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Memory and Performance.
Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

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

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Adding and Subtracting: Plautine *Volgarizzamenti* at the Este Court and the Case of Girolamo Berardo

Abstract

Beginning with an overview of the intense translation activity of Plautine texts at the court of Ercole d'Este and the famous lettera from Battista Guarino to Ercole himself conveying advice for a good vernacular translation: "adiungere et minuire et ridurre in forma de lo usitato parlare quelle antiche cose" ("Adding and subtracting and reducing those ancient words to the language in current use today"), this intervention will attempt to exemplify such a practice through the two translations (*Mustellaria* and *Cassina*) attributed by sixteenth-century printings to the obscure Girolamo Berardo from Ferrara, connecting them to the then declining period of the great theatrical festivals in Ferrara.

Keywords: Ferrara; Plautus; *volgarizzamenti*; Girolamo Berardo

The events related to the investigation and historicisation of a crucial period for the birth of Italian theatre, which unfolded under the aegis of the House of Este in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, have experienced a peculiar fate. Misunderstood or poorly understood for over half a century after the study by Alessandro D'Ancona in the late nineteenth century (1891) due to the scarcity of texts and the precariousness of documentary sources, these events were later explored with inexhaustible generosity, mainly in the last two decades of the past century, by theatre historians. They framed the contemporary descriptions of festive and scenographic apparatuses within broad historical perspectives that are useful for redefining the evolutionary path of theatrical spaces (the study by Cruciani-Falletti-Ruffini in 1994 was fundamental in this regard). A similar process, albeit performed less extensively, has been attempted, naturally in the scope of their own discipline, by historians of literature, who have placed texts and literary events within the vast archipelago of the courts in the Po valley region – we are referring in particular to the significant work of Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (1983 and 2006), reintroduced in very recent years by Matteo Bosisio (2019). Nor should the endeavours of some excellent

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Latinists – Ferruccio Bertini first (1997) and later Giovanni Guastella (2013 and 2018) – be forgotten as they worked to verify the vitality of Plautine theatre during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

After so many precise and well-articulated analyses, it might seem that little space remains for further verifications or panoramic descriptions. And yet, in the scholarship of the period there still thrives a narrative that somewhat schematically dates the beginning of Italian Renaissance theatre from the first performance of Ludovico Ariosto's *Cassaria,* as if it were the product of a random and miraculous birth instead of the fruit of an author who made use, using his well-known ability, of the great explosion of interest in and writing, translating, and staging theatrical texts that preceded him, a movement of which he himself was certainly a part. The persistence of this narrative perhaps warrants a reconsideration of the extraordinary theatrical vitality of the Este court, even if only by trying to reconfigure backgrounds and close-ups according to the needs of a necessarily abbreviated discourse, yet one that is capable, where possible, of detecting its main features with renewed energy.

To return to the origins of theatre at the Ferrarese court, or more generally to the origins of Italian comedy, essentially means revisiting the history of Plautine *volgarizzamenti* (i.e., "translations into the Italian vernacular")[1] at that court; this history was forced to face the very severe judgment of Ireneo Sanesi at the beginning of the last century, who disapproved of the length of the texts and their lack of comedic vigour, caused by the transposition of dialogues from the original Latin of trochaic septenaries or iambic senarii into the incongruous measure of the vernacular tercet, which always exceeded the speed of Plautus' lines.

This, coupled with the anonymity of most of the translations, has discouraged scholarly interest in the texts. While it is difficult (although exceptions must be made) not to agree with Sanesi's judgment, we must refer to these texts and their contemporary reception in an attempt to understand how they formed the foundation of a newly, and fully secular, comic theatre emancipated from moralistic restrictions, that is to say the implementation, in the theatrical domain, of the most genuine humanistic program. The grand festive episode of the wedding of Alfonso d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia is the culmination of this program, the most visible moment of a lively commitment to theatre and its use as a tool of political and social promotion, which was animated by a continuous dialogue between members of the Este family and the surrounding intellectual environment, of which the epistolary exchanges among the members of the Este family

[1] On the meanings and applications of the term for Italian Renaissance theatre, see Di Martino 2023, 151-8.

members and between them and the intellectuals working on the pieces is privileged evidence.

This wedding was a culminating, nearly conclusive, moment if, following the proposal of Clelia Falletti (1994, 144), we agree that this great surge of innovation lasted just over two decades, from the end of the 1470s until around 1503, thus spanning almost completely the years of Ercole I's reign (he was Duke from 1471 until his death in 1505). After this period, so to speak, the die was cast, and Ferrarese (even more, Po-region) drama was able to walk on its own two legs with complete autonomy, reaching new levels of comic and structural excellence with Ariosto's production.

Falletti identifies the inaugural event of this fervent period with the performance of the *volgarizzamento* of *Menaechmi*, which took place in January 1486 in the courtyard of the ducal palace, whereas the concluding moment would be the four Plautine and Terentian performances during the carnival of 1503 (*Aulularia*, *Mostellaria*, *Eunuch*, and again *Menaechmi*: on the chronology, Coppo 1968). Thereafter, the history of Este comedy would be characterised less by the use of translations and more by original texts; over time, *volgarizzamento* would be perceived as something obsolete, rudimentary examples of a cumbersome and convoluted dramaturgy.

Some letters from Bernardino Prosperi to Isabella d'Este provide insight into how much the theatrical landscape in Ferrara had changed in just a few years. These letters, quite well-known, include one from March 8, 1508, in which Prosperi reports on a series of performances for that year's carnival. The plays were all original works, including one by Antonio dal Organo, one by Tebaldeo, one by an unspecified "Grecho" ("Greek") and, most notably, Ariosto's *Cassaria*. Prosperi describes the *Cassaria* as having "tanta elegantia e . . . tanto piacere quanto alcun'altra che mai ne vedesse fare, e da ogni canto fu multo commendata" ("such elegance and. . . allure as any that I have seen put on, and from every side it was highly praised"; qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 414-15). The positive judgment on Ariosto's 'modern' productions was repeated during the first performance of *Suppositi* on February 8, 1509; Prosperi praises it as a "comedia in vero per moderna tuta deletevole e piena de moralità e parole e gesti de renderne assai cum triplice falacie o sia sottopositione" ("a comedy truly all delightfully modern and full of morality, words, and gestures, rendering it very enjoyable with three levels of deceit, or rather subterfuge"; ibid.).

However, the most interesting testimony concerning how, as the century progressed, new texts had supplanted classical ones in the audience's taste comes from a letter by Giovanni Manetti to Niccolò Machiavelli. Manetti reports on a Venetian performance of *Mandragola*, noting that, despite the presence of the renowned comedian Cherea, the *Menaechmi* was considered "something dead" as compared to Machiavelli's work:

> un'altra compagnia di gentilhomeni che ad concorrentia della vostra in quella sera medesima etiam con spesa grande ferno recitar li *Menecmi* di Plauto vulgari, la qual per comedia antica è bella e fu recitata da asai boni recitanti, niente di meno fu tenuta una cosa morta rispetto alla vostra.
>
> [another company of gentlemen, in competition with yours on the same evening and at great expense, had the *Menaechmi* by Plautus performed in the vernacular, which, as an ancient comedy, is beautiful and was acted by good actors, yet it was considered a dead matter compared to yours. (Machiavelli 1961, 452)]

However, being unable, because of its singularity, to avoid recalling a notable letter from a humanist author Battista Guarino to Ercole d'Este in February 1479, we can perhaps rearrange the chronology by taking that date as the starting point for a sometimes tumultuous struggle over ancient texts, which was aimed at converting them into contemporary language. This effort was carried out according to the needs of the Este family that evidently relied on those *volgarizzamenti* to produce self-promoting theatrical events that were suitable for the times, and to simultaneously ensure that its members would experience the pleasure of performances that were both lively and yet scrupulously faithful to the original. We are not dealing with a lord who is content to display an apparatus of spectacle on the occasion of important events, but with a personality who consciously intervenes in the translational operation in order to recover, for the sake of the community, texts that possess the authority typical of the classics; as mentioned, a fully humanistic operation.

In the letter (qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 405-6), Guarino responds to Ercole, who presumably accused him of deviating "da la sententia di Plauto" ("from the word of Plautus") by inserting "molte cose che non erano in Plauto" ("many things that were not in Plautus"). But Guarino replies, "non credo essere per niente lontanato dal sentimento di Plauto né anchora da li vocabuli" ("I do not believe that I am at all far from Plautus's sentiment nor even from his words"), an expression whose relevance, focused on the sentiment of the original, contributes to forming a sort of phenomenology of translation that is still valid today. Guarino continues: "se ho posto moschio et zibetti, el gli è però in lo testo venditori de odori da ongerse per sapere da buon" ("if I have referred to musk and civet, it is because the text mentions sellers of scents to be applied so that we can smell good"); the goal is not to betray the original text but to try to render it in more accessible words that are immediately locatable in the horizon of present-day meanings: "parvemi molto melgiore translatione nominare li diti odori et ridure la cosa ad la moderna, che volendo esprimere de parolla in parolla fare una translatione obscura et puocho saporita" ("It seemed a much better translation to me to name the mentioned scents and transform the thing in a modern manner,

rather than, by expressing the text word for word, creating an obscure and less flavourful translation").

This matter is not merely technical; rather, it involves the relationship between the Renaissance scholar and the ancient one. The discussion between the courtly scholar and his lord involves an extremely important *tête-à-tête* that in some way determines the immediate future of Italian theatre. It results from the exceptional tension between an almost philological desire, on the one hand, not to deviate from the letter of the original, and the necessity, on the other, of making that letter alive and present, especially within the comedic code, which must rely on the immediacy of the theatrical dialogue.

The conclusion of Guarino's letter, in which he states his pledge of obedience, seems to anticipate the victory of the imperative to strict fidelity demanded by Ercole: "tuttavia non mi partirò dal dire di Plauto siccome anche per lo passato credo haver fatto et cossì trovarà la V. Ex. Se farà expojnere li vucabuli da chi intende" ("nevertheless, I will not depart from Plautus's words as I believe I have done in the past, and so Your Excellency will have the words explained by someone who understands").

In a slightly later letter accompanying the translation of *Curculio*, Guarino reiterated his effort to "andare dietro ad le parole dil testo" ("follow the words of the text"), well aware that this risked compromising the enjoyability of a possible theatrical performance, to the point of feeling the need to attribute the responsibility for this reduced enjoyability to Plautus: "se ad la V.Ex. parerà che la non sia così piacevole come lei desiderarebbe, sarà da imputare ad lo auctore e non ad mi" ("if Your Excellency finds that it is not as pleasant as you would like, it will have to be attributed to the author and not to me"; Luzio-Renier, 1888, 178). And again, further down in the letter, Guarino reiterates the difficulty in sticking strictly to the text: "Io mi forcio andare dietro ad le parolle dil testo, benché in certi luogi mi pare melgio pilgiare lo tenore ed formargli un buono soprano" ("I force myself to follow the words of the text, although in certain places, it seems better to me to keep the tenore and give it a good soprano"). It has been argued that this peculiar expression may be suggestive of the fact that Renaissance acting shared some characteristics with singing, implying that Guarino's phrase goes beyond metaphor and is effectively an expressive description (Guastella 2013, 41).

The "de parolla in parolla" ("word for word") option (to use Guarino's term) was, however, disregarded in the practical work of the scriptorium: Guarino's vernacular version of *Aulularia* has not reached us, but all of the Plautine versions that appear to come from the Ferrarese environment (if one wants to remain cautious about the provenience, we can speak of "early" Plautine versions: Guastella 2018, 37-8) follow the mode of intervention proposed by Guarino in the letters to Ercole, as highlighted by Guastella:

"bisogna alcune fiate adiungere et minuire et ridure in forma de lo usitato parlare quelle cose antiche" ("sometimes it is necessary to add, subtract, and adapt those ancient things to the usual way of speaking"). In modern terms (to be thoroughly Guarinian): to add, subtract, and transpose into the commonly used language. This is indeed what we see happening in the translations from those years, whether handwritten or printed, that have been passed on to us.

All *volgarizzamenti* present acts of mediation that attempt to cut what is deemed unnecessary (scenes, fragments of scenes, or even characters within a scene) and to replace with entirely new parts what appears obscure or excessively summarised in the original; and even more, to use, as Guarino himself claims to do, modern terms for Latin words lacking a vernacular equivalent – all in an attempt to convey a broader understanding to the modern spectator.

However, the meter that had meanwhile been imposed for theatrical *volgarizzamenti*, and for original works as well, was the tercet, which contradicts Guarino's claimed need for congeniality because the structure of the tercet forces the original dialogue into improper measures. This often results in rapid exchanges of lines, crafted with extreme economy of words from the original and diluted into an excessive number of lines within the typical rhythm of chained rhyme. Only the translation of *Penolo* is in prose, while that of *Stico* has an unprecedented and almost unique metrical structure (following the pattern of the frottola, with stanzas of six lines). Moreover, *Stico* testifies, according to its modern editor, to "the attempt to free itself from a strict dependence on the Latin model, placing itself now halfway towards innovation" since "the few scenes that are properly translated are shifted and rearranged with extreme ease" (Rosetto 1996, 56).

Not surprisingly, Isabella d'Este, who in her correspondence reveals herself to be a well-informed reader and theatregoer, when writing in 1498 to Francesco Castello (an official of the Este court) asking to receive scripts for reading, she explicitly states that she prefers prose *volgarizzamenti* because, although Plautus" comedies "sono rapresentate e stampite in rima . . . a noi più delecta la prosa da legere" ("are performed and printed in rhyme . . . we find prose more delightful to read"; Falletti 1994, 134).

Isabella makes a clear mention of the activity of reading. However, the fact that texts were mainly used for theatrical practice, which at the time was already well-established in the Este capital thanks to the Duke's efforts (after all, Isabella herself alludes to the practice of performance), is attested to by a letter from Ercole to Francesco Gonzaga in which the Duke apologises to his counterpart from Mantova for having to send him prose translations, rather than the verse, of some requested comedies because these had been lost after being performed (D'Ancona 1891, 2.368-9; Stefani 1979, 71):

> Quando Nui facessimo recitare dicte Comedie, il fu dato la parte sua a cadauno di quelli, che li avevano a intervenire, acciocch"imparassero li versi a mente, et depoi che furono recitate, Nui non avessimo cura di farle ridurre altramente insieme, né tenerne copia alcuna, et il volergele ridurre al presente serìa quasi impossibile per ritrovarsi di quelle persone, ch'intervennero in dicte Comedie, in Franza, parte a Napoli et alcuni a Modena et a Reggio, che sono uno Zaccagnino et m. Scarlattino.
>
> [When we had said Comedies performed, each person who was to participate was given his part so that he could learn the verses by heart, and after they were performed, we did not take care to have them put together in any other way, nor keep any copy of them. Wanting to have them redone now would be almost impossible to accomplish due to the difficulty of finding those people who participated in those Comedies; some are in France, some in Naples, and some in Modena and Reggio, including one Zaccagnino and Mr Scarlattino.]

The use of "Nui" ("we") tells us about the lofty will guiding from the top down an entire ecosystem of texts and performances, which were ultimately a crucial node in the history of theatre, not only in Italy. The explanation of the loss of these texts reveals a fully modern system of understanding theatrical practice: these texts are actual scripts, ephemeral material that only exists for the purpose of enabling the performance, and committed to memory by the actors, each entrusted with his own part, and then dispersed as the actors themselves disperse.

And so we have this emphasis, within the vast panorama of contemporary letters and documents attesting to the flourishing theatrical culture at the Este court, not only on dramaturgy but also and especially on the technical and scenographic aspects of the various productions, precisely because the text is performance.

The diaries and chronicles of Ferrarese officials delve into descriptions of the stage space and sets (that of the *Menaechmi* is well known, featuring a life-size section of a ship on stage: Falletti 1994, 35; Guastella 2013, 36; Uberti 1995, 44-5). Ugo Caleffini, Niccolò Cagnolo and Bernardino Zambotti go into detail about the interludes between the acts of various performances, which must have had an enormous visual impact. Courtiers who served as privileged intermediaries between the Este court and Isabella d'Este, such as Giovanni Pencaro, and later, Bernardino Prosperi, also describe these aspects in their letters to the marchesa. In one letter, Pencaro laments the loss of previous missives that contained very detailed descriptions of performances, particularly one dedicated to *Asinaria* (Luzio and Renier 1988, 180): "Di questa lettera più che dell"altre mi duole che persa sia, perché io la scripsi dopo le sei hore di nocte cum grandissimo somno d"ochij" ("I regret the loss of this letter more than the others because I wrote it six hours after sunset,

when my eyes were very tired"). This clearly indicates that Isabella was eager to know the details of the performances and that her correspondents tried to provide reports that were as detailed as possible (hence the need to write them down promptly).

From all of these descriptions, we learn that performances lasted approximately four hours, that they took place in the evening or in the afternoon after lunch, and that the audience was quite numerous; according to a letter from Isabella d'Este to her husband Francesco Gonzaga on 29 January 1502, the grandstand that would accommodate the audience at the Ducal Palace during the Plautine performances for the marriage of her brother Alfonso to Lucrezia, could hold up to 5,000 people (qtd in Davico Bonino 1977, 412).

The audience's participation is not just (or rather, not simply) a gathering of spectators to view a theatrical performance but is an act of participation in a foundational moment of city life, in which the community comes together; in celebrating the ruling dynasty, it celebrates itself through a social ritual directed from above but not for this reason any less cohesive and unifying.

Hence, it is evident that the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia represents the pinnacle of this theatricalised sociality. Less expected is the fact that, just over a year later, comedies are again being performed at the Ducal Palace for another festive event (the carnival of 1503), which, however, marks the end of that extraordinary period of Plautine translations and performances carried out under the auspices of Ercole; in short, both the apotheosis and the conclusion occurred within little more than twelve months. Curiously, this period concludes with the text that had inaugurated it, namely *Menaechmi*.

Perhaps it is not coincidental that the official Zambotti does not dwell too much on the performances (or at least not as extensively as he had for other similar festive events). However, apart from the essential vivacity of the report, it is interesting to note a difference in its content as compared to, for example, the theatrical reports of almost twenty years earlier, when Ercole had recently come to power and initiated a rich season of works derived from Plautus. Apart from a quick judgment on *Menaechmi*, the only comedy mentioned by name, Zambotti focuses not so much on the content of the texts or their success, but rather on the arrangement of the hall and the apparatus accompanying the performances.

On 19 February, a Sunday (presumably during the carnival season), a comedy was performed in the Great Hall of the Ducal Palace in the presence of Ercole and "Lucrecia Borgia soa nora" ("Lucrezia Borgia, his daughter-in-law"). Behind them, Zambotti notes, was a grandstand with multiple tiers set up where "zintildone e matrone belissime" ("gentlewomen and most beautiful matrons") as well as "zintilhomini e cittadini" ("gentlemen and citizens") sat. The stage, set up on the opposite side, represents a city

with painted and wooden houses, that the actors could enter and from which they could emerge. The comedy is interspersed with "canti e melodie e moresche" ("songs, melodies, and Moorish dances"). On 21 February, a Tuesday, another comedy is performed in the Great Hall "con grandissimi piaceri e jochi" ("with greatest pleasure and games"); it is likely that these generic "jochi" ("games") refer, because of the attention given them by Zambotti, more to the festive quality of the interludes than to the lexical equivocations capable of eliciting laughter, as Ariosto will mention in the prologue to the *Cassaria*. Then, on 23 February, another comedy is presented "con intromissione sempre a li acti de diverse feste e moresche e canti e soni" ("with an intermission including various festivities, Moorish dances and songs and sounds"). Finally, on Monday 27, "una comedia de due gemelli" ("a comedy of two twins") is performed, naturally the *Menaechmi*, the only one, as mentioned earlier, for which Zambotti provides the title; in this case, the chronicler goes so far as to say that it was "molto bella e piacevole" ("very beautiful and pleasant"), noting the presence of "moresche e cantari" ("Moorish dances and songs") as well (1937, 346).

It is noteworthy that on 25 January 1486 (eighteen years earlier), Zambotti provided a much more detailed account of the so-called foundational performance of the Ferrarese Plautine tradition: once again, coincidentally, *Menaechmi*, which both opens and closes that extraordinary season, with a judgment from the chronicler that was overall similar, since in the report from 1486 the comedy was also described as "beletissima e piacevole" ("most beautiful and pleasant"; 171).

On that occasion, the performance took place outdoors, in the courtyard of the Ducal Palace, just like eighteen years later, with scenes made of wood representing the city of the action, and a grandstand hosting the audience – Zambotti mentions, though the number appears excessively high, about "dexemila" ("ten thousand") people. However, the chronicle, before enthusiastically recounting the display of fireworks that followed the performance, takes the time to provide details about the plot and the characters of the comedy, giving attention to the text's content, and not just the festive spectacle, which we will not find in the 1503 chronicle (172):

> . . . dove vene [i.e.: nella scena di legno] dui de una similitudine vestiti, ma uno ne vene in una galea con vela de longinque parte, e dispotono asay qual de loro hera il vero Menechino, intervenendoge il marito e molgie, balie, meretrice e schiave con molte deceptione.
>
> [. . . where two similarly dressed individuals come onto the stage, but one of them arrives in a galley with a sail from a distant part, and they debate much which of them was the true Menaechinus, with the husband and wife intervening, nurses, a courtesan, and slaves with many deceptions.]

Skipping over other chronicles reporting various festive events of that distant year – including the enthusiastic Caleffini: "Il duca de Ferrara in questo tempo se ne andava in mascara ogno zorno per Ferrara et davasi piacere" ("The Duke of Ferrara during this time used to walk masked around Ferrara every day and enjoyed himself"; Coppo 1968, 44) – a diachronic reading of Zambotti's account of such similar events cannot fail to recognise a much more concise approach to describing the theatrical events of 1503 as compared to those of 1486, together with a sort of disinterest in the titles and contents of the comedies. In other words, even if we do not want to claim that theatre had become a common feature of city life, it certainly no longer evoked the interest it did in its early days, an interest which is, for the chronicler, focused only on interludes and spectacular apparatus, not on the texts.

On the other hand, Isabella d'Este, who, as mentioned, was the most discerning of Ferrarese spectators and the most enthusiastic advocate of the practice of theatrical *volgarizzamento*, had already expressed some disappointment with the Plautine performances taking place during the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia Borgia, surely the most significant festive event of Ercole's duchy, which occurred just a year earlier, amid "sbadacchi" ("glares") and "querelle" ("quarrels") from the audience and other less flattering responses (D'Ancona 1891, 2.385).

It was palpable that new needs were emerging as Ercole's death became imminent in 1505; in 1508, three years later, Ariosto's *Cassaria* achieved great success, marking a foundational moment for modern theatre. Although festive and theatrical performances continued under Alfonso, the focus shifted away from Plautus in favour of original works, primarily pastoral and mythological in nature (Falletti 1994, 179), until eventually, as an epitaph of the Latin author's fortune, Giovanni Manetti wrote the letter referred to above and addressed Niccolò Machiavelli's friend.

This represents a sensibility that is refining and moving towards livelier outcomes or, in other words, less essentially frozen in literary postures, forgetting the necessary dynamism of the stage. How that sensitivity begins to resonate with those of us who in our laziness are annoyed by those ancient translations into tercets, can well be seen by opening the *Cassina* and *Mustellaria*, translated by "Girolamo Berardi (or Berardo) Ferrarese" (the printed tradition reports two possible textual variants of the name). This experiment can show points of interest in relation to everything said so far: the performances of the two comedies are situated in the golden age of Plautine theatre at the Ferrara court and in a phase when the debate over the quality of texts was no longer so vibrant (*Cassina* was performed in 1502 and *Mustellaria* in 1503, so during the last two major festive moments of Ercole's duchy); they are among the very few *volgarizzamenti* of which

we have the name of the translator-renovator; and lastly, despite their late origin, they offer some valuable insight into the practice of "addition" and "diminution" characteristic of Ferrarese restructuring: it is a practice that we can see at work in these two texts by the same translator (a significant aspect in a landscape of almost completely anonymous texts available).

The figure of Girolamo Berardo remains rather obscure as very little information and very few documents can be attributed to him. Therefore, the concise profile dedicated to him by Giancarlo Mazzacurati in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (1966) can still prove useful, although there is no mention of a letter, cited by D'Ancona, that was sent by Berardo to Duke Ercole in 1503 about the primacy of sacred representations in Ferrara as compared to those in Florence (D'Ancona 1891, 1.301; Bonazzi 2019, 227). It is mentioned that Berardi sends Ercole a volume of sacred Florentine plays "non perché quella impari da' Fiorentini de ordinare et fare Representatione, ma più presto a ciò che Quella veda quanta differentia è da le cose di V.S. a le loro, li quali tra le cose devote mischiano buffonarie, come in quelle vederà Vostra Excellentia" ("not so that he may learn from the Florentines how to arrange and perform plays, but rather so that Your Excellency can see how different their things are from yours, as they mix buffooneries among devout matters, as Your Excellency will see in them"). Gianmaria Mazzucchelli (1760, 914) and Apostolo Zeno (1753, 402n2) also mention Berardo. According to Luigina Stefani (1979, 74n16), it is "more reliable that Berardo's translations should be placed in the same years when the translation activity by Guarino, Cosmico, and Collenuccio in Ferrara, and by Ceresara and students of the Studio in Mantua, took place extensively and systematically, at the turn of the century, commissioned by Ercole and not by Alfonso, who succeeded his father in 1505".

Berardo signs the letter as prior of Nonantola; it is impossible to know if this Berardo is the same as the translator of the two Plautine comedies, even if the idiosyncrasy of the mixture of "buffonarie" ("buffooneries") and "cose devote" ("devout things") would lean towards excluding the possibility (the two Plautine translations, especially *Cassina*, abound with obscene *doubles entendres*). However, without worrying too much about an unprovable fact, it is advisable to accept the common authorship of the two translations of Plautus, as presented by Zoppino, the Venetian printer by whom they were published in 1530 (their late publication is likely due to the unclear state of conservation of manuscripts, scripts serving the performances and various actors).

Between the two *volgarizzamenti*, that of *Cassina* appears to be deserving of more attention because of the very free way in which the original is handled and its extensive use of *amplificatio*, which greatly expands the perimeter of the action and dialogue among characters, even allowing the

introduction of two characters only mentioned in the original: the young Theuthuirimco and Cassina herself.

A quick synopsis of Plautus's comedy may serve as a summary orientation for the argument here advanced: Lysidamus is infatuated with the slave Casina and, so that he can have her, he intends to give her in marriage to his steward Olympio; this plan however has not taken into account the equally energetic designs of his wife Cleustrata, who instead aspires to marry Casina to the household servant Chalinus so that her adolescent son Euthynicus (the Theuthuirimco of Berardo's version) can enjoy her. From here, quarrels and misunderstandings will arise until the inevitable happy ending. Plautus's dramaturgical cleverness lies in focusing the action on the two couples in dispute, Lysidamus-Olympio and Cleustrata-Chalinus, without the intervention of the young son or even Casina, who are frequently mentioned but never present on stage, which contributes to truly making Casina the protagonist.

Beyond the introduction of two new, important interlocutors, to which we will return, the massive use of *amplificatio* by Berardo can already be noticed in the initial part of his translation, which adds several new scenes to the original with the evident intent of giving greater depth and prominence, in terms of comic rilvalry, to the conflict between the two elderly spouses (Stalino and Cleostrata in Berardo's version). Thus, we have a first scene in which Stalino declares to the steward Olimpione (the Olympio of the original) his intention of giving him Cassina, to which Olimpione responds with lascivious enthusiasm; a second scene in which Stalino reveals the same plan to his wife, receiving in return a refusal motivated by the identical and opposite intention of giving Cassina to the servant Calino so that their son can enjoy her (with Olimpione as an interested spectator in the juicy dialogue); this is followed by a scene between Stalino and his son, in which the father dissuades him from carrying out his intentions towards Cassina. Only at this point does the translation overlap with the original, with a dialogue between Olimpione and Calino, in which each is engaged in claiming the slave for himself.

This overlap actually occupies a few scenes, as Berardo's version then takes off in other directions, subsequently reconnecting with the hypotext and so on, in a sort of "accordion" operation that would be difficult and also somewhat sterile to analyse. Berardo's coarse grain of comedy in the added parts, generally playing on male desires, is noteworthy (1530, C3*r*):

Stalino Io te scio dir che essa è di gran beltade
E non credo che passi quindeci anni
Et è vergine, et è tutta bontade
Olimpione Essa è dunque da alzarli adesso i panni . . .

[Stalino I hear you say that she is of great beauty / And I do not believe she is over fifteen years old / And she is a virgin, and she is all goodness / Olimpione Then it is time to raise her skirts now . . .]

On lexical *doubles entendres* of a clearly obscene nature:

Stalino Ecco che in lei non hai l'animo messo
Indarno, che io farò che tu l'havrai
E quel che brami te sarà concesso.
Ma così come sempre tu me dai
Il primo fico, persica o mellone
Che nasca, e il primo d"ogni frutto ch'hai,
così anchora mi par che sia ragione
che pria che metti in Cassina la mano
lasci gustar a me il primo boccone.
Olimpione Non sciai l'ufficio tu de l'hortolano
Che è di piantare? A me tocca il piantare
La fava, e a te poi tocca il primo grano.
(C3*r-v*)

[Stalino Here you have not wasted your desire on her / In vain, for I will make sure you have her / And what you desire will be granted. / But just as you always give me / The first fig, peach, or melon / That grows, and the first of every fruit you have, / so it also seems to me that it is reasonable / that before you lay your hand on Cassina, / let me taste the first bite. // Olimpione Don't you know the gardener's job / which is to plant? It's my job to plant the bean, and then it's your job to harvest the first grain.]

In short, the "minuire" ("diminishing") that Guarino spoke of in his famous letter to Ercole does not seem to be among the preferred options for Berardo of Ferrara. Furthermore, even when he tries to translate "de parolla in parolla" ("word for word", to quote Guarino again), the structure of the tercet does not allow for short turns of dialogue, since the nature of the stanza only allows closure on the third verse. Thus, very fast exchanges of conversation expand until they dilute the comic substance of the dialogue (Bonazzi 2019, 226).

This somewhat serious and didactic approach to performance exhibited by the author of the *volgarizzamento* of *Cassina* certainly clashed with the too-rapid conclusion of the original text, in which the resolution of the plot is delegated to a final line of the lead, where the noble origin of the slave is declared, and, therefore, the possibility that she can directly marry the young Euthynicus.

In Berardo's version, all of this emerges in dialogue, with the intervention of Cassina herself, who, lamenting by herself, declares herself ready to accept the decision of the mistress to give her in marriage to the house servant. But

from her recollection of her obscure origins comes the discovery that she is the daughter of the neighbouring couple Mirrina and Alcesino, which leads to her subsequent happy marriage to Theuthuirimco.

Beyond Berardo's translation style, it is perhaps possible to hypothesise, with the presence of the two young characters (ultimately happy lovers) as interlocutors, that the occasion for which the translation was intended, i.e., the wedding between Alfonso and Lucrezia, played a role in it. Or even better: the occasion may lead us to think that the Zoppino edition we can access today is precisely the one performed in 1502. The important ceremony at the Este court may have consciously spurred Berardo to introduce the two young figures (Cassina and Theuthuirimco and their wedding party), to the point of making it plausible for the spectators to associate in their minds the royal spouses with the two characters on stage, as could be confirmed by the characters' lines near the end of the play:

> Theuthuirimco Cassina adunque per la man io piglio
> Come mia moglie e rendo gratia a Dio
> Che te ha tratta de affanno e de periglio.
> Cassina Madre mia cara, andiam dal padre mio.
> Vien messere, vien madonna, andiamo tutti
> Che vedo che dal ciel son amata io.
> (C54*v*)

> [Theuthuirimco So I take Cassina by the hand / As my wife, and I thank God / That he has rescued you from anguish and danger. // Cassina My dear mother, let us go to my father. / Come sir, come madam, let us all go / For I see that I am loved by heaven.]

This can be confirmed by a comparison with another text attributed by the sixteenth-century editor to Berardo, namely *Mustellaria* (also printed by Zoppino in 1530 as part of an evidently planned project of recovery of humanistic theatre; Zoppino published several theatrical *volgarizzamenti* in that year). Here, despite the story involving the usual conflict between the generation of fathers and that of sons, with the young Philolache engaged in redeeming the courtesan Philocomasia (in the original, Philolaches and Philematium, respectively), made possible by money left to him by his father Teropide (Theopropides, in the original), the romantic plot does not reach its conclusion on stage. It remains, as in Plautus, confined to the background, while what prevails in the conclusion is the forgiveness granted by the old man to his son, his servant Tranione, and his friend Callidamante (Tranio and Callidamantes, in the original), his fellow reveller.

The treatment of the original appears in this second case to be more rigorous as compared to *Cassina*, with a small but nonnegligible novelty:

the two characters of the servants Sphaerio and Pinacium are eliminated. Sphaerio has the sole task (fulfilled by means of a single line) of informing Tranio of the arrival of old Theopropides; Pinacium, instead, is Phaniscus' interlocutor (Phaniscus is the other servant of Callidamates) in a dialogue about the master"s alcoholic excesses.

For the first, the scene is deleted, while for the second the function of Pinacium is taken on by Phaniscus (Damnisco in the vernacular). In short, if *Cassina* is entirely developed, perhaps for reasons external to the text, by using the practice of "adiungere" ("adding"), here instead, although to a lesser extent, that of "minuire" ("diminishing") prevails.

In both cases, the translator demonstrates a certain knowing awareness of the needs of the stage, given that these two texts can be attributed to the same authorial hand: that of the almost otherwise unknown Girolamo Berardo. This is a crucial point that naturally poses several questions. Martina Mazzoleni, for instance, has demonstrated that Zoppino's edition of *Mustellaria* incorporates printing variants that can be dated to sometime after 1503; this may suggest that Zoppino's printing is an update of the manuscript used for the 1503 performance (Mazzoleni 2016, 236). At the same time, the request for printing privileges submitted to the Venetian Senate by the actor Cherea in 1508 with respect to a few comedies, including *Mostellaria* and *Casina* (the privilege was never used: D'Ancona 1891, 2.111; Guastella 2018, 40), might reveal that the texts sent for printing by Zoppino are the Ferrarese scripts that reached Venice through the actor of the city Lucca, who was at the time involved in performances at the Este court of Ercole I.[2]

Whether the texts performed in 1502 and 1503 are the complete or partial vernacular versions of *Cassina* and *Mustellaria* attributed to Girolamo Berardo, it must be noted that they are heirs to a long-standing tradition, of which they seem to incorporate both merits and flaws, of the practice of an informal translation capable of becoming a revision (opening up to the innovative demands of the first decade of the sixteenth century); and of the insistent use of tercets, not coincidentally perceived as cumbersome and unsuitable, as noted by the exceptional spectator Isabella d'Este.

At the same time, with one (*Cassina*) performed for the marriage of Alfonso and Lucrezia and the other (*Mustellaria*) concluding the great Plautine festivals in Ferrara, the two *volgarizzamenti* attributed to Berardo also seem to fulfil a metaphorical function, exactly in the translational modality of which they are model examples. The *Cassina*, with its additional elements (not by chance leaning towards the theme of love), closely traces the lavish nuptial celebrations of 1502. *Mustellaria*, more faithful to the original,

[2] Cherea is said to have derived his name from a character in the *Eunuchus*, performed in Ferrara during the carnivals of 1499 or 1503 (Guastella 2018, 39n9).

seems like a return to the primary reasons motivating Ercole's Plautine *volgarizzamento* project, right at the time when, almost as a premonition of its end, that project was to fade away due to the duke's imminent death.

In summary, the two *volgarizzamenti* attributed to Girolamo Berardo have the capacity to communicate, both on a concrete and symbolic level, the cultural context of the last two grand theatrical festivals at the court of Ercole d'Este, which, just as it was reaching its peak in magnificence and splendour, had begun an inevitable decline.

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