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Giovanni Barberi Squarotti, Annarita Colturato (ed.), *Il mito di Diana nella cultura delle corti. Arte letteratura musica. La civiltà delle corti, 2.* Firenze: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki, 2018. Pp. xiv, 458. ISBN 9788822265357. €39,00.

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

The present volume is the second of a series entitled *La civiltà delle corti*, published by the Centro studi delle Residenze Reali Sabaude, the first being *Le cacce reali nell'Europa dei principi*.¹

It is composed of a balanced and lucid introduction and five parts: I. Dall'antichità alla civiltà delle corti, which covers the fortuna of the myth of Diana from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; II. *Le corti italiane e la corte di Francia*, with main stops in Italy: Parma, Florence, the Lazio, Ferrara, and Modena, and in France: Fontainebleau and Paris; III. *La Reggia di Diana alla Venaria Reale*, dealing with both the decoration of the buildings and the gardens of the Venaria; IV. *Diane in musica*, comprising studies on 17th- and 18th- century music compositions, plus a study on musical pieces related to the carnival of Ivrea, in the Piedmont; and V. *Sguardi tra Sette e Novecento*, which contains essays on more recent works, the last being a reflection on the role – if any – of mythology in modern and contemporary art, with the spectator in the role of Actaeon. Most of the papers are written in Italian; three are in French, and one in English. There are numerous black and white photographs in the text (some of them of rare works, such as the *Minerva Tritonia* of the Archaeological Museum of Pomezia, Innocenzo da Imola's *Diana and Endymion* in the *Palazzina della Viola* in Bologna or the miniature from the *Ninfale fiesolano* from the Marciana Library of Venice), 46 color photographs, and an index of names (a bit erratic, as is often the case in collective volumes). Biographical information on the 24 contributors and a brief summary of each contribution would have been welcome here given the scope of the publication. In the introduction we read that this volume (just like the first in the series) is the result of the research arising from two international conferences that took place between 2010 and 2012 on the initiative of the Centro studi delle Residenze Reali Sabaude.

Among the contributions in the first part of the volume, Stefania Lapenta presents a well-structured paper on the iconographical metamorphoses of Diana from antiquity to the Renaissance. Lapenta, who devoted her PhD to this theme, presents in true Seznec fashion the passage from Diana's antique aspects to astrological manuscripts and other medieval documents and representations (such as, for instance, the little known image of her as Luna in her cart in the Sala della Giustizia at the Rocca di Angera), up to Raphael's drawings for the funerary chapel of Agostino Chigi in Santa Maria del Popolo, where we see Diana/Luna recovering her antique form (the one based on the statues of the Ephesus amazons, a form taken over by Baldassare Peruzzi), and

Correggio's representations of Giovanna da Piacenza as Diana, for which Lapenta suggests as a possible source Claudianus' *De raptu Proserpinae*.

Elisabetta Fadda's more complex, masterly contribution at the beginning of the second part deals with the Parmigianino frescoes (dating from 1520-1527, according to Fadda) in a room on the ground floor of the Rocca of Fontanellato. She enumerates some 16 proposed interpretations of the function of this saletta and of the paintings representing the episode of Diana and Actaeon, some of them clearly quite irrelevant given the style of the paintings – an alchemical operation of the *coniunctio*, an “altar of the dead”, or a kind of Eleusinian sanctuary. Fadda proposes a reading of the frescoes through the notion of *urbanitas*, (which is closer to the period), bringing to our attention, among others, Niccolò degli Agostini's contemporary edition of the *Metamorphoses*. This reading is confirmed by the testimony of Anton Francesco Doni, author of *Le Ville* (1559-1573) a treatise promoting a cortigiano's view of rural architecture that has eluded the attention of scholars dealing with this decoration. In one of the manuscript versions of the text (1565), Doni refers to Parmigianino's frescoes as “la più dolce cosa che si possi vedere; le carni delicate, i visi celesti, l'attitudini dilettevoli”. We have here neither a Stoic or a Christian subject, nor a representation of “maternal mourning”, but an appropriate decoration for a room such as this one. Well-documented, not only regarding the owners of the Rocca, Galeazzo Sanvitale and Paola Gonzaga, but also regarding the antecedents of this representation and the cultural ambience at the time, Fadda's essay highlights the dangers of over-interpretation. It has a high educational value; this is a case story worth teaching to undergraduate students.

On the other hand, Michele Curnis's contribution on Giacomo Francesco Parisani's *Diana schernita* (1629) in the fourth part of the volume demonstrates the risks of multidisciplinary approaches that inevitably combine elements from several periods and fields. An understandable lack of close familiarity with all aspects of the subject matter – in the present case mythological sources, classical and contemporary (i.e., 17th century) literature, art, and history of science – can lead to unfounded certitudes, and we see here how in such cases one has to tread very carefully. “What has not been noted up to now” is a dangerous phrase to be used with caution. And when Parisani's Endymion asks Apollo to halt his course (“ferma il corso, Febo”) so that he can spend more time with Diana/Luna, do we really have here a reference to the biblical episode of Joshua? This may be an important element in Galileo's story, but here it is just a banal *locus communis*. In a sonnet, e.g., of Lodovico Paterno (1568), “Da sassi Latmij...”, Endymion asks the Sun to leave and not to haste to come back – “Corcati presto, e tardo à noi risorgi”. Also, one would expect the reference to Guercino's Endymion to be in the body of the text despite its being a later work given its importance in this context and not relegated to a footnote, with Miriam Di Penta's² or Pierluigi Carofano's³ relevant studies mentioned in a footnote.

One cannot do justice to all the contributions. In an informative and dense essay, Clara Goria presents the intricate history of the decorative cycle at the Venaria Reale; a genealogical tree and a plan of the decorations for the uninitiated would have made this precious contribution easier to follow. Goria's contribution is complemented by Giovanni Barberi Squarotti's essay on Emanuele Tesauro's role in the same decorative cycle; the author illustrates how an architectural structure, that of the Venaria Reale – conceived by Tesauro in his *Inscriptiones* (1666) as a “suburban Sparta” for its combination of hunting, warfare and civic virtue – was a suitable framework for the classification of a series of mythological hunting scenes, “emblematic stories” and “love symbols” and their moral lessons (with Diana always remaining the paradigm of chastity despite the eroticism of some of the depicted episodes) and demonstrates how Tesauro's erudition was not always first-hand (Homeric hymns, Callimachus), but often filtered through later mediators (not only mythographers such as Boccaccio, Natale Conti and Lilio Giraldi and emblem books, but even contemporary religious literature – we have here again one more reminder of the importance of Jean Seznec's

seminal essay [4](#) which one cannot stress enough. Delphine Trébosc gives us a very fine, formalistic analysis of the Louvre's Diane chasseresse. However, it is the ethnomusicologist Febo Guizzi (who, alas—we are informed in the introduction—did not live to see the publication) who offers the reader probably the most pleasurable and enthralling chapter in the volume. His theme is the “*esistenza sonora*” of Diana in the world of popular traditions. “È bene ribadirlo”, Guizzi writes, “i nomi rivestono realtà contraddittorie, frammentarie, di problematica interpretazione, che tuttavia trattengono elementi disparati, quasi che la tradizione orale non volesse buttare via niente”. Through a journey in the world of magic and of rites of passage, he introduces us to a less well-known aspect of the myth of Diana: her role in the carnival of Ivrea and in the festive rituals of the valleys of Ossola, in the Piedmont, and to the musical pieces entitled *diane*, descendants of the *albas* of the troubadours and the French *aubades* – musical pieces welcoming, actually, the light of planet Venus, expressing the struggle of light with darkness.

If one wanted to mention things that could be considered missing from this otherwise well-conceived volume, one paper that would have been welcome is a separate study of the fortuna of Diana in the texts of medieval and Renaissance mythographers and in emblem-books, as well as on the most important vernacular and illustrated editions of Ovid. Although several contributors refer to them, a comprehensive view of what was available to litterateurs and artists would have been useful.

In addition, although the link between Italy and France is, of course, totally justified given the role of Italian artists in the French court, especially in Fontainebleau, and the subsequent interactions between the two countries, it is surprising that there is almost no mention at all of a court where the myth of Diana was of paramount importance: that of Elizabeth I, the virgin queen. Rinaldo Rinaldi in his essay on *Casta Diana* does mention the “*Virgo Britannica*” briefly (p. 32, accompanied with a reference to Frances A. Yates’ distinguished essay *Astraea*, 1975), but she is missing from the index. Elizabeth I announced in 1559 to the Parliament her decision to remain unwed, and her identification with Luna/Cynthia was a conscious choice that she used as a strategic tool during her whole reign. Her courtiers adopted the guise of Endymion and addressed her also as *Belpheobe*, *Astraea*, *Oriana*, *Caelica* – all stellar names. So much so that Francis Bacon writes in his *De sapientia veterum* (1609) – here in Sir Arthur Gorges’ 1619 translation: “This fable may have reference to the nature and dispositions of Princes ...”. There are several studies worth reading on this subject, such as Philippa Berry’s *Of Chastity and Power*[5](#) and Marie Axton’s *The Queen’s Two Bodies*[6](#), that would have further enriched an already accomplished volume. Christina of Sweden’s equestrian portraits representing her as an Amazon (“*Gothica Amazon*”) are not missing from Clara Gorla’s comprehensive study on Diana as the image of power, while Alessandro Malinverni examines in his contribution the portraits of powerful women depicted as *Dianas* in 18th century France. Malinverni shows us how the figure of Diana was a rare survivor (together with *Hebe*) in the arts in a period during which classicist portraiture theory demanded the abandonment of Greco-Roman mythology in favour of a stronger adherence to reality. Several factors contributed to the success of this type of portrait, such as the centrality of hunting and the taste for *rocaïlle* decoration, as well as the fact that women ended up having a more independent role in society thanks to the *preciosité* movement. Furthermore a Masonic influence is also not to be underestimated, says the author, an element though requiring further research. Of particular interest to art historians are the choices, in the portraits discussed, of the *mise* (the clothing of the models)—all’antica or contemporary, fashionable or classic, dressed, *négligé* or nude—; attributes that accentuated specific traits of the goddess, such as her chastity or her cruelty; as well as whether the models were recognisable or idealized, something condemned in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, which demanded an “*exacte ressemblance*” of the persons depicted [7](#). The only criticism here is the almost exclusive dependence on Édouard Pommier’s *Théories du portrait*.

On the whole, this scientifically sound and lavishly illustrated publication is an impeccable example of an interdisciplinary volume; its most interesting feature is probably the variety of approaches of the different contributors.

Table of Contents

Indice

Introduzione (Pag. V)

Dall'antichità alla civiltà delle corti

Gioachino Chiarini, *Diana e la Luna* (p. 3)

Luigi Surdich, *Giovanni Boccaccio: Diana e Venere* (p. 9)

Rinaldo Rinaldi, *Casta Diana* (p. 25)

Stefania Lapenta, *Metamorfosi iconografiche di Diana dall'antichità al Rinascimento* (p. 35)

Le corti italiane e la corte di Francia

Elisabetta Fadda, *Un soggetto acquaticcio: Diana al bagno negli affreschi di Parmigianino a Fontanellato. Il ritratto emblematico dei committenti* (p. 55)

Valentina Conticelli, *Dea natura, Diana Efesia e Diana nera. Motivi iconografici nella committenza di Francesco I de' Medici: dallo studiolo di Palazzo Vecchio alle grottesche degli Uffizi* (p. 85)

Patrizia Tosini, *In cerca di Diana. Il mito della dea nelle residenze del Lazio nel Cinquecento* (p. 103)

Sonia Cavicchioli, *Diana assente. Miti letterari nella decorazione delle residenze estensi del Seicento* (p. 123)

Delphine Trébosc, *Peindre Diane et ses doubles: La Diane Chasseresse du musée du Louvre* (p. 141)

Céline Bohnert, *Diane à la cour de France sous Louis XIII: évolution esthétique et signification politique du mythe dans les années 1620* (p. 161)

La Reggia di Diana alla Venaria Reale

Giovanni Bärberi Squarotti, *Le Inscriptiones di Emanuele Tesauro e gli affreschi della Reggia di Venaria* (p. 183)

Clara Gorla, *Diana e l'immagine del potere. Jan Miel e il cantiere decorativo della Venaria Reale* (p. 205)

Sara Martinetti, *L'Anticamera di Ifigenia e la Sala dei Templi di Diana: Andrea e Giacomo Casella decoratori a Venaria e nelle residenze di corte* (p. 231)

Paolo Cornaglia, *Il Tempio di Diana. Giardini italiani e confronti europei* (p. 247)

Diane in musica

Michele Curnis, *Novelli Endimioni e falsi Atteoni nella Diana schernita (Roma 1629)* (p. 267)

Jean Duron, *Diane et la musique française du Grand Siècle* (p. 291)

Leonardo Waisman, *Metamorphosis in Reverse: Diana, from Goddess to Woman in Da Ponte and Martin y Soler's L'arbore di Diana* (p. 313)

Febo Guizi, *Altre Diane* (p. 325)

Sguardi tra Sette e Novecento

Francesca Fedi, *Percorsi artemidei tra Gravina e Leopardi* (p. 349)

Alessandro Malinverni, *Il ritratto en Diane nella Francia del Settecento* (p. 365)

Liliana Barroero, *Il mito di Diana nel secondo Settecento romano. Batoni e dintorni* (p. 393)

Monica Tomiato, *Favole antiche per le arti moderne: intorno Diana nell'Ottocento* (p. 409)

Michele Dantini, *Robert Smithson preterintenzionale. Disseminazioni, specchi, frammenti* (p. 425)

Crediti fotografici (p. 433)

Indice dei nomi (p. 435)

Notes:

- [1. La civiltà delle corti; Centro studi delle residenze reali Sabaude; Le cacce reali nell'Europa dei principi.](#)
- [2. Miriam di Penta, "Guercino's Endymion, Hercules and Artemisia for Alessandro Argoli", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 67 \(2004\), pp. 233-254.](#)
- [3. Pierluigi Carofano, "L'Endimione e l'Atlante del Guercino per I Medici. Proposte per una lettura iconologica", Valori Tattili, 5/6 \(2015\), pp. 277-286.](#)
- [4. Jean Seznec, La Survivance des dieux antiques: essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l'humanisme et dans l'art de la Renaissance, London, The Warburg Institute, 1940.](#)
- [5. Philippa Berry, Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen, London and New York, Routledge, 1989.](#)
- [6. Marie Axton, The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession, London, Swift Printers Ltd. for Royal Historical Society, 1977.](#)
- [7. Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers \(1765\), vol. XIII, 153b: "Portrait, \(Peinture.\) Le principal mérite de ce genre de peinture, est l'exacte ressemblance qui consiste principalement à exprimer le caractere & l'air de physionomie des personnes qu'on représente. Si la personne que vous peignez est naturellement triste, ne lui donnez pas de la gaieté qui seroit toujours quelque chose d'étranger sur son visage. Si elle est enjouée, faites paroître cette belle humeur par l'expression des parties de la physionomie où elle se montre. Si elle est grave & majestueuse, les ris sensibles rendroient cette majesté fade & niaise. Chaque personne a un caractere distinctif qu'il faut saisir." The entry is signed by Louis de Jaucourt \[Available \[here\]\(#\)\].](#)

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