



Issue 10 – Winter 2023/2024





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"Zannizine is for the now. Gathering inspiration from the past, fostering experiment and collaboration in the present and securing a future for the Commedia dell'Arte"

- Barry and Bill

INTRODUCING ISSUE 10 OF ZANNIZINE

Welcome to Zannizine's tenth appearance.

Here it is folks, issue 10 of Zannizine, Winter 23/24, a bumper issue for Commedia dell'Arte Day, Feb 25th 2024! A little late but snow is forecast for Scotland so we can still call it winter. Now, don't think that Bill and I expect Zannizine to go on and on in perpetuity. No. The life of most of the magazines we admire varied: *Mir Iskustva*, *The World of Art* which resulted in the creation of the Diaghilev Ballet, lasted only a couple of years; Richard Buckle's '*Ballet*' which brought so many artists and writers to prominence, started 1939, was interrupted by a war, then ran 1946 to 1952; '*Dada*' the magazine of the Surrealists had only seven issues in all; Gordon Craig's '*Mask*' appeared and disappeared and reappeared, over some twenty years. On the other hand the rather dull '*Dancing Times*' (which did much to foster the early days of British Ballet) first appeared 1894 and finally expired in 2022.

We will try to keep Zannizine going as long as it informs and entertains – this second factor is always in our minds, as both Bill and I are theatre people rather than academicians, though Bill never fails to astonish with me his erudition. No. 3 of our team is Dr Oliver Crick, my longtime friend and former student, co-editor of *Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, author of many books and an authority on 'Commedia as is'. Our fourth member is Cheryl Stapleton, the director of *Learning Through Theatre*, teacher, performer, wiz computer buff and, I have recently discovered illustrator (see [Stage Craft - Part III](#)).

There is a further reason to keep Zannizine going and that is as an anthology of Commedia ephemera. In the future, there may well be valuable material, too long for our regular pages; too academic, too arcane, or even too boring. I have, for example, a typescript translation of *Colombine, Avocat Pour et Contre* in which Caterina Biancolelli achieved great success. It runs for over two hours, so too long for the standard edition, but ideally placed in an online anthology.

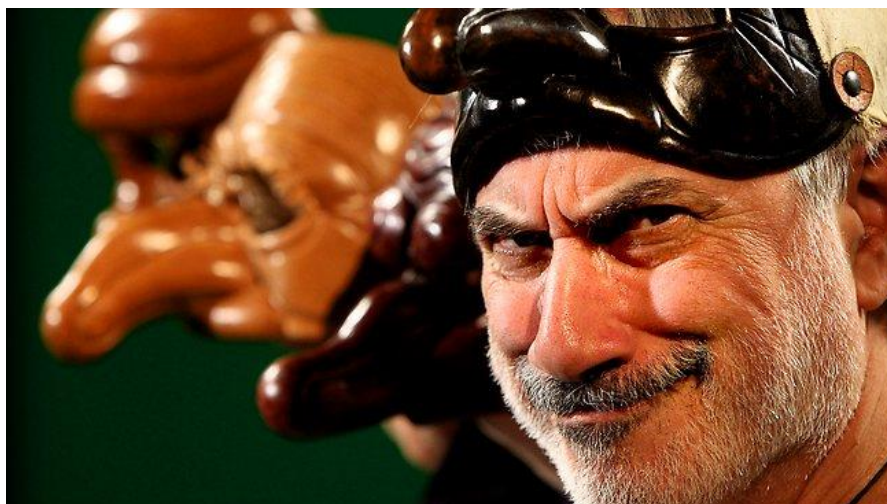
You may find our 10th issue slightly more demanding than our usual editions, starting with the opening item by the Italian Commedia Master, Antonio Fava. It will pay for careful reading. It provides a basis of what was, what is, and what can be Commedia, and keeps us from flights of fruitless speculation and erroneous concepts. We owe its inclusion to the persuasive talents of our Cheryl, who attended a workshop with Fava in Regio Emilia last summer.

Our cover illustration

This is from one of the frescoes in the famous Fools' Staircase in [Trausnitz Castle](#), by Alessandro Padovano in 1575-1579. One of the men depicted is believed to be Zan Ganassa, whose troupe created and performed the canovaccio recorded by Frescobaldi, in his zibaldoni (his actor's sidebook). Be sure to turn to our [From The Archive](#) section for an exclusive glimpse at one of these rare canovaccio in a brand new translation.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE:

ONE NAME, MANY MEANINGS.



1

The phrase '*commedia dell'arte*' is used today in a specific and erroneous way as a name for a 'theatrical genre', identified by the use of masks and improvisation. This very limited view of the historical phenomenon *Commedia dell'Arte*, encompasses spectacles best defined as neo-folkloric, street performances accompanied by 'revelrous' behaviour, wearing an obligatory permanent smile, and other things nearer to the Circus than to Theatre. In other words, it's a picture of a misunderstanding; an error.

Originally, in the 1530s, the *Commedia* was called *Commedia Zannesca* or *Degli Zanni* - only later to be officially dignified as ***Commedia dell'Arte***. It was also called *Mercenaria*, from *mercede*: a reward, meaning paid (hence 'professionalism'), *Improvvisa* for the use of improvisation, *Italiana* for its origin, *Commedia Buffonesca*, *Commedia delle Maschere* and finally, for our great pleasure as "modern", international people, just *Commedia* - the dominant term, present in all definitions. '*Commedia*' never indicates a precise genre, but refers to the art of the actor: the theatre with scenes, costumes, accessories, the hall with seats and the audience that paid to enter. Yes: the *Commedia* invents and inaugurates all this.

Commedia dell'Arte appears written, and thus documented, for the first time by Goldoni, in a negative way, in *Il Teatro Comico*, a manifesto for comedy, composed and performed in 1750, through which Goldoni elaborates his idea of reforming the theatre, based no longer on the *bambocci* (puppets) of the *Improvvisa* (as *Commedia* was usually called at that time), but on the *caratteri* - the characters - that is, real-life, human-social types.

The Italian language, which presides over the origin of the *Commedia*, is rich in expressions born five centuries ago and still in use today, e.g:

¹ Image courtesy of The Advertiser, Adelaide, Nov 2011

- *Fare la Commedia* (to do the Comedy) meaning 'to be an actor'
- *Entrare in Arte* (to enter in professionalism) used to mean 'to embark on the actors' profession'
- *Andare in Stanza* (to go inside the room/to go indoors) used to mean 'to act!' or 'Let's act!'

The last expression, used since the beginning, indicates 'acting indoors', not outside, on the street, but indoors! Where the actor gives his best performance, and the audience can best receive and best enjoy it.

Commedia is Theatre, *Arte* is Craft. And the repertoire? Vast. Consisting of many genres, divided into two fundamental categories: the *Fabula* and the *Opera*. The *Comici dell'Arte*, in distinguishing their representations as *Fabule* and *Opere*, propose, in the first category (Tales/Fables) comic, poetic representations, all with a happy ending; in the second category (Opera) stories that are serious, dramatic, and tragic.

The 'genres', or 'styles', or variants of 'Fabula'², are:

- The '*Commedia*' proper: a comic and intriguing story, extremely eventful, full of misunderstandings, errors, twists, drama, but always a happy ending.
- *Pastorale* (rural)
- *Boschereccia* (woodland)
- *Marinaresca* (maritime; of the sea)
- *Piscatoria* (fishery)
- *Tartarea* (Tartarean; of the underworld)

These were all poetic and with characters taken from classical mythology, such as Satyr, Nymph, Mermaid, Triton, and various deities, sometimes mixed with a character of the *Commedia*, such as Arlecchino-Mercury or Pulcinella-Apollo.

The 'genres', or 'styles', or variants of 'Opera'³, are:

- *Opera Storica* (historical opera)
- *Opera Eroica* (heroic opera)
- *Opera Regia* (royal opera, which is a Tragedy)
- *Opera Mista* (a mixture of more than one genre).

All the different genres of the profession have in common the *Tipi Fissi*: fixed types. These are defined in the Comic *Fabula* as: the two Old Men (Dottore and Magnifico), the Lovers, the Servants, the Captains. These types always appear in all forms: in comic tales, in poetic tales and in opera - even in *Opera Regia*. In poetic genres, such as *Pastorale* and *Marinaresca*, we find mythological and Olympic figures, such as the Satyr, the Nymph, the Triton, the Mermaid, as the most important characters, but servants, old men and the lovers will be there too. In the operatic works, along with

² *La Mirtilla* Pastoral Comedy by Isabella Andreini, 1588. First work composed by a woman, in the Pastoral genre. It's not a scenario, it's written in verse, in full. Andreini summarizes the scenic experiences of the pastoral scenarios in the repertoire of the Compagnia dei Gelosi, in this work. In *Zibaldone Casamarciano*, Nerone, *Dramma Storico*, we find many works that can be traced back to the genres of the repertoire in *Commedia*. In particular, the scenario of *Fabula Marinaresca L'Arcadia Incanta* is of considerable scenic commitment and of great comic and poetic effect. There are many and important analogies between *L'Arcadia Incantata* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

³ In the collection of Flaminio Scala's Scenarios, *Il Teatro delle Favore Rappresentive*, the scenarios of Tragedy, *Opera Regia*, *Opera Reale*, *Pastorale*, *Boschereccia*, *Opera Mista* and more, are reported.

The collection of *Opera Regia* called '*di Ciro Monarca*', contains 48 scenarios. The volume *I Canovacci della Commedia dell'Arte*, published by Einaudi, Turin, 2007, edited by Anna Maria Testaverde, reports 10 scenarios of *Opera Regia* from the collection '*di Ciro Monarca*'.

historical figures like Nero, and the Tyrant, the Queen and the heroic Warrior, there will be Servants, Old Men and Lovers. The latter are involved in the seriousness of the story and may be tragic figures... But funny people always stay funny, they're everywhere, and they never die.

All this great repertoire is what we call *Commedia dell'Arte*.

Commedia is dramaturgical. Dramaturgy is the system of relationships between characters. In Commedia, this system of relationships is defined for all fables and operas. Each character has its own way of relating to others. The result is a dense system of relationships that the actor knows in advance through training, in the same that the violinist knows the notes, the music, the performing technique. The Interpretation is a *Sistema d'Inenzioni*: 'a System of Intentions'. The actor will present the best trajectory for his character through the performance.

Improvisation is a method. It is improvised BEFORE going on stage, to prepare and to create the actions. Originally all the built actions were called *lazzi* (*lazzo* in the singular); nowadays the word is used only for comic actions. Improvisation is a form of writing. The whole Company is 'author', working to follow the '*canovaccio*' (scenario). This is usually pre-written by the *Capocomico* and describes in detail the entire course of the story and takes into account the composition of the Company. Words and actions are "written" together – devised as an ensemble. Once "written", the comedy will be ready to be shown to the public. The scenario scrupulously follows the scheme on which all the fables and operas are based: each actor specialises in a character and will always play that character, in all works.

The Company produces, interprets, distributes its programme. Having arrived in a city, having established the place, the Company represents, on average, ten works of different genres, most of which would be comic fables. Every night has a title. Every night the same audience, enjoying the whole repertoire. The Company is the real protagonist. If *i Gelosi* troupe arrives, the audience rejoices and rushes to attend the repertoire of *i Gelosi*. Of course, Isabella Andreini, lead actress of *i Gelosi*, was famous and loved by the public, but she represents not herself but the *Compagnia dei Gelosi*.

Commedia dell'Arte is a system of organising, producing and distributing theatrical works - fables and operas - represented by professional companies, in an established historical period that goes from the mid-1530s to the 1810s. Subsequently, the form continued in the Kingdom of Naples, then part of Unified Italy, until the first half of the 20th century. There were a few excursions to other places in Italy and Europe, and autonomous forms appeared in the French and English Pantomimes, but it was not until the post-World War II period, that we saw the return of the Commedia in its classic form (characters, costumes, *lazzi*). However, it was all fragmented, reduced to a scheme of 'environmental entertainment' and only rarely seen in full form and dramaturgy as originally intended. Today, despite some generalised confusion, it is once more possible to see examples of complete theatre, in the form and principles of the Great Commedia dell'Arte.

by Antonio Fava

Actor, author, theatre director, Maestro of Commedia dell'Arte and of Comedy. Further biography details and details of Fava's books can be found at the end of this issue.

Since translation can lose some nuance, we have included the original text, [in Italian at the back of this edition.](#)

Keeping the Commedia Banner Flying



An occasional series celebrating companies and individuals who kept the spirit alive, in the lean years.

It was some years into the 20th century before British theatre lovers awoke to the importance of *Commedia dell'Arte* in the history of the western theatre. Maurice Sand's *Masques et Bouffons*, published in Paris in 1860, didn't reach our shores until 1915. It then appeared in a two-volume version with the anglicized title of *The History of the Harlequinade*, presumably to give the wartime (yes, it was!) British reader a point of reference to the *Harlequinade* still performed as the culmination of the Christmas pantomime. Its easy storybook style and coloured pictures widely aroused interest in the traditional improvised performances of the 16th and 17th centuries and its errors were soon corrected by a series of learned books, notably:

Winifred Smith's *The Commedia dell'Arte* (1912)

Allardyce Nicoll's *Masks, Mime and Miracles* (1921)

Cyril W Beaumont's *The History of Harlequin* (1926)

Edward Gordon Craig – Various entries in *The Mask* (1927 -28)

K. M. Lee's *Italian Popular Comedy* (1934)

Another book, the hugely successful *The Italian Comedy* by Pierre Louis Duchartre (1929) also came in for criticism, particularly the claim that Commedia had direct links with Roman comedy.

Even with such erudition available, it seems we, as a nation, have difficulty believing that *Commedia dell'Arte* was not an entirely silent event, a misconception confirmed by the great surge of interest and popularity of Mime, fostered by visits from Marcel Marceau and the film *Les Enfants de Paradis*, resulting in a plague of weeping Pierrot dolls and China figurines.

At least it can be said that Mime had its day in the limelight – which cannot be said of Commedia. An example of how unaware and uninformed the public in general are on Commedia dell'Arte comes from a recent instalment of *The Bidding Room*, a TV program in which four or five dealers bid for articles brought in by the public. By a strange coincidence one item was a porcelain figure, like those I just referred to - a particularly hideous one of a weeping Pierrot with an electric light on his lap.

“Oh, look, a Harlequin!” said one dealer. “No, it's a Pierrot” another corrected him.

“What's a Pierrot, then?”

“He's a sort of Clown.”

“Oh, a weeping Clown. I see”

In the hope of increasing awareness of the importance of Commedia and improving its perceived status, Bill Tuck and I founded the **Zannizine**, an online magazine devoted to all aspects of Commedia. Although it has found favour with the *cognoscenti*, I still have the feeling that we have been 'preaching to the converted.'

The twentieth century, which had promised well, seemed to have lost the ground it had gained, but there were those brave souls who persisted. **Zannizine** is hoping to celebrate a few of those, individuals and companies, who tried **Keeping the Commedia Banner Flying**. Such were Theresa Kitchin and the Acorn Theatre ...

The Acorn Theatre

The Acorn Theatre was brought into being by the vision and energy of

Theresa Kitchin, a woman with a great love of the theatre, and especially of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. So great was this, she wanted others especially, with the young, to share her joy. She wanted them to experience the magic of theatre, not in the school assembly room, not in the village hall, but in a real theatre, with footlights and spotlight, velvet drapes and painted scenery, make up and wigs, false moustaches and yes, MASKS.

For this she created '**Quercus**', a company of professional actors who were paid Equity rates. She favoured those with long experience of the

cut and thrust of a life on the stage. To these she added the apprentice teenagers, and younger children, who were styled the '**Acorns**',



I came to Theresa's attention at *The Brighton Festival* for 1986. The theme that year was the *Commedia dell'Arte* and I had been engaged as the *Harlequin in Residence* at the festival. In addition to going through the town on an open-top bus, visiting schools and old people's homes, Joan (my life and work partner) and I presented performances of '*Harlequin Unmasked*' at the Pavilion Theatre. One evening we were in our dressing room, the show over, removing our makeup, when there was a knock at the door and without waiting for a reply, a small middle class, middle-aged - but very agile and enthusiastic - woman burst into the room and said:

"At last, I've found you, the very person I have been looking

for. I want you to coach my Acorns."

She didn't socialise or mention the show she had just seen. She made sure she had our contact address and gave us hers and left. She was a director; busy person and had a mission on her mind. Within a couple of weeks, I started working with twenty or so young people. I was to continue regular Commedia workshops for the next nine years.





I was soon to meet her husband, Alfred Kitchin, a highly accomplished classical pianist, teacher, and Director of Piano at the Royal College of Music. I learnt from the internet that he was born in 1910; studied with a pupil of Brahms; left Germany to avoid the Nazis, and had made a name for himself, first in the States, and then in England. He accompanied all her productions in two piano arrangements which often affected her choice of themes. In fact, apart



from the Commedia workshops, my first job was as choreographer for *Turbulent Awakenings* which told, in dialogue and music, the love story of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck. This was my first experience of the high standard and professionalism of the production in all its aspects: scenery costumes, lighting, sound and most surprising of all, the 1,300 seater theatre itself – the New Theatre Wimbledon that I was to become more familiar with for the Commedia Production.



Theresa frequently watched my Commedia sessions and in 1996 showed me the play she had written '*Harlequin Returned*' which told the story of how the improvised Commedia developed into British pantomime. It was based on her wide reading and proved quite a workable material. She asked me to direct it.

The only record of the show is the programme and these lovely black and white photographs. Theresa gave each of the professional cast a copy of *Duchartre*, and it was evident that each had studied his character as he would for a straight play. Any lack of the physical skills that distinguishes the player from the actor was compensated by the well-trained Acorns. Their youth created some differences

from the standard Commedia model. For example, the lovers were nearer to Romeo and Juliet than Benedict and Beatrice, and the Colombine, lacking the usual sexual undertones, replaced it with a breathless excitement in every encounter, which was wholly delightful. Eric Galati, the actor playing the Capocomico, was American/Italian and there may have been some influence of the method in his portrayal, bringing some of his own anxieties into the role with the difficulty of keeping his company in order.



by Barry Grantham



COMMEDIA AROUND THE WORLD



The Power of Commedia in Malta

The late mediaeval artisan street theatre called *Commedia dell'Arte* is still alive and kicking in Malta. It is not a mainstream popular entertainment vehicle but a specialised surreptitious activity that stealthily reaches the emarginated audiences normally ignored by legitimate theatre.

With the turn of the millennium a few of us, who were always enamoured with Commedia, met Jaume Villalba Sanchez, a drama teacher who was promoting Commedia at the Munich University drama course. We put our heads and resources together and invited Jaume for 2 months to Malta to teach us the basics of commedia dell'Arte. At the end of the course we produced performances of Goldoni's *Servant Of Two Masters* in Maltese at Teatru Manoel, our Baroque National Theatre.

The following year, I wrote a formal script, *Love Potion for Arlecchino*, and we performed it as street theatre at a number of folk festivals in villages in Malta and abroad. We performed the English version at the Munich University and at a festival organised by the Arab Hebrew Theatre in Jaffa, Israel. This way we were promoting peaceful coexistence through the arts.

Why were we able to fascinate both Maltese and foreign audiences with a theatre style absolutely alien to them?



4



It is the magic of Commedia that through its mime and gestures it can carry text even in an unknown language. We also learned how to use *grammelot* or the pretend language with various sounds and rhythms which convey emotions just as well as a known language. We have been producing at least one *Commedia* play every year ever since.

Some 8 years ago, we offered to perform at Malta's major retirement home, St Vincent de

⁴ Images on this page show *Love Potion for Arlecchino*, at Zejt iz-Zejtun Festival, Zejtun, September 2022. Photo taken by Michael Piscopo

Paule which has a fully-fledged theatre stage with professional lights and sound facilities. In the beginning, the authorities were somewhat wary. However, the elderly residents, the majority of whom were in wheelchairs, came to love our performances and kept asking for more. We subsequently offered invitations to attend our shows to people with disabilities from the government day training centres. Here again, we were unsure of how people with different neurological conditions would react to our shows, but we needn't have been concerned. The colourful costumes, the grotesque *Commedia* masks, Arlecchino's pranks and Colombina's sing-along sessions made everyone in the audience quite happy and keen to join in.

Eventually we went one better. We invited members of Malta's Society for the Blind to bring their accompanied members to enjoy the show. The idea came from researching *Commedia* on London's National Theatre website. Before the show *Arlecchino Meets The Barber Of Seville* began, all five characters, in costume, went down to the first row of the audience where the blind invitees were seated. We stood in turn in front of each one of them and addressed them in our character's voice. I growled my name as Pantalone and made each invitee feel the texture of my mask and costume and hand props. The other characters, including the females, did the same. This way these members of the audience got to know how we sound and could relate our voice to the costume and mask we were wearing.

We put a highly experienced, stand-up comic in the orchestra pit and gave him a hand-held microphone. He was expected to give a visual description of the action e.g. "*Arlecchino is riding on the back of Pantalone and smacking him with his slapstick on his bottom.*" We were lucky to be able to get Malcolm Vella King who had been our resident Arlecchino for eight years before being injured out in a football accident. As a professional stand-up comic, who has worked the pub circuit in London, his improvisation is quite eloquent. Our sound man provided individual ear plugs to relay the running commentary to each patron. So, imagine: a blind member of the audience could hear the actors speak, the running commentary in their ear and at the same time the reaction of the rest of the audience, including their carers sitting next to them. This was a total experience for them. They could enjoy nuances in the performance of a *Commedia* play to a degree which was unimaginable before we tried it. We invited our special guests once a year, for three years running. Then Covid 19 brought everything to a halt.



5

⁵ *Love Potion for Arlecchino*, at Mtarfa Elderly Home, Mtarfa, February 2023. Photo taken by Michael Piscopo

Last year, we re-introduced Commedia once more to SVDP Home for the Elderly in Malta. We had an audience of over one hundred. The staff who are now well accustomed to our events, ferry their residents around on their special vans with lifts to lower the wheelchairs. The large, accessible hall is mostly full of guests in wheelchairs who may be unlikely to ever have the opportunity to see theatre on a legitimate proscenium arch stage. The power of *Commedia dell'Arte* has done the trick.

by Sir Narcy Calamatta

Founder and chairperson of ZARARTI Malta Cultural Association. Further information can be found in his biography at the end of this issue.



MADAME DE MAINTENON & The Commedia dell'Arte

In books dealing with the history of the Commedia dell'Arte, Madame de Maintenon is mentioned only once and that for something not likely to endear her to lovers of the art. For example, Duchartre in his *The Italian Comedy*, writes:

In the 17th century several of the celebrated troops returned (to Paris), this time with official recognition, but they presently had the misfortune to offend the prudish Mme de Maintenon, who in 1697 forbade them to come within 30 leagues of Paris. She died at last; the French gave an "Ouf" of relief, after the manner of Scaramouche, and the Italians re-entered The Palais Royal in triumph. (19 years later!)

This gives us a picture of a harridan, a shrew and a virago, bullying poor Louis into dismissing the Italian players. This is how I visualized her, and never troubled myself about studying her life story until I came across a biographical note in Jacques Houis' translation of Paul Scarron's *Comic*

Romance, written in instalments between 1651-57, the story of a theatrical troupe touring Maine, in France in the 17th century.

The following is a quote from an addendum to Mr Houis' translation.

It was Villermont (world traveler and polymath) who introduced Scarron to 16-year-old Françoise d' Aubigné, the granddaughter of Protestant general and poet Agrippa Aubigné, author of *Les Tragiques*, a classic of French literature considered the only successful epic poem written in the French language. Françoise was beautiful and intelligent, though a poor orphan. She impressed Scarron who married her, though the union resembled an adoption more than a marriage: he was forty and had lost the ability to do anything but speak and move his hands. The fact that he had lost his mother at a very young age may have meant that he identified the young bride with her; it was not the only time he "rescued" a young woman. Ultimately, they both benefited greatly from the relationship which seems to have been based on mutual affection and respect. Scarron appears to have thoroughly educated his wife, whose early correspondence reveals that she had only been semi-literate when they met. For her part Françoise grew up to become a formidable woman. After Scarron's death, she became the illustrious Madam de Maintenon and the mistress and later the wife of Louis the XIV. She founded one of the first schools anywhere to offer girls a rigorous formal education. Napoleon preferred her writing, to those of Madame Sevigne. She was devoted to her paralysed misshapen husband and together they hosted, in the Marais neighbourhood of Paris, one of the great salons of the 17th century, the golden age of salons. The guests ranging from fellow authors to the most powerful men of the court who enjoyed Françoise's quiet demeanour, grace and sparkling conversation, in combination with Paul's extraordinary narrative imagination and irrepressible high spirits. In her last years she may have been the virago we imagined but we know she retained always retained place in Louis' heart.

A case might be made for the conclusion that the closing of the Bourgogne might have been timely. By 1697 there was little of the *Commedia improvviso* left. Instead, there were plays written by French writers and performed by Frenchified actors, replacing all but a few traditional *lazzi* in Italian. Production values were also changing; elaborate sets and mechanical devises replacing reliance on the spectators' imagination. But that will have to wait for another article and another issue.

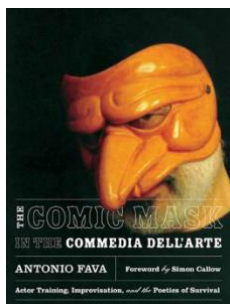
by Barry Grantham





Book Review

'The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte: Actor Training, Improvisation and the Poetics of Survival' by Antonio Fava



([Northwestern University Press](#), 2007)

ISBN: 978-0810123687)

and ([Arscomica](#), 2004)

ISBN: 88-89409-00-2



The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte draws upon Fava's extensive experience as a performer, director, and teacher. Rooted in his deep understanding and familial connection to the art form, the book presents a comprehensive view of Commedia dell'Arte expounding his thoughts, theories and musings, enriched by his deep research and first-hand experiences in the training and rehearsal space.

He examines the essence of what Commedia is and what it should be, challenging perceptions and dispelling common myths. Anyone who has met Fava, will hear his voice resounding clearly through the pages, as his writing style mirrors his conversational manner, occasionally digressing on tangents and blending factual analysis with personal perspectives.

Fava's authoritative voice carries throughout, as he dissects the complexities of Commedia, offering assertions and philosophical reflections on its development and importance. He analyses the precise nature of the mask as a central signifier from multiple perspectives: practical, aesthetic, metaphorical; as an actor's prop; as the total state that an actor takes on when transforming into a character; as a symbolic object; as the theatrical space created in that moment by characters; as the total performance spectacle. As Fava states,

"The mask is a multiplier... a multiplier of life."

Fava approaches Commedia dell'Arte as a living dialectic of the human condition. His classifications of the characters are enlightening, delivered in a scientific manner. The section on the Doctrine of the Humors, in particular, nourished my personal explorations with the masks of the Four Temperaments. Fava considers a multitude of ways that the characters can be classified (even to the extent of drawing direct parallels between Commedia and soccer!) For a director embarking on a Commedia dell'Arte production, these ideas on categorisations feed into the section on Fava's Character System providing rich material for the rehearsal room. Another illuminating section is his extensive discussion on Goldoni's reformation of Commedia and its implications for the evolution of psychological theatre, another fantastic resource for teachers of *Servant of Two Masters*.

The early chapters feature dense prose that can make some sections hard to access, potentially due to translation nuances from the original Italian. Fava's discussions on methods and techniques however are lucid and clear, revealing practical expertise that I have come back to time and time again. These sections offer decisive guidance, but they leave me yearning for more!

One of the book's highlights is the inclusion of a series of photographs of Fava's stunning masks. I have both editions of this book and I note that in the Northwestern Press edition some of the images are omitted that appeared in the first edition - a few of the zanni masks, notably an image of Fava's Zanni Skinhead helmet mask. There is also an additional section of text on Fava's *Satyr* masks, elucidating his exploration of staging Serafino Candido's *Divota Rappresentazione (Devout Performance)*. The reproduction of images in the Northwestern version is overall clearer with some images appearing much larger, and the black and white images of historic iconography are notably sharper, though some of the vivid colour is lost in this edition. In my opinion, the choice of black backgrounds for dark masks is not ideal, but this does not overly detract from an otherwise visually captivating section. Again, these images and mask descriptions, I come back to time and time again.

The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte is a fascinating and rich work; a must-read for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of this timeless art form, providing invaluable insights for scholars, performers, and directors alike. Despite its occasional opaque density, with sections that demand several reads, this book stands as a seminal piece of work and testament to Fava's lifelong dedication to preserving and enriching the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte.

by Cheryl Stapleton



STAGE CRAFT . . . Part III

The third and last. Not that there isn't more to be said on the subject, but those following me will be aware that I have been troubled by referring to it as '*Stage Craft*'. Craft is a word replete with connotations of country fairs, felt toys, leather knickknacks and gooseberry jam, besides being appropriated by the Arts Department in the theatre. Now it has occurred to me that the word '*Craft*' can be replaced by the words '*dell'Arte*' of Commedia. It is all that distinguishes the professional from the outsider. It is the trade secrets, the inherited skills, and *The Knowledge*.

First, under '*Craft*', my father introduced me to the actor's traditional skills, as a father in any other trade would hand on to his son. Then I found myself heir to a different tradition, that of the Variety

and Music Hall, which had done good service for nearly a hundred years. But to me as a young performer (and to Joan), it seemed to represent all that was fustian, dated, limiting (an early review remarked, "Joan and Barry sweep the cobwebs from *Variety* acts"). This view was shared by a bunch of university students who set about creating new and very funny forms of comedy. But before we throw out the old, here is an example of traditional *Variety* delivery at the hands of Flanagan and Alan, two artists whom I rank among the purest gold of Music Hall. Try this with a colleague. Then try using it on your own script or improvisation. Once you get it, it's quite fun.

VARIETY DIALOGUE: DELIVERY

Bud: Chess (*Spoken dead front but then turns his head towards Chess*)

Chess: Yes, Bud? (*Spoken dead front but then turns head to Bud*)

Bud: They say that Elsie went and sat on the bacon slicer (*Spoken dead front*)

Chess: Is that what they say, Bud? (*Spoken dead front but then turn head to Bud*)

Bud: Yeers (sic). And now we are getting behind with the orders. (*both dead front*)

(*Chess turns his head to Bud to 'give' him the laugh.*)

Chess: Do they, Bud? (*Spoken dead front but then, slowly turn head to Bud*)

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The term 'Stage Craft' is one I inherited from my family, but of course, this can also be easily confused with 'Stagecraft', meaning the making, and designing of props and scenery. Perhaps it is more accurate and contemporary to use a term I have recently found in my own library in the student study aid, *Drama and Theatre Studies* by Simon Cooper and Sally Mackey: PROXEMICS.

"The term refers to the positioning of people in relation to each other and the use of interpersonal space. We study the significance of that positioning and grouping to find out about the relationship between people. PROXEMICS can be extended to include the positioning of the cast in relation to the audience and the use of space in the auditorium section of the theatre."

In all my years in the theatre I have never heard it, but I will try and use it from now on. Thank you, Simon and Sally.

⁶ Flanagan and Allen were part of the Crazy Gang. In their Film 'Life's a Circus' there is a delightful fantasy version of the famous ['Underneath the Arches'](#) ([click to view on YouTube](#)).

PROXEMICS: OPEN AND CROSSED

The next is such a fundamental part of the 'Arte' that I hesitate to mention it. This is well understood by dancers, especially those with ballet training, who refer to it as *ouvert* and *croisé*.

You are on stage facing the audience. You raise your right arm to the side and slightly forward of your hips, and about the height of your solar plexus, the palm turned slightly upward. Now raise your left arm to the left, duplicating your right. You are currently in an open position, the basis for all stage movement.



Now bring the right arm across the body and make a bow; your left hand is still in an open position, but the right is now in a crossed position (i.e. crossing the body) Psychologically open positions are *ouvert* and crossed ones are *covert* (from the French *couvert*: to cover) Our English

interpretation of the word might indicate that you can't trust the one who bows to you. You might also note that he is protecting his own most vulnerable organs. The true Innamorato does not cross his arm in front of him when he bows but extends it low to his right, indicating that he lays himself open at his beloved's feet.

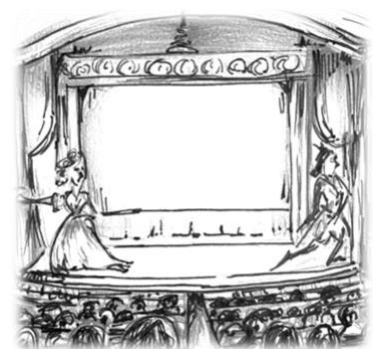


ACTOR-AUDIENCE UNINTERRUPTED VIEW

Now for the undeniable right of every member of the audience to be guaranteed an uninterrupted view of the leading actor or character, and the right of that actor to be seen by the audience. This means there is a perceived triangle or inverted V (Δ) the apex starting from the actor and extending to each member of the audience. Nothing must be permitted to impede it. For example, Queen Victory (the character) calls for a cup of tea, and the maidservant must contrive to serve her without blocking the audience's view of the presence.

BETWEEN TWO ACTORS IN PARALLEL

One must be aware of the 'Wimbledon' effect when blocking a dialogue scene between two actors. While the pair are close enough for physical contact or no more than about eight feet apart, the audience can take in both performers in a single glance. Widen the space between them just a few feet, and there is an awkward stage where they cannot be held in a single line of vision. Once the couple is sufficiently apart, the audience will fall into an action of moving their heads from one player to the other as they speak, producing the Wimbledon effect, as in a tennis match. The director should be conscious of this effect and use it with purpose, not by accident. The



effect of causing the audience to move their heads will sharpen the audience's focus on the specific tension being played out between the two; a subtext exists in that gap that separates them.

EVIDENCE OF 'THE CRAFT' IN REGENCY THEATRE

I will end with an interesting speculation that the rules and traditions of the craft (or *dell'Arte* or proxemics, if you will) were widely known and observed throughout Great Britain and Ireland. This explains to some degree how individual 'star' performers like Keane, Kempe, McCready, and Mrs Siddons could tour the country by coach, accompanied by a single maid or valet and appear with the local theatre company without rehearsal. It would have helped that the plays chosen were mainly Shakespearean favourites like *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* were performed by a rigid formula, and the resident company would be ready to improvise traditional moves around the visiting performers. They would be particularly careful of the rule that nothing must impede the view of the star performer. There are instances of actors being dismissed for not respecting the visiting actor.

by Barry Grantham



From the Archive

'20 Commedia dell'Arte Scenarios from the 1570s'

by John A. Cross

Creating the Book

Some years back, I read that an actor's 'sidebook' (a notebook of speeches and ideas for performance) had been discovered in an old, bound up collection of manuscript pages, in the Real Madrid Biblioteca. Intrigued, I felt an insatiable urge to delve into its contents. My sense of self as an aspiring emulator of their performance style, demanded this like nothing else. However, the constraints of modern life prevented me from doing this, until recently, when the library made images of this manuscript available online. My heart sank though when I saw them. The haphazard Italian scribbles, with inconsistent spellings, interspersed with Spanish annotations employing Venetian orthography, made the manuscripts impenetrable.

I was not giving up though. I enlisted the native Italian linguistic skills of my friend: fellow Boston-area, Commedia dell'Arte performer, Chiara Durazzini. Together, over the course of sixteen months, we painstakingly translated the entire manuscript, save for the poetry, enlisting the help of native Spanish-speaking friends to translate the Spanish elements of the manuscript.

The translated plays were wonderful to have, but they were by no means performance ready. Abagaro Francesco Baldi, often called '*Frescobaldi*', or by his stage name *Stefanello Botarga*, had written them for people who knew the plays and the nuances of performance impossible to capture on paper. Over the years, my troupe, *i Sebastiani*, has developed a process by which to decipher the play: a cycle of performing it, analysing it and then playing it again, iterating this process until the play makes sense. At first, we work to identify the missing cues, and then the character motivations start to become clear, and the pronouns resolve. Taking the starting point of a fresh translation into English, the process typically takes three to seven weeks, per play.

This collection of plays has a set of stock characters distinct from the ones we know from the Scala plays or the Casamarciano plays. In particular, there is a servant, named *Trastulo*, who initially took a while to familiarize, but soon we fell in love with him; he is a man with a compulsion to follow the rules, and a penchant for ensuring everyone else follows them too.

The book, '*20 Commedia dell'Arte Scenarios from the 1570s*' will be available in late February 2024, to celebrate *International Commedia dell'Arte Day*.

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Here, for *Zannizine*, we provide two samples from the book: Act I of the play *'The Lion'* presented here in both the literal translation, followed by our updated version, that strives to maintain the story, whilst also providing actors with clearer direction. (By the way, in acts II and III, it becomes clear that this is the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, albeit with altered names).



by Jay Cross

Jay Cross, under the pen name of John A. Cross, is author of this book. Further details in his biography at the end of this issue.



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⁷ This is one of the frescoes in the famous Fools' Staircase in Trausnitz Castle, by Alessandro Padovano in 1575-1579. One of the men depicted is believed to be Zan Ganassa, whose troupe created and performed these scenarios.

⁸ i Sebastiani performing play #10 from the collection: *Thefts*, featuring Carl West as Zani, Jay Cross as Dottore, and Peter Charmichel as Trastulo.

Literal Version – The Lion, Act I

Magnifico, Zani and Francese

Puts them at the good guard⁹. He says he came to stay in the villa because he doesn't want to give Ortensia to Oracio. They, at the good guard. At that:

Oracio

Asks him for her to be his wife. He, that he doesn't want to give her to him. They argue. Magnifico, at the good guard. Francese, Zani, from the inside, they answer. Magnifico leaves. Oracio remains, complaining, including that he has only a little money.

Trastulo

Promises him a favor in order to make him speak to Ortensia. Goes to get cheese and wine. Oracio retires. At that:

Zani

At the guard.

Trastulo

With the cheese, makes him come out. Zani leaves.

Francese

On the guard. Trastulo, with the wine, makes him leave. They call Ortensia.

Ortensia

She promises him to be his wife. At that:

Zani

They flee. Ortensia, in the house. Zani, to have been played. He enters.

Francese

Drunk, the same.

Curcio, Capitano

Wants to leave Isabella because he is poor and is the enemy of everyone, and that he wants to take Ortensia, daughter of Stefanello¹⁰, because she is rich. They call.

⁹ 'bona guardia' is some specific idiom, but we don't know what it means. Are they in a guard house or other specific place? Are they just on especially careful watch?

¹⁰ Stefanello is Magnifico.

Isabella¹¹

He tells her that and he drives her away. She, in pain, leaves. He sends the Capitano to Stefanello to ask him for Ortensia and leaves. Capitano stays.

Magnifico

Capitano asks him for Ortensia for his master. Magnifico does not believe him; at the end he calls Zani.

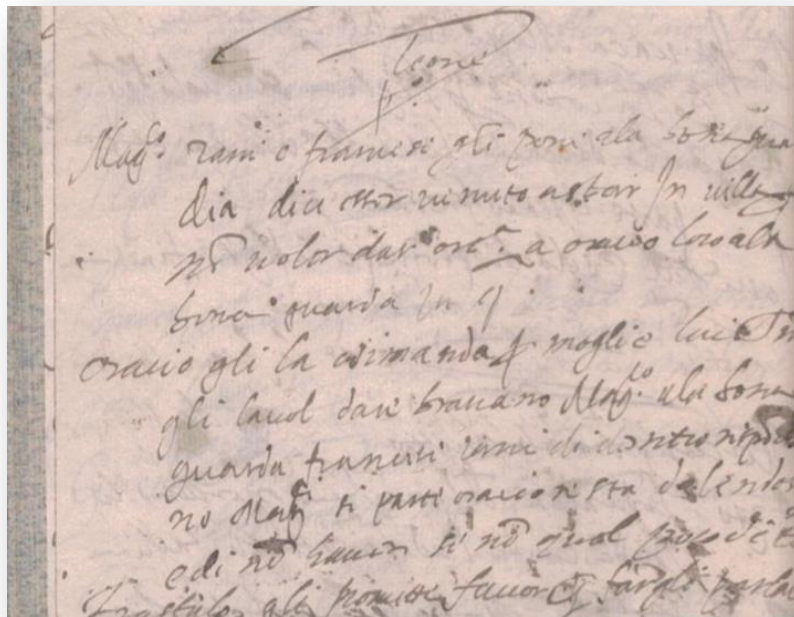
*12

[...]¹³ Capitano, in his house, and tells Zani that [he] wants him to go as an ambassador. And they enter the house.

Oracio, Trastulo

Who has heard everything, being desperate, throws himself into the well. End of the first act: Trastulo, screaming "help", leaves.

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¹¹ Names are inconsistently spelled in the manuscript, Isabella/Isabela, Zani/Zanni/Ganassa, Leone/Lione. Here we have made them consistent.

¹² This appears to be an entrance for Zani.

¹³ One or two short missing words.

¹⁴ Real Biblioteca del Palacio Real de Madrid on RBDigital

Performer Version – The Lion

1.01	Magnifico Zani Francesse	Magnifico puts Zani and Francesse on guard duty ¹⁵ . Magnifico says he came to stay in the country villa because he doesn't want to give Ortenzia to Orazio. Zani and Francesse exit into the guard house.
1.02	Orazio	Orazio monologues about having followed Ortenzia and her father, Magnifico. ¹⁶ Orazio asks Magnifico for Ortenzia' hand in marriage. Magnifico replies that he doesn't want to give her to him. They argue. Magnifico tells the guards to keep Orazio away from Ortenzia. From inside, Francesse, Zani agree. Magnifico exits. Orazio complains, including that he has only a little money.
1.03	Trastulo	Orazio promises Trastulo a favor if he finds a way of letting Orazio speak to Ortenzia. Trastulo has a plan and goes to get cheese and wine. Trastulo exits. Orazio stands aside. ¹⁷ At that:
1.04	Zani	Zani is at the door of the guard house. ¹⁸
1.05	Trastulo	[With wine and cheese] Trastulo asks Zani to come out. Trastulo tells Zani that he won't have to share the cheese with Francesse if he goes down the street to eat it. ¹⁹ Zani exits.
1.06	Francesse	Francesse is at the door of the guard house. Trastulo asks Francesse to come out. Trastulo tells Francesse that he won't have to share the wine with Zani if he goes down the street to drink it. Francesse exits. Orazio and Trastulo call Ortenzia.
1.07	Ortenzia	Orazio and Ortenzia have a love scene. ²⁰ Ortenzia promises to be his wife. They hear people coming. Orazio and Trastulo exit fleeing. Ortenzia exits into the house.
1.08 ²¹	Zani Francesse	[Francesse is drunk] Zani and Francesse do a lazzo about recognizing that they were played. Zani and Francesse exit into the guard house.
1.09 ²²	Orazio	Orazio monologues about his love of Ortenzia. Hearing people coming he hides at the edge of the stage. Orazio hides.
1.10	Curzio Capitano Gamberro	Curzio monologues that his father, the Signore, wants him to marry a wealthy girl. He loves Isabella, but she is poor and is poorly regarded by everyone. He believes Ortenzia, daughter of Magnifico, would satisfy his father. ²³ They call.

¹⁵ The Italian says "bona guardia", which means "good guard". In context it simply seems to mean guard duty, other stage directions suggest that there must be a guard house.

¹⁶ This monologue is implied in the original.

¹⁷ In the Italian it says he retires, which may mean sits down, or otherwise relaxes.

¹⁸ In the Italian it simply says that Zani is on guard.

¹⁹ This specific ploy (in this scene and the next) isn't specified in the original, only that Zani gets the cheese and exits.

²⁰ This love scene is implied in the original

²¹ 1.08 was two scenes giving Zani and Francesse separate parallel scenes. Here combined into one to give them more opportunity to invent some comedy together.

²² This is an added scene that was implied by the final scene in the act in which Orazio has heard everything.

²³ This scene was changed to make Curzio a more sympathetic man to justify his happy ending.

1.11	Isabella	Curzio tells Isabella that he prefers Ortenzia. After a scene of bitter dialog, in pain, Isabella exits . Curzio sends Gamberro to Magnifico to ask for Ortenzia. Curzio exits . Gamberro calls for Magnifico.
1.12	Magnifico	Gamberro asks Magnifico for Ortenzia for his master, Curzio. Magnifico, says he does not believe that the family of high-born Curzio really wants his daughter ²⁴ . After a lazzo ²⁵ Magnifico calls Zani.
1.13	Zani	Magnifico tells Zani that he wants him to go with Gamberro as an ambassador ²⁶ to the Signore. To discuss details, they enter the house. Zani, Curzio, Gamberro, and Magnifico exit into Magnifico's house.
1.14	Orazio Trastulo	Orazio steps forward as Trastulo enters. Orazio, knowing he will lose Ortenzia, spirals in desperation. At the end, he throws himself into the well. ²⁷ Orazio exits into the well. Trastulo, screams: " help ", Trastulo exits .

by Jay Cross

Reading Scala's scenarios, and indeed any commedia scenario, is an acquired skill: the clues to what happens, to who, and by whom are brief, cryptic and often rely on the unwritten (to us) codes of Renaissance class and honour. When the comedies are plotted as densely as 'The Comedy of Errors' or 'Twelfth Night', any slight misunderstanding of these signposts can be catastrophic to an understanding of the story arc. What we have here, is a collection of scenarios where the hard thinking has been done for you. The scenarios have all been road tested and the sense of what happens is very definitely clearer. Next year, a small bird tells me, John and *i Sebastiani* will complete a collection of all of Scala's scenarios, and produce another volume with Scala's Commedia Tragedies and Epic Operas! Watch this space.

Olly Crick

²⁴ In the manuscript, it simply says that Magnifico doesn't believe him, clarity about what isn't believed is added here.

²⁵ In the original it simply says: "in the end". The lazzo is implied.

²⁶ The Italian is ambiguous as to intent. Based on events in Act 2, here it is assumed that Zani will be an ambassador for Magnifico to Curzio to find Curzio's intentions.

²⁷ This is a minor change from how it is expressed in the Italian, but is essentially the same action, just more specific.

BIOGRAPHIES OF NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Antonio Fava is an actor, author, theatre director, Maestro of Commedia dell'Arte and of Comedy. He directs the Scuola Internazionale dell'Attore Comico – SIAC (International School of the Comic Actor) in Reggio Emilia, Italy. He designs and makes leather masks for use in his School and performances. He teaches Commedia dell'Arte in schools, universities and drama academies throughout the world. His masks are on show in important museums and cultural institutions. He is an international director. Books by Fava: [*La Maschera Comica nella Commedia dell'Arte*](#) (in Italian) / [*The Comic Mask of the Commedia dell'Arte*](#) (in English) (Northwestern University Press) [*Vita Morte e Resurrezione di Pulcinella*](#) (in Italian – Arscomica) coming soon in English.



Jay Cross (pen name John A. Cross) is the long time Dottore and Artistic Director of *i Sebastiani*, a Boston-based Commedia dell'Arte troupe that has been exploring Sixteenth Century style performances since 1991. While he is often making a living teaching cloud-related technical skills to engineers, his main obsession over the last decade has been making the extant early scenarios available and playable in the English-speaking world. In 2022, he published: [*40 Brilliant Comedies: Easily Played, Updated, Commedia dell'Arte Scenarios from Flaminio Scala's 1611 Collection 'il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative'*](#) (Truth & Beauty Media, 2022) and now in February 2024, he's releasing *20 Commedia dell'Arte Scenarios From the 1570s*, with future books of historic scenarios already underway.



Sir Narcy Calamatta KM holds a teaching doctorate on Theatrology with the Pro Deo State University of Miami USA. Currently he is the Chairperson of the voluntary organisation of ZARARTI Malta Cultural Association. He is an award-winning actor, film director, scriptwriter, stage designer, cultural organiser and author, with a career that spans 50 years in the theatre and film industry. For many years, Narcy has put on original Maltese Commedia dell'Arte productions for the folk festival *Żejt iż-Żejtun* and has written five original Commedia plays in Maltese.



Fava's article in Italian:

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE:

UN NOME, PIÙ SIGNIFICATI

La locuzione commedia dell'arte, che poi sarà nobilitata in Commedia dell'Arte, si usa, oggi, in modo specifico ed erroneo come nome per un "genere teatrale", identificato nell'uso di maschere e nella pratica dell'improvvisazione. Questa molto riduttiva visione del fenomeno storico Commedia dell'Arte, include spettacolarità diverse definibili come neo-folkloriche, come esibizioni di strada, accompagnate da un comportamento festivo (o festaiolo) con l'obbligo del sorriso permanente, e altre cose così, molto somigliante al Circo, molto lontana dal Teatro. Insomma, è il ritratto di un equivoco, di un errore.

Commedia dell'Arte appare scritto, quindi documentato, per la prima volta in Goldoni, in modo negativo, ne *Il Teatro Comico*, commedia-manifesto composta e rappresentata nel 1750, attraverso la quale Goldoni elabora la sua idea di riforma del teatro, basato non più sui bambocci dell'Improvvisa, ma sui caratteri, ossia, le tipologie umano-sociali riscontrabili nella realtà.

In origine, negli anni Trenta del Cinquecento, la Commedia era chiamata Commedia Zannesca o Degli Zanni. Si è chiamata anche Mercenaria, da mercede, quindi, retribuita (da qui la professionalità), Improvvisa per l'uso dell'improvvisazione, Italiana per la sua provenienza. E ancora Commedia Buffonesca, Commedia delle Maschere e, infine, con nostro grande piacere di gente "moderna", Commedia. Che è il termine dominante, presente in tutte le definizioni. E 'commedia' non indica mai un genere preciso, ma indica l'arte dell'attore, il teatro con le scene, i costumi, gli accessori, la sala con i posti a sedere e il pubblico che, entrando, ha pagato. Sì: la Commedia inventa e inaugura tutto questo.

La lingua Italiana, che presiede all'origine della Commedia, è ricca di espressioni nate allora, cinque secoli fa e in uso ancora oggi. Alcuni esempi: Fare la Commedia per 'essere attore'; Entrare in Arte per 'avviarsi alla professione dell'attore'; Andare in Stanza per 'si recita'. Quest'ultima, in uso sin dalle origini, indica 'agire in un interno', non per strada, fuori, all'aperto, ma al chiuso! Dove l'attore dà il meglio di sé e il pubblico, quel meglio, lo riceve godendone.

Commedia è Teatro, Arte è Mestiere. E il Repertorio? Vasto. Tante generi, appartenenti a due categorie fondamentali: la Fabula e l'Opera. I Comici dell'Arte nel distinguere le loro rappresentazioni in la Fabule e Opere, ci propongono, nella prima categoria, rappresentazioni comiche, poetiche, tutte a lieto fine; nella seconda categoria, la vicenda sarà grave, seria, drammatica, tragica.

I 'generi', o 'stili', o varianti di 'fabula', sono:

La 'Commedia' propriamente detta, che è fabula comica e d'intrigo, estremamente movimentata, ricca di equivoci, errori, colpi di scena, non priva di drammi, sempre a lieto fine.

Le favole Pastorale, Boschereccia, Marinaresca, Piscatoria, Tartarea, tutte poetiche e con personaggi ripresi dalla mitologia classica, quali Satiro, Ninfa, Sirena, Tritone, e varie divinità, a volte mescolate a un personaggio della Commedia, come Arlecchino-Mercurio o Pulcinella-Apollo.

I 'generi', o 'stili', o varianti di 'Opera', sono:

Opera Storica, Opera Eroica, Opera Regia (che è la Tragedia), Opera Mista (più di un genere a formare lo stile).

Tutti i diversi generi dell'Arte, hanno in comune i tipi fissi. Questi sono definiti nella Fabula Comica: i due Vecchi (Dottore e Magnifico), gli Innamorati, i Servi, i Capitani. Questi tipi, appaiono sempre in tutte le forme, nelle favole comiche, quelle poetiche e nelle opere.

Questi 'tipi fissi' sono dunque presenti in tutti i generi, persino in Opera Regia. Nei generi poetici come la Pastorale e la Marinaresca, troveremo figure mitologiche e olimpiche, come il Satiro, La Ninfa, Il Tritone, la Sirena, che saranno i personaggi di maggior rilievo, ma servi e vecchi e innamorati ci saranno. Nelle opere Eroiche, Storiche, Regie, insieme alla figura storica come Nerone, insieme al Tiranno e alla Regina e all'eroico Guerriero, ci saranno Servi, Vecchi e Innamorati. Questi ultimi si confondono con la serietà delle opere e potranno essere figure tragiche.

Ma i buffi restano sempre tali, sono ovunque e non muoiono mai.

Tutto questo grande repertorio è ciò che chiamiamo Commedia dell'Arte. La Compagnia produce, interpreta, distribuisce il suo cartellone. Giunta in una città, stabilito il luogo, la Compagnia rappresenta, mediamente, dieci lavori di generi diversi, con prevalenza di favole comiche. Ogni sera un titolo. Ogni sera lo stesso pubblico, che si gode tutto il repertorio. La Compagnia è il vero protagonista. Se arrivano 'I Gelosi', il pubblico esulta e accorre ad assistere al repertorio dei Gelosi. Certo, Isabella Andreini è famosa e amata dal pubblico, ma chi rappresenta non è la Andreini, è la Compagnia dei Gelosi.

La Commedia è drammaturgica. La drammaturgia è il sistema di relazioni fra personaggi. In Commedia, tale sistema di relazioni è dato in modo definitivo per tutte le favole e opere. Ogni personaggio ha un suo preciso modo di relazionarsi a ciascun altro. Ne consegue un fitto sistema di relazioni che l'attore conosce in anticipo, per formazione, così come il violinista conosce le note, la musica, la tecnica esecutiva.

L'Interpretazione è 'Sistema d'Intenzioni'. L'attore renderà al meglio il percorso di intenzionalità del suo personaggio lungo la rappresentazione.

L'Improvvisazione è metodo. Si improvvisa PRIMA di andare in scena, per preparare, per creare le azioni (in origine tutte le azioni costruite erano chiamate lazzi, Lazzo al singolare; oggi è invalso l'uso della parola Lazzo, lazzi, solo per le azioni comiche). L'Improvvisazione è una forma di scrittura. Una volta "scritta", la commedia sarà pronta per essere mostrata al pubblico. Le parole e le azioni si "scrivono" insieme. Tutta la Compagnia è 'autore', lavora seguendo lo 'scenario', o 'canovaccio', scritto prima spesso dal Capocomico, che descrive in dettaglio tutto il percorso della vicenda. Lo scenario osserva scrupolosamente lo schema generale e definitivo su cui si basano tutte le favole e opere: ogni attore è specializzato nel suo personaggio e reciterà sempre quello, in tutti i lavori. Chi è incaricato di scrivere uno scenario, tiene conto della composizione della Compagnia.

Nei miei *The Comic Mask of the Commedia dell'Arte* (edizione americana NUP, Evanston, Illinois, USA), e *Vita Morte e Resurrezione di Pulcinella* (Arscomica, Italia, presto in English), si possono trovare gli approfondimenti.

Conclusione: Commedia dell'Arte indica un sistema di organizzazione, produzione e distribuzione di lavori teatrali, fabule e opere appunto, rappresentate da compagnie professionali, in un periodo storico accertato che va dalla metà degli anni Trenta del Cinquecento fino alla prima decade dell'Ottocento. Successivamente, la continuità si concentra nel Regno di Napoli, poi parte dell'Italia Unita, fino alla prima metà del Novecento, con poche escursioni in altri luoghi d'Italia e d'Europa, o in forme autonome con contenuti ripresi dalla Commedia, come la Pantomima Francese e quella Inglese. Nel secondo Dopoguerra del Novecento, vediamo il ritorno della Commedia nelle sue forme classiche (personaggi, costumi, lazzi), ma è tutta spezzettata, ridotta a schema d'intrattenimento ambientale e solo raramente in forma completa, drammaturgica, destinata ai teatri e al loro pubblico. Oggi, nonostante una certa confusione generalizzata, assistiamo a diversi esempi di teatro completo, nella forma e nei principi della Grande Commedia dell'Arte.

di Antonio Fava

Happy Commedia dell'Arte Day!

Wishing all our readers and all workers in *dell'Arte* good wishes and joy for Commedia dell'Arte Day on February 25th!

May you prosper and thrive keeping Commedia alive, gathering inspiration from the past, fostering experiment and collaboration in the present and securing a future for the beautiful tradition!

Although we are, sadly, not hosting an event this year, do visit commediadellarteday.org to learn of the numerous events taking place globally. Do share reviews with us of your events, so that we may consider featuring them in the next edition of Zannizine.

