders of which he writes. To exemplify the artistic productivity of nature, which can produce jewels, the myth-*aition* of amber was the perfect subject.

There are numerous other epigrams that can be discussed in terms of the dialectic between art and nature, and the blurred boundary that separates them in the “society of display” Martial describes; I shall limit myself to citing the famous one on the little dog Issa (1.109), an animal so “domesticated” and civilized, so divested of its naturalness, as to appear almost a luxury object (cf. v. 4):

Issa est passere nequior Catulli,

Issa est purior osculo columbae,

Issa est blandior omnibus puellis,

Issa est carior Indicis lapillis,

Issa est deliciae catella Publi.

Hanc tu, si queritur, loqui putabis;

sentit tristitiamque gaudiumque.

Collo nixa cubat capitque somnos,

ut suspiria nulla sentiantur;

et desiderio coacta ventris

gutta pallia non fefellit ulla,

sed blando pede suscitatur toroque

deponi monet et rogat levari.

Castae tantus inest pudor catellae,

ignorat Venerem; nec invenimus

dignum tam tenera virum puella.

Hanc ne lux rapiat suprema totam,

picta Publius exprimit tabella,

*in qua tam similem videbis Issam,*

*ut sit tam similis sibi nec ipsa.*

Issam denique pone cum tabella:

*aut utramque putabis esse veram,*

*aut utramque putabis esse pictam.*

[Issa is naughtier than Catullus' sparrow, Issa is purer than a dove's kiss, Issa is more winning than any girl, Issa is more precious than Indian pearls, Issa is a lapdog, Publius'

darling. If she whines, you will think she is talking; she feels both his sadness and his joy. She lies resting on his neck and slumbers, with not a breath perceptible. Urged by her belly's need, she never betrays the bedcover by a single drop, but rouses him with a wheedling paw and warns to put her down from the bed and then asks to be taken up. Such is the inborn modesty of this chaste little dog, she knows nothing of love; nor can we find any husband worthy of so tender a maid. That her last day may not snatch all of her away, Publius is painting her picture. There you will see an Issa so like that herself is not so like her. In fine, compare Issa with the picture: either you will take both for real, or you will take both for painted]

Like a true artist, Publius reproduced his little dog in a work of art; but unlike Pygmalion, who created his living statue out of inert material, Publius painted a perfect copy of his living *puella* (v. 3 and 16),<sup>40</sup> because the animal was already predisposed for its passage to the artistic dimension; in Issa's case, again according to the Ovidian principle, nature imitates art. The linear "civilization process" carried out by Pygmalion (the artist transforms material into living reality) here takes place in a dual, reciprocal way: art and reality become indistinguishable from one another in a society where real life and "mythical" life interweave and merge. As the two concluding verses assert (their mirroring form iconically suggests the idea of identity, also prefigured by the technique of repetition on which the entire epigram is consummately constructed), there is no difference whatsoever between the living reality and its artistic copy: they are not intended so much to exalt, in keeping with the topos of verisimilitude, the mimetic

perfection achieved by the artist, but rather to suggest that in the society of display, of which Publius was almost a symbol-member,<sup>41</sup> the aestheticization of everyday life is a universal, widespread phenomenon – from frescoes and home décor, to luxury articles like marble, gems, jewelry, glass, fabrics and garden structures, every aspect of material culture falls within the sphere of artifice.

A dominant feature of this society is the phenomenon of “multiplication of copies” (of which there seems to be some symbolic trace in the name *Issa*, which contradicts the idea of uniqueness implicit in the pronoun *ipse* from which it is derived: cf. v. 19-20),<sup>42</sup> the invasion of numerous replicas of a single, original model: unfettered by our modern “myth of the original,”<sup>43</sup> members of the social elite for whom Flavian poetry was intended, and of whom it is in a certain sense an expression, saw in this pervasive presence of artifice a sort of “authoritative cliché” that lent social distinction to those who made it the hallmark of their lifestyle. Also representative of the general course of artistic reproduction and the consequent stratification of art and reality is the comparison – introduced in the first verse of the epigram, in an almost programmatic way – of *Issa* to Catullus’ sparrow, of which Publius’ *catella* is a sort of intertextual replica. In fact, I would say that intertextuality, i.e. the continuous citation or revisiting of great artistic and literary models, is the typical hallmark of the lifestyle of an elite that seeks to construct its image within this framework.

A “total intertextuality” that entails “living allusively,” in contact with models of myth evoked in a wide variety of forms,<sup>44</sup> and sometimes identifying with its protagonists:<sup>45</sup> this is the strongest thrust of the widespread phenomenon that

progressively came to characterized the Augustan and early Imperial ages, i.e. the mythicization of the everyday, of which Flavian poetry (Statius and Martial above all) offers particularly eloquent documentation. We can easily imagine that Ovid's poetry, and the *Metamorphoses* in particular, had an enormous influence on the development of this tendency to "live in myth"; but a more in-depth analysis of the Ovidian poem's impact on the languages of Roman material culture, in addition to a reflection on the similar attitudes with which the leading members of the elite responded to literary texts and visual culture, is something I will address in another, upcoming paper.

Gianpiero Rosati

Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa

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<sup>1</sup> Thus we must not underestimate – as is all too often the case in schematic and simplistic views of Ovid as a *tout court* critic of Augustanism – the component of committed

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devotion to modernization introduced by the principate; if anything, the poet insists on Augustanism's contradictions with its demands of archaization.

<sup>2</sup> The verses *med.* 11-16 polemically recall Horace, *epod.* 2.41-7; another well-known vignette of the archaic female model idealized by Augustan culture is in Virgil, *Aen.* 8.408-13: cf. Rosati 1985, 65; on Ovid's defense of cosmetics as part of a legitimization of luxury consumption and even of female desire, 9-38.

<sup>3</sup> Zeiner 2005, 75; analogous terms have already been used by Pavlovskis 1973, 1. In reality, the still-widespread idea of an opposition between an artifice-loving Statius (the taste documented by the *Silvae*) and a Martial bound to the ethical-esthetic model of rustic archaicism has increasingly proven to be false and misleading: the latter concept is merely a mask Martial wore as a satiric, and thus realistic, poet who attacks the artifices of an artificial and sophisticated society. What Martial in fact has in common with many aspects of Statius's more refined taste is today widely acknowledged: cf. e.g. Rosati 2006; Fabbrini 2007; Merli 2013, ch. 2.

<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of these texts cf. Fabbrini 2007, 239 ff.; on the Hellenistic tradition of the ephrastic epigram, on which much has been written recently with regard to the "new Posidippus," cf. at least Gutzwiller 2002. Cf. also G. Zanker's observations, in Zanker 2003, 59-62.

<sup>5</sup> Martial's translations are by D.R. Shackleton Bailey.

<sup>6</sup> According to a lesson from Hellenistic tradition documented, for example, in the *Lithika* of the new Posidippus; cf. Bing 2009, 253-71; Elsner 2014, 154-6. As a symbol of the genre itself, Martial's epigram inspired the title of Laurens 1989. Elsner 2014 outlines in Posidippus' lithic epigrams a materialistic poetics that figures implicit in the stones a range of social relations; Martial, on the contrary, does not refer to social relations, owner, or speaker, but his use of myth and paradox significantly expands the discursive range of epigram.

<sup>7</sup> Independently from the existence and circulation in Rome of Greek sources of the most famous myths narrated by Ovid, it is clear that the *Metamorphoses* became the obligatory

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text of reference after its appearance. Its presence in Martial is ubiquitous (for an essential bibliography, in which Hinds 2007 stands out, see Rosati 2014).

<sup>8</sup> According to a taste of Alexandrine *lusus* that in Rome is best represented by the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*.

<sup>9</sup> The metaphor that compares honey to nectar as a precious food is traditional in poetry: cf., after Euripides (*Bacch.* 143; also in *LSJ* s.v. νέκταρ, II), as well as Virgil (*georg.* 4.164; *Aen.* 1.433) and Martial (13.104.2 *Pallados a silvis nobile nectar apis*); analogously, the image of honey as a liquid secreted by plants is present in Greek (*LSJ* s.v. μέλι, II; and in Latin, *OLD* s.v. *mel*, 4). In Martial's epigram 4.32, the metaphor (amber is a honey) is combined with the simile (nectar-bee honey is *like* amber), with an insistence on the color, transparency and consistency the two materials share.

<sup>10</sup> On two epigrams dedicated to the same subject, 4.59 and 6.15 (where a humble ant has a rich tomb-monument), more later.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Citroni 1992, 425-8 and Fitzgerald 2007, ch. 5 (*The society of the book*).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Pliny, *nat.* 37.30 *Proximum locum in deliciis, feminarum tamen adhuc tantum, sucina optinent, eandemque omnia haec quam gemmae auctoritatem; sane priora illa aliquis de causis, crystallina frigido potu, myrrhina utroque; in sucinis causam ne deliciae quidem adhuc excogitare potuerunt* [the next place among luxuries, although as yet it is fancied only by women, is held by amber. All the three substances now under discussion enjoy the same prestige as precious stones; but whereas there are proper reasons for this in the case of the two former substances, since rock-crystal vessels are used for cold drinks and myrrhine-ware for drinks both hot and cold, not even luxury has yet succeeded in inventing a justification for using amber] (translation by D.E. Eichholz).

<sup>13</sup> Thus slotting itself into a tradition that must have been flourishing in Hellenistic culture, and is testified to by the *Lithika* of the new Posidippus, on which cf. Bing 2002; Hutchinson 2002; Hunter 2004; Kuttner 2005; Elsner 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Elsner 2007, 68: "Ekphrasis itself, insofar as it provides a pedagogic model for the gaze, may be seen as both its enabler (in helping the viewers it is training to see) and its occluder (in the veil of words with which it screens and obscures the purported visual

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object); [...] one might say that its true subject is not the verbal depiction of a visual object, rather, the verbal enactment of the gaze that tries to relate with and penetrate the object”.

<sup>15</sup> I will leave aside the debated issue of the identity of the narrating voice (on which see the commentary by Moreno Soldevila 2006, *ad loc.*), although the change of voices makes the epigram very elusive, and along with the final switch to a second person address raises in acute form the question of the subject-position of the viewer.

<sup>16</sup> On the associated pleasures of water and nudity in Latin poetry cf. Griffin 1985, 88-111 (ch. 5). But Kuttner 2003 offers much more, and from a particularly original perspective.

<sup>17</sup> On this theme cf. Rosati 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Ovid’s translations from the *Metamorphoses* are by F.J. Miller – G.P. Goold.

<sup>19</sup> But also the myth of Narcissus is to be recalled, where the same colour contrasts of red and white, along with the play of light, are emphasized as standards of beauty and incentives to elusive desire (e.g. *Met.* 3.422-3).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Rosati 2007 at 4.353-5.

<sup>21</sup> It is almost superfluous to observe that the extreme artificiality of the syntax (*imitata monilia*, with the verb in an unusual passive voice, is the apposition of *corallia* and *basas*, to which two other appositions are linked in turn, *concharum germina* and *delicias hominum*) simulates the “artistic” quality of the reality described.

<sup>22</sup> For the idea of the *numerare* behind the screen of water in Martial cf. 8.68.4 and 4.22.5.

<sup>23</sup> We should add to these passages the description Pliny the Younger offers of the waters of the Clitumnus: *epist.* 8.8.2.

<sup>24</sup> In Mart. 8.68.4 we also find the Ovidian *pun* in the juxtaposition of *calculus* and *numerare* (see Rosati 2009, at 5.588-9).

<sup>25</sup> On the erotic nature intrinsic to Ovid’s ‘idyllic places’, in which the aquatic component is always dominant, Segal 1969 remains a key work.

<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that he endorses an openly anti-naturalistic, artificial aesthetic (cf. Newlands 1988, who insists in fact on Ausonius’ reaction to his model Statius; and Roberts 1984, 348). We do not have to deal with a simple replacement of nature by art; it’s rather nature that *imitates* art, that is it realizes its own *opus* (cf. 51 *naturae mirabor opus*) by

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mimicking cultural products. Cf. also Kenney 1984, 195 “he commends the landscape of the Moselle as the product not of nature but of art”; on the Ovidian matrix of this aesthetic cf. here below.

<sup>27</sup> On this term cf. Citroni 1975, 337-8 (at Mart. 1.109.4).

<sup>28</sup> Which must also have been active in Greek, where the metaphorical use of the term stone (i.e., precious stone, gem, etc.) is attested to well before the *Lithika* of Posidippus, already in the diminutive λιθίδιον in Plato, *Phaed.* 110d.

<sup>29</sup> In which, comprehensibly, the *lapilli* in Ovid have a prevalent presence (cf. for example *Ars* 3.129 *nec caris aures onerate lapillis*); it is obviously not surprising to find them in the Pygmalion episode, among the artist’s gifts to his marble woman (cf. *met.* 10.260 *munera fert illi conchas teretesque lapillos* [now brings it gifts... shells and smooth pebbles], and 264-5 *dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo, / aure leves baccae...* [puts gemmed rings upon its fingers and a long necklace around its neck; pearls hang from the ears]).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. McKeown 1998, *ad loc.*

<sup>31</sup> Thus Roberts 1989 notoriously defines a sector of late-Antiquity poetic taste.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. in general Rosati 1983 (esp. ch. 2); Hardie 2002; Hinds 2002, who points out how Ovid’s landscape descriptions imply a sense of danger and deceptiveness, a tension between beauty and violence, between aesthetic pleasure and moral turmoil.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for example the fine work by Zeitlin 2013, who notes in the novel by the Greek Heliodorus (5<sup>th</sup> c.) a devotion to the same anti-naturalistic aesthetic: “in Heliodorus’ case, the terms are reversed. Amazement now consists in the recognition that the painting is the true model (archetypon) and the girl is merely the copy. Art seems to triumph over biology in this fantastic tale that accounts for the mismatch between child and parent and challenges our notions of the relations between nature and artifice. *This is a bold and unprecedented step* [my italics]”, 77. Obviously, while the importance of the process is undisputed, its *unprecedented* nature is questionable (at least in the ancient aesthetic; but there has notoriously been intense debate on the possibility of Greek knowledge of Latin literary culture in the Imperial age).

<sup>34</sup> On the ecphrastic nature of the episode of Perseus, see Hardie 2002, 178-86.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hardie 2004; on precedents of the process in the Hellenistic epigram cf. Hardie 2002, 187 n. 36.

<sup>36</sup> On Martial's 'amber epigrams' cf. also Bonvicini 1986 and Ruiz Sánchez 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Naturally the notion of the real vegetal origin of amber (along with mythical one, and many other legends about it) was acknowledged in antiquity: cf. for example Pliny, *nat. hist.* 37.46 (the wide-ranging section 31-46 contains a polemical discussion on various and sundry theories on the subject); Tac. *Germ.* 45.6.

<sup>38</sup> Their combination seems to be reflected in the verbal juxtaposition of the precious *Phaetontea* and *feram*, a striking word for an ant, more usually applied to wild beasts, that here ironically emphasizes the tension, and the occasional alliance, between art and nature, by performing the spectacle of nature's artistic productivity.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Fitzgerald 2007, 119; for Rimell 2008, 82, epigrams 4.32 and 59 "appear as neat icons for the gem-like brilliance and epitaphic drive of Martial's poetry".

<sup>40</sup> Notable, if anything, is the mythical paradigm to which Publius is allusively compared: the idea of the portrait as an instrument for keeping alive the memory of a beloved "person" after death (v. 17-8) recalls the myth of Laodamia, who has a wax image made of her groom Protesilaus (Ovid also alludes to it, *her.* 13.151-8; cf. Bettini 1992, 12-6).

<sup>41</sup> On this personage's characterization based on other Martial epigrams as well, cf. Citroni 1975, 334.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. data in Citroni 1975, 335-6.

<sup>43</sup> There is a vast bibliography on the theme: among others, cf. Ridgway 1984, Zanker 1992, Gazda 2002, Perry 2005.

<sup>44</sup> On the allusive function of decorations in Pompeian domestic paintings cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 25; the difficulty, obviously, lies in understanding in each case not only the object of the allusion, but also its meaning.

<sup>45</sup> For example, the theme of the "love of the gods," so popular in literary (like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it goes without saying) and figurative spheres, lends itself to offering readers/spectators the more or less conscious sensation of identifying with the predatory divinity, as Rosati 2012 tries to show.