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The Pain of Ancient Gods and Heroes

The Use of Raised Arms as *Pathosformel* in Giovanni Antonio Rusconi's Xylographs for the *Trasformazioni* by Lodovico Dolce

According to Aby Warburg, Ovid and his epigones (translators and illustrators) acted as vehicles for the passionate nature of ancient times, passing it on through generations of readers, and allowing it to survive into the Modern Age: he is able to arouse *pathos* in readers of all ages and therefore to revive ancient emotionality through his words. Besides being the most significant poem of eroticism, the *Metamorphoses* are loaded with images of violence and pain, from which not even the main deities of the ancient *pantheon* are spared. Between the end of the 15th and the 16th century, the bestselling editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (which was repeatedly republished, including as Italian translations) were those illustrated with woodcuts, in which the main myths told by the Latin poet were translated into images. In most cases, illustrators chose to portray myths staging the pain caused by the loss of a loved one. The aim of this paper is to analyse the strategies Giovanni Antonio Rusconi used to convey pain in his xylographs for the *Trasformazioni* by Lodovico Dolce (a vernacular edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), where the small dimensions of the format did not allow for detailed representations of facial expressions. To compensate, the artist frequently portrayed his characters making strongly emotive gestures, reactivating ancient *pathos* formulas and disseminating them to a modern audience. In particular he used the ancient themes of raised arms and garments flowing as their wearer runs, to express the desperation of gods and heroes who have lost their loves, of nymphs forced to undergo painful metamorphoses or heroes that are condemned to die. A comparison between text and image also makes it possible to understand Rusconi's logic in choosing to rekindle the relatable emotionality that exudes from the Latin poem.