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Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

Edited by Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino,
and Eugenio Refini

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Sergio Costola*

Lucrezia Borgia's Triumphal Chariot: Notes on Performance Documentation[1]

Abstract

This paper explores Lucrezia Borgia's engagement with ancient forms at the Este court, focusing on her utilisation of the triumph. It argues that conventional labels such as 'actress' or 'playwright' fail to encapsulate the rich and varied theatrical contributions of women in this era, who, during this period, constantly overstepped the bounds of traditional theatre moving into broader fields of cultural and theatrical activity. Together with traditional categories of theatre production, then, it's important to also consider modes of performance, on one hand, located in the domestic and personal spheres and, on the other, to the ways in which they were connected to both the circulation and use of objects. By examining entries from account books detailing expenses for a 'carro triunfante de la Duchessa' in December 1507 and October 1508, the paper investigates how Lucrezia Borgia employed the triumph as a strategic means to navigate and construct her social identity. It focuses on two specific events: the celebrations organized for the wedding of Camillo Costabili and Bianca Martinengo in 1507, and the triumph over the river Po, organized to celebrate Ferrara's victory over Venice at the battle of Polesella in 1509. This approach not only offers fresh insights into historical performance but also prompts a reassessment of the role of archival documents in shaping and preserving meaning.

Keywords: Lucrezia Borgia, triumphal chariots, Este court, Performance documentation, Celio Calcagnini

1. Lucrezia Borgia and Classical Antiquity

According to Diane Ghirardo (2005), Lucrezia Borgia has "been locked into the paradigm of an Italian Renaissance duchess, . . . known for her material possessions and family affiliations" and "of interest mainly for her jewelry, her wedding to Alfonso I d'Este and fabulous dowry" (476). She is not

1 I would like to thank Jessica S. Hower for reading drafts of this paper and for her helpful comments and Diane Yvonne Ghirardo for our conversations and for generously sharing archival material. I would also like to thank the staff of the Archivi di Stato di Modena and Mantua for their expertise. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the *Memory and Performance: Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals* conference organized by the University of Parma and UCL (October 13-14, 2022), and at the *Rappresentare gli Este* conference organized by the University of Ferrara (May 23-5, 2024).

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alone: for centuries, women —and notably their theatrical achievements— have been strictly gendered and remained largely invisible. Anne Jacobson Schutte (1994) offers a way out, claiming that women in early modern Italy "managed to lay their hands on physical and psychological space, materials, and techniques insufficient for staging a revolution, but adequate for limited exercises in self-determination. They worked to create not only works of literature, art, and music but also themselves" (186). How did Lucrezia "create herself"? What forms did this creation take and how might they redirect the narrative to which she had been assigned in diaries, chroniclers, and scandal? For centuries, the theatrical achievements of women have remained largely invisible. How is it possible to recover them? This essay explores Lucrezia's engagement with ancient forms at the Este court. I focus on her utilization of the triumph, finding that conventional labels such as 'actress' or 'playwright' are insufficient to fully capture the diverse and nuanced theatrical contributions of women who, during this period, constantly overstepped the bounds of dramatic theatre and moved into broader fields of cultural activity.

The appropriation of Greek and Roman material has been well documented for a variety of cultural practices patrocinated by Alfonso I d'Este: as of lately, the image of the Duke of Ferrara as having very little interest in the creation or the concealment of meaning in the arts and literature, has been substituted by a more balanced perspective that sees instead the Duke of Ferrara as someone who "had perfectly understood the ideological meaning of the figurative arts, a veritable *instrumentum regni*" and who became a "great protagonist of Italian and European history and of an entire era: an era in which Ferrara, thanks to the very particular virtues of Alfonso and the skills of its artists, was truly one of the cultural capitals of Italy" (Farinella 2014, 4, 27).[1]

Lucrezia Borgia, Alfonso's wife, was also a great art enthusiast: she brought several paintings based on sacred subjects from the Roman papal court and commissioned others during her years in Ferrara. She summoned artists of the caliber of Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo and Ludovico Mazzolino to paint the lunettes, friezes, and frames of her rooms (Ghirardo 2019, xliv). These were extremely costly works, but with a signal difference: unlike the important collection of Roman antiquities and depictions of pagan deities that could be found in Alfonso or her sister-in-law Isabella's studiolo, Lucrezia's collection only included one object from classical antiquity: a golden bracelet depicting the labors of Hercules. As Diane Ghirardo has noted, "no other secular or pagan objects appear in the inventory. Similarly, the artworks in

[1] For a reevaluation of Alfonso I d'Este as patron of the arts, see also Venturi 2012, 1-10 and Hope 2012, 43-76. For an excursus of the image of Alfonso as patron of the arts, see Farinella 2014, 1-27.

her apartments in the Estense Castle depicted more Christian subjects than classical inspirations, sharply contrasting with the paintings commissioned by Isabella" (Ghirardo 2019, lxxii).

However, caution is necessary when applying modern categorizations to create distinctions between objects. As highlighted by Leah Clark, the value of an object during the early modern period was tied to the role it played in symbolic activities: "those who attended court in the Renaissance would likely have prized a small gem over a painting, for instance" (2022, 5). While it is true that Lucrezia's collection predominantly featured Christian subjects, it's arguable that the Christian symbolism depicted in these paintings was interpreted akin to the symbolic elements present in myths. This does not imply, Clark continues, that religious artworks were regarded as mythological representations. Observers would have rather employed similar interpretive tools as they would for paintings featuring mythological symbols, often found in private study spaces (134).

However, Lucrezia Borgia's fascination with classical antiquity was more vividly manifested through the kinetic pathos of dance, the representations of eclogues, and her public appearances rather than through the patronage of artworks centered on classical or mythological themes. These instances demonstrate how the moving body could express a sense of identity though the use of classical motifs and themes. Domenico Giuseppe Lipani has argued that Lucrezia Borgia was able to bring "her own specificity, partly consonant with the context, partly new" (2021, 81) into the Ferrarese theatrical culture.[2] It was not a clear *caesura*, Lipani continues, but rather a way of highlighting, within "the plurality of coexisting representative cultures", certain elements like "the accentuated predilection for the eclogue" (82). During the early 1500s, the eclogue was still a highly "experimental terrain" and "a container of classical images and symbols" that, as Francesca Bortoletti has pointed out, allowed to join, within the unitary frame offered by the singing competition among the shepherds, multiple dimensions of the spectacular, all charged with "the new Neoplatonic values and symbolic projections" that translated, within the places of elite entertainment, into pastoral fictions that were "compatible with the symbolic space of courtly celebrations" (2009, 69).[3] The eclogue was thus a multi-media dramaturgical system of both oral and written forms of communication. In addition, it also constituted an "intermedial system", a "system of references and allusions" (130), one in

[2] See also Bortoletti 2008, 133; 254-5.

[3] The eclogue, Bortoletti emphasizes, can be considered as "a container of classical images and symbols" and one characterized by the patronage of the three most important women of the time: Lucrezia Borgia, Isabella d'Este, and Elisabetta Gonzaga (2009, 93).

which the different elements were not only co-existing but interacting with one another in their re-enactment of ancient myths – an idyllic projection of the court to a place of peace and serenity and one to be contrasted to the cruelty of the present characterized by the Italian wars (Gerbino 2009, 23).

2. Triumphal Processions

Like the eclogue, the triumphal procession served as a vessel for classical images and symbols. It became a dynamic space where diverse elements not only coexisted but also engaged with one another, reenacting ancient myths. Amedeo Quondam highlights the significance of Alfonso of Aragon's triumphant entry into Naples on 26 February 1443. Having conquered the city the year before, this event garnered exceptional importance, as both visual and written accounts celebrated the grandeur of the occasion. Upon close examination of the Latin narrative penned by the humanist Antonio Beccadelli, known as the Panormita – his *Alphonsi regis triumphus* – it becomes evident that this event served as the prototype for all modern triumphal ceremonies (Quondam 2017a, 13). The rapid development of this new concept of virtuous majesty in triumph is notable a few years later in Reggio Emilia. On 4 July 1453, Borso d'Este took control of his domains with a dual triumphant entry into Modena and Reggio. Amedeo Quondam argues that while the morphological aspects of triumphs exhibit significant features with both consistencies and contradictions, the construction of the modern triumphal archetype can be attributed to two primary cultural factors. Firstly, the remarkable success, both figuratively and otherwise, of Francesco Petrarca's *Trionfi* lays the foundation for the conceptual framework of the triumph, infusing it with allegorical and moral significance and shaping its basic iconography. Secondly, the pervasive influence of humanistic ideals and practices takes direct control over the representation of the triumph, with many playwrights and directors being humanists. The amalgamation of these influences directs contemporary rulers' triumphs towards a rediscovery of essential elements found in the triumphs of ancient *imperatores*. The paradigmatic Petrarchan model establishes a triumphal archetype with moral and allegorical connotations, providing a standardized form to the quintessential image of the triumph. This straightforward yet highly impactful icon, featuring a chariot pulled by a pair (or more) of animals, parading the central figure of the triumph amidst accompanying figures displaying gestures of reverence, can be elaborated upon with limitless variations and complexities (Quondam 2017b, 342-5). Ferrara played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of triumphal symbolism, boasting a rich repertoire of triumphal entries, wedding ceremonies, and other events. This

is epitomized by the splendid decorative scheme gracing the upper section of the Hall of the Months in Palazzo Schifanoia, showcasing the triumphs of ancient deities.[4]

Lucrezia Borgia was acquainted with this form, not only due to its popularity in Ferrara but also because of her upbringing in Rome. The spectacles during her father's, Pope Alexander VI, reign were described as "diverse and varied", already reflecting emerging trends. The triumphal arches during this time were noted as "a similitudine delli trionfi antichi" (Cruciani 1983, 243; similar to the ancient triumphs). The spectacles organized for Lucrezia Borgia's wedding to Alfonso d'Este are particularly noteworthy in this context. The classical triumph that graced St Peter's Square on 1 January 1502 to honor Lucrezia Borgia was meticulously organized according to a particularly sophisticated iconographic plan. Poet Giovanni Battista Valentini, also known as *Cantalicio*, sheds light on the allegorical meaning of the parade in his collection of forty-three epigrams titled *Spectacula lucretiana*. In poem 24, he reveals the objective: to restore Rome to the glory of its ancient triumphs and allegorically explain the virtues of the Borgias (Passera 2020, 137-40). Regarding the form of the triumph and its direct use by Lucrezia Borgia during public events, no documentary support can be found in the chronicles, diaries, and letters of the time. However, we have two important documents from account books. The first document, unpublished, dated 31 December 1507, reports the expenses incurred for the triumphal chariot of the duchess, paid to Piero da Cremona:

> Piero da Cremona chioldarolo de' havere lire trentacinque soldi sei de moneta per lo amontare de la intera feramenta che lui a dato et meso in opera in suso lo caro trionfante de la duchessa nostra de Ferara et per lui da la Spexa del caro trionfante.[5]
>
> [Piero da Cremona, locksmith, for having thirty-five lire, six soldi of currency, for the total amount of all the hardware that he has provided for the triumphal chariot of our duchess of Ferrara, and for him for the expense of the triumphal chariot.]

The second, dated 16 October 1508, reports the expenses paid to Bartolameo de Vinexia by Lucrezia Borgia for the work done to the "caro trionfale":

[4] For an analysis of the relationship between the frescoes at Schifanoia, the triumphs depicted, and theatrical practices in Ferrara during the reigns of Ercole I and Alfonso I, refer to Zorzi 1977.

[5] ASMo, CDE, *M&F*, Reg. 48, Mem., 1507, 143r. I would like to thank Claudio Passera, Valentina Salierno, and Simone Balossino for their help in transcribing the document, here only partially published.

> Spexa dela Illustrissima domina nostra lire una, soldi dodexe de marchesani a Maistro Bartolameo de Vinexia depintore contanti per havere pagato peze 50 d'oro che lui à posto a reconzare il caro trionfale che à facto fare Sua Signoria più di fano.[6]
>
> [Expense of our Illustrious Lady, one lira and twelve soldi merchesani to Master Bartolomeo of Venice, painter, in cash, for having paid for 50 gold pieces that he placed to restore the triumphal chariot that Her Lordship had ordered.]

These two expenses should not be confused with expenses for the more common "careta de Corte": for example, for the same year and month — October 1508—, in another account book, there is an expense paid to "Mistro Cabreleto depintore per conto de dipingere una careta de Corte de Messer Alexandro Farofino" (Master Cabreleto, painter, for the task of painting a court carriage for Messer Alexandro Farofino).[7] The same year, two more expenses refer to these "carrette di corte": the first is dated 13 May 1508[8] and the second is dated 18 September 1508.[9] *Carrette de corte* and *carri trionfali* were two distinct things: for the wedding celebrations between Bianca Maria Sforza and the Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg in Milan, for example, Bianca Maria sat on a triumphal chariot pulled by four white horses, followed by the orators sent by the King of France and various Italian principalities, together with Duke Gian Galeazzo and Ludovico il Moro. Behind them, as specified by Beatrice d'Este in a letter, there were twelve other *carrette* carrying "le prime damiselle de Milano" (the first ladies of Milan).[10] As Thomas Tuohy points out, "these carriages formed part of the standard equipment" of the Este court, but triumphal carriages were usually made specifically for weddings and, although their function "is not entirely clear", they appeared for the weddings of Anna Sforza, Beatrice d'Este, and her sister Isabella.

[6] ASMo, CDE, *Amministrazione dei Principi*, B, Non regnanti, Lucrezia Borgia, 1131, Mem. (1507-1509), CLI. Published by Franceschini 1997, 2.2, 698, doc. 866c.

[7] ASMo, CDE, *M&F*, Reg. 49, 1508, 62. Published by Franceschini 1997, 2.2, 694, doc. 859i.

[8] ASMo, CDE, *LCD*, 219, "Zornale de ussita" BBBB (1508), c. LII. Published by Franceschini 1997, 2.2, 697, doc. 862.h.

[9] Ibid., doc. 862.m.

[10] See Luzio and Renier 1890, 91, cited in Passera 2020, 88. I would like to thank Claudio Passera for bringing this important event with its use of both triumphal chariot and *carrette* to my attention, as well as for his precious notes on the distinction between *carrette* and *carri trionfali*.

3. Methodological Framework

Theatre history, as Raimondo Guarino has argued, is not "a collection of events comparable to objects", but rather a "process of symbolization, which travels and shapes particular durations, transforms spaces, and mobilizes communities". In addition, theatre must be recognized in its multiplicity and each inquiry must touch on "cultural systems and processes that require circumscribed analyses, relating to individual actions and individual contexts" (2005, ix). During the years of the Italian wars, Ferrarese theatrical culture was not characterized by "a void" (Cruciani 1994, 191): the "well-articulated" and "organic" dramaturgical system – a system elaborated, among others, by humanists such as Pellegrino Prisciani, Ludovico Ariosto, Niccolò da Correggio, supported primarily by Ercole I d'Este, and then by his sons Alfonso and Ippolito – was substituted by different ways of "transforming spaces and mobilizing communities" and, this time, under the tutelage of Lucrezia Borgia. It was the invention of a new "process of symbolization", one in which celebrations and triumphal processions on one hand, and diplomatic receptions on the other became mechanisms for producing signification, operations producing not "plays", but symbolic dramas characterized by dramaturgies more appropriate to the new context. On 31 May 1509, Ferrara celebrated a new victory of Alfonso d'Este over the Venetians with "fireworks, firecrackers, and sounds of bells".[11] In a letter sent to her husband the same day, Lucrezia expresses her joy and writes that she will order to "double the public signs of joy" and that she will also order "to give thanks to the high and omnipotent God" and "prayers for the prosperity and safety of Your Excellency".[12] This letter reveals not only the kind of celebrations that had already been described by the chronicler de' Prosperi, but also the active role that Lucrezia played in ordering and organizing them. The dramaturgy of the following celebrations, in fact, became more sophisticated: everything was turned into a solemn spectacle, with their order and hierarchies, and where political and religious motives were intertwined. To comprehend how Lucrezia Borgia engaged with classical culture, it is essential to view it as an integral aspect within the broader discourse on how the Duchess of Ferrara crafted her image using classical culture. This discourse encompasses various elements such as the portrayal of Lucrezia Borgia by poets, her dance performances during official events, her public appearances (whether alone, with her husband, or with the entire court of women from the windows of

[11] BdP to Isabella d'Este, 31 May 1509, ASMn, AG, b. 1242, 325*v*.

[12] Lucrezia Borgia to Alfonso d'Este, 31 May 1509, ASMo, AE, C&S, Carteggi fra principi estensi, b. 141, 199*r*. Also in Ghirardo 2020, 381.

the Great Hall)[13], and even instances of refusal to appear, like attending mass under a tent in the Cathedral.[14] Considering these instances collectively, as a performance of endurance, sheds light on Lucrezia Borgia's deliberate practice and intentionality, whether in rebellion against societal norms or in celebration of her ideal court of women. In both cases, the revival of ancient forms became a crucial aspect of her performances, transforming Greek and Roman materials into an ongoing, performative act.

It could be valuable, as suggested by Sarah Bay-Cheng, to consider performance not merely as a distinct occurrence but rather as a mode. In line with the *OED*'s definition, a mode is "a way or manner in which something is done or takes place; a method of proceeding in any activity, business, etc.". Instead of framing a phenomenon solely as performance, Bay-Cheng proposes embracing performance as the lens through which we evaluate phenomena. We can conceptualize performance as the medium through which a sequence of interconnected events is perceived. In essence, performance operates not as an isolated event but as a network of interrelated components, presenting audiences with a constellation of constitutive parts (Bay-Cheng 2012, 35).

Let us revisit the two entries in the account books related to the expenses for the *caro trionfante de la Duchessa* and explore the context to which they belong. In the specific case of Lucrezia Borgia's use of a triumphal chariot, the documentary evidence is elusive, since no explicit documentation has been found describing the utilization of such a chariot by Lucrezia, making it challenging to reconstruct a particular event or establish its actual occurrence. Nevertheless, within the historical and cultural milieu of the time, various events, situations, and locations could have provided a suitable backdrop for the appearance and utilization of a triumphal chariot by the duchess. Two notable occasions present fitting opportunities: the 1507 wedding at the Costabili Palace and the triumph organized for the celebration in 1509 following the victory at Polesella against Venice. These events are intertwined in various ways, with the humanist Celio Calcagnini featuring prominently in both instances, contributing to a shared cultural network and exchange of ideas.

[13] "Doppo mangiare li franzesi hano corso al anello, rotte in terra de le lanze e facto uno pocho de bagordo in piaza denanci ale fenestre de la Sala Grande dove erano dicti Sig.ri cum la Duch.sa e parechie done" (After eating, the Frenchmen rushed to the ring, breaking the lances on the ground and causing a bit of commotion in the square in front of the windows of the Grand Hall where the gentlemen were with the Duchess and several ladies). BdP to Isabella d'Este, 9 March 1512, ASMn, AG, b. 1244, 182*r*-*v*.

[14] See Costola 2020, 79, 84, for Bernardino de' Prosperi's unpublished letters.

4. "De le noce anci triunpho" di Costabili

Bernardino de' Prosperi, in a letter sent from Ferrara to Mantua on 6 February 1507, writes:

> Da nui se fa mascare assai e festini terrazzaneschi per ogni contracta, ma de honorevole anchora non se ne è visto veruna, ni sento parlare che alcuna se ne abij a fare se non de le noce anci triunpho di Costabili, li quali ultra il degno apparato de la casa che fano se mettono ad ordine de farse honore grandissimo.[15]
>
> [Here we organize masquerades and parties for every neighborhood, but of an honorable nature, none has been seen yet, nor have I heard of any planning, except for the triumphant celebration of the Costabili. Besides the worthy preparations made at their home, they also arrange to bestow great honor.]

The following days, Bernardino de' Prosperi keeps the Marchioness of Mantua informed on the events following the wedding. On 15 February, he writes:

> Heri doppo le xxii hore la S.ra Duchessa montoe in carreta cum parechie done e andorno a casa de Costabili dove gli cenoe sua S.ria il S.re e credo tuti questi Cardinali . . . Montando in carreta epsa S.ra Duchessa notai due cose: l'una fo de una digna e richa veste che la tenia indosso . . . L'altra cosa fo de una carreta tuta dorata che ne saria honorata ogni Duchessa.[16]
>
> [Yesterday, after 10 o'clock, the Duchess mounted a carriage with several ladies and went to the Costabili's house where she and the Lord had dinner, and I believe all these Cardinals . . . Observing her as she mounted the carriage, the Duchess caught my attention for two things: one was a dignified and rich garment she was wearing . . . The other thing was a completely golden carriage, an honor befitting any Duchess.]

The carriage described by de' Prosperi in his letter is no ordinary one and it resembles instead the *caro trionfante de la Duchessa* as reported in the aforementioned account books. De' Prosperi vividly recounts the opulent festivities held at both the palace of Antonio Costabili and at the Estense palace: on one hand, there were Cardinal Ippolito and other distinguished guests, primarily cardinals; on the other hand, Lucrezia Borgia and her

[15] BdP to Isabella d'Este, 6 February 1507, ASMn, AG, b. 1241, 403*r*. Published by Catalano 1920, 70.

[16] BdP to Isabella d'Este, 15 February 1507, ASMn, AG, b. 1241, 406*r*. Partially published in Catalano 1920, 69.

court of women, who paraded through the city streets in the carriages and triumphal chariot, and who entertained all significant guests with dances.

The relationship between the Este court and the Costabili family is well documented. In 1502, Antonio Costabili assumed the role of *consigliere secreto* (secret advisor) to the duke, and both Ercole I and his son Alfonso continued to engage him in significant diplomatic endeavors (Wattel 2018, 41). Attributed to the architect Biagio Rossetti, the Costabili Palace stands as one the most ambitious palaces of the Renaissance in Ferrara. It was commissioned by Count Antonio Costabili at the end of the fifteenth century and, as Benedetta Caglioti has demonstrated, its precise design can be considered "as expression of a clear linguistic and lexical intention, called *all'antica*, inspired to the Roman classical architecture" and part of that humanistic culture that "permeated the court at Ferrara" and Antonio Costabili himself (Caglioti 2021, 173). Noteworthy within the same structure is the room commonly referred to as the *Sala del Tesoro*, with its famous painted ceiling. The characters in the scene exchange sweet and persuasive glances, and offer fruits like apples, grapes, and even bouquets of roses to those below, thus suggesting an interactive exchange with the viewers in the room. Moreover, the presence of symbols evoking love may serve as a reminder of past events, such as the "noce anci triunpho" for the wedding of Camillo Costabili and Bianca Martinengo, which took place earlier in the same building in 1507, attended by Lucrezia Borgia and the Duke (Pattanaro 2016, 166). The compact chamber also houses eighteen lunettes adorned with grisaille depictions narrating the tale of Eros and Anteros. These illustrations follow an iconographic program crafted by Celio Calcagnini, arguably the most influential humanist in Ferrara during that time. Arvi Wattel (2018) has convincingly illustrated that the balcony scene is visually and conceptually linked to the lunettes. The myth, as narrated by the fourth-century rhetorician Themistius, tells of Venus consulting the oracle Themis about why her son Eros was not growing. Themis advised Venus that her son needed a brother to oppose him, and indeed, after Anteros was born, the rivalry with his brother caused Eros to grow taller and stronger. While Eros represents the god of love, Anteros punishes those who fail to reciprocate this love. Calcagnini emphasizes that Anteros is not a god in conflict with Eros, an anti-Eros, but rather the deity of mutual love.[17] Therefore, Anteros complements Eros rather than opposing him. Calcagnini's discussion of Anteros concludes with eighteen couplets detailing the scenes for the eighteen lunettes in the cubiculum (441). The extensive decorative project was primarily executed by Garofalo who, according to Pattanaro, showcases here a tendency towards classicism, employing elements such as drawing inspiration from ancient models and adopting a rhythmic approach

[17] *Anteros sive the mutuo Amore*, in Calcagnini 1544, 436-42.

characterized by calm and harmonious balance (1994, 104). Garofalo's adjustment to a pictorial vocabulary derived from the sentimental courtly literary repertoire, evident in the Costabili ceiling, can be seen as the result of the cultural renewal underway at court, influenced by the phenomenon of Pietro Bembo's *Asolani* (105).

Costabili's choice to commission an important fresco for his palace to Garofalo could have been prompted by the lost ceiling canvases that were executed between 1506-1507 and that he most probably saw in the Torre Marchesana, where Lucrezia Borgia's apartment was located. The "Camera in volta dela torre marchesana", the very heart of Lucrezia's accommodation in the castle, was a square room of eight meters with a vaulted ceiling showcasing the eight canvases painted "a guazo" and "instoriate" by Nicola Pisano, Benvenuto Garofalo, Ludovico Mazzolino, Domenico Panetti, Michelotto, and Ettore Bonaccossi.[18] The documents do not describe the subjects of these canvases but, according to Allyson Burgess Williams, "it is possible that the subjects were worked out in cooperation with the poet and humanist Antonio Tebaldeo, who was on Lucrezia's staff at the time" (Burgess Williams 2013, 180). Information on the valuable services directly rendered by Tebaldeo to Lucrezia during the time the "tele instoriate depinte a guazo" were being painted, is found in a document indicating the salary paid to him, "620 ducats per year", a very prestigious annual position.[19] Tebaldeo not only served as the secretary of the Duchess of Ferrara from 1504 to 1508 and was her fervent singer, but he was also bound with a deep friendship with Pietro Bembo, whose *Asolani* opens with "a dedication from Bembo to Lucrezia Borgia, in which Tebaldeo is mentioned with honor" (Petteruti Pellegrino 2010, 190). Antonio Costabili, Pietro Bembo, Tebaldeo, Benvenuto Garofalo, Lucrezia Borgia, Celio Calcagnini: they are some of the figures that were part of a shared cultural network and exchange of ideas. As Alessandra Pattanaro has pointed out, Calcagnini's program for the wall painting on the ceiling in the *Sala del Tesoro* reflected Antonio Costabili's "high regard for 'classical' values of friendship and mutual love" and was based "on the same ideals [that] inspire the 'Compagnia degli Amici', of which the young Pietro Bembo was a member" (1994, 109).

On 17 February 1506, the Duchess of Ferrara entrusted Antonio Tebaldeo with the delicate task of traveling to Mantua, bearing two brief letters – one addressed to Francesco II Gonzaga and the other to his wife Isabella d'Este.

[18] For a detailed reconstruction of Lucrezia Borgia's quarters and the documents for payments to the various painters for the eight canvases, see Ballarin and Menegatti 2002, 123-94, 140-1, 153, and 158-60 in particular. These documents can also be found in Franceschini 1997, 2.2, 645-6.

[19] ASMo, CDE, *Amministrazione dei Principi*, B, Non regnanti, Lucrezia Borgia, 1130, Uscite 1506, 93, December 31. Published by Franceschini 1997, 2.2, 646, doc. 7910.

These letters conveyed the purpose of the visit: Tebaldeo, recommended by Lucrezia Borgia herself, was tasked with delivering 'some matters' on her behalf.[20] One might speculate whether this journey to Mantua also served to glean insights into Isabella's renowned *studiolo*. Allyson Burgess Williams suggests that "in choosing a group of painters for the series, it is possible that Lucrezia was trying to imitate her sister-in-law, who had consciously set up a *paragone* between Mantegna, Perugino, and Costa in her famous *studiolo* in Mantua in the 1490s" (Burgess Williams 2013, 180). However, I propose a different perspective: rather than imitating, Lucrezia Borgia sought to engage in a cultural dialogue, perhaps competing indirectly with Isabella's *studiolo* by reviving the old debate on Love-Anteros – a debate stimulated by the arrival of Mario Equicola who joined Isabella's service in 1508 after a long experience in Italian courts, from Naples to Ferrara.[21] Giovanni Romano has emphasized the role of Mario Equicola in Isabella's *studiolo*, noting that the humanist resumed work on his *Libro de natura de amore*, dedicated to Isabella, immediately after 1508. Equicola's book

> aligns itself with the *Asolani* when it promises, in the opening, to explain 'what and how many are the affections, effects, causes, and movements that naturally occur in our souls through [love]' and diverges when it investigates 'what false and true pleasure and beatitude are with reason and authority of highly esteemed ancient sources'. (Romano 1982, 23)

This dichotomy reflects the broader cultural landscape of the time, with Bembo and Lucrezia representing one facet and Isabella and Equicola embodying another. Laura Ricci's research underscores the tension between Bembo and Equicola, evident in contemporary documents and reflected in their respective works dedicated to Lucrezia and Isabella (2007, 247). Bembo's *Asolani* forms the foundation of both Antonio Costabili's frescoes for his *Sala del Tesoro* and possibly Lucrezia Borgia's 'tele instoriate'. Equicola's *Libro de natura de amore* underpins Isabella's *studiolo*. Ricci's examination highlights how these texts shaped the symbolic language of early 16th-century painting, with Equicola's work portraying a dichotomous view of love, contrasting with Bembo's more harmonious interpretation (253).

In this period, at the Este court, the festivities surrounding the wedding held at the Costabili palace signified not merely a matrimonial triumph but, above all, the triumph of a distinct conceptualization of love, for which

[20] The two letters have been published by Ghirardo 2020, 273-4 (letters 242 and 243). For these letters and their purpose, see Faggioli Saletti 2010, 185.

[21] Stephen Campbell (2004) has connected the contemporary humanist discussions on Anteros to Isabella d'Este's *studiolo*. See in particular 69-74 and 214-16. See more recently Wattel 2018, 43.

Lucrezia Borgia emerged as a compelling spokesperson. Within her circle of poets and artists, Lucrezia stood unequivocally triumphant, finding poetic resonance in the verses of Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, who likened her to Venus. One can envision her grandeur, possibly even riding on a triumphal chariot as she paraded through the streets of Ferrara.

5. The Triumph over the River Po

During this period, the city of Ferrara witnessed an unparalleled number of triumphs. Initially characterized by modest displays of jubilation such as fireworks, firecrackers, and the ringing of bells from the Old Castle, these celebrations evolved into grander and more intricately orchestrated events. Despite minor variations, they gradually adopted customary elements, suggesting a refinement in their organization. It could be argued that through these triumphs, Lucrezia Borgia was not only commemorating but also competing with the elaborate spectacles orchestrated by her father's successor to the Holy See, Julius II, engaged during the same years in the organization of entries and triumphs meant foster "the *vulgaris opinio* that a glorious era was starting anew" (Cruciani 1983, 306).

On 22 December 1509, Ferrara defeated Venice in the Battle of Polesella and the victory was so resounding that it prompted the organization of an entirely unprecedented spectacle for the Este city: a triumph on the water along the river Po.[22] On 27 December, Alfonso and Ippolito, along with the Este troops, re-entered the city by sailing along the Ferrarese branch of the Po on galleys seized from Venice and adorned with the spoils of the battle. Duke Alfonso closed the procession on the galley Marcella, adorned with the most splendid trophies (tapestries, silverware, vestments), accompanied by the courtiers and a hundred men-at-arms. The ballad *Gli orrendi e magnanimi fatti del duca Alfonso* (The dreadful and magnanimous deeds of Duke Alfonso) by street singer Bighignol compares this triumph to the one the Romans did for Hannibal: "Il duca Alfonso nobile e reale / Intrò in Ferara con trionfo grande, / Che mai Romani fe' per Anibale" (The Duke Alfonso, noble and royal, / Entered Ferrara with a great triumph, / Which the Romans never did for Hannibal).[23] According to Giovanni Maria Zerbinati,

> quando furno apresso a Ferrara montorno sopra una di esse e se ne venero sino alla porta di San Pollo ove era la duchessa in carretta da corte con tutte le gentildonne ben ornate in segno d'allegrezza e tutto il populo e con gran

[22] For an analysis of the images celebrating this battle, see Farinella 2014, 162-80.

[23] In Beer and Ivaldi 1989, 2.348.

> trionfi . . . li gentilhomini e condutieri . . . se inviorno dentro della terra per la strada di San Pollo.[24]

> [When they arrived near Ferrara, they mounted one of them and came forward until reaching the gate of San Polo, where the duchess was in a court carriage with all the noblewomen well adorned in a sign of joy, and the entire populace with great triumphs . . . the gentlemen and leaders . . . then went into the town along the San Paolo road.]

Thus, upon arriving at the Porta of San Paolo, the Duchess Lucrezia Borgia, in *carretta de corte* and accompanied by all the noble women of the city, welcomed her husband and brother-in-law as true ancient triumphators. Bernadino de' Prosperi says that the *carrete de done* were twenty in number and describes the procession leading Alfonso, Ippolito, and Lucrezia to the *catafalcho* built in front of the doors of the Cathedral.[25]

Both Zerbinati and Calcagnini add two very important details regarding the role played by Lucrezia: according to Zerbinati, Lucrezia performed a central role, since she "stete sempre . . . in piazza con le gentildone sempre in carretta da corte" (stayed always in the square with the noblewomen, always in a court carriage), overseeing the various rituals. Celio Calcagnini, in his description of the triumph, writes that "nobiliores etiam matronae duce Lucretia Borgia principe foemina in pilentis occurrerant" (1554, 490; even noble matrons, led by Lucretia Borgia, a female prince, had come in richly adorned carriages). "In pilentis" seems to be a reference to Book 8 of Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> Hic exsultantis Salios nudosque Lupercos
> Lanigerosque apices at lapsa ancilia caelo
> Extuderat, castae ducebant sacra per urbem
> Pilentis matres in mollibus.
> (1910, 663-6)

> [There, graven cunningly, the Salian choir / Went leaping, and in Lupercalian feast / The naked striplings ran; while others, crowned with peaked cap, bore shields that fell from heaven; / And, bearing into Rome their emblems old, / Chaste priestesses on soft-strewn litters passed.]

In Agylla, Aeneas forges an alliance with the Etruscans led by Tarchon. During this encounter, Venus bestows upon her son a set of arms and armor crafted by Vulcan. The centerpiece of this collection is an impressive shield adorned with scenes from Roman history – a history yet unknown to Aeneas

[24] Giovanni Maria Zerbinati, *Croniche di Ferrara*, 27 December 1509, BCA, ms. cl. I, 337, cc. 41. In Muzzarelli 1989, 86-7.

[25] BdP to Isabella d'Este, 28 December 1509, ASMn, AG, b. 1242, f. xv.2, 398*r-v*.

as it unfolds in the future. On the shield's upper part, in the center, stands the Capitol, flanked on one side by scenes of Gauls launching an attack, while on the other, it portrays the solemn religious rites of the city saved. R. D. Williams elucidates the significance of the matrons in their carriages depicted on the shield, suggesting a connection to historical events: during the Gallic crisis, these noble women gave up their gold to the state, earning the privilege of riding in carriages as a symbol of gratitude and honor (Williams 1973, 269-70).[26] In a letter to Isabella dated 17 December 1509, Bernardino de' Prosperi writes that:

> Questa sira trovandomi in Guardaroba fo portato a D. Hieronimo Ziliolo il sfilzo de perle grosse già de sua Matre e parechi belli peci de zoglie che teneva la S.ra Duch.sa quale tute se mandano ad impegnare ultra molte altre che se ge sono mandate questi dì.[27]
>
> [This evening, while in the wardrobe, it was brought to Don Hieronimo Ziliolo the string of large pearls formerly owned by your Mother, and several beautiful pieces of jewelry that belonged to the Duchess. All of these are being sent to be pawned, along with many others that have been sent in these days.]

As Diane Ghirardo has discovered, there are also notarial documents to support de' Prosperi's statement that Lucrezia decided to pawn her jewels to raise money to finance the 1509-1513 wars with Pope Julius II and Venice.[28] It is clear that, in this passage, Celio Calcagnini wanted to celebrate Lucrezia and her court of women by comparing them to the ancient matrons who gave up their gold to save Rome during the war with the Gauls. The reference to a short passage of Virgil's *Aeneid* might seem to be stretch, if it were not that during the same years (1508-1509), as Vincenzo Farinella has convincingly demonstrated, Book Eight of Virgil's poem constituted "the most important classical literary source for the iconography of Antonio Lombardo's relief *La fucina di Vulcano* and for the study of Alfonso's 'studio dei marmi'" (Farinella 2014, 137). This relief, in fact, seems to cast Alfonso as a new Vulcan, here portrayed as the divine craftsman of weapons for heroes and thus ready to offer an effective *exemplum virtutis* to the new Duke of Ferrara (159).

These interwoven references are too deliberate to dismiss as mere coincidences: in his *Commentarius in Venetae classis expugnationem*,

[26] This detail of story of the Gauls' attack on Rome can also be found in Livy 5.25.9 and Diodorus of Sicily 14.116.9.

[27] BdP to Isabella d'Este, 17 December 1509, ASMn, AG, b. 1242, 389*r*.

[28] Archivio di Stato Ferrara, Archivio Notarile Antico, notary matricula 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, pacco 26 (1510–1511), 27 November 1510, "Mandatum Romano Tombesi". In Ghirardo 2008, 54.

Calcagnini, drawing inspiration from the verse in Book Eight of the *Aeneid*, could have, as mentioned earlier, celebrated Lucrezia Borgia and her court of women who, reminiscent of the matrons of antiquity, not only saved Rome but were also granted the privilege of parading through the city in chariots. However, considering the favorable reception this book enjoyed at court during this period, and the celebratory context created by the comparison between Duke Alfonso and the god Vulcan, one might ponder if the reference to Virgil served as a dual celebration in honor of Lucrezia Borgia. This conjecture gains traction, particularly given that in the same book, Venus makes a sudden appearance to Aeneas, presenting him with arms crafted by her husband, Vulcan. The parallel between Lucrezia and the goddess Venus – the mother of Aeneas, protector of the Trojan people and, thus, of the Este Dynasty – had become a literary *topos* in Ferrara,[29] with a particular focus on Venus and Lucrezia's beauty. In Tito Vespasiano Strozzi's epigram *De eadem tropaeis aureis ornata*, for example, Lucrezia, having captured Cupid, is portrayed as sitting "worthy of veneration, on the triumphant throne".[30]

6. Conclusion

The existence of a triumphal chariot commissioned for Lucrezia finds confirmation in two account books, yet the absence of direct references in contemporary chronicles, diaries, and letters rekindles the debate on whether and how performance disappears or remains, on how to investigate something that, in Peggy Phelan's words, "becomes itself through disappearance" (1993, 146). Does life endure after performance? Can performance persist even in the absence of explicit documentation? I posit that it does. While plans, descriptions, expenses, poems, and paintings can indeed serve as tangible remains of live performances, they should not be viewed solely as traces of the past, relegated to what has been left behind. Instead, it is crucial to recognize that documents are inherently intertwined with any performance from its inception. As Lara Shalson aptly observes, "document and performance endure together in an ongoing relationship," a relationship

[29] The comparison between Lucrezia and Venus can be found in Tito Vespasiano Strozzi (Zarri 2006, 34-5; Cazzola 2010, 83-4, 90, 104), Antonio Tebaldeo and Nicolò Maria Paniciato (Negri 2010, 71), Bernardo Accolti (Tissoni Benvenuti 2006, 12-13), and Marcello Filosseno (Zanardi Prosperi 2010, 169). Notably, Niccolò da Correggio and Antonio Tebaldeo extended this analogy to encompass both Lucrezia-Venus and Alfonso-Mars, a fitting parallel given the Duke of Ferrara's engagement in artillery and cannon construction during those years (Fenzi 2006, 57).

[30] *Strozii poetae pater et filius, Venetiis, in aedibus Aldi et Andreae Asulani soceri,* MDXIII. BCA, Ferrara, coll. E. 77.3. Cited in Cazzola 2010, 90.

in which performance does not simply "depend upon documentation for its longevity, but documents also depend upon performance to endure" (2018, 182). This interdependence challenges us to appreciate the nuanced nature of the historical traces left by performances and prompts a reevaluation of the significance assigned to their documented and undocumented aspects. I suggest that performance can be traced and understood through the documents it generates and interacts with, even in the absence of direct witnesses. By examining the material related to Lucrezia's chariot, I have shown how they reveal aspects of her political, religious, and artistic agency, as well as the cultural and historical context of her time. This approach opens new possibilities for studying performance in the past and challenges us to reconsider the role of documents in the creation and preservation of meaning.

Abbreviations

AE	Archivio Estense
AG	Archivio Gonzaga
ASMn	Archivio di Stato di Mantova
ASMo	Archivio di Stato di Modena
BCA	Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea
BdP	Bernardino de' Prosperi
CDE	Camera Ducale Estense
C&S	Casa e Stato
LCD	Libri Camerali Diversi
Mem.	Memoriale
M&F	Munizioni e Fabbriche

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