Lucius Pinxit: A Painter's Sphragis to Ovidian Illustration

The House of Octavius Quartio (Pompeii II.2.2=the House of Loreius Tiburtinus) exhibits a programmatic relationship between Ovid's written *Metamorphoses* and Lucius' painted intertextual interpretation as emphasized by the fact that Lucius' is the only painter's signature we have that survives from Pompeii. The paintings react to the poem in order to present a sophisticated reflection on what it meant to create art in the first century CE. This paper will be of interested to anyone working on Ovid, Pompeian wall painting, and the intersection of art history and literary studies.

While Ovid's *Metamorphoses* serves as inspiration for four painted scenes, Actaeon and Diana, Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, the elements that Lucius chooses to emphasize and what he leaves out reveals his engagement with the written text and the paintings that surround him in other Pompeian houses. Both artists are proud of their work, but also anxious about its reception. This is clear in Ovid's sphragis "legar…vivam" (*Met.* 878-879) but no one has yet looked at how Lucius' "pinxit" serves a similar purpose. It occurs at the end of his miniature metamorphic narrative of bad readers. Both assert their immortality through the changing of bodies into new: Ovid changes written forms and Lucius changes text to image. Lucius does not just illustrate Ovid; he illustrates *his* Ovid. In noting this, I respond to Stephen Hinds' challenge that we "turn the old question of painting's influence upon the *Metamorphoses* directly on its head, and to ask more energetically what influence the *Metamorphoses* itself may have exerted upon Roman paintings in the later first century AD" (Hinds: 2002, 141). I conclude that the influence is not just imagistic but is political and aesthetic. Lucius is responding not to Ovid's Rome but to his own Pompeii after the earthquake of 62 CE.

While scholars do not hesitate to mark Ovidian influences in Pompeii (Platt: 2002, 80), they are often reluctant to state that there is a sophisticated literary engagement in its paintings (Pompeii in general, Richardson: 2000, 180; Octavius Quartio, Tronchin: 2006, 281, 361-62). The house has also suffered from an emphasis on the awkward juxtapositions of its architectural and sculptural elements (Zanker: 1998, 148 fig. 75). By isolating the pergola and biclinium, and therefore the wall paintings, we can see a very careful program of paintings that work together to negotiate the space between the house and the garden. Coming out of the house, one meets Diana and then progresses to the biclinium by passing Actaeon, Narcissus and finally Pyramus and Thisbe. It is beneath the last painting that we read *Lucius Pinxit* (Spinazzola: 1953, 402 fig. 458, 404 fig. 460). What is occasionally overlooked is that the painter signed the biclinium and not the painting itself. I begin my discussion by returning the biclinium to its original use and therefore with the signature covered and hidden by cushions. We shine light on Lucius, only by lifting the cushion and reading the name. Lucius only lives when we lift the cushion and read his name. His drawn words are his response to the Ovidian sphragis. The pun on *lux* with *Lucius* and the adjacent garden *lucus*, asks us to seek what Lucius is trying to clarify. The paintings are Lucius' work of drawn literary criticism in which he shows that books 3 and four are about bad readers and their punishments. Actaeon glances at the goddess and is punished; Narcissus fails to read the difference between himself and reflection, and Pyramus comes across a cloak that he thinks is marked by Thisbe's blood. Lucius, through his intertextual reference to Ovid, asks the reader to think of his paint as that of the blood, to ask what the cost of creating art is in Pompeii while simultaneously articulating the anxiety of being unable to control one's reception, a particularly poignant reflection for the modern reader for whom the exile to Tomis and the ashes of Vesuvius dominate our understanding of reception.

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