

Chapter 3

Classics in the Garden: Suppers in an Earthly Paradise

Ronald Inden

Summary Historically, the studies of classics have focussed on their use in education, the formation of youth, and have concerned themselves only indirectly or incidentally with the adult use of the classics for self formation. What I propose to do here is to look at the practices in which adults used the classics. What were these practices? They were performative practices—song and classical poetry recitals, storytelling, the reading of classics aloud to one another and discussion of them. These practices were concerned with texts, but there were others that involved other media—music both vocal and instrumental, food and drink, costuming, the viewing of sculptures and paintings, and the use of architecture—most if not all with classical connections. The use of these media in conjunction with one another had the effect of turning these practices into entertainments or spectacles, performances which the performers considered theatrical and didactic. The main institutional venue for these practices was some sort of daily or occasional meeting that involved food and drink and other performances. This is an institution that has a number of variants and a long and complicated history that interconnects the ruling classes of empires and kingdoms from China and India to Iberia, including, of course, the symposium of European antiquity. The locus for these meetings was, from early times, a garden-palace, a palace or pavilion with an audience and banqueting hall complemented by a garden of delights. Almost invariably the masters of these garden-palaces themselves considered these settings to be paradises on earth—exclusive places where those who were qualified by birth and divine connection could have some sort of experience of transcendence of the everyday world by engaging in a liberating practice of some kind—and encouraged others to think so. I refer to the garden-palaces as courtly paradises.

The main example I look at here is the Villa d’Este, a courtly paradise of the so-called Renaissance near Rome and the suppers that took place there. I focus on

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three issues: the constitutive importance of homologizing and allegorizing; the interconnectedness of different media and the importance of performance; and the role of machinery and modernity.

Classics and Transcending Experiences

The idea of a paradise on earth was, in the words of W. B. Gallie, an “essentially contested” concept (Gallie 1964). Rivals of a person claiming to have built one would deny that he had succeeded. People also disagreed over the liberating practices that were appropriate to an earthly paradise, some asserting they should be social and sensuous (many royal courts), others that they should be lone and contemplative (Buddhism), still others that they should be social and ascetical (Benedictine monasteries) or lone and sensuous (Krishnaism). Theologians have also disagreed about whether such an institution could even exist in their present, except perhaps metaphorically. Such disagreements only heightened the importance of efforts to build terrestrial paradises. Indeed, it is my argument that these attempts have been crucial to the success of dominant polities, whether empires or republics, not only in the eyes of their own ruling classes but in the eyes of would-be rivals as well. Courtly paradises were, as I see them, extensions of the institution historians of religion have referred to as divine or sacred kingship. The utopias (and arcadias) of modernity, each equipped with its own ‘political theology’, are themselves the descendants of these earlier paradises on earth, as I show elsewhere.¹

I shall focus on moments in the past when, in my view, classics were crucial to the formation of ruling classes. The ‘early modern’ European idea and institution of a classical education arose in ‘Renaissance’ Italy, in what I prefer to call more narrowly the Habsburg imperial formation or more widely the Iberian-Ottoman. The Habsburg Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1519–1558) and Valois heir of Burgundy (1506), was the central figure of this world. It presupposed that its subjects were going to live in a world substantially homologous with that of the classical texts at issue. It is my argument that a similar situation obtained elsewhere, whether we are talking about the earlier Romans and the Greek classics, the Arabs and the Hellenistic classics, the Turks, Iranians, and Indians of the Persianate world and the Sasanian classics, or the Renaissance Europeans and the Latin (and Greek) classics. Once this condition ceased to obtain, I maintain, the classics concerned ceased to occupy the apex of what we might call a scale of texts in the educational practices of their respective societies.

The main example I look at here, the Villa d’Este, was built by the wealthiest cardinal of the time, Ippolito, in the town of Tivoli near Hadrian’s Villa in the sixteenth century (1560–1572). Ippolito d’Este (1509–1572) the younger son of Lucrezia Borgia and Alfonso I (1476–1534), duke of Ferrara, became archbishop of Milan in 1519 when his uncle, Ippolito I, cardinal of Ferrara (1493–1520),

¹ I give one Indian example in an earlier essay (Inden 2006: 241–311).

resigned. His elder brother, Ercole II, succeeded to the duchy in 1534, while Ippolito followed his uncle and became cardinal of Ferrara in 1538, as was the Italian practice (Maniates 1996: xii). Tivoli, called Tibur in antiquity, stood near the Aniene (Anio or Teverone), main tributary of the Tiber (Tevere) river, in the province of Lazio (Latium). The man who envisioned the garden and supervised much of its construction was Pirro Ligorio, a painter interested in Rome's ruins, who was named the cardinal's "antiquarian" (ancestor of archeologist and philologist) from 1549 until 1555. When Ippolito returned to Tivoli in 1560, he began construction of the garden and continued it until his death with Ligorio supervising the work from 1567 to 1568 onward (Coffin 1960: 92–97). The venture was extremely costly and involved a great deal of destruction—the demolition of a convent and the displacement of many houses and the use of spolia from the nearby villa of Hadrian. The garden-palace was located on the top, slopes, and bottom of a reordered terrain and not, as was usually the case in earlier gardens, on a level terrain.

At the top of this was the summer palace of the cardinal, built along two sides of a courtyard. To the side of the villa was a secret garden (*giardino segreto*). The villa itself consisted of a suite of reception halls, the cardinal's apartments, and a chapel. The main hall or salon (*salotto*) in the palace was in the center of the first floor and its grand entrance provided access to the gardens below through a double staircase. This led to a wide terrace from which two additional double staircases led to the garden below. The halls of the villa had fountains in them and displayed an elaborate decorative scheme of frescos and grottos.

The garden had a central axis having the central entrance to the villa at the top and a series of fountains, the last of which was at the bottom of the garden inside the entrance to the garden-palace used by guests. It was called the Porta Romana because guests from Rome would enter the garden-palace there. The Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II (1564–1576) was so astonished to hear about the villa and its gardens that he had Étienne Dupérac (1520–1607), artist and garden designer, do an engraving of it. The garden in the engraving appears as it was planned and not as actually completed.²

The garden itself was a large and complex "hydraulic machine" comprising 51 fountains and nymphaeums (with 398 spouts, 364 jets, 64 cascades, 220 basins connected by 875 m of tubes and channels) (Barisi 2004: 16). Unusually, it featured not only a central axis, but also two transverse axes. These and the rest of the garden were divided into compartments and arranged over five terraces accessed by staircases leading from the lower parts of the garden to the villa itself.

The cardinal and those who assisted him thought they were constructing a paradise on earth at the Villa d'Este. Using Greco-Roman and Old Testament mythology, they were 'modern' men rebuilding a world along 'ancient' lines. It was a celebration of the Christian God's favor shown to its builders and residents in

² Étienne Dupérac, engraving, 1573, with legend of Antonio Lafreri. Another contemporary description is the so-called Manuscript parisien of 1571 (Desnoyers 2002: 289–296).

the present and above all a setting for experiences that brought about moments of transcendence *of* the world *in* the world.

The experiences that people had here most certainly involved the use of classical texts, but they did so selectively. They articulated what they took from the classics with architectural features and statuary, including many spolia, painted scenes and portraits, an altered landscape, and a complex system of hydraulics, to bring what they wanted from the past into the present. All of these combined theatrically to induce awe on the part of visitors as they journeyed through the garden. The feature of the garden most involved in inducing awe was the Fountain of the Organ, considered a “marvel” at the time. The supper, the main practice in which the cardinal and his guests engaged after they journeyed through the garden, itself involved conversation and drink, poetry, and music, all of which were supposed to induce ecstasy on the part of the participants. The setting for these experiences involving classics was not just that of a villa and garden, but of a villa and garden as a paradise on earth.

Villa and Garden as a Paradise on Earth

People of the ruling society to which the cardinal belonged referred to villas and gardens such as these as paradises on earth (Bentmann and Müller 1992: 69–84). The Franco-Germans (including Italians) had associated their gardens of delight both with the heroes and heroines of “courtly love” and with the biblical figures of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Italian humanists of the so-called Renaissance associated their gardens with Greco-Roman (‘mythological’) gods and heroes. They represented their villas and gardens as paradises on earth associated with groves or gardens in antiquity.

One of the classical gardens to which Italians sometimes turned was the garden of the Hesperides. This “garden,” actually a grove (*alsos*) in antiquity, belonged to Hera and was located “in the west.” The Hesperides were the nymphs of the evening who guarded its tree (or trees), a “tree of life,” the apples of which bestowed immortality on those who ate them. The nymphs were unreliable, so Hera assigned a serpent with a hundred heads called Ladon (later represented as a dragon) to guard it. Hercules (Herakles), the hero of antiquity who carried out 12 labors, was charged, as his eleventh labor, with the task of bringing back apples from the garden. To accomplish this, he slew the serpent. (Another version has Atlas steal the apples while Hercules holds up the world) (Bull 2005: 115–117).

Another model for an earthly paradise taken from Greco-Roman mythology was even more important (MacDougall 1994: 121). This was Mount Parnassus or Mount Helicon, in central Greece, above Delphi. A fountain named Castalia was located on Parnassus. Pegasus, the winged horse, caused a spring or fountain called Hippocrene (“horse spring”) to come forth on Helicon. These springs or fountains made the sites into groves or, more precisely, nymphaeums, grottoes where water

nymphs resided. Many Greeks considered both of these sites to be the home of the water nymphs called the Muses. People in Renaissance Europe often conflated the two mountain sites (Bull 2005: 314–323).³ The term muse derives from the Greek *mousa* as do the terms museum (*mouseion*, “temple of the Muses”) and music (*mousikos*, “pertaining to the Muses”). Apollo rather than Hercules was the main figure on Parnassus. The patron of the Muses, he appeared as a young man wearing a laurel crown and playing a lyre. Mount Parnassus was not only a home of the Muses and Apollo, it was also the location of the Delphic Oracle, the center (*omphalos*, “navel”) of the Greek World.

Villa D’Este as Hesperides and Parnassus

The cardinal and his garden designer, Ligorio, used their imagination of Hesperides and Parnassus in constructing the garden and its fountains. There are several excellent and detailed studies of the villa and garden upon which I rely. The study of David Coffin (1960) uncovers most of the more obvious mythological, geographical, and historical connections of villa and garden. A later study (Dernie 1996) argues that a Christian interpretation can be read into the mythological iconography. An even more recent study (Desnoyers 2002) points to the importance of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), translator, with commentaries, of Plato’s works into Latin, and argues that a Neoplatonist interpretation can be superadded to these.

The first ensemble of fountains and gardening that a guest encountered, just inside the entrance to the garden-palace consisted of four compartments along the axis of the garden at its northern edge. Called an herb garden (*giardino delle semplici*), it consisted of pergolas of grapevines, jasmine, and heather fashioned into a cruciform arcade. At the center of this was an octagonal pavilion (1570) topped with a cupola. Inside the pavilion were four fountains in the shape of flowers. The cupola had eight silver Este eagles at its corners and a gilded lily at its crown. Each of the four compartments had a small pavilion at its center which was aligned with four gates and paths that divided the compartment into four parterres. These were planted with medicinal herbs, flowers, and fruit trees.⁴ What was the point of this virtually self-contained herb garden? I would argue that it closely resembles the aristocratic or royal garden described by Crescenzi and others for the medieval or Gothic garden. This was, in effect, a “historic” garden, as Coffin also argues (1960: 16–17). So what the visitor first saw upon entering was an out-of-date medieval garden in which his view was restricted by the leaves and

³ There was a temple dedicated to the Muses at Helicon, from which Constantine the Great took the statues and installed them in Constantinople.

⁴ Today this suite of compartments has at its center the Rotunda of the Cypresses and off-center, in each of the four parterres around it, a Fountain of the Este Eagle.

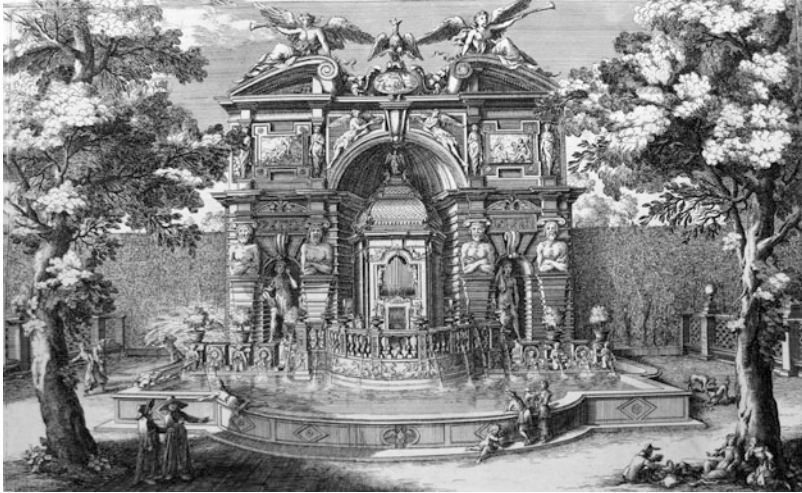


Fig. 3.1 Fountain of the Organ, Luc Leclerc, Claude Venard, 1566–71. Engraving, G. F. Venturini, ‘Le fontane del giardino Estense in Tivoli’ (Falda 1691 pt. 4: pl. 13). Permission to use this and the other Venturini engravings below, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

vines of the arcade. When he emerged from this, he was meant to be struck with awe at the modern garden that rose up the hill in front of him.

Just beyond this medieval garden was the lower of the two transverse axes, an ensemble of seven compartments. The Fountain of the Organ (Fig. 3.1) in the shape of a triumphal arch with the Este eagle at its crest, sits at its eastern and higher end.⁵ It became famous because of its hydraulic works, inspired by Greek and Roman classics in engineering and architecture.

The frontispiece of the organ displays four herms.⁶ A Goddess of Nature or Fortune was installed in 1569 in the central recess of the organ, removed in 1611 and replaced by a kiosk.⁷ The smaller recesses between the herms were to contain statues of Apollo and Orpheus. Above are two reliefs, one of the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas, the other of Orpheus enchanting wild animals with his music. They are flanked by caryatids in the form of sirens. Winged victories hover over the central recess.⁸ The operation of the hydraulic organ and its automated trumpets was itself a marvel, as such automata had been in the Caliphate, New Rome, Rome, and Alexandria:

⁵ Fountain of the Organ, Luc Leclerc, Claude Venard, 1566–71.

⁶ Four herms, Pirrino del Gagliardo, 1568.

⁷ Goddess of Nature or Fortune, Gillis van den Vliete, 1568, after a second-century statue of Diana (or Artemis) of Ephesus, Farnese Diana, National Museum, Naples. The fountain now stands at the bottom of the axial walk featuring the Stairs of the Bubbling Fountains.

⁸ These were all added in 1611.

The show began with the sound of two trumpets held up by Fame above the cornice. After this, the organ sounded—probably a madrigal of four or five voices and, after the music, there occurred the most theatrical effect of the show: the ‘flood’. Suddenly a great spray of water tumbled down from above—pouring from a myriad of taps placed along the cornice of the first order and in other places in view. At the same time, other tall jets spurted up from below. The...water would...produce a rainbow... (Barisi 2004: 66)

Originally, a cascade emanated from below the Fountain of the Organ and continued to ground level.

The Fish Ponds continued this transverse axis. Originally, a semicircular basin was to project out from the fish ponds opposite the Water Organ. This was to have been called the Fountain of the Sea and to have contained a statue of Neptune driving his chariot drawn by four sea horses. This was never constructed. The idea was that the waters of the Tiber splashed down from the mountains and hills to Diana in the organ, thence into the fish ponds of the plains and eventually emptied in the sea. Here, in this transverse axis, the Tiburtine waters presented themselves to the visitor as the font of Nature (Coffin 1979: 327–28), not as it was but as it should be. Above the fish ponds, the steep incline of the garden began.

One other fountain should be mentioned because of its automata. This is the Fountain of the Owl (*Fontana di civetta*) in an enclosed outdoor room at the western end of the garden.⁹

This fountain has strong connections with Bacchus and initiation into his cult (Desnoyers 2002: 238–239). Eight satyrs in niches held vases that poured water. Inside the central niche were three youths of stucco holding a large wineskin from which water poured into a vase and then into the basin below.

On the artificial mount which supported the vase were little tree branches with bronze birds which sang with the play of the water until suddenly an owl appeared whose cry, also created by the water, silenced them. This game between the birds and owl with all the sounds created by the flow of water was naturally one of the great attractions of the gardens. (Coffin 1960: 22–23)

The main classic works at issue here were those of Hero (Heron) of Alexandria (first century C.E.). The devices he describes that are relevant at the Villa d’Este appear in his *Pneumatica*. Since the automata at Villa d’Este were built before these Latin and Italian editions were published, they cannot have been based on these editions, but on engineers’ and workers’ understandings of what these devices were. These understandings probably have more to do with the works of the Arab engineers who made more sophisticated versions of the machines in the earlier New Roman (Byzantine) versions of the older Hellenic/Roman work.

Historically, guests first experienced the central axis of the garden from the entrance at the bottom of the garden. From the moment they emerged from the south gate of the cruciform arcade in the first suite of parterres, they could see the inclined suite of compartments that led up toward the villa. This suite of compartments had at its center the central fountain of the entire garden, the Fountain of the Dragons. Three broad

⁹ Fountain of the Owl, Giovanni Del Duca, 1565–69.

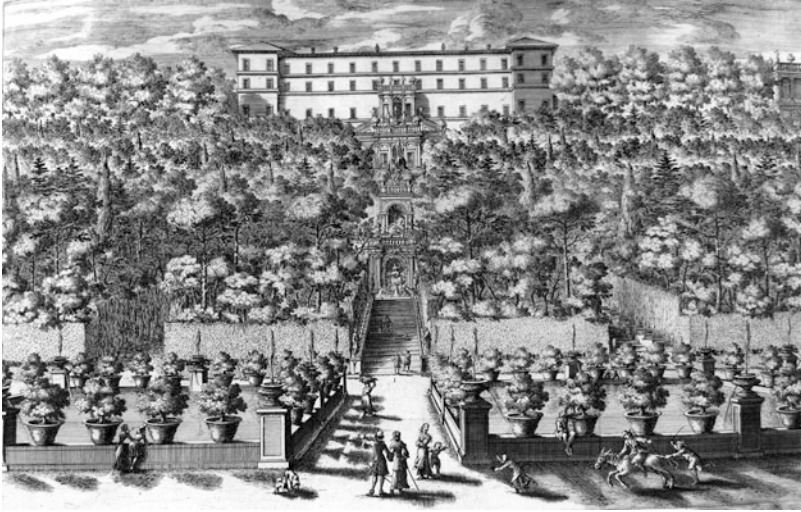


Fig. 3.2 View along the axial stairs, G. F. Venturini, 1691 (Falda 1691: pt. 4, pl. 4)

staircases called the Stairs of the Bubbling Fountains (*Scale dei bollori*) lead up the incline to the upper part of the garden and the villa.¹⁰

When visitors proceeded up the axial stairs (Fig. 3.2) that led up to the terrace of the villa their gaze was directed up to the loggias with statues in them or on their roofs and fountains in front of them, which were situated along the central axis itself.

The Fountain of the Dragons (*Fontana dei Draghi*) is at the center of the ensemble of the gardens, displacing the axial stairs into the two ramped curved staircases that circumnavigate it. These form a partial enclosure for the fountain. A closer view shows the water channel that runs along the staircases. Behind the fountain is a central grotto with an arched entry and columns alongside it. Inside, a statue of the colossal Hercules was installed.

Each of the four dragons spouts water from its mouth while a central, very powerful jet shoots water upwards. When it was constructed, bursts of water produced explosive sounds supposed to resemble artillery fire, one of the marvels of the garden. Originally, one dragon with a hundred heads was to be represented here, Ladon, the dragon Hercules defeated in order to steal the apples from the Garden of the Hesperides.¹¹

Hercules also appeared twice more in this ensemble. Above the fountain of the dragon and along the central axis of the garden stands a grotto with another statue of

¹⁰ Stairs of the Bubbling Fountains, 1567. The northeast stair was not finished.

¹¹ The cardinal had the four winged dragons placed here for the visit of pope Gregory XII (1572), who had this dragon ensemble as his emblem (Barisi 2004: 71–72).

Hercules inside it, that of Hercules reclining after the completion of his labors. Taken from Tivoli, it was installed here in a fountain.¹² On the roof terrace of this grotto was a statue, also spolia, of Hercules and his child Telephus.¹³ One of the reception rooms in the villa was decorated with frescoes depicting the labors of Hercules.

Homology, what M. Foucault (1970: 17–45) refers to as resemblance or similitude in his discussion of Renaissance modes of knowledge, was crucial to the ‘episteme’ through which the cardinal and his visitors understood Hercules and other classical images in the villa and garden. Some of these homologies had to do with spatial conjunction, others with the active emulation of a distant figure, all of them with sympathies among the entities involved. Resemblances were often hidden, requiring special knowledge to uncover them.

Hercules had been worshiped as a protector deity in a temple at Tivoli. Ercole (Hercules) was also the name of the first duke of Ferrara and Ippolito’s father. Hercules appears at numerous points in the iconography of the Villa d’Este as a multivalent allegorical figure. He is the hero, the god, the founder of a dukedom, and the cardinal himself, who labored mightily to build the villa and garden. Three statues of the hero were to have been installed along the main axis of the garden: a colossal Hercules with a club was to go in a niche behind the central fountain of the garden, the Fountain of the Dragon; above that in another niche a figure of Hercules reclining was to be placed; and on the roof of that, an image of the hero standing with his son Telephus. The dragon itself, of course, was the 100-headed serpent that guarded the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides (which Hercules was ordered to steal in his eleventh labor).

Hippolytus, the Greek figure after whom the cardinal was named also appears in the garden-palace. Ligorio designed a series of tapestries drawing parallels between the life of Hippolytus, the Greek hero, and that of the cardinal. They were probably intended for the decoration of rooms in the villa. The drawings for these relied on Seneca’s *Hippolytus* but also on Ovid (Coffin 1960: 69–77).

The placement of these and other figures in the garden, their articulation with one another, were intended to be didactic as well as entertaining. The three apples Hercules stole were the three virtues of chastity, temperance, and prudence, all of which the cardinal (whose seal displays an eagle holding a branch of apples from the Hesperides) supposedly embodied. The dragon was the softness of voluptuous desire that Hercules conquered. Coffin discusses these and other instances showing that Hercules was positioned not just as a glorious hero, but also as a moral figure (Coffin: 79–84).

What of the nymphs, the Hesperides themselves? They appear not here but in a fountain in the courtyard of the villa. Even here their appearance is not straightforward, for they appear in the form of a Roman statue installed in a Fountain of

¹² Reclining Hercules, Courtyard of the Pinecone, Vatican Museum.

¹³ Hercules and his child Telephus, marble, Roman copy, first to second century C.E. of Greek original, fourth century B.C.E., found at Tivoli, moved to Villa d’Este in Tivoli, then Borghese Collection, then Louvre, Paris (purchased, 1807).

Venus/Hesperides.¹⁴ The heraldic eagles of the d'Este family (instead of a serpent) guard the sleeping nymph here. So, the sleeping Venus is also the nymph who guards the Villa d'Este as the Hesperides did their garden. This sculpture establishes a connection between the d'Este garden and the Garden of the Hesperides.

The scene above the Venus/nymph is evocative of the countryside of Tivoli. Branches of a quince tree, on which sit doves, birds dear to Venus, rise along both sides of the arch and meet at the top. The quinces are the fruits of gold, the fruits of immortality that the tree of life in the garden of the gods bears. The white eagle of the Estes sits at the top of these branches (Desnoyers 2002: 19).

Because the fountain of the dragon and the statues and fountains of Hercules occupy the center of the garden, and a fountain of the Hesperides dominates the courtyard, one might think that this was a garden taking the garden of the Hesperides as its model; a dedication confirms this. Marc Antoine Muret (1526–1585), Muretus in Latin, was a humanist Latin poet in Paris, forced to leave France because of charges of sodomy. He went to Italy and in 1558, Cardinal Ippolito settled him in Rome. He frequented the villa at Tivoli and wrote this epigram:

The golden apples which Hercules stole from the sleeping dragon
 Now Ippolito possesses
 Grateful for the gift, he wishes on its author
 That the gardens he has planted—to him be dedicated.¹⁵

The garden-palace of the Villa d'Este was also a Parnassus, as an examination of the second and higher transverse axis will show. This transverse axis consists of a suite of three fountain displays and dominates the gardens above the fountain of the dragon. The Oval Fountain (*Fontana dell'Ovato*), the oldest fountain in the garden (also called the Fountain of Tivoli), sits at the eastern end (Fig. 3.3).¹⁶ Three statues, themselves fountains, stand in three grottoes in the Tiburtine Mountain, made of tatar; behind it, the Tiburtine Sibyl, Sybilla Albunea, with her son, Melicertes in the central grotto and, in the grottoes at her side, personifications of the two rivers that provide the water for the gardens, the Anio, main tributary of the Tiber, and another, the Ercolaneo.¹⁷ The Tiburtine Sibyl was the maternal protector of the Tiber river, which provides water not only to Tivoli but to the city of Rome itself.

The water from the fountains spills into a canal alongside the promenade atop the balustraded semicircular arcade and the oval basin below. A gardener could activate trick jets in the pavement of the courtyard, spraying the unsuspecting. The centerpiece of this basin is the krater-like fountain from which water spills into the oval basin below. Visitors in the arcade could walk underneath and behind the

¹⁴ Fountain of Venus/Hesperides, Raffaello Sangallo, 1568–69; statue of Venus, second to third century, Roman.

¹⁵ Barisi 2004: 23.

¹⁶ Oval Fountain, Pirro Ligorio; three grottoes sculpted, Giovanni Battista della Porta, 1567.

¹⁷ Sybil statue, Gillis van der Vliete, 1568. Anio and Ercolaneo statues, Giovanni Malanca, 1566.

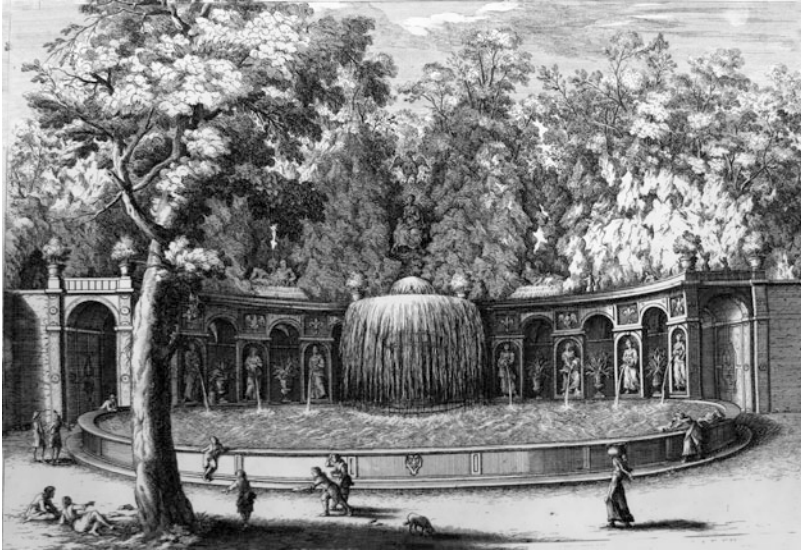


Fig. 3.3 Oval Fountain, Pirro Ligorio; three grottoes sculpted, Giovanni Battista della Porta, 1567. Engraving, G. F. Venturini, 1691 (Falda 1691: pt. 4, pl. 7)

semicircular wall of water it produced. Ten nymphs in the pilasters between the archways of the arcade (now overgrown with vines) pour water from vases into the basin.

A huge white marble statue of a winged horse (sixteenth century) dominates the Fountain of Pegasus on a small hill at the eastern end of the garden behind and above the Oval Fountain.¹⁸

This is, of course, a representation of Pegasus, the mythical horse who, with the blow of his hoof, caused the Hippocrene (“horse spring”), a spring or fountain, to appear on Mount Helicon. In the Renaissance, Mount Helicon became conflated with Mount Parnassus because both were the homes of the Muses, the spring nymphs who inspired men to make and perform poems, dances and dramas, and music. Here, according to the label, Pegasus, his head pointing in the direction of the villa, is pounding his hoof on the mountain of Tivoli and causing the rivers there to spring forth from the fountain below. The Pegasus here, in the eyes of the cardinal and his associates, not only made the hill and the Oval Fountain below into a replica of the original Parnassus; it also demonstrated allegorically that Parnassus as the home of the arts had actually appeared at Tivoli.

The design of the Oval fountain and its courtyard was significant. The semicircular arcade behind the basin made it resemble a theater and, indeed, it was considered a “water theater.” The cardinal and his guests in the courtyard watched

¹⁸ Fountain of Pegasus, B. Pediconi, N. Marziali, G. Bianchi. Another study attributes the hill and statue to Curzio Maccarone, 1566 (Schröder 1993: 94).

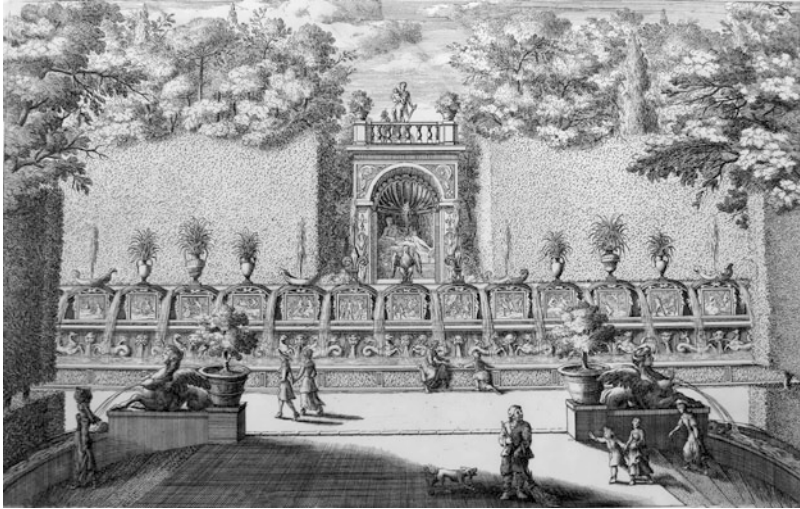


Fig. 3.4 Avenue of the Hundred Fountains, engraving, G. F. Venturini (Falda 1691: pt. 4, pl. 13)

the waters perform and experienced the awe and sense of cool well-being that came from interacting with them.

Visitors could have seen the nymphs in the arcade as the nine Muses—the nymphs of Parnassus or Helicon presiding over the literary, artistic, and scientific topics of the symposium. On the wall opposite, beside the entrance to the fountain room, are fountains of Bacchus, the god of wine who presided over a symposium in antiquity. The cardinal had ten plane trees planted here. This was done not just to provide shade but also to evoke the Academy of Plato, located in a grove. Here, in the cardinal's realization of that institution, on built-in benches and at tables, the guests invited to a supper were welcomed. These events took place in the salon, the main hall of the villa, where the cardinal received guests who had come through the garden and made their way up to the terrace of the villa.

The court of the Oval Fountain is connected to another major fountain display across the garden by the Avenue of the Hundred Fountains (Fig. 3.4) beside which water flows in three channels. These channels were supposed to represent the aqueducts that provided water to Rome from the surrounding Tiburtine countryside. The upper channel contained 22 boats, each separated by 3 vases, from which water spurted. Below the boats and above the middle channel were reliefs, along with fountain spouts, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The reliefs depicting scenes from the *Metamorphoses* were closely related to contemporary practices for publishing classics and especially this one. Published not only in Latin, but also in French, Italian, German, English, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese translations, it was probably the single most important source for mythology (Kinney and Styron 2010). Most if not all of these publications had interpretive commentaries.

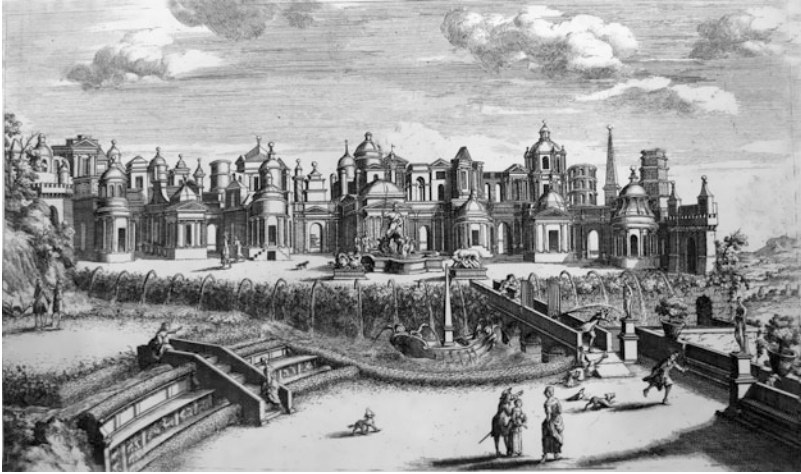


Fig. 3.5 Fountain of Roma with ruins, Pirro Ligorio, Curzio Maccarone, 1567–70. Engraving, G. F. Venturini, 1691 (Falda 1691: pt. 4, pl. 15)

One of the most important illustrators was Virgil Solis (1514–1562), starting in 1563 with a Latin version and a commentary by Johann Spreng (1524–1601). Solis himself appropriates designs from the earlier Bernard Solomon (c. 1508–c. 1561) who illustrated simplified editions of the *Metamorphoses* in French and Dutch, *Métamorphose Figurée* (Lyon 1557) with 178 woodcuts. So far I have not found any attempt to connect the reliefs with any specific book illustrations (perhaps due to the poor condition of the reliefs), but it is obvious that there was an overall connection, since the reliefs derived from the same milieu. We can see each of the reliefs in fact as the projection of a book illustration, the viewing of which could no doubt have prompted recitation of the text illustrated, and explanation of the truth hidden in it, by a learned guest.

Beyond the Avenue is the Fountain of Roma (“*Rometta*”), a simulation of the eternal city in miniature (Fig. 3.5).¹⁹

On a higher podium to the right was a theatrical set representing the Seven Hills of Rome and their more important buildings, including the Colosseum, the Pantheon, and the Temple of Victory on the Palatine. Also to be seen was the Tiber island (*Isola Tiburina*) in the form of a ship in the Tiber carrying an obelisk. On the plain above stands the statue of Rome Victrix. She held a small statue of Victory in her right hand. To her right was the she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus.²⁰ To her left was the depiction of a lion attacking a horse, a representation of Rome dominating Tivoli. Here, in the transverse axis the divinely endowed Tiburtine waters present themselves in counterpoint to those of the fountain of the organ below as the origin of Art, the foremost creation of which was Rome itself (Coffin 1979: 327–28).

¹⁹ Fountain of Roma with ruins, Pirro Ligorio, Curzio Maccarone, 1567–70.

²⁰ The Fleming Pierre de la Motte carved both, 1568.

Suppers and Banquets

After experiencing awe and ecstasy in the gardens, regular visitors to the villa joined the cardinal in a supper. Special visitors invited on special occasions were honored with a banquet, a grandiose version of the supper. The main hall or salon of the villa (Hall of the Fountain) was itself decorated to appear as a monumental loggia set in the middle of a garden. On the walls were landscape scenes separated by painted columns twisted in the manner of the columns supposed to have been taken from the Temple of Solomon or the pillared portico near his palace and used in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome.²¹ One of these frescoes shows the villa and garden themselves.

The imaginary loggia of the salon was synonymous with a monumental loggia built at the western end of the terrace (and near the kitchen). It was entered through a triumphal arch that also doubled as a belvedere (Barisi 2004: 49). Suppers also took place outdoors in this loggia.

The practice that the cardinal and his companions took as their model for their suppers was, of course, the dialogue of Plato called *Symposium*, recounting a symposium that supposedly took place in 416 B.C.E. It was first translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino, with an important commentary, in 1474/1475 (Florence 1484; Ficino 1944: 13). They may also have had recourse to the *Symposium* of Xenophon, another pupil of Socrates, written about the same time and first translated into Latin by Janus Cornarius (Basel 1548; Brown *et al.* 1992: 7, 189). The symposium was a drinks party held in the men's room (andron) of a high-ranking Athenian. It took place after a meal and had rules to be followed by participants—which, as drinking progressed, they sometimes ignored.

The suppers the cardinal held for himself and his guests were contemporary or modern appropriations of the ancient symposium and not literal, historic reconstructions of it. To note just one difference, the supper or banquet took place at a trestle table and the participants, among whom women could be included, sat on chairs. They did not recline on couches, in pairs, arranged around a hall exclusively reserved for men.

The institution of an elaborate meal or drinking party set in a garden of delights or in a hall decorated as a garden can ultimately be traced back to the Achaemenid Persians. What we are seeing in the Villa d'Este is a modification of the earlier courtly feast in Franco-German Europe, especially Burgundy, which itself had taken the institution from the Normans of Sicily, who had in turn appropriated it from the Fatimids. Scenes from their Arab-style courtly paradise appear on the ceiling of their royal chapel in Palermo.²² The two musicians in the picture to the left, both haloed, play lutes. One of the musicians (both of whom are also haloed) in the picture to the right plays a flute, the other a tambour.

²¹ Main hall, Girolamo Muziano, decorative fresco scheme, 1565–70, Dernie 1996: 30.

²² Musicians on either side of a tree, paint on wood, Cappella Palatina ceiling, *Palazzo reale*, Palermo, c. 1150 (Grube 2005: A7.3, 7.2, pl. 12).

From the evidence it is clear that a circle or coterie of humanists regularly visited the villa when the cardinal resided there. Contemporaries referred to such a circle as a cenacle (*cenacolo*, from *cena*, supper). A permanent coterie of philosophers (*cenaculum philosophorum*) was formed in 1571 (Barisi *et al.* 2003: 133). Francesco Bandini Piccolomini, archbishop of Siena, friend and guest of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, called it an academy, after Plato's academy, the *Accademia degli Agevoli*.

Presupposed in the Italian Renaissance idea of the classics was the preeminent position of poetry (Kristeller 1964: 308–309). The Muses are not the mistresses of separate and equal domains. They are mistresses of arts which are all integrated by and in poetry. So it is not surprising that the poet Marc Antoine Muret, already mentioned, was a mainstay of the coterie. He reportedly selected books from Ippolito's library in Rome and took them to Tivoli. There he and the cardinal read some passages from one of these while strolling the length of the shaded avenues of the garden or sitting in the garden being delighted by the cool of the fountains. The readings furnished the starting point for animated discussions in which those in the cardinal's circle participated, on theological and philosophical arguments and themes of interest to the cardinal later in the evening, when the suppers took place. In the hotter afternoons, while waiting for the cooler evening, they preferred to linger over more delightful arguments, reading and commenting on classic poets, in particular on Horace, who had exalted the salubriousness and beauty of the Tiburtine region (Barisi *et al.* 2003: 133).

Music, closely linked to poetry, was integral to the coterie's daily practices. Ferrara was an important musical center. Josquin Desprez, one of several Franco-Flemish musicians whom Ercole I, grandfather of Ippolito, invited to the city in 1503, dedicated a mass to him (*Missa Hercules dux Ferrariae* 1505). It is based on a theme drawn from the syllables of the Duke's name (Lockwood 2005: 254–255). The cardinal was musically educated and is reported to have been accompanied by a band of singers and instrumentalists when he traveled and when he took up his post at Tivoli. From 1551 on, a musical choir (cappella) composed of 30 members was in his service and great masters like Nicola Vicentino (1511–1575/1576), a musical theorist and composer, who was in the service of the cardinal until 1563, directed it. Relying largely on Boethius (c. 480–524/25, *De institutione musica libri quinque*), he claimed he was able to recapture the legendary powers of ancient music in his *Ancient Music Adapted to Modern Practice* (*L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* 1555; Maniates 1996) printed at the cardinal's own expense (Maniates 1996: xxv). Music was a part of the daily routine of the coterie. Vicentino reports that after dinner the cardinal was delighted to listen to madrigals composed by him and other composers of the time (Barisi *et al.* 2003: 135). Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/1526–1594) began organizing summer musical events at the villa in 1564 and entered Ippolito's service (1567–71).

Ferrara was the city in Italy where "secular" or mythological theater was "revived" (under Ercole I) in the form of the comedies of Plautus and Terence, translated into Italian. These and other later theatrical performances took place just before Lent, during the carnival period. Modern vernacular comedy, set in Ferrara and dealing with people in the present, began here. These plays also drew on

religious dramas (*sacre rappresentazioni*). Indoor performances were held in the great hall of the palace and the duke had a special hall built for theater (*Sala dalle Comedie*), never completed. The performance of these comedies involved the use of a “mechanical representation of heaven” (*Paradiso*), a device used in the religious dramas in Florence (Tuohy 1996: 257–261).

Frequent theatrical performances were staged in the palace or garden of the Villa d’Este during the night, for which stage scenery painted on wood was prepared. Tragedies, including those of Muret, comedies, and pantomimes accompanied by fireworks were performed, but the details of these events are not known. According to Estean custom, they included the “forces of Hercules,” i. e., acrobatic shows in addition to feats performed by the Moorish slaves of the cardinal, the buffoonery of jesters, donkey races, and parodies of chivalry/tricks with horses (Barisi *et al.* 2003: 136–137). These Moorish slaves are the only traces of the Arab world of Spain and the Fatimids that the Habsburg empire now saw themselves as dominating. Their use for celebratory purposes goes back to the triumphal progress of Charles V throughout Italy after defeating Barbarossa, admiral of the Ottoman fleet in North Africa (Strong 1973: 93–94).

The grand version of the daily supper was the banquet (*banchetto*, a term originally used to refer to a long bench or table). Banquets could be held at noon or in the evening (Albala 2007: xi). The most important banquets were those held to celebrate victories and for the reception of foreign princes or ambassadors (Albala 2007: xii).

Cristoforo Messisbugo, innovative steward (*scalco*) at the court of the Este family, orchestrated many banquets there and describes them and their novelties in great detail. The first chapter describes a banquet that Ippolito d’Este, then only archbishop of Milan, offered to his brother Ercole, duke of Chartres and Ferrara, and his wife Renea, Francesco d’Este and other gentlemen and gentlewomen, amounting to 54 in all at the first table, on Saturday, 20 May, 1529, St. Bernard’s day.

The event began at the end of the day at 21 hours after men on horseback charged at a target with lances. The guests then entered the palace where a farce and “divine music” were performed by diverse voices and instruments.

Meanwhile, a table with three tablecloths, one on top of the other, was set in the garden with napkins having different folds, “divinely made.” The table was “marvellously decorated” with different flowers and weapons, with salt dishes and knives; above it was “a most beautiful canopy (*frascata*)” with festooned greenery and flowers and different coats of arms “artfully fashioned.” Five figures of Venus, Bacchus, and Cupid, of sugar, partly gilded and artfully painted, were put on display. To the right of the table, under a finely decorated canopy, the credenzas and bottle racks were readied. To the left of the garden was a most beautiful and grand canopied stand, decorated like that over the table for the musicians and other performers.

They left the salon at 22 h., the farce being finished; and while they came to the table, four musicians dressed in livery went among them, one playing a cetra, another a lute, the third a harp, and the fourth a flute; yet all played together, and four boys and girls danced galliards, accompanying them to the table. There they were immediately offered perfumed water for their hands. They ate salads while the boys and girls continued to dance.

Courses of cold dishes consisting of salads, cold meats, and other antipasti alternated at a banquet with those of hot dishes, especially roasts which were carved by carvers (*trinciante*) for the guests. Cold dishes were served from the credenza, hot ones from the kitchen. This banquet was, however, of fish, that is, without meat.

What was innovative here was the entertainment. As soon as the first course was placed on the table, a band of three trumpets and three cornets played until the course was finished. Different combinations of instruments, singers, dancers, and even clowns provided interludes to divert the guests while dishes were cleared off and the next course served up. Among these were a Moorish woman who played the pipes to torchlight while some peasants (*contadini*) pretended to mow the grass in the garden for as long as it took to bring in the fifteenth course, and a man with a lyre who “sang divinely in the manner of Orfeo” before the sixteenth.

After the ninth course of oysters and pears had been served, the first tablecloth was removed and the table reset. Fifteen figures, eight naked Moorish men and seven naked women, their heads adorned with pastries of sesame and honey (*pasta di sosameli*) and garlands of laurel and their private parts hidden by real vegetables and various flowers, were displayed on the tables for the amusement of the guests during this interlude.

After the meal, the “most reverend signora” had carried to the table a small silver ship laden with necklaces, jewels, ear ornaments, rings, perfumed gloves, and other “most genteel articles,” all of which were presented to the diners. Twenty-four men dressed in livery clothes held lit torches and musicians played on pipes while this went on, until five o’clock, at which point “a most beautiful Moresca,” led each one home ([Messisbugo 1992: 31–42](#); [Strong 2002: 129–131](#)).

The ceiling of the salon at the villa d’Este has a painting entitled Synod of the Gods. In it the Olympian gods prepare for a festive entertainment. Jupiter sits at the center; Bacchus, to the left, pours wine; Apollo, to the right, plays his lyre. Hercules looks out at the viewer. We are witnessing his apotheosis (he was not originally a god). The Hall of Hercules explicitly depicts this event in its ceiling fresco. The dining and entertainment that took place at the table below the painting was a homologous refraction of the one above. The Hercules below, Ippolito, acknowledges the gaze of the Hercules above.

Prominent among the items displayed or used at these banquets were dishes of majolica, painted lustreware called Hispano-Moresque ware because their making and design originated partly in the Islamic world and Spain. Italians retained the floral and geometric designs on much of their lustreware but also turned to depicting scenes of human or divine acts.

Christianity and Neoplatonism

At this point, we could make a sharp contrast between this earthly paradise and the one from which the Renaissance villa and garden was differentiating itself, the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Benedictine, Cluniac, or Cistercian monastery. If the monastery with its cloister was an earthly paradise where men engaged in

liturgical practices that would lead to permanent transcendence of the world *after* life, the villa with its gardens was an earthly paradise where men engaged in diverting practices that induced moments of transcendence *during* life. We are witnessing here a move from religious to secular (humanist) discourse. Classical imagery is being used to symbolize secular entities, the power, wealth, and fame of the garden's owner (as if power, wealth, and fame were not themselves historically constituted). This dichotomy of 'religious' and 'secular' which echoes those of 'traditional' or 'medieval' and 'modern', is, however, too neat if not downright false.

It is difficult to talk about a movement from the religious to the secular here because the people of the ruling society of Italy in the sixteenth century also attributed religious significance to the ensembles of fountains and statues in the gardens and the paintings in the villa. These were Christian and Neoplatonic.

There are virtually no direct Christian representations in the cardinal's Villa and its garden, chapel apart (Coffin 1960: 88). There is imagery from the Old Testament (Halls of Stories of Solomon, Noah, and Moses), but these figures are treated like the Greco-Roman ones as mythological. The absence of Christian imagery seems strange, but is itself part of the enjoyment the visitor was to have of the villa and garden.²³ For if the visitor puzzled over their imagery, he could find that Christ did in fact figure prominently—in the form of Hercules himself. Christians had long been willing to see Hercules, along with other Greco-Roman gods and heroes, as a prototype of Christ. This was especially so during the early history of Christianity as the official religion of a New Rome (Byzantium).²⁴ Italian cognoscenti revived this way of homologizing ancient gods and heroes with Christian ones as they came to use the mythology of the ancients for their own purposes. So I think, following Dernie (1996: 117), we can see the polysemic Hercules not only as displacing Christ in the ontology and anthropology of the Villa but as an epiphany of Christ there.

The Sibyls were prophesying priestesses of Apollo. Medieval Christians took 12 of them as parallels to the Old Testament prophets from different places. One of these was the Tiburtine Sibyl. She is said to have prophesied the coming of Christ to the emperor Augustus on the occasion of the Senate's decision to decree his apotheosis. The most important frescoes in the cardinal's chapel depict the Sibyls and the Prophets. The other frescoes in the chapel depict the Virgin and Christ.

The hidden allusions to Christian symbolism in the paintings of the villa are almost endless. According to Dernie (1996: 31), the holm oak tree in the fresco of the villa and garden stands for Jupiter and, hence, God, the nine birds in the sky are

²³ One should not think that this situation is characteristic of all public or courtly spaces. As Malcolm Bull points out, mythological scenes overall remain marginal to Christian ones in the Renaissance (Bull 2005: 380–384).

²⁴ "In Byzantine Egypt the ascetic image of the life of Herakles was particularly valued. The hero's labours, his search for a moral path, his agonising end—all of this transformed him into a saviour and redeemer of mankind. The 12 labours thus represent a metaphor for the earthly path travelled by Herakles, as a result of which the hero attains immortality and reaches Olympus" (Heritage Rooms 2006: 151).

the nine generations of the world prophesied by the Tiburtine Sybil, and the peacock in the foreground is the symbol of eternal life and hence of the resurrection of Christ.

Finally, the knowing visitor was prompted to read into the visual images of the villa and garden a Neoplatonist quest for a direct experience of God through contemplation and ecstatic love. Recall, for example, the statue of Venus (doubling as the nymph guarding the Villa d'Este) asleep in the courtyard of the villa. She could be seen as a sign of erotic love, but she could also be seen in the Neoplatonist writings of Marsilio Ficino, popular among those with a classical education, as divine love in the form of beauty (Desnoyers 2002: 22–24). I might add that she appears herself to be experiencing ecstasy. This ecstasy in a dream could also be seen as an anticipation of the unity the soul attains with the Absolute at death (Desnoyers 2002: 24–26).

Pirro Ligorio, the designer and builder of the Villa d'Este, himself provided the ontological reason, Christian and Neoplatonic alike, for the importance of Apollo, the Muses, Minerva and Hercules. They

signify the labours and happy days of those who are dedicated to higher things, and who lead man to the everlasting pleasures of the greatest knowledge, to high and profound meditation on seeing with the eyes of the mind how wonderful is the Prime Mover who made the heavens and earth so varied in its inspirations. Thus the force and the essence of the Divine Light can be recognized in plants and animals. (Pirro Ligorio, unidentified ms., cited in MacDougall 1994: 121)

The “plants and animals” are of course a reference to gardens.

The paradise on earth at Villa d'Este was not, thus, in the eyes of its builder, a secular competitor of the Paradise called Heaven. I prefer to think of it rather as a supplement to the earlier Christian paradises and an attempt to go beyond them, to bring them into the present-day world. This Platonism or Neoplatonism was itself part of an Italian appropriation of Plato's works and their extensions both a humanist move and a reaction to the demise of New Rome. Cosimo de Medici sponsored a council at Florence in 1439 meant to reconcile the Eastern and Western churches and launch a crusade against the Turks. Pletho, a prominent New Roman humanist and Neoplatonist, attended. According to one scholar, “Cosimo hosted lavish banquets during the council at which the luminaries on both sides mingled, and these congenial gatherings provided a venue in which Pletho held forth on his favorite subject” (Wells 2006: 100). Cosimo also gave Ficino the use of a villa at Careggi, near Florence, a metaphoric “academy” because Ficino and his circle could meet there (Field 2002).

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the people at the Villa d'Este valued the books of the classics they had studied while being educated as young men (and women). They did not, however, as adults, confine the classics to books. They used the classics in many media in the villa and its garden to bring about liberating experiences that were both cognitive *and* emotive. The suppers and banquets that took place in the

villa and garden were intended to appeal to all of the senses, so they involved not only delicious foods and wines, but also playful and even erotic poetry, music, and dramatic performances, often translating Latin into Italian. The builders of the garden-palace used statues, reliefs, fresco paintings, fountains, and other architectural features, all of them supposedly classical in origin, to turn their surroundings into what they called a theater where not only people, but rivers, fountains, and machines performed, inducing awe and ecstasy in the spectators (who were often also performers themselves).

The cardinal and his coterie made their readings of the classics, texts of a remote past, the foremost of which was probably Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, come alive in their own present through the use of homology, the idea that forms of the present and past are not arbitrarily similar. They resemble each other because they have the same origin and purpose and are hence in sympathy with one another. As Foucault puts it, language consisted not of a binary system of signifier and signified, but of a ternary system of signifier, signified, and conjuncture, the link, often hidden, that connected the other two. The classics not only provided a language for and knowledge of the past but for the present. Allegory was perhaps the most commonly used vehicle for making these connections, not only in words but in sculpture, painting and architecture. Sophisticates used some classics, notably those of Plato and his followers, the so-called Neoplatonists, to explain how and why past and present were connected.

Scholars and rulers reinvented the classics of European antiquity as we commonly talk about them during the Iberian-Ottoman imperial formation. What I am calling here a reinvention is often referred to as the Renaissance. I have tried to show here how the people of the ruling society used the classics as adults. Their use of the classics was, I have argued, integral to the fashioning of themselves as men and women resident in a courtly paradise and to the fashioning of that paradise itself, whether as a garden of the Hesperides with Hercules as the main figure or as a Parnassus with Apollo as the main figure. Classics were imbricated in the architecture, the fountains, and the statuary of the garden and in the decoration of the villa. People who had access to the villa saw the classics performed in daily life there and especially on the occasion of suppers and, to the greatest extent, banquets, and often themselves performed. These performances were multimedia, involving not only readings from classic texts but also poetry and especially sung poetry with instrumental accompaniment, all considered theatrical and didactic. The aim, especially of the fountains, was to induce awe, while the aim of the other performances was to bring about ecstasy, a love that they thought was both Platonic and Christian and could liberate people from their mundane lives.

What made all this possible ontologically was a newly divinized world outside the Church and its institutions, a world seen as an organism and not as a machine. Its political dimension was the quest for the reestablishment of a Roman empire centered on Franco-German Europe. As its episteme of similitude gave way to that of representation in a world seen as a machine, the classics as multifarious performative practice crucial to personal liberation lost its hold.²⁵

²⁵ Somewhat confusingly for my purposes, Foucault calls this the "classical" period.

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