

THEATRE AS THE REPRESENTATIVE SCENE OF THE POWER OF COURT: THE FIFTEENTH- AND SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN *EXEMPLA*

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Starting from the second half of the fifteenth century, theatrical performance experiences a privileged moment in Ferrara when the Este family entrusted the humanist Pellegrino Prisciani with a cultural enterprise aiming at recuperating classical texts and playwriting: the presentation of the *Menaechmi* by Plautus as well as other plays, marks the beginning of a coherent route.¹ Festivals converge into theatrical representations full of references to mythology and the use of musical interludes is born to sumptuously enrich the staging. The first aspect to underline is that the theatrical representation transfers itself from the public square to the *reserved* space of the court which, in this way, celebrates its dominant role from a cultural and political point of view.

The fundamental theme of these stagings, according to the Renaissance demand, is a continuity with the ancient world and the myth of Rome, and the House d’Este makes itself the guarantor of this continuity, in particular from Borso d’Este to Ercole I; the authority of the classical world further consolidates the image of the court and of its power on the territory.

In Ferrara of the 1400s the idea of the antiquity is operative, not only in the scribal practice of translation and adaptation of classical texts, but also as a hotbed of spectacular imagery.

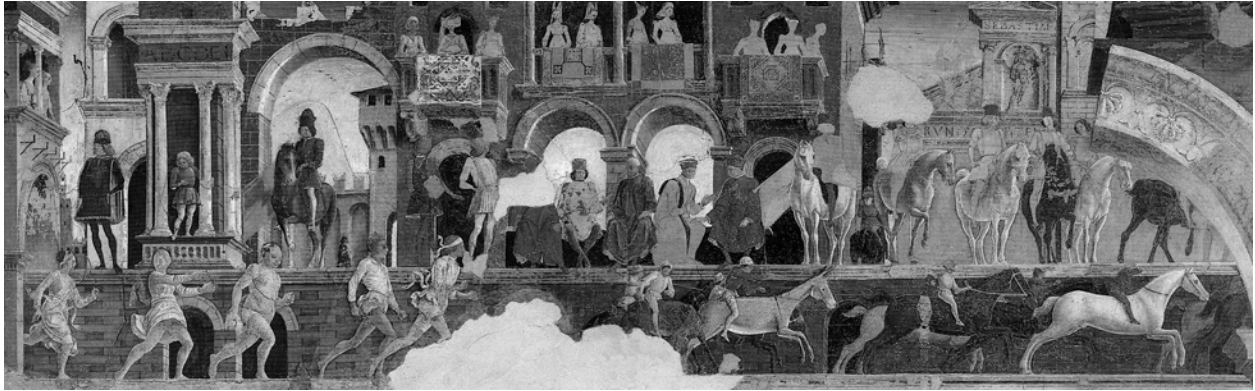
The experience and the material culture of the play, nurtured by the ideology of the court and by the celebrative intents of the Prince, act in the scene both in the comedy and in the mythologically modelled intermission, but also in the pictorial figuration according to a type of theatrical performance called “*mescidato*” (miscegenation).²

Pellegrino Prisciani (1435–1518) is, therefore, a leading figure in the Court d’Este: archivist of the Studium at least since 1455, a diplomat and councillor first for Borso d’Este, subsequently for Ercole I, he is a precious collaborator in the politics of cultural hegemony of the court d’Este. A relevant contribution by Prisciani is – in order of time and notoriety – the inspiration of the fresco cycle in the famous Hall of the Months of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, carried out in 1469 and 1470 by Francesco del Cossa (ca. 1430–ca. 1477), following the idea by Cosmè Tura (ca. 1430–1495) with a probable intervention by Ercole de’Roberti and the collaboration of various skilled workers.³ The erudite inspiration of the iconographical programme of the hall is unanimously acknowledged to be due to the astrological, antiquarian and theatrical culture of Prisciani, and he is considered, by Aby Warburg *in primis*, its real creator.⁴

The memorable essay by Ludovico Zorzi offered an extraordinary reading of what Jacob Burckhardt had defined the “first modern city” of Europe,⁵ in which the medieval system and the Renaissance structure remain connected for a very long time; the dominion of the Este family persists for almost three centuries determining, in a hegemonic way, the political, cultural and artistic evolution of the city: the representation of power, as Gundersheimer observed in his time, enters the connective tissue of the city from city planning to decorative programmes, from etiquette to public demonstrations and the consolidated legacy of chivalry is interwoven



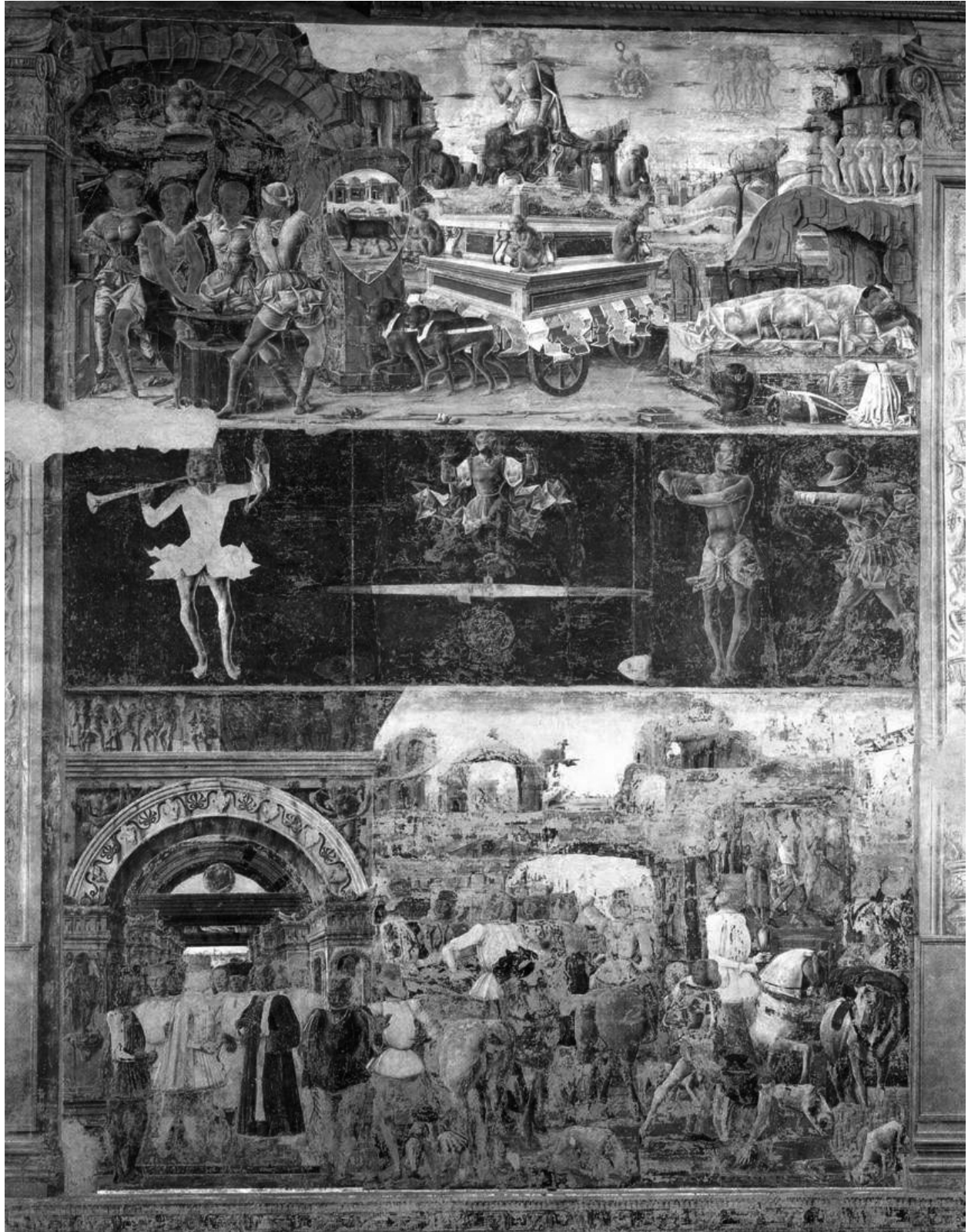
1. Francesco del Cossa, *Aprile* (1470). Fresco at the Salone dei Mesi. Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, east wall.



1a. Francesco del Cossa, *Aprile* (1470). Detail showing the race of the Palio of Saint George in Ferrara.

with the new humanistic unrest.⁶ The age of the learned Leonello d'Este (1407–1450) in profitable relationship with the humanist Guarino da Verona, represents a radical turning point, determined by the intense work of acquisition of classical Latin and Greek texts, and by the re-founding of the Ferrara Studium, where humanists coming from east and west would meet. His less erudite successor Borso d'Este (1413–1450) was a clever politician who employed culture and art as instruments of personal and visual affirmation of his power. The most famous example of this, in fact, are the frescoes of Palazzo Schifanoia, reflecting the intellectual and courtly style, and revealing a peculiar concept of space. Each month of the calendar is, as known, divided into three bands [fig.1]. In the upper one dominate the classical divinities of Olympus, in the middle band are shown the astrological influences determined by the zodiacal signs, and in the lower area are represented the acts of governing Borso d'Este's city under the protection of the gods and demigods. The fresco decoration is kept within an Alberti model of classical architecture: real and illusory spaces intertwine and the city participates in the quality of the three orders passing from the real to the imaginary urban spaces. The represented scenes reveal an illusionistic, even playful nature and, if one considers the theatrical key structure of the entire programme, it matches with the theories of Pellegrino Prisciani and with his theatrical skills to which he dedicated the treatise *Spectacula*, in Alberti's sense of scenic spaces. In the treatise, it is possible to trace different sources spanning from *De architectura* by Vitruvio, to which Prisciani decisively dedicated preeminent respect and consideration being an ancient treaty on architecture, to *De re aedificatoria* by Leon Battista Alberti, *Roma instaurata* by Flavio Biondo and, in a smaller measure, also recalled the *Naturalis historia* by Plinius. The treatise had the aim of being useful to the Prince as an erudition text, but also as a manual for the solution of problems connected with the Ferrara theatrical practices. Even though the text is later than the 1470 frescoes, the Vitruvian interpretation of the studied scene does not differ from the one suggested by the painters of Schifanoia.

Venus and Mars are the Olympian divinities who govern the month of April, surrounded by dames and knights occupied in amatory and musical games according to a typically courtly style, while the city scene designed by Prisciani, according to the Alberti rules, is collocated in the lower part of the frescoes which corresponds to the real order. The city provides the background for the race of the Palio of Saint George [fig. 1a]: a mocking race carried out by the commoners and the donkeys under the amused glance of the court. Various technical particulars underline the scenic nature of this setting: above the ledge of the proscenium, to the right and to the left it is possible to observe what Prisciani used to call the "theatre's jaw" (la fauce del teatro) or rather the jambs delimitating the proscenium; the truncated arch on the right, behind which the figures of the racing horses disappear, would sign the passage to the site of the stage, or to the base of the upper ledge, in the support base of the architectures it is possible to identify the open barrel vaults of some entrances to the trap cellar.⁷

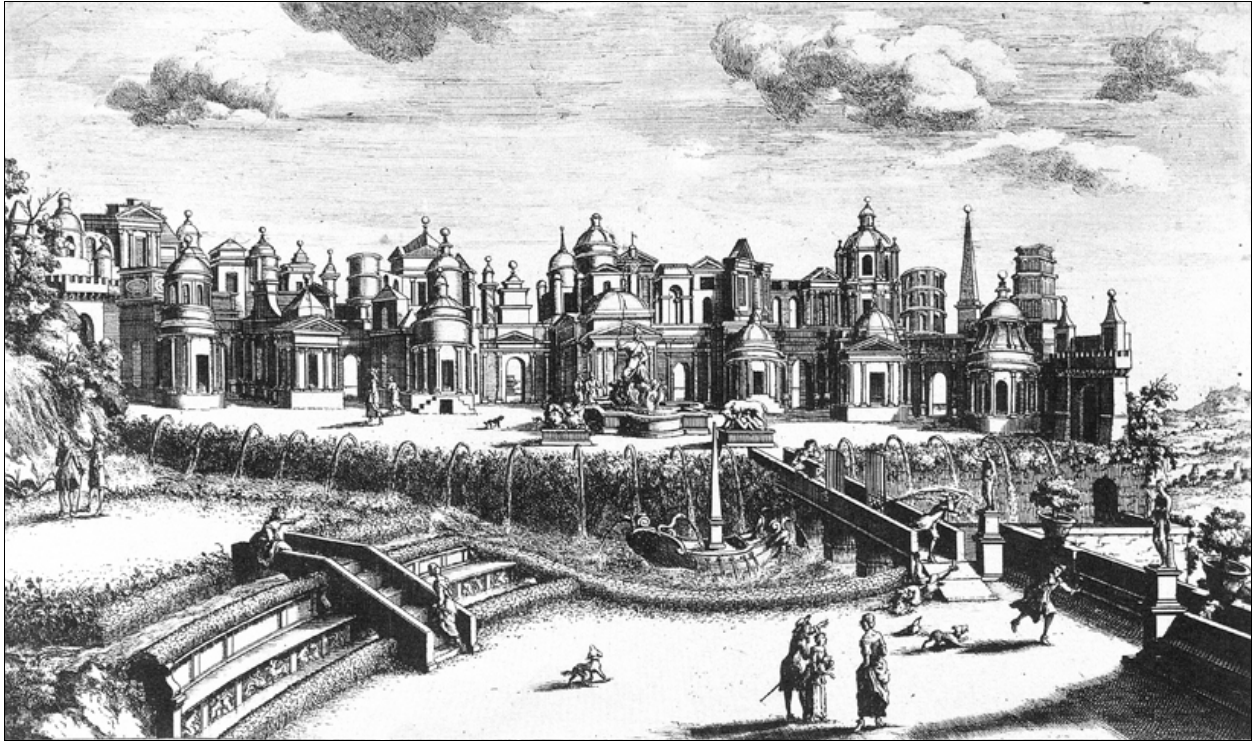


2. Francesco del Cossa, *Settembre* (1470). Fresco at the Salone dei Mesi. Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, north wall.



3. *Mirabilia urbis Romae* (Roma: Antonio Blades, 1516), page number. 1. Stationes Ecclesiarum Urbis Romae cum Indulgentiis earundem per totum Annum. Noviter impresse. [S.l.]: [s.a.] – 2. In isto opusculo dicitur quomodo Romulus [et] Remus nati sunt [et] educati. [Do not understand this caption?]

Explanatory in this sense is the representation in the top band of the month of September with the Triumph of Vulcan [fig. 2]. Next to the workshop of the Cyclops is placed an oval in the form of a just fabricated shield, portraying the emblem of Rome *Caput Mundi*. As proved in the past through the investigation of the *Canzone di Aspremonte* by Boiardo,⁸ the Este genealogy is interwoven with the myth of the twin founders of Rome subjected to the project of Borso who, in 1471, solemnly traveled to Rome for the pontifical investiture as the first Duke of Ferrara. According to the Renaissance cliché the Este family traces back its own roots to that ancient world. The subject of the fresco was intended as a tribute to Rome, known since the Middle Ages from the *Mirabilia*, widely distributed among pilgrims heading to the city. The structure in contiguous cells, the hollowed dome rooves on the model of the Pantheon, the presence of the Mole Adrianorum on the right and of the triple-bay arch of Constantine are elements which last a long time in Renaissance stagecraft [fig. 3]. Among contiguous examples can be mentioned another Este commission: the so-called Rometta (a fountain) commissioned by Cardinal Ippolito II in the Villa d'Este in Tivoli. The fountain closes with an illusionistic effect, among decorations and sceneries, ending the path of the Hundred Fountains (viale delle Cento Fontane) [fig. 4]. In the delight

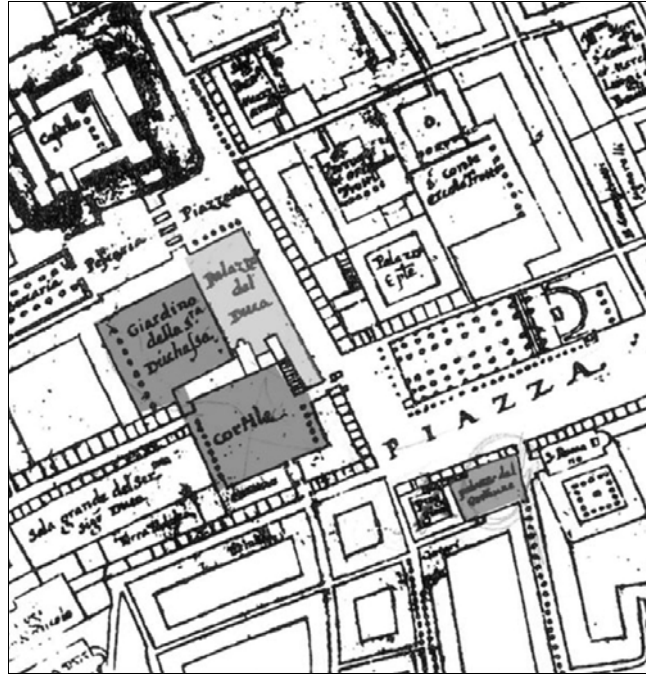


4. Giovanni Francesco Venturini, *La Rometta in the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, with the prospect of ancient Rome* (1675). Engraving, DIMENSIONS. Collection credit.

of Schifanoia, which had amusement and representation purposes, it is possible to trace, in figurative terms, the exaltation of the court which manifests its role in an illusionary reality separate from the real one: these criteria will be adopted in the festivals held in Ferrara during the same period and also towards the end of the 1480s, with the beginning of the grand theatrical season of Ferrara centred on the synthesis between courtly theatre and the rebirth of classical theatre.

With the lordship of Ercole I d'Este, who ascended to the ducal seat in 1471, the role of Prisciani in the court moved to the foreground. Besides his political and diplomatic appointments, Prisciani also played the role of the cultural animator for Ercole and Isabella obtaining for them books, instructing them in letters and in arts and carrying out researches on behalf of the court. Prisciani was translating from Latin, organizing shows, and had been actively occupied in the rediscovery of antiquity. *Spectacula* was born, therefore, as a symbol of theatre, and dedicated to Ercole I so he may learn the "ancient memories of such performances, in the games and in the buildings necessary for them" responding to a theatrical vocation wanted by the Prince as a compendium between the dramatic and architectural aspect of theatrical practice.⁹

It is known that the first centre of experimentation in this field was the city of Florence, where the Medici court had been promoting Carnival performances for already a long time; and if the erudite study of the text had been a privilege of Ferrara since 1446, date of the re-opening of the Studium by Leonello d'Este, it is precisely from Florence that Ferrara imported the practice of theatre in its first form of religious play. The season takes the religious play as a basis, which cannot boast a strong local tradition, but it is imported there. The first documented theatrical action was *Lezenda de Sancto Jacobo* in 1476. For its representation the Duke Ercole I invited Florentine skilled workers to the city: it is not, therefore, a chance that the performance was very similar to those held in Florence in those years, with great relevance assigned to the impact of the scenery and the presence of many profane themes parallel to the sacred base theme.



5. Giovan Battista Aleotti, Topographic map of Ferrara (1605) marking places for staging of Classic plays: Cortile di Palazzo Ducale in 1486-1487; the Great Hall in Palazzo Ducale in 1491-1503, room audience in Palazzo della Ragione in 1502.

The comedy, being the first Renaissance presentation of an ancient theatrical text in Ferrara, was chosen personally by the Duke and was set in the Cortile Vecchio of the Palazzo Ducale [fig. 5]. In this sense the *Menaechmi* of 1486 are paradigmatic compared to all the subsequent iterations of classical festivals to which Ercole I binds his lordship. In the productions of the comedies, the intellectuals of court “act as an *equip* of an industrial type and rhythm”; the engines of the singular projects are always the Duke and Isabella, who personally choose the texts to take the suggested performances from, they appoint the actors, supervise the production of costumes and stage settings and they ask the exponents of the Ferrara Studium rapid translations from Latin with the aim of claiming, through the use of vernacular, the individuality and autonomy of Ferrara in theatre production, possibly in opposition to Florence (also, with the notable exception of *Orpheus* by Poliziano) and Rome. According to the descriptions of the diarists of Ferrara, such as Zambotti,¹⁰ the set up recalls a spatial idea of sacred medieval theatre and it can be seen that the first plays did not have formal presumptions of a classical type: more simply, sacred theatre is moved from the square to the courtyard of the palace and resized on the basis of the available spaces. The great difference, however, is in the intentionality: the houses “crenelated with windows and uses for each” (*merlade con fenestra et uso per ciascuna*) no longer have the didactic heterogeneity of the religious play, but become the deliberate representation of the city as such.

Ercole doesn't exclude the citizens from court performances and he orders the building of a structure in the courtyard able to contain, at least in part, the citizenry of Ferrara who become guests, therefore, of court theatre. Before 1486, in fact, each festival, starting from Carnival up to the religious plays of Easter or in honour of Saint George, belonged to the people, as did the theatres built in the squares, with rudimental tribunes and long stages, aligned with the facade of the Duomo or with the small shops of the Palazzo del Comune. With the *Menaechmi* of 1486, the theatre of the city is literally brought inside the court d'Este, in the context of a cultural operation directly guided by the Duke. The operation repeats itself in 1487 with the



6. Vincenzo Scamozzi, Teatro all'antica (1588-90). Sabbioneta near Mantova.

presentations of *Fabula di Cefalo* by Niccolò da Correggio¹¹ and of *Amphitryon* (*Amphitruo*) by Plautus,¹² held in the Cortile Nuovo of the palace. The circumstances are however different: even though it is set at Carnival, the presentations are connected to the celebrations for the wedding of Lucretia d'Este with Annibale Bentivoglio.¹³ Celebrations of the whole city, on dynastic occasions the Lords d'Este place under the spotlights the practice of classical theatre, which is a model of a careful cultural policy intrinsically tied to the presentation of court.¹⁴

In *Amphitryon*, staged in January and February 1487, the element which most diffusely occupies the description of the chroniclers of that play is a starry sky made up of 1,200 lamps suspended behind some black cloths and by a rotating apparatus on which children dressed in white are seated "in the form of the planets" (in forma de li pianeti).¹⁵ Beside them are the Duke's cantors. The genius (formula which will then become the intermission) foresees the opening of the sky/Olympus and the descent of Jupiter. The intermissions of the comedy represent an homage to the Duke who personally curates the textual element of the comedies in a sort of theatrical protectionism. Such diligence suggests the awareness of theatrical use and of translation. The "ancient piece" is a fundamental ingredient, a sign of prestige to flaunt in relations with other courts because "the important stagings are [...] always the cultural experimentalism of these events".¹⁶ **Theatre enters the feast culture of the city where skilled stage designers are formed; such were the pyrotechnics with the vernacular Plautine version of the *Menaechmi*,¹⁷ the so-called "fire flares" (*razzi da Fogo*).** Battista Guarini will write about it in 1496 in his eulogy on the *Menaechmi*,¹⁸ the staging which brings to life the pomp of Roman theatres, but at the same time fulfils the popular culture of the feast. The textual data of the ancient comedy is quoted "in modern form" whilst the spectacular data is nobilitated by the reference to the ancient. Plautus becomes a "political" instrument known by humanists, but inserted here in the practice of the performance/feast attended by princes, ambassadors and scholars from the whole of Italy, invited for the occasion by the Duke in person.

The success of the celebrative operation is measured by the level of mingling between the need to renew the splendours worthy “of ancient theatres” joined with contemporaneous readability, which transcends the exclusive circle of customers and producers and reaches the classes excluded from the aristocratic game of self-reflection in the feast. The spectacular intermission is the principle instrument of this very tangible enforceability: it allows to conform the ancient to the celebration of the present because it enables an exhibition “in modern form” of ancient matter. Even vernacular, on the level of literary dramaturgy, is the result of such a need and the staging, to be effective, uses intermissions; a need for the classical performance of Ferrara connected to important events for the Duke and his home according to an organic feast “direction”. The performances of 1486–87 form an *unicum* for the coexistence, at a substantially joint level, of the urban dimension and the court dimension;¹⁹ the appropriation of theatrical practice on behalf of the court, also in terms of *physical collocation*, will end up in the following years separating classical theatre from urban theatre even more. Starting from 1490, plays are held in indoor spaces, substantially at the sole presence of the court; the separation between the square and the court takes place in the name of classical theatre. The tension towards the physical form of ancient theatre increases and is not touched by the temporary freezing of theatrical initiatives due to the bereavements of the Este family between 1493 and 1499 and to the descent of Charles VIII: with the resumption of the performances in 1499, Prisciani will carry out important changes. The mediation, in the reception of the myth of Seneca’s *Hercules*, adds on to the re-examination of the theme in an encomiastic key. The myth of the hero who for the exceptionality of his merits rises to the glory of Olympus reveals itself to be functional for the celebrative needs of the Duke, the tragic-dramaturgical workshop is actually elaborated according to celebrative and spectacular parameters. In the sixteenth century such a manipulation of mythological subjects will find an elective space in the urban entrances and triumphs, a real and utter form of performance in the self-representative culture of the courts to which the myth of Hercules offers a founding ideology and a repertoire of images.

As in the frescoes of the Hall of Hercules in the Palazzo Paradiso or in the reliefs of the Palazzo dei Diamanti inside the famous Herculean addition by Biagio Rossetti, up to the *Pastorali* by Matteo Maria Boiardo, the myth of Hercules in Ferrara has, therefore, a radicated tradition: this can also include the mythological masquerade organized by Giovanni Marrasio in 1433 with the parade of the same “*Ercole leonis indutus pellem clavamque manu retinens*”.²⁰

The strategic centrality of the Herculean mythologeme drenched in euhemerism may be found in certain terms in academic and court theatres, such as the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (1580–1585) and the Teatro all’antica by Vespasiano I Gonzaga in Sabbioneta near Mantua (1588–1590) [fig. 6]. The Teatro Olimpico designed by the perspective architectures Giandomenico and Vincenzo Scamozzi, following their visit to Rome in the 1480s, reconfirms the central connection between the representation of the ancient and the exaltation of the power of court expressed through the powerful means of knowledge and of ancient styled image.

The ideation represents a significant precedent also for the Umbrian painter Giovanni Alberti (1558–1601; who in turn had lived in Mantua in 1587 with his brother Alessandro). On the occasion of the jubilee year 1600, he and his brother Cherubino painted the Clementine Hall of the Vatican and *mutatis mutandis*, in it continued the fundamental theme from the earlier court theatres. This is especially apparent in the double balustrade crowned with statues, creating a grand scene effect. The myth of Hercules in the personification of *Labor* inside the *Allegory of Art and Sciences* also returns [figs. 7 & 8]. The iconographical identifiability supports the representative function of theatre and myth inherited by Renaissance culture, now reconverted according to current needs and new instances in an articulated decorative programme aiming, during the holy year of 1600, to solemnize the centrality of pontifical power.

The report by Bernardino Zambotti concerning the presentation of the *Eunuchus* by Terence in 1499 and then in 1502, during the wedding of Alfonso d’Este and Lucretia Borgia, according to the testimony of Nicolò Cagnolo, indicates that the seats for the audience were positioned in a semicircle: “the audience was invited into another very big hall adorned and set in the form of a theatre with its chairs in a circle above and below and on one side the proscenium with many rooms all crenelated and decorated with their fireplaces where the mimes and histrions who represented the comedy were and in the middle the orchestra where all the Most Distinguished Sirs and Orators were seated.”²¹



7. Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, *The Clementine Hall, ceiling* (1598–1600). Vatican City, Apostolic Palace.

On this occasion, the orchestra is explicitly mentioned for the first time and defined as a deputed place to accommodate the most important guests. The theatrical hall of Ferrara has reached the last phase of its evolution and has acquired the fundamental characteristics of the ancient theatrical building maintaining at the same time those typically local aspects. The original square of the religious play (with the people gathered around the central scene), with its didactic and allegorical apparatus is by now a distant reality: the plays in Ferrara, which from the very beginning were also an excuse to show off richness in front of foreign guests and the people through the number and quality of the background actors, of their costumes and of the sceneries, see an intensification of the staging of plays which will bring, in the 1500s, to a substantial popularization of theatrical practice in Ferrara.

The main expression of this phenomenon is undoubtedly the progressive growth in importance of musical interludes (the *moresche*), collocated between acts of the comedy, or in moments in which the text requires a particularly demanding change of scenery. They form from the very beginning a great attraction of the Ferrara performances. Initially they are mere inserts of instrumental music, but soon they evolve with the addition of chants and choreographies right up to become real and proper ballets with their own subject,



8. Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, *Allegory of the Arts and Sciences* (1598–1600). Vatican City, Apostolic Palace, The Clementine Hall.

often of a licentious type, becoming the main attraction of the show. The aforementioned sumptuous shows of 1502, held during the wedding of Alfonso d'Este with Lucretia Borgia are exemplary. The setting of the plays is in this case moved for organizational reasons to the audience hall of the Palazzo della Ragione (no longer existing); the classical style semi-elliptical cavea, almost certainly inspired by Prisciani, preannounces by now a repertory theatre, which Ercole I may have been thinking about; and the scenery, finally, is urban therefore "comical", made up of accessible rooms from which carts for the moresche come out from.

At the death of Ercole I, in 1505, the season of classical plays ends; his successor Alfonso (1476–1534), in fact, even though continuing the tradition of the Ferrara plays in the Sala Grande, prefers contemporary dramas where the story form prevails on ancient drama. The tension between the materialization of the theatrical building continues to grow with the introduction, in 1508, of the first perspective scenery made by Pellegrino da Udine, an elementary form of 1500 theatre, with a hemicycle and perspective scenery cavea. And twenty years later it will be Alfonso I, in fact, to reach, in 1529, the construction of the first repertory theatre of Europe under the direction of Ludovico Ariosto.

NOTES

¹ Elena Povoledo, "La Sala Teatrale a Ferrara, da Pellegrino Prisciani a Ludovico Ariosto", *Bulletin of the International Centre of Architectural Studies Andrea Palladio* 16 (1979), 105-138.

² Domenico Giuseppe Lipani, "«Iocosi intermedi»: Lo spettacolo estense tra idea dell'antico e celebrazione del presente (1486-1487)", *Dionysus ex machina* V (2014), 192-214; idem, "Lo spettacolo sacro a Ferrara nel Quattrocento e i legami con la tradizione fiorentina", *Annali on-line di Ferrara: Lettere* VIII/2 (2012), 218-231; idem, "Teatro e immaginario figurativo: Ercole de' Roberti e lo spettacolo sacro a Ferrara", *Annali on-line di Ferrara: Lettere* V/2 (2010), 256-278.

³ Its first examination was offered in Roberto Longhi, *Officina ferrarese 1934: Seguita dagli ampliamenti 1940 e dai nuovi ampliamenti, 1940-1955* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1956).

⁴ Aby Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara", *L'Italia e l'arte straniera: Atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte in Roma*, ed. by Adolfo Venturi (Roma: Magliione & Strini, 1922; repr. ed. 1978), 179-193.

⁵ Ludovico Zorzi, *Il teatro e la città: Saggi sulla scena italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), in part *Ferrara: Il sipario ducale*, 5-29; Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch* (Basel, 1860), Italian ed. by Giorgio Manacorda, intro. by Eugenio Garin (Firenze: Sansoni, 1968), 47.

⁶ Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Italian ed. *Ferrara estense: Lo stile del potere*, trans. by Vittorio Vandelli (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1988; reprint 2006).

⁷ Ludovico Zorzi, *Il teatro e la città*, 15.

⁸ Stefania Macioce, "La 'Borsiate' di Tito Vespasiano Strozzi e la 'Sala dei Mesi' di Palazzo Schifanoja", *Annuario dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Arte* n.s. 2 (1982-1983), 3-13; eadem, "L'immagine di Roma nella cultura ferrarese della Rinascenza", *Le due Rome del Quattrocento: Melozzo, Antoniazio e la cultura artistica del '400 romano*, proceedings of the conference held at the Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza", Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Institute of Art History, 21-24 February 1996. Ed. by Sergio Rossi and Stefano Valeri (Roma: Lithos, 1997), 394-404; eadem, "Roma e l'antico nella cultura ferrarese del secondo '400", *Roma nella svolta tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, proceedings of the conference held at the Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza", Department of Italian Studies, 28-31 October 1996. Ed. by Stefano Colonna (Roma: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2004), 313-324.

⁹ "antiche memorie de tal spectaculi de li ioci et de li edificii necessarii a ciò." Pellegrino Prisciani, *Spectacula*, ed. by Elisa Bastianello (Rimini: Garaldi-Engramma 2015), 33.

¹⁰ Giuseppe Pardi, ed., "Bernardino Zambotti: Diario Ferrarese", *Rerum italicarum scriptores: Raccolta degli storici italiani dal cinquecento al millecinqucento* XXIV (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1937), vol. II, 7 and 171-172.

¹¹ Niccolò da Correggio, *Opere: Cefalo, Psiche, Silva, Rime*, ed. by Antoina Tissoni Benvenuti (Bari: Laterza, 1969); *Il Teatro del Quattrocento: Le corti padane*, ed. by Antoina Tissoni Benvenuti and Maria Pia Mussini Sacchi (Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1983), 199-255; Antoina Tissoni Benvenuti, *Niccolò da Correggio e la cultura di corte nel Rinascimento padano* (Reggio Emilia: Cassa di risparmio, 1989).

¹² Antoina Tissoni Benvenuti, "Il mito di Ercole: Aspetti della ricezione dell'antico alla corte estense nel primo Quattrocento", *Omaggio a Gianfranco Folena* (Padova: Editoriale Programma, 1993), vol. 2, 773-92.

¹³ Giuseppe Pardi, ed., "Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 al 1502 di autori incerti", *Rerum italicarum scriptores* XXIV (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1928), vol. I, 179-180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 7 and 122.

¹⁵ A. Tissoni Benvenuti, "Il mito di Ercole", 773-792.

¹⁶ The bibliography on the theatre of Ferrara is vast and it would be idle to list it here in detail. An unescapable starting point remains the co-written study by Fabrizio Cruciani, Clelia Falletti, and Franco Ruffini, "La sperimentazione a Ferrara negli anni di Ercole I e Ludovico Ariosto", *Teatro e storia* IX (1994), 131-215.

¹⁷ As the chronicler Girolamo Ferrarini notes: "it started I think with trumpets and flutes and other sounds" (come <n>zò potius credo con trombe e pifari et altri soni); the length of the show: "it started at 10 o'clock in the evening I think and it lasted 24 hours" [Did "hore 22" mean at that time 10 o'clock. Time in Italian towns was not standardized to our current system before 1866? - You know that in Verdi's *Rigoletto* midnight is marked by 6 beats, and in *Falstaff* with 12.] (comenzò ad hore 22 credo et durò insino ad hore 24), relevant is the closure of the performance of the *Menaechmi*, with a pyrotechnical pinwheel: "a pinwheel with whirlpools was in the said courtyard next to the hall full of flares, flares which were full of gunpowder, and above the pinwheel was a man made of cards, decorated well; and there was the name described which Begosso spoke about. Once the feast was over, this pinwheel was fixed and all the flares were filled and the whirlpools turned, which was certainly a beautiful feast and such a pinwheel to see" (una zirandola con mulineli era in dicto cortille apresso la sala piena di razi, li quali razi erano pieni di polvere da bombarda, et in cima la zirandola li era un homo facto di carte, cunzo con bono modo; et li era il nome descripto che diceva Begosso. Fornita fu la festa, questa zirandola fu imprexa e tuti li razi si impioni et li mulineli andavano in volta, che fu certo bela festa et tal zirandola da vedere). Primo Griguolo, ed., *Girolamo Ferrarini: Memoriale estense* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2006), 123.

¹⁸ Battista Guarino, *Poema divo Herculi ferrarensium duci dicatum* (Modena, 1496).

¹⁹ Povoledo, "La Sala Teatrale a Ferrara", 115.

²⁰ Niccolò Loschi in a letter to his brother Francesco published in 1890 by Remigio Sabbadini, *Biografia documentata di Giovanni Aurispa* (Nota: F. Zammit, 1890), 182.

²¹ "si invitò in un'altra grandissima sala ornata e accomodata in forma di scena con le sue sedie in cerchio alte e basse e da un canto il proscenio con parecchie camere tutte merlate ed ornate con li suoi camini dove stavano li mimi ed istrioni che rappresentavano la comedia ed in mezzo l'orchestra dove sedevano tutti gli Illustrissimi Signori ed Oratori." Bernardino Zambotto and Nicolò Cagnolo, *Lucrezia Borgia in Ferrara, sposa a Don Alfonso d'Este* (Ferrara: Domenico Taddei Tipografo Editore, 1867), 186. — G. Pardi, "Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 al 1502 di autori incerti", vol. I, 221; Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Italian ed., *Li due Orfei* (Torino: Edizioni Rai

Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1969), 49.