

Chapter 6

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Correggio's 'Lascivie'

The title of this essay is intentionally provocative because I would like to trigger a debate about an unresolved problem. In the sixteenth century, mythological paintings like those created by Correggio were defined as 'poesie'. But, in order to highlight the erotic connotations of a canvas like the *Venus and Cupid Sleeping, Spied upon by a Satyr* (fig. 1a)—likely commissioned from the artist by count Nicola Maffei the Elder of Mantua—the modern history of art conceived of a new genre, unknown in the Renaissance: the 'erotic poesia'.¹ Eroticism is, however, a term that appeared in Italian only in the course of the seventeenth century and became widespread only in the nineteenth, while during the sixteenth century one used more explicit concepts, for example libidinous and lascivious things (*libidine e lascivia*).

Unfortunately, Vasari was not aware of the existence of the painting, now in the Louvre, and his description of the *Loves of Jove* is notoriously imprecise, because it is based on oral information furnished by Giulio Romano in 1541 during the biographer's four-day visit to Mantua. In this famous passage Vasari does not speak of 'poesie' or 'lascivie', but uses instead rather generic language: Correggio had painted for Duke Federico Gonzaga 'due quadri' to give to the emperor Charles V, a 'Leda ignuda' and a 'Venere'—in reality the *Danae Borghese*—'sí di morbidezza, colorito e d'ombre di carne lavorate, che non parevano colori ma carni' [worked with such softness, color and shadow that they appeared to be not of paint, but of flesh].² For Vasari these paintings were not intended for 'uomini disonesti', like the

¹ For the concept of 'erotic poesia' see Marcin Fabianski, *Correggio: Le mitologie d'amore*, Quaderni della Fondazione Il Correggio, *Lecture Allegriane*, Quaderno n. 2, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), 2000. The original English version is even titled *Correggio's Erotic Poesie*. For the provenance of the painting, which one can deduce from the inventory of 1589 made just after the death of Nicola Maffei the Younger, see Guido Rebecchini, 'New Light on Two "Venuses" by Correggio', *Journal of the Warburg*

and Courtauld Institutes, 60, 1998, 272–75, esp. 274. Moreover, Guido Rebecchini, *Private Collectors in Mantua 1500–1630*, *Sussidi eruditi*, 56, Rome, 2002, 72–85 and 278–86 for the inventory of November 27, 1589.

² Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, with a commentary by Paola Barocchi, vol. 4, Text, Florence, 1976, 52.



1a. Correggio, *Venus and Cupid Sleeping, Spied upon by a Satyr*, ca. 1528–30. Oil on canvas, 190 x 124 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre.



1b. Correggio, *Education of Cupid*, ca. 1525. Oil on canvas, 155 x 92 cm. London: National Gallery.

vulgar engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi based on drawings by Giulio Romano. Instead, they were paintings that communicated a pleasing grace through representational strategies that would then be disseminated in the field of sensual imagery. The apparently *carnal* paintings of Correggio were married with the natural through the inclusion of a lush landscape, the limpidity of transparent water, the whiteness and softness of skin, and the fine, blond hair of a woman considered ideal; all elements that alluded to the pleasures of love and represented a breakthrough in the visual culture of the west on a metaphoric and atmospheric level.

The inventory redacted in 1589 at the death of count Nicola Maffei the Younger does not help to resolve the question between ‘poesie’ and ‘lascivie’, because the two canvases that were in the bedroom (*camera da letto*) on the ground floor of the palace in Contrada Montenegro in Mantua, the *Venus* and the *Education of Cupid* (fig. 1b), were described laconically: ‘et primo una venere et cupido che dormono con un satiro che scopre di man del Correggio ... item una venere che guida cupido a scuola da mercurio di man del Correggio’ (And first a Venus and Cupid Sleeping with a satyr that discovers [them] from the hand of Correggio ... item a Venus who delivers Cupid to the school of Mercury, from

the hand of Correggio).³ The inventory mentions the revelation of the body of the sleeping Venus to expose her to the gaze of the spectator, but the sensuality of the gesture remains, so to speak, implicit.

To understand how these paintings were, and might have been received by the public in the sixteenth century, we must therefore work *ex negativo*. That is, we must turn to those passages in Vasari's *Lives* where the Aretine biographer clarifies how one should *not* paint altarpieces. The opening of the life of Fra Angelico in the Torrentino edition is the *locus classicus*: 'Certamente chi lavora opere ecclesiastiche e sante, doverrebbe egli ancora del continuo essere ecclesiastico e santo, perché si vede che, quando elle sono operate da persone che poco credino e manco stimino la religione, fanno spesso cadere in mente appetiti dionesti e voglie lascive' (Certainly, he who works on ecclesiastical and holy painting, should continue to be ecclesiastical and holy, because you see that, when they are produced by individuals with little faith and who lack respect for religion, often they cause the mind to fall into dishonest appetites and lustful desires).⁴ This is an idea repeated in a celebrated passage from the life of another Dominican painter, Fra Bartolomeo, where Vasari records how the 'lasciva imitazione del vivo' [the lascivious imitation from life] in that artist's Saint Sebastian caused female spectators to fall into temptation. The theme also appears in a less well-known anecdote in the life of the Veronese artist Caroto in the Giunti edition: 'Fu Giovan Francesco molto arguto nelle risposte; onde si racconta ancora, che essendogli una volta detto da un prete, che troppo erano lascive le sue figure degli altari, rispose: Voi state fresco, se le cose dipinte vi commuovono: pensate, come è da fidarsi di voi, dove siano persone vive e palpabili' (Giovan Francesco was very clever in his responses: so it is still said that when told once by a priest that his religious figures were too lascivious, he responded: You must be pretty frisky yourself if painted figures have such an effect on you. Consider how much you must be trusted where there are living, touchable people.)⁵

I have already examined in another place the significance and importance of the word *palpabile*, rare enough in the economy of the *Vite*.⁶ Here, I will limit myself to recording that Vasari uses it only to describe sculptural qualities of unusual verisimilitude and to characterize the sensual quality of Rosso Fiorentino's *Bacchus*, then in the Gallery of François I at Fontainebleau.⁷ Vasari writes: 'È il Bacco un giovanetto nudo tanto tenero, delicato e dolce, che par di carne veramente e palpabile, e più tosto vivo che dipinto' (Bacchus is a completely nude youth, tender, delicate and sweet, whose flesh appears truthful and palpable, rather alive than painted).⁸ What interests me here is the relation between palpability, sweetness and fleshiness, because the last two terms reappear, as we have seen, in the biography of Correggio: sweetness (*dolcezza*), softness (*morbidezza*) and shadow (*ombra*) of the worked flesh that give us a pulsing and palpable body, statue-like—one notes the sculptural quality of the winged Venus in the *Education of Cupid*—or, in other words, sensual.

The tendency to talk of works of art comparing plastic and tactile values with visual experience was already set from the middle of the fifteenth century, that is, at the time of the *Commentarii* of Ghiberti.⁹ But it acquired a greater centrality when it was assimilated into discussions about the *paragone*,

³ Rebecchini, 'New Light ...', 274, note 14.

⁴ Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. 3, Text, Florence, 1971, 273–74.

⁵ Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. 4, Text, 571. The passage on Caroto was also noted by Robert W. Gaston, 'Sacred Erotica: The Classical *figura* in Religious Painting of the Early Cinquecento', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2, 1995, 238–64, esp. 243, note 12.

⁶ Alessandro Nova, 'Il Cristo *in forma pietatis* del Rosso Fiorentino fra devozione e bellezza', in *L'immagine di Cristo dall'acheropita alla mano d'artista: Dal tardo me-*

dioevo all'età barocca, ed. Christoph L. Frommel, Gerhard Wolf, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Studi e testi, 432, Vatican City, 2006, 323–35, esp. 332–33.

⁷ On this painting see, above all, Sylvie Béguin, 'New Evidence for Rosso in France', *Burlington Magazine*, 131, 1989, 828–38 and Janet Cox-Rearick, *The Collection of Francis I: Royal Treasures*, Antwerp, 1995, 275.

⁸ Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. 4, Text, 487.

⁹ See Mary Pardo, 'Artifice as Seduction in Titian', in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions,*



2. Anon. (Northeast Italian), *Various occupations (recto), Allegory on Copulation (verso)*. Copper engraving plate, 15 x 22.4 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art.

wherein sculpture was presented as a natural vehicle of an image that we today define as erotic because touch was considered the most voluptuous of the senses. This is documented by the ‘*explanatio*’ of Jodocus Badius Ascensius to the French edition of the *Narren-Schyff* by Sebastian Brant; the glosses were composed in 1498 and the edition appeared in Paris in 1501. The ship of touch is guided here by couples of libertines.¹⁰ We are here on the threshold of a revolution, at the limits of an historical period in which, to take up an old thesis of Carlo Ginzburg, sight joins touch as a privileged erotic sense.¹¹

How did this transformation in the hierarchy of the senses reach the sexual sphere? One answer may be found in the diffusion through prints of a new ‘*libidinoso*’ imaginary. This term, dear to Aretino, was already in circulation in Italian Trecento literature and had a profound impact on the court painting of northern Italy. To avoid any equivocation, it is evident that the *stile* of Correggio had little in common with the language of the ‘*bella maniera*’ elaborated by Giulio Romano, Rosso Fiorentino and Perino del Vaga. My claim is, however, that the followers of Raphael, along with Rosso, had prepared the terrain, above all with their engraved works, for an even more adventurous path promoted by Correggio and his patrons. This thesis, if proven, would have implications for the chronology of paintings produced by the Emilian master.

I shall leave aside the scandalous episode of *I Modi*; for addressing this would require a deep analysis of that undertaking’s political context, because the elements of those engravings that today we define as ‘*pornographic*’, an adjective that came into usage only in the nineteenth century, conceal a merciless social satire.¹² It is preferable to concentrate on the *Loves of the Gods* engraved by Jacopo Caraglio when the Veronese master was hardly 27. The fundamental innovations of this series, if one contrasts them to *I Modi*, are the following: first, Caraglio’s burin-engravings represent the loves of the gods and not Roman courtesans embracing their lovers; second, the carnal relation, coitus, is not represented explicitly, as occurs in the drawings by Giulio Romano for Marcantonio Raimondi; third,

Texts, Images, ed. James G. Turner, Cambridge, 1993, 55–89, esp. 62.

¹⁰ See Carl Nordenfalk, ‘The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 48, 1985, 1–22, esp. 13.

¹¹ Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figura-

zione erotica nel ‘500’, in *Tiziano e Venezia*, Convegno internazionale di studi, Venice, 1976, Vicenza, 1980, 125–35, esp. 134.

¹² On *I Modi*, see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton, 1999 and Alessandro Nova ‘Erotismo e spiritualità nella pittura romana

the accompanying texts are very suggestive, but far less obscene than those created for the first series by Aretino, on account of its ingenious mingling of word and image. Licentious texts and illustrations were also produced before *I Modi* without raising violent protests. The fifteenth century saw the appearance of *Il Manganello*, the evocative title of a misogynist poem by an anonymous author; and already in 1425 Antonio Beccadelli (Il Panormita) had composed his *Hermaphroditus*, dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, written to compete with the erotic texts of antiquity by Propertius and Martial.¹³ What is more, a few 'erotic' engravings (fig. 2) at the end of the Quattrocento indicate how the market for such products may have developed in a very precocious phase of the history of print-making.¹⁴ So far as we know, however, texts and images remained rigorously separated. It was Are-



3. Jacopo Caraglio, *Pluto and Persephone* (after a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino), ca. 1527. Copper engraving, 21.1 x 13.5 cm. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts.



4. Jacopo Caraglio, *Saturn and Philyra* (after a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino), ca. 1527. Copper engraving, 21.1 x 13.5 cm. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts.

del Cinquecento', in Francesco Salviati et *la Bella Maniera: Actes des colloques de Rome et de Paris* (1998), ed. Catherine Monbeig Goguel, Michel Hochmann, and Philippe Costamagna, Rome, 2001, 149–69, esp. 150–52.
¹³ Nova, 'Erotismo e spiritualità', 151. On Beccadelli and his work see Antonio Beccadelli (Panormita), *Hermaph-*

roditus (Humanistica, 10), ed. Donatella Coppini, Rome, 1990.

¹⁴ See Jay A. Levenson, Konhrad Oberhuber, and Jacquelyn L. Sheehan, *Early Italian Engravings from the National Gallery of Art*, Washington, DC, 1973, 526–27.

tino's ingenious intuition to unite these in a single product, achieving thereby an explosive mix that had incalculable consequences for the future history of the genre until the present day.

The compositions of Rosso that belonged to the series of the *Loves* took their distance, as we have seen, from forms of experience that were no longer possible, especially after the arrest of Marcantonio Raimondi. They are, however, precisely for this reason important not only for the history of print-making but of the image in general because they document the development of compensation strategies that are still topical: Rosso's two works abound in so-called phallic symbols. In the engraving with *Pluto and Proserpina* (fig. 3) the branch above their heads, the forked weapon of the god and the penis of Cerberus, clearly emphasized, play symbolic roles, substituting for the male member of Pluto. While the form of the broken baton featured in the foreground of *Saturn and Philyra* (fig. 4) leaves no doubt about its function. It may very well be that the original drawings given by Rosso to the printmaker were less explicit. Indeed, when we compare a drawing by Perino del Vaga today in the Uffizi with its respective print by Caraglio (fig. 5a, 5b), we observe that the engraver altered the image in one detail, in the pubic area, rendering it even more vulgar.¹⁵ In any case, there is one point about which there can be no doubt: the very strict censorship enacted on the series by Marcantonio did not halt the birth and diffusion of a new genre of images that had a profound effect on the secular painting of the time, including, as we shall see in a moment, that of Correggio.

Giulio Romano's vast painting of the *Lovers* in the Hermitage—so large that it measures 163 by 337 cm—was originally painted on a panel but at some point was transferred to canvas (fig. 6). It was in all



5a. Perino del Vaga, *Venus and Cupid*, ca. 1528–29. Pen and ink. Firenze, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.



5b. Jacopo Caraglio, *Venus and Cupid* (after a drawing by Perino del Vaga), ca. 1528–29. Copper engraving, 21.1 x 13.3 cm. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts.



6. Giulio Romano, *Lovers*, 1525. Oil on wood transferred to canvas, 163 x 337 cm. Saint Petersburg: Hermitage.

likelihood executed for Federico Gonzaga in 1525, shortly after Giulio arrived in Mantua; he had moved to that city, although not yet fully permanently, by October 22, 1524.¹⁵ With the life size rendition of two lovers, stripped of any attributes that would identify them as, say, Mars and Venus, we find ourselves confronting a completely new mode of painting the human body in the art of the West, at least since the end of antiquity. There can then be no doubt that the reference to the only image of *I Modi* in which the couple is accompanied by a procuress was completely intentional, made on purpose in order to satisfy the taste of the marquis, not yet a duke, who had already learnt much about this material in the *camerino d'alabastro* of his uncle Alfonso d'Este in Ferrara. Modesty has stemmed commentary on the profound vulgarity of the image, for the heavy if not dense allusions are plain to see: the erect tail of the little dog is an obvious reference to the male member because *penis* in Latin also means tail; the keys that hang from the belt of the madam, and being sniffed by the animal, had only to be transformed into their verbal form to achieve their goal (*chiavi/chiovare* = keys/to screw); and, for the thick-skulled, the painter has represented the embrace between a satyr and a nymph on the leg of the bed. It was costly painting that said a lot about the real interests of the patron: I do not think that we have to disturb neoplatonists of any sort when we enter the Room of Psyche in the Palazzo Te, a place reserved for the delights of the duke and his guests, where the allusions to carnal love abound.

It is in this context that we must analyze Correggio's canvas from which we took our point of departure. Other authors have remarked upon the affinity between the composition of the Emilian master (fig. 1a) and the engraving with *Jove and Antiopé* (fig. 7), based on a drawing by Perino del Vaga and belonging to the series of the *Loves of the Gods* engraved by Caraglio in 1527–28. Only Marcin Fabianski, however, in his volume on the mythologies of love, appears to take account of the implications that this relation might have for the tormented chronology of Correggio. Because if the painting

¹⁵ For the visual comparison see already Elena Parma Armani, *Perin del Vaga: L'anello mancante*, Genoa, 1997 [1986], 70.

¹⁶ Fabianski, *Correggio*, 50.



7. Jacopo Caraglio, *Jove and Antiope* (after a drawing by Perino del Vaga), ca. 1528–29. Copper engraving, 21.1 x 13.5 cm. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts.

Cupid, today in the National Gallery, London, a painting that until a few years ago was falsely understood to be a pendant to the painting in the Louvre.²⁰ Also, traced on the *recto* of the same sheet is a

depends on the print and not vice versa, we must then date Correggio's painting to 1528, or even later.¹⁷ This goes against the prevailing consensus in the most authoritative publications on the painter, which date the work to the early 1520s or between 1523 and 1525.¹⁸ In a short career like that of Correggio's a difference of three, five or more years is of great relevance.

To find a solution to this problem, one must consider two things that might argue for an earlier date. In the first place, those who prefer to date the work to the early 1520s might date Correggio's composition to about 1523, when Parmigianino worked in Correggio's workshop. Parmigianino, through graphic means, might have carried the invention with him to Rome in 1524; there, Perino del Vaga could have reused it for the engraving. This is, however, a somewhat tortured hypothesis and experience teaches us that the most economical arguments are usually the truest: suffice it to say, and until proven otherwise, it is far simpler to hypothesize that Correggio saw the freshly printed engraving in the hands of a member of the Gonzaga court, certainly interested in the new 'libidinose' and 'lascive' images¹⁹

There is, nonetheless, a second problem. Conserved in the British Museum is a study in red chalk for the figure of Cupid in the *Education of*

¹⁷ Fabianski, *Correggio*, 61–62. Marzia Faietti is also convinced that the Caraglio's print is slightly earlier in date than the *Venus, Cupid, and a Satyr* by Correggio: see Marzia Faietti, 'Betrayals of the Gods and Metamorphoses of Artists: Parmigianino, Caraglio and Agostino Carracci', *Artibus et historiae* (forthcoming), 7.

¹⁸ Cecil Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, London, 1976 (toward the middle of the third decade); John Shearman, *Only Connect ... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1988, Princeton, 1992, 247 (beginning of the third decade); David Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, New Haven and London, 1997, 269 (the *Education of Cupid*, around 1523) and 272 (the *Venus* later than the *Education*). The later dating here proposed, was already advanced by Lucia Fornari Schianchi, *Correggio*, Florence, 1994, 64 (around 1528), and it has been confirmed by Sylvie Béguin in a catalogue entry in the exhibition in Parma, *Correggio*,

ed. Lucia Fornari Schianchi, Milan, 2008, 317–19, where the *Education* of London was dated to about 1525, if not earlier, while the *Venus* of the Louvre was put even as late as after 1530.

¹⁹ At the conference (2008) organized in Parma, where I first discussed these ideas, David Ekserdjian told me that the hypothesis about an original creation by Correggio landing shortly thereafter in Perino's repertory filtered through the drawings of Parmigianino is less improbable if one considered that two drawings of Parmigianino's Roman period reflect inventions by Correggio. He was referring, no doubt, to *Jove and Antiope* in the Louvre and to the *Priapus and Lotus* of the British Museum. The first is dated 1526–27 and slightly precedes the engraving by Caraglio, but the pose of Venus, the arms of the satyr that unveil her, and the excited Cupid riding an eagle are all different than what we see in the Louvre painting. It is true that the two compositions re-

preparatory sketch for the *Agony in the Garden*, once in Reggio Emilia and today in Apsely House.²¹ This small devotional painting is dated, usually, to the early 1520s. Although, in a typically circular argument, this date is derived in turn from the presumed dating of the *Education of Cupid*, which was originally to be found in the same collection as the painting today in the Louvre. In a chain of hypotheses now out of control, this early dating would then help to date the Louvre *Venus*.

It is easy to contest each of these arguments. First, in the sixteenth century there are many cases, as the drawings of Michelangelo demonstrate, where the *verso* was used some years after the *recto*. Second, the date of the *Agony in the Garden* is uncertain, as is almost all of Correggio's chronology, and nothing prohibits dating this work later, toward 1525. Third, as has been already noted by others, that the *Venus and Cupid Sleeping*, *Spied upon by a Satyr* and the *Education of Cupid* belonged to the same collection does not mean that they were pendants. Their measurements do not correspond (fig. 1a, 1b) and they are stylistically quite different: in other words, nothing rules out dating the *Education* to 1525 and the *Venus* to 1528, or even later, as a cultured reflection on the diffusion of the series of the *Loves of the Gods*.

Beyond problems of chronology and turning again to the principal theme of this essay, the 'eroticism' of Correggio's mythological paintings is a commonplace in the writings about the artist. It is my aim to demonstrate that in order to grasp their disruptive power they must be understood, with greater courage and coherence, in the context of a more general production of images in the early Cinquecento, without making distinctions between high and low language, between printed and painted works. The basic thesis is the following: it is not possible to appreciate Correggio's 'lascivie' if they are not compared with the prints of his time, for it was in the graphic sphere that sight became progressively eroticized. One may judge the impact of this visual revolution if one compares the canvases of the first *studiolo* of Isabella d'Este with the allegories of the second. While Mantegna's canvas *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* reveals a phase in Italian visual culture projected toward the modern manner (*maniera moderna*), where salacious details of the scene are filtered through the use of a dry and composed style, the *Allegory of Virtue* by Correggio demonstrates an exuberance of ornaments, gestures, poses, and knowing smiles.²² Twenty-five years after Mantegna's death, even the virtuous Isabella could not manage to impede her favored painter from representing the priapic vice in tune with the tastes of her son and of his permissive court. All this took place within a process that led sight to outflank touch as the privileged erotic sense. Thus, if in a letter of Aretino to Federico II,

veal a generic similarity and that in the drawing the satyr seems to dance like in the painting, but significant differences remain. One can imagine how Perino might have taken inspiration from the graphic composition of Parmigianino, but it is difficult to explain how the former might have managed to get closer to the work of Correggio than did Parmigianino. Surely, it is possible to imagine that Parmigianino had with him other drawings that were more faithful to the presumed prototype by Correggio, but at this point the hypothesis becomes overly complex. The *Priapus and Lotus* of the British Museum was, instead, dated by Popham to 1535–40 (A. E. Popham, *Catalogue of the Drawings of Parmigianino*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Catalogue*, New Haven and London, 1971, 109, note 257), but Gnann puts it, following the opinion of Konrad Oberhuber, toward the end of the first period in Parma or at the beginning of the Roman period (Achim Gnann, *Parmigianino: Die Zeichnungen*,

Petersberg, 2007, 401, note 330). However, in this case and independent from problems of chronology, the composition is truly very different from the presumed original by Correggio. What links Perino's composition to the Louvre painting are the pose of the satyr, who enters the scene from the left, crossing his arms to raise the curtain and reveal the body of the goddess, the wooded setting with branches to which is tied the cloak, and, above all, the arm that Venus bends behind her back. In other words, it is simpler to hypothesize that Correggio had consulted the print.

²⁰ Correggio: *I disegni*, ed. Mario Di Giampaolo and Andrea Muzzi, Turin, 1988, no. 88 *verso*.

²¹ Di Giampaolo and Muzzi, *Correggio*, no. 88 *recto*.

²² Maddalena Spagnolo, *Correggio: Geografia e storia della fortuna (1528–1657)*, Quaderni della Fondazione Il Correggio, *Lecture Allegriane*, Quaderno 8, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), 2005, 22.

dated October 6, 1527, the writer could refer to a statuette of Venus by Jacopo Sansovino intended to decorate the secret *camerino* of the duke as 'si vera e si viva che empie di libidine il pensiero di ciascuno che la mira' [so true and lifelike that it raises the libidinous thoughts of whoever looks at it]²³, it was the diffusion of prints that opened this new phase in the erotic imagination of the West and that would lead to the creation of openly pornographic images from the beginning of the nineteenth century; this is a story in which Correggio's works, conditioned by the tastes and the parameters of their time, played a major role.

²³ *Lettere sull'arte di Pietro Aretino*, ed. Ettore Camesasca, commentary by Carlo Cordiè, vol. 1, 1526–42, Milan, 1957, 17.