



## Strife of Love in a Dream

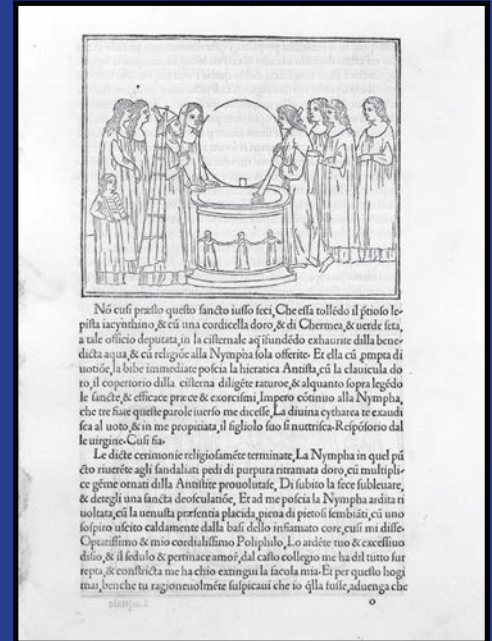
by Alex W. Barker

Placing works into meaningful contexts is a key part of the Museum's mission; often the challenge is less finding such a context than choosing among the many alternatives. Consider, as a case in point, a set of four woodcuts from *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*Strife of Love in a Dream of Poliphilo*), a remarkable incunabular first printed by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1499. Our woodcuts are from the second edition, published by Aldus' heirs in 1545. The woodcuts themselves are attributed to Benedetto Bordone, a Paduan active in Venice from about 1488 (but some have suggested other artists were involved, including Gentile Bellini and Andrea Mantegna). The result is one of the most celebrated books of the age—in equal measure fascinating and inscrutable.

The protagonists of the story are Poliphilo (lover of many things, as apt a name for a humanist as ever was) and Polia (many changing things, hence his innamorata—cue *La donna è mobile* from *Rigoletto*). The plot is intricate, and made more so by the use of an odd mix of Italian and Latin, peppered with Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic, as well as endless digressions into aesthetics and esoterica. Poliphilo has been shunned by his love, Polia, and in dreams is transported to a dark wood, where he encounters a bestiary of fantastic creatures and equally fantastic architecture, lovingly illustrated and described. Next is a dream within a dream (think of Gogol's "Portrait"). Poliphilo professes his love for Polia to the queen of the nymphs, and is compelled to choose between three gates: he chooses the third, and there finds his beloved, and they are reunited. Triumphant processions and recondite ceremonies ensue, sumptuously illustrated. Polia becomes narrator briefly, describing Poliphilo's love from her perspective. She shuns Poliphilo yet again, and Poliphilo swoons at her feet. Cupid commands her to save him with her embrace, Venus blesses their union, and the lovers are reconciled—until Poliphilo awakens.

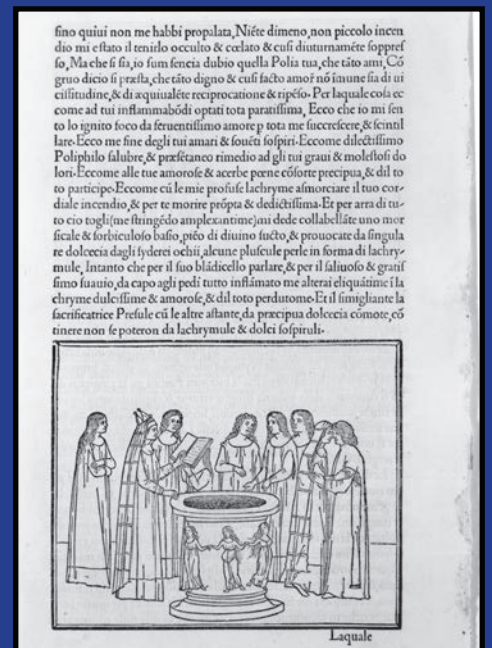
The woodcuts are elegant and compelling line art, in which Beardsley figures move through settings depicted in oddly rigid

(Continued on page two)



*Poliphilo extinguishing Polia's torch in the temple of Venus*

Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.1 recto)



*Polia reveals her identity to Poliphilo*

Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.1 verso)



# MUSEUM FRIDAY FEATURE

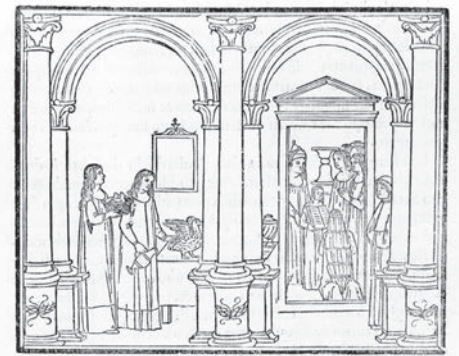
one-point perspective. Some woodcuts depict opulent processions, spread across two matching woodcuts on facing pages, others depict architectural works, decorative standards or other objects in precise detail, while still others illustrate the plot with a sense of movement and naturalism, storyboards for the plot rather than mere ornaments to it. We hold four leaves from the 1545 edition; all are illustrations of the love story.

The book is printed in a beautiful, eminently readable typeface originally carved by punchcutter Francesco Griffo for Aldus' 1496 publication of Pietro Bembo's *De Aetna*, a typeface thus sometimes called Aldine Roman and more commonly Bembo. Bembo gave rise to many modern serif font families today, including Roman and Garamond—and the type in which this is written. Here, too, there's a whiff of mystery; punchcutters were steel workers, who made metal type by using a steel punch to stamp matrices into copper, which served as molds for casting settable type. Our last record of Griffo is in 1518, when he's accused of murdering his son-in-law, who was beaten to death with a steel bar. His fate is unknown.

Every (other) aspect of the work charms. Even the authorship, which can be guessed by examining the foliated initials beginning each of the 38 chapters—they form an acrostic reading “POLIAM FRATER FRANCISCUS COLONNA PERAMAVIT,” which roughly translates as “Polia is solemnly loved by Brother Francesco Colonna.” In the story, Poliphilo falls in love with Polia when he sees her combing her hair at a window in Treviso; Colonna, a Dominican monk in the monastery of Saints John and Paul in Venice, is known to have been teaching novices in Treviso in 1467 when the work is believed to have been composed. But attributions are never simple, and Liane Lefaivre argues that it's the work of Italian humanist Leon Battista Alberti, and at one point Lorenzo de Medici was suggested as well.

Scholarship regarding the work provides its own delightful surprises. Anthony Blunt's magisterial essay on the work, which includes his wry observation that the book suffers from “being too well printed and too beautifully illustrated,” was published in 1937—coincidentally the same year that his biographer Miranda

*(Continued on page three)*



Et quiui le ualue doro referate, in fene intoronno. Ma io me affctmai fopra il fancto, & riuerendo limine. Et cum uigilanti oechii, nelamãtiffi mo obiecto imobilemente infixi refpectante, uidi la monitrice iubente, che la mia polia uero myropolia fe geniculaffe fopra il fumptuofa pauimento, & cum fincera deuotione coricarle.

Ilquale pauimento era mirabile tuto di gemme lapidofa, orbitamete compofito cù fubtile factione, cù multiplice & elegate innodatione politamente diftincto, opera officulatamete tafelata, difpofita in uirente foglie, & fiori, & auicule, & altri animali, feudo che opportuno era il grato colore delle pietole petre fplèdido illucente, cù perfetto cooquamento, dallequale geminato rimonftraua quelli che erano intrati.

Sopra quello dunque la mia audacula Polia denudati religiofamete gli lactei genui, cum fumma elegata genuiflexe. Piu belli che unque ue defte la uifercordia ad fe dedicati. Per laquale cofa ifteti lofepamete at tento cù gli filenti labri. Et per nõ uolere gli fancti litamenti interropere & le ppitiatione cõtaminare, & interrompere le folene fce, & il mylre riofo minifterio, & le arale cerimonie perturbare, gli iprobiti fofpiri da ua lido amore infiammati debitamente incarcerai.

Hora dinanti di una fanctificata Ara, nella mediana dil cerulo ope rotamente fituata, di diuina fiamma lucente, geniculata humilmente fe flaua.

La

*Polia at the altar in the temple of Venus*  
Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of  
Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.2 recto)

ueniffi? O me dolorofa calo. O rea fortuna mia, che poffo piu fi non puramente morire? Chi dunche di noi dui piu mifero & infelice fi tro uat? O il mio amorofo Poliphilo morto, ouero io in tanta inconfolabile uita fuperfite? Venite dunque tutte difpiccate & horribile fure, Quale ad Floreffe, & di lalma mia conuenientemente uitate la fuprema feuita. Dico che per mia maligna & peruerfa cagione il michino Poliphilo, & folo per me! O cagna & perida barbara, indigna, & immerita) amando, & per tanto maleficio intento e il michino obito.



Et gia hauendo gliochii mei facti laco dipianti, fedule lachryme manante, & tutto ello, & me fluido di cadenti & interpolati guttami, & per il medefimo modo che la fidiffima & animofa Argia fece fopra il caduere lachrymante del fuo dilecto Polydice. Et alquanto pofliti la mano fopra del fuo freddo pecto, io fentui in elfo uno pauculo & farditato pullo rebullire. & piu, & piu feratamete abbracciamlo, fe rifealdorono excitati gli fui fugati fpiriti. Et il uiuace core fopra fe le tan-

*Polia kneeling beside the sleeping Poliphilo*  
Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of  
Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.3 recto)



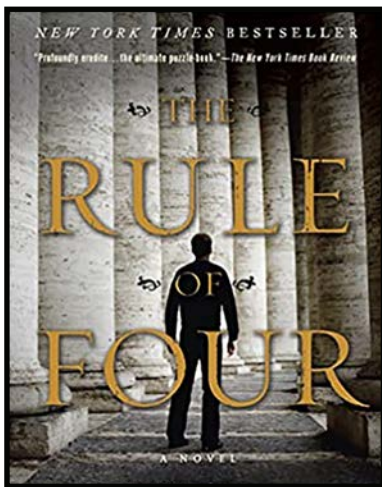


# MUSEUM FRIDAY FEATURE



Harold "Kim" Philby Soviet Stamp

Carter believes he was recruited by Soviet intelligence. Because in addition to being a leading art historian (his work on Poussin is still considered the *locus classicus*), Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, and Director of the Courtauld Institute, Blunt was also a member of the Cambridge Five, a group of Soviet spies that included Donald MacLean, Guy Burgess, John Cairncross, and the infamous Harold "Kim" Philby. Reality puts to shame the fictional works featuring the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, such as 2004's *The Rule of Four*, a thriller by Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason.



The Rule of Four Book Cover

It's a unique work. When I retreat into the book-lined recesses of my mind, the leather-bound volumes are all printed in the gorgeous Bembo font, most are humanist arcana intertwining star-crossed love with scholarly digressions-within-digressions, enigmatic and engrossing, and most are illustrated in the same spare and elegant style. And each time I open one, I learn something new, and am reminded how much is left to discover. ■

to optatissime carne sentendo , nelle quale l'alma sua uigendo , fe nutritua fe cuigloze fupultrante , & resperte le occlufe palpebre . Et io repente audiffima anhellando alla fua infperata reiteratione riceuete le debilitate & abandonate bracce , piamente & cum dulciffime & amorofe lachrymale cum fingulato pertractantilo , & manuagendolo , & fouente bafan tulo , prefentandogli gli montraua il mio Immo fuo albente & pomigero pecto palelemente , cum humaniffimo afpetto , & cum illici occhi elfo ficia uario di hora , riuene nelle mie calte & delicate bracce , Quale fi laffo ne patito non haueffe , & alquanto raffumete il contaminato uigore , Como alhora ello ualeua , cum tremula uoce , & fuplriti , manufatmente diffe , Polia Signora mia dolce , perche cuifi torto me fai ? Di fubito , O me Nynphe celeberrime , me lentiua quali de dolcecia amorofa , & pietofa , & excelfiffa alacritate il core per meoio piu molto di lacerare , perche qual fanguis che per dolore , & nimia formidine in fe era conffricto per troppo & inuffinata laticia , lazzare uene il lentiuca caluaffo , & tuta aborrea , & attonita ignoraua che me dire , Si non che io agli ancora pallidati la bri , cum foluta audacia gli offerri blandicula uno lafcuo & miffulento baffo , Ambi dui ferati , & conffricti in amorofi amplici , Quali nel Hermetico Caducco gli intricatamente conuoluti ferpi , & quale il baculo inuolutato del diuino Medico .



Polia resuscitating Poliphilo on her lap  
Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of  
Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.3 verso)

Onde non cuifi praffo che ello completamente haue reafsumpte , & recenate le prilline uirtute , nel fino & nelle bracce mie , & tantulo purpurifate le gene , La pontifice del Sacrato Tempio , cum tumultuaria turbula delle oioeque facerdotule & minifre di fancto famulatio forfa auditi gli mei anguthamenti , & lachrymofe lamentatione , & gli alti , & improbi fopfiri nel tonante Tempio , quiui uerfo nui uene , Et animaduertendo (peruenuta) delle illicite operatione , Interdicte in quello fancto & impoluto loco , in fenfa grauemente cum altre fue minifre , di ira extumefcente , Alcune cum uirgule , & altre cum rami di quercio , ad nui improbando , & grauemente minabonde , & percotendo difocorono il noffro dolce ampiecamento perturbantilo .



Per laquale cofa alhora immoderatamente dubitai non mi adueniffe , quello che alla terrifica Medufa , lo rafcente furore di Minerua aduenne , quando ella nel fuo mundo Tempio , Neptuno amorofamente conobbe . Et quello che famulante accadete ad Hippomane , & alla auara & uolce Atalanta , che per illicito coniuugimento fe conuertirono in Leoni . Et ancora la furia delle Proide per Lunone . Et appena fora delle fue mano , fi non cum granditate laboriofa fugiffimo . Et

Polia and Poliphilo driven from the temple of Diana  
Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of  
Professor Saul Weinberg (77.111.4 recto)