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Cicali, Gianni. L'Inventio crucis nel teatro rinascimentale fiorentino. Una leggenda tra spettacolo, antisemitismo e propaganda

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“defenses” of law (213), ignorance (217), poverty (221), and farting (225, 230, 233).

But even Bruscombille’s impressive erudition pales beside that of the editors, without whose copious footnotes many of these pages would be incomprehensible. To take just one example, the “Prologue des habitans de Cornuaille” in *Les Fantaisies* (244–46) runs to fewer than three pages, has nineteen Latin tags and a total of 23 footnotes. Even if you read Latin, would you know who the “Grammairien de Xaintes” probably was, or what “les Curettes et les Corybantés” are? And here we have only three pages out of a total of 647. In the pages beyond, we find corrections, a very useful glossary, a list of expressions used in the texts, a bibliography, and an index. I have been reading Renaissance literature for 50 years, and yet constantly needed to look at the notes and/or glossary of this volume. Bruscombille represents a seventeenth century very different from that of Molière, Corneille, Racine, and La Fontaine, and the editors are to be heartily congratulated on explaining him to us.

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Cicali, Gianni.

L’ Inventio crucis nel teatro rinascimentale fiorentino. Una leggenda tra spettacolo, antisemitismo e propaganda.

Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2012. Pp. 181. ISBN 978-88-6032-3 (paperback) €15.

Gianni Cicali’s engaging *L’ Inventio crucis nel teatro rinascimentale fiorentino* explores the tradition of the *Inventio crucis* from its earliest beginnings and tracks its development through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In taking on this topic—which is really a study of the “drammaturgia del sacro” as he defines it—Cicali contributes substantively to the legend’s scholarship, and does so in a novel manner. Unlike scholars who have examined the issue mainly from the perspectives of history, philology, and art history, Cicali probes the legend’s development from the distinctive standpoint of its links to the Medici family, from its anti-Semitic approaches, and from its occasional exotic, oriental leanings. In addition, for the Florentine sacred representations

and spiritual comedies he examines, Cicali studies two crucially important elements: language and scenography. Through this, he not only invigorates the study of the legend itself, but also helps establish the legend of the cross as an essential component in Florentine theatre under the aegis of the Medici family.

Cicali's argument develops across four chapters through which he dexterously weaves several goals: to demonstrate the links between theatre and Florentine socio-political history; to propose new interpretative strategies between theatre and visual arts (the painters he discusses are Piero della Francesca, Agnolo Gaddi, and Raphael); and to show the propagandistic anti-Semitic vein that pulses through the spectacle-oriented goals of the legend. In short, his study is a history of theatre and spectacle inscribed within a historical, political, social, and theological context.

The first chapter, "Storia e valore di una leggenda: l'*invenzione della croce*," sets the stage for the entire work. Here the author not only retraces the early development of the *inventio* of the discovery of the cross, but also outlines the subsequent evolutions and manipulations the legend of the discovery underwent. Cicali convincingly shows the manner in which history and legend melded, as the main players in the *inventio*'s diffusion—the Medici—were renowned historical figures driven by political ends. For this same reason, within the same arc of time, the *inventio* was coloured by a distinct anti-Semitic hue.

The second chapter, "La drammaturgia del sacro e l'*Invenzione della croce*: una scelta esemplare di testi teatrali tra XV e XVI secolo," zeroes in on the leading question of the study, the "drammaturgia del sacro." Cicali fixes the Council of Florence (1439) as the backdrop to the renewed cultural and artistic spirit that invested Florence in the first half of the fifteenth century. His work shows that the Medici turned theatrical/sacred representations into another means of self-advancement. Cicali's analysis of the impact this strategy had on the legend of the cross is made more cogent by his insightful study of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici's *Invenzione della croce*. In this analysis, Cicali provides one of the clearest and most concise explanations of the Medicean anti-Semitic stance stoked by Franciscan preachers such as Bernardino da Feltre. The chapter is enriched by the discussion on the new Italian taste for orientalism that the Council inaugurated and which found its most elaborate artistic renditions in the Vatican's Sala di Costantino, begun under Pope Leo X and continued under Clement VII, both Medici popes whose respective father and uncle (Lorenzo the Magnificent) had purchased "pieces" of the Holy Cross.

Chapter 3, “Il *Costantino imperatore* di Castellano de’ Castellani: una rappresentazione d’ordine gigante,” focuses on the sacred play *Costantino imperatore, San Silvestro papa e Sant’Elena* by Castellano de’ Castellani. Cicali’s acute examination of the work highlights on the one hand the stylistic, theological, and socio-cultural currents traversing it; on the other, the scenic artifices, the “technical tricks” the representation required. The discussion on the inclusion of special and lighting effects that Castellani’s representation necessarily involved—and which Cicali details—lends a novel immediacy to the study of Florentine theatre and representations as it provides new information on the art of dramaturgy of the sacred. As for the comic aspects of Castellani’s works, Cicali accurately links them to the anti-Semitic element present in the work.

The last chapter, “1561. *L’ invenzione della croce* di Beltramo Poggi: un contesto medico al femminile,” is the gem of the book. It examines a little known text, *Invenzione della croce*, authored by Beltramo Poggi. This sacred tragicomedy was specifically prepared for representation in the Dominican convent of La Crocetta in Florence. Cicali’s masterful study of the work emerges through his detailed examination of the historical context within which the tragicomedy was created; through the rich compendium he provides of Poggi’s scant biographical information and works; through the exploration of his dramaturgy of the sacred. Cicali ends his book with an additional bonus: the inclusion of the prologues and first act of Poggi’s *Invenzione della croce*. This addition offers a tempting foretaste of the uniqueness of Poggi’s work. At the same time, it is a fresh reminder of the fact that a complete critical edition of Poggi’s tragicomedy is sorely needed.

This volume makes an excellent contribution to our understanding of Renaissance sacred representations within Florentine theatre.

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