

Giulio Romano's Garden of Venus as an Interactive Spatial Metaphor

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This paper is concerned with the treatment of real and fictive space in Giulio Romano's *Room of Psyche* (c.1527-30) at the Palazzo Te in Mantua.¹ In particular, it focuses on the fictive environment proposed by the wall fresco as a literary fantasy. Both this narrative/spatial concept and its formal means represent a departure from Giulio's known work with Raphael in Rome; and, for this reason, the present study looks to the artistic and literary tastes of the north-Italian region for the program's rationale. The regional context is inferred from: 1) the major decorative precedents that Giulio encountered in Mantua; 2) some conventions of contemporary romantic and pastoral novellas printed in Venice; and, 3) northern Italy's continuing interest in the garden of love as a literary and artistic motif.²

The *Room of Psyche* is the principal *sala* of the suburban pleasure palace designed and decorated in the early years of Giulio's tenure as court artist to Federigo II Gonzaga, fifth Marquis and first Duke of Mantua. It is located in the north-east corner of the hollow quadrangle and overlooks the gardens at the rear of the complex. As the crowning achievement of the palace's first decorative campaign (organized around themes of nature, art, and love), the frescoes reconcile, in ar-

tistic terms, the contrasting values of spiritual and physical love.³ The vehicle for this neo-Platonic conceit is the myth of Psyche and Cupid, whose story from Apuleius is illustrated in episodes contained within the coffers and lunettes of the vault.⁴ As a counterbalance to this idealizing program, the wall fresco deploys a Bacchic scenario that flows uninterruptedly around the room. A classicizing inscription at its upper margin announces the villa's function as an escape from the routine cares and duties attendant upon public life.⁵ Together, the frescoes' subject, inscription, and enveloping spatial effects posit the *Room of Psyche* (and by extension, the Te) as a "modern Arcadia."

The real space of the room becomes the setting for the wedding feast of Cupid and Psyche, whose marriage is depicted, *di sotto in su*, at the apex of the vault. It represents a contemporary garden, delineated by a topiary grid on the plane of the west wall, a vine-trellised pergola on the south wall, and a pavilion on the north wall.⁶ The room's proximity to the palace's actual gardens and fishponds (visible through the windows on the east wall) helps to blur the boundary between the illusory and the real. Vignettes of Venus, Mars, and Adonis identify the space as the Garden of Venus; appropriately, it

¹ This paper was written under the direction of Dr. Charles R. Mack, whose expertise and encouragement have contributed much to its completion. Dr. Mack is a Louise Fry Scudder Professor of the Liberal Arts and the William Joseph Todd Professor of the Italian Renaissance at the University of South Carolina.

² As demonstrated by numerous citations below, I am indebted to Joanna Woods-Marsden's interpretation of Pisanello's Arthurian fresco as an interactive decorative program and to Patricia Fortini Brown's characterization of the literary Arcadian milieu as an alternative reality. With regard to the northern context, it should be noted that, in 1959, John Shearman suggested in his review of Hartt's monograph that Giulio, in important ways, had become a north-Italian artist. See: John Shearman, review of Frederick Hartt, *Giulio Romano* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1958) in *Burlington Magazine* (1959): 459.

³ Frederick Hartt, *Giulio Romano* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1958) 130ff.

⁴ Hartt argued for the vault program as a neo-Platonic allegory based on Beroaldus' *Commentary* on Apuleius. See: Hartt 130ff. W. L. Gundersheimer's discovery of Sabadino's contemporary record of Ferrarese monuments revealed a regional precedent for a similarly episodic treatment of the subject as a narrative on "moral love" at the Estense villa of Belriguardo (lost). See Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, *De triumphis religionis*, 1497 (Vatican Library); cited in Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 260.

⁵ The border inscription in the *Room of Psyche* reads: "*Federicus Gonzaga II Mar. V.S.R.E. et Reip. Flor. Capitanus Generalis honesto ocio post labores ad reparandam virt. quieti costrui mandavit.*" ["I, Federigo II Gonzaga, Fifth Marquis of Mantua and Captain General of the Florentine Republic, built this place for innocent leisure work in quiet after labor."] Bette Talvacchia has discussed the erotic nuances of "honeste ocio" in this context—a pertinent insight, considering the tone of the room. See Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 60.

⁶ Giulio's trellis-roofed marble pavilion is quite similar to Sabadino's description of a pavilion in the garden of the Castello di Ferrara. See Giovanni Sabadino; cited in Gundersheimer 253. The pergola recalls illustrations in Crescenzi and resembles woodcut illustrations in the *Hyperotomachia* (considered to reflect contemporary garden practice, albeit in an exaggerated manner). See Piero de' Crescenzi (1305), *De agricultura*, ed. Venice, 1495, c. Diiv, in Naomi Miller, "Paradise Regained: Medieval Garden Fountains," *Medieval Gardens*, ed. Elisabeth B. Maddougall (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1983) fig. 12; See also: Francesco Colonna, *Hyperotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499); cited in Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 37. In the *Room of Psyche*, the east wall, which greets the visitor, features a fireplace with windows overlooking the real gardens on either side; above the fireplace is Polyphemus with a background consistent with the vistas on the other walls. Over the windows are panels of Jupiter and Olympias and Pasiphae and the Cow.

is set against a background of illusionistic coastal vistas evocative of the islands of both the mythical Cythera and the Mantuan Te. This scenario derives, in part, from Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, in which the dreaming poet accompanies Psyche and Cupid on a pilgrimage to Adonis' tomb.⁷ The personal nature of the *painted* fantasy is suggested by the room's seeming allusions to Federigo's well-known relationship with his mistress, Isabella Boschetti, implying an analogy between the Mantuan couple and the immortal lovers.⁸ In addition, contemporary genre figures, in company with satyrs, nymphs, and river gods, populate the landscape as though to deny the boundary between the Mantua of Federigo and the Arcadia sung by Virgil, Mantua's revered native son.

The interactive qualities of this fantasy are enabled by the spatial effects that Giulio built into the composition (Figure 1). Because the viewer is physically surrounded by the scenario and can appreciate it from many positions in the room, his/her attention strays gratuitously to any of a series of motifs that make up the fictive *environment*, rather than focusing on a chronological narrative or a dominant viewpoint, either of which would elicit a more distanced response. The figural groupings form a pattern of major and minor motifs that flow into one another in ways that privilege, first, the filling and unifying of foreground pictorial space, and, second, the expression of theme over narrative. This horizontal, additive, and rather flattened approach to composition has been characterized as scenography and linked to Giulio's probable experience with theatrical projects in Rome.⁹ The extent to which the scenario encircles the viewer, however, renders him/her as much an *actor* as a spectator and facilitates viewer-partici-

pation in the shared fantasy. This element of "enactment" pervading Renaissance life, particularly its organized pageantry, led Johan Huizinga to characterize the splendor of the period as a "masquerade within the parameters of a fantastic and ideal past"—a past that had been gleaned from the mythic realms of both pastoral and chivalric literature.¹⁰ Beyond the generalized taste for splendor, posturing and pageantry, however, the *Room of Psyche* appeals to a cultural fascination with "experiencing" imaginary places that is especially evident in the illusionistic art (including religious art and manuscripts) and the "dream" literature of northern Italy.¹¹

As a fictive environment, Giulio's room had Mantuan precedents that included Mantegna's *Camera Picta* (1465-74) and Pisanello's unfinished Arthurian cycle (1448-9), both of which had been commissioned for the Ducal Palace. Although the *Camera Picta's* influence is evident in Giulio's radical perspectives and in the extent of his illusionistic landscapes, it does not extend to his evocation of another world. In Mantegna's room, fantasy is confined to illusionistic vistas and architecture. His realistic portraits of the Gonzaga reinforce the actual world of the court; unlike Giulio's mythologized interpretation of the Te, they do not place the patron and his court in a mythic literary context. Pisanello's room, by contrast, evokes the world and characters of chivalric legend and attributes to them the qualities of Mantua and the *personnae* of the Gonzaga. In a manner similar to Giulio's later mix of Gonzaga emblems and Arcadian myth, Pisanello includes the Gonzaga *impresa* of a seated white dog, a castle resembling the contemporary Castello, and Arthurian heroes sporting the family colors.¹² Joanna Woods-Marsden has suggested that this conflation of Arthurian and Gonzaga iconog-

⁷ Egon Verheyen, *The Palazzo del Te: Images of Love and Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 25-6.

⁸ Verheyen 26. The year 1528 was a particularly intense period in the illicit relationship, involving the furious disapproval of Federigo's mother (Isabella d'Este), the attempted murder of Isabella Boschetti, and Federigo's revenge-killing of her husband. See Verheyen 20. Verheyen cites (as the room's allusions to this affair) the leitmotif of Federigo's salamander *impresa* and motto, "*Quod hinc deest me torquet*," (considered, on one level, to reflect his passion for Isabella) and the subject of the window-wall panel of Jupiter and Olympias whose offspring, Alexander, had the same name as the son (and successor) that Isabella had borne to Federigo. In the nineteenth century, Intra interpreted the room as a *poema d'amore* to Isabella Boschetti whom he considered to have been portrayed in Psyche. See Giovanni Battista Intra, *Mantua ne suoi monumenti di storia e d'arte* (Mantua: 1883). Verheyen's correlation of the biographical material with the broad decorative themes is not universally accepted. Notably, Amadeo Belluzzi disputes the personal and political preoccupations of the patron as influences on the content of the program. See Amadeo Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te a Mantova* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 1998) 136.

⁹ Howard Burns, "'Quelle cose antique et moderne belle de Roma,' Giulio Romano, the theatre and the antique," *Giulio Romano*, eds. Paul Davies and Nicholas Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 135. As court artist to the Gonzaga, Giulio would have continued to design sets and costumes for processions and pageants.

¹⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, cf. *Lex Jeux a la Renaissance*, ed. P. Aries and J.C. Margolin, Actes du XXIIIe colloque international d'études

humanistes (Tours, July, 1980) 258-9; quoted in Manfredo Tafuri, "Giulio Romano: Language, Mentality, and Patrons," *Giulio Romano*, eds. Paul Davies and Nicholas Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 50. See also: Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) 180-1.

¹¹ In addition to illusionist programs like Veronese's, I refer to the manuscript tradition where the impulse to "pierce the veil" between the real world and the world of the text is expressed in the device of the "torn" manuscript, e.g. Girolamo da Cremona's hand painted frontispiece for the *Opera* of Aristotle (Venice, 1483), Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Through the "rents" in the "parchment," the reader "enters" the presence of Aristotle. A similar effect obtains in a Ferrarese *Madonna* (c.1470-80) at the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. The veil between the physical and spiritual worlds is represented as peeling away in the *View of Verona over a Scene of the Holy Family*, attributed to Marco Agnolo del Moro, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio. In these works, real and imagined worlds are depicted as coincident in time and space, and the veil separating them is understood to have been breached through a visionary experience. These two-dimensional works are reproduced in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*, Exhibition Catalog (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art and Lund Humphries, 2002).

¹² Giovanni Paccagnini and Joanna Woods-Marsden have called attention to the Gonzaga iconographic references in the Pisanello frescoes. See: Giovanni Paccagnini, *Pisanello* (London: Phaidon Press, 1973) 56; see also: Joanna Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 69-71.

raphy (a natural affectation for a dynasty of military leaders) and especially the encircling and unframed nature of the design itself, were intended by Pisanello (and perhaps by the patron, Ludovico) to further an aristocratic self-identification with this legendary world.¹³

Traditionally, Mantua's *Sala del Pisanello* has not been considered a precedent for Giulio's literary/spatial fantasies at the Te. Its fairly recent discovery, its fragmentary and damaged condition, and (not least) its International Style aesthetic and chivalric content have militated against the connection. It is clear, however, that, whether as an indicator of the court's continuing taste for illusory mythic environments or as a possible formal influence, Pisanello's cycle (like the romance-derived program at the Castello di Manta) shares important qualities with the *Room of Psyche*. These include: 1) the blending of courtly and legendary worlds; and, 2) a formal treatment that facilitates this fantasy, *i.e.* an emphatically horizontal, scenographic, and continuous format involving all four walls, which, in turn, entails a multi-focal and patterned composition.¹⁴ Was Pisanello's fresco available to Giulio? Although it is impossible to know conclusively, there seems no definitive evidence that it was not. In 1480, after the *Sala del Pisanello* had been damaged by the collapse of the ceiling, Federigo's grandfather had instructed that "everything possible should be done to preserve [the room]."¹⁵ An old layer of glue (covering the fresco where the wall had been damaged by the collapse) may date from this injunction—indicating, perhaps, a desire to preserve the fresco itself.¹⁶ When Paccagnini uncovered the cycle in the 1960s, the *sinopie* were encrusted with layers of dirt, a condition that suggested to him that the space had been empty and neglected at some point. The walls were not actually re-frescoed until the major remodeling undertaken by Duke Guglielmo in the second half of the sixteenth century, well after Giulio's activity at the Te.¹⁷ It seems inconceivable that, if it were still visible, the Pisanello cycle

would *not* have interested Giulio. In his time, Pisanello had been the most sought-after courtly artist in northern Italy.¹⁸ The Arthurian project had represented a major commission, and its abandonment would have been a well-known chapter in the history of Gonzaga patronage.

Basic to any encompassing spatial effect is the treatment of the room's corners. To achieve a sense of living in the romance, Giulio, like Pisanello before him, unfurled a free-form design that spanned the corners of the room in a scenographic treatment similar to a diorama. In the *Room of Psyche*, this suppression of the corners does not derive from any (known) prior work by Giulio for Raphael, nor from Raphael's designs themselves.¹⁹ The frescoes for the Vatican *Stanze*, for example, while incorporating all four walls, feature cohesive individual narratives contained by architectural elements (real or illusory) or by *faux* tapestries. In the *Room of Psyche*, however, Giulio's purpose is to extend, rather than to contain narrative. The illusionistic setting involves only those "architectural" references that are consistent with a garden, such as topiary, trelliswork, a pergola and a pavilion; and while they articulate the windowless walls and allow for an organization of the narrative that reflects the coffered design of the vault, these minimal garden props also allow a fluid figural composition with multiple foci.²⁰ Giulio may have adapted them (to define the garden metaphor for the real space of the room) from Mantegna's tapestry rod, which tracks the planes of all the walls in the *Camera Picta* and reinforces the loggia metaphor. But, while Mantegna's fictive hangings and pilasters impose the visual logic associated with the view from within a loggia, they also function as transitions from scene to scene, easing disjunctions between scenarios on adjacent walls, as in the corner between the "landscape wall" and the "portrait wall" where a tapestry panel serves as a framing device. However, the *Room of Psyche*'s outdoor setting required that Giulio address the corners in ways that expand the illusion of a con-

¹³ Woods-Marsden 69-71, 88-92. Charles R. Mack has shown that several mid-quattrocento Florentine monastic cycles involved fictive environments that were designed to enhance architectural spaces with "enter-able" *devotional* fantasies. These cycles (which, like the romance-derived cycles, straddled Late Gothic and Renaissance aesthetic styles) dissolved the monastic walls to transcendent visions of biblical narrative or to a monastic earthly paradise. They "pierced" the architecture, however, without suppressing it. See Charles R. Mack, "Fictive Spaces for Monastic Places: Art and Architecture in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Arts* 12 (2001): 30-43.

¹⁴ Woods-Marsden points out that Pisanello's room was a departure from the period's usually compartmentalized decorative programs, *e.g.* the *Room of the Months* at Schifanoia, as well as a departure from his own (surviving) works in Veronese churches that feature framing devices and a greater use of perspective. She does cite, however, the Tristan cycle at Castelroncolo, near Bolzano, and the Manta cycle as other surviving formats that are continuous and unframed. See Woods-Marsden 88-92. For the Manta cycle's textual source, see Evelyn Welch, *Art and Society in Italy, 1350-1500* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 294. Roman relief narrative (*e.g.* Trajan's Column) is usually cited as the likely source for Giulio's similarly horizontal composition. See Hartt 107.

¹⁵ Letters from Federico, third Marquis of Mantua to Fancelli and Andreasi; cited in Giovanni Paccagnini, *Pisanello* (London: Phaidon Press, 1973)

¹⁸ Paccagnini suggests that this concern for the preservation of the room's interior, without mentioning the frescoes *per se*, reflects a continuing regard for the work despite its unfinished condition and the reigning classicism of Mantegna. See Paccagnini, 7-19.

¹⁶ Paccagnini 19, n.14.

¹⁷ Paccagnini 19, n.15.

¹⁸ Pisanello had executed decorative programs for Leonello d'Este at Belriguardo. Gundersheimer 238.

¹⁹ While the centripetal style of Raphael's tapestry cartoons suggests an affinity with Giulio's attention to corners in the *Room of Psyche*, they were obviously designed with framing in mind and are thought to have been sized for specific spaces along facing walls, without regard to compositional continuity. See Sharon Farmor, *The Raphael Tapestry Cartoons* (London: Scala Books, 1996) 9-16.

²⁰ This is not the case in Raphael's (Garden) *Loggia of Psyche* in the Villa Farnesina in Rome, where the garland frames and tapestries contain the figures. Giulio's use of a topiary idiom for a program on the same subject in a similarly garden-related space, however, may derive from the Raphael design.

tinuous panoramic vista and maintain the fiction of the garden. Instead of centering the distant perspectives on each wall, therefore, he places them on either side of a large figural motif, so that the perspectives dominate the corners of the room, which are spanned in the foreground with gestural language and figural and objective correspondences. This more effectively dissolves the walls themselves as both reminders of an interior space and as barriers between reality and fantasy.

Both the *Hall* cycle at the Castello di Manta (featuring the discovery of the fountain of youth and an erotic burlesque) and Pisanello's Arthurian cycle had submerged the corners of their respective rooms. In an effect that may have reflected the hanging of actual tapestries (not sized for specific walls), these late Gothic designs suppressed corners by allowing figures and objects to *straddle* the angles of the rooms (Figures 2-3).²¹ This is a wrap-around technique that Giulio fully exploits in the *Room of the Giants*, where the corners disappear under the continuous narrative. In the earlier *Room of Psyche*, however, he downplays the corners by more tentative means suited to a less cohesive narrative/spatial concept. For example, he projects the plane of the south wall onto the east wall (Figure 4) to conjure a building that obtrudes into the extended space. Adonis runs from the north wall to a doorway depicted on the east wall where the overhanging gilt corbels suggestively reinforce it (Figure 5). In the southwest corner, the gushing urns of erotically conceived river figures on the west wall visually and symbolically echo the lustration motif on the south wall; here, too, the mountainous landscapes in the background merge to carry the scenario around the angle of the room (Figure 6). Mars, bathing with Venus on the north wall, extends his hand in the direction of another figure of Venus on the west wall; she returns the gesture in a communication that effectively rounds the corner between them (Figure 7). This unifying imperative extends to the vault, where the Muses shower their gifts onto the real space of the room below, from similarly overflowing jars and ewers, and at the apex where Giulio echoes the reaching gesture of Mars and Venus in the union of Cupid and Psyche.²²

Obviously, Pisanello's use of the International Style in the face of his cycle's outdoor setting, had entailed a perspective-less and therefore a more radically unfocused design than Giulio's own outdoor solution. Even his knights were scaled and grouped without regard to spatial recession, in order to increase viewer recognition of each one.²³ Surrounded by the *pattern* of figures and landscape, the viewer was encouraged

to identify with the fictive world by means of the artist's realism in natural details, his use of human scale, the Gonzaga iconography, and the inclusion of chivalric incident of a type still enacted in the Renaissance.²⁴ Giulio's use of figural pattern and his repetition of motifs—as devices to fill and unify the space and to continually involve a viewer strolling through the space—are *functionally* related to Pisanello's Gothic strategies of pattern and repetition. In each case, the three-dimensional evocation of a legendary world has required that an encompassing "narrative" be married to an additive aesthetic that does not privilege one motif over another. The consequently emblematic effect allows characters to be repeated in a unified picture space. Woods-Marsden relates this quality in Pisanello's fresco to the interconnectedness of the various Arthurian stories and the interlacing style of the romance genre.²⁵ In the *Room of Psyche*, the effect resonates with the similarly repetitive and inter-related events, themes, and characters of classical mythology. It also parallels the chronological anomalies found in the dream-journeys of Arcadian literature.

Sannazaro's influential *Arcadia*, a series of pastoral eclogues interspersed with passages of prose narrative, had been published in Venice in 1502. Favoring an eclectic combination of modes and motifs, Sannazaro claimed Arcadia as essentially a "country of the mind" that could accommodate any number of related source-traditions, as well as the occasional contemporary interloper.²⁶ The typical poet narrator entered this country by means of a persona who interacted with the characters of myth—a convention that enabled a comingling of real and mythological personages in a composite world of the literary and the real.²⁷ Just as Giulio juxtaposes contemporary genre figures (and mythological stand-ins for Federigo and Isabella) with satyrs and nymphs, so poet-narrators wander in Arcadia in the company of gods, shepherds, and shepherdesses. Sannazaro's entire narrative framework is bound up with the poet's confusing double persona as one of the shepherds. By definition, this narrative device playfully defies boundaries while fostering a fantasy that is entirely self-conscious.²⁸ It necessarily promotes narrative discrepancies that undermine consistency and call attention to the sense of make-believe; for example, the *Arcadia's* second eclogue, careless of the demands of cohesive narrative, features characters who seem to be in two places at once.²⁹ This blithe unconcern for chronologically consistent and coherent storytelling is evident, too, in the narrative anomalies that exist side-by-side

²¹ Woods-Marsden 89.

²² Hartt 134-5.

²³ Woods-Marsden argues that, although Pisanello was demonstrably capable of using perspective, he chose the qualities of the International Style as a means of continually involving viewers who were circulating around the space. She concludes, however, that he was striving, within this basic approach, to make the finished work more focused and legible than the *sinopie*. See Woods-Marsden 88-92, 103.

²⁴ Woods-Marsden 70.

²⁵ Woods-Marsden 103.

²⁶ Ralph Nash, *Jacopo Sannazaro, Arcadia and Piscatorial Eclogues* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1966) 22-24.

²⁷ Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 207.

²⁸ Nash 12-25.

²⁹ Nash 12, 14.

with spatial illusion in the *Room of Psyche*. Venus appears simultaneously in several locations; she is in the bath with Mars on the north wall and on the east wall where she reaches back toward him. They share the bath in the same implied time frame as that in which Mars discovers her with Adonis (Figures 5, 7). With no structural sequence to suggest chronology, these events seem to conflict in what is (in the totality) a unified picture space and thus, by inference, a unified time frame. The emphasis, in both painted and poetic pastorals, is not on internal consistency, but on the balance and flow of those motifs that evoke both the fictive world and its related "state of mind" and whose chronological and spatial lapses reveal a self-conscious fascination with the flickering interaction between the real and the illusory.³⁰

The *Hypnerotomachia*, a source for the wall cycle in the *Room of Psyche*, is a hybrid production with roots in this pastoral tradition, as well as in the ornamental world of courtly romance. Published in Venice in 1499, it featured a garden of Venus that updated the medieval garden of love—a subject that had been a staple of courtly romance literature since its appearance in the *Romance of the Rose*. The literary currency of this motif reflects the continuing north-Italian interest in the garden as a setting for romantic and erotic narrative, while the familiar device of the (humanist) poet's dream allows the reader to vicariously experience the garden of love. This subject also had remained viable in the visual arts of northern Italy's Francophile courts.³¹ Giulio's interactive setting, like the *Hypnerotomachia* itself, translates the long-popular motif of the garden of love into an ornate Arcadian idiom that corresponds to Colonna's rhetoric.

As a fictive environment, Giulio's garden of love had at least one Venetian precedent. Antonio Vivarini had painted a set of three (known) panels that, in the aggregate, would have suggested a garden setting. The cycle (c.1465-70) was executed in the International Style and represented different views of a contemporary garden whose attributes, including fashionable men and women, replicated in life-size and modern dress a traditional medieval garden of love. The panel in Melbourne (Figure 8) depicts two men and three women near an elabo-

rate fountain in a space enclosed on three sides by a trellised rose hedge but entered from the fourth. A second panel (location unknown) reportedly shows a couple standing in a garden setting; and a third (also not located) depicts a rose arbor without figures.³² The panels' original installation, assuming their pendant relationship and given their large scale, would have suggested a vaguely illusionistic setting whose contemporary details and traditionally erotic emblems would have resonated with the viewer's sense of the social and amorous nuances of the courtly garden.³³

Such gardens had traditionally been the sites of courtly promenade, dalliance, and organized pageantry. The new *cinquecento* garden theatres associated with the revival of classical plays had reinforced this theatrical linkage. Indeed, Giulio's choice of a garden as both a spatial metaphor and a pretext for courtly role-playing invokes the courtly garden's time-honored function as a venue for playacting and show. Regional testimony to the garden-as-theatre survives in Sabadino's record (1497) of the nearby Castello di Ferrara, the seat of the Estensi dynasty that included Federigo's maternal grandparents, Ercole d'Este and Eleonora d'Aragona. According to Sabadino's account, the Castello garden was a favored resort of the court's ladies; and in the tradition of the garden of love, it was still the site of nocturnal concerts of love songs.³⁴ It also accommodated all kinds of spectacles, allegorical plays, and pastoral idylls—complete with mechanical devices for instant set changes and special effects, as well as topographical follies like the artificial mountain built by Borso d'Este to challenge the flatness of the countryside.³⁵ As in the romantic novella, the northern courtly garden was the locus not only of pleasure, but of fantasy. When Giulio selected it as a spatial metaphor for the Garden of Venus, he was drawing upon more than a set of literary conventions; he was evoking these multiple real-life functions of the garden (scenography, fantasy, alternative landscape, *amore*) to support the room's thematic issues, to underline its role as a fictive theatrical environment, and to elicit a performative response.

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³⁰ Brown 204-6.

³¹ Paul F. Watson, *The Garden of Love in Tuscan Art of the Early Renaissance* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1979) 122.

³² The Melbourne panel (illus.) may have been cut at the bottom; it presently measures (4' 10" x 7' 10"); its two companions measure (4' 11" x 7' 7") and (5' x 7' 7 1/2"). The companion panels have not been located. See Watson 122-4, 165, n.2,3,4,5.

³³ See Watson for a full discussion of the erotic emblems associated with the garden of love.

³⁴ Gundersheimer 253.

³⁵ Sabadino; cited in Gundersheimer 155-6.



Figure 1. Giulio Romano, with Rinaldo Mantovano, Benedetto Pagni da Pescia, and Assistants, *The Room of Psyche*, 1527-30, fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Photo courtesy of Scala / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2. Author's illustration of figure placement by Antonio Pisano (called Pisanello), corner between walls 1 and 4, *Sala del Pisanello*, c.1442-49, fresco. Palazzo Ducale, Mantua.



Figure 3. Author's illustration of figure placement by Antonio Pisano (called Pisanello), corner between walls 1 and 2, *Sala del Pisanello*, c.1442-49, fresco. Palazzo Ducale, Mantua.



[above left] Figure 4. Giulio Romano, corner between the south and east walls, *Room of Psyche*, 1527-30, fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Photo courtesy of Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, Modena.

[above right] Figure 5. Giulio Romano, corner between the north and east walls, *Room of Psyche*, 1527-30, fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Photo courtesy of Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, Modena.

[facing page top left] Figure 6. Giulio Romano, corner between the south and west walls, *Room of Psyche*, 1527-30, fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Photo courtesy of Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, Modena.

[facing page top right] Figure 7. Giulio Romano, corner between the north and west walls, *Room of Psyche*, 1527-30, fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Photo courtesy of Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, Modena.

[facing page bottom] Figure 8. Antonio Vivarini *b.c.* 1415-*d.c.* 1476-84, Italian, *The Garden of Love*, *c.* 1465-70, oil, tempera and gold on wood, 152.5 x 239.0 cm. Felton Bequest, 1947. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Victoria.

