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Edgar Wind and Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs*: A 'Romantic Affection' for the Centaurs

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Abstract

Within Edgar Wind's collection of studies devoted to Michelangelo and published posthumously in *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo* (2000), we aim to focus on the analysis of one of his brief sketches, whose subject is the marble relief of the *Battle of the Centaurs*, Casa Buonarroti, Florence. The intent of this paper is to propose a possible conclusion to the ideas that Wind, unfortunately, suggests only in a fragmented and incomplete form. The dense – and still open – historiographical debate on the meaning and subject of the famous relief that Michelangelo sculpted during his youth, following the close suggestion of Agnolo Poliziano (anglicised as 'Politian'), can thus benefit from the original perspective of Wind, who, using Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a guide, alludes to an unusual 'romantic affection' toward the ferocious centaurs that would be mysteriously represented in the artwork. In particular, women and adolescents appear to rebel against their 'rescue' by men so that they might remain in the arms of the centaurs, who would be the only creatures capable of *par amor* – that is, just and equitable love – as evidenced by the tragic story of Cyllarus and Hilonome. The extraordinary beauty of Cyllarus as described by Ovid, which Michelangelo reproduces in the strangely canonical and harmonious proportions of the centaurs of his relief, may also allude to homosexual love – a theme to which the controversial Politian dedicated a number of his poems.

Edgar Wind devoted many articles to Michelangelo with the declared aim of eventually publishing an overarching study on the artist. Much of his efforts were directed toward the interpretation of the symbolism of the Sistine Chapel ceiling – to which, in fact, all his known contributions are dedicated. However, the intention of publishing a book on the art of Michelangelo led Wind to also explore his juvenile sculptural activity, in which Wind showed a sharp interest. The notes, fragmentary but full of sensitive ideas, are published posthumously in *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo* (2000), and date back to around 1970, with the exception of those on the *Madonna della Scala* (1936) and on the *Battle of the*

Centaurs (circa 1950).[1] Only one piece dedicated to Michelangelo's youth saw light when Wind was still alive, in the chapter *A Bacchic Mystery by Michelangelo*, contained in Wind's most successful work, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (1958), within which Wind investigated the restoration of the right hand of Michelangelo's *Bacchus* and the Roman intellectual milieu of the period.[2]

Of particular interest to us is Wind's intervention dedicated to the Casa Buonarroti marble relief of the *Battle of the Centaurs* (1490–92).[3] It must have arisen from Wind's intention to respond critically to Charles De Tolnay's recent publication dedicated to Michelangelo's early career (*The Youth of Michelangelo*, 1943), within which the Hungarian historian presented an Ovidian interpretation of the relief – of which we will speak shortly.[4] Wind's piece should perhaps have enriched the lectures that he held at Oberlin College in 1949, which were collected and published in 1958 in *Pagan Mysteries*, within which, as mentioned, Wind showed interest in Michelangelo's training as well as the cultural ideas that he could have absorbed between Florence and Rome at the end of the fifteenth century.

Fig. 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Centauromachia* (1492), Casa Buonarroti, Florence.

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[1] Edgar Wind, 'Appendix A. Fragmentary Sketches on Some Early Works', in *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo*, ed. by Elisabeth Sears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 175–187.

[2] Wind, 'A Bacchic Mystery by Michelangelo', in *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), pp. 147–157.

[3] Wind, *The Religious Symbolism*, pp. 175–177.

[4] Charles De Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, 2nd edn rev. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 133–137.

Before delving into the interpretation of Wind's text, which we intend to expand, it is necessary to explain the details of the thorny iconographic issue that Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs* raised within scholarship. As reported by Ascanio Condivi in his biography of Michelangelo (1553), Agnolo Poliziano prompted the young Michelangelo to sculpt a relief whose subject would be '*il Ratto de Deianira e la zuffa de' Centauri*' ('the Rape of Deianira and the Brawl of the Centaurs').[5] This identification was later corroborated by Benedetto Varchi, who in 1564 described the relief in his funeral oration dedicated to the sculptor with words betraying the knowledge of the mythological centauromachy as narrated by Ovid: '*la zuffa de' Centauri, quando eglino non meno riscaldati dal vino, che caldi d'amore rapirono d'in sul piu bello del convito forzatamente Deianíra piangente*'.[6] Giorgio Vasari noticed the existence of the relief only in the 1568 edition of *Lives*, and described the subject with '*La battaglia di Hercole co i Centauri*' (The Battle of Hercules with the Centaurs), de facto in agreement with Condivi and Varchi, given that Deianira was the wife of Hercules.[7] Vasari's version was taken from Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* (1584),[8] and in *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (1591) Francesco Bocchi wrote that the story of the relief was totally '*chiara*', even if he did not specify what it was.[9] Thus, it is clear from contemporary descriptions that there were no doubts about the subject of the work, and that it was identified with a myth involving Hercules, his wife Deianira, and the centaurs.

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, debate on the subject of the relief ignited, following the study that Franz Wickhoff dedicated to Michelangelo, in which he declared that Condivi had confused Deianira with Deidamia, that is, Hippodamia.[10] Therefore, what Michelangelo depicted in the relief would be the nuptials of Pirithous and Hippodamia and the consequent battle between the Lapiths and the centaurs, as narrated in the Thessalian myth handed down both by Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*[11] and, above all, by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,[12] where the author dwelt on the meticulous description of the battle along 325 lines: the centaur Eurytus, '*saevorum saevissim*[us] *Centaurum*',[13] intoxicated by wine,

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[5] Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, ed. by Giovanni Nencioni (Florence: SPES, 1998), p. 13.

[6] Benedetto Varchi, *Orazione funerale […] fatta […] nell'essequie di Michelagnolo Buonarroti […]* (Florence: Giunti, 1564), p. 23. Translation: 'The brawl of the centaurs, when they were no less warmed by wine than warmed by love, and forcibly kidnapped the weeping Deianíra at the very height of the banquet'.

[7] Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Paola Barocchi (Milan: Ricciardi, 1962), I, p. 11.

[8] Raffaello Borghini, *Il riposo* (Florence: Marescotti, 1584), p. 511: '*sculpì in un pezzo di marmo la battaglia di Ercole co' Centauri opera meravigliosa*'.

[9] Francesco Bocchi, *Bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (Florence, 1591), p. 167, uses the vague expression '*una battaglia de' Centauri*'.

[10] Franz Wickhoff, 'Die Antike im Bildungsgange Michelangelos', *Mitteilungendes Institutes für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, III (1882), pp. 408–435.

[11] Plutarch, 'The Life of Theseus', in *The Parallel Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1914), p. 71.

[12] Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by Piero Bernardini Mazzolla (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), book XII, vv. 210–535.

[13] Ibid., 219.

dragged Hippodamia away from her husband, unleashing a fierce fight between men and centaurs that involved the heroic Theseus, among others. In this version of the myth, the presence of Hercules is somewhat ambiguous, but he certainly was not the protagonist of the battle.[14] In one fell swoop, therefore, Wickhoff had done away with the tradition handed down by both Condivi and Vasari.

A few years later, Josef Strzygowski replied to Wickhoff,[15] and traced the probable myth to which Condivi and Vasari were referring, recognising it in the very concise *fabula* XXXIII handed down in the mythographic collection by Hyginus:

> *Hercules cum in hospitium ad Dexamenum regem venisset eiusque filiam Deianiram devirginasset fidemque dedisset se eam uxorem ducturum, post discessumeius Eurytion Ixionis et Nubis filius centaurus petit Deianiram uxorem. cuius pater vim timens policitus est se daturum. die constituto venit cum fratribus ad nuptias. Hercules intervenit et Centaurum interfecit, suam speratam abduxit. [Item, aliis in nuptiis. Pirithous Hippodamiam Adrasti filiam cum uxorem duceret, vino pleni Centauri conati sunt rapere uxores Lapithis. eos centauri multos interfecerunt, ab ipsis interierunt.]*[16]

Hercules took his betrothed Deianira from the centaur Eurytus, to whom she was also promised by her father, Dexamenus; indeed, the characters correspond to the versions of Condivi and Vasari. The reference to the myth of Hyginus has been accepted by Karl Frey,[17] Henry Thode[18] and Carl Justi[19]: Frey underlined how Hyginus, immediately following the story of Hercules and Deianira, also passed down – albeit briefly – the battle between the Lapiths and the centaurs during the wedding of Hippodamia and Pirithous; Justi also noted that the same myth was handed down by Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (book IX, chapter XXIX), and was therefore easily traceable in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century:

DE EURITO YSIONIS FILIO.

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[14] Ibid., 536–576. In this fragment of the poem, Tlepolemus asks why his father Hercules was not named among the heroes of the battle. Nestor, king of Pylos and narrator of the events of the centauromachy, despondently replies that he holds a grudge against Hercules (*tuum genitorem odium offensasque*), for he killed his entire family, and thus he will always remain silent on his labours, however heroic (*quam fortia facta silendo ulciscor fratres*).

[15] Josef Strzygowski, 'Studienzu Michelangelo's Jugendentwickelung', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, XII (1891), pp. 207– 219.

[16] When Hercules came as a guest to King Dexamenus, he took the virginity of his daughter Deianira, pledging his faith that he would make her his wife. After his departure the centaur Eurytion, son of Ixion and Nubis, demanded Deianira for his wife; to whom her father, fearing his strength, promised her. On the appointed day he came with his brothers to the nuptials. Hercules returned, killed the centaur, and carried off his betrothed. Likewise, at another wedding, when Pirithous took Hippodamia, daughter of Adrastus, to wife, the centaurs, filled with wine, snatched up the wives of the Lapiths. The centaurs killed many of them and perished at their hands.

[17] Karl Frey, *Michelagniolos Jugendjahre* (Berlin: K. Curtius, 1907), p. 95.

[18] Henry Thode, *Michelangelo: Kritische Untersuchungen über seine Werke* (Berlin, 1908), I, pp. 8–10.

[19] Carl Justi, *Michelangelo. Neue Beiträgezur Erklärung seiner Werk* (Berlin: Grote, 1909), I, pp. 22–31.

Euritus ex Centaurisunus, ut refert Lactantius, in domum Oenei regis Calidonie veniens, Deyaniram, quam paulo ante Hercules petierat et fidem prestaverat se illam in uxorem ducturum, postulavit in coniugem. Oeneus vim timens spopondit, et constituto die, dum nuptias Euritius celebraret, supervenit Hercules, et inito cum Centauris ibidem existentibus certamine, eos occidit, et Deyaniram sibi matrimonio copulavit. Ovidius vero non sic, quin imo dicit quod cum Perithous duxisset Yppodamiam coniugem, et posuisset in antro mensas Centauris, et ipsi epulantes vino plurimo caluissent, in lasciviam venere et audaciam nimiam, et capiente Euritio Yppodamiam atque trahente eam, insurrexit Perythous atque Theseus, et turbati casu adversus eum et socios inivere pugnam, et cum abstulisset Theseus Yppodamiam Euritio, eum conantem manibus cratere sumpto interfecit.[20]

Note how Boccaccio also inserted the myth of the marriage of Pirithous and Hippodamia and the battle between Lapiths and centaurs. It is therefore likely that Politian – who was aware of the double myth probably thanks to Boccaccio, and was undoubtedly well acquainted with Ovid's version – intended to combine the two stories in a single artwork, so as to philologically bring out their common origin. Although this explanation was more than convincing, and would have allowed a new thread of investigation into Politian's mythographic sources, Tolnay's 1943 publication once again opened the debate. He considered the theories that spread from their start with Strzygowski to be unlikely, and he recaptured the defective version of Wickhoff, according to which Michelangelo and Politian referred only to the myth passed down by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. It was at this point that Wind intervened.[21]

In light of the dense historiographical debate summarised above, Wind's intervention may appear obsolete and not very meaningful. In reality, it is worth lingering over, both because it is revealing of Wind's method of investigation and because it presents illuminating interpretative ideas, such as the convincing identification of the episode of Cyllarus and Hilonome that reopens the Ovid issue. From the bibliography of his piece on the *Battle of the Centaurs*, we intuit that Wind had to make use of a few precious critical texts (Justi and, in all probability, Tolnay), relying heavily on the careful and passionate reading of *Metamorphoses*. The story that Ovid offers of the battle indulges in profuse and vivid

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[20] Euritus is one of the centaurs, as Lactantius reports, who, coming to the house of Oeneus, king of Caledonia, requested marriage to Deianira, whom Hercules had sought out shortly before and pledged to take to wife. Oeneus, fearing his strength, promised her, and on the day appointed when Euritius was celebrating the nuptials Hercules returned and entered into battle with the centaurs in attendance, killed them, and was himself joined in marriage to Deianira. In fact, Ovid does not have it this way, but rather says that when Pirithoüs took Hippodamia to wife and placed the table of the centaurs in a grotto, the revellers filled with much wine grew heated, falling into venereal lewdness and unbridled insolence. When the bride Hippodamia was seized by Euritus, who was dragging her away, Pirithoüs, and also Theseus, rose up and fell into a tumultuous brawl with him and his companions; and when Theseus snatched Hippodamia away from Euritus, he killed him with a crater he had laid hold of with effort.

[21] Other publications dedicated to Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs* followed, of which we mention only Margrit Lisner, 'Form und Sinngehalt von Michelangelos Kentaurenschlacht mit Notizien zu Bertoldo di Giovanni', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XXIV (1980), pp. 299–344; and, above all, the very recent Charles Dempsey, 'Angelo Poliziano and Michelangelo's Battle of the Centaurs', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Insitutes in Florenz*, LXII (2020), pp. 158–179, which lines up all the versions, and offers new investigation tools useful in resolving the debate once and for all.

details, and Wind must have thought that it was precisely that text that served Politian (and therefore Michelangelo) to fine-tune the iconography of the relief. As we will describe in more detail below, it is actually quite difficult to trace precise references to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* within Michelangelo's relief, and the free licenses of the sculptor seem to be more numerous than the adherences, just as the formal and stylistic references to ancient and modern sculpture appear to be more pertinent than literary ones.[22] Wind, however, had to find convincing the Wickhoff and Tolnay thread of research, which wanted Condivi and Vasari to be so confused about the real subject of the relief, that they would replace Hippodamia with Deianira, and Theseus with Hercules.

Wind entrusts his point of view, with respect to the historiographical debate, to a note, and the observations he makes can in fact be embraced. To the theory of Justi (which resumed, as mentioned, Strzygowski, Frey and Thode), according to which the iconography of the relief was inspired by the myth of the abduction of Deianira by Hercules, Wind countered decisively, finding no connection with Michelangelo's relief. In this and other points, we note his dependence on Tolnay. Whereas in the sculptural work, two groups (humans and centaurs) oppose one another frantically, in the Hyginus tradition Hercules finds himself facing the centaurs alone. In any case, Wind's position appears to remain open when he says that 'it is unlikely that Politian, who must have understood the requirements of this particular genre of poetry very well [Ovid's], would have considered it good for sculpture'. It is clear that Wind's ideas were still in the making and that he left room for any second thoughts. However, Wind is precise in identifying three episodes narrated by Ovid within Michelangelo's relief:

- *Theseus's deadly assault on Eurytus*

- *The rescue of Hippodamia, pulled away by the hair*

- *The joint deaths of Cyllarus and Hylonome, a pair of beautiful young centaurs.*

Unfortunately, Wind develops only the first of the three episodes; it will be the task of this contribution to try to recognise and argue the other two.

According to Wind's reconstruction, partly dependent on Tolnay, the figure who stands at the centre and of whom only the agile cloaked bust is seen, would be Eurytus, the ferocious centaur who started the fight by taking Hippodamia from her husband Pirithous. From the most common photographs of the marble, the figure could appear human, but a close and direct view of the sculpture allows us to see the barely sketched horse's legs that support the torso, which undoubtedly qualify the figure as a centaur. Again, Wind seems to be unsure of this identification, when he writes: 'it is indeed uncommon to picture the wildest centaur with a beardless face of classic proportions'. However, he does not further develop his doubts, and justifies the centaur's good looks with an unspecified 'romantic

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[22] See Martin Weinberger, *Michelangelo the Sculptor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), I, pp. 38–44.

affection' that Politian would have felt for Eurytus. This is one of the many intriguing gaps that make reading the text fascinating, and to which we will return shortly.

Wind then identifies Theseus as the man in the foreground holding Eurytus by his cloak, ready to throw a large stone at him. Ovid's text, however, recounts that Theseus struck Eurytus to death not with a stone but with a decorated vase. Sharply, Wind then proposes a solution, noting that because the sculpture is still in its draft state, what appears to us as a large ovoid boulder could actually have become a vase in the final polishing of the work – perhaps a tendentious observation that aimed only to strengthen Ovid's theory, but at the same time one so brilliant that it has recently been revived by Charles Dempsey.[23]

The last character recognised by Wind is the old man who is behind Theseus, who would be the 'garrulous' Nestor, the narrator designated by Ovid to tell the deeds of the centauromachy, who participated in the fight, killing some centaurs himself. When he narrates the story, Nestor is more than two hundred years old; therefore, according to Wind, at the time of the battle against the centaurs he was already old. Furthermore, Nestor's omniscient wisdom could be depicted only in the guise of a bald, bearded elder.

Wind's fragmentary text goes no further, abruptly ceasing its observations about Nestor. If we wanted to virtually conclude it, we would have to develop the other two episodes proposed by him, and therefore identify in Michelangelo's relief the rescue of Hippodamia as well as the deaths of Cyllarus and Hilonome. It is nowadays undisputed that the central group in the foreground composed of three struggling figures represents the rape (or rescue, depending on our point of view) of a woman, be she Hippodamia or Deianira, and Wind most likely agreed with this reconstruction. The actions and poses of the figures, however, are ambiguous and differ significantly from the story contained in *Metamorphoses*. Ovid wrote that Eurytus dragged Hippodamia away by her hair ('*raptartuque comis per vim nova nupta prehensis*'[24]), whereas in the relief, the one who drags the woman by the hair is a man, and holding her by the bust is another figure, who only a very close view allows us to identify as a centaur. If we were so ambitious as to attempt a reconstruction of Wind's ideas regarding the representation of this episode, we could suggest the hypothesis that he, too – like us – found problematic the ferocity with which the man drags the woman by the hair; with her hands clawing at the arm of the kidnapper, she seems rather to want to free herself from him and return to the arms of the centaur.

With regard to the ambiguity of Hippodamia's attitude, we could refer to the theories that Carlo Del Bravo briefly expressed in one of his essays dedicated to Michelangelo.[25] He noted that not only Hippodamia, but also the women in the upper left group appear to resist their 'rescue' by the men, such as the one who seems to wriggle in the arms of a man, another who does not want to look at the arrow directed toward the centaurs, which

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[23] Dempsey, p. 175.

[24] Ovid, 223.

[25] Carlo Del Bravo, 'La bellezza nei Duchi di Michelangelo', *Artista* (2002), pp. 172–183.

is being shot by the bow of the man next to her, and yet another wailing and fleeing in the direction of the centaurs. The same happens in the lower left corner, where we see a young man in despair bent over himself. Love for centaurs overwhelmed women and boys alike, and a pederast like Politian must have been particularly sensitive to such a controversial subject.[26] Following Del Bravo, we could then suggest that Michelangelo's relief, explained '*a parte per parte*'[27] by Politian, also intended to deliver a reinterpretation of the myth, within which the bestial, sensual and unnatural love of the centaurs is preferred to love according to human law. Obviously, it is not possible for us to know what Wind thought of such a possibility, but his remark on the 'romantic affection' that Politian felt towards Eurytus may lead us to think that he, too, had perceived in the relief a strange sympathy towards the centaurs. Besides, proposing this will soon come in handy when we discuss the love between Cyllarus and Hilonome.

Ovid recounts that it was Theseus who removed Hippodamia from Eurytus's clutches before killing him; however, completely absorbed in the truculent narrative of the struggle, Ovid does not dwell on the methods of rescue: '*Neve ea magnanimus frustra memoravit heros / submovet instants raptamque furentibus aufert*'.[28] Hippodamia is undoubtedly the object of the dispute around which the entire relief develops. Such an acute reader of Ovid's verses as Wind likely believed that the man who drags the woman by her hair could be the betrothed Pirithous, a close friend of Theseus, who is safeguarding his honour right next to him. '*Quae te vecordia / [...] Euryte, pulsat [...] qui me vivo lacessas / Pirithoum violesque duos ignarus in uno?*'[29] shouts Theseus to Eurytus when he starts the battle. In these words, we note the splitting of a single will into two characters, Theseus and Pirithous. Thus, just as in Ovid, the desire of Pirithous to get Hippodamia back is fulfilled by Theseus – who takes the responsibility of first recapturing the bride and then killing Eurytus – thus, in Michelangelo, the two actions are divided between the two characters, Pirithous and Theseus. Another possibility Wind may have considered is that the man who drags Hippodamia is still Theseus, just as the centaur who holds her could still be Eurytus; within the relief, both would be represented cinematically in two different moments, that of the abduction and that of the struggle. In truth, the iconographic choices for this episode would lead us to believe that Michelangelo represented the Hyginus version of the myth, where it was Hercules who took Deianira from Eurytus, instead of Ovid's version. Unfortunately, the primary feature of the relief is that no character is endowed with recognisable attributes; therefore, any identification must necessarily be speculative.

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[26] See Politian's poems with themes of pederasty: Agnolo Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*, ed. by Isidoro Del Lungo (Florence: G. Barbera, 1867), pp. 144–145.

[27] Condivi, p. 13.

[28] Ovid, 231 (The magnanimous hero did not merely talk: he pushed the assailants off and rescued the woman from those furious creatures).

[29] Ibid., 228–229 (What madness, Eurytus, has crossed you! While I have life, you dare attack Pirithous. You reckless are violating us both by hitting one).

Wind must have particularly appreciated the passage that Ovid dedicated to the joint death of Cyllarus and Hilonome, as can be seen from some passages of the text: he described the Ovid poem as a 'series of stupendous and cunningly varied barbarities, interrupted by a lyrical episode', Cyllarus and Hilonome are 'beautiful young centaurs', and again their story is presented as a 'lyrical interlude'. In fact, the Latin poet devoted ample space to the tragic story of the two lovers – Romeo and Juliet among the centaurs. In particular, he concentrated on the description of the beautiful Cyllarus: golden hair, perfect features in both the human and equine parts, a power worthy of Castor.[30] Hilonome, madly in love with Cyllarus, does nothing but make herself beautiful for him, and Ovid dwells on the descriptions of the centauress's make-up methods: frequent ablutions in the cool waters of the streams, garlands of flowers and rosemary on her head, precious animal skins on the shoulders.[31] The love that united them ('*par amor*') kept them always together; together they went to the home of Pirithous to attend the wedding, and together they fought after Eurytus's outburst. Cyllarus was the first to fall, hit in the neck by a flying spear. As soon as Hilonome became aware of her companion's wounding, she rushed there to support him, and seeing that she could not save him, she decided to pierce herself with the same spear, and embraced him in death ('*incubuit moriensque suum complexa maritum est*'[32]).

In the relief, Wind must have recognised this tragic episode in the couple on the ground at the centre: a centaur lying on his side, atop whose body another figure lies. Cyllarus and Hilonome are a genuine invention of Ovid, and their tragic story is above all a literary device useful for giving emotional depth to the centaurs. The interpretation that Jeri Blair DeBrouhn gives of the pair of lovers,[33] however, offers us the opportunity to further investigate the value of this 'lyrical interlude', and may trace the interest that this episode aroused in Wind. By carefully examining Ovid's text – an act that, as we have said, guided Wind in the analysis of the marble – we note some characteristics that are well connected to what we said earlier regarding the supposed primacy of the feral and unbridled love of the centaurs (and therefore, by extension, sodomy) that would have led Politian to decide to assign this episode to the young Michelangelo. If, on the one hand, we have the love of Pirithous and Hippodamia devoid of any lyrical connotation, and which is indeed closely associated with the bloody battle ('*Felicem diximus illa / coniuge Pirithoum, quod paene fefellimus omen*'[34]), that of Cyllarus and Hilonome, on the contrary, allows Ovid to investigate the possibilities of *par amor*, that is, love between equals. The tragic deathly ending is the perfect final act of the union of the two lovers, whom death unites in marriage: *maritum* is the word that defines Cyllarus at the end, when Hilonome surrounds him in the eternal embrace of death.

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[30] Ibid., 395–403.

[31] Ibid., 407–415.

[32] Ibid., 427.

[33] Jeri Blair DeBrohun, 'Centaurs in Love and War. Cyllarus and Hylonome in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 12.393-428', *American Journal of Philology*, CXXV, 3 (2004), pp. 417–452.

[34] Ovid, 217–218: '"May you be happy with her, Pirithous!" Our wish almost turned out to be ominous'. Joy and fear of death are here juxtaposed in a single verse.

The Latin poet thus subverts the cliché, and assigns ideal love to creatures traditionally ferocious and devoted only to sensual pleasure – Ovid himself, right before dwelling on Cyllarus and Hilonome, describes the centaurs just like this. He pursues this goal by resorting to varied descriptive devices, such as the extraordinary beauty of Cyllarus, who is the object of desire of many females ('*multa illum petiere*'[35]), thus becoming the counterpart of Hippodamia. A male as an object of desire is an allusion to homosexual love, and this aspect becomes even more emphasised when, describing the strength of Cyllarus's equine part, Ovid dwells on his '*tergum sessile*',[36] which is a clear reference to the sodomitic act. His beauty is linked to the 'uncommon' beauty of the central centaur of Michelangelo's relief, which Wind identifies as Eurytus. It was perhaps for this reason that Wind considered the episode of the love of Cyllarus and Hilonome to be of great importance, because it might have given Politian the opportunity to express his preference for the centaurs – and, cloaked behind a 'pagan mystery', his preference for sodomy – and thus to resolve the iconographic issue on Michelangelo's relief.

Certainly, what we have said about the last two episodes is a purely speculative exercise. We do not have sufficient elements to know the paths Wind intended to follow to conclude his piece dedicated to Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs*. However, net of our wanderings, there remains a fact that is worth pointing out, namely that Wind is the only scholar to have persuasively posited the identification of Cyllarus and Hilonome within the sculpture. This would reopen the issue of the correspondence between *Metamorphoses* and Michelangelo's relief with greater force. Who knows whether a further analysis of Ovid's text in comparison with the piece of marble will lead to other identifications and other conjectures on the myth of the centauromachy? For the moment, we can simply admire the acute perceptiveness and deep knowledge of Wind, one of the most neglected art historians of the twentieth century.

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[35] Ibid., 404.
[36] Ibid.*,* 401.

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