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Castiglione's 'Green' Sense of Theater

It is impossible to imagine the Neoplatonist, elitist Castiglione recommending that a courtier, or his friend the emperor Charles V, learn the minutiae of keeping account and receipt books. It would be hard to keep one's *sprezzatura* while toiling over balance sheets.¹

So wrote Jacob Soll, in 2009, brilliantly recasting Peter Burke's previous discussion of chivalric and courtly values in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* within a new history of knowledge and politics. There are several things to notice about this quotation. First, Soll suggests that the vast information system that lies at the very center of the rise of the modern state was actually indebted to humanist pedagogy in two ways – that is, through the instrumental legacy of measurement developed by the *ars mercatoria*, and through the antiquarian ideals of learning related to the use of historical scholarship and paperwork – rather than to be seen as a complete departure from earlier conceptions of the legal archive, both in terms of scale and as an aesthetic object. Second, even though royal business was larger and infinitely more complex than its Quattrocento predecessors, none of its instruments, old and new, were self-evident in their use. The type of double-entry bookkeeping favored by Tuscan merchants, for instance, or Luca Pacioli's insistence that inventorying should be kept in real time, needed to be articulated, as Soll has shown, by a new class of interpreters and instructors. Thus, these practices also needed a community of scholars and consumers already aware of their importance, and capital assessment, in turn, had a function in creating a larger public in which people's interests and undertakings switched from manufacture to use and meaning.

My question in this chapter is: how can we best describe the managerial dimension of Castiglione in his time and space? To answer that question, I take Castiglione's unusual engagement as a stage-manager to be a representative instance of theatrical networks and public-making in early modern Italy. The event took place in the ducal palace of Urbino on the last Sunday of carnival, on 6 February 1513, and involved a production of Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena's successful comedy *Calandra*. The degree to which that performance is able to stand as an adequate description of an early, coalescing phase of trade, distance, and sociability in European drama as a whole depends not

¹ Jacob Soll. *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009, p. 54.

necessarily on the play's documented capacity to outstrip many competitors, but rather, I submit, on its meta-reflection on staging. The *Calandra* is not a theatricalized essay on authorial responses and rewritings, but it does focus, in its insistence on touching and wearing, on the detachability of theatrical wardrobe (at least in Scenes 1.2 and 4.2).² You might perhaps want to imagine Castiglione as being especially keen to exploit such engineering of the senses in his role as theatrical director and being aware of how that playtext was a slice taken from a larger, networked organism of public-making across a range of intellectual and artistic activities. Indeed, what he had to say to his friend Dovizi, who was a frequent guest in his conversations (both real and fictional), could neatly find its counterpoint in the Roman production of the Plautine comedy *Poenulus* (*The Little Carthaginian*), also of 1513, which fell to the credit of a famous stage-manager, Tommaso Inghirami, known as Phaedra because of his iconic reprise of a classical figure and his proclivities for cross-dressing. In what follows I am not aiming to reconstruct the literary echo or the archival trail of these parallel festivals; in either case, a dossier could be easily assembled.³ I focus, instead, on one specific document: the letter that Castiglione addressed to Bishop Ludovico Canossa (1475–1532), reminiscing with instructive details upon the making of *Calandra* in Urbino, and ruminating on the emotional aftermath of the night.

At least since Alessandro d'Ancona's seminal study *Origini del teatro italiano* (*Origins of the Italian theater*), of 1891, Castiglione's letter has been rightly celebrated as a primer on the early fabric of Renaissance entertainment in Italy by a distinguished observer. In this line of scholarship the celebratory aspects have eventually overwhelmed the epistemological ones. My approach here differs in part because I am more interested in Castiglione's entrepreneurial awareness than in his courtly ideology, and in part because I am persuaded that by attending to what is often frankly instrumental in the Canossa letter a host of historical actors would emerge – people, that is to say, other than courtiers and patrons. In other words, Castiglione the 'project manager' functions

² On the materiality of theatrical memory see Peter Stallybrass. "Hauntings: The Materiality of Memory on the Renaissance Stage." *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*, edited by Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, pp. 287–316. Here and below, I cite *Calandra* from Giorgio Padoan's critical edition: *La Calandra: Commedia elegantissima per messer Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena*. Padua: Antenore, 1985, p. 204.

³ See Fabrizio Cruciani. "Le feste per Isabella d'Este Gonzaga a Roma nel 1514–1515." *Teatro e storia*, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 167–188, and Laura Giannetti Ruggiero. "When Male Characters Pass as Women: Theatrical Play and Social Practice in the Italian Renaissance." *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 36, 2005, pp. 743–760.

as a discursive gateway to skills, audiences, networks, and the style of their imagined movement; such itinerancy, in turn, complements the study of early drama in the way that paying attention to sound and vagrancy has completed the picture offered by traditional histories of print based only on sales at the bookstalls.⁴ Likewise, in what follows I am not trying to find faults in Soll's reconstruction of modern expertise, but only to point out how Castiglione's association with the mechanics of theater puts significant pressure on his recasting as a spiteful, aloof humanist. There is a genuine concern for 'media effects' in the letter:⁵ what works and what does not; things that are immediately bankable, and those that are not. There is also a considerable amount of *sprezzatura*, I would further argue, in supervising a scribbled memorandum intended for the painters and woodcutters employed in Urbino. And a sense of hurry, of scurrying servants as on the Roman stage, and of the play itself as a bounded object, is a shared experience for a broad range of theatergoers, from pimps to the pope.

Since my focus is both limited and local (though my goals are quite broad, and related to Esther Schomacher's discussion of cognition and embodiment in this volume), I will not attempt to emulate Ronald Martinez's take on the rising fortunes of literary Tuscan in Dovizi's *Calandra*, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁶ Nor will I follow some of the recent work on Castiglione by scholars such as Jennifer Webb, Olga Zorzi Pugliese, and W. R. Albury – Webb in relation to Federico da Montefeltro's *studiolo* and its spatial self-policing, which she sees, after Stephen Campbell and Foucault, as an integrated system where visibility is a trap; Zorzi Pugliese in light of Castiglione's praise of architecture's durability as a trope able to overcome time; and Albury across a wide reclamation of medicine and statecraft, especially Ottaviano Fregoso's argument that courtier-physicians ought to cure diseased states of corrupt leaders.⁷ Each of them has produced impressive historical scholarship, all of it aiming to speak more or less to the same assimilation of aesthetic construction and theatrical

4 See Rosa Salzberg. *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.

5 For a suggestive analysis of 'media effects' and the meaning of 'senseless scenes' see Esther Schomacher, "Sex on Stage: How Does the Audience Know?" in this volume.

6 See Stefano Gulizia. "Spatial Traffic: Cognitive Ecologies of Bibbiena's *Calandra*." *Studi rinascimentali*, vol. 9, 2011, pp. 115–127.

7 See Jennifer D. Webb. "All is not fun and games: Conversation, play, and surveillance at the Montefeltro court in Urbino." *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 26, 2011, pp. 417–440; Olga Zorzi Pugliese. "Unity and Multiplicity: Castiglione's Views on Architecture in the *Cortegiano*." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 54, 2012, pp. 257–266; and W. R. Albury, *Castiglione's Allegory: Veiled Policy in The Book of the Courtier*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

display that I am questioning. They read the *Book of the Courtier* against the background of the synesthetic and perspectival reduction of the ideal city-state that it proposes (“non un palazzo, ma una città in forma de palazzo esser pareva,”) (“not a palace, but a city in the shape of a palace”), Urbino’s skyline being, of course, the palace.⁸

To be sure, Castiglione’s 1513 staging of *Calandra* contributes to the ideological dimensions of this culture, but my approach differs from theirs because I intend to look at what the play does more than at what it means. Indeed, my interest depends on the idea that its core knowledge and geographical compass are indeterminate, that it orchestrates interest communities that would be hard to describe as publics, and that its performance relies on the capacity to elicit, gather, and anchor a variety of sensorial and cognitive responses. Thus far, the dominant mode of theatrical analysis with regard to early Italian texts has been a notion similar to *historia* described by Michael Baxandall in his groundbreaking *Painting and Experience*, which quite against the artisanal training of its main spokesmen, including Leon Battista Alberti, relegates bodies and instrumentality to their mere materiality, and privileges instead elite membership and the mainstreaming of the humanist gaze.⁹ As a challenge to Baxandall’s argument for the way theatrical things necessarily fashion urban images and identity, we can add Castiglione’s stage-setting as a compelling case for the social agency of things themselves and for the ‘greening’ of entities like the earliest and improvised playhouses. At the same time, a mode of analysis centered on corporeal rather than intellectual comprehension is well suited to the study of Castiglione’s management as something truly worldly.

The idea of ‘green’ theater derives from Bruce R. Smith, who emphasizes that a study that attends to the materiality of the theatrical evidence – including curtains and sixteenth-century furnishing owned by people of certain means in which the color green appears to have been prominent – must also acknowledge “the embodiedness of the investigator in the face of that evidence.”¹⁰

Although explicitly modeled after features of Shakespeare’s art, such historical phenomenology captures a vast array of forms that is of great interest beyond Elizabethan culture: apart from the situatedness of what is known,

⁸ See Baldassare Castiglione. *Il libro del Cortegiano*, edited by Giulio Preti, Turin: Einaudi, 1965, p. 12.

⁹ For Baxandall’s approach, see Patricia Lee Rubin. *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ Bruce R. Smith. *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009, p. 8.

which remains a central issue in early Italian playtexts, the comedic plots in the age of Ariosto, Dovizi, and Machiavelli remind us that Galenic medicine made the thinking subject absolutely dependent on seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. Furthermore, Plautine or Boccaccian tricks such as those adapted by Dovizi da Bibbiena were always more likely to prioritize or engage strongly with physicality. Finally, to the extent that the *commedia erudita* facilitated a reuse of Roman materials in England, the anthropological pluralism and self-reflexiveness of a play like *Calandra* is directly answerable to the emergence of an international comedy of errors through a process of circulation of various spin-offs that are alternatively textual, oral, and artifactual.¹¹ As a result, taking a cue from Smith's concerns with 'thinking' color, Castiglione's letter is not 'green' simply in analogy with familiar tropes of environmental criticism, but because it left an archival record in the wake of the creation of a social space of conversation.

My argument identifies a political and managerial dimension of Castiglione's staging of *Calandra* not with its investments in the landedness of the Urbino court in early modernity, which was already conventional as an articulation in its own rights, but with its engagement with the bodily groundedness of theatergoing, calibrated through noise and a neighbor's response. The political dimension of the play, I suggest, is bound up with its ability to cultivate sensorial practices. *Calandra*'s artistic effects, once we disentangle ourselves from its permutations of various bits of action, work generally to expand the experience of laughter through absorption and intense physical subjugation to the stage. Ideas and practices are not, of course, entirely separable, but in this case Castiglione's handling of the comedy, its material reiteration and imagined publicity, is part of a larger process of action, democratization, and association that tries to authenticate and open bodies for the theater. That is why the entrepreneurial intervention of an author whose ideology has been routinely characterized in traditional Platonic-moralist terms needs to be understood as a vehicle of social skills, not social dominance. What Castiglione experienced and then advocated was a spectator's idea of theater rather than an original directorial view.

It also needs to be pointed out that the writing and first performance of *Calandra* in 1513 and in Urbino are not points of absolute origination since Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena was already adapting material which itself had a 'Roman' life in the theater and which, in turn, would come to represent, almost

¹¹ See Tiffany Stern. "Watching as Reading: The Audience and Written Text in Shakespeare's Playhouse." *How to Do Things with Shakespeare: New Approaches, New Essays*, edited by Laurie Maguire. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 136–159.

as if by design, the perfection of Rome's revival in various aspects of contemporary artistic life. From the moment of its inception onwards, dissemination, revision, and response had been an integral part of the dialogized meaning of *Calandra*.¹² On the one hand, the record of Castiglione's brilliant orchestration could stand as a fountainhead, but he is also a link in the chain of 'mailing' a play from Rome to Urbino, and later from Urbino to Venice in the 1520s, on the other hand.¹³ Rootlessness and not a sense of here and now is what emerges from these transactions, even though with early modern drama it is hard to resist the temptation to lock a play's plot within the specific political conditions of the court or city-state in which it is embedded – physically or fictionally.

In fact, Dovizi's text finds its path into stage and publication in such a way as to emphasize its similarities with two culturally and linguistically adjacent playtexts: the Spanish *Celestina*, which was first appropriated by the Ciceronian circles in Rome,¹⁴ and Ariosto's *Negromante* (*The Necromancer*), whose topical representation of medical charlatanism pushes the vestigial Jewishness of the protagonist to different levels of verisimilitude, according to the different audiences it summons in its successive rewritings.¹⁵ *Calandra* too is part of this migratory impulse. In this discussion, I want to consider not only playwright, players, playgoers, and Castiglione as a stage director, but also the social agency of the props and costumes that traveled along with the movement of texts and scenarios – the torches, vases, and Trojan tapestries explicitly recalled in the letter to Bishop Canossa.

I will come to the social life of props, but first I want to imagine the first moment in the performance of Dovizi's play in Urbino in which, according to Castiglione's intensely self-regarding reconstruction, things fall under the spell of a green disguise. The moment that I have in mind is in the third paragraph of the Canossa letter. Castiglione has just re-emerged from the initial and cumbersome epistolary address and reminded his friend of a marine elegy sent along with the mail. He then excuses himself for not expanding on the play,

12 On the vexed question of Castiglione's proem, see the discussion of my "Spatial Traffic: Cognitive Ecologies of Bibbiena's *Calandra*." *Studi rinascimentali*, vol. 9, 2011, pp. 115–127; pp. 124 f.

13 For a discussion of theatergrams in movement, see *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater*, edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson. Farnham: Ashgate, 2008.

14 See José Luis Canet. "La *Celestina* y el mundo intelectual de su época." *Cinco siglos de Celestina: Aportaciones interpretativas*, edited by Rafael Beltrán and José Luis Canet. Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1997, pp. 43–61.

15 See Giuseppe Coluccia. *L'esperienza teatrale di Ludovico Ariosto*. Lecce: Manni, 2001, pp. 162–166.

trusting that the recipient of his notes would have already consulted a range of witnesses to the performance at the time of writing. At this juncture, Castiglione describes the scene of *Calandra*. Here acoustic and watery signals adjust their mutual orientation frequently. The resulting impression is at once thick and fleeting, insinuating yet superimposed. Until the gaze moves upward:

Al cielo della sala erano attaccati pallottoni grandissimi di verdura: tanto che quasi coprivano la volta; dalla quale ancora pendeano fili di ferro per quelli fori delle rose che sono in detta volta: e questi fili tenevano dui ordini di candelabri da un capo all'altro della sala, che erano tredici lettere, perché tanti sono li fori.

From the roof of the hall hung giant balls of greenery, to the point of almost taking over the vault of the room, from which were also lowered iron strings through the holes of the rose windows that are over there: and these strings held two layers of chandeliers from one side of the hall to the other – thirteen in all, like the rose windows.¹⁶

The passage tells us something important and easily overlooked about the kind of stage created for *Calandra* in Urbino. The location is a richly decorated hall, vaulted and with interlocked rose windows, which is made to function as an occasional playhouse mostly on the strength of intermixing the voices of human actors with a field of foliage, flowers, and fruit, along with sleek chandelier lights and Latin inscriptions framed in light blue. The process of transformation in the room – at least, within the textual selection I have chosen to cite – starts with the most distinctive feature in the ensemble: giant balls of greenery and garlands. Floral arrangements on such grand scale were not found *in situ* in Federico da Montefeltro's palace at any given time; they neither helped establish a 'country house' ideology, nor did they necessarily foster the court's wealth. If anything, part of their task was to give an expressive voice to the artisanal dimension of the playing company itself, by forcing it to move among shadows and lights, and by suggesting differences in scale between two sets of images offered to the viewers. Staging *Calandra* under spheres of decorative moss ensures that Castiglione's green is simultaneously something one sees from without, and within which one sees.

Repeatedly, Castiglione's letter invites the viewer's eye to move from one side to the other of the woven narrative, as if in a palimpsest. The greenery hung from the roof is a neat complement to the flower-and-ivy borders of a Renaissance tapestry, as well as of a richly decorated printed edition. By implicit design, the *Calandra* production in Urbino accentuated Arachne's equiv-

¹⁶ Castiglione's letter was included, without its concluding part, in the anthology *Delle lettere facete et piacevoli di diversi grandi huomini et chiari ingegni* [...], edited by Dionigi Atanagi. Venice: Zaltieri, 1561. Translation mine.

ocal art rather than the lurking of Ovid's more turbulent chaos. It is possible to read in the tamed wilderness above the wood planks of the theater the equivalent of the play's investment in comic business. They are both logofugal: they flee from words. And they emphatically contradict the interpretation of *habitus* as a style of behavior as opposed to as a philosophical precondition of embodiment.¹⁷

In the late fifteenth-century Italian tradition of courtly entertainment the green matrix, as telescoped and re-envisioned by Leonardo da Vinci, already functioned within a larger theatrical context, both as the gentlemanly induction to a feast and as a self-justifying wit produced by advances in technology. I am not referring here to the painter's many sketches of machines – some of which are almost indistinguishable from Brunelleschi's own machinery, like the moving heaven-machine used in the Florentine staging of sacred representations, and some of which, like the 'noise generator' in the manuscript *Arundel 263*, are straightforward devices to bring thunder, wind, and rain to the popular theater – but rather to the comparatively lesser-known work that Leonardo left in a room of the Sforza Castle in Milan known as the *Sala delle Asse* during the 1490s [fig. 1]. A testing ground for his experiments, this *Sala* was fitted with a painted forest canopy and images of tree trunks lining the wall; its purpose may have been a simple extension of Leonardo's idea of offering to his wealthy patron a knightly automaton, based on a grandiose hydraulic conception.¹⁸ Still, in this example a green ceiling as contrived as in the Urbino celebrations functioned as a threshold, showing the cunning intelligence of *techne* and its green offsprings and subtexts.

It may be useful, at this point, to add some reflections on how the Renaissance idea of green, not only as established symbol of youth or the pastoral mode, was developed in relationship with the bookselling culture in which wanderers and rogues thrived. Such a development would reach a point of maturity with Shakespeare, and specifically in *The Winter's Tale*, where the appearances of the color green become a running commentary on the career of Robert Greene the balladeer and on the suspicious mischief that, along with criminal dexterity, accompanied his itinerant selling of pamphlets and roman-

¹⁷ For the first interpretation, see Peter Burke. *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, p. 29, who notes how the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu followed the medieval translators of Aristotle; a new discussion in Evelyn Tribble. "Distributing Cognition in the Globe." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 56, 2005, pp. 135–155.

¹⁸ See E. R. Truitt. *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.



Fig. 1: Leonardo da Vinci's wall and ceiling painting in *Salla delle Asse* (detail) from ca. 1498, tempera on plaster.

ces. Even in Castiglione's own days, however, subsuming the stage-scenery under a dome of artificial green means reminding the audience of how literary metamorphosis should always try to outperform roguery and its subset of texts and trinkets in order to enact itself – and of how, in order to study the early stages of literary circulation as an emerging industry, one needs to pay attention to the cultural power of robbery and tactics of stealing. The 'wanderings' of a play such as *Calandra* do not seem to threaten the social unity of Urbino, but Castiglione needs to signal the role performed by the songs he introduced into the spectacle in order to encourage actual unity, while promoting his unusual managerial tasks to wide courtly attention.

Castiglione in Urbino is a man who is never able to go public, someone who feels the need to feign that an outburst of anger occurred while dealing with the master woodcutters and the singing personnel, musicians, and dancers summoned to Urbino for the festival.¹⁹ But his intimate correspondent in

¹⁹ “[...] chi avea da combattere e con pittori e con maestri di legnami [...]” (“[...] he who had to fight both with painters and woodcutters [...].”) *Calandra*, p. 207.

the Lucanian town of Tricarico must have known, upon receiving news of the 1513 *Calandra*, that Castiglione's letter spoke to his deep pride in handling personally and directly the stage workers and their requests, seeing in particular that the eccentric mythological performances surrounding the play – which, though technically separated from text and plot, were a customary benchmark in evaluating the success of an event such as a carnival – were executed to everyone's satisfaction. As a whole, in fact, the letter to Canossa provides a brilliant argument for seeing the political force of early theater not as the emergence of a supposed bourgeois subjectivity, with the usual corollary of considering a courtier's engagement in fields like *feast* or *drama* as a challenge to social rivals and upwardly mobile persons through imitation of their social betters, but simply as a prospect for people from different walks of life to take their concerted action into the real world. There is more at play in Castiglione's management of Dovizi's drama than a wily *sprezzatura* ostensibly trying to swallow a hard province of mechanical entertainment and information: the groups of workers that he moves around as the show's director express the necessary relationship between publicity and personhood. Likewise, once we account for the basic fact that a perfect courtier must always hide or dissimulate his innermost thoughts, the robust role that Castiglione played among 'actors,' including giving them a new prologue to act since the old, authorial one arrived too late in Urbino to be used,²⁰ is communal and describes a middle ground in the theater-making practices between publishing, playing, and play-going.

Possibly, and attractive though it is, the construction of Castiglione the joiner and theatrical entrepreneur is just a fiction, not a system, of a piece with the active creation of authority and accessibility in the *Book of the Courtier*. It is tempting, however, to discover effects of that ideal commonwealth of skill and publicity I have been describing in his discussion of stage management. Within the Canossa letter, to be sure, a most promising place to do so is the ample treatment of the songs, dances, and masquerades interspersed in *Calandra*, which occupies the central paragraphs of Castiglione's dispatch and takes up almost half its space. While there is no space here to tackle adequately the representative publicity of these musical *intermezzi*,²¹ the premise of my interpretation is that these artifacts were on the move (sometimes expensively so, being in themselves bulky and with oscillating degrees of precision), and

²⁰ See *Calandra*, p. 205.

²¹ See at least Nino Pirrotta. *Li due Orfei, da Poliziano a Monteverdi*. Turin: Einaudi, 1975; and Anthony M. Cummings. *The Politicized Muse: Music for Medici Festivals, 1512–1537*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

therefore should be understood primarily as material objects in market conditions.

By slightly downplaying the musical dimension of these artifactual components of the 1513 *Calandra* in Urbino – which, in fairness, is hardly at the forefront of Castiglione's own interests – we can also understand how the chosen *intermezzi* operated a potentially transitional exchange across the social spectrum: a manufacturing or constructing public (artisanal to a lesser or greater extent, often organized in structures resembling medieval guilds),²² a normative public (mostly concomitant with humanists at court and their elite guests), and a consuming public (overlapping with, yet not exhausting, the 'crowd' of playgoers, and open to significant disagreements on how anyone ought to interact with an isolated bodily exploit).

This view introduces some important changes to our established narratives of sixteenth-century courtly entertainment. First, none of the performers cited by Castiglione could ever count on scripted movements of such perfection as to ensure a fully beautiful execution: the writer's hyperbolic emphasis on how each *moresca* dancer, even if impeded by the torch he had to carry, as in Juno's allegorical retinue, pushed his art to 'every possible limit' only underlines the reality of failure looming large over their presentation. Second, the *intermezzi*, which could easily be mistaken as a 'closed' form of association because of their mythical iconology,²³ effectively catered to heterogeneous interest groups – perhaps not cohesive enough to claim the Habermasian requirements of equality and parity, but with impressive potential for strangers or foreigners to 'buy in' and share the interests of local theater-focus groups. Finally, Castiglione's letter actually narrowed, rather than widened, the gulf between aristocratic audiences and *virtuosi*; one might observe, as well, that its insistence on seemingly mundane details such as the fish scales on the costumes of the acting crew, or the bright and motley-colored apparel of the parrot impersonators, instead of the finer points of Ovidian exegesis, encouraged a more open and egalitarian form of discussion.

Reorienting appreciation for the lavish *intermezzi* of 1513 away from courtly ideology and toward skilled contributions, trade, and sociability, means having Castiglione interact with the apprentice system of theatrical troupes and its 'amateurs.' In addition, his casting for *Calandra* comments on a delicate moment in early Italian drama when things became 'matters of concern' (and no

²² On the mechanics of early Italian companies of drama, see Ludovico Zorzi. *L'attore, la commedia, il drammaturgo*. Turin: Einaudi, 1990, pp. 31–33.

²³ A useful treatment of urban rituals and parades is Samuel Kinser. "Presentation and Representation: Carnival at Nuremberg, 1450–1550." *Representations*, vol. 13, 1986, pp. 1–41.

longer ‘matters of fact’). The tendency up to now has been to see Castiglione as a purveyor of asymmetrical discourses of power and information; on that basis alone, it would be logical to assume that in his job as stage-manager he had also adopted a top-down approach. And yet the Canossa letter clearly asserts that the emotions of bystanders and playgoers were swayed and seized across the hall, that a premium was placed on understanding as a precondition of the cognitive ecology peculiar to playhouses, and that, in effect, even the triumphalist, Medicean device was contradicted by the plot’s circling back to scenes of raw corporeal wit and sexual innuendo. In 1513, the viewer of *Calandra* did not access the play all at once, but had to move backwards and forwards, as well as sequentially around the walls – from ornamental tapestries to balls of greenery. In short, Castiglione’s ‘green’ sense of theater preserved what in Habermas’s parlance is the idea of “social intercourse.”²⁴

A more nuanced description of the Urbino festival, it seems to me, is one in which the celebration of status or rank is replaced by an argument on how a shared ‘tact’ (combined with theatrical ‘touch’) was progressively seen as befitting equals. There is a neglected hint in Castiglione’s letter that Dovizi’s play had a social life even before playbooks and scripts were distributed, that is, that it was an agent capable of making a difference in the interregional system of newsmongering and that its meaning was more urgent than just an invitation to urban courtiers to bask in the ersatz recreation of a prized cultural good from Tuscany. This hint is Castiglione’s repeated conviction that his bishop friend must have kept himself informed on the progress of *Calandra* through the itinerancy of its own echo. In the pragmatics of the letter, a virtual readership is conjured up by virtue of the very act of its address. In this light, Castiglione’s hailing of a specific theater ‘public’ – a community of means already ‘in the know’ that needs no rehearsing of the obvious, as the letter declares – provisionally constitutes and generates an audience, intrinsically, by apostrophizing it. The writer’s strategy compares interestingly with those *subjunctive-creative* addresses studied by Michael Warner as many examples of a *world-making* enterprise, although in Castiglione’s case the play’s true publicity does not depend on its spatiality as much as on the engineering of its *sensorium*,²⁵ which gains strength, to a certain extent, from the very variety of people in attendance and their bemusement.

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, p. 36.

²⁵ See Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

As a professional project manager, Castiglione had to avail himself of both social and rhetorical notions of the wider public. What his recipient is invited to consider while reading the letter, namely *Calandra's* power of exertion in the court of public opinion in Italy, also has an anticipatory effect on the behavior of the actual public that would read the published version of the letter. This is far from a private exchange among intellectual snobs. Grievances with the working class operating the stage of the festival are not the only notation entrusted with relevance by Castiglione. Many readers have expanded on the passage in his letter to Canossa that describes the setting of the stage from the point of view of Medicean promotion, either by arguing that Calandro's ambiguous pedigree looks back at Ficinian mysteries, or by observing how mutually advantageous was a triumphalist semantics based on Roman restoration,²⁶ but few critics, if any, came to terms with the fact that this information is framed by a praise of the state workers of Urbino, who did miracles with the schedule of their assignment. What strains belief, Castiglione says, is that four months turned out to be sufficient for Urbino's public hands to erect an arch with faux-reliefs.²⁷ At this point, the printed tradition of Castiglione's letter reads the variant *operai* for *opere* ('blue collars' for 'works'), making the sounds of physical labor on the theatrical space curiously distorted, ventriloquised almost, as though piped in from somewhere else. Nor is Castiglione's marveling an isolated feature. His monitoring of the theatrical space is further nuanced by an archaeology of gender, sustained by a realization that, judging from available circumstantial evidence at the 1513 celebrations in Urbino, child actors put their older, professional counterparts to shame, and that nothing inspires like the wonder of watching 'tiny oldies' achieving with stage gestures the Greek gravity of Menander.²⁸

Workers and kids have not gained any significant space in the history of early Italian drama. But it was their adjoining forces that impressed Castiglione the most: at any rate, more than the emblazoned Latin, the hangings of silk, or the excellent finishing of many stage props. Presumably, our lack of responsiveness derives from a historiography whose goal is to claim through the theatrical object an elevated status concurrently reinforced by the primacy of the eye over other senses in aesthetic considerations of public festivals, by the

²⁶ See Luciano Bottoni. *La messinscena del Rinascimento: "Calandra," una commedia per il papato*. Milan: Angeli, 2005, pp. 57–100; and Ronald L. Martinez. "Etruria Triumphant in Rome: Fables of Medici Rule and Bibbiena's *Calandra*." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 37, 2010, pp. 69–98.

²⁷ See *Calandra*, p. 204.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 205.



Fig. 2: A woodcut from Girolamo Parabosco's *Il Pellegrino* (*The Pilgrim*), 1552.

humanist training of all the historical actors involved in the staging of play-texts, and by an increasing importance of perspectival design. In these accounts, the real pursuit of this fusion of research tools is an underlying intimation of philosophical detachment. Scaffolded platforms and greenwood, however, punctuated a performative execution in which the qualities and valences of green cognition are hardly exhausted by the strategic display of a city stage reserved for the elite. Castiglione's letter, in fact, should remind us of how frequently overlooked are urban communities of artisans and the share that they took in the rituals and commissions of early modern theatrical companies and brigades, effectively blurring boundaries rather than facilitating social ascent.

We lack convincing or definitive documentary evidence on the 1513 carnival in Urbino, but the 'grounding' of *Calandra's* audiences is vividly presented by Castiglione himself when he remarks on the seating arrangements as if in a moat, with a watery landscape receding and alternating with the roof of a castle-keep. In support of the way Castiglione 'greened' Dovizi's play as its director, one might cite a relatively well-known woodcut from the comedy *Il Pellegrino* (*The Pilgrim*) written by Girolamo Parabosco (1524–1577), as republished by Gabriel Giolito's Venetian firm in 1552 [fig. 2]. At first glance, Parabosco's thick grid on stage looks like the anchoring of a full, mathematical eradication of local differences. In truth, its Serlian conquest or measurement, that is, the violent subduing of the space of representation into perspectival imperatives, proceeds hand in hand with what in Robert Weimann's terms is the separation between *locus* and *platea* – with a player walking in great strides to

gain an intersecting center-stage, which is situated midway, acoustically and environmentally no less than visually, between false doors and tapestries at the back, and a standing, stalking public in front.²⁹

The effect of the green stuff in Castiglione's reduction of *Calandra* is first or foremost a material witness. Yet fewer critics have taken the 'materialism' of floral arrangements incumbent on the stage sets of 1513 literally in order to chart the implications for both the play and its manager of changing theories of ecological cognition and the senses that it involves.³⁰ Taken together, the consistency, color, and even smell of the large balls of greenery account for the multiple traces of time embedded in theatrical things. In his letter to Ludovico Canossa, Castiglione's preoccupation is with material inventories and a shifting mnemonic economy encompassing environment, audience, players, and playtexts. Similar is Luchino Visconti's design for Carlo Goldoni's *L'impresario delle Smirne* (*The Impresario from Smyrna*), which was performed in Venice in 1957 and in which a massive curtain synchronically encapsulated and bridged a system of medieval, neighboring *continuum* into new states of the action. So it is with Visconti's giant curtain as with Castiglione's 'moat' imagery or, in this particular case, with the great Elizabethan scenes of gravedigging: remembering is like moving simultaneously back and forth in time, and the traces of past interaction are never completely erased.³¹ Unfortunately, this branch of theatrical investigation has been overwhelmingly empiricist, and within a predominantly Italian tradition of inquiry only a few readers have promoted the image of learned comedy and revivalist drama as a palimpsest of material traces, or an assemblage of real-world features, excavating 'green' as a natural, semi-natural, and wholly artificial substance. In this chapter, using a celebrated letter in a slightly unusual manner, I have tried to demonstrate that Castiglione had keen interests in cognitive distribution, in managing information, and in the consequences of distance and deferral, not only in the banal sense that it took a certain number of months for a troupe to stage or 'mail' a *Calandra* from Rome to Urbino, for instance, but precisely because the resulting time lag enabled a Latourian network of inscription, calibrated at key nodes of such theatrical traveling.

29 On the double projections of theatrical space, see Robert Weimann. *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

30 See Henry S. Turner. "King Lear Without: The Heath." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 28, 1997, p. 177.

31 See Jonathan Gil Harris. *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

More intimate – and greener still – are the circumstances in which Castiglione realized the powerful pull of song and music as a site of mediation between the smaller and larger communities of his court, and, more specifically, in which he discovered the importance of well-executed *intermezzi* for his overall conception of the 1513 carnival in Urbino. Given how potent and physical is his reconstruction of the events on behalf of his bishop friend, and how very concrete, sensory, and thoroughly textured is the imaginary recasting of his staging of *Calandra*, it is remarkable that the letter has received scant attention as a leverage to localize the discrete publics or interest groups that made up the theatrical polity in the early modern period. In my reconstruction, onlookers are often palpably present, in a phenomenological sense, crammed together into the theater, and what has traditionally appeared as the secure, unassailable, and privately controlled space of a humanist-courtier could be entered and willingly invaded by sound. As a result, the permeability of human agency across physical environments and of Renaissance spaces in general, which has been the object of growing interest in recent years,³² might bring a new awareness to the study of drama and its historical networks.

Another criterion would be to compare these findings to two among the most crucial communicative functions that, according to the *Book of the Courtier*, ambassadors and envoys performed in their serving duties: secrecy and management. To the extent that the Boccaccian theater-machine of Bernardo Dovizi functioned in essence as a *lingua franca* across different Italian states, then its green execution in Urbino could stand as a figure of complete legibility and unmediated knowledge – an acoustic or visual circuit linking one stage to the next. At the same time, in analogy with the other automatic machines and counterfeit voices described in Castiglione’s treatise,³³ and perhaps, even better, with the logic of Leonardo’s breaching of the inside-out in the *Sala delle Asse* in Milan, to green a *Calandra* was to create an artificial chirping sound. Castiglione’s hard-won acquaintance with the paradox that a writer’s secrets were best protected by divulging them – indirectly or directly controlling the means of their printed dissemination – made him uniquely positioned to enjoy

32 See Elizabeth S. Cohen, and Thomas V. Cohen. “Open and shut: The social meanings of the Cinquecento Roman house.” *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, vol. 9, 2002, pp. 61–84; Flora Dennis. “Sound and domestic space in early modern Italy.” *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, vol. 16, 2009, pp. 7–19; and Kate Colleran. “*Scampanata* at the widows’ windows: A case-study of sound and ritual insult in Cinquecento Florence.” *Urban History*, vol. 36, 2009, pp. 359–378.

33 See Jessica Wolfe. *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

the privilege that by taking on his public task as a project manager he both expanded and eradicated what was most individuated and unreproducible about the private self.

