

The Double Allegory of the *Bon Architecte* and the *Mauvais Architecte* by Philibert De L'Orme

Francesca Fatta

Philibert De L'Orme was one of the leading exponents of the architectural culture of the Second Renaissance in France [Blunt 1958].

A double image has been chosen, one of the best-known of the sixteenth century, which takes up the idea of the good architect, as opposed to the bad one, in an allegorical key. In the representation of the double allegory, a current, since eternal, concept emerges, intended to involve the reader in reflections that directly invest the social and political context of the practice of architecture.

These works are two woodcuts, placed at the end of the treatise *Le premier tome de l'Architecture* (1567) [1] which documents the competencies of the architect as designer, builder and decorator. They have the characteristic of presenting the human figure and the architectural and landscape settings in an articulated and explicit manner.

De L'Orme was a builder and theoretician of great prestige in France, under the reign of Francis I, and undoubtedly represented a strong and influential personality for the time. In these images, between similarities and differences, it is summarized the evolution of the figure of the designer and of the builder in the phase of transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Known as antithetical images of positive and negative attitudes toward designing and building, they recall Ambrogio Lorenzetti and his frescoes on the effects of good and bad government [2].

The "*sage et docte Architecte*" (on the right) is represented in pleasant surroundings, enlivened by cultivated gardens and fountains that –in a play of perspectives– are surrounded by airy, spacious buildings with façades marked by well-designed and well-proportioned rounded arches. The exteriors and interiors interpenetrate each other, giving the impression that nature and architecture play agreeable, mutually respectful roles.

But it is above all the figure of the architect that attracts, amazes, despite its incredible physical alteration, without creating repulsion. His posture is hieratic and condescending, he turns compassionately towards the student and the two share gestures and looks.

A physical figure that we could call 'everted,' given the multiplication of the senses with which it is represented: four hands, three eyes, four ears, to amplify hearing into listening, the hands into the transmission of actions, and sight into grasping the signs of the past, the present and the future [3]. In addition, the feet are endowed with small wings, probably for resting on nature in a light and considerate way. The 'good architect' speaks to the student with a slightly-open mouth because his science must be transmitted in a calm and transparent way [4]. The scroll held in one of his hands represents Drawing that organizes the world.

The 'bad architect' (on the left) is represented according to a similar and opposing idea. The setting appears bleak and in disarray. Nature is desolate and barren, un-

This article was written upon invitation to comment on the image of Philibert de l'Orme, not submitted to anonymous review, published under the editor-in-chief's responsibility.

related to a scene that has as a backdrop a dark, massive castle, providing a clear reference to an obsolete medieval culture. The house on the right is little more than a hut and the sky is menacing. Even the large tree in the center of the picture appears to have no connection with the landscape. At the center, a maimed figure moves clumsily, an architect without eyes and nose, his hands cut off, with disorderly garments that leave his bare legs uncovered, making the appearance of the “*mauvais Architecte*” even more fragile and exposed. Finally, his mouth is wide open, always for the idea of contrast with the reasoned speech of the “*bon Architecte*” [5].

Notes

[1] The treatise of Philibert De L'Orme, published in 1567 and entitled *Le premier tome de l'Architecture* (*The First Volume of Architecture*), because a second one was planned, consists of nine *Livres*. The *premier tome de l'Architecture* closes with a *Conclusion* centered on the figure of the Architect and on “*certaines instructions sur l'entreprise et faicts des bastiments*” which end with recapitulative advice on the knowledge that the “*sage et docte Architecte*” shares with his student so that he, too, will become a “*bon Architecte*” [de L'Orme 1567, pp. 281-283].

[2] Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegoria del Buon Governo, Effetti del Buon Governo, Allegoria del Cattivo Governo*, 1338-1339. Siena, Palazzo Pubblico.

Author

Francesca Fatta, Department of Architecture, *Mediterranea* University of Reggio Calabria, ffatta@unirc.it

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This symmetrical juxtaposition between positivity and negativity, between amplification of the senses and mutilation, emphasizes the response from positive to negative in the art of building and in the ethical and representative figure of the architect. The importance of knowledge, of know-how and of knowing how to teach is emphasized. An allegory that, as already underlined, resumes the Ambrogio Lorenzetti's allegorical idea conceived about two centuries earlier. Even in that case, the frescoes rely on allegory to underline a clear didactic message. The allegory of the *Buon Governo* and that of the *Cattivo Governo* both use opposing visions of architectural and landscape order and harmony to inspire the conduct of rulers.

[3] De L'Orme states: “*la figure cy-apres descrite [...] vous met devant les yeux un homme sage [...] ayant trois yeux. L'un pour admirer et adorer la sainte divinité de Dieu, et contempler ses oeuvres tant admirables, et aussi pour remarquer le temps passé. L'autre pour observer et mesurer le temps present, et donner ordre à bien conduire et diriger ce qui se presente. Le troisieme pour prévoir le futur et temps à venir*” [de L'Orme 1567, p. 282].

[4] De L'Orme states: “*il fault beaucoup plus ouyr que parler*” [de L'Orme 1567, p. 282].

[5] In this case De L'Orme states: “*Il a seulement une bouche pour bien babiller et mesdire*” [de L'Orme 1567, p. 281].

bert de L'Orme conseiller et aumosnier ordinaire du Roy. Paris: chez Federic Morel, rue S. lean de Beauvais: <<http://architecture.cesr.univ-tours.fr/Traite/Images/Les1653Index.asp>> (accessed 2018, July 22).