The reflections of memory : an account of a cognitive approach to historically informed staging

Blin, G.R.

1 Poetic and Performing spaces in Monteverdi's operas

This chapter presents my approach to the relationship between space and scenography for the three remaining operas of Monteverdi. The opera production of Monteverdi spreads over almost fifty years at a time of major social, religious and philosophical movements. Artistic growth was abundant at the period and literature, with the development of the printing press, was not less intense. Taking in consideration the range of visual culture in evidence from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century, I attempt to show how opera drew heavily on this imagery to stimulate the imagination of the audience. I plan to demonstrate how the theatrical arts that surrounded Monteverdi and his contemporaries had a profound influence on the ways in which opera was written, staged and received. By doing so I hope to give a renewed *image* of Monteverdi's operas.

From the early attempts of the Renaissance at reconstructing the milieu of the stage of antiquity, set design had progressed via the scene changes for the musical *intermedii* of spoken drama to the scenery of the Venetian opera. Created in 1607, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* belongs to the beginning of this period, when the language of performance is still a subject of experimentations, having still some inheritance from the past but by then influenced by politics more than religions[1]. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, opera and the art and technique of theater design, had undergone a rich development and the opening of public opera houses in Venice modify the opera purpose and, consequently, its art form[2]. It is in this context that Monteverdi's last operas were created. The scarcity of sources for *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and the plurality of versions for *L'incoronazione di Poppea* turns any study of the sets for Monteverdi's operas into a challenging investigation. Although the chronology of performances and their documentations already offer a great deal of information, the sets of the Venetian premieres of 1640 and 1643 can be more accurately traced by putting the spectacles in the context of theater set history and Venetian opera practice.

To evaluate how the research of ideal performing space has connections with the operas of Monteverdi it is necessary first to outline the main currents in theatre design at the beginning of the early modern period. Along with the revival of classical culture in the Renaissance, European artists found most of their inspiration when designing for the performing space in the writings of a Roman architect, Vitruvius (ca. 80–70 BC to ca. 15 BC). Back in the first century BC, Vitruvius wrote *De architectura*, known today as *The Ten Books on Architecture*, the only surviving major treatise on architecture from antiquity, which has been available in numerous editions since 1486. A Venetian edition published in 1511 was very

[1] Strong, Roy. *Art and Power, Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*. Berkeley (CA) : University of California Press, 1973.

[2] Rosand, Ellen. *Opera in seventeenth-century Venice, the creation of a genre*. Berkeley (CA) : University of California Press, 1991.

comprehensive and offered detailed illustrations[3]. Italian artists of the *Rinascimento* initially based their reconstructions on Vitruvius's descriptions of the theatre and the stage[4], also studying the remains of the extant Roman and Greek theatres[5]. In 1545, architect, painter, and theatre designer Sebastiano Serlio (1475–ca. 1554) included in his *Secondo libro di perspettiva* (published in Lyon, France) a discussion of the stage, influenced by Vitruvius's descriptions of Greek and Roman theatres and his own experiences with temporary performing structures[6]. And indeed, Serlio's proposals are for a temporary theatre, built in wood in a room or a courtyard. These conditions requiring that a temporary structure be placed within a permanent one, not designed to contain such structures, influenced the conception of the set in a square frame, not in the panoramic rectangle that will become the trademark of any set designs. This set does not comprise all the space devoted to acting, as a flat platform is placed in front of the elevated slope stage.

Serlio was the first to give a well-developed chart of rules inspired by Vitruvius, who, apart from the description of the Roman stage, had established a short typology of sets for it: the *scena comica* showed a market street in a city; the *scena tragica*, a square with ancient monuments; and the *scena satyrica*, trees and a few huts[7]. These three sets were supposed to enable performances of all the dramas of antiquity and the contemporary plays inspired by its rules. The engravings in Serlio's book, in the Italian edition published in Venice in 1551, and constantly reproduced thereafter, show scenes composed around a central path. This path, which take the character of a street for the Comic and Tragic urban sets, is noticeable even in the bucolic scenery of the satirical set, which suits the pastoral repertoire, as shown in Figure 1. In each of the scenes, a set of stairs connecting levels shows that performers were able to go down or up on the stage. They link the realm of the fiction[8] with the real dominion where

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[3] The *De architectura* of Vitruvius published in Venice in 1511 by Giovanni da Tridentino is a folio edition prepared by Fra Giovanni Giocondo (ca. 1435–1515). It marked a milestone, for the text was considerably modified compared with those of the first three editions (ca. 1486, 1496 and 1497) and it included one hundred thirty-six woodcuts. See: http://architectura.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Traite/Notice/CESR_2994.asp?param=en (accessed 21 November 2017). See also: Pagliara, Pier Nicola. « Le *De architectura* de Vitruve édité par Fra Giocondo, à Venise en 1511 », in *Sebastiano Serlio à Lyon. Architecture et imprimerie*. Lyon: Mémoire active, 2004, pp. 348–354.

[4] In book V, Vitruvius describes how to build theatres and other buildings for spectacles. See: Vitruvius. *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Translated by Morris Hicky Morgan, Ph.D. LL.D. New with illustrations and original designs prepared under the direction of Herbert Langford Warren, A.M. York: Dover Publications, 1960.

[5] Theatres such as the ones of Orange, Verona, Roma, Pula, and Vicenza (Teatro Berga) were known and started to trigger the interest of humanists. See: Ricci, Giuliana. *Teatri d'Italia, dalla Magna Grecia all'Ottocento*. Milano: Bramante Editrice, 1971.

[6] In 1539 in Vicenza, Serlio built a temporary theatre in a courtyard « cortile della case Portesca ». See: Frommel, Sabine. *Sebastiano Serlio architect*, translated from the German by Peter Spring. Milano: Electa, 2003, p. 20.

[7] The three scenes designed by Serlio (1475–ca. 1554) have been often reproduced. See: Hart, Vaughan and Hicks, Peter. *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture Volume One, Books I–V of* Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva *by Sebastiano Serlio*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 86–91.

[8] Serlio confirms that these sets make use of visual illusion even for the satirical scene: « Et perche a tempi nostri queste cose per il piu delle volte se fanno la invernare, dove pochi arbori & herbe con fiori si tritrovano, si potran bene artificiosamente fare cose simili di seta lequali saranno anchora piu lodate che naturali, percioche: cosi comme nelle Scene Comiche e Tragiche, se imitano li casamenti & altri edifici, con l'artifico della pittura: cosi anchora un quelle se potran bene imitare gli arbori, & l'herbe co'fiori. » In Serlio, Sebastiano, [*Libro Primo & II d'Architettura*...], Venezia: G. Battista & Marchio Sessa Fratelli, 1560, p. 27.

the performance is taking place, as the patron is seated in the center of a middle level in Serlio's plans. These stairs, so essential to the circulation between poetic, allegoric and political spaces, will be present for more than a century, even when permanent performing structures, theatre buildings, eventually appear. It is worth noticing that the spaces of Vitruvius and of Serlio are presented in a square composition, a geometrical form which will be soon forsaken and be replaced by the horizontal rectangle that still predominates today.

Figure 1: Sebastiano Serlio, *Scene Satyrique*,
engraving from a non-identified seventeenth century-century French edition of *Libro II d'Architettura*...
Collection of Gilbert Blin.

It was near Venice that the first attempt was made to reunite permanent architecture with the illusionist realm of the stage. In the late 1570s, Andrea Palladio (1508–1580)[9] created a theatre in Vicenza for a very distinguished academy of patrons, scholars and artists—the *Accademia Olimpica*—with a clear reference to the work of Vitruvius. The overall impression of the *Teatro Olimpico*, which took its name from the academy, is indeed that of a roofed Roman theatre: the ruins of Roman antiquity gave ample visual examples of Vitruvius's descriptions, but Palladio was also familiar with the theories of the Roman author, since he had provided illustrations for a critical edition of *De architectura* in 1556[10]. The two main features of the *Teatro Olimpico,* inspired by the Greek and Roman remains, are the placement of the rows of benches designated for spectators in the form of a half ellipse, and the *frons scaenae*, a monumental wall in front of which the actors would perform. Palladio's design of this wall as a stable solution

[9] For an introduction to the work of Palladio, see: Wundbram, Manfred; Pape, Thomas; Marton, Paolo. *Andrea Palladio, 1508–1580, Un architecte entre la Renaissance et le Baroque*. Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1989. On the Teatro Olimpico, see: Schiavo, Remo. *Guida al Teatro Olimpico*. Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 1980. See also: Rigon, Fernando, *Il Teatro Olimpico di Vicenza*. Milano: Electa, 1989.

[10] This edition had comments by Daniele Barbaro (1514–1570). In 1569, he also published in Venice *La Pratica della Perspettiva* where he reconsiders the system of the three classical scenes, already theorized by Serlio, but he adds precise details about defining the stage in perspective.

to the question of the scenic space turned out to be a misdirected attempt. The *Teatro Olimpico* had little influence on the development of scenic arts at the time. Instead, it was the need for a frame – which would soon develop into the proscenium arch[11], representing the transition from the reality of the auditorium to the illusionary world of the stage – that gives the *Teatro Olimpico* the shape we see today. Palladio died before he finished his theatre's technical equipment, so the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552–1616)[12] had to be called upon to design the "sets" for the theatre's first production, the Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*, in 1585[13].

Scamozzi's evocation of the city of Thebes, seven streets leading to the seven famous gates of the city, appears like a multiplication of the *scena tragica* described by Vitruvius[14]. But far from respecting Palladio's original idea, this intervention reduces the monumental wall to the function of a proscenium arch[15]. By enlarging the central gate, Scamozzi turns the Palladian wall into a frame. He proceeds with the idea of a permanent set but does so by constructing streets of houses built in three-dimensional perspectives, thereby offering the possibility of movement to the actors, who can appear in the streets of this *Città Ideale*.[16] Scamozzi was the sole designer of *Il Teatro Olimpico* at Sabbioneta, which the local inhabitants prefer to call *Il teatro all'Antica* to avoid confusion with Palladio's theatre[17]. Constructed between 1588 and 1590, *Il teatro all'Antica* was the first example of a theatre built as a single building, and this isolated structure also offers a new articulation of the scenic space with the auditorium, all integrated in a rectangle plan. Within the building is a U-shaped amphitheater with stepped rows of seats under a colonnade of Palladian inspiration. A permanent set, seen through a proscenium arch, represented a city street in the same style as the ones that Scamozzi had designed for Vicenza. The configuration of this theatre, based on an architectural approach,

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[11] The frontispiece of *I Quattro libri dell'Architettura* by Andrea Palladio, published in 1570 in Venice, presents figures of Architecture and of Geometry in front of an arch/wall meeting with some figures of fame and glory. Later, in 1638, Sabattini, forsaking the allegory, extended the notion : See: Sabbattini, Nicolo, *Pratique pour fabriquer scènes et machines de théâtre*, Traduction de Maria Canavaggia et Louis Jouvet. Neuchâtel : Ides et Calendes, 1942, Chapitre 31 : « comment colorier le parapet de la scène », p. 51.

[12] "Vincenzo Scamozzi" in *Sabbioneta, guida alla vista della città.* Sabbioneta: Il Bulino edizioni d'arte, 1991.

[13] *Edipo tiranno* of Sophocles was performed in a translation by Orsato Giustiniani on 3 March 1585.

[14] Subtle differences between the architectures of buildings in each street seem to follow the original idea of Palladio: at the center the royal gate (*porta regalis*), and on the sides the streets where the foreigners to the city would come from (*portae hospitales o hospitalia*). See: Schiavo, Remo. *Guida al Teatro Olimpico.* Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 1980, p. 100. The commission to evocate Thebes with its seven gates was clearly expressed by the stage director of the play, Angelo Ingegneri. See: Beyer, Andreas. *Palladio Le Théâtre Olympique, architecture triomphale pour une société humaniste*. Paris: Adam Biro, 1989, p. 39.

[15] Despite the work by Vincenzo Scamozzi, the initial project of Palladio is still clear for well-read amateurs as noticed by Carlo Goldoni in the eighteenth century (I underline) : « Je vis avec plaisir à Vicence le fameux Théâtre Olympique de Palladio, très célèbre architecte du seizième siècle, natif de cette ville, j'admirai son arc de triomphe, qui, sans autres ornements que ceux de proportions régulières, passe pour le chef-d'œuvre de l'architecture moderne. » in Goldoni, Carlo, *Mémoires de M. Goldoni, pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie et à celle de son théâtre*, Edition présentée et annotée par Paul de Roux. Paris: Mercure de France, 1965, Chapitre XXVII, p. 119.

[16] Palladio seemed to have initially thought to use the *Periaktoi*, this triangular construction thought to come from ancient Greece, which was supposed to offer a view through the doors on three different types of settings. But as the detailed plans are lost, it is difficult to have a clear idea of what exactly Palladio had in mind.

[17] A revelatory tradition if « all'Antica » refers to the Roman times, as suggested with the capital letter A.

was meant to focus the eyes of the audience on the stage, where the use of forced perspective was drawing the eye.

In the sixteenth century, the stage was thought to be a picture; as such, the rules of perspective in painting could be applied to it. Even in the beginning, however, the three types of sets mentioned by Vitruvius were approached with ingenuity. The idea of combining illusion—where the surfaces were painted in an illusionist manner—and reality, with the flat shutters assembled in space to create an architectural effect, came from previous forms of entertainment ranging from church pageants to feasts for princely weddings[18]. Soon European writers were creating new dramas that, although inspired by the classic Roman and Greek models, showed some freedom in their conception. Like these earlier forms of entertainment, both comedy and tragedy were performed with music. Singers and dancers were combined with luxurious costumes and scenery to produce incredibly extravagant entertainments. Florence led the development of these *intermedii*, at the occasion of the princely weddings. Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608)[19] had set the Florentine standard in 1589 for these extravaganzas with his memorable sets for the *intermedii* of *La Pellegrina*. All kinds of devices were used, but in the third *intermedio* showing *la Vittoria di Apollo su Pitone*, what was to become the main feature of the art of theatrical perspective in the seventeenth century was introduced: a series of wing flat shutters, placed on two diagonals converging on a distant central vanishing point. This pictorial concept, developed further through the establishment of Florentine opera, will ultimately predominate for centuries.

[18] Magagnato, Licisco. *Teatri Italiani del Cinquecento*. Venezia: Neri Pozza Editore, 1954.

[19] For reproductions of some of the sets by Bernardo Buontalenti, see: *Illusion et Pratique du Théâtre, Propositions pour une lecture de l'espace scénique des Intermèdes florentins à l'Opéra-comique vénitien*. Paris: Editions des Musées de France, 1976.

1.1 *Orfeo* in Mantua

« I have always made a small, carefully measured *modello* in wood and paper card
and it served me easily to scale up each individual thing to a very accurate,
full-size version of the work I had undertaken.
This lesson may perhaps be difficult to follow for some students of this science,
but I can make it more intelligible only by advising them to make *modelli*,
because the experience attached to the study reveals the truth of what one is looking for. »[20]

Sebastiano Serlio, *Libro II d'Architettura*..., Paris, 1545.

It is in the dynamic context of exploration of the performing space that *Orfeo* by Alessandro Striggio (1573–1630) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) came to fruition in Mantua. Even though considered by many as the first true opera, *Orfeo* was not written for the theatrical building equipped with a proscenium frame that would soon be synonymous with the genre in which it later came to shelter. Although there is still a great deal of research to be done about the actual material context of the first performance of *Orfeo*, it has been established with certainty that the premiere on 24 February 1607 did not take place in a theatre but in a room of the ducal palace in Mantua. Furthermore, in these modest conditions, *Orfeo* was first presented in front of a very restricted audience: the members of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*, the "Academy of the enamored." Alessandro Striggio, author of the libretto, was himself a member of this society of gentlemen longing for knowledge, who discussed the arts and studied the Roman and Greek classics during their meetings. Not conceived as a grand court festivity, like most of the other first attempts to create full-length musical dramas[21], and far from the idea of pure entertainment, *Orfeo* was conceived as an experimental work by a poet and a composer striving for new musical ways of expression.

While not totally free from political message, diplomatic influence and circumstantial allegory, the piece manages to establish a new level of artistic ambition. The complexity and at the same time candid character of the music by Monteverdi, and the clarity in Striggio's libretto of the metaphysical treatment of the myth of Orpheus, make the piece a kind of an intellectual modello. Although it is generally accepted that *Orfeo* has all the qualities to be considered an

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[20] « J'ai toujours en telz accidentz faict un moule ou patron d'aix de papier, & de boys mesurez le plus justement possible, & cela m'a servy pour faire facilement en grand, l'ouvrage que j'avoye entrepris. Je ne scay si ceste lecon sera malaysée a entendre a aucuns studieux de cette science. Mais je ne la puis rendre plus intelligible que par conseiller qu'ilz facent des moules, car l'experience conjoincte a l'estude faict trouver la vérité de ce que l'on cherche. » In Serlio, Sebastiano, [*Libri d'Architettura*...], Paris: Jehan Barbé, 1545, p. 66.

[21] *Dafne* by Ottavio Rinuccini with music by Jacopo Peri, first performed in Florence during the Carnival of 1598, is the earliest known work that could be considered an opera. *Euridice* from the same authors followed in 1600. *Il rapimento di Cefalo* by Gabriello Chiabrera and Giulio Caccini was performed the same year. Caccini wrote his own *Euridice,* performed in 1602, on the same libretto by Rinuccini. For general orientation, see: Donington, Robert. *The Rise of Opera*. London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981. For Peri, see: Mayer Brown, Howard. "Opera Began: An Introduction to Jacopo Peri's Euridice (1600)" in *The Late Italian Renaissance 1525–1630*, edited by Eric Cochrane. London: Macmillan, 1970, pp. 401–443. On the less-known *Cefalo*, see: Carter, Tim. "Rediscovering *Il rapimento di Cefalo*" in *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music, Volume 9* (2003) No. 1. https://sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/carter.html#AuthorNote (accessed 18 December 2017).

opera, by referring to the term "modello," which is a preparatory study or model, I want to switch the attention from the temporal (time) approach, although taking in consideration both historical and musical aspects, to a questioning of the space, both poetic and factual, to show the specificities of *Orfeo* that should be addressed by any staging. The word "modello," which gained currency in art circles in Tuscany in the fourteenth century, and the Latin term modulus, a synonym of typus, "archetype," are pertinent to *Orfeo*. Usually proportioned in a smaller scale than the final version, this model for a work of art or architecture is especially produced for the approval of the commissioning patron before its full development: all aspects that accord well with what we know of the context of the creation of *Orfeo*.

The distinguished *Accademia degli Invaghiti* could pride itself for being under the protection of the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga (1562–1612), and, even more so, under the active patronage of the heir to the Mantuan throne, Francesco IV Gonzaga (1586–1612), the prince who sponsored *Orfeo*. The Gonzaga family had a strong practice of patronage[22], without a doubt emulated by their familial and political links with the Florentine court. Ferdinando Gonzaga (1587–1626), the younger brother of Prince Francesco, had already written the text and music for a court ballet performed in Pisa in 1606 for the Medici court, where, as a cleric scholar, he was acting as de facto Mantuan ambassador. The correspondence between the two brothers shows their common interests in this type of entertainment and artistic research, certainly nourished by their memberships in the *Accademia degli Invaghiti*, but if the 1606 spectacle showing *L'abatimento di Dario et il finto Alessandro* by Ferdinando is clearly a typical Florentine court ballet[23], what Francesco was planning for the following year in Mantua was something more radical. Both Gonzaga brothers were busy in 1607, each preparing a « comedia in musica »[24]. Francesco asked his brother to send singers belonging to the Medici court to Mantua[25] for *Orfeo*, and Ferdinando had informed his brother of his own project: « I spend the carnival very cheerfully and work on my comedy, optimistically to have it performed on Monday of the carnival, hoping that I will be able to enjoy it and that it will please me. »[26]

A week later, the Medici court could enjoy Ferdinando's work in Pisa: « on this day 26 [February 1607] at 22 o'clock H. H. went with the whole court in the room called Consoli di Mare where a comedy in music was recited, the one that Cardinal Don Ferdinando Gonzaga

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[22] On the Gonzaga influence and relation with music, see: Fenlon, Ian. *Music and patronage in sixteenth-century Mantua*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 119–160.

[23] The role of Alessandro was danced by the young Francesco Medici (1594–1614). See: Solerti, Angelo. *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637; notizie tratte da un diario, con appendice di testi inediti e rari.* Firenze: R. Bemporad & figlio, 1905, pp. 37 & 38.

[24] *Nomenclatura* of entertainments is extensive during the early seventeenth century. See: Calcagno, Mauro. *From Madrigal to Opera, Monteverdi's Staging of the Self*. London: University of California Press, Ltd. 2012, pp. 17 & 18.

[25] See: Fenlon, Iain. "Monteverdi Mantuan Orfeo: Some New Documentation" in *Early Music, Vol. 12, No. 2* (May 1984). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 163–172.

[26] Ferdinando to Francesco, 18 February 1607: « vado passando il carnevale assai allegramente et tirando innanzi la mia comedia par farla rappresentar il lunedi di carnevale, sperando che mi riuscirà benne et a gusto moi ». Francesco answered : « Prego V. E. a darmi ragguaglio della sua opera recitata costi, che per farmi credere che sia stata bellissima, bastava di ch'essa è sua » in Bertolotti, Antonio. *Musici alla corte dei Gonzaga in Mantova dal secolo XV al XVIII. Notizie e documenti raccolti negli Archivi Mantovani*. Milano: Ricordi, 1890, p. 86.

had done »[27]. Created two days apart, both works had in common that they were conceived partly as court spectacle and partly as experimental, since the carnival allowed a freedom for the overall conception of what elements might be included in the entertainment that the diplomatic and celebratory concerns during weddings and state visits, their customary field of production, did not[28]. These social events, where the distinction between audience and spectators sometimes ran very thin, were of a variable nature: masquerade, banquets, feasts, etc. They were all based on exploring the relationship between poetry, music and visual arts, one of the most fruitful debates of the academies at the time.

Did the « comedia in musica » by Ferdinando in Pisa draw again from history as had the one from the year before, or was it inspired by mythology, like the one Francesco produced in Mantua? The Pisan work seems lost, but the origin of the two pieces by the Gonzaga brothers are entwined in time, and the locations of their creations shed some light on the shapes their first performances took. The room in Pisa where the comedy of Ferdinando Gonzaga was performed is called « Consoli di Mare ». It may be the room where the Magistrature of the Consuls of the Sea was established during the era of Florentine domination, with the purpose of administering trade justice and regulating the dikes and the drainage of water in the Pisan damp plain. The « salone » on the first floor, with a majestic vault composed with admirable frescoes depicting in compartmented sections Ovidian myths such as the tales of Diana and Actaeon and of Love and Psyche, the labors of Hercules and other deities, was a fitting place for a piece which was likely to have been in the Florentine style.

It is also obvious that the Prologue of *Orfeo* was written as taking place « hic et nunc », in the very place and time of the performance. The request for silence by Music, the character who gives the address, to be made on « these banks » is clearly an evocation of the geographical location of Mantua, almost an island then, surrounded by lakes and next to the river Mincio. This convention presents the coming show as a performance, commanding attention from the audience, and more specifically the patrons, to the story and the tale. The Gonzaga family received praise for its support to the society when Alessandro Striggio paid tribute to its kin in the very first lines of the prologue of his libretto for *Orfeo:* « Glorious Heroes, noble descendent of Kings, / Of whom Fame proclaims high praise, / Yet without attaining the truth because it is beyond description »[29]. The allusion to the praise of Fame was establishing a strong relation between the « descendents » of history, and the « Heroes » of mythology. The character of Music then tells the Gonzaga that she is about to tell the story of another hero: Orpheus, the mythical artist. Orpheus was among a small number of mortals whose art was so outstanding that they could measure themselves with the gods, the first musicians. Orpheus was the most renowned, as he was the only one to ally instrument and voice, music and poetry.

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[27] « 1607 [Feburary] et adì 26 detto [lunedi] alle 22 ore S.A. andò con tutta la corte nella sala detta dei Consoli di Mare dove se recitò una *comedia in musica* la quale fece fare il sig. Don Ferdinando Gonzaga » in Solerti, Angelo. *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637; notizie tratte da un diario, con appendice di testi inediti e rari.* Firenze: R. Bemporad & figlio, 1905, p. 38.

[28] Blumenthal, Arthur R. *Theater Art of the Medici*. Hanover (NH): Dartmouth College, 1980.

[29] « Incliti Eroi, sangue gentil de' Regi, / Di cui narra la Fama eccelsi pregi, / Nè giunge al ver, perch'è tropp' alto il segno. » In Striggio. *Orfeo*, Prologue. The references to the libretto of *Orfeo* in this dissertation are from my performing edition of libretto based on the text published by Francesco Osanna in Mantua in 1607 and the variants of the scores published in Venice by Ricciardo Amadino in 1609 and 1615. Striggio, Alessandro. *Orfeo Favola in Musica (A Tale in Music)*. Alessandro Striggio. Claudio Monteverdi. English Translation by Gilbert Blin. Cambridge (MA) : Boston Early Music Festival, 2012.

1.1.1 Orpheus, the Humanist figure

The figure of Orpheus was well defined by ancient literature: Apollonius of Rhodes, the Greek poet living in the third century BC, tells how Orpheus, the son of the muse Calliope, took part in the Argonauts' quest to recover the Golden Fleece[30]. Even if his strength did not lie in fighting or cunning behavior, he certainly showed himself to be valuable. When Jason's companions were tired at the oars, Orpheus let his lyre sing, and at once the rowers started to beat the water in rhythm. And again, when an argument threatened, his instrument had such calming effects that even the most aggressive of the heroes regained their composure and forgot their rage. Not even the singing of the immortal Sirens could measure up to his music, and Orpheus diverted it from the ears of the Argonauts by the power of his own voice and so saved their lives. Two Roman poets, Ovid and Virgil, completed the Orpheus story and gave matching accounts of his unhappy union with Eurydice[31]. Each of their texts describes in detail Orpheus's strength and increasing power. The musician no longer bewitched only human, but also the animals of the fields. The power of his singing was so great that the wild beasts followed him; even the rocks, the plants and the trees moved. No one could withstand him, everything both living and lifeless followed him, and even the rivers changed their courses to get closer to him. Orpheus the artist, accordingly, had great power: the power to transform the order of the gods, the power to create a new order of nature.

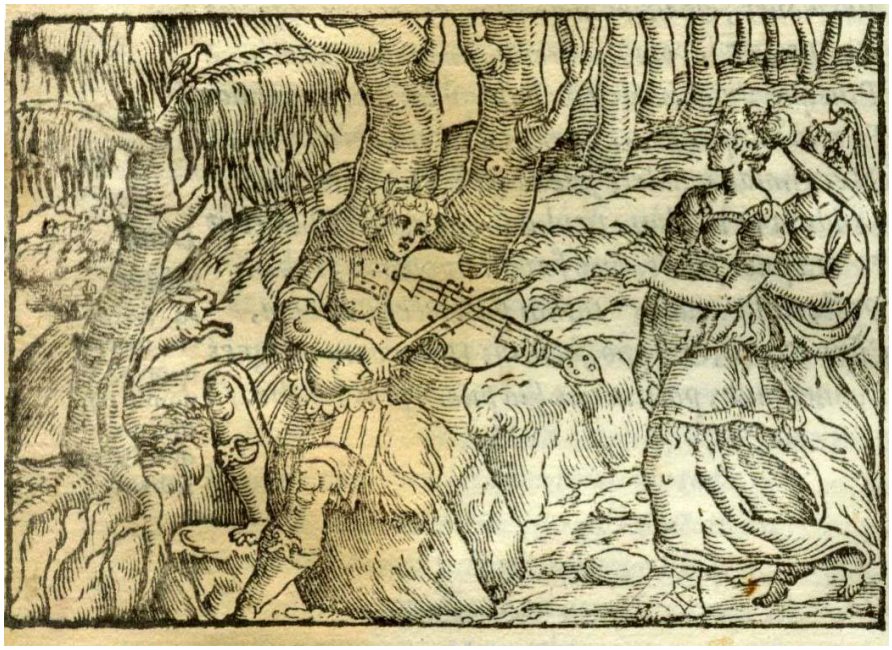

Figure 2: Orpheus charming all. Engraving from *Ovidii Metamorphoseon.*
Venice: Ioannes Gryphius, 1591.

The lords of the universe took offense that a mortal could possess such power, and they put Orpheus to the test. Here ensues in the Orpheus myth the twofold experience linked

[30] The Editio princeps of Apollonius's works was published in Florence in 1496. Orpheus is mentioned in: Book 1, lines: 23, 32, 494, 540, 915, 1134; Book 2, lines: 161, 685, 928; Book 4, lines: 905, 1159, 1409, 1547.

[31] Ovid tells the story of Orpheus in the Book X of his *Metamorphoses*. For the various early editions of Ovid's works, see: http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/ovidillust.html
Virgil tells about Orpheus in the *Georgics*. Book IV, 453–527. For Virgil, see: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0059%3Abook%3D4%3Acard%3D453

with Eurydice. The young wife's death, the first ordeal that the singer endured, failed to diminish Orpheus's artistic power: indeed, the experience of pain enhanced his inspiration. The suffering did not crush the poet's lyre, but made it sing more deeply, more movingly. The other, more subversive, baptism of fire begins with Orpheus being put to the trial: he is allowed to test his bewitching art on the gods. His success with the deities of the Underworld, the hardest of them all, appears to confirm and increase his power, and even these gods seem to yield to it. Has Orpheus become the equal of a god?

It is through the express condition of the reunion with Eurydice, however, that his true ordeal comes: he must not turn around. This prohibition works within him to call up one of the basic elements in man's lot: the phenomenon of doubt. This doubt appears in Orpheus's and Eurydice's passage from darkness to light, and it affects the artist so that at last he is overwhelmed and made into that which he has always been: a human being. Orpheus doubts, turns around, and loses Eurydice. The gods can be content: however great the artist's power may be, a god he is not. The artist is a human being like all the others. Although he has lost Eurydice, Orpheus continues to sing, and his power over the world is not reduced but, on the contrary, grows greater. Therefore, the gods decide to put an end to him: only his death can satisfy them. The women of Thrace cast themselves upon Orpheus, in the excitement of their Bacchanalian orgies, and tear him to pieces. But his head, which is separated from his body, continues to utter Eurydice's name, like the ceaseless love and indomitable hope in the heart of mankind. To interpret the Orpheus myth can be only an attempt, but whatever moral one takes from the events, the Gods, the Artist and the Mortal articulate essential relations between them and that may explain the attraction of the Humanism movement for the character[32].

Figure 3: Orpheus and the Bacchants. From *Ovidii Metamorphoseon.*
Venice: Ioannes Gryphius, 1591.

[32] This interpretation of the myth of Orpheus was first expressed in relation with my production of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Theatre of Drottningholm. See: Blin, Gilbert. "The Gods, The Artist and the Mortal, An attempt to interpret the Orpheus myth" in *Program 1998, Drottningholms Slottsteater*, Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 1998, pp. 68 & 69.

1.1.2 *Orfeo*: a static lesson

Striggio, a member of the *Accademia*, was clearly inspired by the works of Ovid and Virgil, but the full enterprise may have been conceived as a tribute to a famous play by Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) on the same subject. Poliziano's *La favola d'Orfeo*[33] had been performed more than one hundred years earlier in Mantua for the 1490 wedding of Francesco II Gonzaga (1466–1519), the ancestor of Striggio's own patron, Francesco IV. Striggio's *Orfeo* follows the outline of Poliziano's: a prologue gives the subject of the tale – Orpheus's travails – and then a succession of scenes is presented, conceived as episodes, whose autonomy had previously inspired various forms of visual representation[34]. Poliziano already presents Orpheus as a sovereign poet, an idea that runs through all his writings[35]. But, by omitting the character of Aristeo, the other suitor for Euridice, Striggio concentrates further on the figure of Orfeo. His *favola* exhibits some common points with the morality plays popular in the fifteenth century, in which the protagonist, always on stage, is met by personifications of various moral values before his fate is decided[36].

This similitude with the earlier type of spectacles can be supported by the fact that *Orfeo* of 1607 may have been seen by Striggio and his fellow academicians as a new type of a moral allegory about the meaninglessness of earthly life. Around this time, the transient nature of all earthly attachments and pursuits, including musical eloquence, was at the center of reflecting. In this vein, *La Rappresentatione di Anima et di Corpo* by Emilio de' Cavalieri (ca. 1550–1602) was a first milestone in February 1600. With this « Representation of the Soul and the Body », Cavalieri regarded himself as the composer of a new genre[37]. Whether the work, on a libretto by Agostino Manni (1548–1618), is better categorized as an opera or an oratorio is subject to some academic debate. But as it was first performed in Rome during Carnival time, in the Oratorio dei Filippini, adjacent to the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, the moral

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[33] See: Poliziano, Angelo. *Fabula di Orfeo, in Stanze, Orfeo, Rime*, introduzione, note e indici di Davide Puccini. Milano: Garzanti, 1992.

[34] See: Calcagno, Mauro. *From Madrigal to Opera, Monteverdi's Staging of the Self*. London: University of California Press, 2012, pp. 22 & 23.

[35] As Stephen Murphy puts it: « Poliziano marks the culmination of Quattrocento discourse on poetry, in particular two currents: the essential category of praise as idealized gift exchange and the elevation of poetry to a position of sovereignty and primordiality. » See: Murphy, Stephen. *The Gift of Immortality: Myths of Power and Humanist Poetics*. Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997, p. 31. See also the article of Paola Ventrone about Angelo Poliziano in: *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007, pp. 1463–1469.

[36] For Italy: Ventrone, Paola. "The Influence of the Ars praedicandi on the Sacra rappresentazione in Fifteenth Century Florence", in *Prédication et liturgie au Moyen Âge*, études réunies par Nicole Bériou et Franco Morenzoni. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008, pp. 335–348 and Stallini, Sophie. *Le théâtre sacré à Florence au XVe siècle. Une histoire sociale des formes*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011. For texts of this kind in Italy, see: D'Ancona, Alessandro. *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV, e XVI*. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1872. For France, see: Helmich, Werner. *Moralités françaises. Réimpression fac-similé de vingt-deux pièces allégoriques imprimées aux XVe et XVIe siècles*. Slatkine: Genève, 1980.

[37] See Cavalieri's text in Carter, Tim. "Composing opera from *Dafne* to *Ulisse Errante*" in *Practica musica No. 2*. Kraków: Musica Jagellonica, 1994. (English translations of Italian originals of Rinuccini, Peri, Caccini, Marco da Gagliano, Cavalieri, Agazzari, Vitali, Mazzocchi, Ottavio Tronsarelli, Landi, Michelangelo Rossi, and Giacomo Badoaro.)

edifying purpose is clear[38]. The specific request Cavalieri made that the orchestra should not be seen by the audience was also an attempt to elevate the *Rappresentatione* to a mystery play. In 1607, Striggio elevates the figure of Orpheus to the one of a humanist « saint », by unfolding the edifying content of the « Favola » in two main poetic gestures and in an ingenious dramatic construction artifact.

The first poetic device Striggio uses in his libretto to write the story of Orpheus as a moral lesson on the fleeting nature of human life is the direct inclusion of philosophical considerations. The verses which conclude Act II are a clear summary of the moral lesson: « Let no mortal man trust / Fleeting and frail happiness, / That soon vanishes, and often / after a great ascent a precipice is near. »[39] It echoes the « Time the devourer of all things »[40] found in Ovid. In the following acts Striggio integrates in each chorus rewordings of thoughts of Roman philosophers: these humanist paraphrases capitalize on the knowledge of the listeners by awakening a reflective attitude. « No undertaking by man is attempted in vain, / Nor against him can Nature further arm herself. »[41] which starts the conclusion of Act III is related to the « Nothing is impossible for humankind »[42] of Horace. The end of this act also builds on the parallel between Orpheus's travails and human destiny: « and of the unstable plains / He has ploughed the wavy fields, and scattered the seeds / of his labors, when he has gathered golden harvest »[43]. By the very end of the piece, this angle is clarified in the epilogue with the well-known « He who sows in sorrow / Reaps the fruit of all grace »[44]. Both are rewordings of « As you sow – you shall reap »[45] found in Cicero and the Bible. This poetic device works on memory because the situation, besides the paraphrase, makes the listener/viewer thinks of the quote, accentuating the prompted spiritual reflection. To present Orpheus as a parable, Striggio was relying on the high level of erudition of the members of the *Accademia degli Invaghiti* who, all well learned in Latin, would have knew these quotes[46]. Next to these Latin elicitations, Striggio also quotes recent authors, albeit these are more difficult to

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[38] In the 1640s, Giacomo Carissimi (1604/1605–1674) wrote *Vanitas vanitatum*, a short piece for two voices with text from the *Ecclesiastes*, which takes its title from the *Vulgate* 1:2; 12:8 where the verse is rendered as « Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas ». For musical and stage expressions of the Counter-Reformation, see: Lowe, Robert W. *Marc-Antoine Charpentier et l'opéra de collège.* Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1966.

[39] « Non si fidi huom mortale / Di ben caduco a frale, / Che tosto fugge, e spesso / A gran salita il precipizio è presso. » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act II.

[40] « Tempus edax rerum » in Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, 234.

[41] « Nulla impresa per uom si tenta invano / Nè contr' a lui più sa natura armarse. » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act III.

[42] « Nil mortalibus ardui est » in Horace. *Odes*, Book I, ode III.

[43] « Ei de l'instabil piano / Arò gli ondosi campi, e 'l seme sparse / Di sue fatiche, ond' aurea messe accolse. » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act III.

[44] « chi semina fra doglie / D'ogni grazia il frutto colgie. » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act V.

[45] « Ut sementem feceris ita metes » in Cicero *De Oratore* and from the ninth book of the New Testament, Paul the Apostle's *Epistle to the Galatians*, 6:7: « Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. », as found in 1611 King James Version of the Bible.

[46] See: Black, Robert. "School" in Tilg, Stefan and Knight, Sarah. *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

trace. The most obvious quotation is the « Abandon hope, all Ye who enter here »[47] that Hope reads to Orpheus at the entrance of the Underworld. Coming from the *Divine Comedy* by Dante (ca. 1265–1321), it extends the relation to Virgil, as it is this author, as a fictional character in Dante's book, who explains it: « Here all doubt needs must be abandoned, /All weakness must needs be here extinct. / We to the place have come, where I have told thee / Thou shalt behold the people dolorous / Who have foregone the good of knowledge. »[48] « Forego the good of intellect »: this understated elucidation of the damnation supports a spiritual background and helps to confer *Orfeo* an ambitious moral scope.

The second device used by Striggio to elevate the myth to a spiritual journey is the inclusion in his libretto of simple words, evocative of material objects commonly used in visual vanitas. The Latin noun vanitas means « emptiness », from the Latin adjective « vanus », meaning empty, and thus refers in this context to the traditional Christian view of the worthless nature of all earthly goods and pursuits. Vanitas visual themes were common in medieval funerary sculpture art, and by the fifteenth century, these became extremely explicit, reflecting an increased obsession with death also seen in the illustrations of the *Ars moriendi*, the depictions of *Danse Macabre* and in the overlapping motif of the *Memento mori*[49]. With the Humanist movement of the Renaissance such motifs gradually became more emblematic and founded a new field in the still-life genre. Works executed in the vanitas style were meant to remind viewers of the transience of life, the futility of pleasure and the certainty of death. In the realm of visual arts, common pictorial vanitas symbols include skulls, which are a clear reminder of the certainty of death, but also fruits and flowers (decay), bubbles and smoke (suddenness of death), hourglasses and musical instruments (brevity and ephemeral nature of life)[50]. Striggio integrates some of these themes in his libretto (See table 1), and some hand props, inspired by the accounts of Ovid and Virgil, may have completed the picture when Striggio's words were not explicit enough. Horace's « Ut pictura poesis »[51] was a definite subject of reflection for Humanist culture and discourse. This parallel of Horace, taken up again by the Italian treatises on painting, where it was also quoted in reverse, expressed the wish that painting was considered to be an art directly related to poetry[52]. The transfer of a philosophical concept to a visual expression created the unique pictorial genre of the vanitas, but this field was also present in stagecrafts, where poetry and painting coexisted, and were merging to create the new form of *Rappresentatione*. Already well organized in a language at this period, allegory and emblems were used in profusion and created a visual culture whose condition of

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[47] « Lasciate ogni Speranza ò voi ch'entrate » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act III and « Lasciate ogni Speranza, voi ch' entrate! » in Dante (Durante degli Alighieri). *Divina Commedia*, "Inferno", Canto III.

[48] « Noi siam venuti al loco ov' io t' ho detto / che tu vedrai le genti dolorose / c' hanno perduto il Ben dell' intelletto. » in Dante (Durante degli Alighieri). *Divina Commedia*, "Inferno", Canto III.

[49] *Moyen Âge entre ordre et désordre*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004, pp. 184–187.

[50] See: Schneider, Norbert. *Les Natures Mortes, Réalité et symbolique des choses, La peinture de natures mortes à la naissance des temps modernes*. Köln: Taschen, 1994, pp. 76–86.

[51] Horace. *Ars poetica,* Verse 361.

[52] Reflecting the opinion of many scholars, the comparison refers, through Latin Plutarch (c. 46 AD – 120 AD), to the Greek lyrical poet Simonide de Céos (556 BC – 468 BC). See: Rensselaer, Lee Wright. *Ut Pictura Poesis, The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (1940). New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. 1967, pp. 3–9. For an example of Horace's influence in the seventeenth-century visual culture, see: Asemissen, Hermann Ulrich. *Vermeer, L'Atelier du Peintre ou l'image d'un métier*. Paris: Adam Biro, 1989, pp. 49–58.

ephemerality linked itself with the fleeting nature of life. The conception of *Orfeo*, and its first performance, must have drawn substance from this fertile philosophical debate. Certainly, the words of Apollo in the second finale are an echo of this spiritual idea: « Do you still not know / How nothing that delights down here will last? »[53]. By merging the time frame of the tale with the time development of the show, Striggio creates a structure which he develops further by integrating different pictures.

	Prologue	Act I	Act II	Act III	Act IV	Act V first part	Act V second part
TIME ORIGINAL TEXT	« hor... »	« fortunar o giorno »	« sè n'alletta l'ombra »	« tenebrosi regni »	« perdando il sole » « l'ombre eterne »	« l'odiosa luce »	Apollo/ Sun
TIME	Time of performa nce	Morning	Noon	Evening	Night	Before Dawn	Dawn
SPACE ORIGINAL TEXT	« queste rive" (Mantua)	« in questi prati »	« prato adorno » « boschi ombrosi »	« Altra palude... nero stagno »	« Di morte ampie campagne...q uesti abissi... orrribile carverne »	« Selve suavi »	« al cielo"
IMAGES VANITAS	« Cetera d'or »	In these meadows	flowers, shadows	Dark marsh… Black swamp	Vast fields of death… abysses… terrible caverns	Sweets woods	To Heaven
ELEMENTS ORIGINAL TEXT	« De la lira del Ciel piu l'alme invoglio »	« Imeneo face ardente » « Sol… Luna… Stelle »	« Care selve et piagge…i sassi »	« atra palude » « fiume »	« per quel foco »	« campi di Traccia »	« una nuvola »
COSMOGONY ELEMENTS	Harmony	Air	Earth	Water	Fire	Earth	Aether
SENSES ORIGINAL TEXT	« cantand o »	« offriam incensi »	« mi rispondi sol con gli ultimi accenti »	« acerbo » « amari »	« Un solo sguardo »	« voi lagrimerò mai sempre »	« vaghegge rai le sue sembianze belle »
HUMAN SENSES	Hearing	Smell	Touch	Taste	Sight	Confu-sion	Grace

Table 1: *Orfeo's* dramaturgical themes in chronological order.

1.1.3 *Orfeo*: a dynamic construction

These devices are of a poetic nature, playing with Latin roots and culture, but in the overall construction of his libretto, Striggio also uses a dramatic construction which accentuates the idea of a cycle of life and its submission to time. Attached like the time frame to the character of the protagonist, this device is of a spatial nature and therefore had naturally an impact on the space components of the performance. While the first vocal involvement of Orfeo is already centered on the memory of the first time he saw Euridice and how she initially responded to his courtship, the notion of return, central to the tale of Orpheus, is also exploited in a spatial way in the rest of the piece. By twice bringing back his main character in

[53] « Anco non sai / Come nulla qua giù diletta e dura » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act V.

a space which has seen events of an opposite emotional nature, the poet forces contemplation and reflection in the main character and, through Orfeo's self-expression, in the audience. The first return takes place at the beginning of Act II, when Orfeo comes back with the shepherds to the place where he had lamented about his then-unreciprocated love for Euridice, an event that took place before the telling of the tale. « Here I return to you, / Dear forests and beloved meadows […] Do you remember, O shady groves, / My long and harsh torments / When, at my laments, the rocks were moved to pity? »[54] Here the negative past has vanished, as the present, shared by the shepherds and the audience, is happy. But during the act, the atmosphere changes as this space is also the one where Orfeo hears about the death of Euridice. The second return, at the beginning of Act V, is more striking as Orfeo, after having lost Euridice in the Underworld, comes back to the same place where he heard of Euridice's death: « These are the fields of Thrace, and this the place / Where my heart was pierced / By grief at the bitter tidings ».[55] This goes beyond retrospection to become a reflective moment, and Striggio and Monteverdi integrate the character of Echo[56], who by returning the last words of Orfeo's lamentations like she did for Narcisse, advises him that he has « wept enough ». These returns to the same place certainly had a direct effect on the conception of space during the original performance.

	Prologue	Act I	Act II/act V first part	Act III	Act IV	Act V second part
SPACE ORIGINAL TEXT	« queste rive»	« in questi prati »	« prato adorno » « boschi ombrosi » « campi di Traccia »	« Altra palude... nero stagno »	« Di morte ampie campagne...questi abissi... orrribile carverne »	« al cielo »
SPACE	Mantua	In these meadows	flowery meadows, shady groves Fields of Thrace	Dark marsh…Black swamp	Vast fields of death …abysses…terrible caverns	To Heaven

Table 2: Spaces in *Orfeo*. NB: The prologue englobes all locations

This series of episodes may have been visually emphasized by a long stage, that the Italians of the fifteenth century called « talamo » (the bed), divided in different spaces, showing for each a different location of the plot, the « luogo deputato ». Or even different set units like the mansions used in medieval theatre to represent specific places, such as Heaven or Hell, organized from right to left. In this lens, *Orfeo* also clearly articulates itself between the two poles of the Underworld of Pluto and the Aether where Apollo brings Orfeo. Flanked by these opposites, all other spaces can find a location in between. The actors would move between these mansions as the play demanded, accentuating the idea of the quest of Orpheus, depicting the wanderer's path and his bitter return. The « platea », the acting area of the stage around or along which mansions were placed, would take on the scenic identity of the particular mansion

[54] « *Orfeo*: Ecco pur ch'à voi ritorno, / Care selve e piagge amate / [...] / Vi ricordà o boschi ombrosi /De' miei lunghi aspri tormenti, / Quando i sassi à' miei lamenti / Rispondean fatti pietosi? » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act II.

[55] « *Orfeo*: Questi i campi di Tracia, e quest'è il loco / Dove passommi il core / Per l'amara novella il mio dolore. » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act V.

[56] See: Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, Book III, 356.

where the story was taking place. Like in ancient Greek dramas, that is perhaps where the « coro stabile » would comment on the adventures of Orpheus. This performance system also has roots in the liturgical plays popular in Italy and continental Europe, where the stations were lined up in an open space, sometimes in a U-shaped or circular formation, the mansions figuring specific places mentioned in the story[57]. The conditions of the first performance of *Orfeo*, which took place in a room without proscenium, seem to lead to a stage configuration with coexisting sets, evocative of pieces with a spiritual content, such as the « laudi » and « sacre rappresentazioni » of the north of Italy[58] and the « mystères » of France and Flanders. The most famous, *La Vie, la Mort, la Passion et la Résurrection du Sauveur* performed in Valenciennes in 1547, shows a series of mansions, articulated through an axis coming from Paradise to Hell. Even inside the frame of a proscenium stage, this type of scenography was still influential in the early seventeenth century[59], showing that the so-called Aristotelian rule of unity of place was not applied universally[60].

Figure 4: 1577, Stage Design by Hubert Cailleau (ca. 1526–ca. 1579) for the performance of *La Vie, la Mort, la Passion et la Résurrection du Sauveur* in Valenciennes in 1547.
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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[57] Rey-Flaud, Henri. "Le Théâtre et la Ville au Moyen-Age et à la Renaissance" in *Architecture du Spectacle, Monuments historiques,* Numéro 4 1978. Paris: Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques, 1978, pp. 5–9. Although apparently no drawing survives, this type of configuration may have been used for the performance of Poliziano's *Orfeo* in Mantua in 1490.

[58] Pandolfi, Vito. *Histoire du théâtre, Tome 2 : commedia dell'arte, théâtre religieux, classicisme, théâtre kabuki*. Paris: Marabout Université, 1968, p. 124.

[59] For examples of this type of sets, see: Nicoll, Allardyce. *The Development of the Theatre, A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day*. London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd., 1966, pp. 93–95. See also: Bayard, Marc. *Feinte baroque, Iconographie et esthétique de la variété au XVIIe siècle*. Collection d'Histoire de l'art. Rome : Académie de France , 2010.

[60] Aristotle's *Poetics* was not well known until the sixteenth century. The first reliable Latin translation, that of Giorgio Valla, appeared in 1498; the first commentary, Robortelli's, in 1548; the first Italian translation, Segni's in 1549. Both Robortelli and Segni remark on the long neglect of the book. See: Spingarn, Joel Elias. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*. New York: 1938, p. 16.

1.1.4 Space in *Orfeo*'s score

If we accept a likelihood that the score published in 1609 gives the forces of the Mantuan spectacle of 1607, it is clear that *Orfeo* is a work that calls for a complex involvement of the orchestra, as Monteverdi's score is quite explicit in terms of instruments and instrumentation[61]. In the small room the varied instruments of the sizable orchestra would have constituted a major visual element. The instrumentalists, Striggio and Monteverdi likely among them, would have been aware of the strong relationship between their playing and the emotions that the operatic score, text and music, was supposed to create in the audience. It is probable that the performance, like the music, was neither solely illustrative nor purely descriptive but mostly evocative. Nevertheless, Striggio's libretto is titled *La Favola d'Orfeo rappresentata in musica* in its 1607 edition[62]. This title can be read as an aesthetic program: it is a tale with different episodes; it is not yet a « drama », although the Gonzaga call it a « commedia », as there is a distance from the subject created by the moralizing chorus, the « Coro stabile », at the end of each act. The subject is taken from Greek mythology, and this antique story is « represented », that is, performed in words, music and pictures. In short, the title is: The Tale of Orpheus represented in music.

Such an idea was still experimental in 1607, and would undoubtedly stimulate a poet musician, and indeed Striggio, the son of a renowned Mantuan madrigalist[63], was himself a distinguished viol player, the instrument whose family was mostly associated with Orpheus in the iconography of the period[64]. The printed score in 1609 goes even further than Striggio, as Monteverdi's *Orfeo* is subtitled *Favola in Musica*: not only is music the subject of the story of *Orfeo*, but although one can argue that this title refers also to the *Orfeo* score itself, the *Favola in Musica* has become the object of the whole presentation itself, its nature[65]. Monteverdi's musical setting merges the Renaissance intermezzi, the short musical and allegorical sequences which framed the acts of spoken dramas, with the linearity of an intimate human tale. The

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[61] Stubbs, Stephen. "« L'armonia sonora »: continuo orchestration in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*" in *Early Music. Vol. 22, No. 1, Monteverdi II (Feb. 1994)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 87–98. See also: Carter, Tim. "Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1609)" in *Music & Letters, Volume 91 Number 4 November 2010*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 498-512.

[62] [Striggio, Alessandro]. *La favola d'Orfeo ; Rappresentata in musica il carnevale dell'anno 1607. Nell'Accademia de gl'Invaghiti di Mantova sotto i felici auspizii del Serenissimo Sig. Duca benignissimo lor protettore.* Mantova: Francesco Osanna, 1607. http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=drucke/549-quod-1&imgtyp=0&size (accessed 18 December 2017).

[63] Alessandro Striggio, the elder (ca. 1536/37–1592), born in Mantua, evidently to an aristocratic family, began working for Cosimo de' Medici in 1559 as a musician, eventually to replace Francesco Corteccia (1502–1571) as the principal musician to the Medici court. In 1560 he visited Venice and produced two books of madrigals in response to the musical styles he encountered there. Throughout the 1560s Striggio composed numerous *intermedi* for the Medici. During the 1580s he began an association with the Este court in Ferrara. Ferrara was one of Italy's avant-garde centers of musical composition in the 1580s and 1590s, and Striggio composed music, now lost, in the progressive madrigal style he heard there, commissioned by the Medici. In 1586 the elder Striggio moved to Mantua where he remained for the rest of his life, although he retained a close association with the Medici, composing music for them at least as late as 1589.

[64] Gétreau, Florence. « Orphée et les instruments de musique dans l'Occident moderne » in *Les Métamorphoses d'Orphée*. Gand: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994, pp. 95–103.

[65] *L'Orfeo Favola in Musica da Claudio Monteverdi rappresentata in Mantova l'Anno 1607, & novamente date in luce. Al Serenessimo Signor D. Francesco Gonzaga Principe di Mantova, & di Monferato, &c.* In Venetia, Appresso Ricciardo Amadino, MDCIX [1609].

story of Orpheus had already proven a good choice for such an enterprise as the action does not fully fit in a realistic context, which already helps to give the characters a symbolic status. This is obvious in the case of allegorical characters that are intended to represent an idea or to convey a moral message. The gods, although subjected to passions, embody various forms of power and are also part of a symbolic framework. The humans are the characters of the fable who must comply with the laws of fate, determined by the forces of nature. Orfeo, whose semi-divine origin as the son of the god Apollo makes him the receptacle of all conceptual, godlike and human traits, is at the work's center as the supreme artist he was.

In his published score, Monteverdi divides his orchestral forces in two groups, some players visible and some behind the space devoted to acting and singing. Even if Monteverdi called this acting space « la sena » [sic], the stage, it should not necessarily be understood as a unique platform, separated from the audience by a proscenium frame. At any rate, the composer's acoustical use of the spaces clearly suggests an optimization of the available spaces to enlarge the scope of the tale. If we assume that the score registered some of the Mantuan performance practices and considering the obscurities and inconsistencies of some of these notes (they almost look like notes taken hastily during rehearsals), some of the instruments were played « from within » the main room or « from outside »[66], while some instruments are played « at the left-hand corner, the other at the right-hand corner ». The « noise » that causes Orfeo to turn to Euridice in Act IV is specified as coming from « behind the curtain »[67], maybe an attempt to quote Virgil's mention in his *Georgics*: « There all his toil was spilt, and the treaty broken with the merciless monarch; and thrice a thunder pealed over the pools of Avernus. »[68] Although Striggio and Monteverdi place this noise before Orpheus turns back and not after like the Roman source, this Virgilian origin at least gives us an idea of the extent (three times) and unpleasant nature of this « noise ».

At any rate, in view of these indications added by Monteverdi in his score, it is obvious that the composer considered the role played by the placement of the instruments as crucial. We have no further evidence that this dispersed configuration may or may have not been the one of the original performance, but the spatial distribution of sound sources was an area of research in full development at the time. During the late Renaissance, the contrast between distant and close sounds, as well as the variety of sources, was one of the tropes of the aesthetics of theatrical performances, and more specifically of their *intermezzi*: during these moments when music was given a role of a distinct importance, alongside the voices, the resounding instruments were sometimes visible to the spectators, and sometimes hidden or distant[69]. It is therefore reasonable to assume that *Orfeo* was performed with some effects of this kind, which were part of the performance practice. From this point of view, it is interesting to observe Monteverdi's creative relationship with motifs so typical of the spectacle of his time, to see how he exploits them for expressive purposes and, for the performance, how Monteverdi uses the small spaces at his disposal to extend the musical experience.

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[66] « di dentro », « nel angolo sinistro de la sena l'altor nel destro. » In *L'Orfeo Favola in Musica da Claudio Monteverdi...*, Amadino, MDCIX.

[67] « Qui si fa strepito dietro la tela » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act IV.

[68] « Ibi omnis / effusus labor atque immitis rupta tyranni / foedera, terque fragor stagnis auditus Avernis. » in Virgil. *Georgics*. Book IV, Verses 4491–4493.

[69] See: Farahat, Martha. "On the Staging of Madrigal Comedies" in *Early Music History*, Vol. 10 (1991), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 123–143.

1.1.5 A comparative work: *Le Balet Comique de la Reine*

We know that *Orfeo* was created in a room of the Ducal palace. But this summation is misleading, as *Orfeo* was in fact musically performed in a *few* rooms. The main palace chamber that housed the singers and the audience has been the subject of various theories, and the palace has been so often modified and restored that is difficult to know for sure which rooms were the location of the ephemeral structure built for the performance. What we do know for sure, thanks to eyewitnesses of the time, is that it was not the large salon commonly used in Mantua for musical entertainments but a rather small space, a fact that would have made the dispersion of instruments a necessity[70]. However, it is possible to see the connected rooms as a perfect architectural structure to separate the instruments for artistic effect and, therefore, the location must have been chosen knowingly. While we are sure that *Orfeo* was presented in a small palace room, there are no surviving visual documents about that first performance[71].

To have a visual idea of how these types of spatial arrangements were used in an actual architecture for a performance, one must turn to France, where the Florentine style had been imported beginning at the start of the sixteenth century, and where Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589) had an active role in protecting poetry academies and organizing court spectacles with them[72]. An important « ballet de cour », *Le Balet Comique de la Reine*[73], was presented not long before *Orfeo*, and has some similarities with Striggio's *favola* as does its musical organization with the work of Monteverdi. Performed on Sunday, 15 October 1581, *Le Balet Comique de la Reine* was described in French by its Italian born author, Balthasar de Beaujoyeux (1535–1589)[74], in a book dated the same year, which is regarded as the first illustrated and printed ballet. In addition to the plot, based on the story of the enchantress Circé and her evil power, it gives the text that was sung and recited, and a full description of the staging and some

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[70] See: Besutti, Paola. "Spaces for Music in Late Renaissance Mantua" in Whenham, John and Wistreich, Richard. *The Cambridge Companion to Monteverdi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 76–94.

[71] The actual room has been differently identified. For discussions of the evidence surrounding in which of the rooms the opera was likely performed, see: Besutti, Paola. "The « Sala degli Specchi » Uncovered: Monteverdi, the Gonzagas and the Palazzo Ducale, Mantua" in *Early Music, Vol. 27, No. 3* (Aug. 1999), pp. 451–456, 459–461 and 463–465. See also: Fenlon, Iain. "Monteverdi Mantuan *Orfeo*: Some New Documentation" in *Early Music, Vol. 12, N° 2* (May 1984). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 163–172.

[72] Sternfeld, Frederick. "Les intermèdes de Florence et la genèse de l'opéra", in *Baroque, 5*. 1972. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/baroque/368 ; DOI : 10.4000/baroque.368 (accessed 29 December 2017).

[73] *Balet comique de la Royne, faict aux nopces de monsieur le duc de Joyeuse & madamoyselle de Vaudemont sa soeur. Par Baltasar de Beaujoyeulx, valet de chambre du Roy, & de la Royne sa mere*. Paris: Le Roy, Ballard & Patisson, MDLXXXII [1582]. The « Royne » is here queen Louise de Lorraine, wife of king Henry III. The designation « Ballet Comique » means here « Ballet Dramatique », as the prime importance of this spectacle was the full dramatization of the story, in which dancing, music, singing, declamation, and pageantry were combined for the expression of the theme: the tale of Circe. It also refers to the happy ending, as explained in the preface of the book.

[74] Baldasarino da Belgioso (1535–1589), whose name was frenchified as Balthasar de Beaujoyeux when naturalized around 1555, was violinist, composer and choreographer of the French Court. See: Handy, Isabelle. *Musiciens au temps des derniers Valois (1547–1589)*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008, pp. 105, 127, 130, 138, 161, 308, 326 & 434. See also: McGowan, Margaret. *L'art du Ballet de Cour en France : 1581–1643*. Paris: CNRS, 1963, pp. 37–43. See also: Caula, Giacomo Alessandro. *Baltazarini e il "Balet Comique de la Royne"*. Biblioteca degli eruditi e dei bibliofili. Scrittidi bibliografia e di erudizione raccolti da Marino Parenti. LXXXVIII. Firenze : Sansoni Editore, 1964.

music; it also contains some engravings showing most of the costumes and the sets of the spectacle[75]. The single performance took place at the Hôtel de Bourbon (Figure 4), a palace contiguous to the Louvre in Paris[76]. Although the dimensions of the Grande Salle where the ballet was given were ample and estimated to be fifteen meters wide and thirty-five meters long with an apse adding an additional thirteen meters at one end, and thus have little in common with the size of the rooms in Mantua's palace, it is in the division and organization of spaces that *Le Balet Comique* may help to understand how *Orfeo* was performed in its original space.

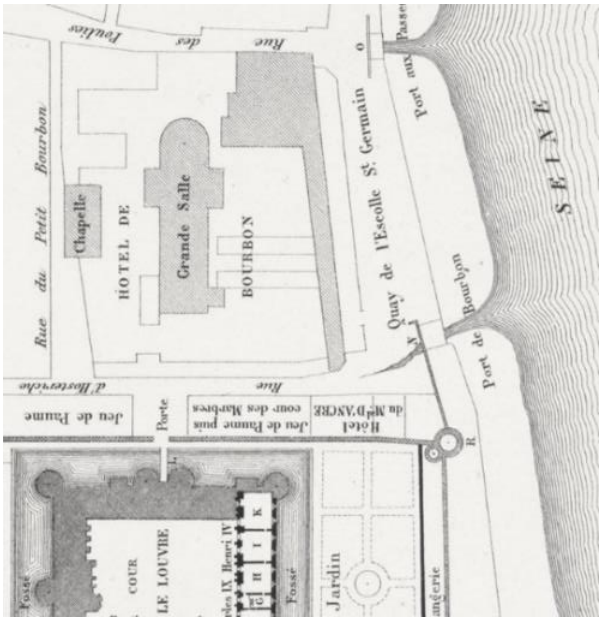

Figure 4: Reconstructed site plan of the Hôtel de Bourbon in 1595
from the book of Theodor Josef Hubert Hoffbauer (1839–1922): *Paris à travers les Ages, aspects successifs des monuments et quartiers historiques de Paris, depuis le XIIIème siècle jusqu'à nos jours, fidèlement restitués d'après des documents authentiques.*
Paris: Firmin Didot, 1875–1882.

For the Parisian audience, the Grande Salle was equipped with two tiers of seats, in form of galleries, erected on the two longest sides of the hall. The Queen herself taking part in the ballet, the King, his brother, the Queen mother, and the ambassadors sat on one end of the hall, in front of benches built in amphitheater for the ladies of the Court. The position of the royal family (the queen mother seated at the right of the king) is an indication that the design was engraved in reverse, to be able to show on the print the actual order of the room during the performance. The division of space is organized around the direction of the position of the sovereign. Comparing what we know about the original architecture of the room with the depiction in the book, we can see that Patin and Beaujoyeux made pragmatic use of the floor plan of the hall, similar to the cross of a church, to divide the playing area and take advantage of the apse, and of the recesses on the sides.

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[75] See: Donington, Robert. *The Rise of Opera*. London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981, pp. 53–61.

[76] Bjurström, Per. *Giacomo Torelli, and Baroque Stage Design*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962, p. 122. The Great Hall, the Grande Salle du Petit-Bourbon, was larger than any room in the Louvre, and served as the first theatre used by Molière upon his arrival in Paris in 1658; by 1660, Molière's troupe had been evicted, and the Petit-Bourbon was pulled down to make space for the construction of Claude Perrault's Colonnade, as an addition to the Louvre.

1.1.6 Space and scenery for *Le Balet Comique de la Reine*

On the first of the twenty-seven engravings of the book, it is evident that the sets, designed by Jacques Patin (d. 1587) are spread out in the space (Figure 5). The descriptive and detailed text of the *Balet* gives more information: opposite the king, using the apse in the back of the hall, was Circé's garden, « all enclosed with balustrades, with gold and metallic balusters and brownish silver, and divided in two green alleys », decorated with flowers and fruits « counterfeit in gold, silver, silks, and feathers of colors necessary there. This garden appeared even more beautiful, as it was vaulted over by a large trellis. »[77] On either side a passage allowed the entrances and exits of decorated cars: « on both sides there were two vaulted trellises [...] and this place was even more remarkable, since it was necessary for the musicians of the intermezzi to pass through, and the cars, which were going to present themselves to the King »[78]. Behind this trellis was Circé's castle surrounded by walls. To the right of king was the « Grove of Pan » that Beaujoyeux describes as « having all around it very fine oaks, two feet long, of which the trunks, branches, leaves, and acorns were gilded, and made by a singular artifice ».[79] This Grove of Pan was hidden by a curtain made of veil which was brought down during the evening, when the cart of Diana's Nymphs joined in the pastoral: « The curtain that hid the grove fell, exposing to everyone's sight the marvelous beauty of this enclosure. »[80] To the left of the king was a gilded arch covered with gleaming clouds: « A vault of wood, eighteen feet long, and nine wide, having at the front its opening only three feet long; outside, it was trimmed with great clouds everywhere, and at the front, all gilded with gold shining and gleaming, because of the great quantity of lights concealed therein, serving to make the gold so radiant, that this place appeared part of the azure sky ».[81]

Between all these spaces, the acting and dancing area was left free for the entrées of characters, singers, dancers, and instrumentalists. They were sometimes accompanied by floats, which followed a route that came from the left of Circé's garden and exited right. This space is the equivalent to the low platform recommended by Serlio in his advice for building a temporary theatre, and he recalls from his own experience in Vicenza how « there, because of the extraordinary intermezzi which took place – triumphal carriages, elephants and various

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[77] « tout enclos d'accoudoirs, avec des balustres dorez d'or et de ducat, & d'argent bruny, & party en croix avec deux allees vertes […] contrefaict d'or, d'argent, soyes, & plumes de couleurs y necessaires. Ce jardin ressemblait encores de tant plus beau, comme il estoit voulté par-dessus d'une grande treille » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 6.

[78] « à ses deux costez y avait deux treilles voultees […] & estoit ce lieu plus remarquable, d'autant qu'il falloit que par iceluy passassent les musiques des intermèdes, & les chariots, qui s'alloyent presenter devant le Roy. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 6.

[79] « ayant tout à l'entour de fort beaux chesnes esloignez de deux pieds, desquels les troncs, branches, feuilles & glands estoyent dorez, & faicts par un singulier artifice » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 4.

[80] « Le rideau qui cachoit le bois tomba, exposant à la veue de chacun la beauté merveilleuse de ce pourpris. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 39.

[81] « une voulte de bois, longue de dixhuict pieds, & de neuf de large, ayant par le devant son ouverture de trois pieds seulement de long: au dehors elle estoit bouillonnee par tout de grands nuages, & au devant toute doree d'un or esclatant & reluysant, à cause de la grande quantité de lumières qui y estoit cachee, servant à faire resplendir de telle sorte l'or, que ce lieu paroissoit quelque partie du ciel azuré. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 5.

Moorish dances and the like – I wanted it to be flat in front of the sloping part of the stage. »[82] Above this acting space, « at the top of the hall [ceiling], there was a large cloud full of stars: the light from which pierced the cloud, through which Mercury and Jupiter descended into the earth »[83], that the engraving unfortunately fails to show. Again, Serlio gives us some indications: « The rising of the sun, its progression and then at the end of the play its setting can be seen, done with such ingenuity that many of the viewers are amazed by it. With this artifice, when the occasion presents itself, a god can be seen descending from heaven ».[84]

This musical tribune did not see any dramatic action but used forty musicians, instrumentalists and singers who stayed there, certainly seated, during the performance: « Within this vault there were ten consorts of music, different from each other; and it was this vault which was called Golden, both because of its great splendor, and for the sound and harmony of music, which was sung there: which for its resouding voices, some of the audience considered to be the same voice which was converted into a resouding air, called since Echo: and others more educated in the Platonic discipline, considered it to be the true harmony from heaven, from which all things that are in existence, are preserved and maintained. »[85] But if this tribune provided most of the music during the performance, it was from behind the rearmost backdrop of Circé's garden that the music to signal the beginning of the proceedings could be heard: « behind the castle a note of oboes, cornetti, sackbuts, and other soft musical instruments »[86]. And it is behind the grove of Pan that a grotto was created where seated musicians with big instruments could play out of sight: « Inside the grotto, and behind its opening, was arranged the music of the soft organs, to play also in time and place. »[87] Elaborate cars on wheels and walking masquers brought voices and instruments into the middle area following their allegorical identities.

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[82] « Et pour l'aysance des estranges figures de personnages que se devoient entremettre du jeu, meemes pource qu'il estoit besoing qu'il y eust des chars de triumphe, des Elephans, & des moriques de beuacoup de sorte, je voulu qu'il y eut devant la Scene penchante une platte forme » In Serlio, Sebastiano. [*Libri d'Architettura*...]. Paris: Jehan Barbé, 1545, p. 65.

[83] « Entre le bois & la voulte susdite, & au feste de la salle, y avoit une grosse nuee toute pleine d'estoiles : la lueur desquelles transperçoit le nuage, parmy lequel devoyent descendre en terre Mercure & Jupiter. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 5.

[84] « l'on voit le lever du Soleil, & son mouvement circulaire. Puis sur la fin du jeu son occident conduict par une telle ruze que plusieurs des assistans sont estonnez de la merveille, & en ces entrefaictes se voit (quand l'occasion se presente) quelque dieu descendre du ciel. » In Serlio, Sebastiano. [*Libri d'Architettura*...]. Paris: Jehan Barbé, 1545, p. 65.

[85] « Au dedans de cette voulte y avoit dix concerts de musique, differens les uns des autres : & fut ceste voulte dicte & appelee Dorée, tant à cause de sa grande splendeur, que pour le son & l'harmonie de la musique, qui y fut chantee : laquelle pour ses voix repercussives, aucuns de l'assistance estimerent estre la mesme voix qui fut convertie en air repercussif, appelé depuis Echo : & d'aultres plus instruits en la discipline Platonique, l'estimerent estre la vraye harmonie du ciel, de laquelle toutes les choses qui sont en estre, sont conservées & maintenuees. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 5.

[86] « derrière le chasteau une note de hauts-boys, cornets, sacqueboutes, & autres doux instrumens de musique » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 7.

[87] « Au dedans de la grotte, & derriere l'huys d'icelle, fut dispose la musique des orgues doulces, pour iouër aussi en temps & lieu. » in *Balet comique de la Royne*… MDLXXXII, p. 5.

Figure 5: « Figure de la Salle » in *Balet comique de la Royne, faict aux nopces de monsieur le duc de Joyeuse & madamoyselle de Vaudemont sa soeur.*
Par Baltasar de Beaujoyeulx, valet de chambre du Roy, & de la Royne sa mere.
Paris: Le Roy, Ballard, & Patisson, MDLXXXII. [1582]
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

1.1.7 Space and scenery compared

Beyond the fact that the poetic spaces of *Le Balet comique* shows many similarities with the ones of *Orfeo*, notably the grove of the god Pan, mentioned by the shepherds at the beginning of Act II (for which the score specifies « flautini »), and the places of Harmony and Heaven where Musica and Apollo come from[88], more consequently the ballet's organization also gives some information about the places where orchestra and chorus were disposed in relation with dramatic and poetic intents. Table 3 and Table 4 are an attempt to structure the performing space of *Orfeo* on the poetic and spatial template given by *Le Balet comique*. The concern for a clear spatial understanding of the poetic imitation is also found in the various disdascalia present in the *Orfeo*'s libretto of 1607. One can argue that these few indications were not written as staging instructions, as this edition was created for the audience to read, but perhaps were written down by the Corago of the Mantuan performance to indicate the planned staging or what it was supposed to represent[89]. These notes could indeed be matters to help what the visualization was only suggesting. An interesting instance is the mention of Orfeo crossing the river Styx after he has put Caronte asleep: « Here he enters the boat and crosses over, singing »[90]. It suggests the movement of a boat on wheels, a vehicle stable enough for a standing Orpheus to sing and that passes from one side of the space to another, further suggesting the visual simultaneity of the two sides of the river. This is another point of concordance with *Le Balet comique*, where carts paraded the heroes through the room, with an obligatory passage in front of the patron.

Contrary to *Le Balet comique* where an allegorical antagonism is created between the patron and the subject[91], dictating the opposition of the king and Circé, the story of Orpheus articulates itself through two complementary sides, earth and the underworld, presented equally to the patron, as an effect of the concept of *Vanitas*. This clear dichotomy is accentuated by some changes of space indicated in the libretto and score. But if the « Qui si muta la Scena » at the end of Act II seems to indicate a changing of sets from the fields of Thrace to the entrance of the Underworld, it may refer to the inclusion of the gate of hell in the middle of the platea. At the « Qui di nuovo si volge la Scena », the set moves again when the Underworld section ends, bringing Orfeo back to the fields of Thrace. It may even suggest a use of the turning set, if the word « volge » (« turn » or « revolve ») is to be understood literally, and that this set element had on one face the gate of hell and on the other arcadian components suited to the Thracian space of Acts II and V. This mention of scenic movement suggests a device like the one found in the *Ballet de la Delivrance de Renaud* in France in 1617 where the middle part of the central set would revolve, offering two different scenes[92].

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[88] « Apollo (descende in una nuvola cantando) », « Apollo ed Orfeo (assende al Cielo cantando) » in Striggio. *Orfeo*, Act III.

[89] For the Corago, see: Savage, Roger and Sansone, Matteo. « *Il Corago* and the staging of early opera: four chapters from an anonymous treatise circa 1630 » in *Early Music, Vol. 17* (1989). Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 495–511. For the full text, see: *Il Corago, o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche*. Edizione a cura di Paolo Fabbri et Angelo Pompilio. Firenze : Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1983.

[90] « Qui entra nella barca e passa cantando » in Striggio, *Orfeo*, Act III.

[91] For an analysis of the general allegory of *Le Balet comique*, see: Salazar, Philippe-Joseph. *Idéologies de l'opéra*. Paris: PUF, 1980, pp. 25–29.

[92] See: [Durand, Étienne (1585–1618) ; Bordier, René (d. 1658?) ; Guédron, Pierre (1564–1619/20)] *Discours au vray du ballet dansé par le Roy, le dimanche XXIXe jour de janvier. M. VIc. XVII. Avec les desseins, tant des machines & apparences differentes, que de tous les habits des masques*. Paris: Pierre Ballard, 1617.

	Le Balet comique poetry	*Le Balet comique* music	*Orfeo* poetry	*Orfeo* music
Referent	To the French King		To the Gonzaga family	
Prologue	A man « Gentilhomme fugitif », escaping from Circé's palace to here, « là », where he addresses the « Roy »		Music coming from « Permesso » to « queste rive » (Mantua) where « Incliti Eroi » are	
Space 1	Opposite of the patron, back of the room: Circé's garden and behind it her city and then her palace	Wind Musicians behind Circé's backdrop for Intro: « hauts-boys, cornets, sacqueboutes, & autres doux instrumens de musique »	Opposite of the patrons, back of the room: The gate of Hell and behind it the Acheron with a boat, and then Pluto's palace (or the three mansions next to each other, from right to left)	« Dietro la tela »: « toccata »
Space 2	Right inside of patron: Pan's grove behind a curtain	« Orgues » behind Pan's grove	Right inside of patrons: « Campo di Tracia » behind a « tela »	Behind « campo di Tracia »: 1 Organ di legno 1 contrabasso
Space 3	Left inside of patron: « Tribune Dorée » Golden vault	40 musicians (singers and instrumentalists) « vraye harmonie du ciel »	Left inside of patron: « Pindus and Elicona »: The Pindus mountains with Mount Helicon in the center with river Permessus floading from it	« tutti li stromenti »: « 5 viole di braccio, 3 Chitarroni, 2 Clavicembali, 1 arpa doppie, 1 Contrabasso di Viola »
Space 4	Under ceiling: Mercure and Jupiter cloud		Under ceiling: Apollo cloud	
Space 5	Acting/Dancing Area with various moving Cars with seated and walking musicians	Music: Instrumentalists and singers in « Entrée » of Masquers	« Platea » with Caronte's « barca » and walking musicians, and « coro stabile »	Singers and Flutes and violins for Shepherds

Table 3: Comparison of the spaces of *Le Balet comique* and *Orfeo*.

	Le Balet comique poetry	*Le Balet comique* music	*Orfeo* poetry	*Orfeo* music
Referent	To the French King		To the Gonzaga family	
Prologue	A man « Gentilhomme fugitif », escaping from Circé's palace to here, « là », where he addresses the « Roy »		Music coming from « Permesso » to « queste rive » (Mantua) where « Incliti Eroi » are	
Space	Opposite of the patron, back of the room: Circé's garden and behind it her city and then her palace	Wind Musicians behind Circé's backdrop for Intro: « hauts-boys, cornets, sacqueboutes, & autres doux instrumens de musique »	« Pindus and Elicona »: The pindus mountains with Mount Helicon in the center and river Permessus from it	« tutti li stromenti »: « 5 viole di braccio, 3 Chitarroni, 2 Clavicembali, 1 arpa doppie, 1 Contrabasso di Viola », etc. « Dietro la tela » « toccata »
	Right inside of patron: Pan's grove behind a curtain	« Orgues » Behind Pan's grove	Right inside of patron: « Campo di Tracia » behind a « tela »	Behind « campo di Tracia » 1 Organo di legno 1 contrabasso
	Left inside of patron: « Tribune Dorée » Golden vault	40 musicians (singers and instrumentalists) « vraye harmonie du ciel »	Left inside of patron: Pluto's palace.	
	Under ceiling: Mercure and Jupiter cloud		Under ceiling: Apollo cloud	
	Acting/Dancing Area with various moving Cars with seated and walking musicians	Music: Instrumentalists and singers in « Entrée » of Masquers	« Platea » with the gate of Hell center and the Acheron with Caronte's « barca » walking musicians, « coro stabile »	Singers and Flutes and violins for Shepherds

Table 4: The musical spaces of *Le Balet comique* and *Orfeo* adjusted.

At any rate, however the space was changed, it seems logical to articulate the spaces in two sides, with the underworld to the patron's left (using the underworld's « sinistra » association), the « campo di Tracia » on the patron's right, and the « permesso », or larger orchestra center, opposite the patron. Both Thrace and the Underworld are spaces connected (through doors) to other rooms, where instruments can play « di dientro ». There are many differences between the printed libretto of Striggio and the scores of Monteverdi, and these discrepancies witness that, as with any operatic creation, the piece received a number of modifications. This first « tryout » was a complete success, and preparations for subsequent performances were immediately underway. A second performance was organized for the « ladies of the town » of Mantua, and a third performance for a planned visit of the Duke of Savoy was also in preparation. It is probably –and my belief– for one of these « public » performances that the finale of Act V was changed, and the scene where Apollo leads Orfeo to immortality replaced the (deadly?) Bacchanal initially written by Striggio[93]. The poet and the composer were infinitely practical and adjusted their productions according to the new circumstances[94] and new audiences[95]. The whole production may have gained another dimension if it left the narrow stage to go into a bigger room, possibly equipped with a flying machine, like the one used for *Le Balet Comique*[96].

1.1.8 *Orfeo*, the Modello of Striggio and Monteverdi

After this definition of a possible organization of the space, what do these speculations mean for the staging of this academic modello? From a letter written by Francesco Gonzaga, we know at least that there were not many principal performers, as the singers took multiple roles[97]. They performed these roles from memory, but the text was in the possession of the audience. Francesco Gonzaga had librettos of the opera printed, so that everyone could have a copy to follow while the performance was in progress: « the tale has been printed so that

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[93] We know that the ladies' opinion was generally taken in consideration: for example, in 1606, a ballet for Pisa staging the battle between Ajax and Odysseus, and their respective followers, was not appreciated by the ladies because they judged it to be too dangerous and serious: « fu specie di tragedia ». See: Solerti, Angelo. *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637; notizie tratte da un diario, con appendice di testi inediti e rari*. Firenze: R. Bemporad & figlio, 1905, p. 37.

[94] Fenlon, Iain. "Monteverdi Mantuan *Orfeo:* Some New Documentation" in *Early Music*, *Vol. 12, N°2* (May, 1984). Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 163–172.

[95] Aresi, Stefano. "Dai « doppi finali » alle edizioni anastatiche. Alcune considerazioni in merito alla tradizione de *L'Orfeo*" in *Philomusica on-line Vol. 8, No. 2, L'Orfeo di Claudio Monteverdi nel quarto centenario della prima rappresentazione*. Cremona: Università degli Studi di Pavia, 2009, pp. 64–90. See: https://www.academia.edu/8374116/Dai_doppi_finali_alle_edizioni_anastatiche._Alcune_considerazioni_in_merito_alla_tradizione_de_L_Orfeo (Accessed 12 March 2018)

[96] The Mantuan court theatre was not completed until early 1608 by the architect Antonio Maria Viani. See: Fabbri, Paolo. *Gusto scenico a Mantova nel tardo rinascimento*. Padua: Liviana, 1974, pp. 41–43, 51, 52 & 54. See also: Fenlon, Iain. *Music and Spectacle at the Gonzaga Court, c. 1580–1600*. Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association Vol. 103. London: 1976–1977, pp. 90–105.

[97] For an exhaustive analysis of what parts were doubled and who likely sang which roles, see Carter, Tim. "Singing Orfeo: on the Performers of Monteverdi's First Opera" in *Ricercare* 11, 1999, pp. 75–118.

each of the spectators can have one to read, while it will be sung »[98]. So even if we don't know much about the shape of this production, we can get a sense of direction from this very point: the few principal singers would sing their role for an audience who were reading the verses, their eyes moving between actors and text. By doing so, they were merely checking what was happening: the story of Orpheus was even better known then than it is today. But the audience would have judged and enjoyed the invention with which the performers depicted the story of the legendary artist.

To make clear the multiple identities they were interpreting for the audience, the singers must have worn a variety of luxurious costumes[99]. Besides the integration of symbols and emblems which would have made the characters readable as allegorical figures, expensive garments were expressive of the patron's wealth and the local craftsmen's proficiency. This theatre convention was also made necessary by the fact that the female roles were performed by castrati[100], special performers which seems to indicate that the full cast was of male origin[101]. A small « coro stabile », likely recruited from the chapel musicians of the Gonzaga, would have completed the cast[102]. In addition to Striggio, some other distinguished members of the Accademia may have played some of the numerous instruments for a specific section of the performance and, before or after, enjoyed the show while standing in a corner of the room. The configuration of the room, far from being a handicap, may have facilitated these movements and involvements. During this period, the best view of any type of scenography would have been from the location of the patron of the performance.

This political gesture is both an expression of the renewed place of the arts in society and of the quest for absolutism which dominated the late Renaissance. Most of the librettos of this period integrate thoughts and references to the role of sovereigns, as they were (History and Myth), as they are (Praise) and as they should be (Demands and Wishes). By praising Art and associating it with Philosophy, *Orfeo* is a philosophical lesson. This discourse is addressed to the patron but also, in the frame of the Academy, by the patron. With this angle in mind, there is some evidence that the performance of *Orfeo* incorporated, in more than a single way, spatial relations with the Gonzaga family: the plan would have laid out the routes of circulation, and stairs between the various levels of acting and the viewing areas would have connected

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[98] « la favola s'é fatta stampare acciochè ciascuno degli spettatori ne possa havere una da leggere, mentre che si canterà » See: Fenlon, Iain. "Correspondence Relating to the Early Mantuan Performances," in *Claudio Monteverdi: Orfeo*, edited by Whenham, John. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 170.

[99] Serlio, in a praise of the role of the patron, declares about a show staged by Girolamo Genga for Francesca Maria, Duke of Urbino at an unknown date) mentions superb costumes of shepherds, made from costly gold and silk cloth and lined with the finest wild animal skins. See: Hart, Vaughan and Hicks, Peter. *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture Volume One, Books I–V of* Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva *by Sebastiano Serlio*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1996, p. 90.

[100] See: Calcagno, Mauro. "Signifying Nothing: On the Aesthetics of Pure Voice in Early Venetian Opera" in *The Journal of Musicology, Vol. 20, No. 4*. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 2003, pp. 461–497.

[101] Kelly, Thomas Forrest. "« Orfeo da Camera » Estimating Performing Forces in Early Opera" in *Historical Performance Volume 1 Spring 1988*. 1988, pp. 3–9.

[102] The singing chorus in the 1585 *Edipo* at Vicenza numbered fifteen; Cavalieri seems to recommend a minimum of eight for the *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, while for *Dafne* Gagliano suggests at least sixteen. See: Grout, Donald Jay. "The Chorus in Early Opera", in *Festschrift Friedrich Blume*, ed. By Anna Amalie Abert and Wilhelm Pfannkuch. Kassel: 1963, pp. 151–161.

performers and audience. Trying to visualize the original Palazzo Ducale conditions of the 1607 performance informs us greatly about the various possibilities that any planned production of *Orfeo* should consider. But then again as the original libretto offers some differences with the published scores, when establishing performing material, it is necessary a question of choices. Logically to be influenced, like it was in 1607, by the factual conditions and resources at the time of the production, performers must find their way[103]. Monteverdi, in the dedication of his score to Prince Francesco, launches *Orfeo* from a narrow stage, « sopra angusta Scena », into the great Theatre of the Universe, « nel gran Teatro dell'Universo ». The space metaphor proves to be a prophecy for the unexpected destiny of what was an academic modello.

[103] Carter, Tim. "Some Notes on the First Edition of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1609)" in *Music & Letters, Volume 91 Number 4 November 2010*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 498–512.

1.2 Monteverdi's operas in Venice

« therefore I can truthfully say of myself that, for the pleasures of Architecture and of Machines I was the first one, in this time, to have been making Sceneries and Machines in this City »[104]

Giovanni Burnacini. Venezia, 1651.

Besides the fertile experiments of academies, the social events of princely courts remained for decades the main occasion for designers to experiment and refine their theories about theatre sets. It was for such a lavish occasion that architect Giovanni Battista Aleotti (1546–1636)[105] was employed in 1587: he created, as a performing space, a temple modelled on the Pantheon in Rome, and whose stage functioned as a sort of 'magic box' made dynamic by mechanical motion, a concept close the « Wunderschränke » which was fascinating the intellectuals of the time[106]. Prompted also by a princely wedding, associating two of the most powerful families of Italy, the Farnese with the Medici[107], the major contribution of Aleotti came to light when he inaugurated one of the most important theatre buildings of all times: the *Teatro Farnese* in Parma. Although Aleotti had apparently first employed the flat-wing system in the temporary theatre of the *Accademia degli intrepidi* at Ferrara in 1606, it was not until his design for the *Teatro Farnese*, which opened in 1628 after ten years of planning and construction, that a building of

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[104] « A me dunque, che per i diletti dell'Architettura, e di macchine posso con verità dirmi il primo, quanto al tempo c'habbia ornate Scene, ò fatte Macchine in questa Città » in Burnacini, Giovanni. "Al lettore" in Cicognini, Hiacint' Andrea. *Gli amori di Alessandro Magno e di Rossane*. Venezia: Pinelli, 1651, p. 8. https://www.loc.gov/resource/musschatz.19833.0/?sp=6 (accessed 18 June 2018).

[105] Architect Giovanni Battista Aleotti, called l'Argenta from his native city, was especially active in Parma and can be considered as the first of the great architects of the early seventeenth century, as he applied his skills in the various fields of civil, religious and military construction, hydraulics and ballistics, scenography and the stagecraft, always with a theoretical activity, as he wrote important treatises in these various sectors, assimilating Palladio, Scamozzi and Vignola, without forgetting the Ferrarese tradition.

[106] We have no visual documents about this magic box; for marvel boxes, see: Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Devices of Wonder, From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001, pp. 158–165. One of Aleotti's more traditional theatrical productions for the Ferrara court, a variation on the *scena satyrica* of Serlio, was made in 1592 in Mantua for a performance of *Il Pastor fido* of Giovan Battista Guarini. See: Sampson, Lisa. "The Mantuan performance of Guarini's *Pastor fido* and Representations of Courtly Identity" in *The Modern Language Review*, Volume 98, 1 January 2003, pp. 65−83.

[107] The marriage of Duke Odoardo I Farnese with Margherita of Medici took place on 11 October 1628 in Florence. The wedding celebrations were accompanied by much spectacle and pageantry, including the performance of Marco da Gagliano's *La Flora*, composed especially for the occasion. To welcome the couple back to Parma, *Mercurio e Marte* was performed in the Teatro Farnese on 21 December 1628.

this magnitude was specially conceived to integrate the flat-wing system[108]. The opening spectacle in the *Teatro Farnese*, which made good use of the various mechanical possibilities, but also of the large « platea », dedicated here to horses' ballet and chariot entrance, was *Mercurio e Marte* by Claudio Achillini (1574–1640), performed with music by Claudio Monteverdi[109]. The score is lost but we know that the performance was testing the theatre's resources to the full: It ended with a scene in which Neptune flooded the central arena to a depth of two feet; storms, shipwrecks and fights between sea monsters ensued, to be pacified only by the descent of Jupiter on stage with « one hundred » attendants.[110]

Aleotti's architectural reference for Parma is still Roman in its ambitious proportions; Venetian Aurelio Aureli (1652–1708), in the foreword of his libretto *Il Favore degli Dei*, could still write in 1690: «The theater of Parma, indeed the most sumptuous in Europe—indeed in the whole world—is in no way inferior to the long-vanished theaters of ancient Rome…»[111] The auditorium, a larger copy of Scamozzi's in Sabioneta, was not in itself unique; Aleotti's innovations were in the design of the stage, where behind a majestic *frons scaenae*, he placed painted panels upright in grooves laid out on the stage floor[112]. In a parallel pair of these runners, two wings were put, one directly in front of the other, with one of them extended towards the stage center in view of the audience[113]. The flat-wings stage was in relation with the art of perspective since these sets were composed of frames, arranged on each side of the proscenium at intervals running up-stage, and closed off in the rear by a backdrop. The set design was painted onto this series of flat-wings over which canvas was stretched; these increasingly distant images faced the audience: thus, the special relevance of the art of perspective as a unifying principle. The coordination of the simulated architecture of the set and the real space was created by visual illusion.

The innovations from the Florentine opera were carried to other wealthy cities. In Rome, the Barberini cardinals had added a temporary theater to the Palazzo Barberini in 1632;

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[108] See : "Le Théâtre Farnese de Parme" in *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, 1954 III. Paris : Société d'Histoire du Théâtre, 1954, pp. 170–172.

[109] *Mercurio e Marte* was an extravagant show which involved many creators, but even if Monteverdi's contribution is lost, we have a lot of insights coming from the letters of the composer. See: Fabbri, Paolo. *Monteverdi,* Translated by Tim Carter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 206–219.

[110] See: Tidworth, Simon. *Theatres: An Illustrated Histor*y. London: Pall Mall, 1973, pp. 65–68.

[111] « Perché si come il Gran Teatro di Parma è il più maestoso di quanti n'abbia l'Europa, ansi il mondo tutto, nulla cedendo in pregio a gl'Antichi più famosi di Roma già dal tempo distrutti » in Aureli, Aurelio. *Il Favore degli Dei*, 1690. This opera on music by Bernardo Sabadini (lost) was given on the wedding of Odoardo II Farnese with Dorothea Sophie of Neuburg in the Farnese theater. See: Heller, Wendy. "*Il favore degli dei* (1690): Meta-Opera and Metamorphoses at the Farnese Court" in *Dramatic Experience, The Poetics of Drama and the Early Modern Public Sphere(s)*. Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2016, pp. 118–139.

[112] The Farnese theatre does not have space under stage. See Dall'Acqua, Marzio. "L'Illusione Farnese" in *FMR* N°2, aprile 1982. Milano: Franco Maria Ricci, 1982, pp. 73–98.

[113] This change was done by the stagehands who, at a given signal, pushed out the second wing and pulled back the first. Since this movement had to be synchronized for full effect, a great number of stagehands was necessary; the total synchronization could only be achieved in Venice with a mechanization of the stage: the grooves were cut all the way though the stage floor and the flats were mounted on little carriages that ran in tracks located under the stage. A winch system with counterweights allowed a single individual to put in action the machine.

the first performance was of the opera *Il Sant' Alessio*, with a libretto by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi (1600–1669), and music by Stefano Landi (1587–1639). We know little of the building itself, but the symmetrical concept of the stage, by then firmly established, appears in engravings showing the sets attributed to the architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). The picture isolated by the stage frame is formed by superimposed graphics on the wings and backdrop[114]. The perspective stage is clearly readable along several painted elements. The use of the illusionist art of *trompe-l'oeil*[115] in the paintings followed the rules of central perspective: this theory, continually enriched by the works of architect and painters, found in the theater a fertile ground for large-scale experiments in all Italy.

1.2.1 Opera in Venice

Until the foundation in Venice of the first public opera house in 1637, Italian theatrical life was mainly connected to the humanistic environment of academies and princely courts, secular or spiritual. Indeed, with *Andromeda* by Benedetto Ferrari (1603–1681) and Francesco Manelli (1594–1667), it was an opera in the Roman manner that conquered Venice. But in the Republic, although librettists were often linked with literary academies, opera evolved, in its performing form, from an aristocratic *passe-temps* to a seasonal spectacle open to all, an extra attraction of the yearly Carnival preceding Lent. Within five years, Venetians could rightly boast of maintaining several public theaters—no other city had even one—four of which presented opera performances: the Tron Theater at San Cassiano[116], the Giustinian Theater at San Moisè, and the Novissimo Theater and the Grimani Theater, both situated in the parish of Santissimi Giovanni e Paolo; it was in the Grimani that Monteverdi's operas, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, were created[117].

What characterizes the Venetian opera is its conformity with the theatrical productions of the time following the mercantile model. Opera houses had an entrance fee, as opposed to court performances funded by a patron, and were therefore operating on a precarious basis, surviving primarily on income from performances[118]. Appealing to a socially enlarged audience

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[114] See: Bjurström, Per. *Den romerska barockens scenografi*. Stockholm: Svenska Humanistika Förbundet, 1978, pp. 23–32. For a recent reconstruction of this set for a stage performance, see: Landi, Stefano. *Il Sant'Alessio, DVD*, Direction musicale : William Christie, Mise en scène : Benjamin Lazar. Paris: Virgin Classics, 2008.

[115] "Trompe-l'œil" (French for "deceive the eye") is an art technique that uses realistic imagery to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions. For a large approach, well-illustrated, see: Milman, Miriam. *Le Trompe l'œil*. Genève: Skira, 1992. And, for architecture, from the same author: Milman, Miriam. *Architectures peintes en trompe l'oeil*. Genève: Skira, 1992.

[116] In 1637 Benedetto Ferrari and Manelli's *Andromeda* had its premiere in the newly built theater San Cassiano il nuovo, introducing Venice to public opera. The entire company came from Rome and indeed *Andromeda* was an opera in the roman manner with machines.

[117] Titles of Monteverdi's operas for Venice already vary in the period sources and nowadays the capitalization of certain words is not consistent in all publications. I choose to write *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and use capitalization as rhetorical device, but the footnotes include variants adopted by the respective writers and publishers.

[118] Opera may have been a commercial business in Venice but was all together unprofitable, earning the family of patrons far more in prestige than in wealth. See: Glixon, Beth Lise and Glixon, Jonathan Emmanuel. *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 3–16.

called for a revision of the elitist models of the Florentine and Roman schools. The Venetian opera houses naturally wanted to retain the splendor associated with princely courts. Due to financial constraints, lacking the traditional resources of a prince such as large groups of singers coming from his chapel and a troupe of recreational dancers, the emphasis was placed upon solo singers, the *virtuosi*, as opposed to numerous choruses[119] and allegorical ballets. Nevertheless, the sets and costumes remained of high importance, not surprising in a city where the taste for painting and architecture was so well established, and also attractive to visitors. The role of machine-driven engineering stimulated by the presence of important shipyards is as well not to be underestimated. It was to satisfy the appetite for visual arts, the medium best shared with music in Venice, that Venetian opera was developing a musical dramaturgy in which set designs and mechanical marvels would hold a predominant place[120].

The fact that sceneries and machines were becoming an art by itself, combing architecture, painting and engineering is witnessed by the edition of the very first book about theater practice. In 1638, Nicola Sabbattini (1575–1654) published his book on the machinery of the theater[121]. *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* is a treatise of the utmost importance, which contains an abundance of views and relevant precepts so pertinent that many of them set a path for centuries to come. It also confirms what Serlio proposed in the previous century regarding the general architecture of the theater. The construction of buildings used exclusively for the theater was still a new development at the time, so Sabbattini still focuses primarily on how to adapt existing facilities. In addition to numerous tricks to that end, the book also gives a clear definition of the proscenium arch: for the purpose of enhancing the illusion, one can make « An arch with statues and colonnades, and in its inside, build the scene because not only will one be well assured that the interior [back stage] will not be in sight, but the stage itself will be beautifully decorated with it, will gain more perspective and, on the other side of this arch, one can put many lights which will not only illuminate the houses of the scene, but the whole sky without being seen as no one will know where they are placed ».[122] This search for a new quality of illusion lead to the transformation of Venetian theaters, initially conceived for dramatic works. To welcome the artistic company that had introduced Roman operas to Venice, the theater Santissimi Giovanni e Paolo, for its official reopening in 1639, was fitted out with a new proscenium arch, whose columns are clearly visible on the design dating from

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[119] The choir presence is diminishing quickly and by 1650 it has almost disappeared. See: Rosand, Ellen. *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice, The Creation of a Genre*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 54–55.

[120] Glixon, Beth Lise and Glixon, Jonathan Emmanuel. *Inventing the Business of Opera*.... Oxford, 2006, pp. 227–276.

[121] The *Pratica* published in 1638 by Sabbattini in Ravenna (Book 1 was previously printed at Pesaro in 1637) is a compendium of techniques used at the time in theaters. See: Sabbattini, Nicola. *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri*. Ravenna: de' Paoli e Giovannelli, 1638. See : https://archive.org/details/praticadifabrica00sabb (accessed 18 June 2018).

[122] « si potrà in testa al Palco fare un'Arco con Colonne, e Statue, e dentro fabricarvi la Scena, perche oltre all'essere sicuro di non esser vedute le parti di dentro, darà gran dissimo ornamento all medesima Scena, aggiungendole ancore maggior fuga, e dalla parte di dietro ad esso Arco vi si potrà porre buona quantità di Lumi, i quali non solo illuminaranno le Case della Scena, ma ancore tutto il Cielo, senza essere veduti, e senza sapersi dove siano posti. » in Libro II, 3, Sabbattini, Nicola. *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri*. Ravenna: 1638, p. 73.

the third quarter of the seventeenth century[123] reproduced on Figure 1. And although this design has to be considered with great precautions, its general layout is relevant to Monteverdi's Venetian operas.

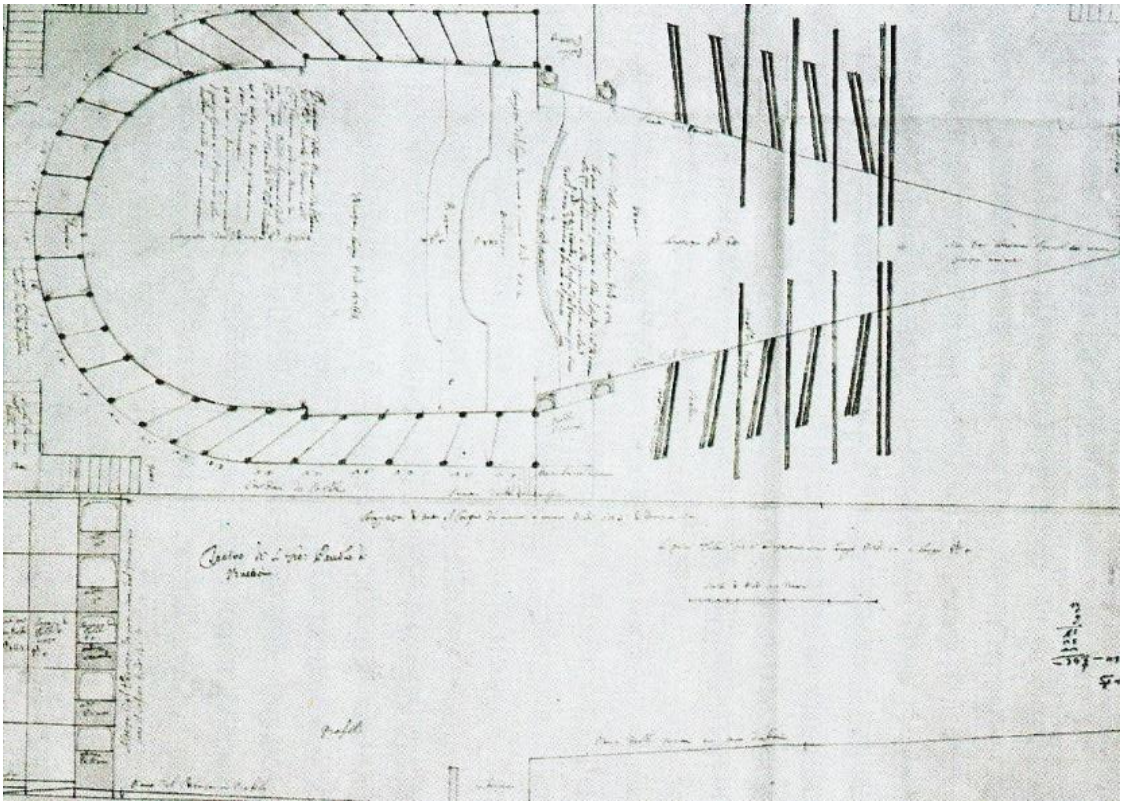

Figure 1: Tomaso Belli, *Theatre of SS Giovanni e Paolo* (Teatro Giovanni Gristostomo), measured drawing, post 1678, plan and section inscribed: «Tomaso Belli Ingiegniero». London, Sir John Soane Museum.

[123] The plan of the Santissimi Giovanni e Paolo probably shows the theatre by the end of the seventeenth century, so it has to be analysed with great care when trying to refer to the première of Monteverdi's operas. At this time, the stage had five pairs of tracks on either side at oblique angles, on which to mount and move the wings. They are also 3 tracks on either side and 2 pairs of tracks toward the back of the stage, all parallel with the proscenium. These parallel tracks could support and move flats that fulfil the functions of backdrops. See: Holmes, William C. "Venetian Theaters during Vivaldi's Era" in *Opera and Vivaldi*, edited by Thomas A. Collins and Elise K. Kirk. Austin (TX): University of Texas Press, 1984, p. 134. Andrea Pozzo in his book of 1693, *De perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* proposed a machinery of the same nature with oblique wings and parallel tracks for bigger shutters; see: Nicoll, Allardyce. *The Development of the Theater, A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day*. London: George G. Harrap & company LTD, 1966, p. 185.

The manager Giovanni Grimani (1603–1663) and his brother Antonio Grimani (1605–59), whose family owned the theater, had a strong interest in the commercial perspectives of opera that undoubtedly led him, when reconstructing the theater, to equip the stage with the most advanced machinery of the age, a pole of attraction for curious entrance buyers. The machinery must have allowed set changes to take place, as the theater was inaugurated with *La Delia o sia le Sera sposa del Sole*, a mythological opera by Francesco Manelli with significant spectacular components. It is a sign of the times that Giulio Strozzi (1583–1652), in his *Scenario*[124] for *La Delia*, chose as one of the dedicatees the set designer, Alfonso Chenda (1591 or 1597 or 1607–1640), whose sets and machines he claimed would « ennoble » his drama[125]. As an engineer, Chenda, born Alfonso Rivarola, had already worked in Parma in 1628 for the inauguration of the Teatro Farnese; he could have met Monteverdi there during the rehearsals for *Mercurio e Marte* in the most technically advanced theater of the time[126]. As an upcoming architect, he also gained fame by building temporary theaters in his native Ferrara[127] and in Padua[128], this last one being one first example of the system of boxes that will predominate the architecture of Venetian theatres, so it is likely that he was commissioned to make the Grimani

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[124] The *scenario* was first used as a publicity tool by Giulio Strozzi who recognized the importance of providing the public with advance publicity. Using various lures, including the fame of its composer, Francesco Manelli, whose *Andromeda* had been such a success, and the fact that it was the inaugural opera for the new theatre SS Giovanni e Paolo, Strozzi published his scenario over a month before *La Delia* opened. This scenario consisted of a synopsis and a running description of the action, a preface by the author, and an advertisement for the next production, Ferrari's *Armida*. See: Thorburn, Sandy. "What News on the Rialto? How Publicity Created and Destroyed Commercial Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice" in *Discourses in Music: Volume 4 Number 1* (Fall 2002). Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002.

[125] « una nuova Armida, che sarà come sono state l'altre due delgi anni andati, la maraviglia delle Scene, venedo hoggi tanto nobilitata dele Machine di Vostra Signoria [Grimani], e del Signor Alfonso [Chenda]…» in Strozzi's *Delia Scenario* of 1638 reproduced in Rosand, Ellen. *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice, The Creation of a Genre.* Berkeley: 1991, Appendix I. 15c, p. 414.

[126] Chenda is named as assistant of Francesco Gutti (c.1605-1645) when the latter was working with Aleotti for *Mercurio e Marte* in Parma in 1628. See: Bjurström, Per. *Giacomo Torelli, and Baroque Stage Design*. Uppsala : Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962, p. 44 & note 23.

[127] For Ferrara 1631, see: *Il Torneo a piedi, e l'invenzione, ed allegoria, colla quale il signor Borso Bonacossi comparì à mantenerlo l'Alcina maga favola pescatoria fatta rappresentare dal suddetto signore nella sala detta de' Giganti in Ferrara, alla presenza di tre Altezze Serenissime di Mantova, e de i due Eminentissimi cardinali Sacchetti, e Spada, nel carnovale dell'anno 1631. Descritti dall'Aggirato accademico fileno. Evvi aggiunto il Tebro epitalamio, che fu dispensato nella sera, e nel teatro, in cui si fece il torneo.* Ferrara: Gioseffo Gironi e Francesco Gherardi, 1631. The tournament was organized by Borso Bonacossi for the nuptials of Giovanni Francesco Sacchetti and Beatrice Estense Tassoni in the Ferrara Castle, in presence of the Duke of Mantova Charles de Nevers, dedicaty of the book, and of the cardinal Giulio Sacchetti. The book contains 6 engravings of the sets of Alfonso Chenda. See: http://bibliotecaestense.beniculturali.it/info/img/lib/i-mo-beu-70.i.19.6.pdf

[128] For Padua 1636, see : *L'ERMIONA del S. Marchese Pio Enea Obizzi Per introduzione d'un Torneo à piedi & a cavalli E d'un Balletto rappresentato in Musica nella Città di Padova l'Anno M. DC. XXXVI dedicata Al Sereniss. Principe di Venetia FRANCESCO ERIZO descritta dal S. Nicolo Enea Bartolini Gentilhuomo, & Academico° Senese*. Padua: Paolo Frambotto, 1638. Performed in Padua in 1636 *L'Ermiona*, music by Giovanni Felice Sances and text by G. Tonti Padova and Pio Enea degli Obizzi, unlike previous operas, was not commissioned to celebrate a special occasion, nor was it performed before an audience exclusively made-up of the nobility. See: Rosand, Ellen. *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre*. Berkeley 1991, pp. 69–72. For the sets, see also: http://movio.beniculturali.it/bupd/lemusetrailibri/it/72/23-scenografia-dellermiona

theater suitable for performing operas in front of an auditorium divided in boxes[129]. This division was made necessary by the desire to offer a private as much as public experience for the audience. In this case the theater Santissimi Giovanni e Paolo must correspondingly have had a wing stage from the start, which allowed several sets to appear, one after the other. The number of tracks inserted in the stage permitted scenes to change before the audience's eyes in a minimal amount of time: and although the way they were changed is not known, this would have been new for the audience and part of the attraction for the spectacle. Indeed, the stage machinery of the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo may have been among the most sophisticated at that time[130]. But after a second spectacular production, *Armida* by Benedetto Ferrari, Chenda died in 1640. He appears to have been succeeded at the SS Giovanni e Paolo by Giovanni Burnacini (1610–1655), to whom can be attributed the sets for Monteverdi's operas in Venice.

1.2.2 Giovanni Burnacini (1610–1655)

Born in Cesena around 1610, Giovanni Burnacini built a temporary theater in Ferrara in 1642 to stage a tournament entitled *La Pretensioni del Tebro e del Po*. For this big spectacle, which took place in the courtyard of the Palazzo Publico, Burnacini designed a performance area closed on three sides with four tiers of boxes, a formula invented by Chenda for the same type of spectacle[131]. On the fourth side, the stage could offer changeable scenery: from an Underworld scene with ruined architecture to a woody landscape[132]. Burnacini divided his large stage, fit for the horses of the tournament, into three sections: the river gods Tiber and Po on each side, and, a center space where, after showing the flaming palace of Pluto, the city of Ferrara was the focal point[133]. This similitude of conception with the performance space that Chenda had chosen in 1637 for *L'Ermiona* in Padua may indicate some shared experience or at least common ideas that will prevailed for the Venetian opera auditoriums[134]. Burnacini's first

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[129] *L'Ermiona* is generally regarded as the decisive antecedent of the commercial Venetian opera; see: Petrobelli, Pierluigi. "*L'Ermiona* di Pio degli Obizzi ed i primi spettacoli d'opera veneziani" in *Quaderni della Rassegna musicale 3,* (1965), pp. 125–141.

[130] This supremacy was short lived as the Tron family opened the Teatro Novissimo in 1641 with machinery invented by Giacomo Torelli for *La Finta Pazza* which was allowing quicker and simultaneous changes of sets. See: Bjurström, Per. *Giacomo Torelli, and Baroque Stage Design*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962, p. 47.

[131] It is quite revealing that from all cities in Italy, Venice will be the one to promote public opera and the only one where horse tournaments were, by then, if not impossible, difficult to achieve.

[132] For Ferrara 1642 see designs reproduced in Torrefranca, Fausto. "Il primo scenografo del popolo G. Burnacini" in *Scenario*, N°3. Milano & Roma, 1933, pp. 191-194. For the descriptive text, see: *Le Pretensioni del Tebro, e del Po' cantate, e combattute in Ferrara, nella venuta dell'eccell. sig. principe Taddeo Barberini ... Componimento del sig. Donn'Ascanio Pio di Sauoia. E descrizione di Francesco Berni*. Ferrara : Francesco Suzzi, 1642. See also : https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2048088/oai_www_internetculturale_it_metaoaicat_oai_bid_braidense_it_7_MI0185_UM1E000444.html

[133] For the hell scene this structure is kept, with columns dividing the palace in 3 sections, and burning city as focal point.

[134] Gualandri, Francesca. "Spettacoli, luoghi e interpreti a Venezia all'epoca della *Didone*" in *La Fenice prima dell' Opera* 2005–2006, no. 7, pp. 45–48, suggests that Chenda's sets were transferred from Padua to Venice where they were reused for various productions.

recorded work for the Venetian opera stage was presented in 1643[135]: he worked in SS Giovanni e Paolo as a set designer and impresario for the opera *La Finta Savia*, the marketing answer devised by Grimani to counter the success of *La Finta Pazza,* performed in the rival Novissimo theater with spectacular sets of Torelli [136]. However, the opera's librettist, Giulio Strozzi, seems to indicate that Burnacini had already been working in Venice for some years. In the foreword of the libretto, Burnacini is praised as the designer "who in the past years was the first one to revive the theaters of Venice, with this majestic grandeur […]"[137] This reference to his activity during previous seasons is the reason that one can attribute to him the sets of the other operas performed in SS Giovanni e Paolo after the death of Chenda in 1640[138]. Among these productions, the three last operas by Monteverdi stand out: *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* with a libretto by Giacomo Badoaro (1602–1654) in 1640, revived in 1641; *Le nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* by Michelangelo Torcigliani (1618–1679) in 1641 (the score of which is now lost); and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* by Giovanni Francesco Busenello (1598–1659) in 1643.

As impressive as these records are, we have only a couple of pieces of visual evidence of Giovanni Burnacini's activity in Venice: two small prints that represent ephemeral architecture, one for the Feast of the Virgin on the Piazza San Marco in 1642[139] and one for a fireworks' display probably given during Carnival[140] (Figure 2). Although these festive displays indicate serious connection with the elite of the city, who was in charge of organizing such public events, his position in Venice was likely overshadowed by the presence of his rival, Giacomo Torelli (1608–1678)[141]. This ambitious designer, ever mindful of his reputation, had engravings made at great cost of his own sets designed for the Novissimo Theater, itself a rival of the Grimani Theater. These lavish publications had, and still have, great impact on Torelli's fame. It was only after the departure of Torelli for Paris in 1645, following the bankruptcy of the Novissimo, that Burnacini was able to regain his position as the premier designer in Venice.

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[135] Dates are tricky to establish when retracing the evolution of Venetian opera because of the specificity of the Venetian calendar: Despite my effort to be consistent, dates through this chapter may vary from one year. On the complexity of opera and the Calendar, see: Donington, Robert. *The rise of opera.* London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981, pp. 307–316. See also: Selfridge-Field, Eleanor. "Ritual, liturgy and the Venetian theatrical calendar" in *D'une scène à l'autre, l'opera italien en Europe. vol.1 : Les pérégrinations d'un genre* sous la direction de Damien Colas and Alessandro Di Profio. Wavre : Editions Mardaga, 2009, pp. 13–25.

[136] *La Finta Pazza* by Francesco Sacrati to a libretto by Giulio Strozzi. Its premiere in Venice during the Carnival season of 1641 inaugurated the Teatro Novissimo. *La Finta Savia* of Giulio Strozzi with Music by Filiberto Laurenzi, Giovanni Battista Crivelli, Benedetto Ferrari, Alessandro Leardini, Tarquinio Merula, and Vincenzo Tozzi was performed on 1 January 1643 at the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo.

[137] « Le macchine, e le scene con numerose mutationi sono state inventate dal vivacissimo Sig. Gio. Burnacini da Cesena, il quale fù gli anni adietri il primo, che ravivò i Teatri di Venetia con questa maetrose apparenze. » in Strozzi, Giulio. *La Finta Savia*. Venetia: Matteo Leni e Giovanni Vecellio, 1643, p. 184, quoted by Torrefranca, Fausto. "Il primo scenografo del popolo G. Burnacini" in *Scenario*, N° 3. Milano & Roma, 1933, p. 191.

[138] 1642: *Gli amori di Giasone e d'Issifile* by O. Persiani and Marco Marazzoli, and *Il Narciso ed immortalati Eco* by the same artists.

[139] I was not able to locate a copy of this print. See: https://www.uibk.ac.at/aia/burnacini_giov_5_1.htm

[140] On the forefront of the print a battle is taking place: that seems to suggest the fistfight between the two main guilds of gondoliers, a yearly spectacle in Venice taking place on the Saint Barnaba Bridge. See chapter 6.

[141] For the latest approach of work of Torelli, see: *Giacomo Torelli, L'invenzione scenica nell'Europa barocca*. a cura di Francesco Milesi. Fano: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, 2000.

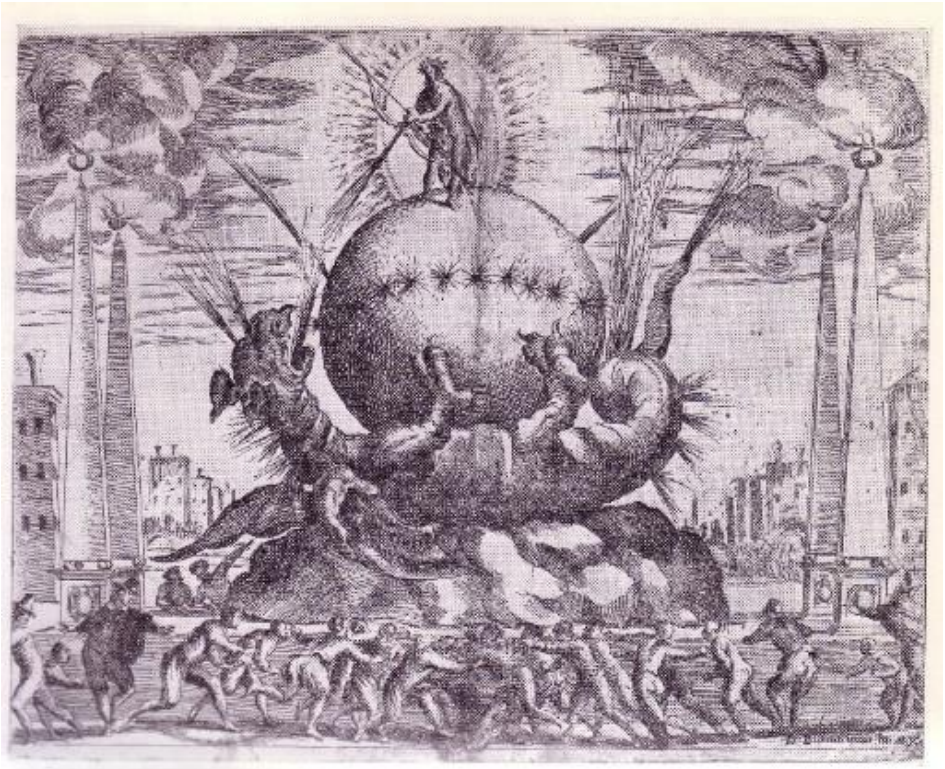

Figure 2: 1640?, engraving by Giovanni Burnacini of his set for a firework display in Venice showing *The Victory of Apollo over the Python*[142].
London, Victoria and Albert Museum (previously in Theater Museum, Harry R. Beard Collection).

One of Giovanni Burnacini's documented productions from this later period is 1651's *Gli amori di Alessandro Magno e di Rossane*, with music by Francesco Luccio (ca 1628–1658). For this piece, presented at the Grimani Theater, Burnacini acted as designer and impresario. In his foreword to the libretto of Giacinto Andrea Cicognini (1606–1651), he claims that he was "the first who has adorned the stage and made machines in this city."[143] Despite this entitlement, Venetian opera theaters were constrained in the production resources they could provide, and did not always offer the designer, even doubling as impresario, ideal conditions in which to maintain a predominant position next to the composer and the poet whose fields of activities were more diverse and easily accessible in printing form. The career path of Torelli moving from the unsecure private enterprises of Venice to state patronages in France was a model whose prestigious social appeal, inherited from the Renaissance, was also based on a search to find circles as well learned as connected. Perhaps this is also why, in 1651, Burnacini accepted the princely invitation of Emperor Ferdinand III (1608–1657) to Vienna where the

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[142] In *The rise of opera*, this print is attributed wrongly by Donington to his son Lodovico, Donington reading on the print « Lo: Burnacinius », when one should read « Io. ». The letter « I » is used here in the Latin way, Ioannis, coming from the Greek Ioannese and derived from the Hebrew «Yohanan», consisting of «Yahwè», God and «hanan», to be merciful. Venetian used Giovine or Iovine as nickname or to indicate a young (in modern italian giovane) person. See: Donington, Robert. *The rise of opera*, London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981. pl. XII.

[143] « A me dunque, che per i diletti dell'Architettura, e di macchine posso con verità dirmi il primo, quanto al tempo c'habbia ornate Scene, ò fatte Macchine in questa Città » in Burnacini, Giovanni. "A Lettore." in Cicognini, Hiacint' Andrea. *Gli amori di Alessandro Magno e di Rossane*. Venezia: Pinelli, 1651, p. 8.

Italian artist, until his death on July 21, 1655, established a productive career as a court architect and theater designer. His son Lodovico (Ludovico) Ottavio Burnacini (1636–1707), first working as his assistant, will keep on in the style of his father and establish a long-lasting influence on the scenography of the German speaking countries.

Due to the lack of first-hand iconographical sources on Giovanni Burnacini's creations for opera in Venice, we are forced to look at his productions in Austria to get an idea of his personal style. One of his productions, *La Gara*—an operatic prologue for a tournament by Alberto Vimina (1603-1667) —was performed in Vienna in 1652. The libretto is illustrated with engraved scenes evoking the event[144]. Even more informative, as we will see, is *L'Inganno d'amore* by Antonio Bertali, as the libretto by Benedetto Ferrari, published for the performance in Regensburg in 1653, shows clearly the different sets[145]. One of Burnacini's designs for *La Gara* (Figure 3) is typical of the architectural work of the designer. Behind a majestic *frons scaenae* composed of long columns, the eye is drawn and led along the walls, cornices, and colonnades toward the center of the stage. The interest is concentrated upon these transversal elements, which form the most significant decorative part of the picture. The backdrop perspective is simply used to complete the milieu; it was too far away and too dimly lit to transmit more than a dominating mood or atmosphere[146]. Its effect in Burnacini is primarily to serve as a neutral background in front of which the performers are more defined, thanks to the colored costumes[147], and better lit, as a result of the footlights. Even so, regardless of the magnificence and the ornamentation of Burnacini's sets, it is easy to perceive the strict symmetrical and monumental composition that would enhance the human presence[148].

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144 See: Vimina, Alberto. *La gara. Opera Dramatica rappresentata in Musica. Per introduttione di Torneo fatto in Vienna per la nascita della Serenissima Infante di Spagna, Donna Margarita Maria [sic] d'Avstria, dedicata a Sua Eccellenza il Signore Marchese di Castel Rodrigo, Gentilhuomo Della Camera di S. Maestà Cattolica, del suo Conseglio, e suo Ambasciatore estraordinario in Corte Cesarea. Da Alberto Vimina.* Vienna d'Austria: Matteo Riccio, 1652.

145 See : Bertali, Antonio. *L'Inganno d'amore. Innhalt und Verfassung der comoedi von Liebs Betrug ; ersinnet von Benedicto Ferrari ; dedicieret dem aller durchleuchtigsten grossmächtigsten und Unüberwindlichsten Römischen Kayser auch zu Hungarn und Böhmen König &c. &c.* [Regensburg] : Gedruckt in der Kays. Freyen Reichs Statt Regenspurg bey Christoff Fischer, 1653.

146 Later in the century a French traveller wrote : « L'on joue à Venise plusieurs opéras à la fois ; les théâtres sont grands et magnifiques, les décorations superbes et bien diversifiées, mais très mal éclairées. » in Limojon de Saint Didier, Alexandre Toussaint. *La ville et la république de Venise*. Paris: 1680, p. 347.

147 For costumes, a good source are the paintings kept in the Pinacoteca of Fano showing Torelli's sets for *Venere Gelosa* (1643) and for *Deidamia* (1644), although the presence of nudity of the gods in the set of this piece indicates a desire of the painter to elevate the composition to History painting, and not performance documentation, the bright colours seem accurate. See: *Giacomo Torelli, L'invenzione scenica nell'Europa barocca*. Fano: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, 2000, pp. 122–146.

148 Lodovico (Ludovico) Ottavio Burnacini (1636-1707) was his father's assistant until the latter's death and succeeded him in the office of theatre architect and imperial court engineer to the Habsburg Emperor. He is famous today thanks to the series of engravings showing his sets for *Il pomo d'oro*, the opera by Antonio Cesti (1623-1669) on a libretto by Francesco Sbarra (1611-1668), which was first performed before the imperial court in a specially constructed open-air theatre in Vienna. Originally planned to mark the wedding of the Emperor Leopold I and Margaret Theresa of Spain in 1666, the production was rescheduled to mark the Empress's seventeenth birthday in 1668. The work was staged over the course of two days: The Prologue, Acts I and II were given on July 12; Acts III, IV and V on July 14. The staging was unprecedented for its lavishness and no fewer than 24 sets with stage machinery.

Figure 3: 1652, anonymous engraving of a Giovanni Burnacini's «Atrio Reggio» for *La Gara* in Alberto Vimina. *La Gara : Opera Dramatica rappresentata in Musica, Per introduttione di Torneo fatto in Vienna Per La Nascita Della Serenissima Infanta Di Spagna, Donna Margarita Maria D'Avstria, Dedicata A Sua Eccellenza il Signore Marchese Di Castel Rodrigo* ...
Vienna d'Austria : Matteo Riccio, 1652.
London, British Library.

1.3 *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*

A visual configuration that emphasizes the movements of the singer was clearly appropriate for the Venetian staging of the story of Ulisse's return to his island of Ithaca. It may not be a coincidence that the existing prologue of the opera by Monteverdi shows Human Frailty tormented by three gods who are blind[149]. Unfortunately, this intriguing visual allegory is, like many aspects of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, difficult to investigate, as there is little extant evidence of the first performance in Venice in 1640. Even though the opera was revived in 1641, no printed copies of the libretto have survived. Fortunately, a number of manuscripts is kept in Venice, one likely to be contemporary and perhaps even from the hand of the librettist Badoaro. This lack of printed sources makes the study of this libretto as essential as examining the only surviving manuscript of the score, as it contains scenes that were not set in music and seems therefore to have preceded the production. In this libretto, we learn about the original plan to perform the opera in five acts and a prologue, a division that brought the play closer to the antique model of *tragedia*[150]. In this plan, the development of the sets appears to be very closely related to the action of the drama. The libretto offers a dramaturgy of space, both in terms of places of action and types of scenery required, close to the one Homer describes in his *Odyssey*[151]. The narrative style of the libretto, with its division by sequences, may be an evocation of the Greek epic, but the definition of its spaces of action on stage also bears the mark of Venetian early opera[152]. The extensive information we have about the usages and practices of the Venetian theaters of the period fits well with what the librettist Badoaro had in mind. First of all, the narration follows a series of episodes that do not necessarily succeed each other chronologically until they merge during the slaughter of the suitors. Furthermore, to establish this pacing, these events take place in different locations, and the changes of space underline the possible simultaneity of action. Movable scenery and special effects, a trademark of Venetian designers, offered the perfect visual tools to display the multiple events of the ultimate episode of Ulisse's story.

On the libretto manuscript, next to the detailed list of characters, the so-called Aristotelian unity of place is announced: «The scene is in Ithaca, an Island in the Ionian Sea, now called Theachi. »[153] Ithaca is a real island in the Ionian Sea, and it was under Venetian control in the time of Monteverdi: one of numerous harbors offering shelter for the maritime

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[149] Badoaro wrote another version of the prologue showing: Il Fato, la Fortezza and La Prudentia. See following note.

[150] Manuscript of the libretto of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*: I-Vmc 564, Biblioteca d'Arte e di Storia del Civico Museo Correr, Venezia, Italy.

[151] Badoaro bases his adaptation on the book 13 to 24 of Homer's *Odyssey*, and, as Ellen Rosand, has suggested, on the Italian translation published in 1573 by Lodovico Dolce. See: Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas: a Venetian trilogy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p. 133.

[152] See: Carter, Tim. *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 237-249.

[153] « La scena é in Ionia Isola del Mar Ionio Vera nomineva Theachi » in Manuscript of the libretto *of Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. Biblioteca Correr.

trade of the *Serenissima*[154]. Called « Thiaki » by the sailors before the Venetian period, the name was kept by the inhabitants, and the island was called « Theaki » by the Venetians, sometimes written « Theachi » as in the manuscript of the libretto. Far from being an imaginary place, or a place lost in time, Ithaca/Theaki was as real for the audience of the theater SS Giovanni and Paolo as any other island of the Mediterranean and the patriot audience of 1640 may have seen in Ulisse regaining his kingdom over the suitors, a possible allegory of Venetian legitimacy in the possession of Theachi over the Ottomans. On stage, the island, where the entire opera takes place, is shown in three sets, very different from each other: the « Reggia », the « Boschereccia », the « Marittima »: The Royal Palace, the Grove, and the Seashore.

1.3.1 The « Reggia »

One custom that characterizes the scenography of most Venetian operas of the period is the presence of a *Scena Maestra* (principal set), also known as *Scena ordinaria* (regular set)[155]. In *Ulisse* the royal palace occupies the function of *Scena Maestra*, the set that appears most often in the story as the center of power of Ithaca and the destination of Ulisse for his return to his fatherland. The title of the opera, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, declares clearly that it focuses on the final chronological episode of the Homerian adventures of Ulisse. By making the royal palace the most recurrent set in *Ulisse*, Badoaro is able to develop two distinct narratives before merging them in this very space for the last scenes: Penelope facing the suitors, and Ulisse and his journey from the moment of his landing on the shores of Ithaca to his arrival in his home. The « Reggia » is the royal palace where Queen Penelope has confined herself, waiting for her husband, and where the suitors are courting her. More specifically, the main room of the palace is the center of royal power and where the King of Ithaca received his visitors: in *Ulisse*, it is a throne room without a king, and an empty seat may have highlighted the imbalance of power.

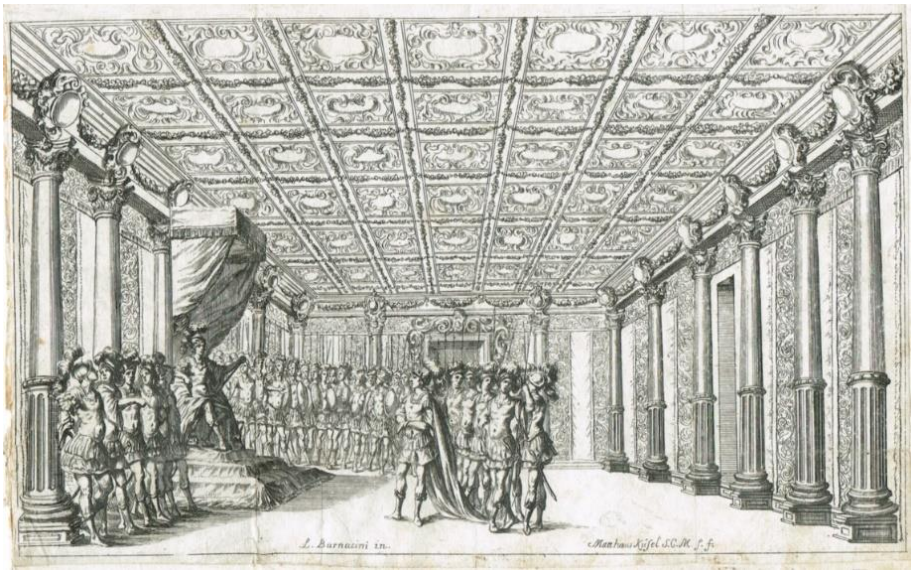

Figure 4: 1674, engraving by Matthäus Küsel, (1629-1681) from the set by Lodovico Burnacini (1636-1707) for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* by Niccolo Minato & Antonio Draghi, Vienna, 1674. Collection of Gilbert Blin.

[154] Scammell, Geoffrey Vaughn. *The world encompassed: the first European maritime empires, c. 800-1650*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981, p. 119.

[155] Glixon, Beth Lise and Glixon, Jonathan Emmanuel. *Inventing the Business of Opera…* Oxford, 2006, pp. 242–244.

To reflect this, it is likely that Burnacini had painted an imposing architecture for his principal set, with lines of columns and pillars bringing the eye to the vanishing point, where an empty throne would have been a clear expression of the void Ithaca suffers from. We already have seen the *Atrio Reggio* by Giovanni Burnacini which can be found in his work of 1652 for *La Gara*[156] in Vienna (Figure 3). The stage is organized in a very monumental way, with the perspective accentuated by means of close points of connection coming from the capitals and the pillars creating perspective lines. This configuration emphasizing the vanishing point could lead to a throne in the middle. However, the throne may also have also been located on one side, as we find this disposition in many sets of this period.[157] A throne room by Lodovico Burnacini, the son of Giovanni, for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* in Vienna in 1674 shows also such a disposition. Taking in consideration that the print showing a « Room in the Palace of the Dictator in Roma » may have reversed the original composition, the place of the ruler, « with his majestic seat »[158], is on the side (Figure 4)

Figure 5: 1653, engraving by Jacob van Sandrart (1630–1708) of Giovanni Burnacini's « Atrio Reggio » for Act I of *L'Inganno d'amore* for the performance in Regensburg.
Washington, Library of Congress.

[156] Vimina, Alberto. *La Gara : Opera Dramatica rappresentata in Musica, Per introduttione di Torneo fatto in Vienna Per La Nascita Della Serenissima Infanta Di Spagna, Donna Margarita Maria D'Avstria, Dedicata A Sua Eccellenza il Signore Marchese Di Castel Rodrigo* ... Vienna : Matteo Riccio, 1652.

[157] A good example can be found in one of Torelli's sets for the *Ballet de la Nuit*, performed in Paris in 1653, but the accumulations of different performing space in the design, reusing elements of *Andromède*, dissolve the idea of a throne room. See: *Giacomo Torelli, L'invenzione scenica nell'Europa barocca*. Fano: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, 2000, p. 236.

[158] « Stanze, del Palazzo del Dittatore in Roma con il suo maestoso Seggio » See: [Niccolo Minato and Antonio Draghi]. *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali, Drama Musicale Per la Feliccissima Nascita della Sereniss. Arcciduchessa Anna Maria Figlia delle S.S. C.C. R.R. M.M. Dell' Imperatore Leopoldo, e della Imperatrice Claudia Felice....* Vienna: Giovanni Christoforo Cosmerovio, 1674.

For *l'Inganno d'amore* of 1653, Burnacini designed a « Royal Atrium composed of Doric order with a continuous order of doubled columns, with in the inter columns niches with statues, whose beautiful construction, and continuation of depth […] »[159]. This royal atrium fits the elements of *Ulisse*'s «Reggia» (Figure 5). The courtyard open to the sky would also allow in *Ulisse*, the flying of Minerva who «appears in a machine»[160] for the slaughter of the suitors.

The place speaks of the absent center of power, but it is also the place of rebirth, where Ulisse will regain his true identity as King of Ithaca: the room where the suitors will be slaughtered. This episode, one of the most important of the *Odyssey*, is reminiscent of the fatal meals that are a staple of Greek mythology[161], and is the one most represented in visual arts. In these drawings, paintings, and engravings, the space is often organized vertically with the architecture of the palace and horizontally by the axis delimited by the table of the banquet of the suitors. A very good example of this type of composition is present in a drawing of the Genovan artist Luca Cambiaso (1527–1585) whose language, influenced by the purpose of his work, destined to become a fresco, is close to the one of a picture of a stage performance (Figure 6). Following Homer[162], Cambiaso places in the center the figure of Minerva, flanked by Telemaco on one side, with a spear, and Ulisse, on this other, with his bow. As the entrance of the room is blocked by Ulisse, the suitors have no way to flee away. As viewers in the room itself, we are part of the action.

While a banquet with its long table is often presented in the Venetian paintings showing biblical meals at the center of lavish architecture in perspective—Veronese had been the champion of this type of composition, and the size of some of his canvases reached the actual dimensions of a stage[163]—the visual trope of the meal as phenomenon of revelation acquires a new outcome in *Ulisse*. This composition of the verticality of the palace and the horizontality of the table is completed by the dynamic axis defined by Ulisse slaughtering the suitors. Luca Cambiaso makes good use of the rules of perspective, and the scene seems perfectly suited to the Venetian stage. In this scene, with Burnacini's strong linear style directing focus, the violence that stops the festivities must have been very effective, but how realistic the staged

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159 « Atrio Regio composto d'ordine Dorico con una continoata ordinanza di duplicate colonne, negl'intercoluni delle quaili erano nicchie cone statue, onde belle construttione, e continoatione di lontananza faceva restare ammirato ciascuno, che le riguardava. » in: Bertali, Antonio. *L'Inganno d'amore.* [Regensburg] : Gedruckt in der Kays. Freyen Reichs Statt Regenspurg bey Christoff Fischer, 1653.

160 «Apparisce Minerva in macchina» in *Ulisse*, Act IV, Last Scene.

161 One may think of the story of Atheus and Thyestes as told by Seneca in his *Thyestes* (based on a Euripides model now lost).

162 « Then Athene, daughter of Zeus, drew near them, like unto Mentor in form and voice, and Odysseus saw her, and was glad; and he spoke, saying: "Mentor, ward off ruin, and remember me, thy dear comrade, who often befriended thee. Thou art of like age with myself" [then the goddess] flew up to the roof-beam of the smoky hall, and sat there in the guise of a swallow to look upon. » in Homer. *The Odyssey* with an English Translation by A.T. Murray. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press & London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1919, Book XXII, 200–240, pp. 353–355.

163 Several compositions by Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) include a meal and a table: *The Supper at Emmaus, Feast in the house of Levi, Feast in the house of Simon*, etc, and *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (1563) which measures 6.77 m × 9.94 m.

slaughter would have been remains a question[164]. Nevertheless, this massacre was certainly an expression of ferocity, which is reaffirmed by the parallel as established in the story when a witness of the butchery, Iro, compares the « proci » (suitors) to « porci » (pigs)[165]. The libretto suggests a ritual sacrifice, a cleansing in blood and that anchors the drama in the Greek style[166]. The celestial good omens that Minerva bestows[167], the sound of thunder and the vision of lightning that she promised as the signal for the slaughter, must have amplified its extent on stage[168].

Figure 6: ca. 1565, Study by Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585) for the *Return of Ulysses*,
Pen and brown ink and brush and brown wash on brown laid paper, squared in red chalk for a fresco for the Grimaldi palace on the Strada Nuova in Genova.
Princeton (NJ), Princeton University, Art Museum.

[164] It seems that, in respect for the integrity of costumes, simpler artifices were more commonly used on the stage. Red fabric, as used in eastern theatre form, would have produced in the dim lighting of the candles the same effect without irreversible consequences for the garments.

[165] On the comical aspect of the part of Iro, see: Rosand, Ellen. "Iro and the Interpretation of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*" in *Journal of Musicology 7* (1989), pp. 141-164.

[166] The aim to refer to ancient tragedy is part of the literary aims of Badoaro. See: Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas*…2007, pp.130-143.

[167] « Minerva [...] Allor che l'arco tuo ti giunge in mano / e strepitoso tuon fiero t'invita, / saetta pur, che la tua destra ardita / tutti conficcherà gli estinti al piano. / Io sarà teco e con celeste lampo /attererò l'umanità soggetta: / cadran vittime tutti alla vendetta, / ché i flagelli del ciel non hanno scampo.» in *Ulisse*, Act III, Scene 6.

[168] The lightning effect, the « lampo » that Minerva predicts, must have been figured by fireworks in directional « flagelli », while the « tuon » may been done with the help of a thunder machine.

1.3.2 The « Boschereccia »

Whereas the royal palace is the sty of sin, the pastoral scene is, in opposition, presented as the kingdom of innocence. The « Boschereccia », the grove where Eumete, the swineherd, reigns over his pigs, is the first place where Minerva sends Ulisse, albeit incognito. It is there that the broken hero meets the wise Eumete and gradually regains his human identity by being honored with the ancestral laws of hospitability. There, he also recovers his unique status as a father by being reunited with his son Telemaco. These fundamental values of the pastoral life, the sense of community and the family ideals, speak of an uncorrupted world and natural goodness. The woodland of the Venetian stage, the « Boschereccia », was probably still much like the design Serlio had proposed a century before as a generic set for the Pastoral Scene, which he called in a Greek fashion following Vitruvius, *scena satyrica* (See Figure 1, in the *Orfeo* part). In a forest dominated by tall trees that look like Mediterranean pines, on both parts of a path some simple huts can be seen, suggesting a human settlement. Indeed, in Homer, Eumete welcomes Odysseus in his house, but Badoaro chooses to have the action take place outside, among the trees.

Figure 7: 1636, anonymous engraving of the theatre set by Alfonso Chenda (ca 1600 -1640) for «una boschereccia o Campagna di Beozia» with an apparition of Pallade of *L'Ermiona*, music by Giovanni Felice Sances and text by G. Tonti Padova and Pio Enea degli Obizzi, in Padua in 1636.
Los Angeles, Getty Museum.

For the performance in Venice, Burnacini may have reused sets from the stock left by Chenda at his death, and more specifically the trees this designer created for the first act of Ferrari's *Armida*, a spectacle which opened a few months before *Ulisse*. The shutters showing the game-filled forest of the magician would have suited the calm and beauty of Eumete's abode. The side shutters may have shown the same elongated trunks which confer an architectural feel to the set for « una boschereccia o Campagna di Beozia » of Chenda's 1636 production of *L'Ermiona*, as seen on Figure 7. If Burnacini would have wanted to express the specific idea of Homer about the dwellings of Eumete, he may have integrated to the trees of Chenda some shutters painted like rustic buildings. Shutters showing wild trees appear on many sets of this period and these shutters showing huts may have made all the difference. The model of Serlio was the reference for composing a set of this kind and a good example of the wide spread influence of *Scena satyrica* is the design by Inigo Jones (1573–1652), for *Florimène* in London in 1635 or 1636[169]. As shown of Figure 8, the English designer, who spent formative years in Italy, follows strictly the composition of Serlio but enlarged it in proportion with the dimensions of the Whitehall, where the performance took place. If one forgets the design of Jones for the proscenium frame, and the graphic hand of the artist, Burnacini's « Boschereccia » may have been of the same type, maybe with a view of the royal palace on the backdrop, as the grove of Eumete is only a step, although decisive, between the seashore and the «Reggia».

Figure 8: 1635-36, Study by Inigo Jones (1527–1585) for a set for *Florimene*, in the Whitehall,
Pen and brown ink and brush paper
Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection.

[169] For an intresting reconstruction of the sets of *Florimene*, see:
https://spectacle.appstate.edu/news/florim%C3%A8ne-whitehall

Ulisse of Monteverdi ends, as it started, in the « Reggia » set, but with the evocation of another space of the palace, this one hidden in its center: the marital bedchamber. Ulisse describes it in visual terms: « I know that your pure bed, which none have seen, save Ulisse,…»[170]. By stating that the marital bed has not been seen by anyone else, Ulisse reassures Penelope of his trust and at the same time proves his identity. The bed, as much as the throne, is Ulisse's goal: a wanderer who wants to repossess his identities as man, father, king, and husband. The reunion happens after the gods have agreed to let Ulisse regain the last part of his self. In this scene, which summarizes the twenty years of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Juno, goddess of marriage, admits that « Ulisse has wandered too much »[171] and thereby marks the beginning of the denouement. To finally convince his wife of his identity, Ulisse must describe the couple's bed and the figure of Diana that Penelope has embroidered on the bed cover. It is with the description of this picture of the chaste goddess that Penelope recognizes Ulisse, and in the conjugal embrace that follows that the wandering of the hero really ends. The association of ideas elevates the sovereigns to the status of mythic couple for the audience as much as it did for the readers of Homer[172].

1.3.3 The « Marittima »

This ultimate private center in the palace parallels the immensity of the sea, where the wanderer went when he left Ithaca and where he is returning from at the beginning of Monteverdi's opera, that main theme of Homer's epic poem. The relation of Venice with the sea was at the center of its identity by 1640, culminating in *Lo Sposalizio del Mare* (The Marriage of the Sea), the lavish annual ceremony that used to symbolize the maritime dominion of Venice[173]. Since the eleventh century, this symbolic union took the form of a pageant on Ascension Day with the head of the state, the Doge, as the main character, and the sea as partner and backdrop. Considering the importance of the sea in Venice both in terms of reality and symbol, it is not surprising that the depictions of seascapes became compulsory in Venetian operas. Indeed, the first opera presented in a Venetian public theater, *Andromeda* in 1637, had a sea-related theme, and for its very first set Chenda designed a « Marittima »: «The Curtain gone, one could see the whole sea with, in the distance, some movements of water, and rocks, the naturalness of which (even though it was fake) brought doubt as to whether one was in a theater, or on a real seashore ».[174] In *Ulisse*, the set that immediately follows the first appearance of the palace is the seascape. The way to present the illusion of the sea was reported by Sabbatini in 1638, and his treatise describes various techniques to represent water, showing that ingenuity was a constant factor in attempting to represent this most constantly changing of elements. The capacity of the sea to metamorphose inspired much research in

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[170] « So che'l letto pudico, che tranne Ulisse solo, altro non vide,…» in *Ulisse*, Act V, Last scene.

[171] « Ulisse troppo errò » in *Ulisse*, Act V, Scene 7.

[172] The alternative text for a prologue found in the manuscript, kept by the Biblioteca d'Arte e di Storia del Civico Museo Correr, is even closer to this end: Speaking of Ulisse, Il Fato declares: « Gode la patria al fin, gode la moglie».

[173] Urban, Lina; Romanelli, Giandomenico; Gandolfi, Fiora. *Venise en fêtes*. Paris : Éditions du Chêne, 1992, pp. 14–20.

[174] « Sparita la Tenda si vide la Scena tutta mare; con una lontananza cosi artifitiosa d'acque, e di scogli, che la naturalezza, di quella (ancor che finta) movea dubbio a Riguardanti , se veramente soffero in un Teatro, o in una spiaggia di mare effettiva. » in [Ferrari, Benedetto]. *L'Andromeda Del Signor Benedetto Ferrari ; Rappresentata in Musica in Venetia l'Anno 1637. Dedicata all'Illustrissimo Sig. Marco Antonio Pisani. Con Licenza de'Superiori, e Privilegi*. Venetia: Antonio Batiletti. MDCXXXVII, pp. 5–6.

how to show the movement of waves, from quiet swells to a tempestuous sea. On the stage of the SS Giovanni and Paolo, the shores of Ithaca may have been created by a complex system of sea rollers or more simply by a series of balancing profiled canvases showing waves.

Fig 9: ca 1651, engraving by François Chauveau (1613–1676) of the theatre set by Giacomo Torelli (1604–1678) for Act III, of *Andromède* by Pierre Corneille and Charles d'Assoucy, 1650. Collection of Gilbert Blin.

The side shutters of a « Marittima » were almost invariably of rocks, and Torelli's well known set fo*r Andromède* in Paris of Figure 9 shows a good example of such seaside cliffs. *Ulisse*'s « Marittima » must have been created by Burnacini following the same scenic language. The disposition that Burnacini will apply in 1653 for *L'Inganno d'amore* in Regensburg as shown on Figure 10 is constructed the same way and allows moving boat and flying devices: « A quiet sea, where desperate Fortuna whose little ship, with the broken rudder and the sail torn, is sinking. Amor, who from the beach mocked her, rises in Heaven to the sign of Venus, which on a golden chariot wandered with artful motions the air, from which Hymen gently descended on earth. »[175]. Here again, the question remains whether Burnacini may have used for the sea of the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo the sea set made by Chenda for his 1637 production of *Andromeda*, which visual language must have been close to the sets for *Ermiona* of the same year (Figure 11). He may also have repainted the existing shutters or at least reused the wooden frames, a custom documented in the period[176]. This would explain the lack of first-hand documents on the sets of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*: in the confusion which probably followed

[175] « un tranquillo mare, in cui la Fortuna disperata sù picciola nave con l'albero rotto, e la vela squarciata si sommerse. Amore che sù la spiaggia la deridea sali repente in Cielo all cenno di Venere, che sù carro dorato con moti artifitiosi vagò par l'aria, dalle quale dolcemente discese Imeneo in terra.» in Bertali, Antonio. *L'Inganno d'amore.* [Regensburg] : Gedruckt in der Kays. Freyen Reichs Statt Regenspurg bey Christoff Fischer, 1653.

[176] See: Glixon, Beth Lise and Glixon, Jonathan Emmanuel. *Inventing the Business of Opera*…. Oxford, 2006, pp. 271–272.

Chenda's early death, Burnacini may have had to complete or reuse some of the elements painted by his elder for a previous spectacle. Added to the fact that Burnacini did not have his work printed prior to his Austrian period, that may explain why the set designer of Monteverdi's first Venetian opera did not enjoy the same fame as his predecessor Chenda or his "rival" Torelli.

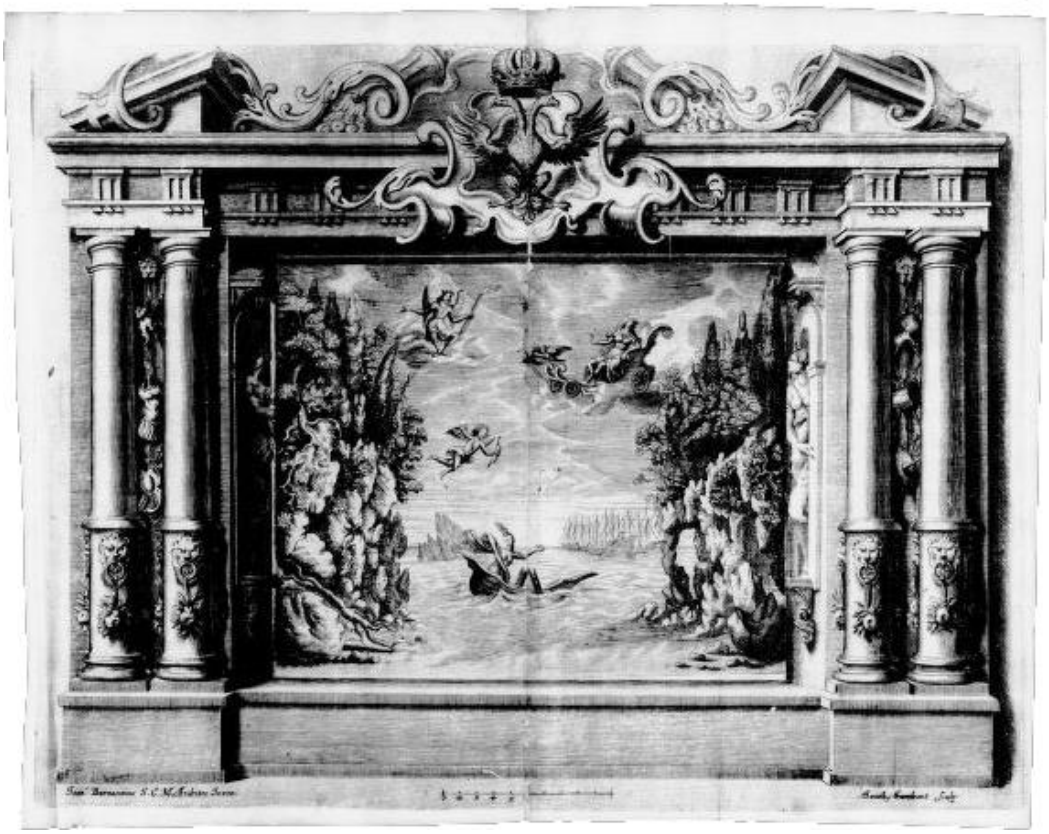

Figure 10: 1653, engraving by Jacob van Sandrart (1630–1708) of a Giovanni Burnacini's set for *L'Inganno d'amore* for the performance in Regensburg.
Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria did, however, demand some spectacular special effects which may have satisfied the appetite of the audience for theatrical marvels: a ship turning to stone, a trapdoor swallowing a disguised Ulisse (and bringing him back in another costume), an airborne chariot transporting Minerva and Telemaco, Jupiter's eagle flying over the suitors, and Minerva appearing in the sky during the slaughter. All these effects, which involve the different levels of the stage, were becoming customary in Venetian opera at the time, and were spread out strategically by Badoaro over the course of the drama. The techniques involving pieces of scenery movable by pulleys and ropes, thanks to human strength, were close to the ones used on ships. The first stagehands of the Venetian theater were likely to have come from the city's *Arsenale* district. The mechanical prowess of shipbuilders and sailors, turned carpenters and stagehands for the Republic's theaters, were becoming a part of the opera genre, alongside poetry and music. The flying effects were one of the greatest attractions of the business of Venetian opera. In 1645, a young Englishman on his Grand Tour exclaimed: « We went to the Opera which are Comedies and other plays represented in Recitative Music by the most excellent Musitians vocal and Instrumental, together with a variety of Sceanes painted and contrived with no lesse art of Perspective, and Machines, for flying in the aire, and other

wonderful motions; so taken together it is doubtless one of the most magnificent and expensive diversions the Wit of Men can invent ».[177]

Fig 11: 1636, anonymous engraving of the theatre set by Alfonso Chenda (ca 1600 -1640) for Act III, of *L'Ermiona*, music by Giovanni Felice Sances and text by G. Tonti Padova and Pio Enea degli Obizzi, in Padua.
Los Angeles, Getty Museum.

[177] John Evelyn in 1645, see: Evelyn, John. *Diary*, London: 1907, I, p. 202.

1.4 *L'incoronazione di Poppea*

That sets, and machines were part of the attraction of Venetian opera is confirmed by a trend which is of great interest for the study of set designs during this period: impresarios would publish, often before the opening night, a synopsis of the action with mention of the sets that were planned for the performances[178]. The *Scenario* of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* does not provide much details of Giovanni Burnacini's sets, but it at least indicates what types of spaces the characters should act in and what changes were subsequently represented. The Scenario presents the following sequence: « The Palace of Poppea » and « The City of Rome » for the first act; « The Villa of Seneca », « The City of Rome », and « The Garden of Poppea» for Act II; and « The City of Rome » and « The Palace of Nero » for Act III[179]. In the story itself, it appears as if the chosen spaces articulate themselves in a polarity of forces, expressive of the axis of tension where the plot is developed. Rome is the general space of the action, but there are different locations around the center of power. Therefore, the city of Rome and its various locations revolve around its focus: the imperial palace. The rather recent discovery of another copy of *Poppea*'s libretto[180], a manuscript called the Udine *Poppea* Libretto (in reference to its current location), has offered new information and therefore allowed new insights into the original staging of the piece[181]. Considered today as the closest to the first performance of 1643, its reading in conjunction with the first Scenario allows a notably better understanding of the space of the action and the sets with which *L'incoronazione di Poppea* could have been performed.

The opposition between the palace, the city, and the forest, even if it seemingly follows the rules of Serlio, is united by the unanimous acceptance by the characters that the center of action is the palace of the emperor. The last set mentioned in the scenario, this « Reggia di Nerone », witnesses the coronation and apotheosis of Poppea. This ultimate association of a space to a specific character, after « The Palace of Poppea » and « The Villa of Seneca » anchors the plot in history and brings its load of reference both from literature and visual arts. Busenello, like Badoaro librettist of *Ulisse*, was member of the Accademia degli Incogniti (Academy of the Unknowns) the learned society of freethinking intellectuals, mainly noblemen, that significantly influenced the cultural and political life of mid-seventeenth century Venice[182]. At the beginning of his libretto, Busenello summarizes the Roman history of Nerone and Poppea adding « And thus Tacitus is telling. » but, referring to his libretto, he

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[178] On opera 'Scenarios' see: Rosand, Ellen. "The opera Scenario, 1638-1655: A Preliminary Survey" in *In Cantu et in Sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta & Franco Piperno. Florence: Olschki, 1989, pp. 346-355.

[179] "pallazzo di Poppea" (Act I, sc. 1-4). "città di Roma" (Act I, sc. 5-13); "villa di Seneca" (Act II, sc. 1-3), "città di Roma" (Act II, sc. 4-11), "giardin di Poppea "(Act II, sc. 12-14);" città di Roma "(Act III, sc. 1-7),"reggia di Nerone"(Act III, sc. 8). See: *Scenario* of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* as transcribed by Ellen Rosand in Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas*… 2007, p. 394.

[180] Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea*, Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

[181] See: Fabbri, Paolo. "New Sources for Poppea" in *ML 74*, 1993, pp. 16-23. See also: Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas*… 2007, pp. 50 & 51 & pp. 61-68.

[182] See: Carter, Tim. *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 270-277.

added: « But here it is represented differently. »[183] To this familiarity with the *Annals* of Tacitus[184] (Figure 1) we may add his knowledge of the tragedies attributed to Seneca[185], and notably *Ottavia,* likely known to Busenello in the translation[186] of Lodovico Dolce (1508/10–1568), the erudite Venetian man of letters and theorist of painting (Figure 2).

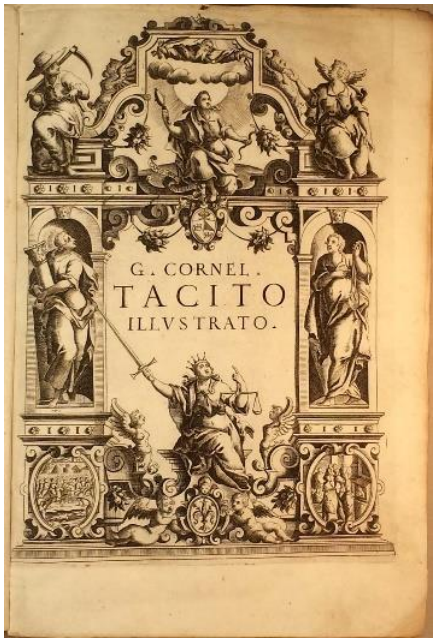

Figure: 1: Title page of *Opere di G. Cornelio Tacito, Annali, Historie, Costumi de' Germani, e Vita di Agricola; illustrate con notabilissimi aforismi del signor D. Baldassar' Alamo Varienti, trasportati dalla lingua castigliana nella toscana da D. Girolamo Canini d'Anghiari.*. Venetia: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1618.
Figure 2: Title page of *Le Tragedie di Seneca, tradotte da m. Lodovico Dolce*
Venetia: Gio. Battista & Marchion Sessa f., 1560

Since the Renaissance, besides Latin literature, Roman architecture and sculpture, mosaic and paintings, medals, with their text and representations of emperors, were starting to

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183 Busenello, in his "Argomento" of *Poppea* wrote « ... così rappresenta Cornelio Tacito. Ma qui si rappresenta il fatto diverso. ». For a full transcription of Argomento, Scenario and preface see: Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas...* 2007, pp. 394–397.

184 Nero's reign is described in Tacitus, *Annals*, Books XIII to XVI. For Tacitus, see: *Opere di G. Cornelio Tacito, Annali, Historie, Costumi de' Germani, e Vita di Agricola; illustrate con notabilissimi aforismi del signor D. Baldassar' Alamo Varienti, trasportati dalla lingua castigliana nella toscana da D. Girolamo Canini d'Anghiari. Aggiuntoui dal medesimo il modo di cauar profitto dalla lettura di questo autore, e la vita di Tacito, le testimonianze fatte di lui dagli Antichi Scrittori, l'Arbore della Famiglia di Augusto, le Postille in margine del Lipsio, la Cronologia dell'Aveerto, e la Distintione del Testo del Grutero, Arricchite di tre copiosissimi, e ordinatissimi Indici, l'uno delle voci, e delle materie Historiali, e Politiche del Testo, il secondo degli Aforismi, e il terzo de' nomi antichi più oscuri de' luoghi.* Venetia: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1618.

185 Busenello, letter about *Statira principessa di Persia*, dramma per musica by Francesco Cavalli, first performed in Venice at the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo, on 18 January 1656. For the text of the letter, see: Livingston, Arthur. *La vita veneziana nelle opere di Gian Francesco Busenello.* Venezia: V. Callegari, 1913, p. 373.

186 "Ottavia" in *Le Tragedie di Seneca, tradotte da m. Lodovico Dolce*. Venetia: Gio. Battista & Marchion Sessa f., 1560, pp. 252–284.

fascinate scholars for the historical value they represent.[187] Venice hold an important place in this part of the humanist movement notably with the erudite Sebastiano Erizzo (1525–1585), thanks to his collection of nearly two thousand coins and medals and over a thousand books. The publications of his *Trattato dell' istrumento e via inventrice degli antichi* (Venice, 1554) and his *Discorso […] sopra le Medaglie […]de gli Imperadori Romani* (Venice, 1559-1571)[188], which knew many re-editions and contains no less than eighteen pieces related to Nero (Figure 3), contributed to give a leading place to Venice in the European network of Antiquarians. This strong relationship with Roman history[189], added to the artistic license claimed by the Venetian poet, must have had an impact on the design of the sets of *Poppea*.

Figure 3: Title page of *Discorso di M. Sebastiano Erizzo sopra le Medaglie de gli Antichi : con la Dichiaratione delle Monete Consulari, & delle Medaglie de gli Imperadori Romani : nella qual si contiene una piena & varia cognitione dell'istoria di quei tempi.*
Vinegia: Giovanni Varisco, 1571.

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[187] See: Haskell, Francis. *History and its Images, Art and the interpretation of the past*. New Haven (CT) : Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 13–79.

[188] Erizzo, Sebastiano. *Discorso di M. Sebastiano Erizzo sopra le Medaglie de gli Antichi : con la Dichiaratione delle Monete Consulari, & delle Medaglie degli Imperadori Romani : nella quale si contiene una piena & varia cognitione dell'istoria di quei tempi*. Vinegia [Venetia]: Giovanni Varisco, 1571.

[189] Besides Tacitus and Seneca, Ellen Rosand points out that Busenello included facts coming from Suetonius and Dio. See: Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas...*: 2007, pp. 176–177. For the earlier biographers of Nero, see: Champlin, Edward. *Nero*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2003. On Venetian opera and Roman history, see also Heller, Wendy. "Tacitus incognito: opera as history in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*" in *Journal of the American Musicological Society, 52*, 1999, pp. 39–56.

One aspect of this historical ambition must have expressed itself in this very set of the « Reggia di Nerone » and the libretto, differing from the scenario, mentions the « Città di Roma con lontananza », City of Rome with a view in the distance. This new detail draws our attention to the requirements for the staging of the last event of the story; as the gods also descend from heaven to praise the beauty of Poppea, one should imagine an exterior architecture with a long perspective, maybe an open courtyard with cloud borders. This «cortile» could be an open palace with a recognizable view of Rome itself on the backdrop. The custom to paint well-known monuments on the far backdrop to associate the action to a specific city was well spread during this period. Burnacini himself had represented the city of Ferrara on his backdrop for *Le Pretensioni del Tebro, e del Po'* in 1642, as Torelli did for Venice the same year, following the example of Alfonso Parigi (1606–1656) for Florence in 1637 (Figures 4 & 5). Burnacini may have chosen to paint a backdrop showing the most famous monuments of Rome.

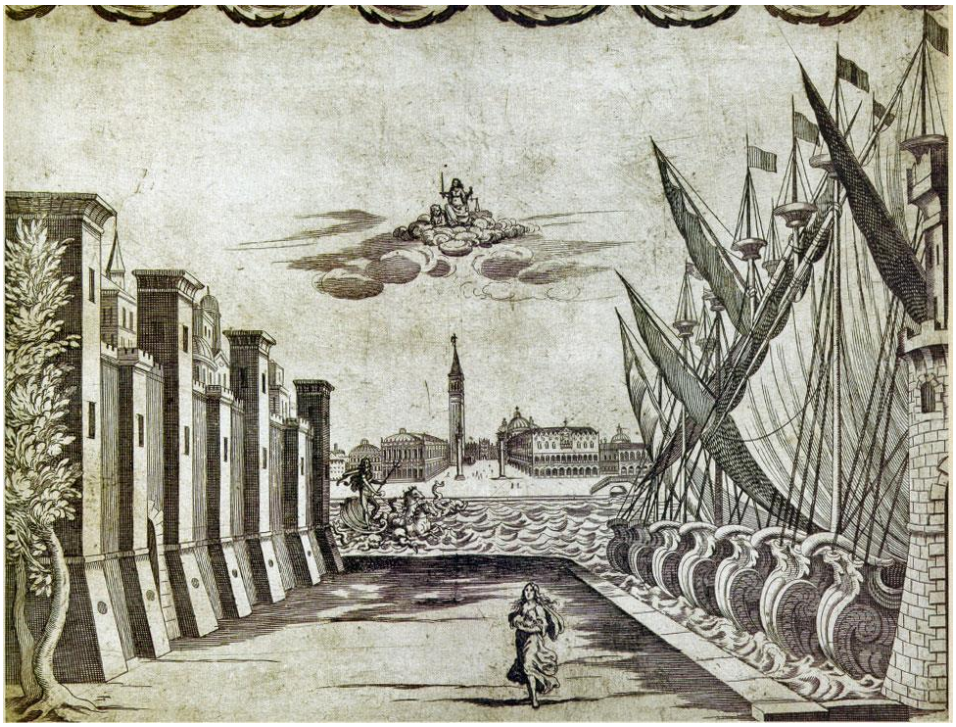

Figure 4: 1642, engraving by Giovanni Giorgi of a set by Giacomo Torelli, showing a view of Venice, for the prologue of *Il Bellerofonte,* created in Venice.
Milano, Museo Teatrale all Scala.

While these depictions featuring in the prologues had the function of sending the message of «hic et nunc», presenting the city of Rome at the end of the opera, may have fulfilled the opposite purpose of emphasizing the "there and then". By showing together as many Roman buildings as possible, even without any topographical accurateness, Burnacini would have increased the recognition potential of the place depicted as Rome. The set designer would have followed in this approach the genre of painting known as « capriccio ». While for Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), the term capriccio refers to the expressions of a puzzling fantasy, testifying to the originality of a painter, Filippo Baldinucci (1625-1697) in his *Vocabolario Toscano dell'Arte del Disegno*[190], finally defined in 1681 the capriccio as a work born from the spontaneous

[190] Baldinucci, Filippo. *Vocabolario Toscano dell'Arte del Disegno, nel quale si explicano i propri termini e voci, non solo della Pittura, Scultura, & Architettura; ma ancora di altre Arti a quelle subordinate, e che abbiano per fondamento il Disegno....* Florence: Santi Franchi, 1681, p. 28.

imagination of the painter. The meaning of capriccio becomes metonymic by referring to the work itself, not to the whimsical idea that produced it. The roots of this type of *vedute* can be found during the Renaissance in the architectural settings of frescoes and ceiling decorations known as « quadrature ». These architectural elements gained prominence in seventeenth century painting to become subjects of easel paintings[191]. Like in a capriccio, where elements are borrowed and worked up from real monuments, buildings that could be seen in Rome, both ancient and modern, could have figured on Burnacini's backdrop. This process would have echoed the way Busenello compose his libretto, by way of collage of various antique sources, and Burnacini would have use the notion of space like the librettist used the one of time, in their artistic evocation of Nero's Rome.

Figure 5: 1637, Design after Alfonso Parigi's set, showing a view of Florence,
for the prologue of *Le Nozze degli Dei*, created in Florence, Palazzo Pitti.
Paris, Archives Nationales.

[191] For a plurality of views on the Capriccio, see: *The Architectural Capriccio: Memory, Fantasy and Invention,* edited by Lucien Steil. Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, 2014, and notably the article of Selena, Anders. "Patronage in the Golden Age of the Capriccio", pp. 41–59.

1.4.1 Street of Comedy or of Tragedy?

The opera shows the rise of Poppea to the rank of empress, but the audience of 1643 would have immediately understood that her affair with Nero was primarily of a lascivious nature when seeing the first scenes: the action of Nero leaving the dwelling of Poppea in the early hours of the morning is witnessed by her previous lover, looks like an episode in the life of a courtesan. For the first scene of Act I, the scenario and the Udine libretto indicates « the Palace of Poppea » and the Florence manuscript mentions « il cortile di Poppea ». But are we in the palace or, as Ottone's words suggest by mentioning a window[192], in front of it? If it is the exterior of Poppea's building, we must imagine a front porch flanked by two ways, one of which will serve for the entrance and exit of Ottone, while the other angle may support the two sleeping soldiers. Poppea and Nero would have sung their goodbyes in the frame of the doorway. But how can one justify this precarious location for the intimacy of the following scene between Poppea and Arnalta, « old woman her adviser »[193]? Here the convention clearly comes from the Roman and Greek theater, and the comedies of Terence, Plautus, and Menander, where young ladies confide their love secrets in the bosom of their beloved nurses[194], a tradition already revived by the Commedia dell'Arte, with the added variant of the procuress character[195]. This set would have been inspired by the street of houses of the *scena comica* of Vitruvius as explained by Serlio and placed on each pair of grooves parallel to the proscenium, with a backdrop showing the house of Poppea. All in all, the opera opens in the atmosphere of a comedy and the street scene, a typical set for this genre from the Renaissance, allowed the extension to opera, as exemplified by the work of Alfonso Chenda for *L'Ermiona* in 1636 and the set of Ludovico Burnacini for *Il pomo d'oro* in 1668, as presented on Figure 6 and Figure 7.

After this first scene full of comic conventions, we face a total change of atmosphere, with the appearance of the forsaken Ottavia, the true tragic figure in the opera[196]. Here, more than ever, we have to read the libretto to complete the scarce information the Scenario offers. Indeed the « City of Rome», which appears here for the first time and returns so often throughout the piece, could also be the generic street of classical buildings as defined by Serlio with a backdrop of a view of temples or triumphal arches, a scene reminiscent of the scena tragica of Vitruvius and Serlio. The fact that the empress tells Seneca she is on her way to the

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192 «Apri un balcon» and «Amoreggio con lagrime un balcon» in Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea*, Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

193 «Arnalta vecchia sur consigliera » in Scenario of *Poppea*.

194 For an overview of the reception history of a major literary genre from Greco-Roman Antiquity to the present day, see: *Ancient Comedy and Reception: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Henderson,* edited by S. Douglas Olson. Berlin & Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2014. See Section II, which deals with the European reception of Greek and Roman comedy in the Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern periods, and with the European stage tradition of comic theatre more generally.

195 See: Pirrotta, Nino. " 'Commedia dell'Arte' and Opera" in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, N°3, (Jul., 1955). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 305–324. See also: Wilbourne, Emily. *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell' Arte.* Chicago & London : The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

196 Heller, Wendy. "Phaedra's Handmaiden: Tragedy as Comedy and Spectacle in Seventeenth-Century Opera" in *Ancient Drama in Music for the Modern Stage*. Edited by Peter Brown and Suzana Ograjensek. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 67–84.

temple[197] may suggest a street between the Imperial Palace and a Temple. Later, the appearance of Pallas Athena in this space seems to corroborate this fact, as the goddess could fly from the cloud borders above the street.

Figure 6: 1636, anonymous engraving of the theatre set by Alfonso Chenda (ca 1600 -1640) with apparition of Pallade for *L'Ermiona*, music by Giovanni Felice Sances and text by G. Tonti Padova and Pio Enea degli Obizzi, in Padua in 1636.
Los Angeles, Getty Museum.

The difficulty to elect the « City of Rome » to the rank of *scena maestra* seems to come here from the fact that many scenes of intimate or even secret nature would have to take place in this location. It is hard to imagine that Ottavia would plot the murder of Poppea in the middle of a public square. Perhaps the "Città di Roma" may also refer to various locations in Rome, and it could subsequently mean a more isolated courtyard in the empress's apartment, or a street with the front of the Palace. Once accepting this possibility, one must be very careful when linking action and suitable settings for them, as the understanding of convention in Venice in 1643 was necessarily very different from ours today. Their convention was closer to their understanding of Roman drama, where all sorts of events could take place in the same location: the set was also the expression of this convention allowing the story to be told boldly without any minor interference. Stylization was often as much an artistic answer as an intellectual solution. In any case, it is likely that this simple mention of the « city of Rome » was given more as a reference for the space and would have allowed Burnacini to design various architectures in a Roman style, or even to use some classical stock left by Chenda, for different sets. That non-definition of a certain space by the librettists would allow designers not only to keep the open relationship with a certain style, here Roman, but to have a significant input in the poetic definition of the drama, represented by the novelty of their composition for the architecture set. It could also serve an economic interest, as every theater, public or private, would have a suitable set of architectural shutters already in stock for this type of description. The indication of the City or Roma was no doubt the most generic the scenario

[197] « E va a porger preghiere al Tempio » in Scenario of *Poppea*.

could use, without constraining the designer, and the impresario, to any overconfident promises.

Figure 7: Period hand coloring engraving of Balthasar Sigmund Setlezky (1695-1771) reusing Lodovico Burnacini's set for Act III of *Il pomo d'oro* for the performance in Vienna in 1668.
Collection of Gilbert Blin.

Because the wings were planted parallel to the edge of the stage, the designer could interrupt this plan with a backdrop, which itself could be removed to create more depth. It is likely that Burnacini had created generic Roman scenes playing with the depth of the stage and therefore was able to create space that could respond to some specific requirements of the libretto. While the wings' shutters were likely to display houses' facades, in the basic style which can be seen on all set designs of the seventeenth century (the similitude in the wings of the sets by Chenda, Torelli and Burnacini is evocative of this trend), different backcloths could have locate the various actions in specific parts of the city of Roma, a city not short of recognizable architectural icons. This distinction between « scena corta» and «scena lunga»—scenes with a *short* real perspective and scenes with a *long* one—has been explored from the earliest times, as it allowed this type of variations[198]. This use of long scene and short scene in Poppea is confirmed by the mention in Udine libretto, of Act III scene 7: « The prospect closes and Roma comes back »[199]. The use of a long scene for the departure by boat of Ottavia for exile would have showed the river in the back ground where the empress « that goes by boat

198 See: Glixon, Beth Lise and Glixon, Jonathan Emmanuel. *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 241, n. 33.

199 « Si serra il prospetto e torna Roma » in Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea*, Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

to exile »[200]. The « Strada in Roma ove s'imbarca nel Tevere » by Lodovico Burnacini (1636–1707) for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* in Vienna in 1674 shows a very suitable composition (Figure 8): a street of Roma where one embarks on the river Tiber. We see the generic city set opening on a « lontano » occupied by the river and finished by a backdrop showing Roma, a lontano which can easily be closed by a prospect, to hide the river. It is interesting to note that in the *Poppea*'s scenario this scene of the departure for exile of Ottavia is also happening in the set "Città di Roma" and it worth mentioning that set of the same nature already appeared in *Le nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* by Michelangelo Torcigliani in 1641.

Figure 8: 1674, engraving by Matthäus Küsel, (1629-1681) of the *Strada in Roma ove s'imbarca nel Tevere* by Lodovico Burnacini (1636-1707)
for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* by Niccolo Minato and Antonio Draghi, Vienne, 1674.
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

[200] « che se ne va in barca all'essiglio » in Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea*, Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

1.4.2 From « Boschereccia » to « Deliziosa »

Indeed, the mention of Seneca's villa could also mislead us, as the picture of Roman country houses is as vivid in our imagination as it was for Venetians, being surrounded by the revival villas of Palladio. But here again, essential information is provided by what the characters say. Seneca is not *in* his villa, but outside of it: the Stoic philosopher is celebrating the rustic charm of trees and greenery around him when Mercury comes to him and flies away. It is therefore a set showing a natural landscape with Seneca's villa in the perspective: a clear moral antipode to the urban house of Poppea. The group of wings representing trees around Seneca's villa probably already existed in the stock of the theater, maybe coming from Burnacini's set for the « Boschereccia » of *Ulisse*, or, if they required a new investment, the resulting set could be used again in future productions of the theater Santissimi Giovanni e Paolo[201]. It is also relevant to note that because the trees do not imply a specific setting to keep the rules of perspective, they can be used in different sets, combined with various architectural elements—in this particular case, certainly a backdrop showing a villa. A disposition that Torelli used for *Deidamia* in 1644, as shown of Figure 9.

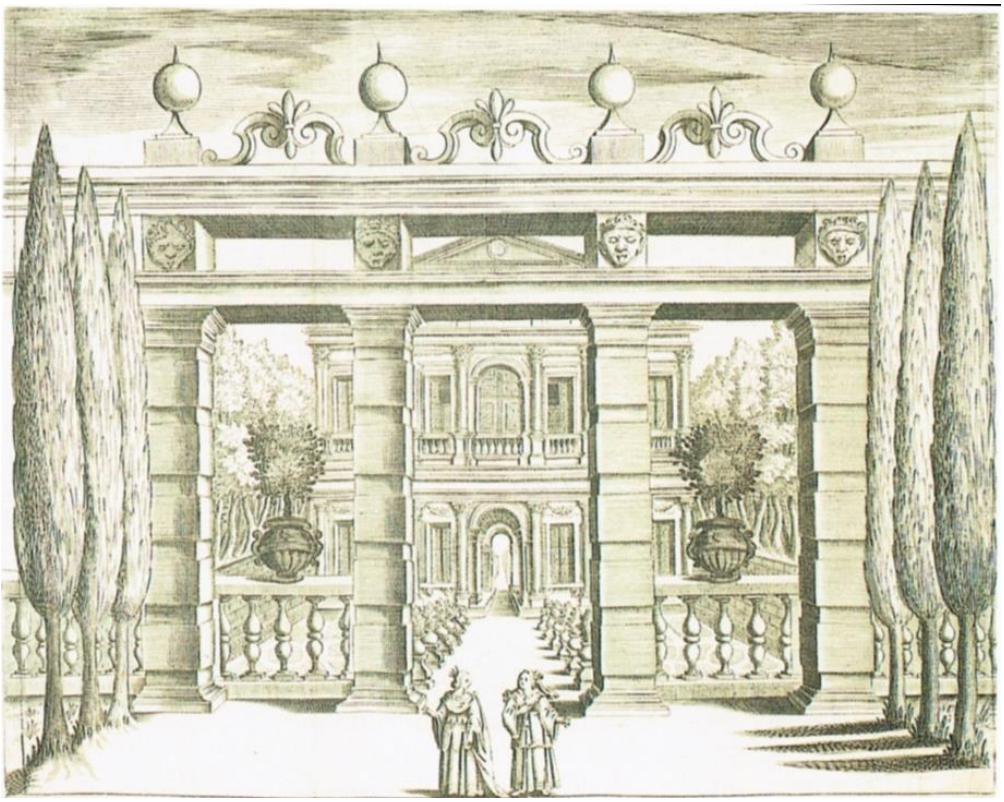

Figure 9: 1644, engraving by Marco Bioschin of a Giacomo Torelli set, showing a « Cortile Delitioso» for Act II of *Deidamia,* for Venice. Fano, Romolo Eusebi.

[201] Trees shutters designs do not vary from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century. In the case of Torelli, recognizable cypresses in some of his sets for *Deidamia* in 1644, (as shown in Figure 7 and 8) were already present in *Bellerofonte* (Venice 1642): shutters could be reused, not only in their actual painting at least in terms of designs as these cypresses reappear in *La Finta Pazza* (Paris, 1645). See: *Giacomo Torelli, L'invenzione scenica nell'Europa barocca*, a cura di Francesco Milesi. Fano: 2000.

Figure 10: 1644, anonymous painting a Giacomo Torelli's set, showing a « Cortile Delitioso » for Act II of *Deidamia,* for Venice.
Fano, Museo Civico.

Interestingly enough, an anonymous painting representing the same set of Torelli shows different characters and, looking at a resting figure of a woman on stage discovered by another character[202], one can think of a similar placement for Poppea when she falls asleep in her garden lulled by Arnalta (Figure 10). But, even if also connected to Nature, the garden of Poppea would have been a space of a different kind than the one of the severe philosopher, as it is a "pleasure garden." The Italians invented a delicious term to name what would become the most commonly used for sets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries operas: a « *Deliziosa* ». Ludovico Burnacini gave a wonderful example in his « Giardino del Palazzo del Dittatore » for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* in Vienna in 1674[203]. The statues of satyrs, evocative of lascivious pursuits, serving as columns of his roman garden, would fit well the sensual atmosphere of the scenes taking place in the garden of Poppea (Figure 11). A period hand coloring of a later reproduction of this set, shows how this set was still popular in the eighteenth century (Figure 12). This enclosed garden, ornate with architecture and a proper place for a lady to take a nap in peace, had been created in ancient Rome; it experienced a wonderful revival during the Renaissance[204] but was, due to the foundation of the water city, a rare sight in Venice, and more than anywhere else, evocative of wealth. Here again the sets

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[202] The character of Deidamia is asleep and Eufrina discovers her: a situation similar to the scene of Poppea and Ottone. See: Bjurström, Per. *Giacomo Torelli, and Baroque Stage Design*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962, pp. 89–94.

[203] Minato, Niccolò. *Il fuoco eterno custodito dale vestali. Drama Musicale Per la Felicissima Nascita della Sereniss: Arciduchessa Anna Maria, figlia dell' Imperatore Leopoldo, e della Imperatrice Claudia Felice*. Vienna: Giovanni Christoforo Cosmerovio, 1674.

[204] See: Thacker, Christopher. *The History of Gardens*. London : Croom Helm Ltd Publishers, 1979, pp. 95-111. See also: Laird, Mark. *The Formal Garden, Traditions of Art and Nature*, Photographs by Hugh Palmer. London : Thames and Hudson, 1992, pp. 11–40.

would have given information about the social identity of the character but play with the imagination and experience of the audience[205].

Figure 11: 1674, engraving by Matthäus Küsel, (1629-1681) of the *Giardino del Palazzo del Dittatore* by Ludovico Burnacini (1636-1707) for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* by Niccolo Minato & Antonio Draghi in Vienna. Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Figure 12: ca. 1740, period hand colored engraving after Matthäus Küsel, (1629-1681) of the *Giardino del Palazzo del Dittatore* by Lodovico Burnacini (1636-1707) for *Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito Dalle Vestali* by Niccolo Minato & Antonio Draghi. Collection of Gilbert Blin.

[205] Fortini Brown, Patricia. *Private lives in Renaissance Venice, Art, Architecture, and the family*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 48–50.

1.4.3 Gods in Machines

While the scenario does not offer any indication for the location of the prologue, the libretto manuscript gives two pieces of information: a description of the set, «Aerial scene with a low horizon»[206], and the positions of the three gods «in the air on clouds». These two clarifications, after the names of Fortune, Virtue, and Love, enable us to imagine a cloud scene with the gods in three cloud chariots, or even only two, as Love having his own wings may have been a free flying effect, with the performer directly attached to the machinery[207]. While Love claims the center, as the play will demonstrate, the debate/dispute between Fortune and Virtue establishes clearly a symmetrical opposition. The presence of these two allegorical figures in the prologue would have echoed the permanent statues on both sides of the proscenium of the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo. The tradition to ornate the *frons scenae* with allegorical figures having a meaningful relation with the performance was coming from the setting of princely performances.

Figure 13: 1637, Frontispiece of *Le Nozze degli Dei*. Design engraved by Stefano della Bella, showing a view of the *frons scenae* created by Alfonso Parigi in 1637 in Florence, Palazzo Pitti.

[206] « Scena areara con orizonti bassi» «Fortuna, Virtù e Amor in Aria sopra nuvole» in Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea.* Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

[207] I differ here totally from the analysis of Nino Pirrotta, who did not know about the existence of the Udine libretto. see: Pirrotta, Nino. "Teatro, scene e musica nelle opere di Monteverdi." In *Claudio Monteverdi e il suo tempo*, ed. Rafaello Monterosso. Verona: Stamperia Valdonega, 1969, pp. 45–67.

Numerous examples exist of such a disposition, but the engraving opening the book[208] showing *Le Nozze degli Dei,* the «Favola» given in Florence in 1637 to celebrate the wedding of duke Ferdinando II of Toscana with Vittoria Principessa d'Urbino is remarkable because it does not only show the *frons scenae* and the curtain of the theater built in the Palazzo Pitti but integrate it in the manner of a frontispiece on the first page of the commemorative book. Two statues figure on both sides of the stage, while the coats of arms of the Duke and the Princess occupied the top center (Figure 13).

This disposition and ornamentation for a *frons scenae* finds its roots in the engraved frontispieces of Renaissance books, whose conception as a portal towards knowledge was already in bloom before the theatre and musical drama were evolving. Besides their connection with architecture and theatre performance, the editions of the work of Palladio offers many good instances of the long-lasting usage of such allegorical system on title pages. On the edition published in Venice in 1570 (Figure 14), figures of Geometry and Planimetry are on both sides of a portico in Roman style, while Philosophy (often confused with Architecture in modern comments) is seated in the center, flanked by two figures of Fame blowing trumpets.

Figure 14: 1570, Title page of *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura di Andrea Palladio* in the edition by Dominico de' Fransechi in Venice.

By couching his theories in the same philosophical musings that had so interested Vitruvius, Palladio associated *I quattro libri* with the architecture of classical Rome. While in the edition published in 1642 (Figure 15), the figure of Philosophy has been replaced by the coat

[208] *Le Nozze degli Dei Favola Dell Ab' Gio. Carlo Coppola Rappresentata in Music in Firenze Nelle Reali Nozze de Serenis.[Mi] Gran Duchi di Toscan Ferdinando II. E Vittoria Principessa d'Urbino.* Firenze: Amadore Massi e Lorenzo Landi, 1637.

of arms of the dedicatee, a member of the influential Vidman family, patron of the edition [209]. This heraldic custom which established itself for the *frons scenae* of the theatre, as we have seen with the example coming from Florence, but the use of allegory was also well spread in Venice[210]. We can only suppose that the Grimani coat of arm ornamented the top of the stage frame[211], but we are sure that statues were present: in 1664, the performance of a three-act opera in the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo, *Rosilena* was attended by an English traveler. Before the curtain went up, observing first that the musicians were placed in front of the stage[212] Sir Philip Skippon (1640 or 1641-1691) noticed that « on each side of the stage was a fair statue.»[213]

Figure 15: 1642, Title page of *L'Architettura di Andrea Palladio* in the edition by Marc Antonio Brogiollo in Venice.

[209] On the Vidman, or Widman or Vidmani, family and their relationship with Barbara Strozzi, see: Beer, Anna. *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music*. London, Oneworld Publications, 2016, pp. 53–87.

[210] Hochmann, Michel. « L'allégorie à Venise vers 1540: Le Sorti de Francesco Marcolini » in Nativel, Colette. *Le noyau et l'écorce, Les arts de l'allégorie XVe-XVIIe siècles*. Rome : Académie de France and Paris : Somogy éditions d'art, 2009, pp. 323–337.

[211] The coat of arms of the Grimani is present on the engraving by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli showing the interior of Teatro Grimani a San Giovanni Grisostomo in 1709 (Collection of Ton Koopman).

[212] Incidentally this remark shows that this disposition was not all established at the time. We know for example that in 1628 in Parma, the orchestra was divided in two groups, seated under portico arches on both side of the proscenium. See: Fabbri, Paolo. *Monteverdi,* Translated by Tim Carter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 212–216.

[213] "An account of a Journey Made Thro' Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy and France by Philip Skippon, Esquire" in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, tome VI.* London: Churchill, 1732, pp. 359–736. Skippon's account of the Venetian opera is on pp. 506-508. See copy online: https://archive.org/stream/cihm_33302#page/n557/mode/2up (Accessed 12 January 2018).

The presence of gods in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is perhaps the most stylistically dated element of the libretto of 1643. It offers a realm of rhetoric that sheds light on the moral values called into question by the story[214]. Fortune, Virtue, Cupid, Pallas Athena, and Mercury punctuate the action with their comments; Cupid even intervenes to change the course of events. The appearance of Pallas takes place in the City of Rome. Mercury flies away from the «Villa of Seneca», Love comes down from the sky in the « Garden of Poppea », and for his final triumph in « the Palace of Nero », he is accompanied by «Little cupids, Venus and a chorus of Graces»[215]. It seems clear that the libretto and what we know of the convention of the time are strictly connected and offer an objective fact: all of the sets of Poppea were spaces open to the sky: sets with cloud borders allowing the flying of gods to take place, both logically in terms of the drama, and physically given the existing stage machinery. In 1664, this kind of staging was still in full existence as «In the prologue some of the actors hung in the air, and then flew cross the stage, and one flew downwards […] and then he flew up again » Skippon's[216] accounts give us also the mechanism for a free flying. And it is appropriate to *Poppea* that this figure shows a winged god. Mercury like Cupid had his own wings to fly by himself and did not require a cloud chariot. Free flying was a dangerous but spectacular effect and its transversal motion over the stage was a subject of a technical diagram by Skippon, showing «The Engine us'd to fly down with. » and how it was done at the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo: the mechanism seen from under, while the figure is presented from profile (Figure16).[217] No doubt that Mercurio who first appears in the garden of Seneca on the floor of the stage would have departed flying thanks to this machine equipped in the upper section of the stage.

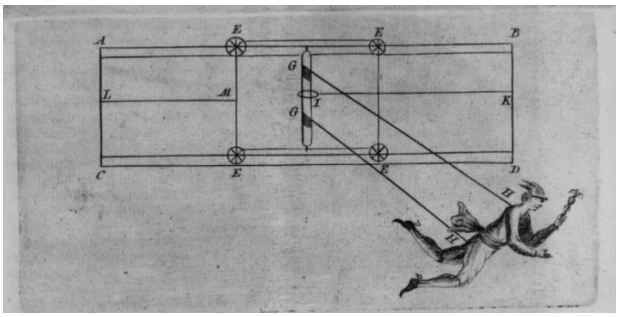

Figure 16: 1664, Diagram of «The Engine us'd to fly down with. »
mechanism for a flying Mercury in Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo, in "An account of a Journey Made Thro' Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy and France" by Philip Skippon, Esquire."
Edmonton, University of Alberta Libraries.

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214 For a discussion about meanings in Venetian opera, and notably in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, see: Calcagno, Mauro. "Signifying Nothing: On the Aesthetics of Pure Voice in Early Venetian Opera" in *The Journal of Musicology,* Vol. 20, n°4. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 2003, pp. 461–497.

215 « Choro d'Amori, Venere e choro delle gratie » in Udine *Poppea* Libretto: *La coronatione di Poppea*, Udine, Biblioteca Comunale, 55.

216 Skippon describes productions seen at the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo and the Teatro San Salvatore. See: "An account of a Journey …by Philip Skippon, Esquire" in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, tome VI*. London: Churchill, 1732. He includes three diagrams: The floor plan of the stage of the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo with the mechanized flat wing scene change using central shaft and counterweight (p. 507), and the flying machine utilizing a tracked sled and graduated shaft (p. 508, diagram reproduced here figure 16).

217 See: Day, Christine J. "The Theatre of SS Giovanni e Paolo and Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*" in *Current Musicology 25* (1978), pp. 22–38. See also: Larson, Orville. K. "Giacomo Torelli, Sir Philip Skippon, and Stage Machinery for the Venetian Opera" in *Theatre Journal, Vol. 32*, No. 4, Dec.1980. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, pp. 448–457.

1.4.4 « senza machine »

It is more than likely that a mechanism of this type for the flying of the gods in the performance of *Poppea* in the SS Giovanni e Paolo, but are these flying effects necessary to a HIP performance of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* ? If cutting most of the scenes presenting the gods would reduce the opera to a mere irregular comedy of manners, and reduce the scope of their motivations, it is certainly possible to imagine a full performance of the opera without any of the machines the SS Giovanni and Paolo possessed, even on historical grounds. We know for sure that, after the performance in Venice, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was performed in Naples. Taking place in a theater in 1651, it is likely that these performances, under the title *Il Nerone overo L'incoronatione di Poppea*, would have been in the same style as the ones in Venice, with an expanded use of machines as the roles of the gods were lengthened, maybe requiring more flying devices. But recently, a new source has been discovered and, even if still in need of corroboration, it offers some fresh perspective of the absolute necessity of changing sets and flying machines when performing Monteverdi's masterpiece.

In Paris in January 1647, in the middle of difficult rehearsals of a new piece, *L'Orfeo* by Francesco Buti, the music by Luigi Rossi being unfinished, the Italian company[218] called by Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661) was led to seek a possible replacement, and thought to turn to *L'incoronazione di Poppea* as an alternative piece in order to offer a performance: « it is believed that we'll certainly do the Nerone but in a small theater without machines, only with beautiful costumes, and then we'll do the big opera [*l'Orfeo*], the one with the text of Mr. Buti. »[219] That « the Nerone » mentioned by Stefano Costa could be another title for *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is more than likely as this singer, a castrato[220], had sung the leading part of Nero in the Venetian premiere four years before. Besides, some contemporary scores and librettos of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* bear this very title[221] and make his choice of designation of « Nerone » more likely[222]. We know for sure that *L'Orfeo* of Rossi was finally performed on March 2, 1647, but it has not yet been confirmed whether this Parisian performance of *Il Nerone* ever took

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[218] See: Nestola, Barbara. « Les italiens à la cour de France : histoire en forme d'opéra » in *Les italiens à la cour de France : de Marie de Médicis au régent Philippe d'Orléans.* Versailles : Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles & Établissement public du musée et du domaine national de Versailles, 2004, pp. 11–45.

[219] « si crede che faremo il Nerone sicuro in anzi pero nel piciolo teatro senza machine, solo con le abbiti belli, et doppo faremo l'opera grossa quale le parole sono del sig.r Buti. » see: Monaldini, Sergio. *L'orto dell'Espiridi: Musici, attori et artisti nel patrocinio della famiglia Bentivoglio (1646-1685).* Lucca: Libreria italiane musicale, 2000, p. 13. Letter of 3 January 1647 from Stefano Costa in Paris to Cornelio Bentivoglio in Ferrara. Quoted by Rosand, Ellen. *Monteverdi's last operas*… 2007, p. 126.

[220] Stefano Costa, birth and death unknown, studied with Carissimi from 1632 in Rome until an indefinite date. In 1641, Costa is in Ferrara for *Armida* by Marazzoli. Costa is engaged for the 1642-43 season to SS Giovanni e Paolo; he performs in *La Finta Savia* by Laurenzi and then most probably *L'Incoronazione di Poppea.* In Paris, Costa comes to perform in Luigi Rossi's *L'Orfeo* (We do not know what role Stefano played in it). The castrato appears in *Erismena* de Cavalli in 1655 and 1656. The following season, Costa is engaged in the San Cassiano of Venice, and may be singing in Ziani's *Il Teseo.* he is found in the San Luca in 1660-61, for the revival of an opera of Cavalli and the *Pasifae* of Castrovillari. Costa is still singing in Venice in 1666 in *Seleuco* by Sartorio.

[221] Chiarelli, Alessandra. "*L'incoronazione di Poppea o il Nerone*: problemi di filologia testuale" in *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, ix, 1974, pp. 117–151.

[222] *Il Nerone* is also the title under which *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was presented in Naples in 1651. See: *Il Nerone overo L'incoronatione di Poppea, Drama musicale dedicato all'Illustriss. & Eccellentiss. Sig. D. Inigo De Guevara, et Tassis.* Napoli: Molli, 1651.

place and the letter of Stefano Costa may have been the wishful expression of a singer who, cast in a role of third category in *L'Orfeo*[223], was hoping to shine in a title role? However, this letter does introduce the essential fact that for artists and audiences of the seventeenth century, it was possible to present the work without some of the theatrical components that made Venetian opera so famous.

The specific mention of « le abbiti belli »[224], beautiful costumes, still indicates the idea of a dramatic performance not a simple court concert[225], but the mention of « nel piciolo teatro senza machine », in a small theater without machines, suggests the possibility that the performance of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* would have taken place without any change of sets or flying effects. Besides the fact that most of the sets of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* are generic baroque sets, the Paris performance offers a new perspective in our understanding of the theatricality of Venetian opera in general and in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in particular. Although often deeply related to the actions depicted in the libretto, the sets of *Poppea* were an artistic component that could be developed, in excess or in reduction, as required. Flying machines were not necessarily seen as compulsory to perform *Poppea*. The scenario of Venice, the libretto of Udine and the possibility of Paris performance, offer evidence of various definitions of spaces and sets. These variations are an indication that the function of sets was of poetic inspiration, a collaboration between the librettist and the designer, similar to the collaboration between the librettist and the composer, and like it, as much subjected to the vision of the creators, as they were to the circumstances of the patronage, public in Venice, princely in Paris.

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223 Two other castratos, Atto Melani and Marc Antonio Pasqualini, were cast in the title role of Orfeo and the de facto leading one of Aristeo; Stefano Costa, as castrato soprano, may have sung the little role of Nutrice or the one of Bacco. For an overview of the genesis of *L'Orfeo*, see: Klaper, Michael. "New light on the history of *L'Orfeo* (Buti-Rossi)" in *D'une scène à l'autre, l'opera italien en Europe. vol.1 : Les pérégrinations d'un genre* sous la direction de Damien Colas & Alessandro Di Profio. Wavre : Editions Mardaga, 2009, pp. 27–36.

224 In Venice, Skippon also remarked that «The actors cloaths appear'd very rich and plendid, tho' they wore false jewels and bad silver. » in "An account of a Journey …by Philip Skippon, Esquire" in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Tome VI*. London: Churchill, 1732, p. 507.

225 Like for *Orfeo* in Mantua in 1607, the presence of costumes may also have been dictated to allow an easier identification of the characters, which may have been also useful in case of the same singer performing more than one role and use of castrati for travesty roles. For casting questions, see: Tessing Schneider, Magnus. « Seeing the Empress Again: On Doubling in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* » in *Cambridge Opera Journal,* Volume 24, Issue 03, November 2012. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 249–291.