

## Matteo Bosisio, ed. *Il teatro delle corti padane (1478–1508)*

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dedicate a tracciare i rapporti tra le figure italiane ed europee dell'esistenzialismo, il volume di Comparini dimostra più che mai la centralità della discussione letteraria italiana nel complesso tessuto connettivo culturale del Novecento.

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**Matteo Bosisio, ed. *Il teatro delle corti padane (1478–1508)*. Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2019. Pp. 174. ISBN 9788840020877.**

*Il Teatro delle Corti Padane (1478–1508)* presents one complete work, the *Fabula de Orpheo* by Angelo Poliziano, and excerpts from 18 other theatrical works, all composed at the courts of Mantua, Ferrara and Milano in the decades preceding the widespread adoption of the Roman comic model in the sixteenth century. This was an experimental period for secular theater in the vernacular, and Bosisio's volume illustrates the freedom with which Ancient and Italian models were adapted to the moralistic, political, celebratory and encomiastic exigencies of courts. An introduction by Alberto Bentoglio focuses on Bosisio's elaboration of the reciprocal influences of authors and plays, which allows Bosisio's analysis to move beyond the traditional presentation of individual works.

Having published scholarly articles on several of the plays, Bosisio's anthology provides an introduction for students, with notes on outmoded verb forms, Latinisms and dialectal words. The volume includes brief biographies of the writers (Angelo Poliziano, Filippo Lapaccini, Serafino Aquilano, Galeotto Del Carretto, Antonio Cammelli, Matteo Maria Boiardo, Niccolò Da Correggio, Pandolfo Collenuccio, Bernardo Bellincioni, Gualtiero Sanvitale, Gaspare Ambrogio Visconti, and Baldasser Taccone), and a bibliography. Two of the texts have never been treated in modern editions, and nine are not included in the anthology considered fundamental to the study of the theater of the courts, *Teatro del Quattrocento*, *Le corti padane*, edited by Maria Tissoni Benvenuti and Antonia Mussini Sacchi (1983).

The courts of Milan, Mantua and Ferrara were mutually influential, competitive, and connected to the Estense family, especially after the marriages of Isabella d'Este to the Mantuan Marquis Francesco II Gonzaga in 1490, and Beatrice d'Este to Ludovico il Moro of Milan in 1491. Theatrical entertainment was a form of cultural politics, an *instrumenta regni*, and Bosisio is attentive to

political and cultural nuance, which he presents in a chronology and in cogent introductions to each of the courts.

Bosisio establishes the *Fabula de Orpheo* by Angelo Poliziano as the prototype for court drama. Commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua in 1478, Poliziano's Arcadian setting was imitated by other court writers, as was the extensive use of dialog, the interpolation of song, and his play with varying meters. Especially influential was Poliziano's *docta varietas* or eclectic fusion of different voices from ancient literature, all stripped of their context. Other court playwrights took similar license in their adaptations of Ovid, Virgil, Lucian, Apuleius, Juvenal, Terence and Plautus. Even the brutal dismemberment of Orpheus by the Baccanti at the end of the *Fabula*, interpreted as punishment for the widowed Orpheo's rejection of conjugal love, became part of the model for court entertainment. Unlike the *Fabula*, later works are divided into five acts, the format of ancient comedies.

Following the crushing defeat of Ferrara in the war with Venice in 1482, theater was promoted by Duke Ercole II as a way to renew a sense of community in the city, according to Bosisio. Ecce was celebrated as the lord who restored theater, both intellectually and architecturally. The first vernacular performance of an ancient comedy took place in the *cortile nuovo* of the Estense palace in 1486, before 10,000 spectators according to a contemporary. Plautus's *Menaechmi* became the Italian *Menechini*, the plot is adapted in the interest of intelligibility, and every line uttered extended to at least a tercet, which lengthened the comedy and blunted its humor. *Menechini* is described in glowing terms by those who were present, and performed repeatedly in Ferrara. Bosisio points out that the embrace of Roman comic authors in Ferrara was also criticized as overly passive by writers like Bellincioni, a Florentine writing at the court of Milano. In the years before Ariosto recast Roman comedy as modern, the *Fabula de Cefalo* by Niccolò da Correggio (1487), also composed in Ferrara, was almost as influential as Poliziano's *Fabula*. The ancient myth is rewritten with a happy ending and Procris restored to life and her husband; performed at an aristocratic wedding, the *Fabula* became a lesson to disparage jealousy. The work inspired similar "corrections" in other festive works based on Ancient mythology, under the aegis of a lord or barely disguised Christianity.

For a public accustomed to receiving ancient mythology as symbolic, the encomiastic function of festive court performances drawn from mythology was easily understood. In Milan, where Ludovico il Moro usurped power by force in 1479, theater was the privileged activity in his campaign to acquire the loyalty

of the ruling class, according to Bosisio. A cadre of poets were maintained at the court, as was Leonardo da Vinci who provided machines and scenery for theatrical productions. The image of the nurturing and protective *moro*, or mulberry tree, was Ludovico's response to Lorenzo's *lauro*. Niccolò Da Carreggio spent 6 years in Milan (1491–1497), and his *Fabula de Cefalo* inspired works in which the wise, powerful and beneficent Ludovico is credited with the renewal of joy and a happy ending, either as a character on the stage or indirectly. We witness this reweaving of ancient mythology into the court's celebration of itself in Bellincioni's *Egloga o vero Pastorale*, Sanvitale's *Mosso da grande amor verso te movomi*, Taccone's *Atteone* and *Comedia di Danae*, and Visconti's *Pasitea*.

In Mantua, the least successful of the three courts in maintaining a coterie of renowned writers, there was the same interest in Italian versions of Roman comedies that inspired theater in Ferrara. Several tragedies were also composed there.

An introduction to a field of study, Bosisio has made an expert choice of texts and his commentary supports his vision of the function and vitality of theater in the period. The volume will promote further study of the creativity and talent expressed in theater, and closely related cultural forms like opera.

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**Gabriella Romano. *The Pathologisation of Homosexuality in Fascist Italy: The Case of 'G'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. Pp. xiii + 110. ISBN 9783030009939.**

This brief study makes an important contribution to the history of gay men and lesbians in fascist Italy. Romano tells the story of G, otherwise unidentified, who was committed to the mental asylum in Collegno, near Turin, in 1928, after being identified as a homosexual. Central to her account is a remarkable document, a lengthy letter that G penned in anticipation of his arrest and incarceration, that discloses the lurid back-story of what would be his eventual institutionalization. His account is jaw-dropping, and I would not want to spoil it for eventual readers. Suffice to say that the letter discloses a very ugly family drama with financial implications, and it impugns the motives of a relative whose animus leads to an unpleasant conclusion for G. This is not a family one would happily join.