Staging of Musical Drama in Italy at the Turn of Seventeenth Century
A History of Theatrical Production

Raluca Marinescu

A dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

University of Washington
2013

Reading Committee:
Stephen Rumph, Chair
George Bozarth
Rhonda Kline
Ioana Dumitriu

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
School of Music

University of Washington

Abstract

Staging of Musical Drama in Italy at the Turn of Seventeenth Century

A History of Theatrical Production

Raluca Marinescu

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
PhD Stephen Rumph
Music history

Seventeenth-century musical drama is a product of the humanist preoccupation with the revival of the cultural ideals of the antiquity. Italian critics of the sixteenth century, after studying the classical texts of Aristotle and Plato, had already launched theories according to which music was present in the theatrical performances of the antiquity. Some theorists, like Girolamo Mei and Francesco Patrizzi, promoted the idea that tragedies were sung throughout, while others, like Giovanni Trissino, Giraldi Cinthio, and Orazio Toscanella, more accurately considered that only certain parts of the plays were sung.

The following work offers a general view of the performance practice of musical drama at the turn of the seventeenth century in Italy. There are few works dedicated to the study of

stage matters in the *intermedii* productions of the century. Information on such performances is scarce, with most of the music and even parts of the libretti being lost. For this reason, in order to offer a more complete image of early musical drama, it is necessary to study the history of theatrical performance practice of the time.

The primary sources quoted throughout this work include letters, programs, and descriptions of theatrical events. The most valuable primary sources are, however, the theatrical treatises of the time: *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (1565) by Leone de' Sommi, professional director at the court of Mantua*; Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (1598) by Angelo Ingegneri, stage director; and *II Corago o vero alcune osservazioni per mettere ben in scena le composizioni drammatiche* (1628), an anonymous treatise by a professional director in the early baroque theater.

Several such sources have been translated into English, completely or at least in part, by Carol MacClintock, Allardyce Nicoll, Claude Palisca, Denis Stevens, and Oliver Strunk. Other materials have been published by editors such as Alessandro d'Ancona, Angelo Solerti, Paolo Fabbri, and Angelo Pompilio. There are, however, numerous other primary sources that have not been translated into English and offer important details of performance practice.

Numerous descriptions of weddings and other court events celebrated through theatrical performances exist only in Italian. They present details regarding set design, hall decorations, lighting, theater machines, costumes, and special effects that allow us to form a better idea of the performance practice of the time. Throughout the work I have introduced numerous quotes and excerpts from these writings in order to convey a more veridical image of the seventeenth-century performances.

This study aims to display elements taken from such documents in order to offer a coherent image of performance practice at the time when opera started to emerge as a new genre. For a better understanding of the process this work includes studies of theatrical design, sets, and machinery, costumes and lighting, and stage direction in the early Italian theater.

Table of contents

List of figures

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Adrian Marinescu, who has given me the courage and strenght to accomplish my dreams.

Introduction

The turn of the seventeenth century marks an essential moment in the history of music, with the emergence of a new genre that brought together music and theater – the musical drama. The purpose of this dissertation is to study all the elements involved in the production of such early dramatic performances. Given the number of arts involved in this process, there are clear benefits to the study of the treatises as well as the available descriptions of some of the performances of the time. Thus, the present study brings together a series of studies about specific technical elements of theatrical productions as well as various performing aspects. In this way, it is my hope to offer a clear understanding of the performance aspect of musical drama and its development from an experimental stage to a complex new art form.

This thesis is an attempt to present a complex image of early dramatic productions and it is, first and foremost, an educational work, a useful resource for students and educators. It brings together, in an organized manner, information from several valuable primary sources that has rarely been compiled in a single work.

In order to offer a better understanding of how these early performances were constructed with such popular success, this study presents information from several treatises of the century. The works of Sebastiano Serlio, Nicola Sabbatini and Joseph Furttenbach discuss numerous technical aspects of scenic productions, such as scenery, lighting and special effects machines. They offer important technical details on the methods of changing scenery and achieving stunning visual effects. The other three important treatises of the sixteenth century provide valuable information regarding other practical aspects of performance. Leone de' Sommi, Angelo Ingegneri and the anonymous author of *Il Corago* offer advice on choosing the text, casting, acting, costume and stage design as well as the use of stage machines. Descriptions of

some of the most extraordinary theatrical events of the time corroborate the theoretical guidelines proposed by the above-mentioned treatises. Some of the works cited have not been translated into English and, thus, make the present study even more valuable for scholars interested in early theatrical history. All these works suggest that the newly developed genre was meant to appear as a unified form of multimedia-style musical theatre. It appealed to the audience in various ways, through elaborate visual and auditory effects that overwhelmed their senses.

One of the major achievements in sixteenth-century theater was the discovery of perspective set design and the development of movable scenery, which are central to the visual aesthetic of conceptualizing an art work as distinct from everyday life. The use of the newly discovered perspective sets displayed a seemingly endless visual world, further enhanced by elaborate costumes, choreography and lighting. To offer a more complete image of this important aspect of the production, this work provides several descriptions of the machineries and set changing techniques that can prove to be useful in the reconstruction of early productions.

The interest in producing historically informed music performances continues to inspire numerous professional ensembles to specialize in period performance practice and several educational programs offer early opera workshops for young singers who want to gain performing experience. This study presents accurate historical information on the sets, special effects machines, costumes and lighting, and can serve contemporary stage directors interested in recreating such performances. The knowledge of period stylistic and technical aspects of performance can benefit singers, actors and producers of early music productions.

Chapter I

Musical Drama in Seventeenth-Century Italy

The Ancient Stage - Greek Drama and Opera

The notion that music was present in Greek and Roman theater provided the inspiration for the new genre created at the end of the sixteenth century in Italy. One of the theories that circulated among the humanists of the time was the belief that the ancient Greek drama was predominantly sung rather than spoken. This concept was particularly popular within the members of the Camerata fiorentina, Giovanni Giorgio Trissino, Francesco Patrizi and Girolamo Mei, to name a few. Peri goes as far as stating that the ancient Greeks and Romans "sang entire tragedies on stage."[1] Marco da Gagliano considers the Monteverdi had achieved this goal in *Arianna* by setting Rinuccini's words "in so exquisite a way that one can truly affirm that the excellence of ancient music was revived [si rinovasse il pregio dell'antica musica], since he visibly reduced the whole theater to tears."[2]

Even though the theory was later proved an exaggeration, it is well known that theater as an art has its origins in the rituals of the *choric dithyramb*, where music, dance, and poetry were used to reenact the story of the death and resurrection of Dionysus (the god of wine and fertility). As Plato notes in his *Laws*, "music was early divided among us into certain kinds and manners. One sort consisted of prayers to the Gods, which were called hymns; and there was another and opposite sort called lamentations, and another termed *paeans*, and another, celebrating the birth

---

[1] Claude V Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance musical thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 408.
[2] Tim Carter, *Composing Opera: From Dafne to Ulisse Errante* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 1994), 53.

of Dionysus, called, I believe, dithyrambs."[3] One of the first ancient writers to mention the presence of music in theater is Plato. According to him there were poets who "introduced the reign of vulgar and lawless innovation […] they had no perception of what is just and lawful in music; raging like Bacchanals and possessed with inordinate delights — mingling lamentations with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute on the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no truth, and, whether good or bad, can only be judged of rightly by the pleasure of the hearer. And by composing such licentious works, and adding to them words as licentious, they have inspired the multitude with lawlessness and boldness, and made them fancy that they can judge for themselves about melody and song. And in this way the theaters from being mute have become vocal, as though they had understanding of good and bad in music and poetry; and instead of an aristocracy, an evil sort of theatrocracy has grown up."[4] Other Greek writers such as Cicero, Quintilian, Suetonius, and Aristotle talk about actors singing on stage, indicating that certain musical modes were considered noble and could be used only by soloists and not by the chorus. An anecdote preserved by Plutarch recounts Euripides's reaction to a chorus member who misbehaved in rehearsal: "Sir, unless you were very stupid and insensible, you could not laugh while I sing in the grave mixolydian mode."[5]

The theater of ancient Greece, consisting of three types of drama – tragedy, comedy, and the *satyr* play – continued to develop throughout the ages. As the Roman Empire expanded, invading several Greek territories, Greek drama started spreading throughout Europe. The first

---

[3] Plato. *The dialogues of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), trans. Benjamin Jowett, accessed October 20, 2013, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1085530.
[4] Ibid.
[5] A.M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History = Sources of Theatrical History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 7.

record of Roman drama dates from 240 BC, when Livius Andronicus translated and adapted the first literary works in plays for the Roman Games (Ludi Romani): "Livius was the first, some years later, to abandon *saturae* and compose a play with a plot."[6] After Livius, a suite of dramatists such as Gnaeus Naevius (c. 270-201 BC), Quintus Annius (239-169 BC), Marcus Pacuvius (c. 220-c.130 BC), and Lucius Acius (170-c 86 BC) started to write comedies and tragedies in the Greek manner.[7] Only fragments of such plays have survived but they suggest that writers tended to adapt original Greek works following the structure of the Greek dramas. The first dramas to survive in complete form are the works of Plautus and Terence. The plays are mostly comedies, which suggest they were more popular than tragedies at the time. Both Plautus and Terence use stock characters such as: the tragic female, the clown, and the deceiving slave, but Terence's plots are more complex, combining plots from more than one Greek original story.

Roman actors, according to Nagler, usually came from low-class backgrounds and could even be slaves, but they could become famous through their performances and even improve their social status in time.[8] This was the case of Roscius, one of the most famous Roman actors, who became notorious for his performances and was raised to nobility.[9] Roman theater, however, did not reach the heights of the Greek drama, the public showing little interest in serious dramatic endeavors. As Juvenal, a Roman poet of the first century, notes, "the ordinary Roman found great drama less uplifting than a tight-rope walker."[10] Thus, audiences seemed to prefer entertainments such as circuses, chariot racing, horse racing, foot races, wrestling, gladiator

---

[6] Nagler, *A source book in theatrical history*, 17.
[7] Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the theater* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), 57.
[8] Nagler, *A source book in theatrical history*, 18.
[9] Brockett, *History of the theater*, 73.
[10] Clive Unger-Hamilton, *The entertainers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 14.

fights, and sea battles. Tens of thousands of people attended the events held in the Circus Maximus, the Coliseum and other similar locations.[11]

Throughout the fourth and the fifth centuries, as the Roman Empire started to decline and Christianity became stronger as a religion, dramatic production came to a halt. Theatrical tradition survived in the form of mime, pantomime, dances, and scene recitations from tragedies and comedies. From the fifth century to the tenth century there is little evidence of organized theatrical performances.[12] Theater became a constant target for Christianity, as it was associated with pagan festivals. The nomadic bands that traveled and performed throughout Europe presented scenes that often ridiculed Christian practices, offending the morality of the church leaders, and thus, were condemned as dangerous and pagan. Starting around 300 AD the church constantly preached against theater and tried to dissuade Christians from attending such performances. Even though theater wasn't forbidden officially, the Council of Carthage declared excommunication for any citizen who chose to go to the theater instead of the church on holy days. In the Eastern Roman Empire things went even further as the Trullan Council forbade theatrical performances of any kind. This event marks, according to modern historians, the end of ancient Greek and Roman theater.[13]

Ironically, the Church played a critical role in the revival of theatrical tradition around the tenth century, using drama as a means of communication with the illiterate people. Priests had started dramatizing certain important biblical events long before the tenth century, gradually introducing more elaborate processions, rituals, church vestments, as well as pantomime in the special services, on days such as Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, etc. Towards the end of the sixth

---

[11] William H. Byrnes IV, "Ancient Roman Munificence: The Development of the Practice and Law of Charity," *Rutgers Law Review* vol. 57, issue 3(Spring 2005): 1043–1110.
[12] Brockett, *History of the theater*, 73.
[13] Ibid., 80.

century, as Christianity became stronger and more organized many rituals started to be standardized – the choral sections of the Mass were noted in Pope Gregory the Great's *Antiphonarium*. By the ninth century the church became a strong institution that could afford to construct splendid buildings where services were conducted with magnificent processions and elaborate music.[14] It is around this time that tropes were introduced in the music. Their initial function was to lengthen the musical passages, extending the melody at the end of the final syllables (usually on *alleluia*). In time the melodies of the tropes became more and more elaborate, with added words and even some dramatic action.

Historian O.B. Hardison goes as far as considering the ceremony of the Mass itself to be a forerunner of liturgical drama. In his view, the celebration of the Eucharist is a "divine comedy" re-enacting the death and resurrection of Christ in allegorical terms.[15] He based his interpretation on the writings of Amalarius, Bishop of Metz (780?-850), who's work *Liber Officialis* (821) describes "each detail of the Eucharist, beginning with the entrance of the bishop and his clergy at the Introit.... The deacons represent the prophets; the sub-deacons, the wise men; the acolytes, the scribes; the bishop, Christ Himself. The thyme burning in the thurible signifies the body of Christ full of sweet odor; the altar, the hearts of the elect; the kissing of the Gospel-book, the love which we should have toward those from whom we are separated."[16]

One of the first known liturgical dramas was *Quem-Quaeritis* (Whom do you seek) The chant consisted of only four lines and was introduced into the liturgy around 925, later on being separated and developed into a full-fledged Easter play.

Interrogatio. Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae?

---

[14] Ibid., 83.
[15] O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages; Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 39.
[16] Robin Wallace, "The Role of Music in Liturgical Drama: A Revaluation," *Music & Letters* 65, no. 3 (1984): 224.

> Responsio. Jesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.
> Angeli. Non est hic; surrexit, sicut praedixerat. Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchro
>
> [Question [by the Angels]: Whom do seek ye in the sepulcher, O Christian women?
> Answer [by the Marys]: Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, O heavenly one.
> The Angels: He is not here; He is risen, as He foretold. Go and announce that He is risen from the dead.][17]

St. Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester noted in his Concordia Regularis (965-975) not only the text of the trope but also the detailed directions for its performance:

> While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulcher without attracting attention and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. While the third response is chanted, let the remaining three follow, and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense, and stepping delicately as those who seek something, approach the sepulcher. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monument of Jesus. When therefore he who sits there beholds the three approach him like folk lost and seeking something, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing Quem Quaeritis.[18]

This was the first step in the creation of liturgical drama, a type of play that spread throughout Europe and continued to develop and expand. Initially, liturgical dramas were simply sung by two groups, with no individual actors involved. Gradually the plays became more complex, introducing actors, settings, and costumes. The actors were normally members of the church or choir boys, dressed in church vestments and wearing symbolic accessories, such as wings for angels, or hoods for female characters.[19]

By 1350 the performances were moved outside the church, with plays being performed in vernacular, rather than Latin and using laymen as actors.[20] There is little evidence regarding the reason of this transition because few plays or records of performances of the time have survived. Thus, the churches' control over the performances diminished in time, the secularization leading

---

[17] Nagler, *A source book in theatrical history*, 39.
[18] Ibid., 39.
[19] Brockett, *History of the theater*, 88.
[20] Ibid., 90.

to even more complex plays, non-liturgical but still with a religious character. Mystery plays developed, presenting Bible stories as tableaux with accompanying antiphonal song.

A new type of drama developed from the mystery plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – the morality play. The central theme of the genre was the struggle of the protagonist against temptation. The purpose of the morality plays was, as in the case of liturgical drama, to educate the mostly illiterate masses through entertainment. David Bevington defined this type of play as "the dramatization of a spiritual crisis in the life of a representative mankind figure in which his spiritual struggle is portrayed as a conflict between personified abstractions representing good and evil."[21] One of the earliest morality plays was the *Commedia Spirituale* performed in Padua in 1243. Other similar plays included *Il conversione di S. Paolo* (Rome 1440), *II Figluolo Prodigo* (1565), and *La commedia dell'anima* (printed in Siena without a date). The story of the Passions of Christ was one of the favorite subjects, being set to music multiple times. The music combined elements of ecclesiastical plainchant with elements of vernacular song.

Medieval plays were presented on temporary stages that were usually removed upon the completion of the performances. As dramas became more complex, they required the use of costumes, props, and scenery in order to make the performance more realistic. During the fifteenth and sixteenth-century theater continued to develop, incorporating music, movement and set design, combining spectacle with realism into a complex performance that was both entertaining and educational. Secular theater, rooted in pagan rituals, mimes and the jongleurs' stories and songs, started to develop slowly alongside the religious dramas. The oldest known secular play is *Jeu d'Adam*, written by Adam de la Halle in 1262, comprised of satirical and

---

[21] David M. Bevington, *Medieval drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 792.

pastoral elements with musical interludes and dances.[22] These secular entertainments became very popular in European courts and they started to be organized by the nobility for special events such as festivals, tournaments, and visits of important political figures.

Renaissance Theater

The seventeenth century, a period of experimentalism and innovation in arts and science, inherited a well-established tradition of courtly spectacle. For centuries throughout Europe, special events had been celebrated with feasts, tournaments, and parades, involving luxurious decorations and costumes. Theater was a popular means of entertainment and an essential aspect of the cultural and social life of the courts and even of the church, with the liturgical drama taking on a more visual character. Such dramatic spectacles reflected the social and political history of the Italian cities. They were staged to entertain the members of the courts and their foreign guests and were an important part of the court weddings celebrations. The lavish decorations and artworks had another, more obvious, purpose: they displayed the ruler's power and prestige. The Church itself played an important part in the development of theater, even though it continuously attacked the "corrupting" influence of the theater, especially fighting the popular *commedia dell'arte*, a controversial subject in the ecclesiastical world. This genre appeared in the sixteenth century in Italy, the first recorded performances dating from 1551. It was characterized by the use of masks and stock characters and the performances were mostly improvised. Unlike the *commedia erudita,* written by academics and performed by amateurs, *commedia dell'arte* was performed by professional actors. Nobility usually sponsored the troupes of actors (like *Gelosi*, *Confidenti*, *and Accessi)* and provided outdoor, temporary stages for their

[22] Brockett, *History of the theater*, 110.

performances during the festivals. Recognizing the power of communication of this genre, clerics started using theater as a tool in promoting the church's teachings. Jesuit monks went as far as teaching acting in their schools, encouraging the writing and performance of sacred dramas on religious subjects.

Theater developed differently in the various European countries of the time. In England, Shakespeare was already regarded as the greatest writer and dramatist. In Spain, the climax of dramatic achievement was reached through the works of Lope de Vega and later on of Calderón, while in France theater was flourishing in the age of Corneille, Moliere, and Racine. Seventeenth-century Italy produced no outstanding playwrights, but continued to influence the theatrical arts of other European countries through the *commedia dell'arte* and, more importantly, its new genre, the opera, which would soon become extremely popular throughout the continent.

Theoreticians of the time, among them Antonio Minturno, Julius Caesar Scaliger, and Lodovico Castelvetro, were preoccupied with defining the goals of comedy, tragedy, and tragicomedy. The fundamental purpose of drama was, in their view, verisimilitude, a concept that combined reality, morality, and generality.[23] The principal types of drama were, according to the neoclassical theory, comedy, and tragedy. All the other types were considered less important, since they derived from these two main ones. Comedy was directed to the middle and lower classes, having plots and characters inspired by everyday events, written in normal speech and offering a happy ending. Tragedy, on the other hand, used mythological stories and usually had unhappy endings, employing a more elevated poetic style.

---

[23] Ibid., 128.

Commedia dell'arte was, however, thriving along these main theatrical genres. The courts began to sponsor the troupes, which by the early seventeenth century developed into professional companies under the protection of the ducal houses. Around this time *commedia dell'arte* works began to be printed and famous actors started discussing in the prefaces rules for acting and improvising on a text. They published plays and discussed performance issues such as acting and improvisation in relation to the scripted drama. The most important aspect at the time was not the quality of the plot, but the skill of the performer in improvisation and body language. Francesco Andreini (1548-1624), actor and leader of the Gelosi troupe (which traveled all over Europe), published in 1607 the fifty-five dialogues of *Le bravure del Capitano Spavento* (*The courageous deeds of Captain Spavento*), the first published collection of *commedia dell'arte* texts. Flaminio Scala (1547-1624) followed course with *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* (translated into English as: *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'arte*), the first collection of scenarios.[24] Pier Maria Cecchini (1563-1645) wrote essays on the social and moral purpose of the comic theater in his work, *Brevi discorsi intorno alla commedia, commedianti e spettatori* (*Brief essays on comedy, actors, and spectators,* 1614).

Commedia dell'arte started declining towards the end of the sixteenth century, partly because of the extensive travelling and the changing demands required by different socio-cultural and linguistic preferences of the public. Thus, by the end of the century, commedia become a stereotyped series of comic routines that appealed mostly to the lowest class of spectators. Jacques Callot (1592-1635) a printmaker and draftsman from the Duchy of Lorraine, left a series of drawings depicting *commedia dell'arte* figures called *Balli di Sfessania* (*Dances of Sfessania*).

---

[24] Flaminio Scala, *Scenarios of the commedia dell'arte: Flaminio Scala's Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, trans. Henry Frank Salerno (New York: New York University Press, 1967).

Though considered to be historically unreliable, the work presents in a simple, caricature-like style, the orientation of the genre in Naples with obscene humor and masks (see Appendix Chapter I, Figure 1, 2, 3).

Regular comedy continued to be performed during the sixteenth century, with the classical comic situations, characters, and formal patterns, usually written in five acts. Changes wrought to the genre included multiple levels of action, moralizing plots, and high-ranking characters.

Tragedy was extensively cultivated in its traditional form, with the most important masterpiece of the time being *Aristodemo* (1657) by Carlo de' Dottori (1618 – 1686). His work was tailored on the model of the Greek tragedy, with a plot using all the theatrical devices to satisfy the audience's taste for drama: revenge, murder, mutilation, and carnage. It showed, however, the influence of the contemporary sacred tragedy, Merope being portrayed as a virgin martyr. Also popular were the tragedies written in the academies for the entertainment of a mixed audience. Works by Ansaldo Ceba (1565-1623), Francesco Bracciolini (1566-1645), and Prospero Bonarelli (1588-1659) depart from Greek and historical subjects, turning to epic and fictional plots. Sacred tragedies, presenting the life of saints, were another popular form of entertainment. They were inspired by the Counter-Reformation movement and the Jesuits used them as a pedagogical tool. The dramatic reenactment of the life of martyrs, whose faith brought the reaffirmation of the eternal order of divine justice, was appealing both to the public and the Church.

Tragicomedy, a mixed genre, was a controversial subject, only slightly touched upon in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he discussed tragedy with a dual ending. The genre did not exist in antiquity, even though a few Greek plays, like *Alcestis*, may be called tragicomedies.

Giambattista Guarini's play *Il pastor fido* (1590) was titled "tragicommedia pastorale" and caused intense discussions regarding the definition and purpose of the genre. In his 1601 *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* (Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry), Guarini discusses the manner and merit of combining the elements of the traditional tragedy with elements of comedy. Guarini believed its goal was: "[T]o imitate with the resources of the stage an action that is feigned and in which are mingled all the tragic and comic parts that can coexist in verisimilitude and decorum, properly arranged in a single dramatic form, with the [architectonic] end of purging with pleasure the sadness of the hearers."[25] Thus, in his view, tragicomedy brings together the grandeur and severity of tragedy and the earthiness of comedy in a coherent blending resulting in a homogenous style.

A genre that often brought together elements of tragedy and comedy was the pastoral play. The genre played an important part in the development of the other forms of *Seicento drama*, especially in the emergence of the opera. Most pastorals, like the popular *Aminta* (1578) by Torquato Tasso (1544–1595) and *Il pastor fido* (1590) by Battista Guarini, were tragicomedies. Guarini discussed *Il pastor fido* in his *Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry* and defined it as "a pastoral tragicomedy."[26] He began the work with a discussion of the Golden Age, first mentioned by the Greek poet Hesiod in his *Works and Days* (750-650 BC), and considered to have been a period of primordial peace, harmony, stability, and prosperity in the early seventh century BC. It was followed by the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, the Heroic Age, and the Iron Age, each being worse than the one that went before. Tradition claimed that the site of the original Golden Age had been Arcadia, a poor rural area of Greece where the shepherds lived a

---

[25] Giambattista Guarini, *The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry*, trans. Allan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism Plato to Dryden* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1940), 524.
[26] Ibid., 524.

life of rustic innocence and simplicity, untainted by the corruption of civilization. Guarini discusses the pastoral form with the eclogues, dialogues between shepherds fitted within a single story divided into acts. He labeled his work "a pastoral tragicomedy," the latter term showing the quality of the pastoral drama. The work was, as he explains, "a single conception... an action of shepherds, composed of tragic and comic parts mixed together, and not three actions, one of private persons, the second of persons of rank, the third of shepherds; there is one action that at the same time is kingly and private and pastoral."[27]

Dramatists, preoccupied with the principles of structuring a play, found their inspiration in Aristotle's *Poetry*, the earliest work of dramatic theory. In this work he defined tragedy as "a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions. By 'embellished speech,' I mean that which has rhythm and melody, i.e. song; by 'with its elements separately,' I mean that some [parts of it] are accomplished only by means of spoken verses, and others again by means of song."[28]

Music thus, was proven to be present in the dramatic works of the antiquity and reappeared in theater in the *intermedii*, musical spectacles which were introduced between the acts of a play. The *intermedii* eventually became too elaborate, having their own plots and overwhelming the original plays. Leone de' Sommi (c.1525 - c.1590) wrote in his *Dialogues on Stage Affairs* (probably published around 1565) that they should not only be related to the plot of the main play, but also unite the music and text into a single thematic unit. The *intermedii*, like

---

[27] Ibid., 533.
[28] Aristotle, *Poetics I*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1987), 7.

the pastoral genre played an important part in the emergence of the new genre that brought together music, poetry, and staging – opera.

Court Spectacles

In seventeenth-century Italian cities music and theater were highly appreciated and present in everyday life. Music was played everywhere from the aristocratic courts to churches, and even in the streets. Theatrical spectacles were modeled on the Neo-Platonist ideals of the era, bringing together poetry, music, dance, painting, and architecture to reflect the harmony of the universe. It is thus, not surprising that in this context a new form of art reuniting music, poetry and drama was born. This new genre, "dramma per musica," grew out of the tradition of court entertainments.

The court of Medici in Florence and Gonzaga in Mantua were the most involved in the evolution of early musical theater. The Medici family had established themselves as the ruling family in Florence in 1434. They played a major part in the social and cultural evolution of the city, making it one of the greatest European cities by 1472. Florence was also a city of art, home to Dante and Boccaccio. In 1515 Giovanni de' Medici became Pope Leo X, consolidating the family's power. Florence became a duchy in 1532 when Clement VII (another descendent of the Medici family – Giulio de' Medici) appointed his illegitimate son Alessandro de' Medici as Duke of the Florentine Republic. The Medici family's tradition of supporting the arts reached a high point during the reign of Francesco I (1574 to 1587) and Ferdinando I (1587 to 1609,) who was considered to be one of the most popular of the later Medici. The famous Medici Theater and the Accademia della Crusca were built under the rule of Francesco I. The Medici family used teams of artists like Giorgio Vasari, Bernardo Buontalenti, and Giulio Parigi, to produce elaborate

spectacles to celebrate the dynastic marriages of members of the family and other important occasions.

One of the most important theatrical events of the Renaissance took place in 1589 and proved to be a turning point in the merging of arts – the wedding of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando I with Christine de Lorraine, niece of Henry III of France. The festivities lasted for three weeks and were thoroughly documented by the Medici family. The comedy *La Pellegrina* by Girolamo Bargagli was the most grandiose performance and the musical interludes framing the acts overshadowed the play itself through the scenic illusions and spectacular metamorphoses presented in the full view of the audience. Count Giovanni de' Bardi (1534 – 1612), patron of the group of composers, music theorists and scholars who made up the Florentine Camerata, was the stage-director and overseer of the *intermedii* for this play. Bernardo Buontalenti was the architect–engineer and a total of six then-famous composers from Florence contributed to the music: Luca Marenzio (c. 1553 – 1599), Emilio de' Cavalieri (c. 1550 – 1602), Cristofano Malvezzi (1547 – 1599), Jacopo Peri (1561 – 1633), Giulio Caccini (1551 – 1618) and Giovanni de Bardi. There were six *intermedii* structured as prologue, entr'actes and epilogue to the play, celebrating the power of music (see figure 4, 5). In the first one soprano Vittoria Archilei appeared on a cloud, singing a highly ornamented madrigal (attributed to Cavalieri) suggesting the Platonic music of the spheres: "From the highest spheres…I am Harmony who comes to you, o mortals." The next four pieces represented mythological tales with pastoral scenes, the heavens, the underworld, and the ocean, each one allegorically representing the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The *intermedii* were constructed as a series of independent musical numbers, which included accompanied solo songs, ensemble counterpoint madrigals, and sinfonias. The instruments were used according to their symbolic connotations; for example,

harps, citterns, and viols represented the celestial spirits, while the viols, lira, and trombones portrayed the infernal ones. The new musical style that the Florentine Camerata (*stile rappresentativo*) was just starting to create appears only in one madrigal setting, by Bardi, being chordal in texture, and better reflecting the poetic declamation. The final *intermezzo*, written by Cavalieri, celebrated the union of gods and mortals and was the most complex in construction, bringing together singing, and dancing. The music alternates five-part chorus sections with a trio of dancing soprano soloists emulating the Greek choruses, which the Camerata believed to have danced while singing. *La Pellegrina* proved to be very influential, becoming the basis for numerous instrumental variations and providing inspiration for structuring theatrical spectacles.

The other important court in the development of the new genre was Mantua, an old city and a more modest cultural center. Mantua was ruled by the Gonzaga family from 1328 to 1708. One of the earliest pastoral plays which included some musical numbers – *La fabula d'Orfeo* (1480) by Poliziano – was produced in Mantua. Romain Rolland goes as far as suggesting that this work was a prototypical opera, through its adaptation of *sacre rappresentazioni* to a secular subject.[29] He points out that these spectacles were an important precursor to opera, as they were mostly sung, and therefore the evolution of musical theater can be traced back to the 1480 production. Pirrotta, however, disagrees arguing that Poliziano's play was not related in any way to the *sacre rappresentazioni*. He also characterizes the singing in the former works as being "intoned recitation," not comparable to operatic vocal music. He instead relates Poliziano's work to the tradition of court performances in which spoken text was intermixed with song.[30]

---

[29] Romain Rolland, *Some musicians of former days*, trans. Mary Blaiklock (New York: Holt, 1915), 28-35.
[30] Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 19-21.

The next important theatrical event was the production of Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, in Mantua, in 1598 (see figure 6). Leone de' Sommi, author of the *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (*Four Dialogues on Scenic Representation*), and harpist and singer Isacchino Massarano, were involved in the production of the play, which began rehearsal in the early 1590s but was not produced until the end of the decade. The production was delayed, as letters from Gonzaga and Guarini reveal, partly because of the requirements for the performers to act, speak, sing, and dance. Guarini admitted that the introduction of dance numbers was one of the most troublesome aspects of the work.[31]

These productions set the stage for the advent of a new genre that would bring together theater, music, and dance. The Renaissance theoreticians believed in the purity of ancient theater and music, and were hoping to achieve a new form that would express the Baroque concern with reconciling material and spiritual realities.

Birth of Opera

After the 1589 wedding of the Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici and the French princess Christine of Lorraine, composers started expanding the possibilities of the pastoral play, using the genre's dramatic opportunities to introduce songs, dances and choruses. They continued searching for ways in which music would best reflect the word, creating a stronger bond between the two arts. Vincenzo Galilei (1520 – 1591), a member of the Florentine Camerata and the author of the treatise *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna*, "the central manifesto of the Camerata movement," believed that music's role was to support and

[31] Iain Fenlon, "Music and Spectacle at the Gonzaga Court, C. 1580-1600" *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 103 (1976): 93-94.

deliver the message of a text, defining music as a rhetorical art.[32] Galilei, together with the other Florentine composers, developed a new musical style, starting from the ancient Greek concept that ascribed to music miraculous powers (for example in the stories of Orpheus). They considered this art had faded away from that ideal, losing in time the contact with its roots in language. Thus, they wanted melody and rhythm to flow directly from the declamation of poetry, using the instruments as a simple support for the singing voice. The Florentine Camerata criticized contemporary music for the overuse of polyphony at the expense of the sung text's intelligibility. They believed that excessive counterpoint obscured the *affetto* (the "affection" or feeling) of the poetry. Their musical experiments led to the development of the *stile rappresentativo*. Emilio Cavalieri was the first to employ the new musical style in his works. As Peri noted, it was Cavalieri who "before any other so far as I know, enabled us with marvelous invention to hear our kind of music upon the stage."[33]

Rinuccini, Peri, and Corsi were the first to take decisive steps in this new direction, towards the creation of a new genre. Together they created an entirely sung pastoral play entitled *Dafne*, of which only fragments survive today. Peri mentions in his preface to *Euridice* that *Dafne* was a work in process as early as 1594, but it is not clear if this means he actually wrote *Dafne* then or only talked about it with Rinuccini and Corsi. He also admits that Corsi assisted him in writing some of the arias from *Dafne*. The earliest known performance was in 1597, as stated in Marco da Gagliano's preface to his *Dafne* (1608). Giovanni Medici and other important Florentine personalities were present in the audience. The following performance was on January 18, 1599, in the Palazzo Corsi with yet another one on January 21 of the same year, in the Pitti

[32] Claude V. Palisca, "Camerata" *Grove Music Online Oxford Music Online*, accessed April 28, 2011. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/04652>.
[33] Claude V. Palisca, "Emilio de'Cavalieri" *Grove Music Online Oxford Music Online*, accessed April 28, 2011. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05202.

palace, for a larger audience including Cardinals Dal Monte and Montaldo. There are records for two more performances of the opera in Florence: one in August, 1600, at the Corsi palace, and one on October 26, 1604, at the Pitti palace, in honor of the Duke of Parma.[34]

Tim Carter believes that *Dafne* was created as a counter-attack to Emilio de' Cavalieri's claim that he was the first to recreate the style in which "ancient Greeks and Romans who, according to the opinion of many, sang their tragedies throughout on the stage."[35] The Florentines could not accept the idea that a Roman interloper in Florence had succeeded where they had been struggling and thus, *Dafne* was created.

According to Peri the opera was written as an experiment, to see if music could imitate "speech in song" in the style of how they believed the ancient Greek tragedies were written. In his preface to *Euridice*, Peri mentioned an "intermediate path" that was not quite music, but is more musical than speech alone. He considered that in speech some words were "intoned in such a manner that harmony can be based upon them." Thus, he decided to move the bass line according to the feelings inspired by the words, holding it firm through the harmonic and non-harmonic tones. This way the dissonance would be set on non-harmonic tones and pass quickly, while the harmonic tones would be set on consonances. He believed that, even though this could not be proved as the manner in which ancient Greeks sang, it was the only way that contemporary music could be adapted to speech. The opera was a success and thus, encouraged composers to continue writing in this style.

Dafne's success encouraged composers to experiment more, and in October 1600, for the celebration of the wedding of Maria de' Medici and King Henri IV of France, Caccini was

---

[34] W. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1998), 659-662.
[35] Tim Carter, *Monteverdi's musical theater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 25.

commissioned to compose the music for the theatrical entertainment: the pastoral *Il rapimento di Cefalo* by Gabriello Chiabrera. Only fragments of the score have survived in manuscript, but it is believed that the work was sung entirely. It was performed in the Uffizi Theater for an audience of three thousand gentlemen and eight hundred ladies, according to an official report. Despite the spectacular scenic effects, the work made a poor impression; one member of the audience even stating that "the music was tedious, that it seemed like the chanting of the passion. Marchese del Piano was particularly of this conviction."[36]

The first complete opera to survive was Peri's *Euridice* (1600) composed for the same event, but performed in a relatively small room in the Pitti Palace for two hundred guests (see Figure 7). The rivalry between Caccini and Peri was well known at the time, and thus, it was not surprising that Caccini decided to write his own setting of Rinuccini's text for *Euridice*. Peri claimed in his preface to the work that Caccini made his students sing his own setting rather than Peri's, with Caccini himself performing the title role. Caccini actually published his own score in 1600, before Peri, but it was not a successful version and was not performed until 1602.

Rinuccini's *Euridice* enacts the mythological story of *Orpheus and Eurydice*. It opens with a strophic prologue, sung by the allegorical figure of La Tragedia (Tragedy), dedicating the work in honor of the royal wedding between Maria de' Medici and Henry IV of France. She states that she will banish her usual topics and "tune her song to happier strings." This was Rinuccini's way of presenting the ancient tragedy as the inspiration for presenting drama in song. The play is set in five episodes, separated by choruses in strophic verse. In each episode there is an impressive monologue: in the first one Orfeo sings a hymn to nature; in the second one *Dafne*

---

[36] Tim Carter, "Rediscovering Il rapimento di Cefalo," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, v. 9 no. 1 (2003), accessed April 7, 2011. http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/carter.html.

recounts Euridice's tragic death; next the shepherd describes the rescue of Orfeo by Venus in a golden chariot. The climax of the piece is Orfeo's lament at the gates of Hell. The play ends with Aminta sharing the news that Pluto has returned Euridice to Orfeo. Rinuccini, however, alters the end of the play, eliminating the requirement that Orfeo does not look back while leading *Euridice* out of Hades. He explained his decision in the preface: "Some perhaps may think it excessively bold in me to have altered the ending of the fable of Orpheus; but I thought it more seemly to do so on so festive an occasion, having as my justification the example of Greek poets in other fables."[37]

The mythological settings easily lend itself easily to music, meeting the theorists' requirements of verisimilitude, and the characters of ancient Arcadia communicated through poetry and music. This particular myth provided another strong reason for the use of music to advance the plot: Orpheus was known for his superior musical abilities through which he succeeds in overcoming the power of Hades.

In the preface of his opera, Peri explains that he adopted *recitativo* and *basso continuo*, attempting to follow what the Camerata considered to be the Greek model. He further declares that he considers his setting the only one suited to the story and calls his *Euridice* a "tragedia per musica," a tragedy with music, acknowledging that dramatic requirements influenced his writing. Thus, his musical decisions had a dramatic reason. For example, he avoided counterpoint throughout the work, using it in only one chorus in order to portray the different voices of the people in the crowd. Another important decision was placing the musical instruments behind the scenes, in order to make the audience focus exclusively on the action on stage.

---

[37] Piero Weiss, *Opera: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

From the very beginning critics, starting with Pietro de' Bardi, compared Peri's more technically correct version with Caccini's elegant music: "Peri had more science, and having found a way of imitating familiar speech by using few sounds, and by meticulous exactness in other respects, he won great fame. Giulio's inventions had more elegance."[38] Caccini's music, they claimed, was more tuneful, with extensive melismas and a declamatory rhythm that follows the poetic structure less faithfully. Peri's music, on the other hand, expressed in depth the theatrical aspects of the text, creating more distinct characters. Caccini's version shows a less dramatic score, with narrow melodic and harmonic range. His melodies stay within an octave and the characters rarely make strong cadences in their recitatives. Peri's score appears to be more dramatic, making use of arched melodic lines, shorter melismas and a more daring harmonic language.

However, both composers display a radical purism of style, typical of the Florentine reform ideas. In both works the recitative dominates the scene, with the speech rhythm, key scheme, and modulation being very similar in both scores. Both Peri and Caccini departed from the recitative style at the same places, setting the prologue as a strophic aria, and using corresponding refrain choruses. The bass line for the recitative is written predominantly in the slow pedal-point style. Peri stated in the preface that he sustained the bass even against the dissonances of the singer, and moved it "according to the affections" whenever they made a change of harmony necessary. This remark proves how important the merging of word and music was for the Florentines. A similar statement can be found in the preface to Caccini's *Le Nuove Musiche*. Peri's pedal basses are more rigid and surpass in their dramatic impact those of Caccini. On the other hand, Caccini's bass line is more varied, and his florid melodic

---

[38] Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, 524.

ornamentation shows his attraction for the virtuoso singer. There are few refrain choruses in either opera usually preceded by a strophic variation. The choruses of the shepherds seem to have been written with a deliberately anti-contrapuntal intent. The recitatives are punctuated by musical refrains only in a few places, such as in Orfeo's lament in the underworld. The perpetually slow recitative cadences, which emphasize each line of the text inevitably, create a monotonous effect, relieved only by Peri's attempt to evolve melodic figures for questions and exclamations. Characteristic of the style is the musical representation of feelings through the presence or absence of florid passages, chromaticism, and dissonances. Thus, characters' status, age, and state of mind were portrayed through musical parameters such as melodic range, singing style, and harmonic vocabulary.

Emilio de Cavalieri's work – *Rappresentatione di anima e di corpo* – with a libretto by Agostino Manni, is considered to be the first surviving opera. Written in three acts with a spoken dialogue, it was presented fully staged in Rome, in 1600. Another work that is now regarded as the earliest operatic masterpiece was Monteverdi's Orfeo, premiered at the Mantua court on 24 February 1607. The libretto was written by Alessandro Striggio, who adapted the same Rinuccini pastoral style that Peri and Caccini used for their settings of *Euridice*. It follows the original story closely with one exception: Striggio decided to have Orfeo look back, as in the original myth, and thus, lose Euridice for a second time. In the final act Orfeo has another lament, and starting from this point Monteverdi's score differs from the libretto. The composer, wanting a more heroic end to his opera, decided to introduce a *deus ex machina* and offer a happy ending. In his version Apollo descends, taking pity on his son Orfeo and transports him to the heavens where he will see Euridice in the sun and stars for eternity. This performance was an unusual event, as Carlo Magno, a court official, stated in a letter: "Tomorrow evening the Most Serene

Lord the Prince [Francesco Gonzaga] is to sponsor a performance… It should be most unusual, as all the actors are to sing their parts."[39]

Orfeo is the product of two musical epochs, combining elements of the traditional madrigal style of the sixteenth century with the recitative and monodic singing as developed by the Camerata and their successors. Through this work Monteverdi met the goals suggested by Galilei by musically imitating features of ordinary language – "imitating in song a person speaking" ("imitar col canto chi parla.") Monteverdi developed the musical vocabulary inherited from his sixteenth-century predecessors, transforming it into a sophisticated and powerful language, capable of expressing human affections.

He used in this work most of the standard musical devices of late Renaissance, along with the newest discoveries of the Camerata. Monteverdi used the *stile rappresentativo* infusing it with intense pathos. He reintroduced the closed musical forms (like the strophic aria, the dance song, the chamber duet, the madrigal, and the instrumental interlude), which the Camerata had discarded, making them subservient to the drama. The text dominates the music in the solo sections, while sinfonias and instrumental ritornelli illustrate the action, the audience's attention being drawn primarily to the words. To this regard he shortened or completely eliminated certain transitions he considered weak and focused on following the musical and psychological narrative. For instance he wrote a compressed version of the narrative of the messenger announcing Euridice's death and completely eliminated the transition presenting the incredulity

[39] Ian Fenlon, "Correspondence relating to the early Mantuan performances," in *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 167.

of Orpheus and his companions and Daphne's reconfirmation (which was present in Peri's version).[40]

The centerpiece of the opera is Orfeo's third act aria "Possente spirto e formidabil nume" (Mighty spirit and powerful divinity), through which he attempts to persuade Charon to allow him to enter Hades. Here the vocal embellishments and virtuoso accompaniment provide what Carter describes as "one of the most compelling visual and aural representations" in early opera.[41] Monteverdi introduces in the accompaniment the full gamut of plucked, bowed and wind instruments (chittarone, pipe-organ, double-harp, violins, and cornetts) to suggest that Orfeo is using all the available forces of music to support his plea. The instruments support the singer in the first four variations in a vivacious *dialogo concertato*. For the final variation Monteverdi used simple chords in the accompaniment, allowing the singer to offer one last heartfelt prayer. There are two versions of this aria: one without embellishments, the other with all the coloratura ornaments of the *gorgia* illustrating the art of singing of the time better than any theoretical discussion. [42]

Monteverdi ingeniously used timbre and registers to strengthen the dramatic effect desired. Thus, the lack of humanity in the underworld is portrayed by somber choruses in the low register, dark brass instruments, and the regal (a small portable organ, furnished with beating reeds and having two bellows) serving as continuo instrument. By contrast, in the fourth act when Proserpina sings on behalf of Orfeo the music becomes warm and emotional, going back to the dark atmosphere when Orfeo "looks back."

---

[40] Nino Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque A Collection of Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), 243.
[41] Tim Carter, "Possente spirto: on taming the power of music," *Early Music* 21, no. 4 (1993): 517.
[42] Vocal ornamentation style practiced around 1600 in the performance of madrigals, motets, and other pieces. Caccini, in his preface to *Le nuove musiche* (1602), gives a detailed explanation of the various types of ornament required.

The musical structure of the opera reflects Monteverdi's ability to combine the expressive power of choral, instrumental, and vocal music. Unlike Peri and Caccini, Monteverdi shows a less doctrinaire approach to musical drama, closely following the plot but also allowing the beauty of music to speak for itself. If La Musica's prologue presents the power of music to move and exalt, the whole opera reveals that music can also be an organizing device, setting the pace and flow of a dramatic work. Therefore, the recurrence of the opening ritornello at the end of Act II and again at the beginning of Act V constitutes a musical bridge between the pastoral world and the Underworld, bringing balance and symmetry to the work.

Monteverdi's opera sends two powerful messages. Most obviously, it shows the power of music, and a subtler moral message. It also transforms the myth into a human drama, a story of a young man unable to control his emotions. As the chorus reflects at the end of Act 4, "Orfeo conquered the Inferno and was conquered by his own passions. Only he who is victorious over himself shall be worthy of eternal glory." Act V also contains a veiled Christian message as Orfeo decides to obey his "heavenly father" Apollo's advice and is rewarded with "grace in heaven."

Early operas drew their inspiration from the ancient Greek myths, like the legend of Orfeo and Euridice, the Trojan wars, Ulysses, Darius, or the Crusades as recounted by Tasso. These stories were intended to exemplify personal moral or civic virtue. Cavalieri, Peri, Caccini, and other composers were faced with the problem of how to adapt music to the meter of poetry while following the inflections of the voice and suggesting various emotions. In the prefaces to their works, they used different phrases to describe the effect they wanted to achieve: Cavalieri calls his music *recitar cantando* – a sung declamation; Peri uses the term: *imitar col canto chi parla* – imitating in song a person speaking; and Caccini calls it *in armonia favellare* –

harmonious speech. Musical drama was designed to bring back the miraculous powers ascribed to music by Greek philosophers and poets, with the melody and rhythm directed by the poetic verse and the harmony confined to support the singing voice. All the other theatrical aspects, such as choosing actors, designing the costumes and settings, lighting, and staging, were designed to obtain a unified spectacle that would offer the audience a veritable portrayal of the dramatic text.

Chapter II

Performance Space – The Theater and Set Design

Performance Space

The history of Italian modern theater cites Plautus' *Menaechmi* in 1486, as one of the first translations of Roman comedy presented in the courtyard of Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrara's palace.[43] Another production mentioned was Seneca's tragedy *Hippolytus*, offered by Cardinal Raffaele Riario, nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, in front of his palace in Rome.[44] Both works were deliberately chosen to show the interest in revivifying the culture of antiquity. Soon thereafter modern plays started being presented alongside revivals of Roman works. Performances took place on temporary stages, erected in the courtyards or larger halls of palaces. The audience was seated according to rank, with the members of the important members of the court seated close to the stage. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, in Milan, and Raphael, in Rome, designed the sets for these events. Permanent court and public theaters began to be built in the early 1500s.

In 1414 Vitrivius' work *De architectura* (*On architecture*, published in English as *Ten Books on Architecture*) (c. 80–70 BC - c. 15 BC) was rediscovered by the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini. Vitruvius' book is the only complete treatise on architecture to have survived from the classical era. The rediscovery of this work had a profound influence on architects of the Renaissance, preoccupied with promoting the Neo-Classical style. The Florentine edition was the first to accompany the text with illustrations, showing Greek and Roman theaters, and proved to

[43] Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theater and Its Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), 202.
[44] John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 36.

be an inspiration for architects like Niccoli, Brunelleschi, and Leon Battista Alberti (see Appendix Chapter II, Figure 1).

In *De architectura*, Vitruvius provides instruction for building a theater, starting with choosing the best location and the orientation of the building:

> If these winds come from marshy districts or from other unwholesome quarters, they will introduce noxious exhalations into the system. Hence, such faults will be avoided if the site of the theater is somewhat carefully selected… We must also beware that it has not a southern exposure. When the sun shines full upon the rounded part of it, the air, being shut up in the curved enclosure and unable to circulate, stays there and becomes heated; and getting glowing hot it burns up, dries out, and impairs the fluids of the human body. For these reasons, sites which are unwholesome in such respects are to be avoided, and healthy sites selected.[45]

He next writes about the foundation and the best materials for building the seating area, the correct proportions for the curved cross-aisles, and the number of entrances in the building. Next he discusses the plan of the theater itself:

> Having fixed upon the principal center, draw a line of circumference equivalent to what is to be the perimeter at the bottom, and in it inscribe four equilateral triangles, at equal distances apart and touching the boundary line of the circle, as the astrologers do in a figure of the twelve signs of the zodiac, when they are making computations from the musical harmony of the stars. Taking that one of these triangles whose side is nearest to the *scaena*, let the front of the *scaena* be determined by the line where that side cuts off a segment of the circle (A-B), and draw, through the center, a parallel line (C-D) set off from that position, to separate the platform of the stage from the space of the orchestra. The platform has to be made deeper than that of the Greeks, because all our artists perform on the stage, while the orchestra contains the places reserved for the seats of senators.[46]

Acoustics has been an essential aspect of theater building ever since the Greek drama came into existence. Before Greek theater appeared there were festivals in honor of Dionysus, performed on a circular platform with an altar placed in the center. Large crowds attended the

---

[45] Vitruvius Pollio, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture*, trans. M. H. Morgan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: H. Milford. Oxford: University Press, 1914), accessed October 20, 2013. http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/20239.
[46] Ibid.

festivals, and for maximum visibility the platform was built usually near a hill. Greek drama evolved from these festivals and the theater design had to change. The circular platform, called "orchestra," was retained, and concentric seating was built, first from timber and later from stone. At first the chorus was essential and acoustics were not important, but as the theatrical spectacle evolved the number of individual actors grew, and so did the importance good acoustics. Ancient architects started building the steep seating rake (between 20°–34°), realizing that higher angles of incidence to the seating plane are beneficial. Greek architects discovered early on that the stage height influences the acoustics. If the first theaters (such as the Dionysus) had a stage height of 1 to 1.2 meters, in the later buildings (Epidaurus and Priene) it was increased to 3–3.6 meters.

Drama became so successful that bigger theaters needed to be built. The Theater of Dionysus, in Athens, is one of the earliest and largest open-air theater, holding up to 25,000 people, all of them able to hear clearly what was being said on stage. Another theater, at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, dating from around 350 BC, was designed by Polycleitus the Younger and is perfectly preserved throughout the centuries. It originally had 34 rows and was extended to 55 by the Romans (see Figure 2). The furthest seat in the theater was about 229 feet away from the stage, making it difficult for the audience to observe the facial expression of the actors. This justifies the existence of masks used in Greek drama. Masks, however, presented a second advantage; they functioned as a megaphone, amplifying the actor's voice.

The earliest documentary mention of acoustics that inspired Italians in their efforts to recreate the perfect space for performance can also be found in Vitruvius' treatise, for Renaissance humanists the canonical text of architectural theory. Preoccupied with acoustics, Vitruvius advised architects to choose the most suitable sites for building "in which (the voice) is

supported from below, increases as it goes up and reaches the ears in words which are distinct and clear in tone. Hence, if there has been careful attention in the selection of the site, the effect of the voice will, through this precaution, be perfectly suited to the purposes of a theater."[47] His preoccupation with acoustics can be seen repeatedly throughout the book: "The curved cross-aisles should be constructed in proportionate relation; it is thought, to the height of the theater, but not higher than the footway of the passage is broad. If they are loftier, they will throw back the voice and drive it away from the upper portion, thus, preventing the case endings of words from reaching with distinct meaning the ears of those who are in the uppermost seats above the cross-aisles. In short, it should be so contrived that a line drawn from the lowest to the highest seat will touch the top edges and angles of all the seats. Thus, the voice will meet with no obstruction."[48]

Vitruvius justifies the circular ascending seating in theaters, comparing the propagation of sound to the "circular waves which appear when a stone is thrown into smooth water […] hence the ancient architects, following in the footsteps of nature, perfected the ascending rows of seats in theaters from their investigations of the ascending voice, and, by means of the canonical theory of the mathematicians and that of the musicians, endeavored to make every voice uttered on the stage come with greater clearness and sweetness to the ears of the audience."[49]

Earliest Italian Theaters

Nikolaus Pevsner mentions that permanent theaters were first constructed in Ferrara (1531), Rome (1545), Mantua (1549), Bologna (1550), Siena (1561), Venice (1565), and

[47] Ibid., Chapter VIII, no. 2.
[48] Ibid., Chapter III, no. 4.
[49] Ibid., Chapter III, no. 8.

Vicenza (the Teatro Olimpico in 1580).[50] Only the Teatro Olimpico, Teatro all' Antica, and the Teatro Farnese survive. The first theater was constructed in 1531 in Ferrara by Lodovico Ariosto. It was not built in the ducal palace, but rather in a hall above an apothecary shop. Unfortunately there is no description of the space, as it burned down after just one year right before the performance of one of Ariosto's own plays.

A few years later Sebastiano Serlio published his book *Architettura*, the first work detailing the design and construction of a court theater. His design of the building was based on Vitruvius' configuration with a horseshoe-shaped audience facing the stage and an additional performance space on the apron between the audience and the stage. Serlio included in his book drawings of his theater built in 1539 in Vicenza. This theater, however, like most of the theaters at the time, was temporary.

The first permanent theater of which we have a description was the court theater built in Mantua by the Giovanni Battista Bertani (1516 – 1576), destroyed by fire in 1588. The theater is described in sixteen lines of a poem written by Raffaello Toscano:

> Rich is the scene: where the actor's intent
> On the beautiful works gather often.
> Whose proud and noble ornaments
> Show how much art Art has placed here.
> And there quickly follows a city of hewn beams
> and of wood painted, or carved in relief.
> Which seems to be filled with as many arts
> And virtues as once had Athens.
> Against the great Stage which gracefully slopes
> Bertani the architect places a thousand steps
> That a half-circle make, and there one ascends
> With great ease to the roof;
> Below is a field, where often the fiery Mars
> Lights the breasts of his followers:
> Temples, Towers, Palaces, and Perspectives

[50] Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 66.

There are; and figures that appear live.[51]

The theater appears to follow the instructions from Vitruvius' book with semicircular seating, and wooden scenery painted and decorated with sculptures. The steps followed the same prescriptions being arranged in a half-circle, imitating the design of the ancient Greek and Roman theaters.

The most important center for court theater in the second half of the sixteenth century was Florence. *Salone dei Cinquecento* – the most imposing chamber in the Palazzo Vecchio built in 1494 by Simone del Pollaiolo – was used for all theatrical spectacles. In time, however, as performances became more complex, using machines for special effects, the Salon became unfit for the desired grandeur. Giorgio Vasari (1511 – 1574), who earlier was hired to enlarge the *Salone*, was asked to build a new theater in the Uffizi Palace, with a deep stage and a rectangular auditorium. The theater was completed for the celebration of the wedding of Virginia, Cosimo I's daughter to the Duke of Modena, in 1586. The architect, Bernardo Buontalenti (1531 – 1608), was in charge of the interior of the theater for this event. He transformed it into a garden, with arches decorated with fruits, rabbits, and deer overhead. After the audience entered the auditorium birds were released as the curtain rose to reveal a set painted with a view of a part of Florence. The center of the hall was reserved for royalty in attendance, while men were sited on benches and women on carpeted steps around the walls of the auditorium.

The most important theatrical performance of the century took place in the same hall: La Pellegrina, for the wedding of Ferdinand de' Medici to Christine of Lorraine in 1589. The Medici family ordered the building of an aerial bridge between the Uffizi's great hall and the

---

[51] Suzan Zimmerman, *Shakespeare Studies* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), Vol. 33, 26.

theater in order to permit guests to pass directly from one building to the other. Around the same time the royal family asked Vasari to build a corridor to link yet another building to the Uffizi Palace – the Baldracca theater. This theater was restructured by Buontalenti in 1588 and was one of Italy's first public theaters. It was less sophisticated than the court theater as it was designed for the lower social classes. The Medici family wanted to be able to see and, if needed, censure the *commedia dell'arte* plays that took place outside the court. Thus, the duke had Buontalenti build a private balcony which could be easily reached from the corridor: "common viewers will access it from the alley behind the building, (the infamous street Baldracca), from which the theater, now gone, took the name, the Prince could attend the shows illegally (unworthy of his dignity and his role) hidden behind the grille of a closet that goes directly from Pitti through the Vasari Corridor" (see figure 3).[52] At the same time Buontalenti was asked to remodel the Uffizi theater a second time, turning it into what would be the first permanent indoor theater with a proscenium arch.

In his book, *Descrizione Dell'apparato E Degli Intermedii Fatti Per La Commedia Rappresentata In Firenze Nelle nozze de' Serenissimi Don Ferdinando Medici e Madama Cristina di Loreno, Gran Duchi di Toscana*, Bastiano de Rossi (c. 1550 – c. 1610) offers a detailed description of the Uffizi theater. According to him the dimensions of the theater were: length – 95 *braccia*, width – 35, height – 24 (180 by 65 by 45 feet).[53] He mentions that the floor sloped toward the stage at approximately 2 1/8 ells (18 inches) and also toward the audience to allow optimal perspective. There was also a backstage area (*palcoscenico*) of 25 *braccia* (48

---

[52] Marzia Pieri, *La nascita del teatro moderno in Italia tra il XV e XVI secolo* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989), 105.

[53] Bastiano de'Rossi, *Descrizione del magnificentiss. apparato, e de' maravigliosi intermedii fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle felicissime nozze degl'illustrissimi ed eccellentissmi signori il signor don Cesare d'Este, e la signora donna Virginia Medici* (Firenze: Appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1586); quoted in Pirrotta, *Music and Theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 208.

feet) of the overall length of the hall. Along the richly decorated walls he installed twenty-four pyramids that increased in height progressively as the floor sloped towards the stage. There were nine Corinthian pilasters that framed four windows on the left side of the hall. On the right side there were openings that led to the upper level. Carved figures, cartouches, masks, and statues designed by Giovanni Battista Strozzi and by Giambologna (of which only one survives in a fragmented state) decorated the walls. The ceiling was decorated with sixteen chandeliers, each formed by six Harpies holding torches, adding to an impressive number of 88 torches.[54]

The most important and innovative feature of the theater was the framed proscenium, raised above the auditorium. The statues of the gods Arno and Po (symbolizing Tuscany and Lorraine) were smartly placed one on each side of the proscenium, to hide the machines and the crew operating them. Rossi mentions three stage curtains: the house curtain which was red, and a second curtain that was painted to look similar to the rest of the room which dropped to reveal a painting of Rome. The last curtain depicted the city of Pisa, a Medici possession, and the location of the action of *La Pellegrina*. The audience was seated as before, in three distinct areas for royalties this time on a raised platform, men on chairs around the center and women on the sides. Later this became the standard seating chart for the Italian court theaters.

The oldest theater of the sixteenth century that still stands today is the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, built by Andrea Palladio and completed by Vincenzo Scamozzi in 1580 (see figure 4 A and B). Unlike the Medici theater, the Olimpico was not a court theater, being built by the Accademia Olimpica, an association of Vicentine aristocrats interested in antiquity. The first performance took place during the carnival of 1585 with a production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* translated into Italian. The building followed the instructions in Vitruvius' treatise to the letter,

---

[54] A. M. Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici, 1539-1637* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 60.

but it was an indoor rather than outdoor theater. The audience was seated on steps that followed an oval shape in order to fit the space. Women were placed in chairs in the orchestra area. The stage was a long rectangle raised above the adjoining orchestra. The walls were decorated with statues representing important local figures. Vincenzo Scamozzi's perspective set is the oldest surviving stage set in existence. It represented the city of Thebes and consisted of painted panels designed to create the illusion of five long streets receding to a distant horizon.

The second oldest theater still standing today is the Teatro all'antica ("Theater in the style of the ancients") in Sabbioneta (see Figure 5 A, B). Its importance in theater history is accentuated by the fact that it was the first free-standing theater in the modern world. The architect who completed the Teatro Olimpico, Vincenzo Scamozzi finished it in 1590. Duke Vespasiano I Gonzaga built his own city – Sabbioneta – as an example of an ideal classical city. The theater was erected on the principal street of the town, the Via Giulia.

As there were no precedents to inspire him in designing the exterior architecture, Scamozzi designed a building similar to the palace, but with fewer stories. It is noteworthy that it did not copy, in this regard, the model of Roman theater architecture with superimposed arched orders as illustrated in Serlio's books.[55] The interior resembles the Vicenza building having pillars behind the seating area and similar set designs.

Teatro Olimpico and Teatro all'antica share similarities in the design of the colonnade behind the seating area. The seating area, however, was built differently, as the Sabbioneta building was roughly three times as long as it was wide, whereas the space occupied by the Teatro Olimpico was approximately square. The longer, narrower structure of the theater

[55] A superposed order is when successive stories of a building have different orders. The heaviest orders are at the bottom, whilst the lightest come at the top.

building meant that Scamozzi was unable to build the seating area in the form of the semicircle that had been seen by Palladio as the ideal form for an audience. Instead he had to arrange seats in the form of a horseshoe, more appropriate to the dimensions of the hall. The lateral walls between the stage and the seating area were painted with frescoes representing scenes of ancient Rome, transporting the audience to another time and place even before the performance started. On the sides the walls were decorated with painted balconies and audience.

The set was also changed, Scamozzi abandoning the classical scenes he had used in the Olimpico in favor of a single perspective view of only one street. He realized the illusion of distance by gradually diminishing the size of the painted buildings. He designed the floor level to rise at a sharp angle in order to allow the buildings to shrink vertically and create the perfect illusion of great distance. This set was replaced in the seventeenth century by a more modern one with sliding wings. The original plans were, however, kept in the archives at the Uffizi Palace in Florence allowing the reconstruction of the original set in the twentieth century (see Figure 6 A and B).

The last Renaissance theater to survive the passing of time is the Teatro Farnese in Parma (see Figure 7 A, B, C). It was built in 1618 by Giovanni Battista Aleotti (1546 – 1636) in the ducal palace and was almost completely destroyed during World War II, being reconstructed in 1962. It is noteworthy that the theater is not on the ground floor, but on the *piano nobile* and its design allowed it to be flooded for mock naval battles or jousts that the aristocrats enjoyed as an entertainment. The audience was seated on steps arranged in a U-shape similar to the design of the Sabbioneta theater. The walls were decorated with arches under which equestrian sculptures of Farnese dukes were placed. A richly decorated proscenium arch, used to mask the stage machineries and technical staff involved in the production, framed the stage. Scene changes,

however, were still carried out in view of the audience. Later on, around the beginning of the eighteenth century, the curtain started to be used for hiding scene changes.

Around the time the Farnese theater was built, a new type of theaters started appearing in Venice – the theater with box seats – used mainly for *commedia dell'arte* performances. The plague hit the city of Venice hard in 1576. As it slowly started to recover in the following years, the demand for entertainment increased. Venetian aristocrats saw a chance to use the rise in popularity of the comedies to gain some profit. They built a new type of theater with box seats that provided comfort and privacy and could be rented by those who could afford them. The profit was split between the owners of the theater and the actors.

The box theater was a huge success, but it also brought up some issues. The Council of Ten, one of the major governing bodies of the Republic of Venice from 1310 to 1797, took control of the theatrical events. They stipulated that the performances should be decent and end at a reasonable hour. They hired architects to carry out safety inspections in the buildings where the comedies were performed. The council also demanded that lights be kept on in the corridors that granted access to the rows of superimposed box seats throughout the whole performance. Another issue with the boxes was the privacy they offered, as the Venetians started using the boxes for less appropriate activities. At the time in Venice there was no similar private space in a public building and the owners of the theaters decided to have the doors to the boxes be kept open, so that nothing scandalous could occur.

The Italian Baroque theater experimented with various auditorium plans – such as the semicircle, the U-shape, the horseshoe, the bell-shape, the straight-sided bell and the truncated oval or ellipse. The sixteenth century in Italy brought two of the most important architectural innovations in the history of theater: the proscenium arch and the box seats. These inventions

redefined the audience's perspective on the action of the play. The most popular design, which became standard for theaters throughout Europe and which proved to be ideal for opera, was the horseshoe auditorium, with multiple rows of boxes stacked above each other. This form would dominate theater architecture for the next 200 years.

Italian Theories of Perspective at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century

According to Vitruvius, Aeschylus was the first to use painted background in the Greek theater. He presents three types of sets and describes them as follows: "Tragic scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues, and other objects suited to kings; comic scenes exhibit private dwellings, with balconies and views representing rows of windows, after the manner of ordinary dwellings; satiric scenes are decorated with trees, caverns, mountains, and other rustic objects delineated in landscape style."[56] He also talks about the first attempts at realizing a "realistic" perspective within the scenery. According to Vitruvius, Agatharcus was the first to attempt it: "in the first place Agatharcus, in Athens, when Aeschylus was bringing out a tragedy, painted a scene, and left a commentary about it."[57] He also mentions that Democritus and Anaxagoras tried to work out a theory of perspective mathematically: "showing how, given a center in a definite place, the lines should naturally correspond with due regard to the point of sight and the divergence of the visual rays, so that by this deception a faithful representation of the appearance of buildings might be given in painted scenery, and so that, though all is drawn

[56] Vitruvius, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture,* Book VI, no. 9.
[57] Ibid, book VII, no. 11.

on a vertical flat façade, some parts may seem to be withdrawing into the background, and others to be standing out in front."[58]

Perspective scenery was thus, a preoccupation since the early days of theatrical production. It took over a millennium, however, to finally achieve that ideal. Throughout the ages painters experimented with a wide variety of methods to create a special perspective that would be convincing to the eye. There were no fixed rules and their methods were based on personal skills and observation. The work of Giotto in the early fourteenth century was a huge step forward showing a systematic planning of the representation of figures and space. His methods were passed on through Cennino Cennini's work (1370 – 1440) *Il libro dell'arte*: "those lines and planes above eye level should appear to incline downwards as they move away from the spectator: those below eye level should incline upwards; those to the left should incline inwards to the right; those to the right should incline inwards to the left; there should be a sense of the horizontal division and the vertical division which mark the boundaries between the zones; and along those divisions the lines should be inclined little if at all."[59]

It was not, however, until the fifteenth century that linear perspective was defined. Filippo Brunelleschi (1377 – 1446), one of the most important architects and engineers of the Renaissance succeeded, as Manetti recounts, "expressing well and proportionately the diminutions and enlargements of far and near objects as they appear to the eyes of men [showing] the size that corresponds to the distance of these objects: buildings, plains, mountains, landscapes of all kinds and everywhere, figures and other things."[60] The Renaissance interest in Greek and Roman science and arts set the stage for Brunelleschi's discovery. As Kemp puts it:

---

[58] Ibid., book VII, no. 11.
[59] Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 9.
[60] Antonio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 9.

"there is little doubt that Brunelleschi's measured representation of these two revered buildings was deeply locked into the system of political, religious, and intellectual values shared by those who exercised the greatest influence on Florentine civic life in this period."[61]

His first experiments in geometric optical linear perspective involved, according to his biographer, a panel painted with a frontal view of the Florentine Baptistery and a mirror. He drilled a hole through the vanishing point of the panel and asked a viewer to hold it with the unpainted side against his eye with one hand, and a mirror in the other hand reflecting the painted side. He had the viewer observe the reflection of the painting and then removed the mirror so that he could see the real baptistery in the same position and relative size as in the painting. This experiment proved that the mirror image could be used to expand the flat two-dimensional painting. The concept soon spread throughout Europe and became standard practice in painting studios.

The first to understand and explain Brunelleschi's linear perspective was Leon Battista Alberti (1404 – 1472). In his treatise *Della Pittura* (On painting) he demonstrates, with the help of a minimal number of mathematical elements, the practical methods of representation, making the concept accessible to artists. The basis for his explanations was Euclid's theorem on proportion to define perspective painting: "If a straight line be drawn parallel to one of the sides of a triangle, it shall cut the other sides, or those produced, proportionately, etc."[62] Alberti continues his explanation:

> But we, in order to make our discourse clearer, shall explain this matter more fully. To begin with it is necessary to know what we mean by proportional. We say that those triangles are proportional whose sides and angles bear the same relation to each other

---

[61] Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 14.
[62] Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, transl. Thomas Little Heath and J. L. Heiberg (Cambridge: The University Press, 1908), book VI, 125.

> ("abbiano fra se una ragione"): so that if one side of the triangle be twice as long as the base and the other side be three times as long, each similar triangle, whether bigger or smaller, provided its sides have the same relation to its base, is proportional to the former For the same ratio that one part bears to the other in the smaller triangle, one part will also bear to the other in the bigger. All triangles therefore of this nature will be proportional.[63]

Alberti used a "pyramid of vision" to define surfaces in space and explained that the correct proportions of diminishing sightlines can be constructed by means of the theorems of similar triangles (see Figure 8). Next he devised another system to establish the proportions in depth, using a scaled construction, in which the intersections corresponding to horizontal divisions of one *braccio* were determined in relation to the distance between the eye of the spectator and the painting.

These principles were taken from painting and applied in theatrical scene design. The most important treatise of the time was Sebastiano Serlio's (1475-1554) *II secondo libro de Perspettiva*. The book offered numerous interpretations of Vitruvius' theories and brought forth a set of rules to be applied in set design. He dedicated a section of the book to the discussion of perspective in building a theatrical set. As he himself states, the task "is not an easy one, for it is hard to demonstrate how and where the vanishing point (the horizon) should be placed for a scene."[64] He offers a sketch of a cross section of a theater, explaining that the forestage should be flat and rise to eye-level (see Figure 9). The next section of the stage – "B" to "A" on the sketch – should be a slope "up a ninth part of the length." In his drawing "O" represents the vanishing point for the back wall of the set, with "C" showing the vanishing point for the front faces of the houses. Should the houses have two sides, those would have different vanishing points. He

---

[63] Rudolf Wittkower, "Brunelleschi and 'proportion in perspective," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 277.
[64] Barnard Hewitt et al., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbatini, and Furttenbach* (Coral Gables: FL, 1958), 22.

further clarifies: "I do not purpose to place the vanishing point at the back of the scene, but to carry it back from there to a distance equal to the distance from the edge of the sloping platform to the back of the scene."[65] Serlio goes on to discuss the sets for the three kinds of plays – comic, tragic, and satiric. For the comic scene he recommends painting houses of middle class citizens, a house of the procuress, a tavern, and a church. To improve the perspective illusion he adds balconies and cornices, and advises designers to place smaller buildings in front. He believed that "the superior height of the houses further back gives the appearance of grandeur, and better completes the scene in that part."[66] For the tragic scenes houses of high-class citizens should be represented, because, he says, "amorous adventures, sudden accidents, and violent and cruel deaths […] have always taken place in the houses of lords, dukes, grand princes, and particularly kings."[67] He advises that all the structures on the roofs and the statues to be made of thin board or even thin wood cut in profile and painted. To maintain the illusion they should be set in the distance so that they cannot be seen from the side. Even though some set designers used to paint people or animals, he considered it would be best to not do this, as they "show no movement." It is, however, acceptable to represent sleeping creatures, as they are not expected to move. The set of a satiric scene consisted of trees, rocks, hills, flowers, fountains and huts, all painted, and built for the stage, preferably from the most expensive materials, in order to reflect the magnificence of the court. To prove his point he describes an example designed by Girolamo Genga in Urbino:

> In these I witnessed as much liberality in the prince as taste and skill in the architect. Such beauty was there in the set as I have never seen in any other similar work. Oh immortal God! what wonder it was to see so many trees and fruits, so many herbs and diverse flowers, all made from the finest silk of the most beautiful colors, the cliffs and rocks covered with diverse sea shells, with snails and other animals, with coral branches

[65] Ibid., 26.
[66] Ibid., 28.
[67] Ibid., 29.

> of many colors, with sea crabs among the rocks, with so great diversity of beauteous things that to write about all of them would take too long.[68]

Nicola Sabbatini also dedicates an important part of his treatise – *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (*Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines*) – to set design, offering advice on how to build the stage, how to plan the front of the stage and represent the first houses, and, of course, to locate the vanishing point for a perfect illusion of perspective. Regarding the latter aspect he says: "The vanishing point must be placed with great care. If it is too high, the houses of the scene will appear to rise in perspective and consequently will not give the proper perspective effect. If it is too low, the houses will seem to go downward."[69] He considered that for a stage fifteen feet deep the vanishing point would need to be one and a half feet high from the floor. He recommends that the designer use cords to define the height of the houses, the streets, the wings, and the back shutter. Although he preferred the sets to be realized on boards, he offered advice on how to deal with cloth sets so that they appear thick, with no wrinkles. He warns, though, that cloth could be easily torn in haste and ruin the effect of the sets.

An important aspect in painting the scenery was the placing of highlights and shadows. Depending on the direction from which the lighting would come, the front of the scenery, behind it or from one side, the highlights and shadows needed to be distributed differently, in order to enhance the illusion of perspective. He offers sketches of all three options and proves that light from the front destroyed the details of the set, while light from behind the scenery created large areas of shadow. He preferred the last method, light from one side, considering it gave the public "complete pleasure" (see Figure 10).[70]

---

[68] Ibid., 32.
[69] Ibid., 49.
[70] Ibid., 61.

Like Serlio and Sabbatini, the anonymous author of *Il Corago* (1630) provided in his treatise details on how to best represent perspective in theatrical sets, considering it to be a key element for a successful performance. Discussing how the performance space influences the actor and his performance, the author notes some of the architectural factors that changed over time. Turning back to Vitruvius' time he reminds directors that the theaters were built outdoors, usually at the foot of a hill, with the spectators seated on an incline and enjoying a natural perspective that enhanced the scenic illusion. In his view, modern theaters tried to recreate the space using perspective scenery, an artificial way of creating the illusion of depth. The author remarks that one of the major issues with this performance space was that the actors had to be placed close to the auditorium and slightly above the sightline of the audience, in order to maintain the impression of space. However, from the director's point of view, this placement restricted the movement of the actor and posed serious issues for crowd scenes, where the chorus had to be placed upstage, behind the principal actors, ruining the visual perspective. The same issue rises for scenes where two main characters have a private dialogue in the front of the stage while other secondary characters interact further back. The groups would have to pretend they do not see or hear one another, a situation which he believes to be ridiculous, considering the small distance between them. Also problematic were the interior scenes, which in antiquity were performed in an upstage area behind doors that would be opened when needed, an effect which he considered impossible to realize in modern times. He advises the poet to refrain from writing such scenes since, due to the diminishing perspective scenery; the visual effect would be unrealistic and displeasing.

The author has specific advice for designing the best perspective scenery. In his view, there should be no more than four houses, carefully painted to offer balance and symmetry on

both sides of the stage. The illusion of depth has to be carefully considered so that the houses diminish gradually toward the back of the stage. Lighting should also serve the illusion, and he notes that it is best to use bright light downstage, decreasing in intensity in the back, and thus, masking any defects of the set.

Reiterating his concern regarding the placement of the actors against the artificial scenery, the author notes that the perspective stage is visually very satisfying without the presence of the actors. It is the director's duty to minimize in performance the disproportion between the scenery and the actor, by smartly positioning them and directing the entrances and exits to be quick and smooth. The author of *Il Corago* believed, however, that modern sets allowed the creation of a realistic representation of the literary text. The new stage building techniques, with luxurious decorations and extravagant machines, permitted the director to create elaborate shows that were not possible before.

Regarding the materials used for building the sets, the author shows his preference for the wooden stage and sets, with rotating wings and machines hidden under the floor. They permit multiple and swift scene changes, magical apparitions and special effects that amaze audiences. He notes, however, that the sets for balls, tourneys, and military jousts should be built from natural sandstone or tile. That would not only minimize the dust in the theater, but would also improve the acoustics, as the wooden floor would be too noisy in these kinds of scenes. He also states his preference for the raked stage, which allows a better view for the audience, especially in crowd scenes.

At the end of his lengthy discussion on performance space, he admits, however, that the modern stage presents numerous practical advantages and offers unlimited creative possibilities. While the theater in antiquity offered real perspective, it also had a major drawback: people

seated in the back of the amphitheater often could not distinguish the actors, making the use of masks a necessity. The huge performance space also restricted the types of instruments that could be used, reeds being often used because of their penetrating sound. In modern theater the audience was more involved in the performance, being able to see the actors and their expressions and enjoying a subtle atmosphere created by various musical instruments. The differences between the classical Greek theater and the modern productions were numerous, and the author advises the director to carefully consider both the classical ideal and the modern inventions in order to create a balanced performance.

The author of *Il Corago* dedicated a whole section of his treatise to scene design and construction, discussing the best ways of building a playing area and scenery harmonized with the structure of the theater itself. He provides a set of ground rules for designing a stage area in an average size theater. In order to provide each member of the audience a perfect sightline from any place in the hall he recommends the stage should not be set higher than five feet from the ground. It also must be raked, preferably at a two-degree angle for the best view of the perspective set. The ideal measurements for the playing area were 24 feet in width and 56 or 57 feet in depth, to accommodate the sets, the actors and machines involved in the performance.

As mentioned above, his ideal perspective set had four houses, two on each side, with the closer houses measuring thirty-four feet in height and twenty-four feet in length, and the rear houses diminishing in proportion to these measurements. The streets had to be four feet wide, while the backdrop measured twenty by twenty feet and was cut into two halves to allow actors to move in and out of the stage quickly. The author preferred sprung wood floors, as he

considered them to provide the best support, especially for dance or battle scenes. They had to be sanded and finished to ensure the actors' safety.[71]

The author also provides guidelines regarding the realization of the visual perspective of the sets. He considers the position of the vanishing point to be of great importance in the design of the perspective. According to him it should be marked in the middle of the backcloth, in accordance with the depth of the stage, its placement determining the position of the houses. To calculate the position of the houses on the right, the designer must stand on the left side and locate the point of distance, using a rope to connect the two points. He can determine visually or with the help of a light torch the position of the edge of the first house. The same procedure is used for the other side. The houses toward the back should have more stories than the ones in the front, in order to create the illusion of depth and height. The backcloth has to match the perspective, but must not be so diminished as to make the actors appear much larger than the painted houses. The author suggests a way of avoiding this danger by designing a central archway behind which a garden or a courtyard is painted. This way the vista blends in with the perspective and hides and possible disproportions.[72]

Aware that there were theaters that did not have enough room to accommodate the revolving wings (called *periaktoi*), the author suggests the designer to paint a perspective that would allow a visual continuity between the urban set and the natural set. One way of achieving this was by incorporating nature in the main perspective, painting houses with balconies containing trees and luxurious plants, suggesting to the audience that the action of the *intermedii* takes place in the same general location as the play. For the heavenly scenes the designer had to

---

[71] Paolo Fabbri and Angelo Pompilio, *Il Corago, o vero, Alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 36.
[72] Ibid., 38.

create a vista that would match the sky painted over the houses. To obtain an authentic effect the author suggests the use of a blue backcloth adorned with clouds. A designer can also add staircases to enhance the décor – such as staircases for temples, churches, or houses. The author warns the designer that unless they are realized by excellent painters they should be omitted, as they can destroy the balance of the perspective set.[73]

Another crucial aspect in designing the sets is lighting. The author points out that lighting needed to be different for a scene happening in bright daylight than for one taking place in the evening or at night. The lights have to be set to cast the appropriate amount of light and create the right shadows for the time of day desired. The designer also has to be familiar with the lighting apparatus at his disposal in order to choose the right colors, tones, and textures for the perspective sets.

Like the writers before him, the author of *Il Corago* discusses his views on realizing the three standard scenes for comedy, tragedy and pastoral plays as defined by Vitruvius. He offers the works of the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena as the best examples of scenic designs of the time.[74] He considered that any set should be realized with taste and elegance, warning the director to carefully consider the dimensions of the performance space, especially in designing sets for tragic plays. The size of the temples and palaces must be proportional to the playing area, or the effect of majesty wouldn't be achieved.

Perspective Set Design in Performance

[73] Ibid., 39.
[74] Ibid., 40.

Perspective was used in theater for the first time by Pellegrino da Udine (1467-1547) in Ferrara in 1508 for Ariosto's comedy *La Cassaria*. Ariosto used the technique of "contaminatio" (the use of classical Latin characters and situations in a new plot) writing his play in the vernacular. Unfortunately, very few drawings or prints describing the stage sets of the early sixteenth-century Italian theater have survived. There are, however, letters and diaries of aristocratic audience members recounting early productions and, according to these, there were few spectacles that employed perspective sets in the first half of the *Cinquecento*. The production of *La Cassaria* was, however, thoroughly documented, the notes including not only the dates and occasions for the spectacles, but also the names of the scenographers. A letter from Bernardino Prosperi to Isabella d'Este-Gonzaga provides a description of the scene: "The subject was beautiful...but what was best of all in these festivities and performances was the entire scene as it was depicted....Done by a painter who has been in the service of the Duke, Signore Peregrino, it is a reduction and perspective of land with houses, churches, bell towers, and gardens with which one cannot satiate himself by viewing it."[75] D'Amico provides a reconstruction of a damaged drawing attributed to Pellegrino (see Figure 11).[76] The design included the Ducal Palace, the old bell tower, and the arch leading to the new extension of the city. Da Udine also designed the sets for Ariosto's *I suppositi* in 1509 and Raphael (1483-1520) redesigned them in 1519.[77]

Because theater was so popular in Italian courts, famous writers like Ariosto and Machiavelli began producing plays for which some of the finest painters started designing the sets. Thus, Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1536) worked on the sets for Bernardo Dovizi da

---

[75] C. Thomas Ault, "Baldassare Peruzzi and the Perspective Stage," *Theater Design and Technology* 43, no. 3 (2007): 33-50.
[76] Silvio D'Amico, *Storia del Teatro Drammatico* (Milano: Garzanti,1958), v.2, 33.
[77] Arthur R. Blumenthal, *Italian Renaissance Festival Designs* (Elvehjem Art Center Madison, Wis, 1973), 22.

Bibbiena's *La Calandria*, performed in 1514 for Pope Leo X in Rome (see Figure 12).[78] His designs followed the model mentioned by Vitruvius, with monumental buildings including an obelisk or a pyramid for the tragic plays, contemporary architecture for comedies and a nature inspired set for pastorals and satyrs. The sets for tragedy usually presented city perspectives, with archeological details including monuments like Roman ruins, the Colosseum or Castel' Sant'Angelo. The design method employed was the one-point perspective, with a flat backdrop, a central axis, and symmetrical design of the scene. Some designers used angled relief wings as well as revolving prisms with each side painted in perspective.

The stage design for *La Calandria* presents several Roman buildings: the Coliseum, the Tower of the Milizie, the Campanile of St. Lorenzo in Miranda, the Arch of the Argentieri in Foro Boiardo, the obelisk in St. Peter's Square, the Column of the Triana, the Castel Sant'Angelo and three columns from the Forum. The stairs leading to the open shop allow the forestage to be used in performance. Peruzzi left behind 15 scenic designs, among which is the set for Plautus' *Bacchidi* (see Figure 13 A and B). The buildings are again representative of Rome: the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Castel Sant'Angelo, the Obelisk, and Trajan's Column. He allowed a large space in the front of the stage, most likely to accommodate the dancers and players of the *intermedii*. He also notated on the plan all the entrances to be used by the actors.[79] His work was a stepping-stone for the development of the perspective stage, Peruzzi being the first to establish the use of a unified perspective vision.

With the exception of Peruzzi, the most important stage designers came from Florence, the city producing some of the most famous scenographers. Cities like Venice, Ferrara, Mantua,

---

[78] Ibid., 23.
[79] The ground plan is translated and explained in C.T. Ault, "Baldassare Peruzzi and the Perspective Stage", 33-50.

and Rome played an important part in the revival of theater, organizing major theatrical productions. Florence was, however, the capital of art in the sixteenth century, with the Medici family spending immense amounts of money for theatrical productions. The court spectacles became lavish, with many important painters and architects working on the stage designs. The best-documented Florentine productions were the weddings and festivals. Thus, in 1539, the wedding between Cosimo de Medici and Eleonora of Toledo was celebrated with the production of Landi's comedy *Il Commodo*. Vasari, in his book *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors and architects, 1568), presents the scenery for the event: "Under the direction of Tribolo, likewise, for the comedy that was performed, Aristotile da San Gallo executed marvelous scenery, being truly most excellent in such things." [80] He describes it in more detail in volume 8:

> Aristotle made in the great court of the Medici Palace, where the fountain is, another scenic set that represented Pisa, in which he surpassed himself, ever improving and achieving variety; wherefore it will never be possible to put together a more varied arrangement of doors and windows, or façades of palaces more fantastic and bizarre, or streets and distant views that recede more beautifully and comply more perfectly with the rules of perspective. And he depicted there, besides all this, the Leaning Tower of the Duomo, the Cupola, and the round Temple of S. Giovanni, with other features of that city. Of the flights of steps that he made in the work, and how everyone was deceived by them, I shall say nothing, lest I should appear to be saying the same that has been said at other times; save only this, that the flight of steps which appeared to rise from the ground to the stage was octagonal in the center and quadrangular at the sides – an artifice extraordinary in its simplicity, which gave such grace to the prospect-view above, that it would not be possible to find anything better of that kind. He then arranged with much ingenuity a lantern of wood in the manner of an arch, behind all the buildings, with a sun one *braccio* high, in the form of a ball of crystal filled with distilled water, behind which were two lighted torches, which rendered the sky of the scenery and prospect-view so luminous, that it had the appearance of the real and natural sun. This sun, which had around it an ornament of golden rays that covered the curtain, was drawn little by little by means of a small windlass that was there, in such a manner that at the beginning of the performance the sun appeared to be rising, and then, having climbed to the center of the

---

[80] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Jonathan Foster (New York: Scribner, 1902), accessed April 7, 2011. http://books.google.com/books?id=p-IMAQAAIAAJ.

> arch, it so descended that at the end of the piece it was set and sinking below the horizon.[81]

The grandeur of the event, with elaborated shows and spectacular sets became a tradition for the Medici wedding festivals. The family brought the most famous artists of the time to collaborate in these productions. The importance of stage design grew in time, leading to the development of changeable and movable scenery and stage machinery.

Thus, in 1565, for the weeding of Francesco de' Medici and Joanna of Austria, Vasari was appointed as overseer of the festivities. Among the theatrical events was Francesco d'Ambra's (1499 – 1558) comedy *La Cofanaria*, performed in the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio on Christmas Day of 1565. Two sources describe Vasari's sets: one by Giovan Battista Cini, the author of the *intermedii* for this play, and the other written by Filippo Giunti and published by Domenico Mellini. The later description reveals the cloud machinery and trap effects for the *intermedii*:

> A brief space after the descent of the curtains which conceal from the eyes of the Spectators the Perspective of the concave Heavens of the opening scene, there is seen to appear a second, most ingeniously contrived Heaven wherefrom, little by little, a Cloud is perceived approaching, in which there is set with singular ingenuity a gilded and gem-encrusted Car, recognized as that of Venus, because it is seen to be drawn by two snow-white Swans.[82]

No drawings of the sets for this play have survived, but the written documents mention a proscenium arch, and a backdrop showing a street scene in Florence – the Piazza Santa Trinita, with the Ponte Vecchio represented as it looked before the flood of 1557. Historians believe that the design was similar to the one for *II Granchio* in 1566 (see Figure 14). Vasari developed the perspective by placing the wings along two diagonals allowing the actors to move into the inner

---

[81] Ibid., Vol. 8, 7, 8.
[82] Oscar G. T Sonneck, *Miscellaneous Studies in the History of Music* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 192), 277.

part of the stage and thus, increasing the illusion of depth. The backdrop was designed as a continuation of the side wings, creating a greater sense of symmetry and perspective.

The next important figure in the development of stage design was Baldassare Lanci da Urbino (c.1500-1571), who introduced the interchangeable scenery in 1568, for Lotto del Mazza's comedy *I Fabii*, performed for the baptism of Prince Francesco and Joanna of Austria's first child. The *periaktoi* were first mentioned in Vitruvius' book on architecture, and Lanci reintroduced them in his design for the play. This type of wings consisted of revolving triangular prisms made of wood. Each of the three faces showed different scenes that could be quickly rotated during the performance. The painted moving panels allowed the scenery to change from a scene of the Piazza della Signoria in Florence into a scene of the Canto della Paglia. The stage was separated from the audience by a curtain that opened to reveal a view of the ducal palace and the surrounding buildings. On both sides of the stage were statues of *colossi* sculpted by Giovanni da Bologna. A cloth placed in each statue's hand could hide part of the stage. The set remained unchanged for the first four acts. For the fifth act a cloud was lowered to cover the set of the ducal palace. After a while, however, the cloud was lifted and the audience was amazed to see a different view of the city: the straw weavers' quarter across from the cathedral, which would be the set for the last act of the comedy. The scene change was realized through the use of the rotating prisms, as the description of Alessandro Ceccherelli reveals.[83] The panels were rotated on their vertical axes and "all the pieces were mounted on pivots and balanced so that a small child would have no difficulty turning them around" with the effect being "marvelous."[84]

---

[83] Alessandro Ceccherelli, *Descrizione di tutte le feste, e mascherate fatte in Firenze per il carnovale, questo anno, 1567* (Florence: L. Torrentino, 1567), in Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 35-39.
[84] Ibid., 17, 27.

Lanci employed the same device for Giovan Battista Cini's comedy *La Vedova* (1569), this time transforming the Piazza della Signoria into the hill town of Arcetri. His changeable set was described by Ignazio Danti (1536-1586) who attended the performance and diagrammed a set of *periaktoi* similar to Lanci's, for the 1583 edition of Vignola's *Le due regole delle prospettiva practica* (see Figure 15, 16):

> During the visit of the Archduke Karl of Austria in the year 1569, I saw a theatrical performance in Florence in a similar décor [using *periaktoi*]; it was in the ducal palace where the set, designed by Baldassar Lanci de Urbino, was changed twice. At the beginning of the comedy the stage picture showed the bridge of Santa Trinita, and since it was evident from the play itself that the dramatis personae had to go to the village of Arcetri, a rotation brought the second plane of the prism into view; the stage was seen to be full of cottages and gardens, just as they are found in Arcetri; vineyards and the surrounding estates were also visible. But then the scene changed a second time and the Florentine quarter of Alberti was disclosed. While the set turned, the stage was covered, and occupied by the loveliest interludes written by Giambatista Cini, a Florentine nobleman to whom we were also indebted for the comedy. I recall that during the first change of scenery the heavens parted, disclosing a great number of gods up in the clouds that sang and played most delightful music. At the same time, a cloud descended to the feet of the gods, covering the stage while the rotation was accomplished. When the cloud vanished upward, there appeared on the stage the landscape of Arcetri outside the Porta di San Grigio, near the city walls. Meanwhile, the Trionfo of Famma swept across the stage, accompanied by several people singing a piece in response to music which resounded from the heavens. When the set changed again by means of a second rotation, it was likewise concealed behind a cloud which emerged, driven by winds, from the side, while the interlude took place.[85]

Although Danti's recollection of the play doesn't match the primary sources regarding the order of the interludes and even though he mentions two set changes for which there is no other historical evidence, he does prove that Lanci used the rotating prisms. Movable scenery became more important as the *intermedii* became more complex, requiring an even more extensive use of sets that could easily shift the location from town to country or from square to

[85] Ibid., 45.

heaven. Lanci thus, began a new tradition in theatrical production, and after him, architects started using movable scenery extensively.

The most important figure in sixteenth-century Italian scenography was Bernardo Timante Buontalenti (1536¬1608). He was first involved in the production of *La Cofanaria* in 1565, designing the cloud machines, the stage trap-door contrivances, and the costumes for Cini's *intermedii*. It is noteworthy that even though perspective was a new concept in stage design, stage machinery and theatrical effects had been used in Italy for centuries, especially in sacred works.

Buotalenti further developed the art of movable scenery that Lanci used so successfully. He created the sets for Giovanni Bardi's play *L'amico fido* (1586) and for the six *intermedii* accompanying it. No drawings of the scene design for the interludes have survived, but historians believe that it must have presented significant Florentine buildings similar to those of Lanci. There is, however, a sketch that has been linked to the first *intermedio*. It portrays Jupiter and eighteen other deities seated on clouds and Apollo, Pallas and the muses standing on the stage. Aby Warburg believed that this drawing must have been conceived for a discarded version of the first *intermedio* (see Figure 17).[86]

The design that made Buontalenti famous across Europe was Bargagli's *La Pellegrina* (1589). Warburg mentions in his book that this was the first production in which the musical interludes had an underlying coherent theme. Bardi, who was one of the six composers to write the music for the *intermedii*, worked in close collaboration with Buontalenti to create lavish sets and machines that would perfectly portray the universal power of music. According to Rossi's

---

[86] Aby Warburg, *I Costumi Teatrali Per Gli Intermedii Del 1589: I Disegni Di Bernardo Buontalenti E Il Libro Di Conti Di Emilio De'cavalieri : Saggio Storico-Artistico* (Firenze: Galletti & Cocci, 1895).

account of the performance, the stage was framed by two statues representing the river gods Arno and Moselle, and was covered by a red house curtain. The first set the audience would see was a perspective of Rome.[87]

The first *intermedio* was played against this background with a cloud descending from heaven, on which the Harmonies sat. The machines and the lighting effects were so realistic that the audience was entranced. As the city of Rome disappeared, a starry sky took its place, an effect realized through the lighting of oil lamps behind a blue curtain, against which four clouds started rising. It is noteworthy that this was the first instance in scenic design to use clouds exclusively to define space and depth (see Figure 18). No other architectural landscape element was used for this scene. The cloud machines and the singers were arranged so that there was no need for any other artifices to suggest space. This was one of the first performances in which scenic design, machines, actors and singers have been used together to create a fantasy.

For the second *intermedio* Buontalenti transformed the stage from the view of Pisa used for the first act of the play into a blooming garden. In order to make the illusion of the garden even more realistic perfumed water was sprayed on the audience in the auditorium. There were painted birds, hedgehogs, and tortoises to complete the nature decor. The audience had time to enjoy all these during a *sinfonia* played by the orchestra. Next Mount Parnassus covered by vegetation would appear from a trap door and a moss-covered grotto appeared on each side (see Figure 19 A and B). The backdrop presented a Tuscan landscape and was continued to the wings by depictions of trees and vines.

The set for the third *intermedio* portrayed a forest in Delphi with oaks, chestnuts and other trees, in the middle of which there was a rocky cave around which the vegetation appeared

---

[87] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 73.

to be destroyed by the flames of the monster that terrorized the village. The dragon itself raised his head out of the cave as Apollo descended from the sky to kill it (see Figure 20, 21). Similarly to Serlio's design for the *Satiric Scene* (1545), the trees of the forest were arranged in perspective to better suggest the depth of the scene.

Before the fourth *intermedio* there was a short prelude played before the view of Pisa used for the first act of the play. Then a sorceress appeared on a flying chariot drawn by dragons. One of Buontalenti's sketches has survived and shows a fiery sphere with twenty demons conjured by the sorceress.[88] The machine looks very similar to the cloud machine used in the first interlude. After the madrigal the sphere disappeared and the scene was changed "instantaneously" into the hell scene, with caverns and rocks surrounded by smoke and fire, on a background of a burning city. The trap in the center of the stage opened disclosing Dante's Inferno from which the Furies emerged (see Figure 22).

The fifth *intermedio* made use of a marine scene, with reefs on both sides of a backdrop of open sea, cliffs, lighthouses, and boats that moved up and down on the waves, creating the illusion of depth through the use of perspective. Amphitrite, seated on a mother-of-pearl shell, is pulled onto the stage by two dolphins. As the play comes to an end, the final *intermedio* brings back a celestial scene similar to that of the first one. Buontalenti's drawing and D'Alfiano's engraving of the scene design survived and they both differ from Rossi's account (see Figure 23 A and B). However, all three show that the stage was filled with clouds on which Apollo and twenty more gods (sixteen in the drawings) could be seen. The evening ended with shepherds and shepherdesses dancing and singing to celebrate Music and Harmony.

---

[88] Ibid., 85.

Buontalenti's machines and rapid scene changes for this event became a signature for the Medici spectacles and had an important impact on the history of scenography. The stage design for *La Pellegrina* is considered Buontalenti's most magnificent and innovative work. However, he created the sets for several other theatrical events, among which Torquato Tasso's *L'Aminta* (1590), Rinuccini's *Dafne* (1595) and Guidiccioni's *II Giuoco della Cieca* (1595). Although there are no records, historians believe that Buontalenti provided the sets for Peri's *Euridice* (1600), a work requiring a relatively simple design and no machines.[89] Buonaroti's *Descrizione* mentions that the design included a proscenium framed by two niches where the allegorical statues of Poetry and Painting were placed.[90] The action of the first three scenes was set in a forest. The stage was decorated with trees that were partly painted on a backdrop and partly three-dimensional. The underworld was the set for the fourth scene. There were rocks and defoliated trees and in the background the burning city of Dis could be seen. For the last two scenes the stage was changed back to the first set. It is interesting to note that Buonarroti used the term "rivolgere," meaning to turn about, which might suggest the use of *periaktoi*.

Another important production in which Buontalenti was involved was the Caccini's *Il Rapimento di Cefalo* (1600). According to Buonarroti there were three thousand men and eight hundred women in the audience in the Uffizi theater. The work was sung throughout the five acts, Prologue and Epilogue, and it involved spectacular scene changes and machines. The design for the Prologue presented a tall mountain covered by trees, on top of which stood a statue of Pegasus. At the base of the mountain there was a grotto inside of which a statue of the spring of Hippocrene could be seen. The audience was surprised to see water trickling down the slope

[89] Ibid., 94.
[90] Ibid., 94.

into the spring. At the end of the Prologue the mountain would disappear into the trap below the stage.

The first act was set in a forest on a set similar to the one in *La Pellegrina* and the second one featured a seascape similar to the fifth *intermedio* of the same work. A night scene with ruins, cliffs, and trees was the set for the third scene and a mountain with springs appeared for the fourth. The audience was fascinated by the mist and perfumed vapors that filled the stage and the theater. As the act ended the heavens opened up to allow Mercury, Cupid and other gods to appear on clouds. The celestial set was maintained for the fifth act with more cloud machines that allowed Mercury to chase Cupid through the air. The most impressive set was saved for the Epilogue. The stage was transformed into an amphitheater decorated with Doric columns and statues. As the Heroes appeared on stage, a chariot bringing Dame Fortune arose from the trap bellow the stage. At the end of the scene she was lifted on a cloud into the heavens. Buonarroti considered the set design for this work to be one of Buontalenti's most important achievements. He was able to create the perfect atmosphere for the plays though his use of fast scene changes, lighting, machinery and space. Giulio Parigi (1571–1635) was in the audience for all these events and admired his work. In 1608, when Buontalenti passed away, Giulio became his official successor.

Parigi started his career with the sets for Buonarroti's *Il giudizio di Paride* (1608) a pastoral drama with musical *intermedii*, part of a four-week festival in honor of the marriage between Maria Magdalena of Austria and Cosimo de1 Medici, the son of Grand Duke Ferdinando. As Fontanelli wrote "The comedy owed its success to the *intermedii*, which were a

beautiful sight, and to the machines, which although they did not perform miracles are nevertheless to be praised for having done their job well without any mishap."[91]

Giulio created seven designs for the production (see Figures 24 to 30). Although these were his first, they had a great impact on the development of scenography throughout Europe. They were printed and spread to many courts in Italy, Spain, France, England, and Germany, influencing artists even more than Buontalenti's designs. With Buontalenti dying a few months before the ceremony, Parigi was left in charge of the costumes, barges, and chariots, the temporary amphitheaters and all the other decorations required by this grandiose event.

It is noteworthy that the *intermedii* for this work, unlike the ones for the 1589 play, did not have a unifying theme and were not written by the same composer. However, they all glorified the Medici family and every one of them with the exception of the third referred to the celebrated marriage. The production of *Il giudizio di Paride* was dominated by the *intermedii* theatrically, dramatically, musically, and scenographically.[92]

For the play the set remained the same throughout the five acts. It consisted of a backdrop perspective of an open field, a hut, trees on rocky cliffs, and three wings on each side of the set portraying large rocks on top of which there were more trees. This design is very similar to Buontalenti's forest set from 1589. There are, however, some important differences: if in the 1589 play the wings were not clearly defined, here the sense of space is greater and they are more obvious. Also the lower point of focus for the perspective makes the sky seem wider and increases the impression of depth.

---

[91] Tim Carter, "A Florentine Wedding of 1608," *Acta Musicologica* 55, no. 1 (1983): 103.
[92] Roy Strong, *Splendor at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and the Theater of Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 209.

Parigi used the *periaktoi* to enable quick scene changes from the pastoral play to the *intermedii*. This is apparent from Buonarroti's original manuscript of the play, which contains diagrams and notes regarding the set for the play and the even the entrances and exits of the actors (see Figure 30). The sketch shows the stage from above, with the eight trapezoid shapes representing the *periaktoi*.

Camillo Rinuccini gave a detailed account of the performance.[93] Talking about the first *intermedio* he recalls that after the curtain "disappeared," the set consisting of ruins, loggias, temples, and antique buildings was revealed. The backdrop painting continued into the wings. What stunned the audience, however, was the Palace of Fame found in the middle of the stage, "made completely by mirrors" (*tutto fatto a specchi*). Rinuccini believed that the building might have been in reality covered with tin foil to simulate mirrors. Like Buotalenti before him, Giulio used the actors to enhance the illusion of depth. As the *intermedio* came to an end, the palace disappeared in the center trap and Fame was lifted into the clouds above.

For the second *intermedio* Parigi maintained the pastoral set but brought on stage many clouds that obscured it and changed the backdrop into a view of Florence with the river Arno. Thus, the set was transformed into a celestial scene with some of the singers descending on clouds. The audience was fascinated with the action on stage, as it involved multi-directional movements with elements entering and exiting simultaneously from above and below. More importantly, this was the first time a cloud machine appeared not in the center, as tradition dictated, but in the upper left, making the scene less symmetrical and thus, more interesting.

---

[93] Camillo Rinuccini, Mathieu Greuter, Francesco Cini, and Francesco Cini. *Descrizione delle feste fatte nelle reali nozze de' Serenissimi principi di Toscana d. Cosimo de' Medici, e Maria Maddalena arcidvchessa d'Avstria* (Firenze: Appresso i Giunti, 1608), accessed October 20, 2013. <http://www.archive.org/details/dellefestefatten00rinu>.

Buontalenti's influence is obvious in the use of the cloud machines, the number of clouds on stage and the heavenly ensemble.

For the next *intermedio* the scene was changed to a garden décor, with fruit bearing trees, rocks, grottoes, trellises, arches and flowers. As in the previous scenes, the backdrop perspective extends by lining up with the winged *periaktoi*. Cloud machines and a flying eagle are used again to float in the singers. Again Buontalenti's influence on Giulio's set can be observed, especially in the design of the *pergole*, the grotto-like niches, the arches, benches, and columns. The garden scene later became an important element in seventeenth-century scenography, Parigi's design anticipating what would become a characteristic of Baroque stage design.[94]

The set for the fourth *intermedio* was a seascape, with the background depicting an open, calm sea. On each side there were rocks on top of which rested exotic trees with huts of reeds visible between them. A ship enters from the right wing with the head of the Lion of Florence mounted on top. Next the audience witnesses a rocky reef covered with moss and shells rising out of the water. As the singer on top of the rock finishes her song, a cloud appears center stage, revealing a large celestial assembly, including Apollo and the nine muses. At the end of the *intermedio* the cloud drifts away and the reef sinks down into the waves and the pastoral scene returns.

When discussing the scene change for the fifth *intermedio*, Rinuccini uses the term "girando" which reinforces the assumption that Parigi used revolving prisms in his design. The set for this interlude was Vulcan's smithy, with the wings presenting ruined arches and palaces appearing to rise from a cavernous rock. The backdrop depicts the smithy, with ovens, anvils and

---

[94]William Dean Eckert, "The Renaissance Stage in Italy A Study of the Evolution of the Perspective Scene" (PhD diss., State University of Iowa, 1961), 318.

bellows illuminated by the glow of flames and clouded by smoke. The scene is very similar to Buontalenti's set depicting hell, especially the flaming caverns and the cloud-borne chariot bringing in the singers. Parigi's design has, however, a greater depth in the perspective, realized through the ingenious use of arched wings and a triple-arch in front of the backdrop, brought for the first time in the set of a hell scene.

For the final *intermedio* Parigi built a golden temple with composite columns supporting six entablatures (the *periaktoi* wings). In the background there were Ionic pilasters on which beautiful arches rested, unifying the set with the wings and enhancing the illusion of depth. A throne appeared from a trap upstage at the same time a cloud descended from the heavens. As the *intermedio* proceeded, four more clouds appeared, each colored differently and carrying chariots in which the gods were seated. They all vow to serve Cosimo and his bride and descend to the stage. The heavens are open in three parts to reveal a celestial chorus in the center and, on the sides, two clouds holding the Gentle Breezes. As the five-hour entertainment came to an end, the audience was astonished by the dance executed in the air, something that had never been done before.

There remains little visual documentation for Parigi's later scenography, but it is known that he became the leader in Florentine staging and his fame spread throughout Europe. Through his sets he brought the city the most important and advanced aspects of early Baroque theater.

Chapter III

Machines and Lighting

The Front Curtain

The front curtain was a tradition passed on from the Greek theater and it was used in order to hide the set as the audience entered the auditorium, being lowered to reveal the stage for the beginning of the show. In the early theater it was used to cover the opening of a mansion or an entire mansion, not to cover the whole stage – a practice that appeared during the early Renaissance. The presence of a curtain is mentioned in many letters and descriptions of theatrical events as well as in Nicola Sabbatini and Joseph Furttenbach's treatises, yet it is not discussed in Sebastiano Serlio's work. He mentions only once "the unveiling to our view of a stage set," but does not offer any details.[95] The curtain itself was very important, and famous painters like Raphael were hired to design it. The moment of revealing the set was an essential aspect of the performance, as can be seen in one of the letters describing the opening performance in Teatro Olimpico in 1585:

> The hour of lowering the curtain having arrived, first there was a very sweet odor of perfumes, to indicate that in the city of Thebes which was represented odors were dispersed, according to ancient history, to soften the disfavor of the gods. Then the trumpets and drums were played, and small fireworks were set off as well as four large pieces. Then in a twinkle of an eye the taut curtain fell before the stage. Here it would be very difficult to express in words, or even to imagine, the great joy and the immeasurable pleasure which came upon the spectators at the sight.[96]

The author of *Il Corago* mentions five different methods of removing the curtain. The most popular one was lowering it to into the pit, even though, as the author remarks, it produced

---

[95] Sebastiano Serlio, *Il primo (secondo) libro d'architettura* (Paris, 1545); quoted in Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 24.
[96] Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical*, 85.

a lot of dust both on stage and in the hall. The curtain could also be drawn to one side of the stage, or, if it were divided into two sections, it could be drawn open from both sides. Raising the curtain to the ceiling of the theater was considered problematic because of the weight of the curtain. The author of *Il Corago* considers the best alternative to be pulling it to the stage ceiling through a system of chords strung through rings evenly placed along the curtain so that when raised it forms an ornamental festoon.

Sabbatini dedicates a section of his treatise to the matter of the front curtain. He presents two methods for revealing the set. The first was the easiest and oldest way – letting it fall onto the floor. In his view, it was essential that the people operating the curtain were perfectly synchronized in order to obtain the effect of "wonder that comes with the sudden and even fall of the curtain."[97] He considered that having only one person drop the curtain would be even better, and advises the use of two weights attached to the sides of the curtain to bring it down even faster.

The second method involved the use of a cylinder longer than the curtain, with a diameter of a third of the curtain's height. The cylinder was hung on two beams set high on the side walls and the curtain was fastened to the roller. Two weights were placed at either end of the curtain to pull the curtain up. Sabbatini preferred this more complex method, indicating that it produced an effect with "greater celerity and without confusion and fright, that often occurs when part of the curtain sometimes falls on the audience."[98]

In his book, *Recreational architecture* (1640), Furttenbach describes four designs for curtains. He considered that the curtain should be "appropriate for the following action" in order

---

[97] Nicola Sabbatini, *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (*Manual for constructing theatrical scenes and machines*, Ravenna, 1638); in Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 90.
[98] Ibid., 91.

to create a state of anticipation for the audience. He does not give any details on how the curtain should be operated, simply mentioning that it could be "drawn to the sides or let down into a special pit in front of the stage."[99] The scene changes always happened in full view of the audience who would become entranced by the quick transformation of the scene.

Angle Wings and *Periaktoi*

Serlio, Sabbatini, and Furttenbach talk about the ingenious planning of set changes realized through the use of angle wings or *periaktoi* to carefully hide the backstage area and the other machines. The ancient Greeks were the first to develop movable scenery and Romans improved the designs, adding traps and even pumping systems that would allow them to flood the stage for aquatic shows. In his book on architecture Vitruvius describes some of the machines used in performance:

> The "scaena" itself displays the following scheme. In the center are double doors decorated like those of a royal palace. At the right and left are the doors of the guest chambers. Beyond are spaces provided for decoration—places that the Greeks call *periaktoi*, because in these places are triangular pieces of machinery which revolve, each having three decorated faces. When the play is to be changed, or when gods enter to the accompaniment of sudden claps of thunder, these may be revolved and present a face differently decorated. Beyond these places are the projecting wings which afford entrances to the stage, one from the forum, the other from abroad.[100]

Toward the end of the fourteenth century more elaborate machinery for spectacles were in demand, especially in religious performances. With the publication of Vitruvius' book, the machines used in Greek and Roman theater were rediscovered and engineers started developing them even further. The art of moving scenery and spectacular stage effects reached its zenith

---

[99] Joseph Furttenbach the Elder, *Recreational architecture* (*Architectura recreationis*, Augsburg, 1640, 59-70); in Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 189.
[100] Vitruvius, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture*, Book V, no 8.

during the Italian Renaissance. As *intermedii* became the main attraction of theatrical productions, rapid scenery changes became vital, encouraging the development of new devices to facilitate them.

In their theatrical treatises Serlio, Sabbatini and Furttenbach describe three major types of wings: the angle wings, the *periaktoi,* and the flat wing. The first type was built with three-dimensional cornices and ornaments and it was designed to present the visible parts of a house. Sebastiano Serlio was the first to describe the angle wings, advising engineers to build them of flat frames as fixed scenic units. They consisted of two panels, a front face and a side painted in perspective, reproducing on stage the three dimensions of the visible parts of the building. Serlio recommended the use of wooden relief to make the décor seem more realistic.

Nicola Sabbatini, in his *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (*Manual for constructing theatrical scenes and machines*, 1638), offers a survey of the techniques used in theaters throughout the seventeenth century, describing the evolution of changeable scenery from the early uses of the rotating wings to the apparition of flat wings, explaining the advantages and drawbacks of each type. He presents three main methods for changing the sets: pulling painted canvas in front of the wings to conceal the previous set; sliding around new wings for the scene change; and the last one derived from the Greek *periaktoi*.[101] Thus, the first method uses cloth to cover up the facades of the houses. He instructs: "two sticks, two and a half feet long and one and a half inches thick, made of good, hard, polished wood are taken and at the end of one of these pieces is nailed the top corner of the short edge of the cloth intended to cover the perspective face of the house. Then the other end of this cloth is taken at its highest point and is

[101] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 47-48.

nailed to the further corner of the straight face of the house."[102] They would be in charge of making this happen quickly. The major inconvenience was, according to Sabbatini, the less realistic look given by the painted cloth.

The second method uses frames placed on grooves three inches behind the first set. The new scenery would be brought forth by two men, who should be familiar with the music, so that the change occurred quickly and at the same time for all the wings involved. The sliding wings had various issues: their size and shape made the shifting difficult to be realized offstage, and the doors and windows needed to be perfectly aligned with the ones in the wings behind them. This last problem would make this type of wings unusable in opera production, because the sets were most of the time completely different from each other.

His favorite method was rotating prisms. Wooden frames of the same size were placed in a triangle parallel to the horizon to facilitate easy turning on a pivot secured below the stage. Two windlasses were placed under the floor, one in front, and one toward the back of the stage linked to the pivot by chords. A half turn of the windlasses would wind or unwind the chords turning the prism to show different faces. This method was by far the most efficient way of changing the scenery and was preferred by many designers.

The production of *La Vedova* (1596), designed by Baldassare Lanci, used a three-sided revolving *periaktoi*. This type of wings was easier to change, needing only to be rotated, as Ignazio Danti's illustration shows. It offered three settings, but the offstage panels could be changed if more scenes were needed. The drawback with this method was the lack of room between the wings for the actors to enter and exit easily, making it necessary for the sets to be used as a three-dimensional design. There was also a coordination problem, as the panels were

---

[102] Ibid., 101.

not linked in any way. The records seem to indicate that this technique was soon abandoned in favor of more efficient ones.

Sabbatini's treatise describes two types of *periaktoi,* one shaped as an equilateral triangle and one as an isosceles triangle (see Appendix Chapter III, Figure 1, 2).[103] The first design would show only one side to the audience, parallel to the front of the stage, with sufficient space for entrances and exits between the units. The second type functioned as an angle wing, with one side showing the straight face of the wing and another one the perspective face of the wing. The third side would be the set for the *intermedii* and it could be changed offstage to show the different settings as needed.[104] However, this method would have the same problems as the sliding wings, and was not suitable for opera, which required different sets for each scene. Of all the methods he described in his treatise, Sabbatini preferred the *periaktoi* technique because it was mechanical and could be easily coordinated by connecting the pivots together, so that everything turned at the same time. However, he warned that it must be "executed with swiftness, otherwise there is much danger of showing what is behind the scenes, which does not happen with the others."[105]

Another type of *periaktoi* used in productions was four-sided and appears for the first time in Parigi's sketch for *Giudizio di Paride* (see Figure 3). They appear to be more realistic for the audience and offered the advantage of changing the offstage panels easily. However, they required even more space for the rotation than the three-sided *periaktoi*. If the stage was raked to improve the perspective image they would be unbalanced, as the front units would not be able to rest on the floor. Sabbatini's solution was the use of a pivoting rear shutter: "At the bottom of

---

[103] Ibid., 104.
[104] Ibid., 105.
[105] Ibid., 103, 104.

each part of the frame is left a piece of cloth painted similarly to the faces so as to cover the portions of the houses revealed by the slope of the stage."[106]

Arthur Blumenthal, in his *Italian Renaissance festival designs*, offers another interpretation of Parigi's design, based on a sketch drawn by Furttenbach.[107] He interprets the set as a double rotating *periaktoi*, with two possible positions: one showing the audience two faces of an angle wing and one showing a flat wing (see Figure 4 A and B). This kind of *periaktoi* would be very difficult to coordinate, as each wing was turned by a separate handle, making it difficult to align the corners in fast scene changes.

Another type described by Sabbatini was the flat wing made of panels positioned one behind the other. Scenery changes became easier to accomplish by removing the visible wings to show the set behind. Grooves were designed to support the panels and close the back of the stage.[108] British architect Inigo Jones used this type of wing in his 1640 design for the courtly masquerade *Salmacida Spolia*. It had the advantage of offering more usable stage space than an angle wing or a *periaktoi* and became the most popular method of changing scenery for the next two centuries.

Knowing the complexity that was involved in the staging of the *intermedii*, Sabbatini included methods in his treatise to enlarge or decrease the stage space as the scenery is changed. Thus, to increase the usable space on stage he recommended making three additional holes—one in the floor, another in the lower triangle, and the last one in the upper triangle—all aligned to the existing holes but moved toward the back of the stage. As the scenery is changed the pivots

---

[106] Ibid., 115.
[107] Blumenthal, *Italian Renaissance Festival Designs*, 22.
[108] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 116, 117.

could be moved to the new holes and fixed in the new positions. To decrease the space the process would be the same, except the holes would be situated toward the front of the stage.

Some productions required the set to seem demolished. In order to accomplish this effect the scenery was made of boards joined together with hinges. These could be easily removed or split into many sections and painted on the reverse side to represent ruins. The pieces were attached to chords that made it possible for the set to be reconstructed quickly. Sabbatini advises against using fire during the *intermedii*, but provides a method to safely show the scene in flames if absolutely needed. Cloth soaked in *aquavitae* was fixed on the frames and men set them on fire at the appointed time.[109]

The back shutter could also be opened or closed and Sabbatini offered four methods employed at the time. The first design uses a framed divided into two equal parts and a groove on which they can slide back and forth. Another method also involved two panels, which in turn could be divided into two more sections united by hinges. The back shutter would open toward the front of the stage. The reverse sides of the panels were painted with the scene that would be used in the *intermedio*. The third method involved the same panels and groove of the first method. This time the panels were set on two wheels and a second groove, double the length of the lower one and wide enough to fit the wheels, was placed higher toward the heaven. This method is preferred because the shutter could be operated by only two people, one for each panel. The last method he presents involves a cloth back shutter that would be lifted up by a cylinder, the same system used in raising the front curtain. He mentions that some believed that raising the houses up into the heavens was not appropriate, but he considers that if the action happens quickly the method would not be as obvious and disturbing.

---

[109] Ethanol.

Another device of great importance in Italian theatrical performances was the trap door. *Intermedii* often required not only swift changes of scenery, but also the sudden apparition of characters on stage through a trap door. According to Sabbatini, the traps should be small and attached to the stage with hinges opening under the stage so that it is not visible from the audience. To secure the trap door closed, a bar should be placed transversely under the stage. This would not only keep it secure but it would also prevent the trap shaking as dancers move on top of it. His instructions include four methods on how actors could get on stage quickly by using the trap. The first solution he offers is attaching a ladder from the door trap to the floor, opposite to the hinges holding the trap. The actor "must stand ready on the first step, leaning in such a way as not to get into the way of the falling trap. As soon as it is open, he straightens himself, places his foot on the second step, and ascends quickly to the stage."[110] The actor could also be lifted on stage on a handbarrow pushed up by two stagehands. Another option Sabbatini proposed was using a lever operated by several stagehands to push the actor on stage. The fourth and final method uses a row of dancers on stage to distract the audience while another row rises from the trap and mix immediately with the others. This method, as Sabbatini warns, requires "great cleverness and care" from the director and the actors as well. [111]

Special Effects Machineries

Machineries had been an important part of the theatrical performance since the fifth century BC, when the Greeks introduced the *deus ex machina* that could lower the actor onto the stage. The Italian theatrical spectacles, the *intermedii*, and the first operas were defined by

[110] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 122.
[111] Ibid., 125.

special effects such as ocean waves, storms, fire, mythological creatures, and moving clouds. Sabbatini and the unknown author of *Il Corago* both describe the manner through which all of these machines were realized. Thus, for the scene change to Inferno required by numerous plays, Leonardo da Vinci designed an early version in the late fifteenth century.[112] It consisted of a revolving set that would transform a mountain scene into the kingdom of Pluto by opening the mountain to reveal its hollow interior (see Figure 5).

Sabbatini presents in his treatise two methods of representing hell. One involves creating a corridor framed by torches within which actors perform safely, creating the illusion that they are in the middle of the flames. The other method involves a "hell mouth" being opened through a trap door in the middle of the stage. It requires four "worthy, zealous, honor-seeking persons" who would hold a pot through which a torch can be pulled.[113] The pot is filled with resin powder and covered with thick paper in which small holes are made. The other end of the pot is sealed with wax to keep the resin powder inside. A man would be standing in in each corner of the trap shaking the pots violently every now and then to throw flames through the trap, careful to not endanger the actors on stage.

Cini describes the representation of hell in the fifth *intermedio* of *La Cofanaria* (1565), and mentions that the floor opened in four places from which fire, smoke and serpents emerged.[114] Later on another much larger trap opened, letting out three-headed Cerberus surrounded by fire and smoke. For the first *intermedio* of *I Fabii* (1568), Ceccherelli recounts

---

[112] Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 290.
[113] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 126.
[114] Domenico Mellini, Giovan Battista Cini, and Francesco d' Ambra, *Descrizione dell'apparato della comedia et intermedii d'essa recitata in Firenze il giorno di S. Stefano l'anno 1565 nella gran sala del palazzo di Sua Ecc. Illust. nelle reali nozze dell'illustriss. & eccell. s. il s. don Francesco Medici, principe di Fiorenza & di Siena, & della regina Giovanna d'Austria, sua consorte* (Fiorenza: Appresso i Giunti, 1566); in Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 20.

that a hell-mouth shaped like the jaws of a dragon spitting fire was opened in the back of the stage, through which several creatures of the Underworld appeared.[115] Similarly, in the second *intermedio* for *L'amico fido* (1586), a cavern opened in the floor to allow the city of Dis to emerge through flames and smoke, portraying the hell described by Dante in the ninth Canto of the Inferno. The hell-mouth was a device used, with variations, in many theatrical events of the time.

Another popular effect was the rising or sinking of a mountain on stage in full view of the audience, as for example in the sixth intermedio of *La Cofanaria*, where a mountain covered with laurel trees and flowering shrubs arose through a trap door.[116] Caccini's *Il Rapimento di Cefalo* uses a mountain that covers the entire stage for the Prologue. The luxuriant vegetation and the springs trickling down the slope of the mountain entranced the audience. As the scene ended, the mountain sank into the stage before the astonished eyes of the spectators.[117]

In chapter twenty-four of his treatise, Sabbatini describes the most popular method for a successful performance. To realize this effect a painting of a mountain was stretched on a frame made of crossbars set on a vertical beam, which could slide up and down with the help of ropes into a hole in the middle of the stage. This device was extremely common and was used in many theatrical spectacles of the time, thus, Sabbatini decided to not include an illustration of the machine. He does offer a sketch of how a man could be "transformed" into stone. A cloth was nailed to the stage and a piece of wood placed into a hole beneath the cloth was pushed upwards by a stage hand, while the actor who's supposedly transforming bends down gradually, making

---

[115] Ibid., 37.
[116] Ibid., 20
[117] Claude V. Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 443.

the illusion perfect. If the process was reversed the rock would change into a man to the audience's delight.[118]

The illusion of water and waves on stage was an effect used successfully in performances. Thus, in the fourth *intermedio* of *L'amico fido*, Rossi gives a detailed description of the marine set, with reefs, springs, corals, and plants and, more importantly, the most natural-looking waves.[119] Similarly, in the fifth *intermedio* for *La Pellegrina*, the stage transforms into an ocean of waves surrounded by reefs, with shell, dolphins, and other sea creatures emerging from the sea. In the new opera *Il Rapimento di Cefalo* there is a sea scene as well, with islands and mountains in the background and sea monsters pulling chariots on the furious waves.

Both Sabbatini and the author of *Il Corago* describe in their treatises various ways of transforming the stage into a marine set. As most of the special effects of the time, representing the sea involved painted cloth stretched onto wooden frames that could be operated with the help of ropes and pulleys. One method described by Sabbatini requires a cord to be run under the painted cloth at even intervals of one and a half feet, with the ends of the rope held by men on both sides of the stage. The cloth could in this way be raised or lowered, creating the illusion of waves. Another way of portraying the sea was shaping strips of wood on which blue cloth with silver edges would be stretched. The pieces would then be placed on stage, creating corridors between which boats, sea creatures, and actors could move. The waves could also be raised or lowered, as they were set on poles that could be operated from beneath the stage. Furttenbach presented these methods similarly in his treatise. Sabbatini's favorite method was, however, to

---

[118] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 128.
[119] Bastiano de' Rossi, *Descrizione del magnificentiss. apparato, e de' maravigliosi intermedii fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle felicissime nozze degl'illustrissimi ed eccellentissmi signori il signor don Cesare d'Este, e la signora donna Virginia Medici* (Firenze: Appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1586); in Pirrotta, *Music and Theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 187.

create wavy cylinders on frames controlled from offstage by stagehands turning cranks. He recommended combining the cylinders with the wooden waves painted in different shades of blue to illustrate storms.

If the methods of creating the sea were somewhat clear, the transition into a marine décor was not described. The descriptions, written by witnesses, testify to the "magical" transformation of the stage but offer no more information as to how that was achieved. For example, in his account of the 1589 *intermedii*, Bastiano de' Rossi only mentions that the stage floor became ocean waves, without offering any other details. [120] From the same description it is possible to determine that the changes were realized by distracting the audience from the movement on the floor by bringing clouds to cover the scenery and by partially turning off the lighting. This way the public would be dazzled and the changes would seem to happen magically.

Thunder, lighting, rain, and hail were other favorite effects in Italian theater of the time. Furttenbach mentions:

> Fresh interest and wonder is created in the audiences, especially on a warm day, by producing a splendid rain of water perfumed with rose and the odors, dripping through many holes bored through the upper floor but only over the heads of the most prominent ladies and their sons. Such effects are held in high esteem by the Italians, and of course are not accomplished without cost. Or, instead of rain, a sugared hail can be produced of sugared confections of coriander, almond, cinnamon, etc., to bring the play to a happy close.[121]

Two chapters of Sabbatini's treatise are dedicated to representing flowing rivers and fountains. Blue cloth with silver margins was cut as wide as the river needed to be and twice as long. One end of the cloth was placed in an urn and the other was slit in the stage floor. A man

[120] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 87.
[121] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 231.

placed under the stage would continuously move the cloth to make the river appear to be flowing. A similar process was used to make a fountain appear to spout water continuously.

Another favorite effect was flooding areas of the theater with water. Abbate Folchi, present at the production of *Marte and Mercurio* (1628) in Parma, recalls being overwhelmed during the final scene of the play, when water was pushed into the pit of the theater: "I was afraid to sit in such a large hall overloaded with thousands of spectators and many machines. Moreover, the same hall later had to sustain the weight of the water which rose to a height of more than half a braccio."[122]

For heavenly scenes the floating clouds were the most important feature. To create the illusion of flying, the clouds were attached to the back wall or to a frame in the wings, using a system of pulleys and ropes to move them (see Figure 6). The surviving contemporary descriptions of the events recount the visual effects that stunned the audiences, but provide few details regarding the mechanics of the machines. Thus, Ceccherelli describes the descending cloud used in the fifth *intermedio* of *I Fabii* as being very safe for the actors, as they were tied onto the cloud with an iron harness, covered with white cotton so as to not be obvious from the audience.[123]

An even less detailed description was given by Rossi for the cloud used in the first *intermedio* of *L'amico fido*, a comedy played for the celebrations of Virginia de' Medici's wedding to Cesare d'Este in 1586, in Florence. He describes how the heavens opened and two clouds appeared a large one in the center and another one to the side. On the second cloud the gods were arranged in perspective, creating the illusion of depth. The center cloud descended and

---

[122] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 148.
[123] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 186-87.

reached the stage, allowing its occupants to step out, and then it disappeared as if blown away by the wind.[124] While very poetic, this description does not explain the method through which this smooth effect was obtained. In the same play the fifth *intermedio* opens with a storm, with rain, hail, thunder, and lightning. A bright cloud floats above the stage, carrying a chariot pulled by two peacocks in which Juno and the nymphs are seated. The storm begins to calm as the goddess orders the nymphs to brighten the heavens in honor of the Medici wedding. This cloud disappears toward the deep end of the stage in the same smooth and mysterious way as in the first *intermedio*, amazing the audience.

La Pellegrina's first musical *intermedio* (1589) opened with a celestial set in which a cloud descended from the heavens carrying the allegorical representation of the musical modes. As the cloud was slowly lowered toward the ground, light surrounded it from behind making it seem to be literally floating. Rossi recounts that as the cloud vanishing in the distance the sky transformed into a starry night with four other clouds rising up toward the heavens, carrying the eight Platonic sirens and angels. The spectacular coordination between the movement of the clouds appearing and disappearing and the ingenious lighting created a magical atmosphere that entranced the audience.

There is a controversy regarding the scenic change from the celestial set to the view of Pisa. According to Rossi's description, just the clouds concealed the backdrop of Pisa during the first *intermedio*, their removal allowing the city view to reappear for the following act. Pavoni, however, believed that the scene was changed using a rotation mechanism. [125] This point of view

---

[124] Ibid., 187.

[125] Pavoni, Giuseppe, and Giovanni de' Rossi. *Diario descritto da Giuseppe Pauoni: delle feste celebtate nelle solennissime nozze delli serenissimi sposi, il sig. don Ferdinando Medici, & la sig. donna Christina di Loreno gran duchi di Toscana : nel quale con breuità si esplica il torneo, la battaglia nauale, la comedia con gli intermedii, & altre feste occorse di giorno in giorno per tutto il dì 15. di maggio, MDLXXXIX ; alli molto illustri, & miei patroni*

is supported as well by Berthold von Gadenstedt and an anonymous writer who also was present at the event.[126] The celestial set returned for the sixth *intermedio* and was even more impressive, with seven clouds floating in carrying the gods and Muses, creating a heavenly ensemble to celebrate the royal wedding of Ferdinando de Medici to Christina of Lorraine.

Zuccari's description of the 1608 festival in Mantua is one of the more detailed accounts when it comes to the description of the machines used in performance:

> It was delightful to see the windlasses mounted over the machines, the cables of optimum strength, the ropes and lines by which the machines were moved and guided, and the many stagehands who were needed to keep the apparatus in operation. Every man was at his station, and at a signal the machinery could be raised, lowered, moved, or held in a particular position. More than three hundred workers were engaged and had to be directed, which required no less experience and skill than it did foresight and reason; it must be realized that in such a situation anything might go awry and unforeseen incidents must be prevented, since one fiery spark could put an end to everything.[127]

Clouds could also be split and reduced in size during the performance, an effect Sabbatini describes in chapter 49 of his book. Thus, three clouds could be attached on separate arms, hinged so that the secondary ones could be hidden behind the main cloud. The effect of separation was achieved through the use of ropes and pulleys. Not only could the clouds unite or separate, but they could also become smaller and ascend or descend. This illusion could be created by stretching the cloud on a frame operating similarly to an umbrella, expanding or contracting with the help of ropes and pulleys.

Many sets of the time involved fantastic creatures that would move across the stage carrying the actors and spouting water or fire depending on what illusion the director wanted to produce. In the fourth *intermedio* of the production of *L'amico fido* (1586) mentioned above, sea

---

offeruandiss. li signori Giasoni & Pompeo fratelli de' Vizani (Bologna: Rossi, 1589); in Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 380.

[126] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 75.

[127] Ibid., 185.

monsters emerged dripping water and spraying perfumed water from their conches. They moved on stage puffing and agitating the sea even more. Neptune appeared on a chariot surrounded by twelve sea nymphs and his voice sent the monsters under the waves, calming the tempestuous waters. His chariot was a beautiful machine shaped like a shell of dark sapphire color embellished with corals, snails, and pearls.[128] The audience, however, was even more impressed with the realization of the four horses that pulled the chariot. Rossi mentioned that the creatures were able to imitate the movements of their real live counterparts, whinnying, foaming, and chewing their bridle bits, using their legs in an almost natural manner to move forward on stage. In the fifth *intermedio* the peacocks drew all the attention with the graceful movement of spreading their luxuriant tails. For the final *intermedio* Buontalenti brought on stage artificial animals, which prowled through the forest, amazing the audiences with their smooth and realistic movement.

As mentioned before, the fifth *intermedio* of *La Pellegrina* also made use of a marine set, from which a mother-of-pearl shell pulled by dolphins emerged. Rossi's description also recounts a galley being rowed through the waves. The maneuvers executed by the ship were impressive, for example pointing its bow toward the bridal couple in the audience, all the sails being struck in their honor. The vessel executed a few more turns before exiting the stage.

Sabbatini explains how this was possible through the use of grooves between the waves on which the ships could slide in slow motion. The vessels could also be moved across the stage and then turned back to the starting point by using cylinder waves divided in two parts to allow the ship to pass between them. He also explains how the marine creatures could appear to be spouting water. Pounded silver or talc was placed in a cornucopia operated by a man hidden

---

[128] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 187.

behind the animal. The man would blow through the end of the cornucopia and the pieces of silver reflecting the light would appear as water to the audience.[129]

The description of the whale created for *Il Rapimento di Cefalo* offers a clear image of how grandiose and effective the use of such a machine could be. Buonarroti recounts the whale as a "grandiose beast" covered with silver scales and quills that could be thrust out or retracted, flapping ears and rolling eyes. [130] The creature could also sink its head under the waves and come up dripping wet and spouting jets of water. Its huge mouth with white fangs would catch small fish leaping from the water. The whole apparatus had a great impact on the audience, which was impressed by the "chaos of machines" created by Buontalenti.

While the treatises of the time offered several solutions for quick scene changes, realistic décor, and special effects machineries, stage productions also involved many other techniques and inventions to produce spectacular performances that entranced the royal audience of the Medici court.

Lighting

In their treatises on theatrical performance Sabbatini and de' Sommi discuss in detail the issue of lighting, describing the best ways to illuminate the hall and the stage. First, there was the choice of using candles or oil lamps. Both presented advantages and disadvantages that needed to be carefully considered. The candle could drip wax onto the audience, but this could be resolved by making them wide and placing a bowl underneath to gather the melting wax. Buontalenti proved to be very creative in designing the auditorium lights for the opening of the

[129] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 143.
[130] Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory*, 443.

new hall of the Uffizi Palace in Florence.[131] Along the walls of the hall, he put twenty-four pyramids and on top of each one an urn in which white wax tapers burned. This ingenious lighting brightened the auditorium and allowed a clear view of the stage. Chandeliers formed by 96 harpies carrying a total of 288 torches were hung on the ceiling. To catch the wax dripping from the chandeliers, Buontalenti designed columns on top of which rested beautiful baskets.

Oil lamps were also often used in theaters, as they were cheaper. Sabbatini mentions that the lamps should be made of tin and that there should be a second lamp below to prevent the oil from overflowing and dripping on the spectators. They also should be filled with the best type of oil, or the light would not be as effective and they would smell badly. They could be suspended from a chandelier through the use of a hook and arrange in different forms, "as eagles or lilies or anything else as may please the taste of the person responsible."[132]

Similar lamps were used in the *intermedii* for *La Pellegrina* (Florence, 1589), as Rossi mentions in his *Descrizione*.[133] The lamps were mounted on the back walls of the set, but they were movable and could be rotated. There were also lamps in each one of the flying machines used in the performances, showcasing the costumes designed by Buontalenti and the actors.

In his treatise, Furttenbach also describes lighting the stage through the use of oil lamps. He gives details regarding the dimensions of the glass lamp to be used: "5 inches high and 4 inches wide above at the mouth, but tapering to 1 inch at the bottom."[134] The lamp was filled with water leaving one and a half inches to add olive oil on top. The floating wick was made out of brass wire and cork blocks. The lamps would be placed around the walls on iron rings with screws to fasten them securely. A piece of gold tinsel was used behind each lamp to reflect the

[131] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 187.
[132] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 93.
[133] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 187.
[134] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 234.

light and at the same time provide a fire shield. According to Furttenbach, the lamps would give good light for twelve hours, as water could be added to raise the oil as needed.

All writers discuss the unavoidable issue of smoke, considering it was not only toxic, but it could also destroy the perspective sets virtual reality by forcing the actors to move downstage. For this reason the author of *Il Corago* recommended the use of beeswax candles or high quality oil lamps. Leone de' Sommi offers in his treatise suggestions on how to circulate the air in the auditorium by placing vents in the ceiling and recommends opening them before the performance.[135] Angelo Ingegneri advises the director to take into consideration not only the safety of the audience, but also that of the actors on stage or in the wings. [136] For safety reasons, all writers agreed that a special crew needed to be assigned for controlling the lights, keeping them lit, and remedying any hazardous situation.

The position of the torches and chandeliers was also of great importance as they should not limit the view from the auditorium, the scene changes, or the actor's mobility on stage. According to Sabbatini, oil lamps had to be placed around the festoon and coat of arms, hidden from the spectators' eyes. To light the stage, lamps would be placed on wooden beams securely fixed to the floor and braced onto the walls in order not to move as the actors and dancers performed on stage. Sabbatini also thought that if candles were used they should not be placed on stage behind the parapet as they would create shadows and make the faces of the actors "seem so pale and wan that they look as if they had just had a bad fever."[137] However, Ingenieri points out that the sources of the lighting should be concealed in order to create and enhance the

---

[135] Leone de' Sommi. *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1968); in Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 65-66.
[136]Angelo Ingegneri and Maria Luisa Doglio, *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (Modena: Ed. Panini, 1989), 9.
[137] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 96.

magical effects desired, and advises the stage designer to place the chandeliers away from both the actors and the spectators. Also, the faces of the actors should be perfectly visible so that the facial expressions would be accentuated, a newly introduced theatrical concept.[138] This could be achieved by suspending a firmly secured lighting grid above the proscenium arch. Reflectors were used to direct the light toward the stage.

A very important matter was the actual process of lighting the lamps once the public was seated. This was supposed to be done as quickly and safely as possible. The lights on stage were the easiest to reach and posed no difficulties for the experienced people involved in the production. The lights in the auditorium, however, needed special attention and Sabbatini offers two methods of operating them. One makes use of a fuse dipped in coal oil, or another liquid easy to light. The fuse would be fixed to the wire holding the chandeliers in three or more places at the same height to avoid any dripping. At the right moment, men would set the fuse on fire, lighting all the chandeliers. Sabbatini notes, however, that the method never appealed to him, as the flames would often go out before reaching the candles or worse, the wire would divide, and burning pieces of flax would fall onto the audience creating damage and panic. The second method, which he preferred, was in his opinion much safer. It required soaking the top of each candle in coal oil and having a man light them using two poles—one with a candle on top and the other with a sponge soaked in water, ready to be used in case a candle would begin to drip on the people in the audience.

All writers advise that the stage be illuminated more than the auditorium as "a man in the shade sees much more distinctly an object illuminated from afar."[139] They slightly disagree on

---

[138] Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa* 10-11.
[139] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 65.

how much the auditorium should be lit, Sabbatini and Ingenieri considering that there could even be no light at all toward the back of the hall, De' Sommi recommending that one place a few lights toward the back so that the audience would not be completely in the dark. Sabbatini offers a method to quickly and efficiently put out the lights by assigning three technicians for each lamp or chandelier.

Mellini's description of the theatrical events celebrating the wedding of Francesco de' Medici to Janna of Austria in 1565 presents in detail the lighting of the hall and the stage.[140] Suspended on the ceiling of the old hall in the Palazzo Vecchio were twelve chandeliers in the shape of crowns, three of which were designed to resemble the papal crown, alluding to the three Medici popes (Leo X, Clement VII, and Pius IV). Three imperial chandeliers were hung closer to the stage, one for Charles V, one for Ferdinand I (the father of the bride), and one for Maximilian II (Johanna's brother). Catherine de Medici and the newlyweds had their own light crowns in the middle of the hall, flanked by four ducal coronets. All the chandeliers were made of glass and crystal, decorated with precious stones. Additional lighting was provided along the walls by statues of females holding crystal bowls filled with colored water and lighted from behind. To supplement the lighting on stage, eight suspended angels carrying torches were placed along the stage sets.

Following the Renaissance tradition that associated bonfires and torches with joy, De' Sommi believed they should be used on stage to create a festive mood. He considered that, used properly, lighting could induce specific emotions in the audience. Thus, he recommended the use of bright lights for the opening of the show to create an atmosphere of joy and the darkening of the stage for the tragic events of the play. The contrast, he claimed, would amplify the drama.

---

[140] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 15.

De' Sommi also used transparent and colored glass in front of the lights to prevent eye irritation resulting from looking at bright lights. Colored glass also offered the advantage of softening and diffusing the lights and creating special effects that would draw the eye of the spectator to a desired spot on stage. Metal reflectors were used behind the lights to amplify their effect and better illuminate the sets. Another technique used in theatrical performances of the time was the concealing of the light sources with small mirrors. A light placed behind the stage set would be reflected with a mirror to bring another layer of texture and depth to the backdrop, enhancing the set. [141]

Serlio dedicates a small part of his treatise to the methods of producing colored lights. To create the sapphire blue one should grind a piece of salt ammoniac on the bottom of a water filled basin until it dissolves, then strain it through a piece of felt cloth into another vessel obtaining thus, a beautiful color that can be lightened by adding more water. By adding saffron to the same solution emerald green could be created. Dark or mixtures of dark and light red wines could be used to create various shades of red. The colored solutions would be placed in glass containers especially shaped with one flat side and one round side to hold the liquid. Translucent colors were created by placing two thin boards on the walls, one to hold the lamps, and one to hold the containers, with the lamps being placed behind each vessel.[142]

He also explains how lightning and thunderbolts were created. For lightning a man positioned high behind the scene would hold a box of resin powder.[143] The box is designed to have holes on the top and a lighted candle in the middle. As the man raises the box the powder

---

[141] Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theater: A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Harrap, 1966), 259.
[142] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 33.
[143] Resin is a hydrocarbon secretion of many plants, particularly coniferous trees. It is valued for its chemical properties and associated uses, such as the production of varnishes, adhesives, and food glazing agents.

lifts and is set on fire by the candle. For the thunderbolts, a rocket ornamented with gold would be lowered on a wire stretched behind the scene. As the thundering stops the rocket is set on fire producing a realistic effect of the thunderbolt.

Furttenbach describes a different method of creating lightning and flames. A stage man holds a piece of tin on which a little resin powder is sprinkled. A candle is held in the same hand about a half-inch above the powder. As the man lifts his arm, the powder is thrown through the light, creating a long flame suggesting lightning. Furttenbach states that this method is safe and "leaves a pleasant odor behind."[144]

Furttenbach also discusses the changing of light necessary for day turning into night. The first idea that comes to mind is lighting or putting out the lights behind the scene as needed. However, he points out that this requires time and creates an unnecessary amount of smoke and a bad smell. He suggests the use of metal boxes that can be drawn over or lifted away from the lamps. This presents the advantage of covering all the lamps at once or only some of them making the change gradual or abrupt as required by the text. These kinds of special effects were mentioned as early as 1539 in the *intermedii* for the festivities of Cosimo I's wedding. Vasari provides a description of the lighting techniques used for the sunrise that opened the performance.[145] A wooden lantern with two torches inside was mounted on an arc behind the painted décor, in front of which a crystal sphere filled with distilled water was placed, creating an aureole around the light. The sun was lifted on the arc slowly through the use of a winch so as to match the action of the play throughout the course of a day.

---

[144] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 229.
[145] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 10.

In the descriptions of the first operas, the issue of lighting is mentioned only in passing. For example, Buonarroti in his *Descrizione* of Peri's *Euridice*, says that the light sources were skillfully distributed on stage to perfectly portray a sunny day.[146] Similarly, for Caccini's *Il Rapimento di Cefalo* he mentions that the stage was hardly illuminated at all, since the action begins before dawn. For the climax of the opera, the lights in the auditorium were dimmed to resemble stars as the crescent moon ascends on stage.

Lighting was thus an issue thoroughly discussed in the early theatrical treatises, and authors offered advice on how to improve performances through the use of lights. Stage directors had to smartly use lighting to create the atmosphere demanded by the text and at the same time to showcase the costumes, actors, and special effects machineries.

The descriptions of the theatrical events of the time are useful in that they recount the performances and the public's reaction, but they rarely give details regarding the technical issues behind the scenes. One thing is certain though: the theatrical performances and later on the operas were grandiose and impressive on every level.

---

[146] Tim Carter and John Butt, eds. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music* (1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 *Cambridge Histories Online*), accessed October 20, 2013. http://dx.doi.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.1017/CHOL9780521792738

Chapter IV

Costumes

Historical Tradition of Theater Costumes

There is no definitive information about the costumes used in the earliest theatrical performances of the Ancient Greece. Fragmentary evidence about the classical costumes can be found in pottery decorations and statues that have survived over the centuries. However, this pictorial evidence, dating from as far back as the fifth century B.C., shows that clothes played an essential part in theatrical performances. Dramatists used clothing to portray characters in a visual manner, through the use of appropriate colors, textures, and designs.

Scholars agree that the costumes were generally variations of the everyday garments adapted for the type of play and character they were meant to portray. Thus, in comedy the traditional costume was an exaggerated version of the less elegant habits of the time, while in tragedy the hero's clothes were more grandiose in style.

The actor's attire most likely consisted of a tunic, or a *chiton* and a *himation* (see Appendix Chapter IV, Figure 1).[147] The men's *chiton* was very similar to the one worn by women, but knee-length or shorter. For hard labor or horse riding men also wore an *exomis* (a short *chiton* fastened on the left shoulder). The garments were usually made of wool or linen intensely colored and decorated with intricate designs. A wide range of colors was used in clothing, with purple, red, and blue being among the most popular. For example, Homer

[147] A chiton is a draped woolen garment wrapped once around the body with excess material folded over the top and doubly covering the bodice. A himation is a form of draped outerwear wrapped around one or both shoulders.

mentions in *Iliad* that Agamemnon's armor, or *cuirass*, made of parallel strips, with "ten dark blue enamel, twelve of gold and twenty of tin."[148]

Since women were generally not allowed to participate in theatrical productions, male actors needed costumes to make them appear feminine for female roles. Thus, padding materials were introduced in the body stocking to exaggerate the stomach, known as the *progastrida* or *progastreda*. The pads used to imitate the female chest were called *prosterniad* or *prosterneda*. In order to appear taller, actors wore wooden shoes with tall heels called *cothornous*.[149]

One of the most popular images associated with classical Greek theater is the mask. Masks were at first used in the worship ceremonies of Dionysus, the god of wine. Thespis is believed to have been the first actor to introduce masks in theatrical performances. [150] One of the most famous Greek vase paintings from the fifth century BC shows actors preparing for a Satyr play holding masks in their hands. This image suggests that masks must have been light enough to be worn by the actors, probably made of organic materials such as wood, cork, leather, or stiffened linen. The illustration also shows that hair was part of the helmet-like mask and not a separate wig. They were not much bigger than the human head, covering the entire face and having holes for the eyes and mouth. The ears were covered only by hair, in order to allow the actors to easily hear each other. The painted images, however, never show the masks in actual performance. They illustrate them being handled before or after a performance (see Figure 2), which may imply that the actor used them to metamorphose into his role.

---

[148] A *cuirass* is a piece of armor, formed of a single or multiple pieces of metal or other rigid material, which covers the front of the torso. Homer and Stephen Mitchell, *The Iliad* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 157.
[149] Iris Brooke, *Costume in Greek Classic Drama* (London: Methuen, 1962), 72.
[150] According to Aristotle, Thespis of Icaria was the first person ever to appear on stage as an actor playing a character in a play (instead of speaking as him or herself). In 534 BC he won the first documented competition for tragedy plays.

The size of the performance space with seating capacity for several thousand people made the use of masks necessary, so that the characters could be distinguished from afar. According to Greek mask-maker Thanos Vovolis, masks not only had a visual function, but also an acoustic one, functioning as a megaphone.[151] The small size of the mouth opening however, discourages this theory.[152]

Masks enabled an actor to play different roles, a quick change of masks being sufficient to switch characters. Through masks the audience could distinguish the sex, age, and social status of the character. They were also used to represent the same character in different situations. For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, the title character appears in a bloody mask after stabbing his eyes, horrifying the audience. Several other tragedies make use of well-designed masks to create a terrifying scene, such as Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Cyclops*.

Masks representing unearthly beings, such as the Furies or the Bacchanals, were ornate with snakes and vine-leaves. Satyrs' masks were a different class in themselves, having specific features such as an enlarged skull, short nose, black beard, and eyebrows suggesting a permanent surprise and animal-like ears and sometimes even horns on the top of their heads (see Figure 3). As a defining feature of Greek tragedy, the chorus members also wore masks. The function of the chorus was to comment on the action as a single character. Their costumes and masks had to be the same, to represent their unity as one.

Evolution of Costumes

---

[151] Thanos Vovolis and Giorgos Zamboulakis, "The Acoustical Mask of Greek Tragedy," Didaskalia Vol. 7.1 (2007), accessed October 20, 2013. http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol7no1/vovolis_zamboulakis.html.
[152] Chris Vervain and David Wiles, "The Masks of Greek Tragedy As Point of Departure for Modern Performance," *New Theater Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2001): 256.

By 240 BC Greek Theater was already familiar to Romans, having been translated into Latin, and brought to Rome. Organized by the Roman authorities, the festivals were secular and the number of days devoted to such festivities grew from 60 in the first century to 175 in the fourth century. They involved circuses, chariot races, gladiator fights, and criminals being torn apart by wild animals. Dramatic plays were performed very often, but they were mostly imitations or translations of Greek dramas.

However, certain Greek colonies in southern Italy and Sicily had their own tradition of comedy. The *phlyax* plays, first mentioned in the fourth century BC, were a form of mythological burlesque, involving figures from Greek mythology with the stock characters of *Atellana Farce*.[153] It was usually performed on improvised wooden stages with the actors wearing grotesque costumes and masks similar to those of the classical Greek comedy. The *Atellana Farce* was a type of performance involving vulgar farces, buffoonish comedy, and rude jokes which imitated the Greek models.[154] It became very popular in Rome during the third century BC and it is one of the most important predecessors of the *commedia dell'arte*. The masks and costumes used in performance were similar to the ones of the *phlyax* plays. Romans, however, introduced a few new types of theatrical performances, such as mime and pantomime, in which actors told a story through dance and movement accompanied by music.

Roman festivals were designed to please the crowds, thus, the quality of Roman theater was dependent on public taste. The audience reveled in anything that was sensational and crude, enjoying the performances of fighters, beasts, and mock sea battles. Theatrical performances thus, had to be transformed in order to please the public. The Greeks' subtle acting style was

---

[153] The name derives from the Phlyakes meaning "gossip players" in Doric Greek.
[154] Named after Atella, an Oscan town in Campania, where they were invented.

transformed into a coarse declamation, with actors dressing in extravagant costumes with huge masks covering their faces (see Figure 4). Theater became trivial and even degrading, driving Justinian I to close all theaters in the sixth century. Theater continued to survive through nomadic troupes of mimes, acrobats, dancers, minstrels and storytellers who traveled in wagons, performing on improvised stages.

Between 925 and 975, drama started being re-introduced into the church services as an expression of the new Christian religion. The Roman church needed a way to explain Christianity to a mostly illiterate population, so it began to dramatize biblical stories as part of the liturgy. At first the dramas were short, of only a few lines – such as the *Quem-Quaeritis* ("Whom do you seek?"), the Easter trope dated around 925. The four lines of text developed, over the centuries, into a huge body of liturgical dramas and mystery plays, performed with scenic décor, music, and costumes. The liturgical dramas were not performed by actors, but by priests who wore church clothing embellished with symbolic accessories.

In time, to make the liturgy even more accessible to the general public, the clergy started to incorporate more spoken dialogue, part in vernacular and part in Latin, moving the performances outside the church. Gradually these performances started being organized by laity and the plays became more complex. The *sacre rappresentazioni* (mystery plays) focused on biblical stories from the Creation to the Last Judgment. Special attention was given to staging and costumes. Contemporary dress replaced the church vestments and machineries were introduced for more realistic effects (for scenes of torture, execution or the appearances from the Mouth of Hell).

Secular theater started to be revived around the beginning of the fourteenth century, as part of important court celebrations, such as monarch visits and weddings. Lavish entertainments

with music and theater were planned for these occasions. At first mimes would perform on improvised stages wearing costumes similar to those worn in the mystery plays. As the Church gradually became politically less powerful, theatrical plays started using myths and legends as inspiration.

Around 1560 the *commedia dell'arte* troupes started to emerge in Italy, performing improvisational plays in temporary venues all throughout Europe. The plays presented stock characters – the lovers, masters, and servants – each one wearing a representative costume and mask. Initially the actors wore street clothes representing different Italian provinces and rustic personalities. The colors used were bold and the cuts were exaggerated, especially for the comic characters. Thus, the famous Arlecchino, an acrobat typically cast as the servant of an *inamorato* (lover) or *vecchio* (old man) usually wore cat–like masks, clothes made of color patches and carried sticks or wooden swords. Pantalone, a caricature of the Venetian merchant, old, rich, and mean, was dressed in a dark colored coat with red breeches, red stockings, and slippers. The defining aspect of his mask was the hooked nose and bushy eyebrows. Colombina, maid of the prima donna *inamorata*, was dressed similarly to Arlechino, but the colors could be used differently depending on the scenario. Colombina's costume always included an apron to show her status. The *inamorato* was the only one without a mask, as he had to express his feelings and had to be eloquent in declaring his love. *Commedia dell'arte* costumes were designed to allow the actors freedom of movement and at the same time be amusing through color, patterns, and style.

Theoretical Guidelines for Costume Design

Renaissance theater was, as previously discussed, an essential aspect of the cultural life of the court and one of the most popular means of entertainment. With the introduction of perspective scenery, machines and lighting, costume design became an art in itself. Costumes were planned ahead, first sketched on paper, which was then passed on to drapers and tailors who would complete the work. An early drawing, dated around 1540, shows the importance of costume design at the time (see Figure 5). In the margins there are notes addressed to the tailors, indicating the different colors and fabrics to be used. Thus, the first note refers to the jacket (number 3 in Figure 5), which needed to be dyed deep blue. The second note indicates that the lower part of the costume must be white with flowered decorations ("biancha tocca fiorita"), while the stockings must be pink ("calzetta incarnatina"). The three theatrical treatises of the Renaissance present some general guidelines for realizing effective costume designs.

De' Sommi on costumes

The third dialogue in De' Sommi's treatise includes a discussion on costume design. In his view, the main function of the costume was to emphasize beauty, revealing at the same time a visual characterization of the personages. The textures, colors, and cuts should be inspired by the literary text, following the indications offered by the poet. If there are no specific directions in the text, the designer could be more creative while respecting the conventions of propriety and verisimilitude. From the very beginning of the discussion Veridico (De' Sommi's literary self) states his preference for noble costumes, especially in tragedies and comedies.[155] He warns

[155] Leone de' Sommi, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1968); trans. in Nicoll, *The Development of the Theater*, 254-255.

against respecting the dressing rules proposed by Pollux, considering them to be too restrictive and outdated. [156]

The dialogue reflects his belief that the costumes should reflect the contemporary dress code emphasizing the class differentiation through the degree of lavishness for each costume. Thus, servants wore elegant clothing just like their masters, only less ornate and without any jewelry. In De' Sommi's opinion not even the lowest characters, such as misers or parasites, should wear ragged clothes, as they would destroy the beauty of the set.[157]

Even though the costumes were very similar to everyday clothing, they were specifically designed for the stage with the purpose of transforming the actor into the character he must play. It was the designer's duty to create the differentiation between characters through cut, color, and accessories. One of De' Sommi's favorite devices for achieving diversity are the use of hats. He offers the example of dressing four servants using different colors and styles for their uniforms: one dressed in white with a hat, one in red with a little cap on his head, the third in a costume of many colors, and the fourth servant with a velvet cap and a pair of knitted gloves. Cloaks, overcoats, feathers and other accessories allow the designer to create countless splendid outfits.

De' Sommi advises the designer against using dark colors, especially in comedy, believing the color affects the mood of the actor and of the audience.[158] The color scheme must also reflect the type of play that is presented. Thus, in comedy it is better to use bright colors and crisp fabrics that will visually match the mood of the play.

Remaining in the realm of comedy, De' Sommi goes on to discuss the benefits of exotic design. He believes that barbarian and extraordinary costumes, not present in typical comedies,

---

[156] Leone de' Sommi and Ferruccio Marotti, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1968), 48.
[157] Ibid., 48-49.
[158] Ibid., 49-50.

could bring charm and novelty to a performance, delighting the audience. These exotic elements need be used only in situations involving foreign or little known characters. To this effect he offers the example of a comedy he was directing at the time, stating he chose the action to take place in Constantinople in order to introduce exotic costumes which would add charm to the performance.[159]

De' Sommi's advice regarding costumes for tragedy is that the actors should never be dressed in modern style. The characters of tragedies are usually kings and nobleman, thus, their dress should be elegant and luxurious, similar to the style of the antique sculptures and paintings. De' Sommi particularly enjoys classical accessories and the weapons of gladiators and soldiers, which he considers to add a sense of grandeur to the performance.

Aware of the costs of such luxurious costumes, De' Sommi instructs the designer to be clever and make choices that reflect his creativity without requiring additional funding. Thus, clothes can be borrowed and restyled for the production. He also suggests the use of brocade and tassels from curtains and other house decorations to create elegant and unusual accessories.

De' Sommi is known for creating new models for pastoral costumes, his designs for shepherds and nymphs becoming standard for this genre. His belief that costumes are revelatory of character is obvious in these models which can be particularized through color, cut, and accessories. Thus, his shepherds wear sleeveless tunics covered with two animal skins. The legs and arms are bare if the actor is "young and handsome" or covered with flesh-colored textile, having socks or *cothurni* on their feet.[160] The designer is free to play with the color of the tunic, the types of skins used, the hair style, and make-up. Typical accessories for shepherds are a

[159] Ibid., 50.
[160] Ibid., 52.

walking stick and a flask or wooden bowl which can be diversified through ornamentation and carrying style. For nymphs he designed white sleeved blouses and sashed skirts with different colors and lengths. The tops could be decorated in different ways with colored silk ribbons, buttons, and pieces of jewelry. He notes that these accessories, when added to a freshly starched blouse, would reflect the stage lights, delighting the audience. Nymphs would always wear a cloak, gold sandals, or colored leather boots. Following literary tradition, nymphs had to be blonde with long hair, so De' Sommi designed special wigs for them, decorated with colored garlands, ribbons, or veils. Shepherdesses could wear the same costumes as the nymphs with the addition of a walking stick. Concluding his discussion on these costume designs, De' Sommi advises the director against using these models for other types of characters in the play. Should the play require the presence of animals on stage, De' Sommi recommends the use of live animals suitably costumed – with collars and coverlets matching the colors worn by their owners.[161]

De' Sommi's costume designs are meant to delight the audience, offering a beautiful visual effect and completing the characterization of the personages:

> I tell you especially that I make efforts to dress the actors always in as noble a fashion as is possible for me, but in such a manner that there is a sense of proportion among them, in view of the fact that the rich costume,…particularly in these times when pomp is at its highest peak, adds much reputation and beauty to comedies, and even more to tragedies. I would not hesitate to dress a servant in velvet or colored satin, as long as his master's costume was embroidered or decorated with gold, so rich that there would be maintained the proper proportion between them…. I do my utmost to dress the actors very differently from one another, and this is of great help, both in adding beauty and in facilitating the understanding of the plot.[162]

Angelo Ingegneri on costume design

---

[161] Ibid., 53-54.
[162] Ibid., 48.

Like his predecessor, Ingegneri dedicates a section of his treatise to costume design. He also advises directors against following the dress code imposed by Pollux, considering it to be restrictive and unsuitable for modern performances. The use of classical masks was also not recommended, as they were a barrier not only for the sound, but, more importantly, for human facial expression which he believed to be essential in performance. Another classical theater tradition was the use of padding under the costume to increase the size of the body. Ingegneri points out that this practice makes the actor's head appear too small in comparison to his body, creating an unpleasant visual effect.

Costumes should be created bearing in mind the age, gender, rank and profession of the characters. Thus, the most elegant and fashionable costumes were assigned to the highest ranking personages. Kings and other noble figures wore the most lavish cloaks and had the longest wigs and the most luxurious accessories. Clothing should also reflect the geographical region where the action takes place. Romans, for example would wear a *toga*, while Greeks had a *pallio*. Similarly, French and Spanish cloaks were shorter than the Polish or Hungarian ones. He notes that styles may differ even from one court to another – for example ample robes with elbow length sleeves were popular in Venice, a type of long robe called *il lucco* was used in Lucca and Florence, a short one (*la cappa corta*) in Genoa and a smaller one (*il robbone*) in Bologna.[163]

He considers that costumes should be representative for each genre: luxurious for tragedy, simple for comedy, and humble for pastoral plays. Like De' Sommi, Ingegneri states his preference for a more elegant design in any type of costume, from servant and animals to kings and nobleman.

---

[163] Ingegneri, 29.

In Ingegneri's view, a king's costume had to include at all times a crown and a scepter as these were the ultimate symbols of royalty. It is noteworthy that in designing the costumes Ingegneri finds his inspiration not only in the text of the drama, but also in secondary sources such as paintings or sculptures of the time. Thus, his Oedipus is wearing a gold robe draped around his body in the Greek manner with a purple mantle. This image has its roots in the paintings of the time, where savior figures were dressed in gold colored vestments.

In his *Progetto* for the performance of *Edipo tiranno* (Teatro Olimpico, Vincenza, 1585), Ingegneri reveals several other characteristics of costume design he considered important. [164] Each one of his characters is particularized through a monochromatic color scheme, a technique that enhances the visual aspect of the performance. Thus, Jocasta's dominant color is also gold, the color of royalty, wearing a gold under slip and a long-sleeved robe finished with cuffs and gold buttons. Creon's main color is black and his hat, trimmed in gold and silver, is the only pointer towards his social status. The caps (either blue or red) are the unifying element for the members of the chorus, as they all wear different colored robes. The priest is the only one to wear the color of purity, white, with grey-white long hair and beard (see Figure 6).

Ingegneri's choice of colors for the wigs and hair pieces shows the same interest in creating a sense of visual uniformity. In his set of *Edipo tiranno* all the elders have grey-white wigs and all the children and young pages have curly golden hair. Female servants have their hair braided at the back while male servants have short hair and wear caps. Unity is present also in the entourage surrounding the royal couple, with Edipo being guarded by archers dressed in Turkish manner (see Figure 7).

---

[164] Ingegneri's *Progetto* is part of Gallo, F. Alberto. *La prima rappresentazione al Teatro Olimpico Con i progetti e le relazioni dei contemporanei* (Milano: Il polifilo, 1973), 15-17.

Both his treatise and his *Progetto* show Ingegneri's attention to detail in designing the costumes for all the characters involved in the production, principal, secondary or supernumeraries. In his opinion, their wardrobe and accessories have to be carefully constructed to enhance the visual spectacle and support the psychological traits of the characters. The designer should be able to create evocative and exquisite costumes through the intelligent use of colors, textures, and cuts.

Il Corago ideas on costume design

Along the same lines, the author of *Il Corago* dedicates a whole chapter (*Degli abiti*, chapter 20) to the discussion of costume design. Going back in time, he looks at the ancient tradition of costumes as described by Plautus, Pollux, and Terence, pointing out the merits and the drawbacks of using it in modern productions. He approves the use of masks and typical costumes in the *commedia dell'arte* plays, considering them effective and meaningful. However, he advises directors to use them less in other genres, as they obscure the actors' facial expressions and impede the projection of the voice. In general, he recommends directors to research the inherited style of costume design, as clothing should conform to the traditions of the country and time period in which the play is set. For the newly born type of sung drama he states his preference for elegant and luxurious designs that fit the more grandiose characters of the genre. Thus, royal characters, heroes, and deities should wear long, elegant robes embroiled with precious stones and jewelry, leather boots and richly adorned accessories. He points out that feathers should not be used for these kinds of characters except in military scenes, where helmets

with feathers were traditionally required. He stresses that feathers should not be too large, as they would impede the actors' movements.[165]

Like De' Sommi and Ingegneri, the author instructs designers to always respect the indications provided by the poet in the text. If no specific requirements can be found, costumes should represent the tradition of the geographical zone where the play is set. An elegant but simpler style should be used for shepherds, nymphs and other rustic characters. Shepherds would wear skins embellished with gold and roses and richly adorned leather boots. They all must wear beautifully ornate hats and use the traditional walking sticks. Nymphs also should be richly attired in long robes and embroidered veils, with flowers in their flowing tresses. The author stresses that their slippers must be even more beautiful than those of the shepherds.

For the chorus members he advises the use of elegant robes and matching caps. He notes that it would not be inappropriate to use the coat-of-arms colors of the court they belong to – such as red and white for the house of Austria, yellow and blue for the house of Farnese and so on.[166] Whatever the colors used for such groups, they must be carefully coordinated to create a superb visual effect.

Costumes must also be designed to allow the actors to move freely. Special attention should be given to dancers, whose feet need to be uncovered and free. Their shoes should be light and simple, so as to not impede their movement. Similarly, soldiers should not be dressed in the antique type of armor, wearing instead breast plates, arm bracelets, visors, and gauntlets. Their shoes should be simple and without high heels so that they do not slip on stage. Their

---

[165] Fabbri and Pompilio, *Il Corago*, 113.
[166] Ibid., 114.

costumes had to be unified in color and style, using different accessories, such as different hats, to distinguish between individual characters.[167]

The author closes the chapter with a final set of recommendations regarding costume design. Like Ingegneri, he was aware of the funds needed for a spectacular wardrobe, so he advises designers to show their creativity using the least amount of funds. Depending on the time of the performance and the type of lighting, different textures and colors could be used. He notes that daylight usually amplifies any defects in the design such as cut, construction, and quality of fabric. Less expensive materials could be used in performances lit with lamps, torches, or candles which create a softer light and enhance the beauty of the outfits. In his view, there are three major aspects which define the beauty of clothing: the cut, the finish and, more importantly, the color. Like De' Sommi and Ingegneri, he considers primary colors to be more effective on stage, noting that white, black, red, yellow, blue, and green can be easily coordinated and combined to create a strong visual impression. Clothes will appear more luxurious when embellished with sequins, pearls and other jewelry. Designers should always consider the type of character for whom they create the costume, distinguishing between regular street apparel and noble outfits. He offers the example of a noble woman dressed in a black under slip covered by a white or yellow robe, indicating that is a very bold and elegant combination but that this would be shocking as a street outfit. The same is true for a green cape over a red dress.[168]

---

[167] Ibid., 114.
[168] Ibid., 115.

He concludes the discussion with final advice for directors. In order to create a harmonious production, the director needs to express the visual impressions he wishes to achieve, so that the designer can translate it into the appropriate colors, textures and cuts.

Practical Examples of Costumes for the Medici Theater Festivals

The theatrical spectacles of the Medici court were thoroughly documented, unlike other similar events in Italy. Thanks to the family's preoccupation with cultural development, there are extensive records describing in detail the performances offered for several important social occasions. One of the first documented events was the 1539 wedding of Cosimo I to Eleonora of Toledo. The festivities included a performance of *Trionfo*, an allegorical revue, in which a formal homage was paid to the guest of honor. Giorgio Vasari mentions in his work (*Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*) that the costumes for the performance were designed by Tribolo based on Giovan Battista Strozzi the Elder's ideas:

> Under the direction of Tribolo, likewise, for the comedy that was performed, Aristotile da San Gallo executed marvelous scenery, being truly most excellent in such things, as will be told in his Life; and for the costumes in the interludes, which were the work of Giovan Battista Strozzi, who had charge of the whole comedy, Tribolo himself made the most pleasing and beautiful inventions that it is possible to imagine in the way of vestments, buskins, head-dresses, and other wearing apparel. These things were the reason that the Duke afterwards availed himself of Tribolo's ingenuity in many fantastic masquerades, as in that of the bears, in a race of buffaloes, in the masquerade of the ravens, and in others.[169]

Pier Francesco Giambullari offers a lengthy and detailed description of the costumes in his book *Apparato et feste nelle noze dello illustrissimo Signor duca di Firenze e della duchessa, sua consorte* (*Scenery and festivities for the wedding of the most illustrious Lord Duke of Florence and the Duchess, his consort*). According to him the spectacle was opened by Apollo,

---

[169] Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*, accessed April 7, 2011.

who appeared dressed in crimson taffeta and silk decorated with gold, with a rainbow-colored belt and a laurel wreath on his head. The Muses' costumes were just as colorful and luxurious. Thalia was dressed in blue silk, with a girdle of olive branches and thyme blossoms and ornamental bees in her hair. Euterpe's dress was yellow-green, with a snake encircling her waste, a hyena skin across her chest and marjoram flowers in her hair. Giambullari notes in a similar manner the details of all the costumes, jewelry and other accessories used in performance.[170] The *intermezzi* for Landi's comedy *Il Commodo* demanded an even more creative approach to costumes. In her first appearance on stage, Aurora was dressed in a red silk costume with gold and silver stripes. Her feet were adorned with roses instead of regular shoes and she had rainbow colored wings. In the pastoral scene inserted between the first acts the shepherds wore rustic costumes – two made of bark, two of goatskins died in red and one made of real birds whose wings were painted in many colors.

Historical documents note that 286 costumes were made for the *intermezzi* of *La Pellegrina,* the main theatrical event for the Medici wedding of 1589. Rossi describes in detail not only the sets, but also the lavish outfits designed for both the play and the *intermezzi*. [171] According to him, Buontalenti found his inspiration for some of his costume designs in the literary texts of the antiquity. Thus, the costume of Necessity followed the description of Horace in the *Ode to Fortuna*: "Necessity before thee stalks, /And holds within her iron grip / Hot lead and wedges, nails like baulks, / And clamps no human hand can rip."[172] She wears a grey satin robe with silver embroidery and a cypress crown.

---

[170] Nagler, *Theater festivals of the Medici*, 7.
[171] Pirrotta, *Music and theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 381.
[172] Horace and W. E. Gladstone, *The Odes of Horace* (London: J. Murray, 1894), Ode 35.

Plato provided the image of the Parcae, who were dressed in white and wore headbands. The costume for Armonia Doria was, however, inspired by Bardi's vision of this majestic character. She had a dark green dress embellished with gold ornaments; her girdle was set in precious stones and she had seven jewels on her crown (see Figure 8).

A unique original document, *Il libro di Conti della Commedia. La sartoria teatrale di Ferdinando I dei Medici nel 1589*, preserved in the Florentine archives, contains a register of the fabrics used, the tailors' wages and other significant details for the play. It notes that all roles were performed by male singers, with the exception of the Armonia Doria. To appear more feminine, men had to wear cardboard breast and chests fitted to their bodies. It also mentions that tailors were instructed to create the feathers for the sirens' costumes out of canvas, since real plumes would have been too expensive.

The preference for bold colors is obvious in the costumes of the sixteen *hamadryads* (mythological characters). They wore satin one-piece costumes colored in iridescent hues: dark blue, red, purple, white, green yellow, sky blue, and orange. Special attention was given to the design of headdresses for the play, as can be seen in Buontalenti's separate study (see Figure 9). Rossi's description mentions the Delphic couples of the third *intermezzo*, each wearing pseudo-Greek robes different both in color and in ornamentation. A sketch of one couple drawn by Buontalenti shows the intricate costume design (see Figure 10). Composer Jacopo Peri appears in another sketch, dressed in his performance costume as Arion in the fifth *intermezz*o of *La Pellegrina* (see Figure 11).

One of the most grandiose affairs of the century was the celebration of Maria de' Medici's wedding to Henri IV of France. The main events were the premiers of the two operas – Peri's *Euridice* and Caccini's *Il Rapimento di Cefalo*. Both spectacles were described by

Michelangelo Buonarroti, and mentioned in several other historical documents.[173] The sets for *Euridice* were considered simple as the opera did not require the use of machines. The accounts mention, however, the beauty of the sets with "magnificent forests" and praise the use of lighting in the performance. The documents also offer details about the singers and instrumentalists involved in the performance, noting the exquisite voices of the primadonna, Vittoria Archilei, and of Peri himself, who sang the role of Orfeo. The descriptions, however, do not offer details about the costumes, simply mentioning the singers' costumes were magnificent, elegant, splendidly colored, and beautifully ornate.

Buontalenti was also in charge of the sets and costumes for Caccini's opera. For this opera, spectacular effects and complex machinery amazed the audience throughout the performance, leaving them spellbound as mountains, clouds and mythological creatures mysteriously appeared and disappeared on stage. Buonarroti's *Descrizione* presents in detail the scene changes and the magical effects achieved through lighting and machinery. The singers' costumes were luxurious, but only a few of them are described in his text. The first to draw his attention was the costume of Poetry, with veils in four colors hanging from the girdle, a sock on one foot, and a *cothurnus* on the other. The audience admired her costume as she slowly descended from the mountain proudly displaying her outfit. Buonarroti doesn't describe Cefalo's costume, only mentioning in passing that his attire was more sumptuous than the other hunters' clothes. Aurora, however, made an impression with her iridescent white robe and golden wings. She was probably wearing a special type of make-up, as Buonarroti notes that her face was shiny. Another costume that remained in his memory was the Night's outfit. She appeared

---

[173] Cesare Tinghi's letter to the Duke of Modena, printed in Angelo Solerti, *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla Corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637*(New York: B. Blom, 1968), 27 and Peri's foreword to Euridice, printed in Angelo Solerti, *Gli albori del melodramma* (Milano: R. Sandron, 1904), v 2, 110.

dressed in black veils, wearing a blue coat spangled with stars, with black wings extending from her shoulders.

According to Buonarroti the special effects and the marvelous machinery ensured the success of the new opera. The production was, no doubt, spectacular from all points of view, the most lavish in the series of entertainments mounted to celebrate the event.

The three treatises, together with the numerous descriptions of court entertainments, offer a compelling image of the Renaissance theatrical costumes. The defining trend of costume design was the tendency towards luxurious, elegant outfits and extravagant accessories. Designers integrated bold monochromatic color schemes for a more effective visual impact. Stage costumes were carefully conceived to reveal the specific traits of the character. Special attention was given to fabrics, textures, and cut. Even though verisimilitude was an important factor in theatrical spectacles of the time, costumes had to be grandiose in order to reflect the magnificence of the court.

Chapter V

Staging and Directing in Late Renaissance

Introduction

Most historians dismiss the idea of stage direction before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as there is little proof of the existence of professional directors before this period. Before the rise of the modern director, opera staging was in the hands of its composer, librettist, conductor, an experienced singer, a troupe's resident poet, or a stage-manager, who occasionally had an instruction-book courtesy of the publisher. However, several treatises suggest that in certain theaters of the early seventeenth century there was a person who had a few tasks in common with the modern director's, but also with the twentieth century impresario, movement coach, and stage-manager. He was known as the *choragus* or *corago*; and his office, skills, and responsibilities were described at length in *Il Corago*, an anonymous treatise written in 1628. There are two other treatises discussing the matter of staging and direction of the first operas: *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (*Four Dialogues on Stage Representation*, 1565) by Leone De' Sommi, professional director at the court of Mantua; and *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (*On scenic poetry and on the manner of representation of dramatic plays*, 1598) by Angelo Ingegneri, who directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*Edipo tiranno*) in 1585 at the Teatro Olimpico in Vincenza.

A closer look at these sources reveals that modern stage direction has its roots in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century theatrical art. Authors of the above treatises addressed several essential aspects of a successful theatrical production, discussing the dramatic text, casting, acting, costume and stage design as well as the use of stage machines.

Leone De' Sommi - *Quattro Dialoghi in Materia di Rappresentazioni Sceniche* (1566)

De' Sommi's treatise is considered to be among the first accounts of directing practices of the time. He was an important figure in the theatrical life of Mantua in the late 1500s, writing plays and supervising all aspects in their production – set design, costumes, choreography, and stage direction. One of the most important productions he coordinated was Guarini's play *Il Pastor Fido* in 1584. Even though the premiere of the play was postponed until 1598, his costume and stage design as well as his directing were maintained.[174]

De' Sommi's treatise is designed as a series of dialogues between Veridico – *maestro dello spettacolo* (the master of the show) and two noblemen, Santino and Massimiano. He addresses several important theatrical aspects: choosing the right play and actors; working with the actors; designing the costumes and sets; lighting and staging of both the play and the *intermedii* to obtain a unified spectacle, "che tutta insieme sia poi un corpo bene organizzato et unito, non senza polsi ne senza spirito" ("that together the whole is a well-organized and unified body lacking neither pulse nor spirit").[175] In his view, the director is the most important person in the production of a theatrical spectacle, in charge of every single detail of the performance. His treatise has the purpose of providing a documentation of the performance practice and it is written from his point of view as a director.

Casting

Thus, after a lengthy discussion on choosing the right play, De' Sommi moves on, in the third dialogue, to the next important step; casting, emphasizing that choosing a good actor is

---

[174] Ahuva Belkin, "Leone De' Sommi's Pastoral Conception and the Design of the Shepherd's Costumes for the Mantuan Production of Guarini's Il Pastor Fido," *Assaph: Studies in the Theater*. C, no. 3(1986): 59-74.
[175] Leone De' Sommi and Ferruccio Marotti, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*(Milano: Il Polifilo, 1968); translated in C.A. Blanchard-Rothmuller, "Four Dialogues on Stage Representation: A Translation with Introduction and Notes," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1973), 85.

even more important than having a fine play.[176] When choosing the actors he takes into consideration the physical and vocal qualities of the actor, as well as his inclination towards comedy or tragedy. In his view, a good actor must also be "ubidiente" (obeying), willing to comply with the director's indications. He also indicates that an actor should have a powerful voice and be cast accordingly – a heavier voice for older characters and a lighter one for younger or female characters. De' Sommi also considered that different roles required specific physical qualities – for example lovers had to be handsome, soldiers well-built, kings tall and the negative characters had to be overweight or have some sort of physical defects. Make-up and hair pieces were used to complete the image of the character the actor was portraying. As soon as the roles were assigned, the preparation for the show could begin. De' Sommi's *Dialogues* shed light on the rehearsal process, pointing out the importance of the director, who was in charge of every aspect from scheduling, organizing and conducting the rehearsals to deciding whether they could be open to visitors or not.

Poetic text

A very novel practice in sixteenth-century theater, possibly introduced by De' Sommi himself was the first reading of the play. The purpose of this was to familiarize all the actors, including the children, with the subject of the play. A discussion of the characters would follow the reading and Veridico would share his interpretation of each character, which would ultimately shape the production as a whole. The parts were then distributed and the actors were required to learn them before the following rehearsal.

---

[176] Leone De' Sommi and Ferruccio Marotti, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1968), 39.

Throughout the rehearsal period he would instruct the actors on how to articulate each word and how to project their voices in order to make the text clear. The director is also in charge of the actor's movement and gestures, determining what would be the best way to interpret the character and impress the audience.

Similar to today's theater practice, the final rehearsals were technical ones, where the final touches were added to the performance, testing the lighting and the machines, adjusting the costumes and make-up and rehearsing with the actual sets. De' Sommi mentions he has always reviewed his checklist and made sure everything was in order.[177]

The Italian theater tradition inherited from the early sixteenth century dictated that rehearsals were supervised by the author. Later on, around mid-century, *commedia dell'arte* rehearsals were supervised by the lead actor or the director of the company.[178] In time the rehearsal period became longer – as it was the case for *Il pastor fido* with rehearsals directed by De' Sommi for a period of over a year. In 1585 Ingegneri had the *Edipo tiranno* rehearsed for a year and Monteverdi's musical dramas required a period of rehearsal of at least six months under the direction of a *corago*. De' Sommi's treatise clearly states the importance of the director in late Renaissance Italian theater, where the *corago* organized and conducted the rehearsals from the very first reading to the final performance.

Rhetoric, with its Five Canons – *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocution* (style), *memoria* (memory), and action (delivery) – was the starting point for acting in the sixteenth century. De' Sommi's approach to acting seems to be somewhat outside the tradition, as he demands his actors to deliver the line in a smoother, more natural way, with less rhetorical

---

[177] Ibid., 37.
[178] Andrea Perrucci et al., *A treatise on acting, from memory and by improvisation* (1699) = *Dell'arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all'improviso* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

accents.[179] He instructs the actor to portray the character with gestures that would be in harmony with the dramatic situation and the feelings of the character at any given point. According to him an actor must create a perfect illusion so that the drama becomes real to the audience.[180]

De' Sommi also offers advice on dynamics, pronunciation, articulation, rhythm, tempo, and tone of speech. Thus, for example he considers that the actor must avoid speaking too fast and also avoid dropping the voice in unnecessary places, saving that effect for the conclusion of the sentences.[181] The tone of speech must shift according to the emotional changes throughout the play. As in the case of gestures and movement, Veridico indicates that speech must sound natural, with intonation, pauses, and stresses of certain words the character would use in normal life. He believes that the text should sound spontaneous and improvisational.[182]

Movement and gestures

Although he believes that the rhetorical tradition of postures and gestures is a useful tool in performance, De' Sommi encourages the actors to go beyond those techniques and find effects that would give personality and "spirit" to the delivery. Thus, for portraying a servant, a good actor should be able to suddenly dance for joy or pull out his hair in grief. Similarly, for playing a fool, the standard interpretation of providing the wrong answers can be enhanced by the actor by adding other foolish actions like looking for fleas or catching flies.[183] Thus, in his vision, any type of character can be improved through the addition of effective movements and seemingly spontaneous gestures suggested by the dramatic text.

---

[179] De' Sommi, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* , 41, 48.
[180] Ibid., 38, 50.
[181] Ibid., 40.
[182] Ibid., 41, 48.
[183] Ibid., 41, 42.

Further on he mentions that the actor must remain at all times agile and flexible in his body movement and never allow himself to become stiff or awkward. The posture, the use of arms and hands should appear natural, and more importantly, any movement on stage should be justified by the dramatic text.[184] However, he recommends that movement and speech not happen at the same time and considers that stillness is necessary for the delivery of the text. At the same time De' Sommi warns actors of the dangers of artificial posing, such as placing a hand on the hip or on the sword. He cautions the actor to never remain in the same position for a long period of time, finding a different gesture for each part of the dramatic speech.[185] For lengthy passages De' Sommi suggests that the actor leave his hands relaxed in a natural way, only using them when the text suggests it, without holding them up or folding them for a long period of time.[186]

Theatrical performance guide

Even though none of De' Sommi's workbooks for any of his productions have survived, his treatise suggests that they would have been very detailed, involving all aspects of the production. In the last of the four dialogues, De' Sommi gives details on several aspects of organizing a performance. In his view, the beginning of the show is essential in creating the ideal atmosphere for the audience to be swept into the play. He uses a front curtain to obscure the set until all the lights are ready to reveal the perspective painting of the sets. When everything is in place, including the actors, the trumpets and flutes announce the beginning of the show and the curtain is dropped into the pit.

---

[184] Ibid., 47, 48.
[185] Ibid., 47.
[186] Ibid., 50.

De' Sommi's ideal in staging a performance was to create a show in which all the aspects –the text, the sets, the lights, the machines and the actors – harmonically blend to create a complete show. Thus, he advises the director to have a proper prologue and *intermedii* for the play, both of which must always be related to either the plot of the play or the occasion of the theatrical performance. He offers examples to this effect, suggesting that if the event is a coronation of a new political figure, an appropriate *intermedio* would present a tale of a God ruling the heavens. The Prologue could then be a speech on good government, matching the occasion for the spectacle. He also warns that *intermedii* should always be chosen with care, avoiding, for example, fantastic ones for comedies, because not only would they distract the audience from the plot of the play, but also, through their novelty, they would diminish the impact of the play itself. According to him, supernatural *intermedii* are permissible in tragedies and pastoral dramas, as the characters in these genres include ghosts, furies, and other such personages.

De' Sommi's vision of a perfect theatrical performance is the seamless blend of all the elements of the staging: sets, lights, sound effects, machines, entrances and exits, costumes and acting. To this effect he devises a director's workbook; a concept which shows a critical shift in the Italian theater of the mid sixteenth century. He describes his director's "guide" in the third part of his treatise, considering it to be an important tool in the production of a show. He divides it into five elements: property chart, costume plot, scene breakdown, character entrance, and cue line chart.[187]

As suggested by its name, the property chart is a list of all the things used by each character in each scene, as well as where they are located backstage and when and how they

[187] Ibid., 54.

should be moved on and off stage. This is still a very important element in today's performances, as it is well known that a missing prop can destroy the show, throwing an actor out of action and breaking the rhythm of the scene and therefor the verisimilitude of the whole show.

De' Sommi also carefully organized the costumes and make-up needed for each character. At the time there were not many cases of costume changes for an actor, but the list helped them locate their pieces and all the accessories for the performance. There was also a dress rehearsal in which De' Sommi checked that everybody was comfortable in their costumes and made final alterations. The scene breakdown noted the scenes, the characters, and the order of appearance in the play, while the cue chart indicated the first lines spoken by the actor and the place from which each one would enter and exit the stage. These lists would facilitate easier entrances and smooth transition between scenes. There were also lists of cues for lighting and special effects, as De' Sommi did not like leaving anything to chance.

Angelo Ingegneri - *Della Poesia Rappresentativa e Del Modo di Rappresentare le Favole Sceniche* (1598)

Ingegneri's treatise is a two-part book, which similarly to De' Sommi's work, presents his theories on drama and directing, using his production of *Edipo tiranno* to illustrate them. Ingegneri's book represents, as Maria Luisa Doglio notes in the introduction of the treatise, a record of the sixteenth-century theatrical developments and shows the transition from Mannerism to Baroque. [188] The elements that were characteristic of Mannerist theater - elaborate conceits, multiplicity of plot turns, and variety of situations – evolved, unifying all the arts. This was the time when theater became a multimedia experience, with scene changes, lights and décor

[188] Ingegneri, XI.

that was designed to hide the machines and draw the public into a magic world. Ingegneri's treatise and his *Progetto* for the *Edipo tiranno* reflect all these tendencies. It was the director's duty to unify the arts, harmonizing the color, lights, mood, scent, and images to create a homogenous performance.

Comparing Ingegneri's book with De' Sommi's treatise, one can find many similarities but also significant differences. They both discuss the importance of the text, indicating that the literary intentions should not be separated from the delivery in performance, but on the contrary, the former should determine the latter. However, while De' Sommi considers the poet to be the perfect director, Ingegneri believes that in order to create a successful production the director needs to not only be familiar with the text, but also with the technical aspects of directing a play. As a director he offers the poet advice regarding the rules of composition, such as, for example, how to write an ideal soliloquy taking into consideration how excessive ornamentation would create problems for the actor and even confuse the audience. Ingegneri dedicates the first half of his treatise to discussing several composition rules for writing a good play. The second part of his book deals exclusively with theatrical production, defining two phases: preparation of the performance text by the director; and the realization of the performance.

Preparation

Ingegneri believed that the director should study the text carefully, paying attention to the smallest details, since it was the starting point for all the decisions involving the production. The story of the play and the history of the personages would provide the director with the information needed to instruct the actors on their character's feelings, motivations, and goals. His approach to acting and staging was very similar to the modern day director's. He believed that

each gesture, movement and line have to be understood by the audience, and needed to be supported by all the other theatrical devices – sets, costumes, make-up and lights.

He advised the actors against displaying movements, poses, or vocal inflections which were not justified by the text, so as to not distract the audience from the action of the play. He preferred simplicity in acting, with subtle gestures that, in his view, were more meaningful and had a greater impact on the audience.[189]

Ingegneri understood that it was the director's responsibility to extract from the text the most important ideas and explain them to the actors so that they could portray them on stage in a coherent and meaningful way. In his view, the actor was the key element in any theatrical show, and all the other devices were conceived to serve him, as he alone, through his voice and movements, could deliver the spirit of the play. This concept represented a turning moment in the history of theater, shifting the focus to the actor and his abilities to express the message of the text.

Ingegneri pays special attention to the events prior to the action on stage, considering that they shape the characters' personality and behavior. He studies not only the distant past, but also the action that might take place in between the acts, which determines the characters' evolution and makes their development seamless. The director has to understand those circumstances by thoroughly studying the text scene by scene, so that no detail should be lost. He considers this to be the most important phase in staging a play and advises the director to analyze the plot, the

[189] Alberto F. Gallo, *La prima rappresentazione al Teatro Olimpico Con i progetti e le relazioni dei contemporanei* Milano: Il polifilo, 1973), 15.

time, and place of the action, the words, and even the rhythmical structure of the phrases. All of these will give a better understanding of the substance of the play.[190]

He uses as an example of text analysis in his work on *Edipo tiranno*. Thus, he starts with presenting the events prior to the opening scene: the circumstances of Oedipus' birth; his adoption by Polybius; his encounter with Laius; the arrival in Thebes; the solving of the riddle and his subsequent marriage to Jocasta. He continues to describe the action in act I to the point where Oedipus requests help from the oracle, which he considers to be where the tragedy begins. A successful production of this play should reflect all these elements of historical background in order to faithfully present the crisis of the city and Oedipus' desperation. Ingegneri draws a plan of the main events of the play, which will serve as the basis for his direction.[191] He divides the play into twelve sections, breaking down the text starting from the given division into acts, on to gradually smaller units and finally arriving at individual speeches and entrances and exits of the characters. As he continues to study of these units, the director begins to have a deeper understanding of the plot, the conflicts and the characters, the rising and falling of the action, its pace and internal rhythm. The characters and their innermost desires, their actions and reactions become more and more clear in the director's mind. He becomes aware of the emotional shifts in each character from one scene to another and how the changes affect the overall atmosphere of the play.

Ingegneri's divides the first act of *Edipo tiranno* into four parts, establishing that the climax occurs in the middle of the act, when Creon arrives and delivers the news that the murderer of the former King Laius must be found and expelled from the city, in order for the

---

[190] Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa*, 23-25.
[191] Ibid., 26.

plague to pass. This means that he needs to create on stage a tense and foreboding atmosphere up to that very point, so that the event has its intended impact on the audience. To show how the text can provide significant details for staging the play, Ingegneri provides his analysis of the first scene, the disclosure of the plague. From this section of the text he deduces that the action takes place early in the morning in Thebes. The presence of the priest and the people dressed in mourning clothes indicate grief as the general atmosphere of the scene.

The text mentions people gathering at the four main devotional sites of the city. Ingegneri places three of them off-stage and only the central square that leads to Oedipus' palace is on stage. The central square includes two altars, which have stairs which can also be used as seats. The costumes are ceremonial and a scent of incense floats from the altars into the hall. From off-stage prayers can be heard as the people gather in the square and Oedipus appears on stage. While reading the text, Ingegneri continues to imagine added details, further elaborating the set, the costumes, the placement of the actors, the lights, and the sounds that he imagines when reading the text. Through this approach he believes the staging of the play will be realistic and have a greater impact on the audience.

This process will also dictate the emotional behavior for each character in light of the events described in the text, revealing to the audience a believable, life-like personage. Thus, Ingegneri proceeds to analyzing Oedipus in practical terms, pointing out his emotions, intentions, goals, and manner of thought. In the prologue Oedipus appears as a benevolent king, ready to talk to his people and provide support. The actor must then use a tone of voice and gestures that will show his goodness and warmth, but at the same time reflect his position as king. The same procedure must be observer in the actions and vocal inflection of the Priest, who, however, needs to be humble when addressing the king.

Ingegneri advises the director to observe the changes that happen between the acts, not only in the general mood, but also within each character. Thus, Oedipus becomes more anxious and impatient as the second act begins, just as Creon, who was calm in the first act, becomes angry and hurt in act III. If constructed correctly the tension between them would build up progressively to the point where they become enraged and engage in a public quarrel in the same act. Between acts III and IV, Oedipus' state of anxiety mounts and Jocasta's fear becomes more obvious as she begins her prayer to Apollo. It is essential that Jocasta's grief and worries in act IV are shown through gestures and acting, in order to prepare for the emotional impact of the final act. The moment of recognition must be expressed brilliantly, with both Oedipus' and Jocasta's exits showing their shock when learning the truth about Oedipus' identity. The shift from inner anxiety to horror must happen gradually in order for the suicide and blinding to touch the audience. Ingegneri believed that each action on stage should have a cause in the text and be logical in the context of the play, justified by the character's motivations and goals from one scene to the next. He believed it to be the director's duty to instruct the actors on the play as a whole as well as on specific actions within each scene and individual lines so that they can portray realistic characters through their voices and gestures.

Although he does not define it as such, Ingegneri's approach to *Edipo tiranno* is a model for directors to follow in the process of staging any type of play, whether tragedy, comedy or pastoral. Ingegneri believed that all the information for staging a play can be found in the text and thus, the director needs to discover the essence of the tale within the text in order to express it in his own style. The result is unique, as the resulting production is particular to the director's imagination, the aspect of the play on which he chooses to focus, and of course, on the input of all the artists involved in the production.

Production

If the first phase in preparing the production was studying the text of the play, the second phase is the actual production. This is when the director, together with the other artists involved in the production – actors, designers, technicians – will synthesize the information gathered from the reading to create a harmonious production. Ingegneri uses a three-part plan composed of *apparato*, *azione,* and *musica*. The first part involves the visual aspects of the production. Ingegneri believes that the sets, as well as the actors, must resemble as much as possible the places and the characters they represent in the play. In his view, the sets should reflect the space where the action unfolds as described in the text and should include a significant landmark of that particular city, so that the audience can easily recognize it. Thus, the set of a tragedy that takes place in Rome should present one of the major buildings of the city such as il Campidoglio, il Palazzo Maggiore, or one of the Roman temples. Similarly, for a comedy he recommends that the set show the Pantheon or the Tiber and for a pastoral play an elaborate rustic perspective with mountains, rivers, and forests. Respecting the classical rules for staging a tragedy, Ingegneri believed that two altars should be used in any set designed for tragedies, one dedicated to Bacchus and one to the protector of the city. The two altars would not only have a decorative function, but they would also help create the somber atmosphere of this genre through the use of incense which is easily dispersed into the air.[192]

The next important step is, in Ingegneri's view, choosing the actors, an action that he approaches from a visual point of view.[193] Thus, for example, a king in a tragic play should be tall, physically attractive, and dressed in the most beautiful costumes to suggest his grandeur.

---

[192] Ibid., 26.
[193] Ibid., 27.

This is based on his opinion that the king was the most intelligent and noble figure in the community and his appearance should match these qualities.

Ingegneri, however, felt that the theatrical talent of an actor was more important than his appearance. Thus, should an actor have the dramatic qualities required by the part but be less gifted physically, the director should hide those imperfections by using hair-pieces, *cothurni* (high heels) and well-designed costumes. The male actors cast in female parts had to have feminine facial features and be skillfully costumed to create the perfect character.

In casting any play, Ingegneri advises the director to take into consideration the class and rank of the characters. Noble characters should be played by be the tallest actors, while the lower-class characters should be the shortest. In pastoral plays, the shortest figures on stage would be the shepherds and the nymphs since they represented the lowest social rank. He advised the director to not only seek the right actors for the specific parts, but also to use other theatrical resources in order to create the illusion of rank and power. He recommended the use of shoes that varied in height, proper costumes and, more importantly, intelligent blocking of the play. All these devices would compensate for any physical imperfections of the actors.

Ingegneri also offers advice for successful depictions of ghosts, which became very popular in theatrical performances of the time. He considered the placement of the creature on stage to be extremely important, and approached this matter from a visual point of view. The ghost should be placed up-stage near the point of perspective of the set to make it appear gigantic in stature compared to the diminished buildings. A dark veil could be used to cover its arms and legs, making it appear to be floating while in motion.[194] The ghost should move while it speaks and disappear as soon as the speech is over, consumed by fire. For safety reasons, the veil should

[194] Ibid., 30.

be soaked in ethanol (aqua vitae) so that the fire would always be under control. The fire should be set as far away from the audience as possible to camouflage the trick of the disappearance. The ghost could be represented by a machine, or, as Ingegneri preferred, by an actor. To make it move smoothly, the ghost should be wheeled on stage on a cart maneuvered by a technician. The actor should be dressed in a long dress which could be made to appear larger or smaller through the use of an umbrella underneath the garment. The actor should use a rough tone, making horrible and unnatural sounds, preferably on the same pitch.

Regarding the actual staging of a play, Ingegneri advises the director to first address the matter of entering and exiting the stage with fluidity, not allowing any confusion on or off stage.[195] Ingegneri wants form, rhythm and space to come together to create a visual effect that perfectly expresses the text. Creating an organized movement was extremely important in scenes involving numerous characters, not only for maintaining the theatrical illusion for the audience, but also for the safety of the actors as they move on and off stage.

Ingegneri offered two solutions for blocking the chorus scenes in a tragedy, suggesting two formations that would have a strong visual impact on the audience. One is used for the set of musical odes, for which he has the actors entering from stage left moving in a measured rhythm to form a semicircle on stage, a configuration that he would use repeatedly throughout the play.[196] The second method is preferred for crowd scenes that require interaction and dialogue. In these situations, Ingegneri recommends blocking the ensemble in a way that creates the impression of real-life, informal interaction. For this effect, he emphasizes the importance of form, line, and shape, as well as the spatial relationship between the actors and the sets. He

---

[195] Ibid., 29.
[196] Ibid., 29, 32.

warns the director to stage carefully the entrances and exits of the characters so that their faces remain visible to the audience at all times. If instructed correctly, they would create the illusion of a crowd moving continuously in and out of the set. To prove his point, he offers the example of his "marvelous" staging of three ensemble scenes from *Edipo tiranno.* The scenes involved 28, 25 and six characters, and he attributing their success to his skillful methods of directing.[197]

To help the actors move to their specific positions on stage, Ingegneri divided the floor into geometrical shapes painted in different colors carefully chosen to complement the scenery. This not only made it easy for him to direct the actors to their places, but also allowed them to move smoothly without having to count steps. If correctly timed, the movement on stage would create a wonderful visual effect for the audience. Sabbatini discusses in his treatise this manner of painting the stage, warning that because of all the traffic on stage, the marks could be easily erased, so the painting of the floor had to be done shortly before the performance.[198]

For the actual direction of the acting on stage, Ingegneri insists on the importance of understanding the play in order to instruct the actors on the vocal tone, body gestures, and manner of moving on stage. He considers it is the director's duty to show the actor how to translate the text into action. Acting, as we have seen, was based on the five canons of rhetoric; invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Ingegneri gives special attention to this last one, dividing it into two categories: quantitative, regarding pitch and volume; and qualitative, consisting of clarity, intonation, and endurance.

These qualities would be combined in different ways to portray each character, situation, or speech. Thus, for example, he considers that prosperity should be suggested by using a full

---

[197] Ibid., 29, 30.
[198] Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 86.

tone, simple and light, while rage called for use a raspy and aggressive sound. Similarly, a gentle and soft tone should be used for pleasant speeches, a firmer but still gentle voice for comfort, a mournful tone to offer sympathy, and a more grandiose sound to demonstrate affection.[199] Ingegneri believes gestures should be used to complete and enhance the attitudes and feelings expressed in speech. Carriage, hand gestures, expression of the eyes, placement of the feet and overall physical appearance should be carefully considered for each character in each scene. Thus, he advises directors against using the antique masks, pointing out that they would hide the facial expressivity that he considered to be highly important in the delivery of the text. Returning to the rules of rhetoric as defined by Cicero – to instruct, to please, and to move the passions – Ingegneri notes that gestural behavior must match the style and the status of the speaker. The director should instruct the actor so that both speech and gestures are consistent with each other and the progression of thought follows through in order to portray the character and situation well.

Considering that the rehearsal period for *Edipo tiranno* lasted four months, it is obvious that Ingegneri took the instruction of the actors very seriously.[200] Even though he does not describe the rehearsal process, from his writings we can deduce the steps he followed in working with the actors. After carefully studying the text he would discuss with the cast every aspect of the plot and his interpretation of the text. Next he would approach the characters from the point of view of the emotional triggers, history, and objectives, exposing the shifts that occur throughout the play. He would follow this with a discussion of the character's appearance, age, physical specifics, his carriage, and the gestures that would best portray his social status, his

---

[199] Ingegneri, *Della poesia* rappresentativa, 30-31.
[200] Thomas J. Oosting, *Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1981), 160-175.

profession, and his emotions. This is where he would also point out the best interpretation from both the physical and the vocal point of view. At the end of these discussions the actor would be fully informed and hopefully able to integrate all these aspects into his interpretation. As Ingegneri repeatedly indicates, the understanding of the literary text by both the director and the actors is essential in creating a successful theatrical performance. To this effect he advises against artificial posturing and gestures as they would not seem natural to the audience. He also notes that the vocal tone should always be controlled and synchronized with the gestures and facial expression to portray the character and his emotions in a life-like manner. To further prove his point he cites Horace's words: "Before you can move me to tears, you must grieve yourself; and only then will your words distress me."[201]

Ingegneri dedicates a section of his treatise to music in theatrical spectacles. He provides what he considers to be the most important rules for integrating music in different theatrical genres. First he talks about the chorus scenes in comedies and pastoral plays. The director may use music either as an interlude or as an accompaniment to the action on stage. It is his responsibility to find the best placing for the ensemble, taking into consideration the size and shape of the theater in order to provide the audience with the best acoustics possible. Ingegneri preferred vocal ensembles to instrumental ones, considering that they enabled the audience a better understanding of the poetic text.[202] Sometimes voices and instruments were used together in certain key moments of the drama. For these occasions the placement of the chorus and the

[201] Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa*, 31.
[202] Ibid., 31.

instrumentalists should be carefully considered, so that they do not appear as two separate ensembles, but rather come together as one entity in perfect harmony.[203]

For interludes used as dramatic pauses between the acts, Ingegneri preferred "sweet" music that would relax the audience's "tired intellect," allowing them better to enjoy the following act.[204] In Ingegneri's view the choral sections in a tragedy had to be different than the spoken text of the play, enhancing the narrative without interfering with the action on stage. He insists that the text should be intelligible at all times, especially in the sections accompanied by instruments. It is also the director's responsibility to choose the right pitch, register, and dynamics for the ensembles, finding the perfect balance to express the literary text. The odes written without instrumental accompaniment had to be treated with even more care in order to create the solemn atmosphere required by tragic plays.

Regarding the number of people involved in chorus scenes, Ingegneri returns to the rules of the classical Greek theater, which usually numbers the ensemble at fifty actors. He believes the number to be appropriate both visually and acoustically, since it would offer the spectator an attractive display that was believable and impressive. He notes that Sophocles used only fifteen people in his chorus scenes. Regardless the number of actors present on stage, the ensemble should move in dance-like steps and their voices should express the tragic events of the play. He observes that the classical choruses were generally strophic, with their rhythm determined by the content of the text, which should be reflected in the actors' movements on stage.

In his production of *Edipo tiranno* Ingegneri wanted to balance the ideals of classical antiquity, with the newly emerging sixteenth-century conventions. Thus, he required the actors to

---

[203] Ibid., 31.
[204] Ibid., 31.

move in a solemn and dignifying manner, with periodic pauses. He considered this type of movement to be the ideal mixture of the contemporary notion of simple walking and the expressive dances of antiquity.

In classical theater the chorus was sometimes placed in the orchestra, which allowed the actors to exit between odes without disturbing the action on stage. Ingegneri, however, preferred to have chorus on stage throughout the play, acting and reacting to the events on stage. He also mentions that the actors should be standing instead of seated, as to not impair the visual aspect of the production.[205] For choral odes, the chorus should be alone on stage.

Ingegneri states his preference for choruses without instrumental accompaniment. In his view, the musical structure of the scenes should enable the audience to follow the text phrase by phrase. He believed the purpose of an ode was to heighten the suspense, providing a clear understanding of the dramatic situation. Should the director choose to use instruments, he had tp consider carefully the selection of instruments and their placement so that together with the singers they create the emotional impact desired. In Renaissance theater, the instruments were placed behind the backdrop, in the wings or on the sides of the stage. They should not be placed in front of the stage or within the set, as they would not only destroy the stage illusion, but also interfere with the movement of the *periaktoi* and the special effects machines.

In conclusion, Ingegneri's views on producing a successful theatrical performance are similar to De' Sommi's. They both consider that dramatic art had to imitate life, insisting that the production should be magnificent, but also seem natural and believable to the audience. They both discuss the importance of studying the text and designing all the aspects of the performance

[205] Ibid., 32.

– the set, costumes, the entrances, and exits of the actors as well as the movement on stage – to express perfectly the emotional content of the play.

Il Corago o Vero Alcune Osservazioni Per Mettere Bene in Scena le Composizioni Drammatiche (1628)

Il Corago is an anonymous treatise written by an anonymous director around 1628. Only a few pages have been translated into English, a fact that explains the lack of attention it has received from theater historians. The treatise is believed to be written by Pier Francesco Rinuccini (son of the poet Ottavio Rinuccini).

Il Corago definition and function

The word *corago* was not invented by the author and it had been used in several works of the sixteenth century. The term had a complicated background in classical Greek and Latin. Thus, in ancient Athens the *choregos* was a citizen who acted as financial sponsor for a play at a drama festival. His role was to find funds for the hiring, training, dressing, and musical accompaniment of a tragic or comic chorus. Although the literal meaning of the words was "chorus leader," the *choregos* did not direct the performers. The chorus was trained by a *chorodidaskalos* while the leader of the chorus was called the *coryphaeos*. Things were different in the ancient Roman theater. The *choragus* came to signify the associate of a theatrical troupe who saw to its costumes and props (and perhaps to general stage management as well), and who collaborated with the *dominus gregis*, the troupe's actor-manager, under the eye of the *aedile*, the state official in charge of festivities.

Two treatises which mention this term are Cesare Cesariano's 1521 book on Vitruvius, where the *choragus* was defined as the person in charge of theatricals and Robortello's treatise *In*

Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes (published in English as *Music and trance: A theory of the relations between music and possession* 1548), in which *choregoi* were people who organized the stage and the scenery. Scaligero's *Poetics libri septum* (*Seven books of* poetics, 1560) presents the *choregoi* as the organizers of the theatrical apparatus, while in *Arte poetica* (*The art of* poetry, 1564) Minturno adds that the *chorago* was also supposed to choose the actors for the chorus. Different sources offer various definitions, all based on studies of antiquity and authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Plautus, and Vitruvius. Most scholars agree that the *corago* organized the visual aspects of the performances, sometimes planning the show and even directing the chorus. A good *corago* was supposed to have talent, to be a poet and Latinist, to have imagination, to be an excellent moralist and an outstanding actor. He also had to be skilled in the arts of music and painting. These requirements were published posthumously in 1727 in Franciscus Lange's *Dissertatio de Actione Scenica, cum figuris eandem explicantibus, et observationibus quibusdam de arte comica* (*Treatise on stage action*). By 1630, when *Il Corago* was written, there were several notable directors at north-Italian courts and academies. Two of them – Leone de' Sommi and Angelo Ingegneri –promoted the new humanist tradition of writing about stage direction and offering advice to future directors.

Il Corago represents an attempt at defining the modern meaning of the term. It is structured in 23 chapters discussing all the aspects of the role and function of the director in contemporary theatrical performances. It offers advice to the *corago* on scenography, directing, dance and combat choreography and designing costumes, as well as instructions on the proper use of stage machinery and lights.

Since opera was already becoming an established theatrical genre, the author of *Il Corago* discusses at length several important aspects of musical drama. His knowledge of the subject is

impressive, as is the amount of details he provides, showing the steps to realize a successful production from the initial phase of composition of the music and libretto to the finished performance presented to the audience.

The author opens his treatise with a discussion of the function of the *corago* and his duties. Looking back in time he mentions that Vitruvius refers to the *corago* as being the hall where all the props used in the spectacle were stored. However, the classical meaning of the term defines a *corago* as the person in charge of finding and organizing the scenic décor, the machines and all the equipment involved in the production. In time, as the theatrical performances evolved, the function became more complex, with the *corago* planning and directing the performance. The modern *corago* was, in the author's view, supposed to transform the poetical text into a dramatic performance, providing the audience the moral ideals expressed by the poet.[206]

Like De' Sommi and Ingegneri before him, the author considers the text to be the basis for any production. The director should use all the theatrical devices possible in order to express the meaning of the literary source. He should oversee the building of the sets and be familiar with the rules of architecture, perspective painting, lighting, and stage machinery. He should supervise the design of the costumes and also be knowledgeable in the arts of acting, music, dance and stage combat in order to instruct the actors and provide them with the best advice for a successful and believable performance.

The author believes that above all, the *corago* must be an expert in acting and knowledgeable about stage machinery, which he considers to be the most persuasive means of obtaining immediate emotional response from the audience.[207] In the seventeenth century,

---

[206] Fabbri and Pompilio, *Il Corago*, 21.
[207] Ibid., 116.

performances were dominated by cloud machines, sea monsters, celestial and infernal deities which needed to be impressive and efficient, creating an impact on the spectator with the least amount of effort.[208]

Poetic text

In the second chapter of the treatise he discusses the importance of studying the text and fully understanding the meaning of the play. He must extract "that which the poem requires" before proceeding to stage the work.[209] The director must thus choose a stage-worthy poem that can be easily transformed into a play. He mentions that both the poet and the director must take into consideration the context of the performance – whether it would be part of a wedding celebration or other court event, a private spectacle for the members of the Academy, or a simple interlude in a play. This and the financial means available for the performance influence not only the type and subject of the play, but also the number of characters involved, the building of the sets, the lay-out of the hall, the costumes and the stage machinery to be used.[210] Thus, for tragedies the subjects must be grandiose – using major themes like the creation of the universe, the burning of Troy, the destruction of Carthage – and the costumes, sets and machines must be rich and magnificent to provide a greater emotional impact on the audience. Aware of the financial expenses involved in producing such a performance, the author suggests, should the funding not be sufficient, that the director refuse the commission or insist on making changes in the text that would cut production costs.[211]

---

[208] Ibid., 22.
[209] Ibid., 24.
[210] Ibid., 26.
[211] Ibid., 24.

He also advises poets to envision the stage when writing a play, avoiding the need to cut scenes or dialogues and make changes during rehearsals.[212] He also advises the writer to avoid long soliloquies and rhetorical speeches, as these would be inappropriate in theater. Much more fitting are dialogues and dynamic scenes that captivate an audience. The action of the play must also be varied and move forward, the whole play lasting no longer than five hours.[213]

He considers it to be of capital importance that the poet and the director work together throughout the production, so that the message of the text is transposed into a valid performance. Ideally, the poet should be present for at least some of the rehearsals, to help the director and the actors understand the meaning and the hidden aspects of the text.[214] The author defines three modes of representation of the text: spoken drama, musical drama or stile recitativo, and pantomime. The author dedicates eight chapters to analyzing the style of musical drama, its history, and the impact it had in the development of theatrical performances of the time.

Casting

The author of *Il Corago* dedicates chapter XV to the art of acting in music. In his opinion, the singer had to be, above all, a good speaking actor, advising the director to choose a talented actor over an excellent singer with little or no knowledge of acting.[215] Good acting skills allow the singer to perform in a natural manner, with logical pauses and inflections that are not necessarily specified in the score, but enhance the meaning of the text. He notes that the orchestra must follow the singer and support his interpretation of the text. The director must, however, make sure that these effects are perfectly timed and rehearsed meticulously before the performance.

---

[212] Ibid., 24.
[213] Ibid., 22.
[214] Ibid., 25.
[215] Ibid., 91.

When casting a musical drama, the director should consider not only the actor's skills, but also his appearance. Thus, an older or weaker singer should be cast in less active roles where singing on clouds and other machines is required. Similarly, a vigorous actor can be given a role that requires more physical movement, such as dancing or stage combat.[216]

Movement and gestures

Regarding movement and gestures in this style, the author points out that, since the action moves at a slower pace than in spoken drama, the actor must move accordingly. Thus, when first entering the stage, the actor must not rush to reach the position indicated by the director. His walking style must match the character he is playing and the situation he is in. A king, for example, would move at a slower pace and use regal gestures to find his position – usually in the center of the stage. A character on the run or involved in a fight would consequently move faster and show agitation in his gestures.

One of the rules of acting also present in De' Sommi's and Ingegneri's treatises was that the actor must never completely turn his back to the audience. Crossing from one point to another or even exiting the stage must be done at an angle. Similarly, when interacting with other characters, the actor must not turn to face his interlocutor directly. This would not only impede the audience from seeing his expression, but would also make his voice less present and clear. All writers agree that the visibility of the face enhanced the audibility of the voice.

As in spoken drama, walking must be avoided when singing, since the voice is so easily altered by motion, losing its beauty and its focus. He advises the singer to never stand fixed in the middle of the stage for a whole solo section. The actor must use the pauses in the text to move - at the end of a phrase, when there is a comma or a period in the verse or during the instrumental

---

[216] Ibid., 92.

sections. However, there are exceptions to this rule, especially in fighting scenes, where motion is demanded by the text.[217] Movement should always be natural and synchronized with the rhythm of the music. The same rule applies to the scenes involving the chorus, where the actors should move in harmony with each other and with the music, employing realistic gestural behavior to suggest the *affetto* desired by the poet.[218]

The movement of the machines used on stage, such as clouds, chariots, and monsters, has to occur slowly and smoothly to the tempo of the music, without bumps that might influence the quality of the singer's performance. Since there is no movement required for the actor performing on such a machine, more frequent gesturing is allowed in order to portray the emotions suggested in the text.[219]

The gestures that accompany the movement on stage must also be carefully considered. They must express the emotions suggested by the text without becoming artificial. They have to be timed so that they do not end abruptly, before the musical phrase is finished. In the author's view the gestures must also match the tempo and "affetto" of the music, be suggestive, and enhance the drama. The author considers essential that the voice and gestures are used in harmony, in the rhetoric style inherited from the classic antiquity. Citing Quintilian and Cicero, he directs the singers to match the musical tonal shifts to the appropriate gestures and make sure that movement happens in the rhythm and tempo of the verse.[220] In his view, this would heighten the affective potential of the performance.

Similarly, the gestures and the vocal delivery style must match the theatrical genre. In tragedies, for example, the actor playing a king or another important figure should move with

[217] Ibid., 91.
[218] Ibid., 91.
[219] Ibid., 92.
[220] Ibid., 93.

dignity and gesture in a grave manner that suggest his position in society, while the singers portraying lovers should convey a languorous demeanor. A comic trickster would display a completely different type of vocal delivery and gestures to suggest his foolishness. The director must keep track of all these aspects and instruct the singers to deliver their part in a realistic manner, each movement emerging from the dramatic situation suggested in the poetic text. [221]

The author offers a set of rules for hand gestures that he considered to be most effective in performance. For example, in dialogue scenes, actors should gesture with the hand that is closer to his interlocutor, not only for esthetic reasons, but also because it would make the communication stronger. In his view, right hand gestures were more powerful than left hand ones. For that reason he advises the actors using props to switch them to the left hand when starting their speech. He allows exceptions to this rule, offering the example of a king carrying his scepter in the right hand and gesticulating with the left. For special dramatic moments – such as praying or grieving – both hands should be used in gentle gestures of supplication. The gestures used in such situations, or in scenes where a royal personage enters the stage, must be elegant and show "great reverence and submission."[222] The actors can achieve this by bowing or kneeling – preferably using the upstage leg, to make sure the audience can see their expression. A different approach is demanded for anger scenes, where the gestures must be quick and intense, preferably with only one hand, used to direct the particular phrases to the adversary on stage. Ample gesturing and rhetorical postures are demanded in messenger scenes, where a distressing event is recounted. For happy scenes the gestures should be light and relaxed, while for scenes of despair they must be thoroughly choreographed. Gestures such as wiping tears,

[221] Ibid., 94.
[222] Ibid., 94.

clenching fists, dropping the arms in abdication or throwing them upward towards heaven must be used thoughtfully in key moments of the verse. The author, like De' Sommi and Ingegneri before him, insists that in order to be realistic, every gesture must be justified in the text and emerge from the dramatic circumstances. They also must be carefully chosen and used with restraint, since excessive gesturing distracts the audience and loses its expressive value.

The Chorus

The author dedicates a chapter to discuss the treatment of chorus in theatrical production. The function of the chorus was to represent the crowds' reaction to the dramatic action. They are usually introduced on stage all together, commenting on the action. There are situations though, where two to four members can appear on stage in messenger scenes to amplify the emotional effect of the news being recounted. The chorus members involved in such scenes must act using the appropriate movements and gestures to express their reaction to the events. Like Ingegneri, the author advises the director to introduce the chorus from the downstage streets, to minimize any traffic difficulties. They must also never enter and exit from the same street. The director has to design their movement according to the configuration of the set, their number, and the type of event they are evoking. The director is also in charge of choreographing their movements, making sure they gesture and move simultaneously. He considers disruptive any gesture that is not synchronized within all members of the chorus.[223]

On stage, the director could arrange the chorus members in various formations, such as animals, letters, coat of arms of the Duke, according to the occasion and the nature of the representation. The author outlines again that they must move in harmony with each other and with the music. They should position themselves so that the patterns designed are

[223] Ibid., 98.

comprehensible and the audience is able to also see their faces. This can be done with the help of markings on the floor, which would allow them to get into formations together quickly.[224]

Dance

When choreographing dances, just as in the case of chorus scenes, the director must decide the series of patterns he believes would be most effective in expressing the dramatic action. He must design the choreography and block the actors so that the audience never sees the figures from the wrong angle. The author prefers to use a large number of dancers in *balli* in order to offer the audience a great visual spectacle. He defines two types of dances, one performed exclusively on stage, and one that can spread out in the auditorium. Depending on the distance between the dancers and the audience, the routines executed would be different in each case. The director must consider this aspect when choosing the footwork, the position of the arms, the placement of the actors and their overall appearance.[225]

As in any crowd scene, the actors have to be perfectly synchronized with each other and with the accompanying music. The leaps and turns have to happen in unison to create an effective visual performance. The choreography must reflect the dramatic situation and the tempo of the music. For fast music the dances would have more turns, twirls, and leaps, while slower tempi would require few or no leaps, with movements happening at a slower pace.[226] While the dance-master was responsible for the choreography, the director had to make sure that it respected these guidelines.

Stage battle

---

[224] Ibid., 99.
[225] Ibid., 101.
[226] Ibid., 102.

The author considers the battles to be very effective in performance, but warns the director that, for safety reasons, they should be coordinated by the Fence Master. More than other scenes they need numerous rehearsals to be "well studied and tried," until the actors feel confident in their execution of the routines. [227]

When designing battle scenes the director must create the illusion of mass combat, with actors advancing from the wings and fighting all across the stage. The context of the battle, the number, and types of characters involved and the dimensions of the playing area would determine the choreography of the scene. To create a realistic battle the director must synchronize the attacks and retreats, perfectly timing every action. The audience should be able to distinguish the fractions involved in the fight at all times. This can be achieved not only through costumes, but also by assigning different weapons, formations and maneuvers to each group involved.[228] The author hints that historical accuracy is a factor in choosing the weapons and armors used. For safety reasons, he recommends that actors using large weapons be placed towards the back of the stage.

Like dances, the battles need to be perfectly timed in order to create the illusion of perpetual movement. The groups have to move in unison and continuously through all the sequences of the fight. The actions on stage must be accompanied by the sounds of clashing weapons and screams to heighten the illusion. The director may choose to use trumpets and drums at key moments of the battle, such as advance, retreat, or victory. While the routines would be designed by the fencing master, the director must make sure that the movement and the sounds match the tempo of the music.

---

[227] Ibid., 104.
[228] Ibid., 102.

The combat scenes involving fewer characters must also be carefully choreographed for a realistic effect. Various positions and moves can be alternated at different speeds to create and maintain the excitement throughout the scene. The author underlines the issue of safety, reiterating that any choreography of a battle scene must ensure it. He advises the use of shields and visors for all actors involved. As in the case of *balli*, it is the director's responsibility to ensure that sufficient rehearsal time is reserved for these scenes.

Final advice

The author of *Il Corago* offers advice regarding all the aspects of theatrical production. In the last chapter he presents a final outline, defining eight steps to be followed before the beginning of the performance. First he must make sure the actors are dressed and placed in the right position in order to avoid any disturbances. He has to check that the people responsible for the machines are also in place and ready for the performance. The people assigned to help the actors change costumes should also be present in their spots. It is the director's responsibility to have the orchestra tuned before the beginning of the show. More importantly, he has to check that the machine are soaped and oiled, to ensure they will function properly, with no interruptions. Giving the example of the mechanical malfunctions in Florence, he warns the director that sometimes, out of "malignancy or envy" people might intentionally damage the mechanisms involved in moving the machines. [229] Thus, the director must hire trustworthy people to supervise their construction and proper functioning throughout the performance. Actors should never stand too close to the perspective set, because they would ruin the illusion, and could impede the movement of the sets, creating many other disturbances. Finally, he brings

[229] Ibid., 125.

back the issue of lighting, advising the director to assign people to supervise the lights at all times, to ensure the safety of the actors and audience throughout the performance.
The author ends his book promising the readers a second treatise, which is now lost, where he would discuss the pantomime and its representation on stage.

Conclusion

The three treatises discussed above provide valuable information on the early seventeenth-century theatrical performances. More importantly, they define the art of directing as an independent profession, outlining the importance of the director as the most important figure in theatrical production.

Each treatise offers, in a different form, advice for the directors. De' Sommi's dialogues are useful, as he himself states, for both the experienced and the novice directors. In his book, Ingegneri presents a guideline for the production of and ideal theatrical performance. *Il Corago* appears to be the most complete and detailed document, describing the director's function and offering advice for several important aspects of the production. All three authors present practical solutions followed by instructions and even examples from contemporary performances that they produced or witnessed.

The books introduce several innovations in theater production. First they present the concept of organizing the production through the use of a director's workbook (De' Sommi) or a guide (*Il Corago*). The importance of studying the text is outlined in all treatises, but is most obvious in Ingegneri's book. He proposes a methodical approach to the analysis of the text to determine which aspects of the play are most important and need to be emphasized in

performance.[230] De' Sommi's concept of the "soul" of the play is similar to Ingegneri's idea of the "substance" of the text. To all writers this is the most important information which would shape the structure of the entire production. Understanding the meaning of the poetic text enables the director to create a performance that would reflect the poet's ideas. The entire theatrical arsenal – actors, costumes, scenery, machines, lighting – must serve the literary text. As the author of *Il Corago* states, the theatrical performance integrates several arts, including poetry, music, dance, painting, and architecture, which must be coordinated by the director in order to offer a meaningful performance. Thus, the director has to be knowledgeable in all these fields. When structuring the production he must also consider the spectators' taste, their expectations, and the context of the performance. The authors suggest that a good director should acknowledge his strengths, but also his weaknesses, asking for advice when needed. De' Sommi admits to relying on the help of the painter and the architect when designing the sets, while the author of *Il Corago* counts on the fencing master and dance master to choreograph the battles and dances. Regarding the poetic text, all authors advise the poets to create a text that would be fitted for performance. The poet should be aware of the different problems that occur in production and work together with the director to ensure that the meaning of the text is expressed in performance. In their view, theater had to reflect the humanist ideals of recreating the splendor of the classical antiquity. Thus, all authors advise the director to draw his inspiration from the classics, but also adding modern elements to make the production more attractive.

The authors encouraged directors to experiment with color, light, line, and texture. One of De' Sommi's innovations was reducing the lighting in the back of the hall. This allowed increased visibility of the stage and separated the playing area from the rest of the hall.

---

[230] Ingegneri, *Della poesia* rappresentativa, 25.

Recognizing that light and color play a major part in creating the right atmosphere, he advises the use of bright lighting for comedies and semi-darkness for tragedies. Similarly, Ingegneri uses lights and adds fragrances and off stage sounds to create the illusion of realism. The author of *Il Corago* introduces the notion of no separation between the stage and the auditorium. In his balli and military battles he allowed the actors to use the entire theater space, drawing the audience even more into the dramatic action. Machines and special effects, such as fire, smoke, and even water, became standard fixtures in most productions. As technical advances allowed for more innovations, theatrical performances became more complex and demanded a director capable of organizing and supervising the production.

The art of acting is considered by all three writers to be essential for any performance, spoken or sung. The actors and directors need to be familiar with the acting principles in order to achieve a successful performance. Even though they note certain differences between sung and spoken drama, they agree that certain basic elements apply to both styles. Under the director's instruction, the actors must create a realistic performance, drawing the audience into the dramatic action.

In order to create a realistic character, the actor should collaborate with the director, studying the text and understanding the psychology of the character to be portrayed. Acting was based on the classical rhetoric principles of gesture, movement, and vocal production. All authors stress that every gesture and movement has to be justified in the text, deriving from the circumstances of the dramatic action. De' Sommi warns the director to not allow any empty postures or gestures as they would create a false, lifeless character. Along the same lines, Ingegneri thinks the director should be familiar not only with the dramatic action of the play, but also with the circumstance before the play and the events happening between the acts. In his

view, all these elements help to create a realistic character whose gestures and movement occur as a natural response to the events on stage.

All three authors organize the production into two phases, the pre-production, and the production itself. In the first phase the director studies the text and works together with the poet and the composer, making the necessary changes to offer the premises of a good theatrical performance. The treatises advise the director to start the rehearsal process having a clear plan of action, ready to express his vision and having concrete directions for everybody involved in the production (actors, singers, technicians, etc.).

Each writer outlines the fact that the director is the ultimate authority over all matters, supervising every step of the production. It was his responsibility to choose (or design) the proper sets, to conduct the technical rehearsals, to decide on the lightning, costumes, staging and acting. He has to allow sufficient rehearsal time for the complicated scenes involving machines, dances, or military battles, testing the equipment involved and ensuring the safety of the actors and the audience.

Before the each performance the director should follow a check list, making sure the show will run as planned. De' Sommi proposes a director's guide, which he considers to be a useful tool in keeping track of the most important elements in the production. His guide includes a property chart, costume plot, scene breakdown, character entrances and exits, and cue line chart.[231] To organize the performance Ingegneri suggests the use of a production plan – similar to his project for *Edipo tiranno*. Similarly, the author of *Il Corago* presents a final checklist to ensure the safety of everybody involved and, of course, the success of the performance.

---

[231] De' Sommi, *Quatro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*, 54.

In conclusion, theatrical performances of the early seventeenth century were complex productions, involving multiple arts coordinated by a director. As defined in these treatises, the director's function was to unify those arts and synthesize all elements involved into a harmonic and coherent performance that would both enlighten and delight the audience.

Epilogue

One of the most difficult issues arising for scholars trying to reconstruct early musical drama performances is the lack of documentation. Numerous elements that made such productions spectacular – such as scores, libretti, lists of performances and scenarios – are no longer accessible. Musical drama at the turn of the seventeenth century was a dynamic art form that changed and evolved from one production to the next. Poets, composers, engineers, scenic designers, painters, singers, musicians and dancers all worked together to capture the essence of the works they presented and create a magical performance that would entrance the audience.

Thus, in order to understand the evolution of musical drama it is necessary to study each one of the arts involved in the scenic representation, as well as the contemporary theories of drama, music and spectacle. The study of the newly developed musical drama within a historically delineated period must involve a description of the different aspects of performance, including historical details and practical examples from productions of the time. Musical drama was primarily a literary and theatrical genre and only secondarily an independent musical genre, especially in the earliest years of seventeenth-century. The primary goal of this thesis was to provide a detailed description of the aesthetic ideals of the time, as well as offer a complete image of the physical space of performance, the settings, the lighting, the costumes and the acting style of the time.

This study presents several technical and stylistic aspects of production and it brings together information from the fragmentary evidence of actual performances and theoretical guidelines provided in the dramaturgical writings of the seventeenth century. The purpose of this work is to provide a complete image of theatrical performances of the time and present a wide range of historical evidence. Musical drama combines multiple disciplines, such as music, architecture, painting, costume design, engineering and acting. Each chapter offers detailed information on these aspects and provides practical examples from productions of the time.

The treatises and the descriptions of events are an invaluable source of information about this period of major transformations in the theatrical tradition. The study of these accounts emphasizes the complexity of the emerging genre and reinforces the notion of musical drama as a synthesis of disciplines. Moreover, associating different aspects with specific performances and discussing them chronologically shades light on the evolution of the genre from mere experiments to its full-fledged and successful realization. The present work combines technical and stylistic information rarely found in a single work, making it a valuable resource for further study of the performance practices of early musical drama. It is, therefore, the primary intention of this study to contribute, in some measure, to the better understanding of these invaluable musical artworks and to serve the artists who bring them back to life.

Appendix Chapter I

Figure 1. *Balli di Sfessania* (Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

Figure 2. *Balli di Sfessania* (Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

Figure 3. *Balli di Sfessania* (Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

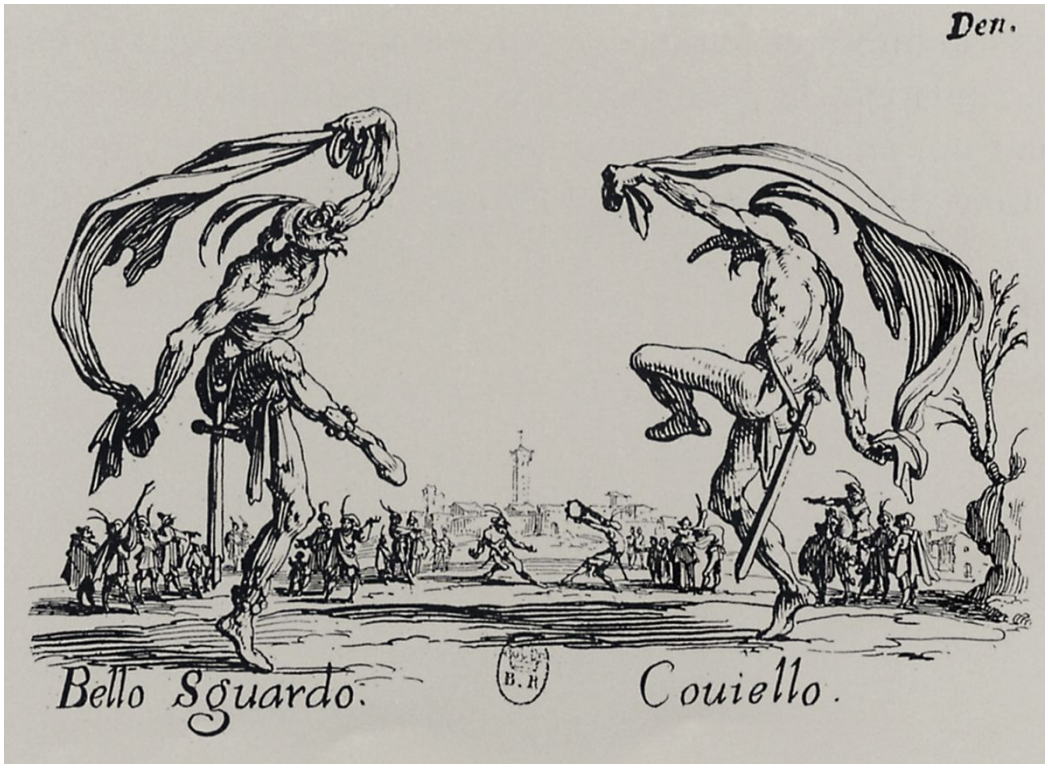


Figure 4. First page of *La Pellegrina* (Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries (ICCU), Italy)

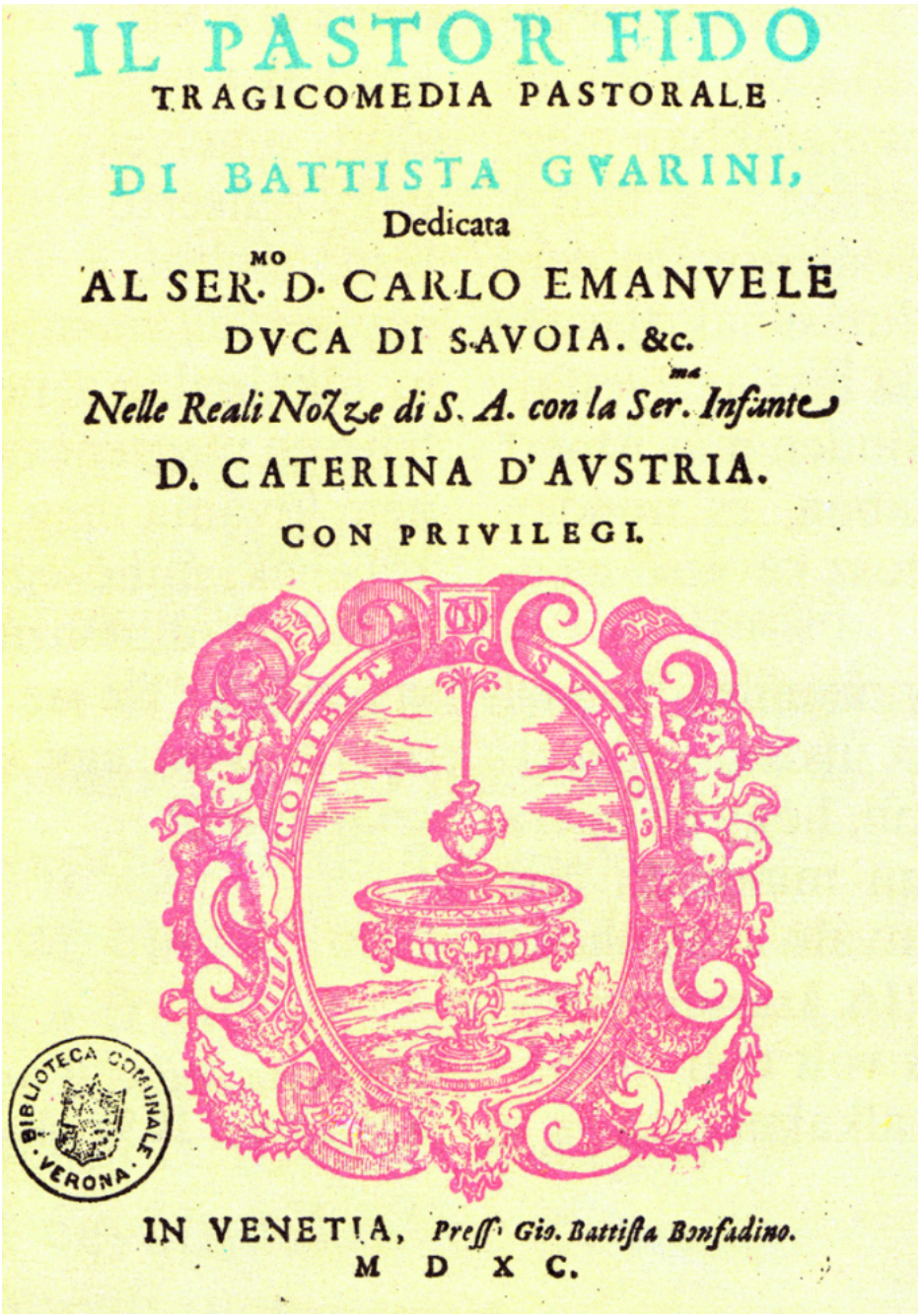
LA PELLEGRINA
COMMEDIA
DI M. GIROLAMO BARGAGLI
MATERIALE INTRONATO:

Rappreſentata nelle feliciſsime Nozze del Sereniſs.
DON FERDINANDO de' Medici Granduca
di Toſcana, e della Sereniſsima Madama
CRISTIANA di Loreno ſua Conſorte.

IN SIENA,
Nella Stamperia di Luca Bonetti. M.D.LXXXIX.
Con licenza de' Superiori.

Figure 5. *La Pellegrina* - First intermedio: Harmony of the Spheres (Medici, Michelangelo, and the art of late Renaissance Florence - Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Palazzo Strozzi, Art Institute of Chicago)

Figure 6. *Il pastor fido* – first page



IL PASTOR FIDO
TRAGICOMEDIA PASTORALE
DI BATTISTA GVARINI,
Dedicata
AL SER.mo D. CARLO EMANVELE
DVCA DI SAVOIA. &c.
Nelle Reali Nozze di S. A. con la Ser.ma Infante
D. CATERINA D'AVSTRIA.
CON PRIVILEGI.

IN VENETIA, *Preſſo Gio. Battiſta Bonfadino.*
M D X C.

Figure 7. Peri's Euridice – Title page of the libretto

L' EVRIDICE
D'OTTAVIO
RINVCCINI,
RAPPRESENTATA
NELLO SPONSALITIO
Della Christianiſs.
REGINA
DI FRANCIA, E DI
NAVARRA.

IN FIORENZA, 1600.
Nella Stamperia di Cosimo Giunti.
Con licenza de' Superiori.

Appendix Chapter II

Figure 1. Vitruvius theater

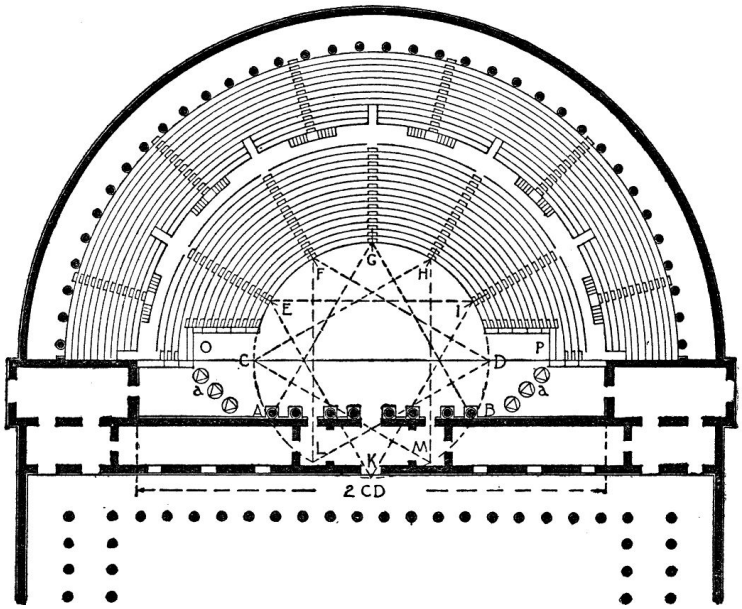


Figure 2. Plan of the Epidaurus theater

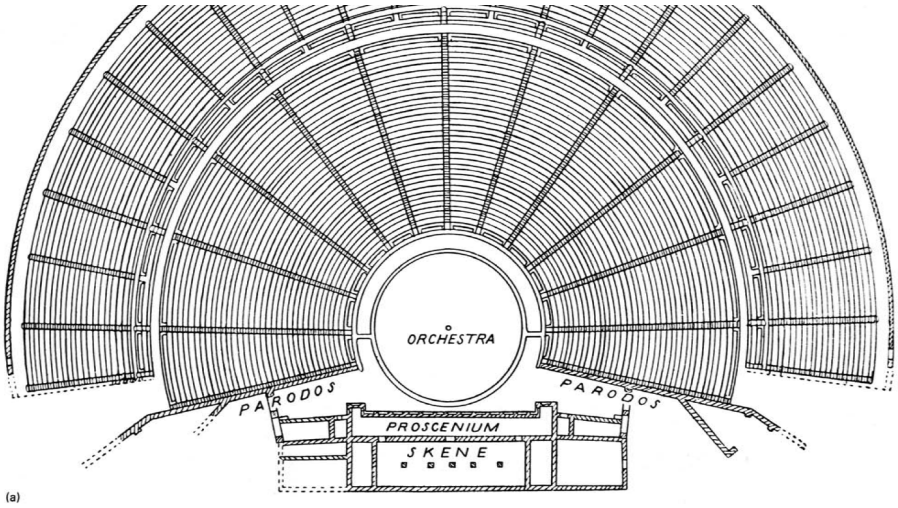


Figure 3. Corridors built by Vasari to link the Uffizi Palace to other buildings

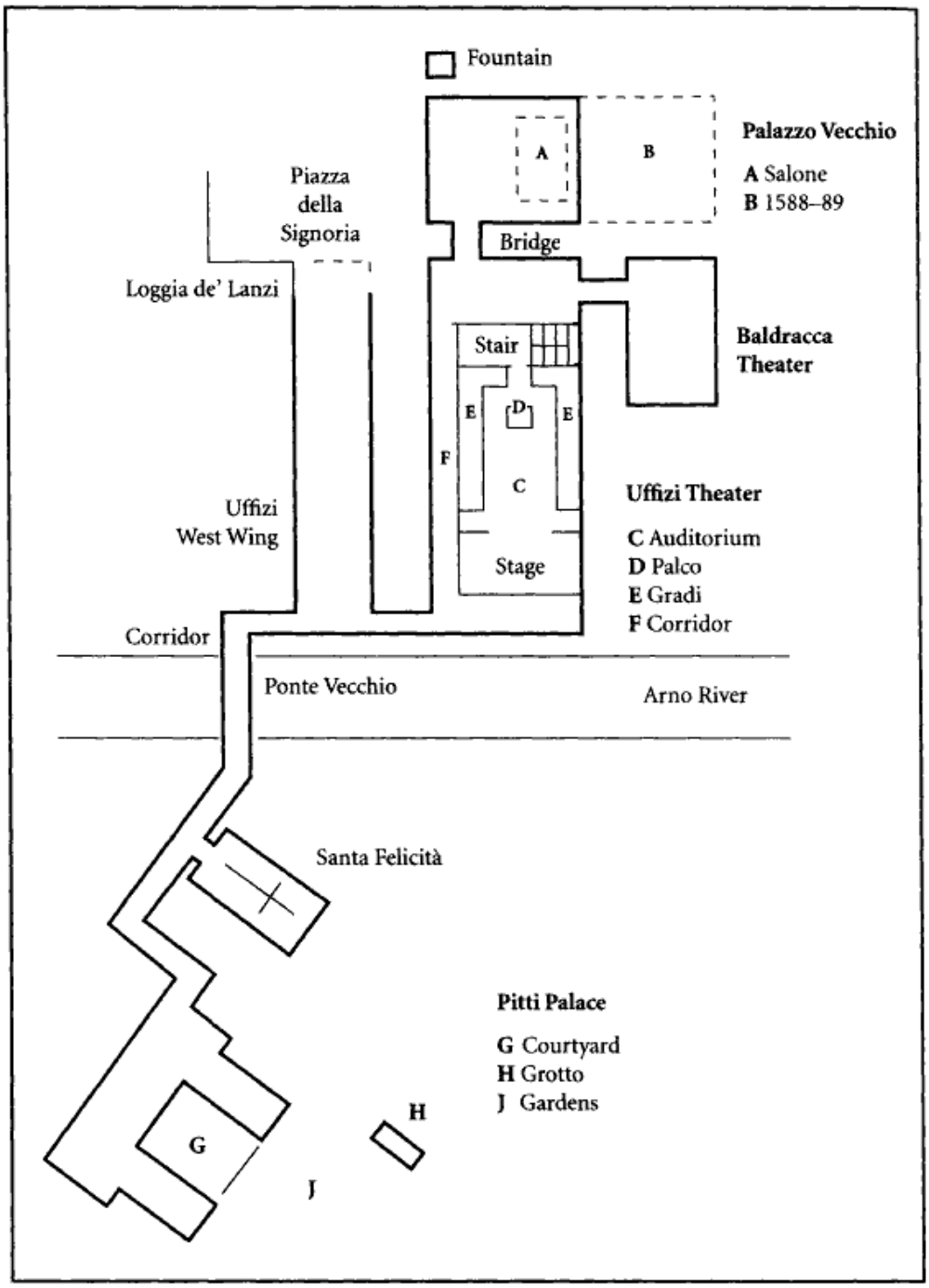
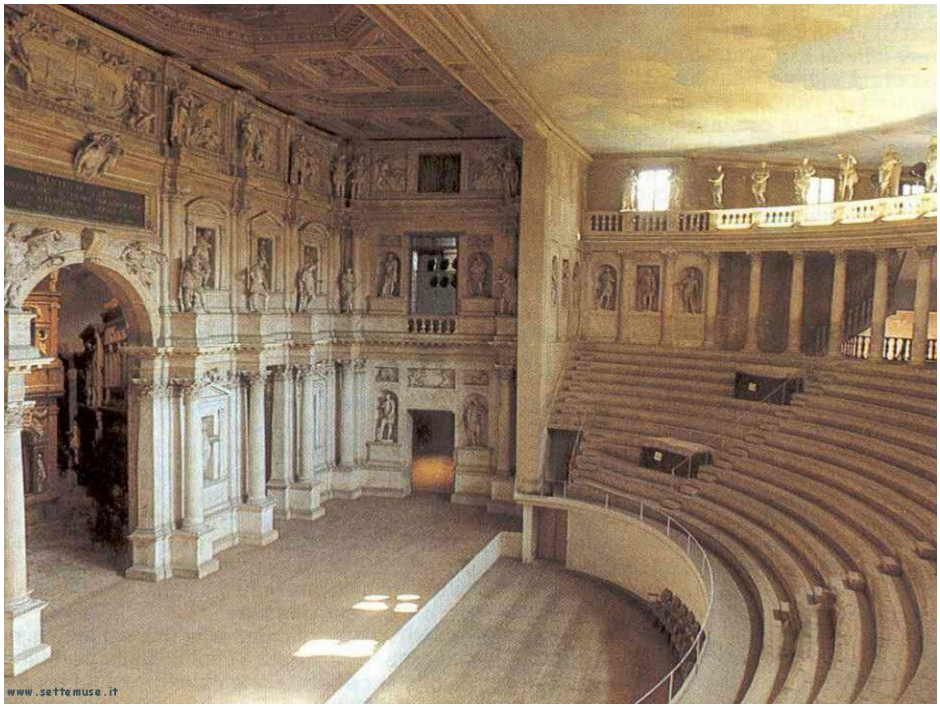


Figure 4 A and B. Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico, Europe's oldest surviving indoor theater

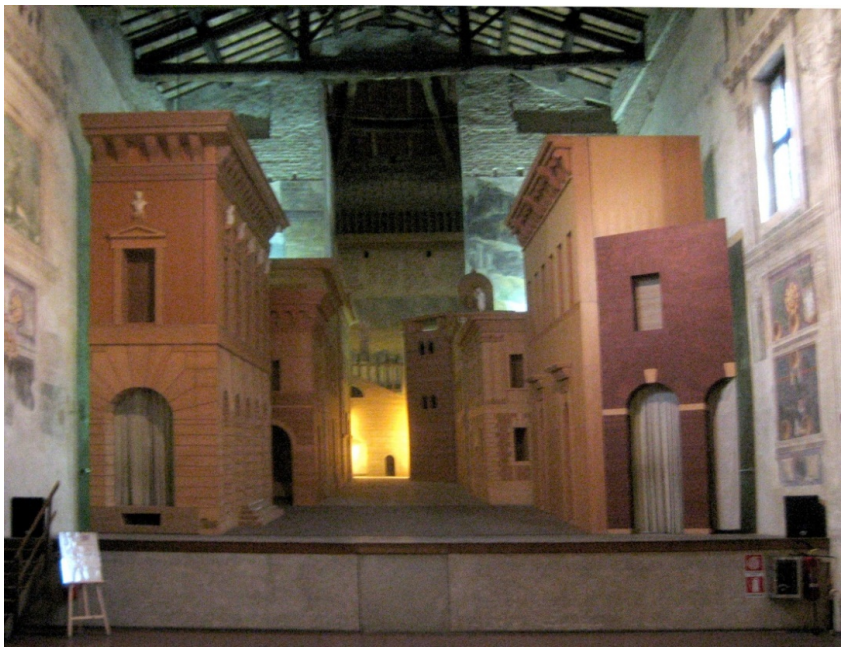
A



B

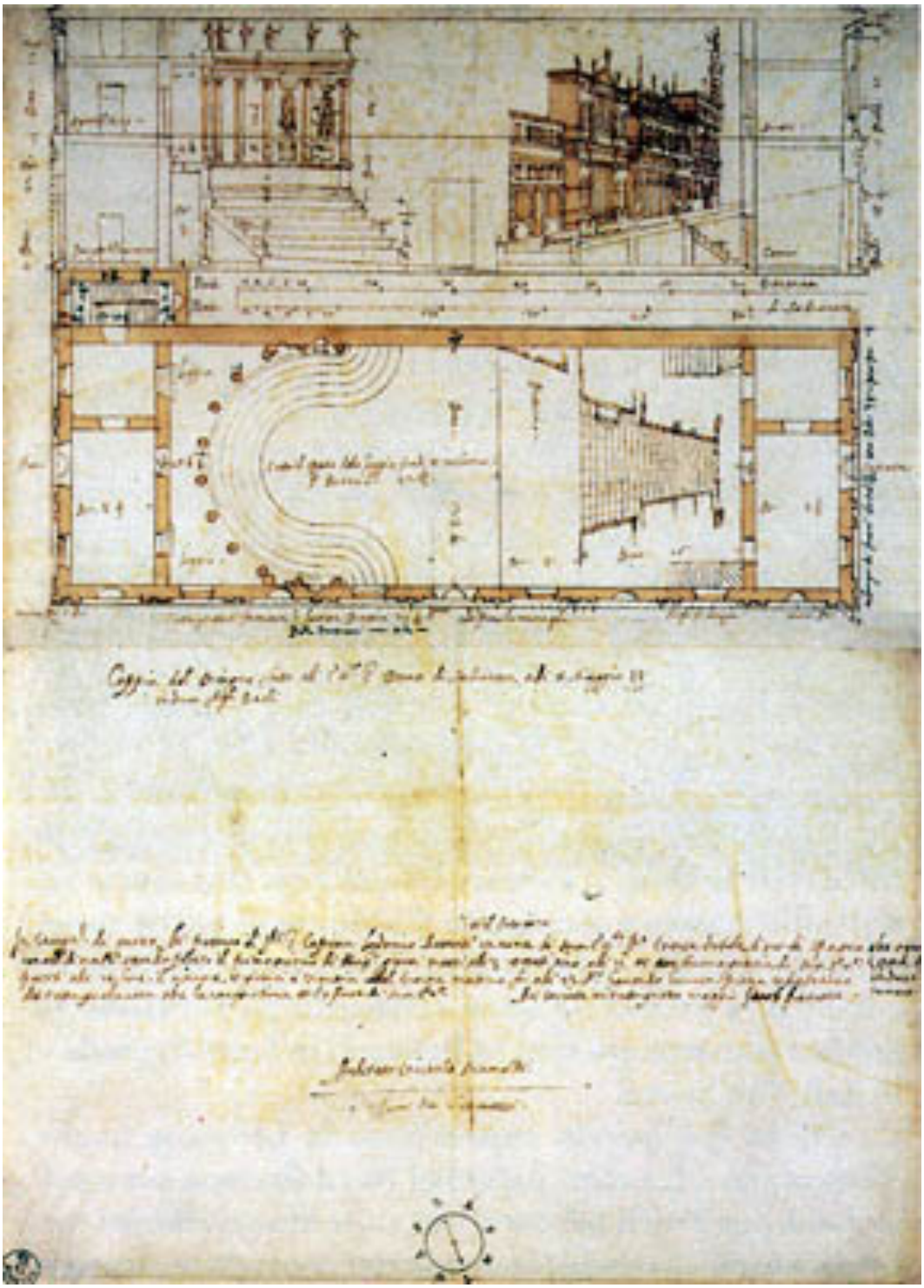
Figure 5 A and B

A. The stage of the Teatro all'antica, viewed from the seating area. The perspective scenery is a modern reconstruction of Scamozzi's original work



B. View from the stage towards the gallery above the seating area

Figure 6. A. Scamozzi's elevation (top) and floor plan (below) for the Teatro all'antica.



B.Scale model of the Teatro all'antica located inside the theater

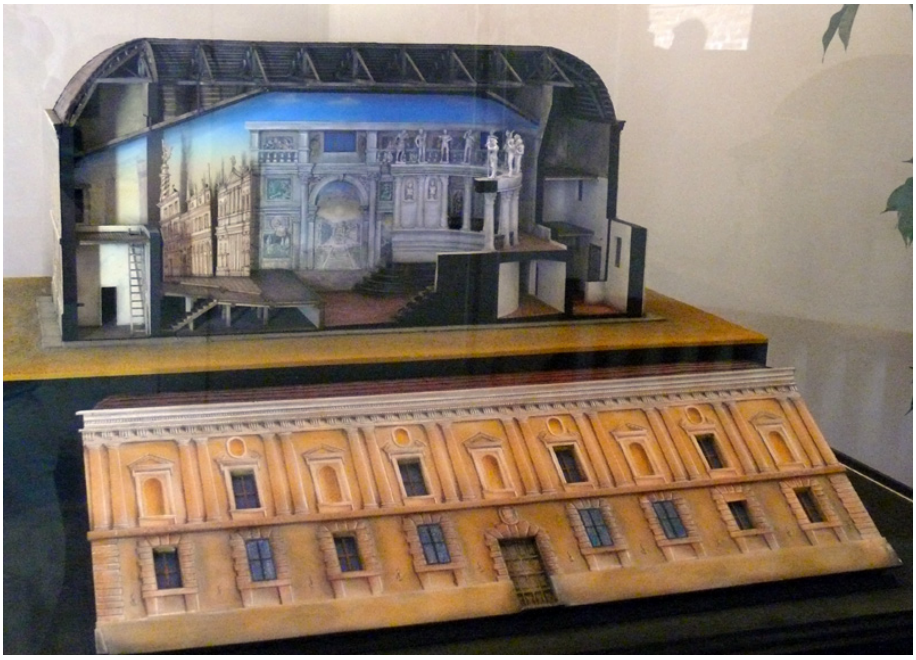


Figure 7 A, B and C. Teatro Farnese in Parma

A.

B.

C.

Figure 8. Visual pyramid after Leon Battista Alberti: *De pictura* (1435–6),

(i) side elevation: (a) picture plane; (b) equal divisions behind the picture plane joined to the viewer's eye; (c) viewer's eye; (d) points at which these lines cross the picture plane, which provide the horizontal divisions for (ii), a grid in perspective; (e) the 'centric' or 'vanishing' point. [2]

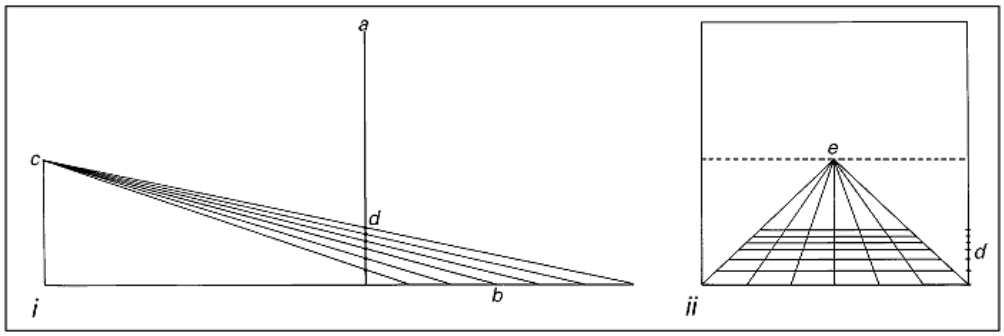


Figure 9. Serlio cross section of a theater

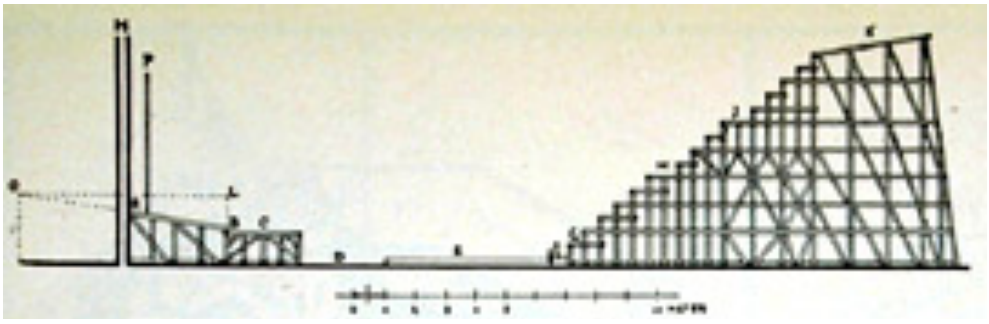


Figure 10. Sabbatini – Perspective illuminated from one side

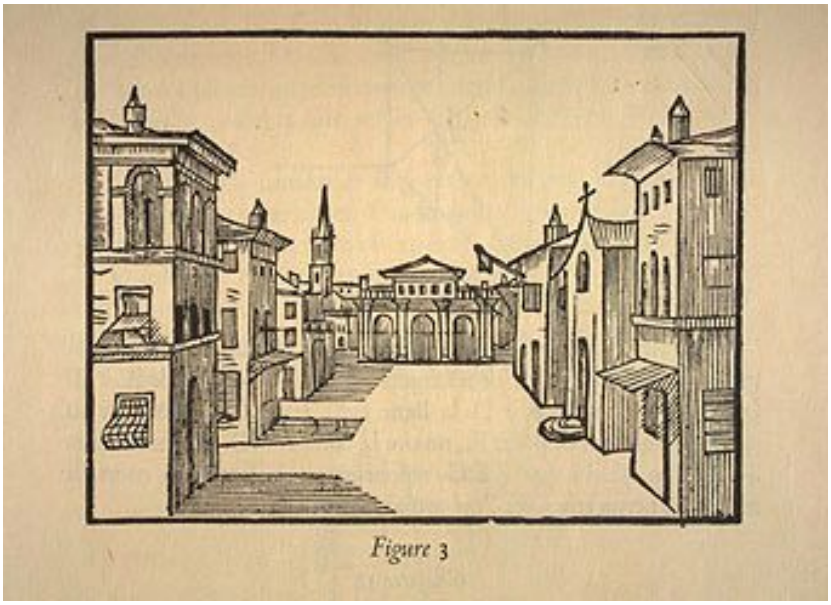


Figure 11. D'Amico reconstruction of Pelligrino's drawing

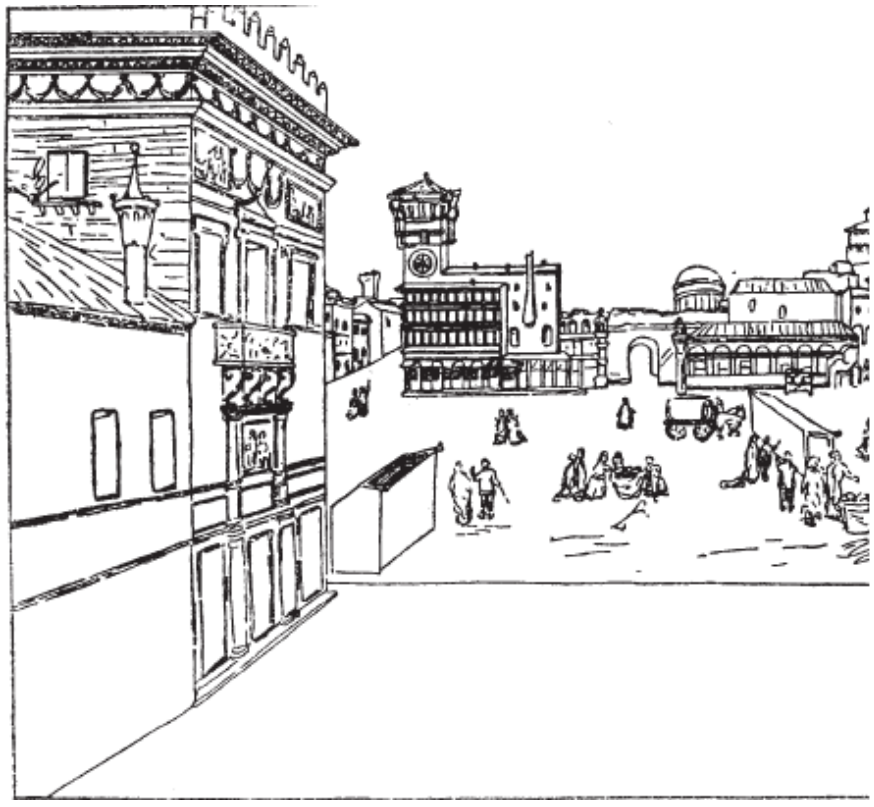
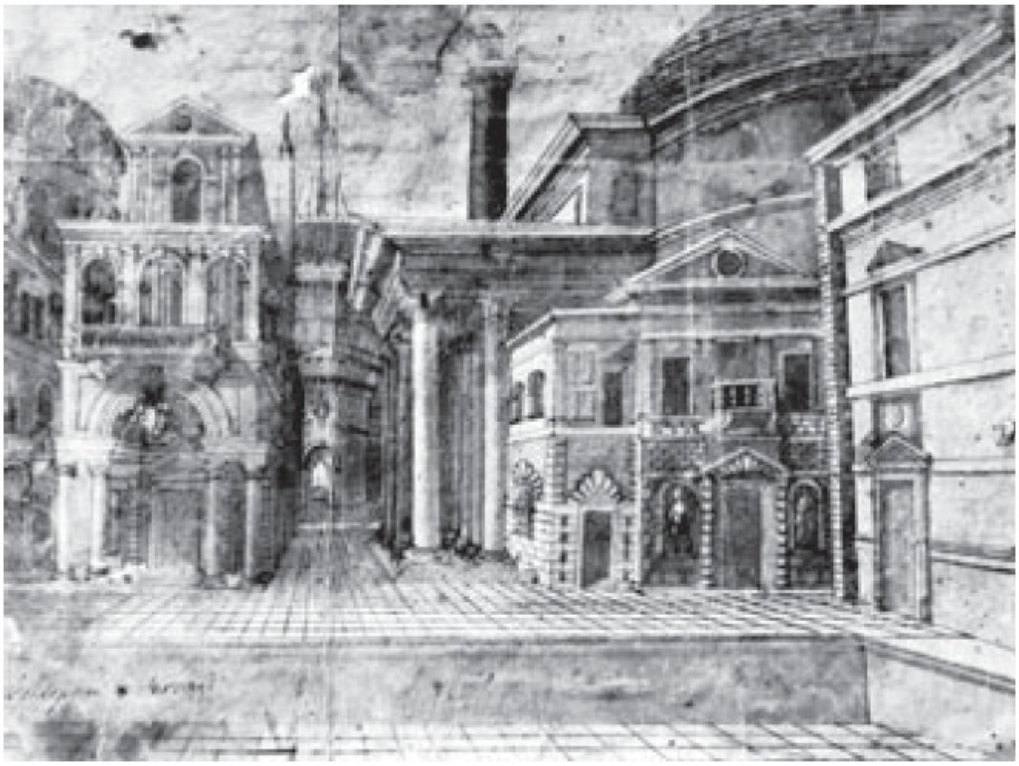


Figure 12. Peruzzi's theatrical perspective with monuments of Rome no. 291 A

Figure 13. A. Bacchidi set design from the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Sienna



B Same design from the Fuller Collection of the Drottningholm Museum.

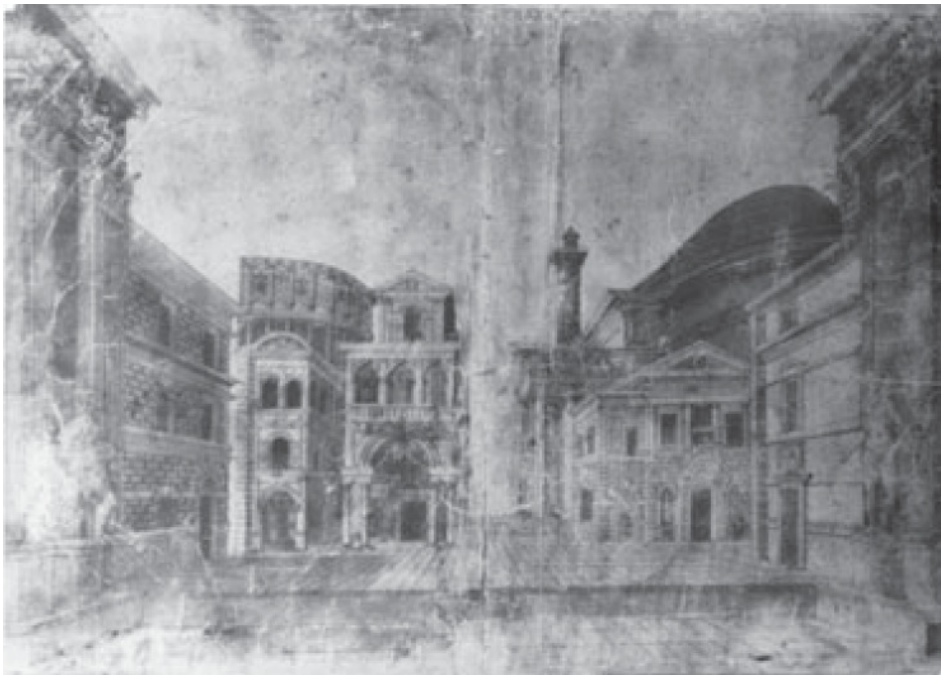


Figure 14. Stage set for *Il Granchio* 1566 (published in the first edition of the play)

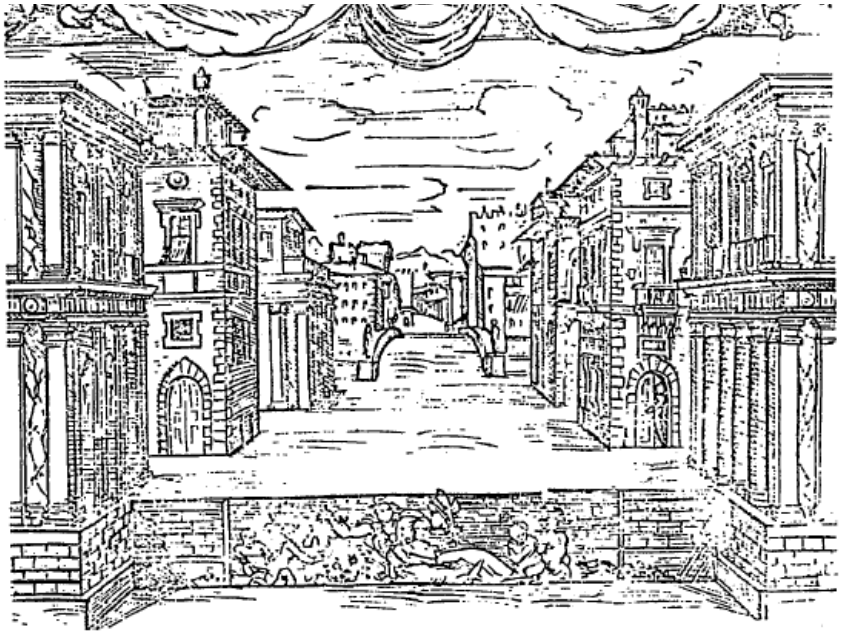


Figure 15. Diagrame of periaktoi from Vignola's *Le due regole delle prospettiva practica* 1583

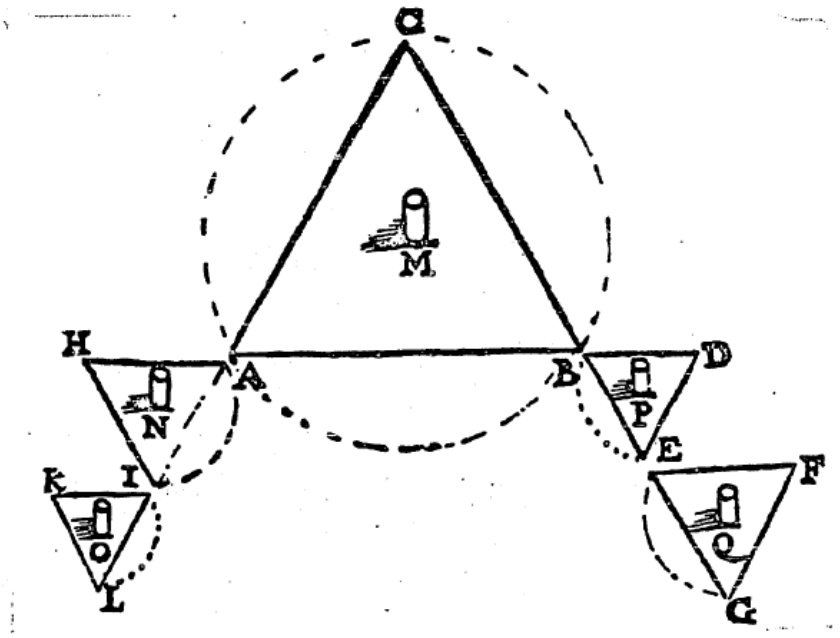


Figure 16. Lanci's five *periaktoi* setting

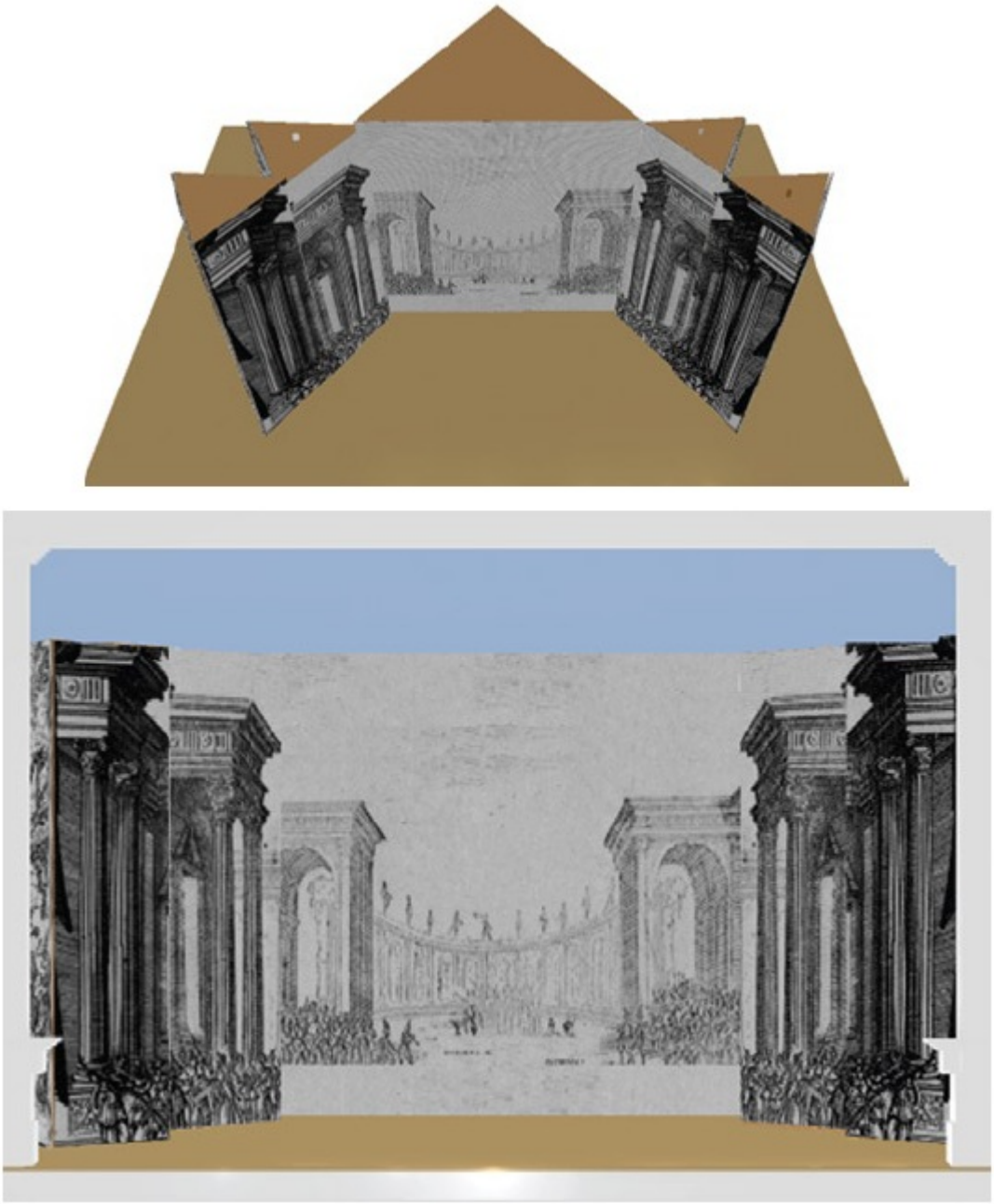


Figure 17. Buontalenti sketch for *L'amico fido*

Figure 18. *La Pellegrina* first intermezzo setting

Figure 19 A. Buontalenti sketch for the mountain setting of the second intermezzo

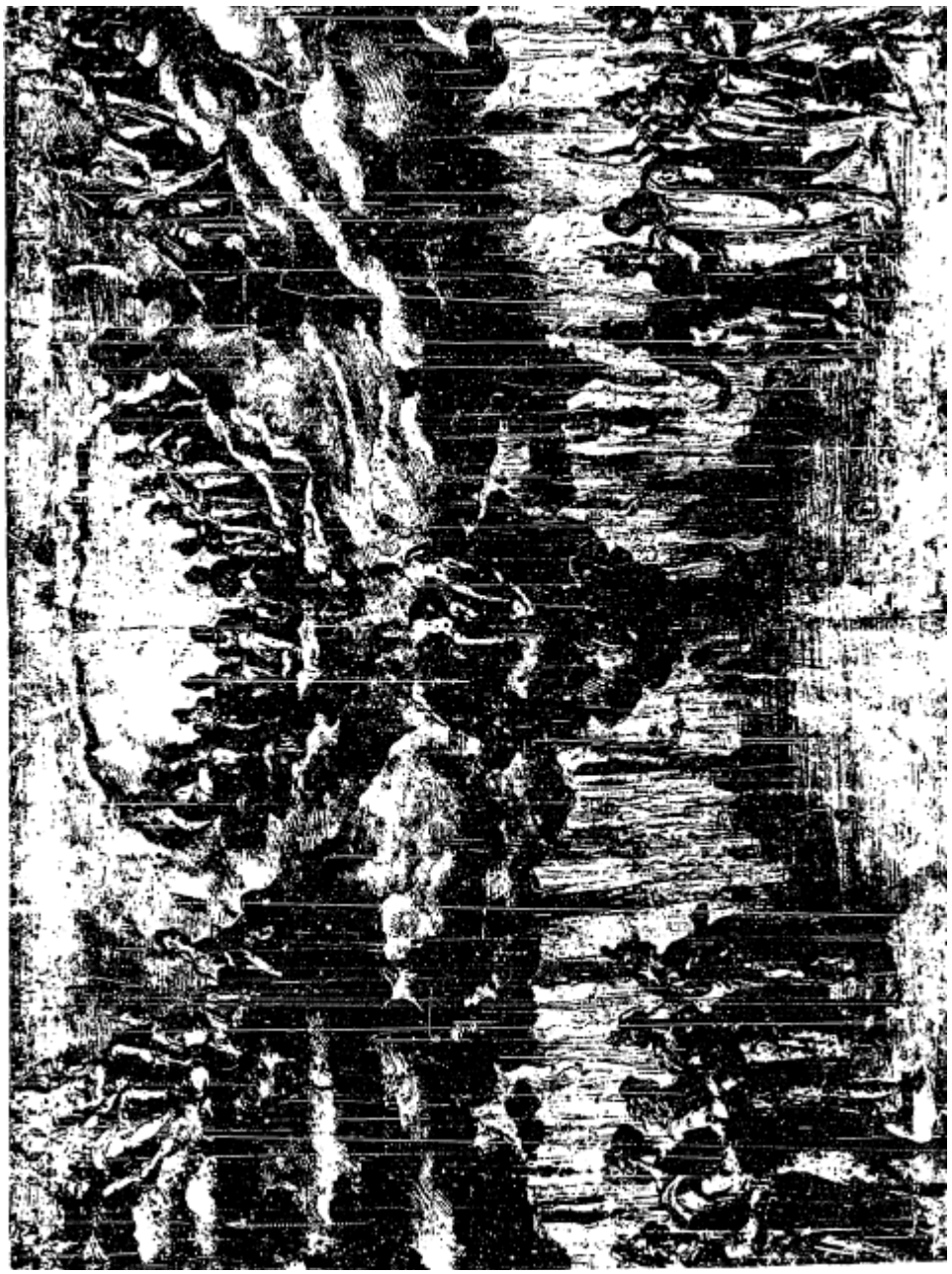
B Buontalenti scene design for the second intermezzo engraved by D'Alfiano

Figure 20. Buontalenti sketch for Apollo and the Python in the third intermezzo

Figure 21. Forest scene for the third intermezzo engraved by Carracci after a drawing by Bernardo Buontalenti

Figure 22. Buontalenti stage design for the fourth intermezzo engraved by D'Alfiano after a drawing by Bernardo Buontalenti

Figure 23 A. Buontalenti stage design for the sixth intermezzo



B D’Alfiano’s engraving for the sixth intermedio

Figure 24. Parigi setting for the first intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

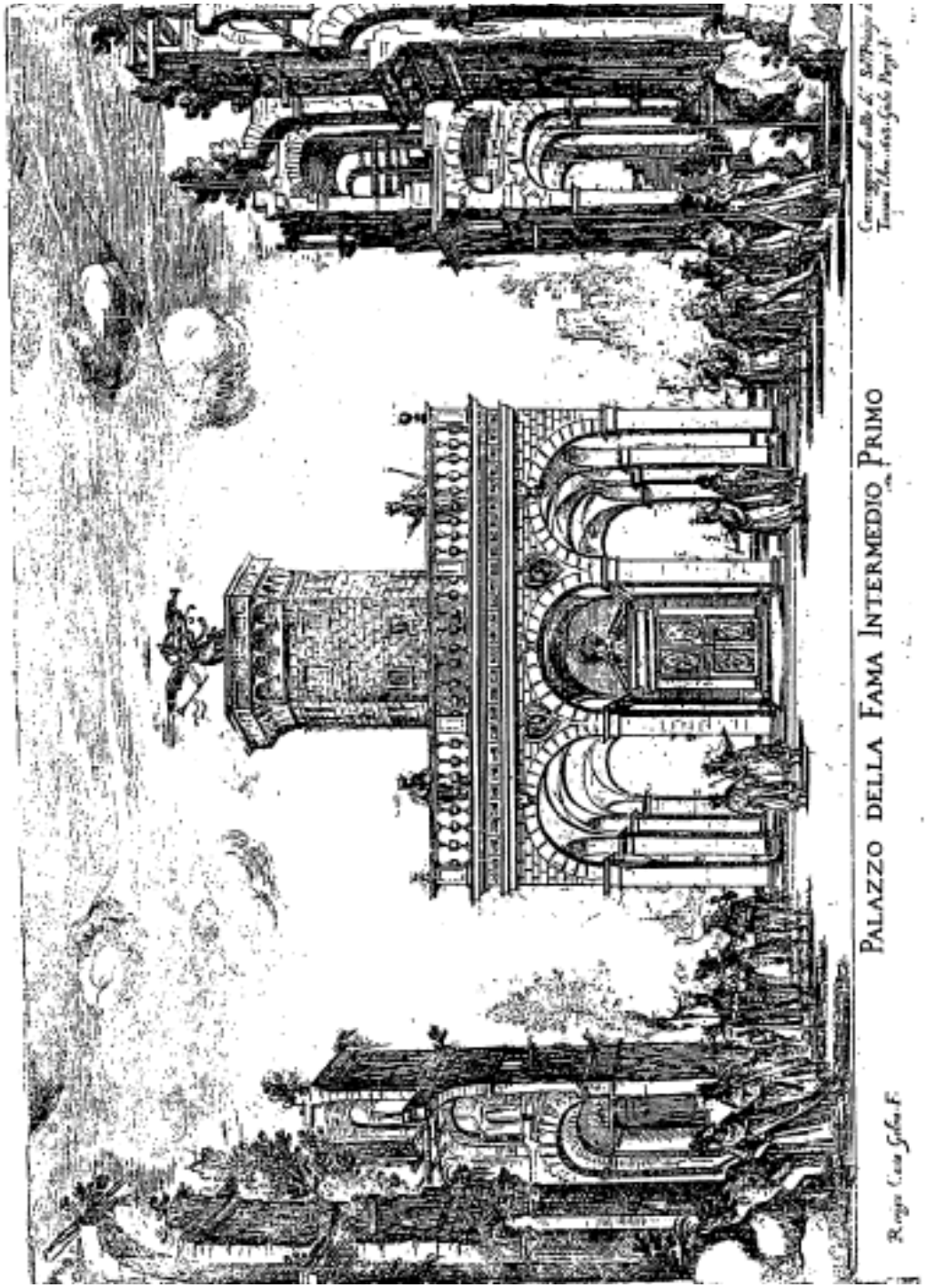


Figure 25. Parigi setting for the second intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

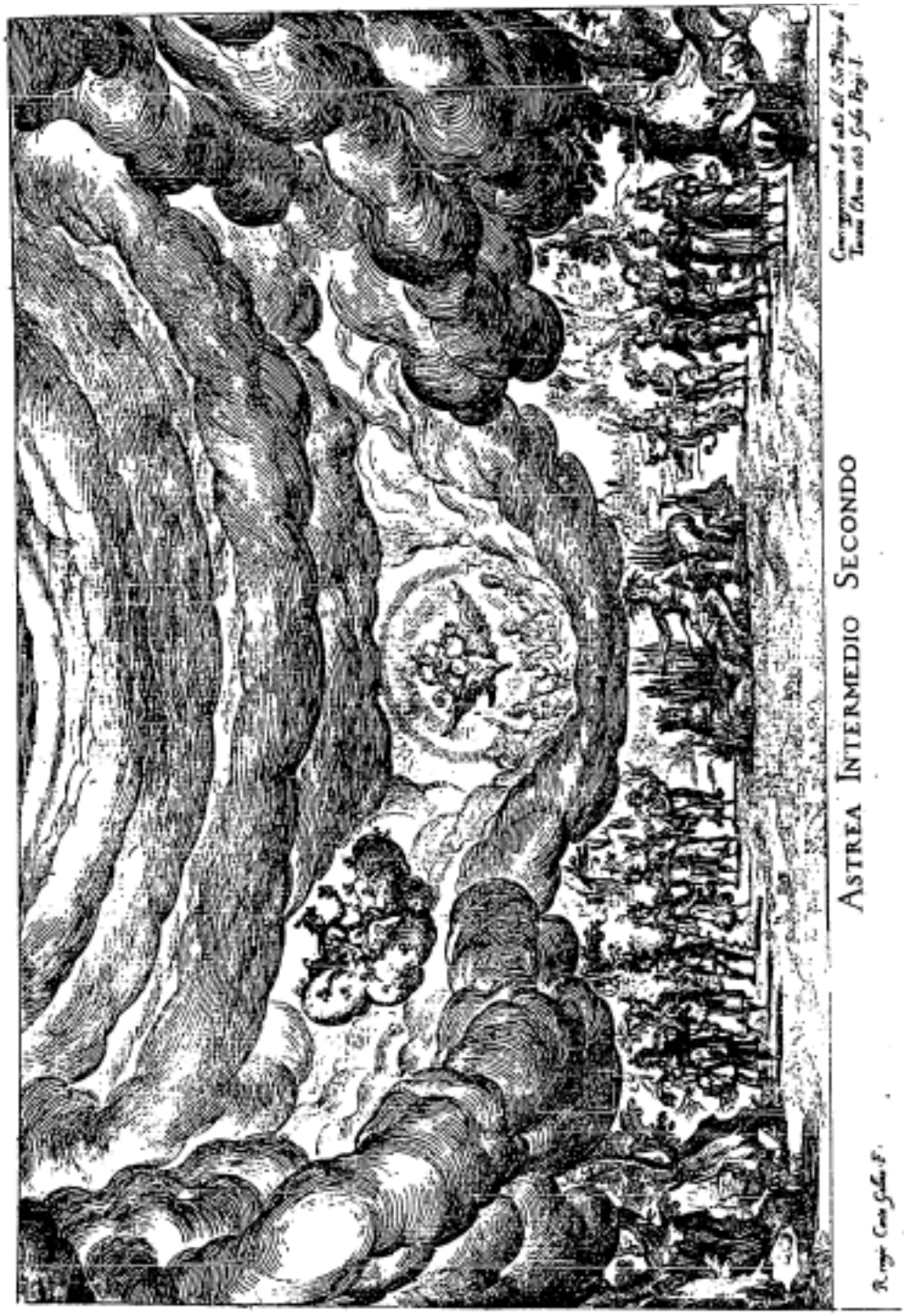


Figure 26. Parigi setting for the third intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

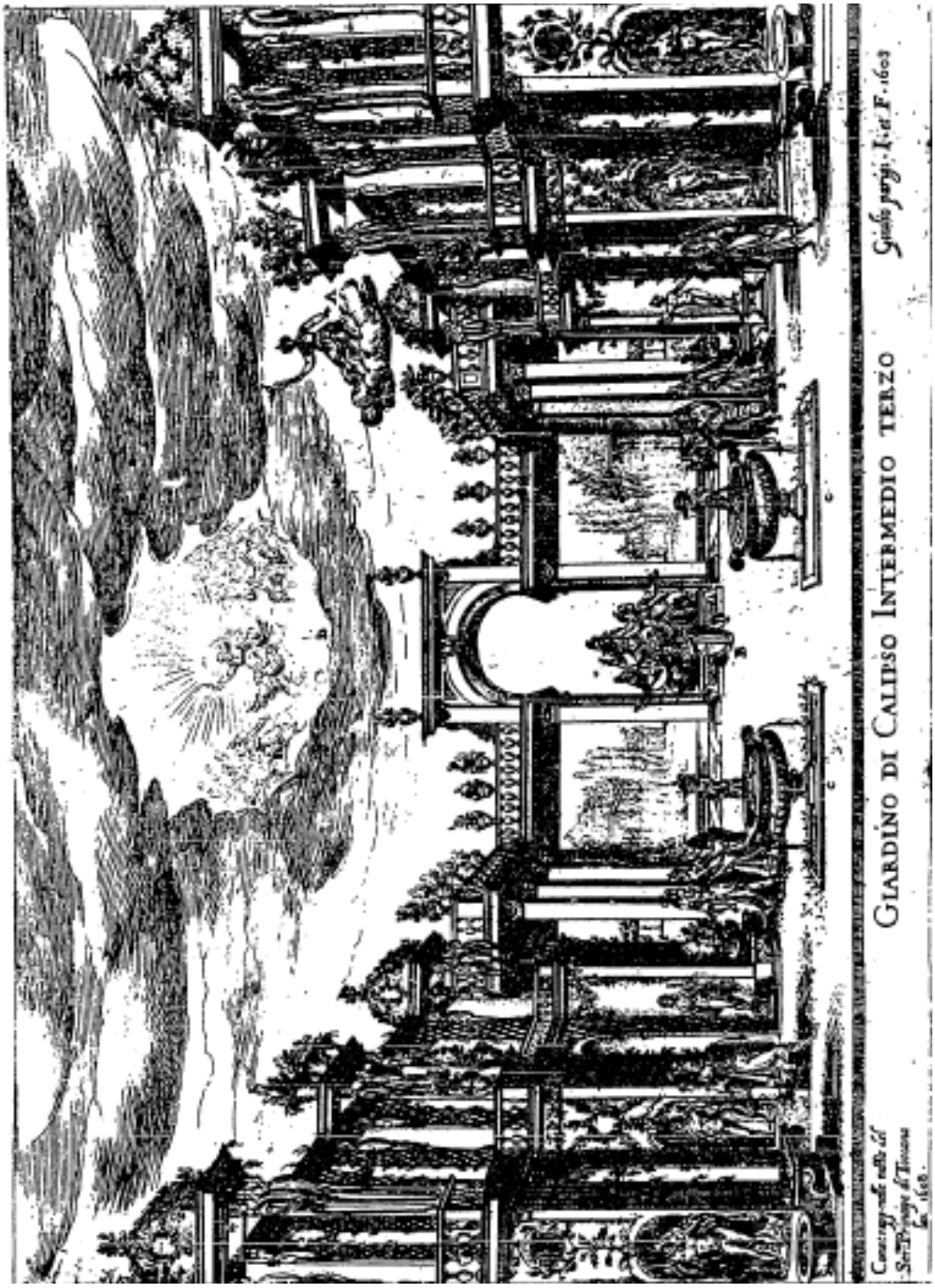


Figure 27 Parigi setting for the fourth intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

Figure 28 Parigi setting for the fifth intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

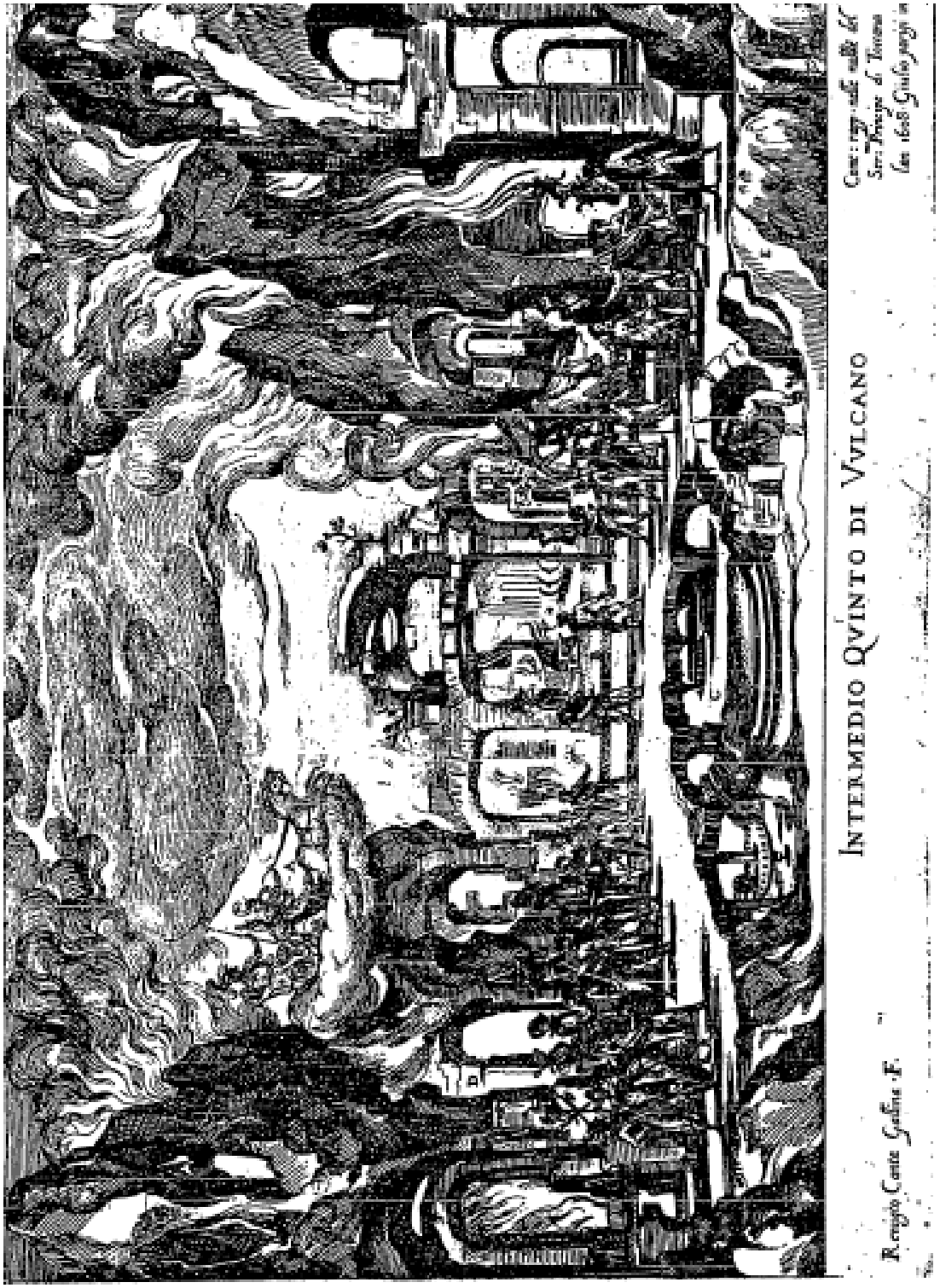


Figure 29. Parigi setting for the sixth intermezzo of *Il Giudizio di Paride*

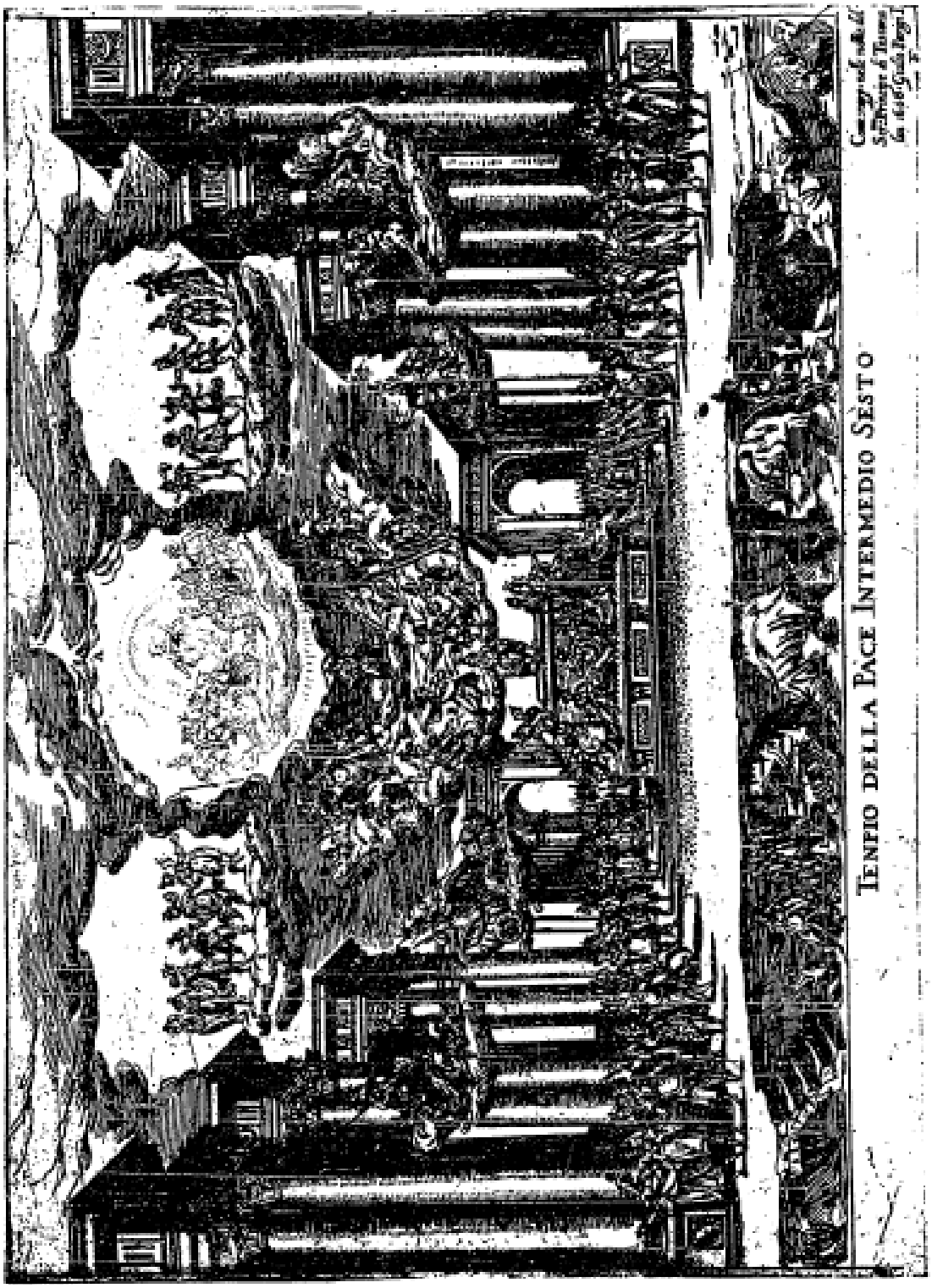
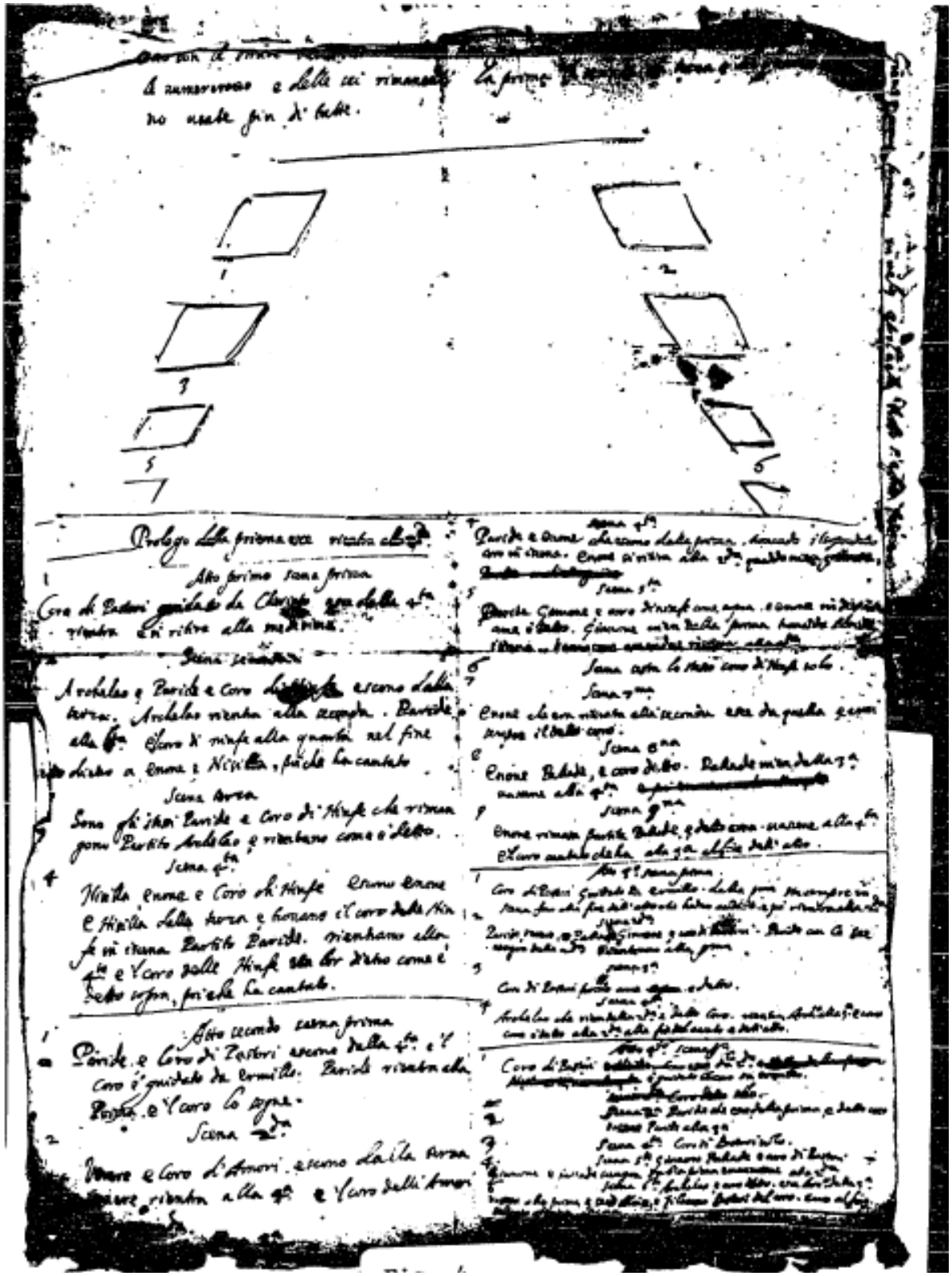


Figure 30. Buonarroti drawing for *Il Giudizio di Paride*



Appendix Chapter III

Figure1. Sabbatini's equilateral periaktoi

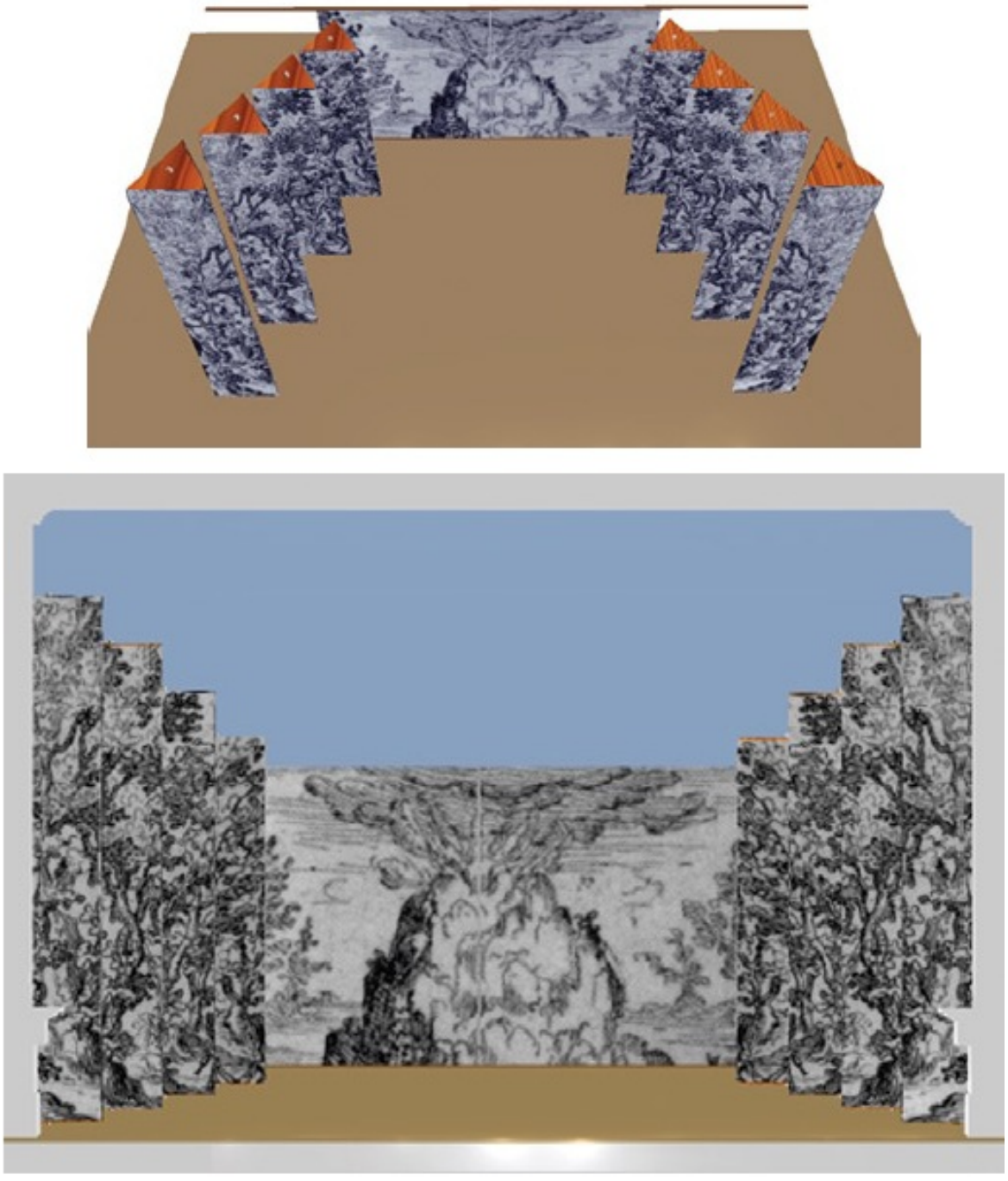


Figure 2. Sabbatini's isosceles periaktoi

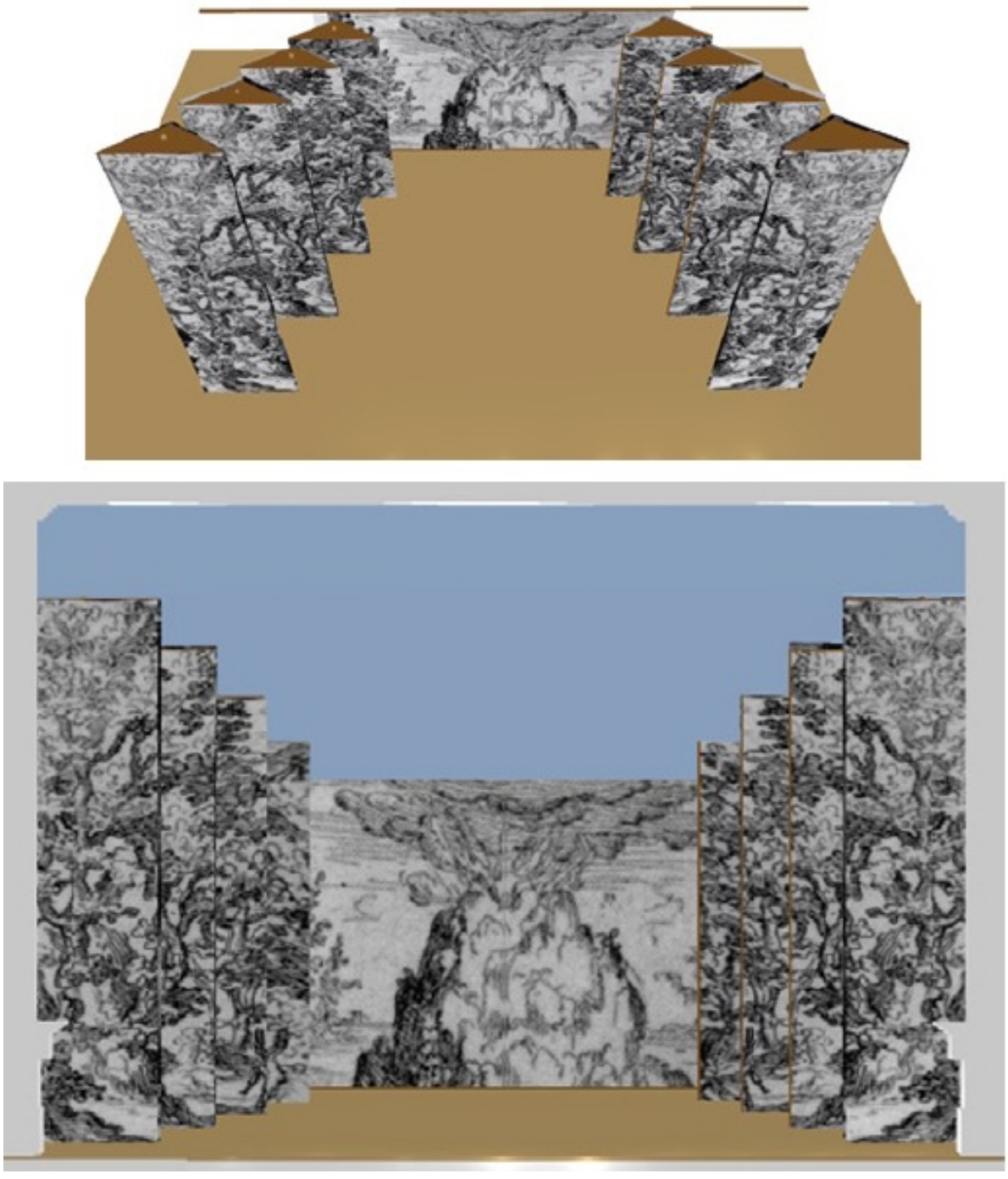


Figure 3. Parigi's sketch for *Giudizio di Paride* – four-sided periaktoi

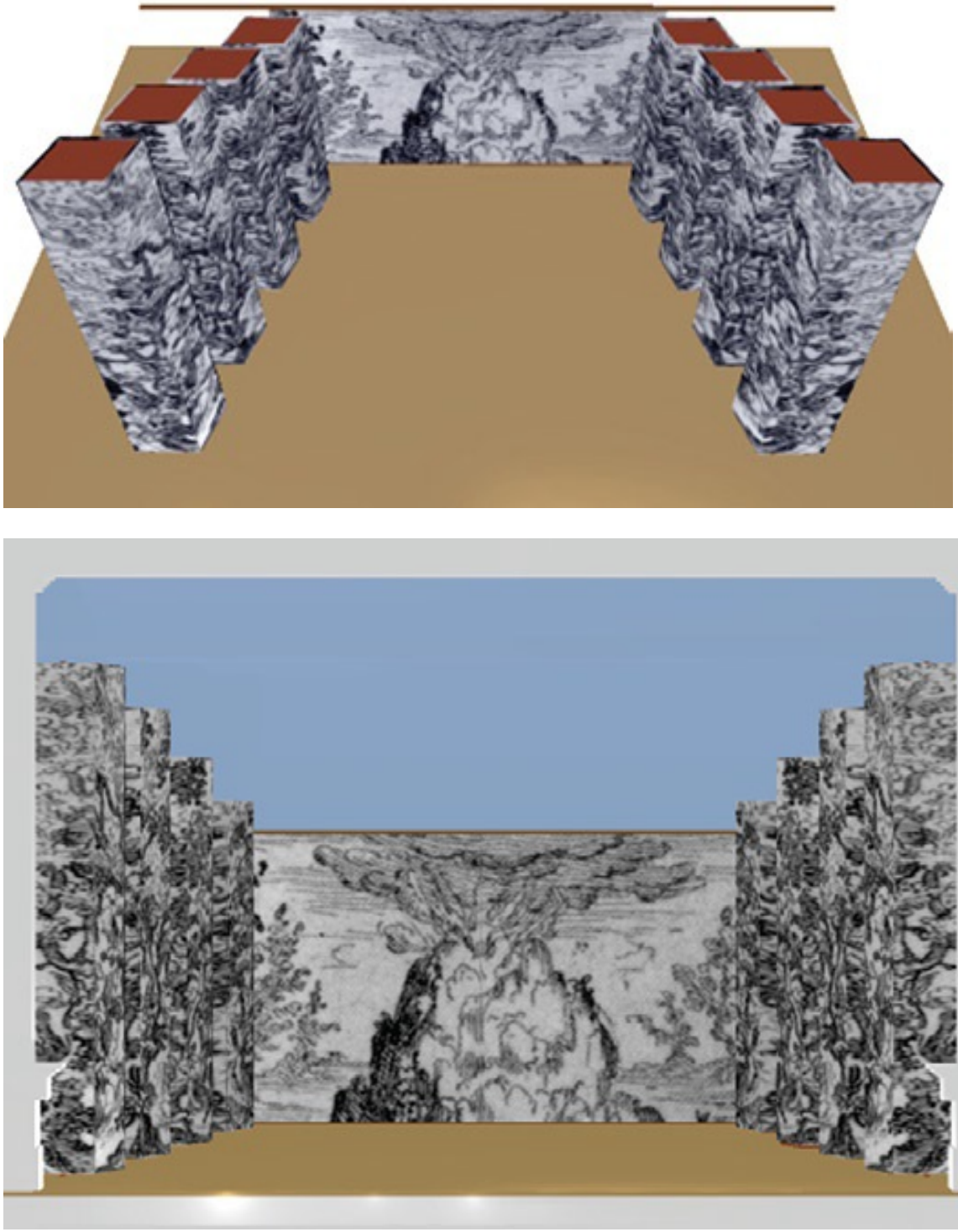


Figure 4 A - Furttenbach's design of Buonarroti's setting

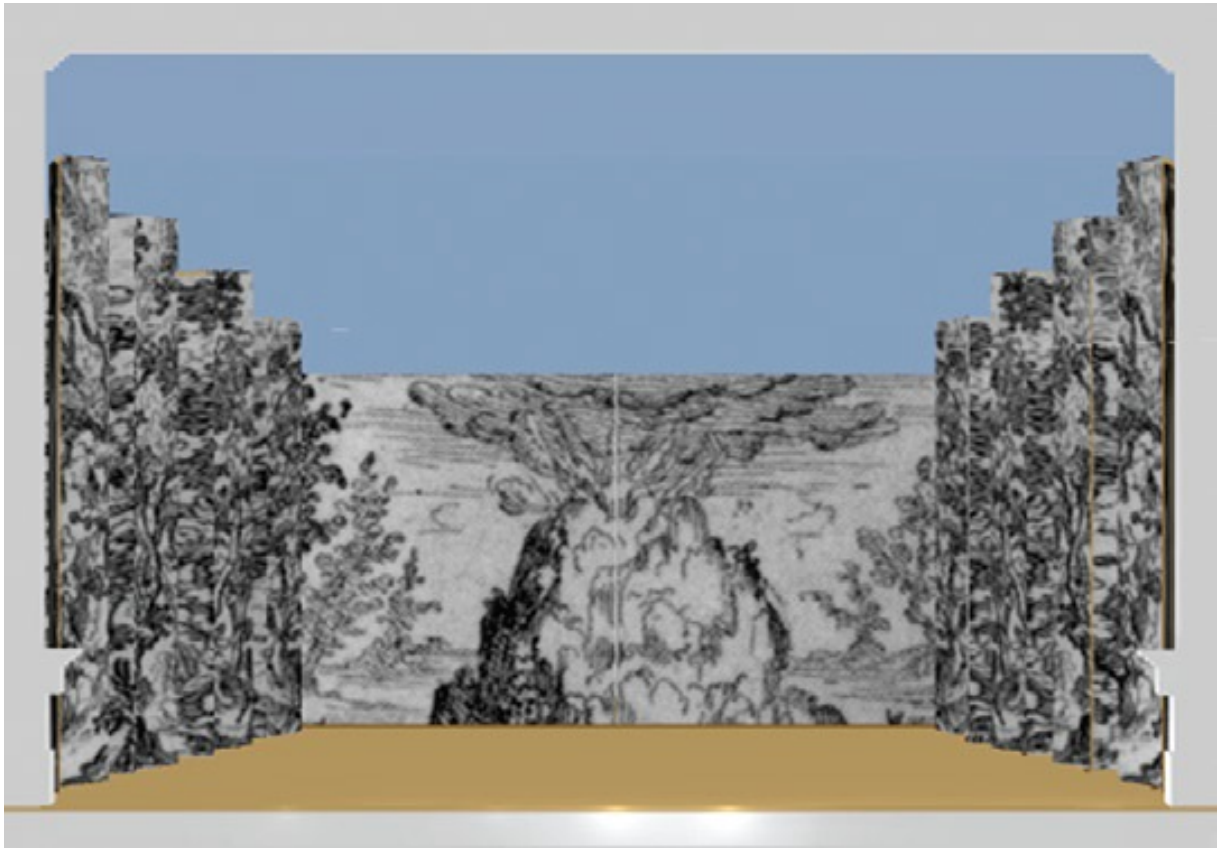
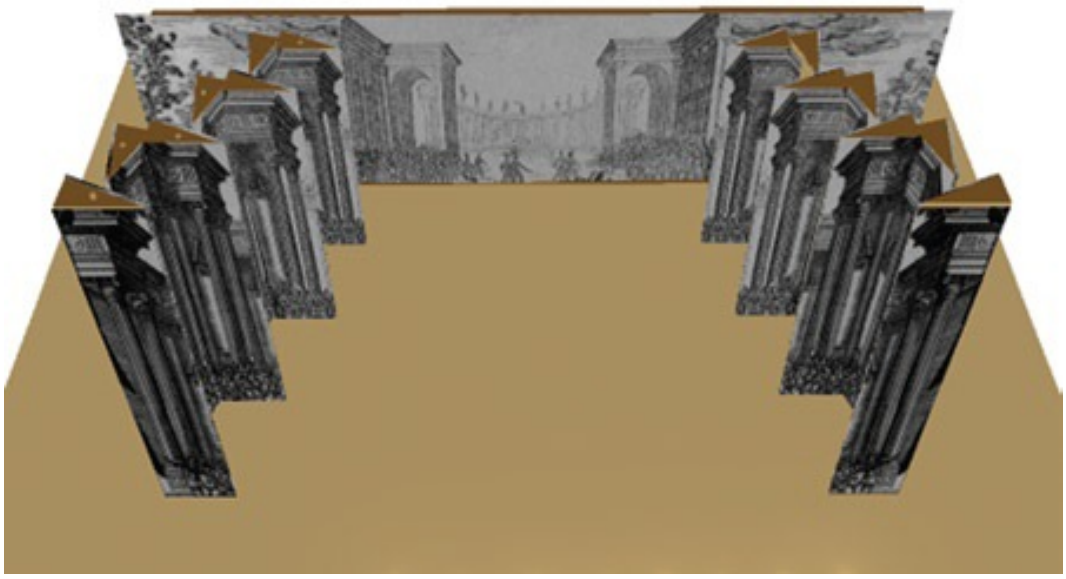


Figure 4 B



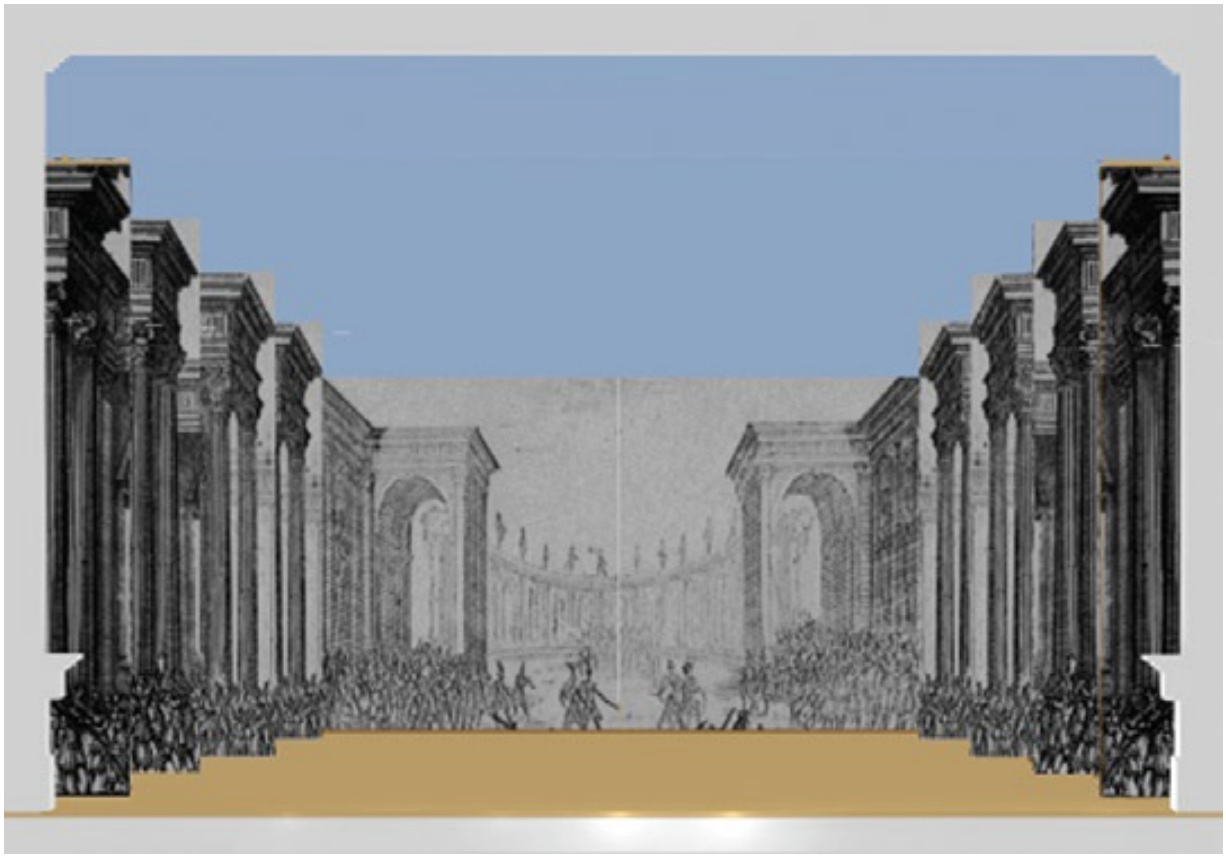
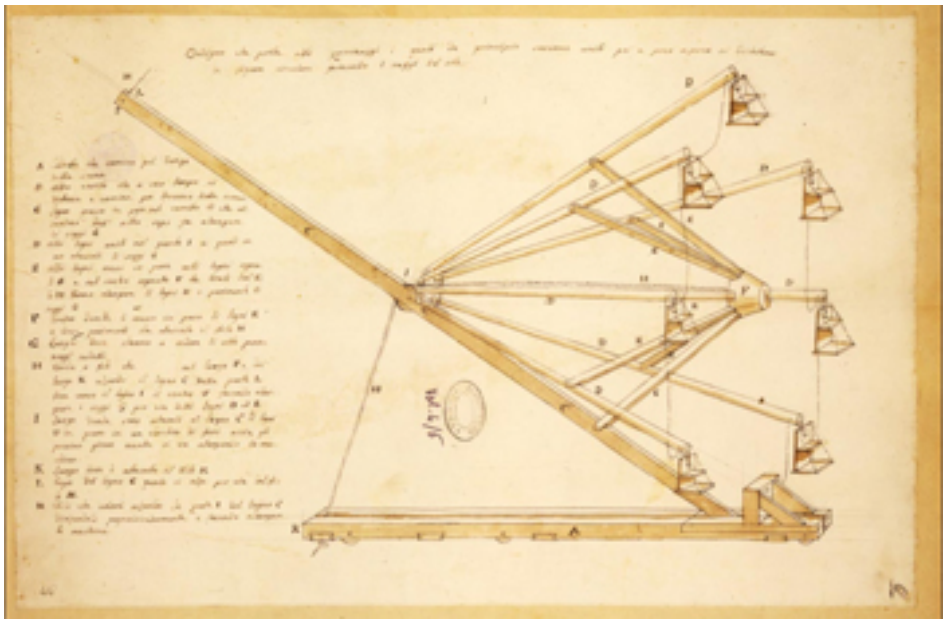


Figure 5. Leonardo da Vinci plan of the stage set for Orpheus – Codex Arundel folio 231

Figure 6. Francesco Guitti “Device for fifty four persons”



Appendix Chapter IV

Figure 1. *Chiton* and *himation*

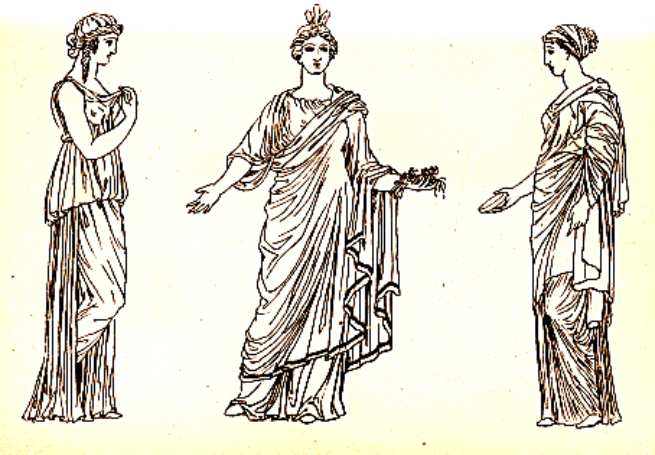


Figure 2. *Pronomos vase* (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale)

Figure 3. *Apulian Red-Figure*: Orestes Seeking Sanctuary at Delphi, vase displayed in Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Oreste, Pythia, Apollo's prophets, shown as an old woman with white hair, Apollo, one of the Furies, shown with dark skin and waving a snake.

Figure 4. Drawing of an ancient Roman *pantomimus* wearing a mask and tunic [232]

Figure 5. Costume design sketch by Pietro Buonaccorsi, known as Perino del Vaga, 1540

[232]Photograph Encyclopædia Britannica Online Web. 6 Feb. 2012

Figure 6. *Old Priest and Messenger from Edipo Tiranno,* sketch by Giovanni Battista Maganza, Sr. (1585)

Figure 7. Oedipus with Attendants from *Edipo Tiranno*, sketch by Giovan Battista Maganza, Sr. (1585)

Figure 8. Buontalenti costume design for Armonia Doria

Figure 9. Buontalenti – Standing Woman in Costume, and Separate Study for Her Headdress, 1589

Figure 10. Buontalenti – Delphic couple

Figure 11. Peri as Arion

Bibliography

Alberti, Leon Battista and John R. Spencer. *On Painting*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1976.

D'Amico, John F. *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

D'Amico, Silvio. *Storia del Teatro Drammatico*. Milano: Garzanti, 1958.

Ault, C. Thomas. "Baldassare Peruzzi and the Perspective Stage." *Theatre Design and Technology* 43, no. 3 (2007): 33-50.

Austin, William W. *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honor of Donald J. Grout*. Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Beacham, Richard, C. *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Belkin, Ahuva. "Leone De Sommi's Pastoral Conception and the Design of the Shepherd's Costumes for the Mantuan Production of Guarini's Il Pastor Fido." *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre* C, no. 3 (1986): 59-74.

Bevington, David M. *Medieval drama*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

Bianconi, Lorenzo. *Music in the Seventeenth Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Blumenthal, Arthur R. *Italian Renaissance Festival Designs.* Elvehjem Art Center: Madison, Wis, 1973.

Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the theatre.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968.

Brooke, Iris. *Costume in Greek Classic Drama.* London: Methuen, 1962.

Byrnes IV, William H. "Ancient Roman Munificence: The Development of the Practice and Law of Charity." *Rutgers Law Review* vol. 57, issue 3(Spring 2005): 1043–1110.

Carlson, Marvin A. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Carter, Tim. "A Florentine Wedding of 1608." *Acta Musicologica* 55, no. 1 (1983): 89-107.

_____. *Composing Opera: From Dafne to Ulisse Errante*. Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 1994.

_____. *Music, Patronage, and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence.* Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2000.

_____. "Rediscovering Il rapimento di Cefalo." *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, v. 9 no. 1 (2003). Accessed April 7, 2011. http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/carter.html

_____. "Possente spirto: on taming the power of music." *Early Music 21*, no. 4 (1993): 517-524. Accessed April 7, 2011. http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/carter.html

Ceccherelli, Alessandro. *Descrizione di tutte le feste, e mascherate fatte in Firenze per il carnouale, questo anno, 1567: e insieme l'ordine del battesimo della primogenita dell'illust. & eccell. S. principe di Firenze, e Siena, con gl'intermedij della commedia, et dell'apparato fatto per detto battesimo.* Florence, 1567. Accessed on April 7, 2011. https://archive.org/stream/descrizioneditut00cecc#page/n3/mode/2up.

Clubb, Louise George. *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Cole, Toby and Helen Krich Chinoy. *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the Great Actors of All Times As Told in Their Own Words.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1970.

Eckert, William Dean. "The Renaissance Stage in Italy A Study of the Evolution of the Perspective Scene." PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1961.

Euclid. *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*. Translated by Thomas Little Heath and J. L. Heiberg. Cambridge: The University Press, 1908.

Ewen, David. *The New Encyclopedia of the Opera.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1971.

Fabbri, Paolo, and Angelo Pompilio. *Il Corago, o vero, Alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche.* Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983.

Fenlon, Iain. "Correspondence relating to the early Mantuan performances." In *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham, 167-173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

_____. "Music and Spectacle at the Gonzaga Court, C. 1580-1600." *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 103 (1976): 90-105.

_____.*Music and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Mantua.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980

_____. "Monteverdi's Mantuan "Orfeo" Some New Documentation." *Early Music* 12, no. 2 (1984): 163-172.

Fenlon, Iain, Tim Carter, and Nigel Fortune. *Con Che Soavità: Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580-1740*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Gallo, F. Alberto. *La prima rappresentazione al Teatro Olimpico Con i progetti e le relazioni dei contemporanei.* Milano: Il polifilo, 1973.

Grout, Donald Jay. *A Short History of Opera.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Guarini, Giambattista. *The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry.* Translated by Gilbert, Allan H. *Literary Criticism Plato to Dryden.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1940.

Hardison, O.B. *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages; Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Hewitt, Barnard, George Riley Kernodle, John H. MacDowell, and Allardyce Nicoll. *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbatini, and Furttenbach.* Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958.

Hibbert, Christopher. *The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici.* Newton Abbott: Readers Union Group of Book Clubs, 1975.

_____.*The Biography of a City.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1993.

Homer. *The Iliad.* Translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Free Press, 2011.

Ingegneri, Angelo, and Maria Luisa Doglio. *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche.* Modena: Ed. Panini, 1989.

Aristotle. *Aristotle on Comedy towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II.* Translated by Janko, Richard. London: Duckworth, 1984.

_____.*Poetics I*. Translated by Janko, Richard. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1987.

Kemp, Martin. *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Kimbell, David R. B. *Italian Opera.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Kirkendale, Warren. *The Court Musicians in Florence During the Principate of the Medici With a Reconstruction of the Artistic Establishment*. Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993.

_____. *Emilio De' Cavalieri "Gentiluomo Romano" His Life and Letters, His Role As Superintendent of All the Arts at the Medici Court, and His Musical Compositions.* Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2001.

Malvezzi, Cristofano, Giovanni de' Bardi, Ottavio Rinuccini, and D. P. Walker. *Les fêtes du mariage de Ferdinand de Médicis et de Christine de Lorraine Florence, 1589.* Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1963.

Manetti, Antonio. *The Life of Brunelleschi.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970.

Nagler, A. M. *A Source Book in Theatrical History = Sources of Theatrical History.* New York: Dover Publications, 1959.

_____. *Theatre festivals of the Medici, 1539-1637.* New York: Da Capo Press, 1976.

Nicoll, Allardyce. *The Development of the Theatre; A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946.

Oosting, J. Thomas. *Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico.* Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1981.

Palisca, Claude V. *The Florentine Camerata: documentary studies and translations.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

_____. "Camerata." *Grove Music Online Oxford Music Online*. Accessed April 28, 2011. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/04652

_____. "Emilio de'Cavalieri." *Grove Music Online Oxford Music Online*. Accessed April 28, 2011.http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05202

_____. *Humanism in Italian Renaissance musical thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Perrucci, Andrea, Francesco Cotticelli, Anne Goodrich Heck, and Thomas F. Heck. *A treatise on acting, from memory and by improvisation (1699) = Dell'arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all'improviso.* Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2008.

Pevsner, Nikolaus. *A History of Building Types.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Pieri, Marzia. *La nascita del teatro moderno in Italia tra il XV e XVI secolo.* Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989.

Pirrotta, Nino. *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque A Collection of Essays.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984.