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CHARACTERS AND SCENARIOS OF EARLY COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

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"I think that the person most able to write plays is someone who has performed them, since if experience is our teacher she can teach someone who has the gift of working up and performing scenarios how to write them out fully.

[…]Who knows better than the actors themselves performing every day, the rules of art?"

Flaminio Scala, prologue to *Il Finto Marito*, 1618.[1]

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

This is the first part of a two-volume series. The first volume is meant to facilitate writing period-plausible *commedia dell'arte* scenarios based on sixteenth-century format. In order to do so, first there will be a brief history of *commedia dell'arte*, early characters, their development and historical context, and how they differ from their more modern versions. The goal is to familiarize the reader with early *commedia* scenarios and assist in making new scenarios, accommodating limitations of the modern *commedia* troupes. The second volume will concentrate on the practical aspects of recreating early period *commedia*, including organizing and maintaining a troupe, producing plays, making masks and costumes, and building a mobile stage suitable for *commedia* performances.

As many books on the topic are easily available, the goal is not to produce a comprehensive document on the history of *commedia*. For example, those who want an introduction to the genre and its history would find *Duchartre's Italian Comedy* or Nicoll's *The World of Harlequin* very informative. *Commedia* players will enjoy John Rudlin's *Commedia dell'Arte*: *A Handbook for Actors*, and Rudlin and Crick's *Commedia dell'Arte: A Handbook for Troupes*.

What is *commedia*? To sum up the distinguishing features of *commedia* in one sentence: *Commedia dell'Arte* was a form of improvised secular performance performed by professional actors playing stock characters, some of which were masked, and was the first form of European professional theater to have female performers.

Most SCA members are familiar with *commedia dell'arte* in the setting of SCA events, especially plays performed during the Pennsic War. *Commedia* appeals to many people. Of all period theater forms, it is arguably the most adaptable to modern audiences, most relatable, and most accessible to modern-day performers. What is known today as *commedia dell'arte* was a wildly popular form of late-period Italian comic theater, at the time known as *Commedia al Improviso*. The term *commedia dell'arte* itself is eighteenth century, first used by Goldoni in *Il Teatro Comico* in 1750.[2] *Commedia* influenced theatrical development all over Europe, and elements of *commedia* can be seen in the works of Shakespeare, Moliere, Lope de Vega, and Cervantes, to name but a few.

The *commedia* known to audiences today is usually the *commedia* of the eighteenth century, such as the plays of Gozzi and Goldoni, marionette theater, or pantomime. Theatrical devices from this type of *commedia* include rigidly defined characters, costumes, masks, carefully choreographed poses, walks, gestures etc. Eighteenth-century *commedia* usually concentrates on the love story and adventures of clever servants *Harlequin* and *Columbine*. However, *commedia* did not start out this way. The costumes were different, characters like *capitano* and *dottore* were not always masked, *Columbine* was not invented yet, the lovers were young nobles, and the love story of the servants was just an afterthought.

The early *commedia* was fairly free-form, and had a greater range of characters, plots, and costumes than the *commedia* we are familiar with. Re-creating early *commedia* gives us more room for experimentation and more freedom than the later forms. Therefore, I will concentrate on *commedia* from the early to mid-1500s to about the 1620s. Even though this is going a bit later than the accepted cut–off date for the SCA, I believe stopping exactly at 1600 will compromise our understanding of the genre and its evolution. Furthermore, as professional comedy in Italy only dates from about 1545, the first record of a full *commedia dell'arte* performance dates from 1568, and because *commedia* is essentially an oral performance genre, not a lot of contemporary literature on the topic was published prior to 1600 because it was a very new genre. Many references dating from the early seventeenth century are considered here to be acceptable because they were written by performers who were active in period, and are based on their careers and experiences, which occurred within period. Of course, wherever possible, SCA-period sources are used.

By the 1620s, the *commedia* settled into the model we are more familiar with. M.A.Katritzky very nicely sums up these changes:

> By the 1620s, the *zanni* comedies were very much settling into the stereotypic format that…eighteenth century contemporaries understood by the term *commedia dell'arte*. The significant roles of the *commedia dell'arte* had largely been defined, and later generations of actors took over already created personae. Originality became increasingly difficult, and despite their different names, most of the *dottore*, *Pantalones*, and captains became as indistinguishable as the lovers had already been in the sixteenth century, lifted out of uniformity only by the most exceptional actors. Publications such as

> Cecchini's influential *Frutti delle modern comedie* of 1628, Barbieri's *La supplica* of 1634 and Perrucci's *Dell'arte rapresentativa* of 1699 made firm recommendations concerning performing practice. These increasingly confine the *commedia*'s range within neat and manageable formulae which, in the very act of defining it, imposed an increasing stylization. From the genuine improvisation, exciting experiments, and wide creative repertoire of their earliest decades, the professional players gradually settle into unity, systematization, and predictable routine. Within a century, custom and expectation had channeled the previously diverse dramatic offerings of the Italian professional into the narrow and predictable range of masked and unmasked stock roles, plots, and lazzi, which for many exemplify the *commedia dell'arte* in its purest form.[3]

There are many excellent academic books on *commedia* published recently, which will be heavily referenced in this work. Unfortunately, despite the limitations of using secondary sources in research, they had to be relied on where primary sources were unavailable.

I will be also relying on visual sources — period paintings, engravings, and such, which, due to lack of space and copyright regulations will not be reproduced, but will be referenced in the bibliography and/or in *Appendix 2*. CA

ORIGINS

Commedia, as we know it, originated and was most popular in northern Italy. (There was also a *commedia* tradition in southern Italy, and the characters of *Pulchinella* and *Tartaglia* came from the south.) Venice contributed so much to the early *commedia* that it may rightly be considered its birthplace. Shortly after its appearance, *commedia* quickly spread through Europe and influenced theater development for several hundred years.[4]

Commedia as a genre developed in stages, borrowing its tropes, plots, and characters from various sources, and it co-existed with other forms of performance. *Commedia* characters were present in other forms of theater. *Commedia* actors performed in venues other than the established troupes. While *commedia dell'arte* was the most popular form of theater in Italy and France, it by no means replaced all the other types of entertainment in Europe. It was contemporary with the Venetian *buffoni*, travelling mountebanks, charlatans, and other street performers, as well

as amateur performers of scripted plays (*commedia erudita*) and the revival of classical theater. Furthermore, the lines between these different types of entertainment were often blurred, and this genre fluidity was acknowledged by the contemporaries, even though the professional *commedia* players worked very hard to distance themselves from these "low" entertainment genres. (For example, in 1599, the Duke of Mantua decreed Tristano Martinelli, the first *Arlecchino*, to be the supervisor of all the charlatans and street performers in Mantua. This decree was again reaffirmed in 1613.)[5]

The official document marking the beginning of professional comedy is the 1545 contract from Padua that formed the professional theater company of Ser Maphio, ditto Zanini da Padova (Sr. Maphio, known as Zanini of Padua). However, the beginning of *commedia* may be even older than that. In his book on the origins of *commedia*, Peter Jordan states that Marin Sanudo, a Venetian diarist, mentions in a 1532 entry that an actor and clown, Zan Polo, travelled to Treviso "with his company of buffoons."[6]

The *commedia* format and formulaic plots with an emphasis on star-crossed lovers can be traced to the *commedia erudita*, a form of fully scripted literary theater. This emerged in early sixteenth century and was usually performed by upper-class amateurs. The earliest known *commedia erudita* play is *La Cassaria* by Ariosto, which was performed in 1508 at the court of Ferrara.[7] *Commedia erudita* itself drew heavily on the Greek New Comedies. The New Comedy was scripted Greek theater, which originated with the plays of Menander circa 320 BCE, and lasted until mid-third century BCE. It was translated and adapted later for Roman theater by Plautus and Terence, Roman playwrights. These plays were revived during the Renaissance, and influenced the development of *commedia erudita*.[8] Stock character types, emphasis of regular people, and de-emphasis of the supernatural, heroic, and divine, are also features of both the New Comedies and *commedia erudita*.[9] The character types of the cruel fathers, merchants, crafty slaves/servants, braggart soldiers, and plot devices such as arranged marriages, long lost family members, etc., were also common to both genres. (A short list of the erudite comedies that were popular in period, and which likely influenced the development of *Commedia dell'Arte* plots, appears in the preface to Richard Andrews' book, The *Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 scenarios*, and is reproduced in *Appendix 1*.)[10]

The use of masks, the distinguishing feature of *commedia* for most people, likely came from the incorporation of masked *Zanni* and *Magnifico* characters from charlatans' and mountebanks' street performances, along with the participation of early semi-professional comedians (*buffoni*) in erudite performances. This process is described in detail in Peter Jordan's book, *The Venetian History of the Commedia dell'Arte*.[11] While masks were a feature of some forms of Greek and Roman theater, and early literature on *commedia* links the *commedia* masks to them, there is no evidence of an uninterrupted tradition of masked comical theater in Europe to support this.[12] Additionally, *commedia* did not replace the earlier forms of performance, and it continued to co-exist alongside the *buffoni*, charlatans, and amateur performers of the erudite plays. These genres were flexible, and there was an exchange of material and performers between them.[13] The *buffoni* performed with the established troupes, and the *commedia* actors performed scripted erudite comedies, as well as performing with charlatans, mountebanks, and other street performers.[14]

The main difference between *commedia dell'arte* and the contemporary scripted period performances was that the plays were improvised. Instead of a script with memorized dialogue, the actors worked from a written scenario: a scene-by-scene plot summary with very basic stage directions. This created an interesting dynamic. Improvisation depends on good interplay between actors, and, as such, no single actor was the star of the performance; all were important for the success of the play, and the atmosphere in early troupes was rather democratic. There were no directors, and, often, no playwrights, as the scenarios and stage directions were devised by the actors themselves. The *capocomico* (leader of the troupe) was often more of an administrative and entrepreneurial director, rather than a creative one. The *capocomico* did not have more power than the rest of the troupe members. In the earliest *commedia* contract mentioned above, Ser Maphio, a *Zanni*, is formally the capocomico of the troupe, but the proceeds are divided equally among all members.[15] CA

CHARACTERS

Commedia is performed by stock characters – the same characters in the same costumes and with the same personalities play different roles in different plays, with different relationships to the rest of the characters. The actors

played the same characters for life, sometimes into their 80s.[16] Occasionally, they would switch characters or play more than one character. Even though it was improvisational theater, the actors did not have to come up with entirely new lines for every performance. They assembled reference compilations of acceptable quotes, *lazzi* (stock comedic actions which do not necessarily advance the plot), and monologues appropriate to each character and would reuse these throughout their plays. Robert Henke's P*erformance and Literature in Commedia dell'Arte* has many examples of these texts.[17]

We can divide the characters into several main types: the servants, called the *zanni*; old people, called the *vecchi*; and the young lovers, called the *inamorati*. *Commedia* characters can be masked and non-masked. The servants (*zanni*), old men (*vecchi*), and *capitano* are usually masked, and the mask is considered their face. The characters' half masks were made out of leather and did not impede speech. The lovers and the female servants were non-masked and wore make up. The female servant does not usually wear a mask unless played by a man as a grotesque character similar to a *zanni*. In this case she is referred to as *zagna*. Non-masked characters can be masked during the play for the purpose of disguise, but will never wear another character's mask.

All characters have well-defined functions, which will be discussed later. There are several other subtypes of characters, which, while slightly different, will also fall within these types when we look at the functions they perform. These are *Il capitano*, a military character, who most commonly falls into a role of a romantic rival, and *servetta*, a female servant, who is somewhat similar to the *zanni*, but can also be a romantic distraction. Later (starting about mid-seventeenth century), *commedia* characters become very rigid, well-defined, with strict criteria of acceptable masks and outfits, and characteristic movements and gestures. In contrast, the early *commedia* characters were much more flexible — the genre was new, the versions of each archetype were many, and every actor developed a different version of the character, with its own name, and, sometimes, outfit. Some, such as *Arlecchino*, survived for centuries, and some died out at the end of the actor's career.[18]

The characters that were developed first were the *Zanni* and the *Magnifico*, or *Pantalone*. We will start with them.

Zanni

Zanni is a nickname for the Italian name Giovanni, and it is probably the earliest *commedia* character. It is always a lower-class character, a migrant laborer, a porter, or a servant. The *Zanni* is almost always from Bergamo, and, as a character, it predates *commedia*. Machiavelli referred to "*zanni Bergamasco*" as

early as 1514.[19] *Zanni*, shortened to *Zan*, was a part of a professional name, almost a title, of a number of "*buffoni*" or clowns, such as Zan Polo, a famous sixteenth-century comic actor. In his book on origins of *commedia*, Peter Jordan very convincingly shows how *Zanni* evolved from the individual *buffone* acts, and was a well-developed character prior to *commedia* emergence.[20] When the *Zanni* acquired a master and an adversary, in the person of *Magnifico*, this never-ending adversarial co-dependent relationship was the nucleus around which all other *commedia* characters eventually coalesced.

The earliest *zanni* are the caricatures of migrant workers. In the sixteenth century, migrant laborers were common in Italian cities. The mortality rate was very high, due to crowded conditions and diseases, and the cities needed workers. Bergamo was at the very edge of the territories controlled by Venice, and there were many laborers from Bergamo trying to make some money, or at least, not to go hungry. Most were day laborers; the luckiest found work as servants. The servants were always hungry. Food shortages were common, even in prosperous cities such as Venice. The competition for work was fierce, and the servants were not paid very much. Statesman Francesco Guicciardini stated, "It is better to be tight-fisted with them. Feed their hopes, but give them only just enough to keep them from despair."[21]

Zanni were concerned with food, sex, and money, although not necessarily in that order. They were always at odds with their masters, but not enough to lose their jobs. This reflects the attitudes towards servants in the contemporary society. The servants were seen as a source of potential dishonor for the household, and master-servant conflicts were very much feared. Servants were viewed as lazy, gluttonous, stupid, treacherous, subversive and, overall, horrible human beings, but they were also a necessary evil. In 1560's Venice, the average citizen's household had 2.5 servants. Interestingly, roughly two-thirds of the servants were female, but it was considered more prestigious to have male servants.[22] Most servants/*zanni* in the *commedia* plays are male. Good servants were supposed to be obedient, swift, humble, chaste, industrious, and do their best to protect the honor of the household. There are no good servants in *commedia*.

Zanni wore baggy, light-colored shirts and trousers, and a floppy hat, which was a standard outfit for a Venetian porter. The mask was dark with a prominent nose. Often it had a large mustache. (This outfit was also a common masquerade costume, which was even used by nobles to participate incognito in street festivals and attend theater.)[23]

In period illustrations, the *zanni* is often in the company of *Magnifico* and plays a musical instrument, such as seen on the Trausnitz frescoes and *Recueil Fossard* engravings, as referenced in the appendix.[24, 25] Early *zanni* came in many varieties, all with slightly different masks, outfits, and accessories. These varied according to the troupe and the actor, and did not become rigidly codified until the seventeenth century. The Stairway of Fools in Trausnitz Castle in Bavaria demonstrates several different *Zanni*, though they all wear similar light–colored, loose outfits.[26] The clear division of the *zanni* into the smart first *zanni* and stupid second *zanni* did not happen until later, and many late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries' *zanni* had features of both. Overall, there were many, many versions of *zanni* in early period comedy, all with different names and personalities, some of which caught on and stuck around for centuries, and some that quickly disappeared.[27]

First Zanni: The first *zanni* is a smart scheming servant, who is fully aware of the consequences of his actions, similar to the clever slaves of the Greek New Comedy. One of the first *commedia* characters of this type was *Franca Trippa*, played by Gabriello Panzanini with *I Gelosi* in 1577.[28] It is uncertain whether Panzanini was the creator of the character. *Franca Trippa* wore a version of the generic loose light-colored *zanni* outfit, with a longer jacket, and had a prominent beard and mustache.[29, 30]

In the 1611 collection of scenarios by Flaminio Scala, the first *zanni* is *Pedrolino*, the character of Giovanni Pellissini who played him into his late 80s. He usually functions as the first *zanni*; however, he does not always come out on top and his pranks can misfire.[31] (Giovanni Pellisini was also the husband of Victoria Piissimi, who was the *prima donna* with *I Gelosi* before she left the troupe to organize *I Confidenti*.) The character was known as early as 1575.[32] The earliest known image of *Pedrolino* is on a game board engraving by Ambrogio Brambilla, dated 1589. *Pedrolino* wears a loose light suit, with ankle-length trousers, which, overall, is a pretty generic *zanni* outfit.[33] The images on the game board are very small, and the faces are depicted with a few lines, so it is uncertain whether Brambilla's bearded *Pedrolino* wears a mask or not, although the face depiction is similar to *Francatripe* in the nearby cell, who we know was a masked character. In a 1621 title sheet from *La gran vittoria di Pedrolino*, he is depicted masked. There is a perception of *Pedrolino* as an unmasked character, with powdered or floured face (*infarinato*) as described by Duchartre and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, among others; however, this may be from conflation with French *Pierrot*, a later, very popular seventeenth-century French *commedia* character. *Pierrot* may or may not have been related to *Pedrolino*. *Pedrolino* is a first *zanni*; *Pierrot*

is a second *zanni*. Duchartre depicts *Pierrot* as a direct descendant of *Pedrolino*. He also ascribes to *Pedrolino* characteristics of the later *Pierrot* and states that *Pedrolino* "…has such engaging simplicity and elegance… In the pieces where *Pedrolino* is in love with *Franceschina*, there is a tenderness and sensitiveness more characteristic of lovers in the aristocratic pastorals of the period than of the kind of companions to whom *Pedrolino* was accustomed." However, in the footnote to this passage, he himself acknowledges that it's his opinion, and other authors think otherwise.[34] Personally, I tend to think that Scala's scenarios are pretty dry, and the degree of tenderness and sensitivity in a character depends entirely on the performers. I agree with Richard Andrews, who describes *Pedrolino* as "… brash, verbally quick and aggressive, sometimes vengeful, but inclined, despite his function as *primo zanni* to embark on the tricks that blow up in his face."[35] The other proponents of the direct relationship between *Pierrot* and *Pedrolino* also point to the baggy white suit and powdered face as the similarities between the characters. However, I was not able to find a reference to *Pedrolino* with a powdered face in SCA period. The white baggy suit is common to all early *zanni*, and prior to *Arlecchino* acquiring his patches and *Brighella* his stripes, most *zanni* looked the same. For example, several different *zanni* in white baggy outfits are depicted in the Trausnitz Castle frescoes.[36]

It is possible that *Pierrot* is a variant of *Pulcinella* (an early seventeenth-century character attributed to Sylvio Fiorillo).[37] Pierrot may have been invented by Guiseppe Giartone. A note in a seventeenth-century scenario manuscript by Bianconelli states that Giartone

> was eventually received into the company under the name and in the costume of *Pierrot*. The nature of the role is that of Neapolitan *Pulcinella* a little altered. In point of fact, the Neapolitan scenari, in place of *Arlecchino* and *Scapino*, admit two *Pulcinellas*, the one an intriguing rogue, and the other a stupid fool. The latter is *Pierrot's* role.[38]

Commedia fans usually think of *Brighella* as a stereotypical first *zanni*. *Brighella* wasn't the generic first *zanni* in the late sixteenth century and did not become the stereotypical first *zanni* until after Goldoni used him that way in the eighteenth century.[39] The earliest mention of *Brighella* is in a 1618 comedy by Giovanni Gabrielli, *Maridazzo di M. Zan Frognocola col Madonna Gnignicola*.[40] The character of the scheming servant in striped livery was already well-established by that time. The green mask, the pouch, and a dagger, which are now so firmly associated with *Brighella*, were the generic period *Zanni* accessories, and can be seen in the anonymous (occasionally attributed to Frans Pourbus) 1571-1572 painting depicting a group of Italian players in court. The painting is currently

displayed in the Museum of Bayeux.[41] In the 1618 feather illustration album by Dionisio Minaggio, there is a character in a white suit decorated with stripes we now associate with *Brighella*, labeled *Schapin* (character of Francesco Gabrielli), playing a guitar.[42] The pouch and the dagger are still present.[43] Many early seventeenth-century engravings of the first *zanni* depict them with guitars as well.[44] Perhaps this is the carry-over from the days when the *Zanni*, before he split into the first and the second, provided musical accompaniment to the mountebank performances and *Magnifico's* serenades.

Second zanni/Arlecchino: *Arlecchino* is probably the best-known character in the *commedia dell'arte*. *Arlecchino*, started out as *Harlequin*, was likely invented in France by Tristano Martinelli, an Italian actor, most likely during his 1584 tour in Paris. He later travelled back to Italy, but he never was as popular in Italy as in France.[45] The popularity of the character was enormous, and *Harlequin*, or *Arlecchino* in Italy, became a generic *commedia* stock character during Martinelli's lifetime.[46] *Arlecchino* is usually the second *zanni* of Scala's scenarios.

Earlier, some researchers were attributing *Arlecchino* to Zan Ganassa, an Italian comic who toured Spain in the 1570s, and the earlier literature reflects this.[47, 48] They also attributed the Bayeux painting depicting Italian comedians in court, dated 1571-72, to a performance by Ganassa's troupe, and suggested that it contains the earliest depiction of *Arlecchino*.[49] However, even though there is a figure wearing a grey outfit with many multicolored patches, this does not necessarily make it *Arlecchino*.

The *Arlecchino's* outfit as we know it, with multiple regular-colored diamonds, doesn't appear until much later and the patches themselves weren't geometric and regular until the 1620s.[50] The most famous set of images featuring a period *Arlecchino* is the engravings of *Recueil Fossard*, which dates to the mid-1580s and most likely depicts *I Confidenti* from their 1584 tour in Paris, with Martinelli as *Arlecchino*.[51] This *Arlecchino* wears a tighter outfit than most *zanni*, decorated with many irregular randomly-applied patches. A 1595 engraving, illustrating a French pamphlet, also depicts *Harlequin* in a tight outfit with multiple irregular patches.[52] However, not all *zanni* with patchwork outfits are *Arlecchino*, and not all period depictions of *Arlecchino* wear patchwork outfits.[53] Furthermore, there are pre-1600 depictions of characters in outfits with regular diamonds – but these are period depictions of fools or jesters, which, while contemporary to *commedia*, are a different species. For example, the same frescoes that depict the *commedia* characters in Trausnitz Castle also have an image of a man in a green, red, and white-checkered outfit, which is identified as an image of a Bavarian fool.[54] M. A. Katritzky in the *The Art of Commedia* cites an English example of a

fool in the same colors from 1548: "a fooles coote w. checker Work of greene Red & White."[55] On the 1589 engraving of a game board by Ambrogio Brambilla, depicting a circular grid with multiple characters, there is a character named *Trastulo* (the character developed by Giovan Pietro Pasquarello of Florence), who wears patchwork pants, and, in a different grid cell, a character in a diamond-patterned outfit, labeled *Il Matto*, or fool.[56]

The tightness of an early *Arlecchino's* outfit also varied. Earlier in his career, Martinelli wore a tighter outfit, presumably to help with acrobatic tricks and the physical comedy his character was famous for. Later, in his sixties, he is depicted wearing a much looser patchwork outfit.[57] The skin-tight *Arlecchino* costume we are familiar with doesn't emerge until the mid-seventeenth century.

Arlecchino's mask is traditionally described as black with a red or black wart or carbuncle on the forehead, short snub nose, short bushy beard, and worn with a black chin strap.[58] In the *Recueil Fossard* engravings, presumably the earliest depictions of *Arlecchino* from the mid-1580s, the mask is present, but there is no chin strap. Instead, *Arlecchino* sports a short pointy beard.[59] In the *Compositions de Rhetorique by* Martinelli himself, published in 1601, the black mask covers most of his face, and there is a short wide bushy beard covering the entire jaw, with a more pronounced tuft of hair in the center, covering the chin. The beard looks like it is attached to the mask.[60] The black chin strap appears later, and the famous seventeenth-century *Arlecchinos*, Domenico Bianconelli and Evaristo Gherardi, are depicted with black chin straps.[61]

While there are many theories on the origin of the name *Harlequin*, it was most likely adopted from the late-medieval devil, *hellequin*.[62, 63] In French folklore, *Mesnie Hellequin* is the name for the Wild Hunt, and the noisy, riotous processions imitating it and featuring the *hellequins* became a part of the Carnival celebrations in the late Middle Ages.[64] *Hellequins* probably also inspired the patched outfit (in medieval pageants, the patches symbolized the "stains" of sin), black mask with a wart, and a black hat.[65] In France, as early as the twelfth century, the name *hellequin* came to indicate rude, uncouth, base people — "quarrelsome, gluttonous, and scruffy, with little to recommend them" and "was applied to living people whose behaviors the church desired to criticize."[66] The name was also known in Italy as well, as Dante named one of the devils in the Divine Comedy *Alichino*,[67] and it is very probable that Tristano Martinelli chose a variation of the *hellequin* for his *zanni* character, known for his obsession with gluttony, lust, and sloth.

Vecchi (the old men)

Magnifico/Pantalone: Unlike the *zanni*, the *Magnifico* did not exist on its own. We do not have the records of solo *Magnifico* performances. He is always coupled with a *zanni*. Together, they are master and servant, always at odds. This relationship predates the professional *commedia* theater. There were satirical and comical poems dating from sixteenth-century Venice called the *contrasti*, showing the master and the servant arguing about all kinds of things, the master usually waxing poetic about intangibles, such as honor and glory, and the servant being concerned about food and sex.[68] There were mentions of *Magnifico* and *Zanni* from other places in Italy and even from France by the mid-sixteenth century, so they were known far beyond Venice.[69] Furthermore, even when *commedia* became an established genre, the *Magnifico/Zanni* duo performances persisted. There is an entry from the diary of Ferdinand of Bavaria, dated December 4, 1565, describing such a performance at an inn in Verona.[70]

The *Magnifico* was an honorary title of the Venetian upper-class – "*il Magnifico messer*." There are many theories about his other name, *Pantalone*, but none of them are too convincing. Occasionally, he has an additional title, "*de Bisognosi*," or "of the needy." By the time the first *commedia* performance play was recorded in 1568, *Pantalone* was already a well-established name and character.[71] Like *Zanni*, he is a star of almost every scenario and is in almost every play of Scala's collection.[72] He is depicted in Trausnitz Castle frescoes and in the engravings of *Recueil Fossard*.[73, 74] If extra *Pantalones* are needed for the plot, Scala used old men named *Zanobio*, *Tofano* or *Cassandro*.[75]

The *Magnifico* is invariably an older Venetian, whose main role in *commedia* is to either arrange the marriage of young lovers, or oppose the marriage plans the lovers make for themselves. He is either a father or a father figure. He usually has no wife, and, if he does, she is much younger, end up with his younger rival at the end. He never gets the girl. He has a horrible temper and is easily duped. He usually has a mask with a large nose, a prominent, long, pointy beard, mustache, and bushy eyebrows. The color of the masks does not appear to be fixed in period: the *Recueil Fossard Pantalones* have light masks, and the *Pantalone* of the Trausnitz Castle frescoes has a dark mask, even though only a few years separate both sets of images. He wears very tight red pants, a dark skullcap, and black cloak (*zimarra*) and slippers. He has such a very prominent codpiece that it made some authors make parallels with the phallophoric (phallus-bearing) characters of antiquity.[76] Even if there is no large codpiece, he wears a purse, a dagger, or a handkerchief front and center, calling attention to his groin.[77, 78] Even when his representation changes, as the character travels around Europe,

the large phallic object persists, such as in the illustration from the "A merry nevv catch of all Trades," a ballad published in London in 1620, where *Pantalone*, who is a foreign tradesman, sports a huge codpiece, decorated with slits.[79]

His tight red hose and doublet called *zipon* were already out of fashion by the time *commedia* develops, and were earlier associated with young nobles of the Companies of the Hose (*Compagnie della Calza*, theatrical associations responsible for public and private entertainment) of the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. Peter Jordan, citing Cesare Viccelio, states that the *zimarra*, as well as slippers, are worn indoors, and, as such, to the contemporary viewers, the costume would be ridiculous — something like a middle-aged man in a 1970's leisure suit wearing his bathrobe and slippers, trying to project power and authority, and also hit on young women.[80]

Later, in the eighteenth-century scripted comedies of Goldoni, *Pantalone* is a respectable, harmless old man, a father trying to do the best by his children. His main vice seems to be avarice, and that's how most modern *Pantalones* seem to be played. However, it seems that in period his main attribute was his constant and inappropriate sex drive. The avarice became the defining characteristic later. The association with merchanting was present at the beginning, and it became more pronounced as time went on. He is listed as a merchant in some of Scala's scenarios. Guilio Pasquati, in *Capricii, e nove fantasie alla Venetiana, di Pantalone de' Bisognosi*, alludes to the profession of a trader, but mostly what is highlighted is *Pantalone's* sexual appetite.[81] In contrast to the lovers, *Pantalone* is not in love; he is in lust, perpetually and inappropriately. In the end, he is punished, either by beating or by cuckolding.

Thus the main vice of *Pantalone*, who is supposed to be the family patriarch, is that he discards the "superiority of the masculine rationality" and yields to the emotions of lust, or anger or avarice, which, as a patriarch, he was to have control over. Therefore, he disrupts the social order.[82]

Pasquati, the author of the *Capricii*, is probably the *Pantalone* of Scala's scenarios.[83] Andrea Calmo (c.1509-1571), who was an actor and a playwright, also contributed to the development of *Pantalone* as a *commedia* character, and published scripted plays and comic letters which were used by contemporary actors as sources.[84]

Dottore Graziano: *Dottore* is the second *commedia* patriarch. If *Pantalone* is a patrician elder or a merchant, *Dottore* is the university-educated professional, though not necessarily a doctor — he could be a lawyer or have a doctorate in humanities. In fact, in Scala's scenarios, often a doctor is called when a medical advice is needed, and it is not *Dottore*. *Dottore* was supposed to speak in Bolognese

dialect, hinting that he probably was educated at the University of Bologna, the oldest university in Europe (established in 1088 CE). The university educated many scholars, including Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarch.[85] In sixteenth-century Italy, there was demand for educated people, such as lawyers and doctors, and thus the professionals were given some societal standing and respect. If one was not born into the upper class, education was one of the few ways to rise to the elite. At the same time, a Latin education became mandatory for the upper classes, and Latin tutors were in demand.

Unlike university professors, who had the highest social status, the Latin tutors were on the bottom of the professionals. By this time, the Latin education became mindless, rigid and boring. The educated writers of *commedia* erudita could relate to the mind-numbing classical education, and the figure of a Pedant or a Latin tutor was a common stock character in the literary comedies.[86] The upper-class audience would recognize and appreciate misused classical quotes and imperfect Latin. *Commedia dell'arte* had broader appeal, and the Pedant became *Dottore* – the authoritarian pseudo-intellectual everyone could laugh at and ridicule. The *commedia Dottore* speaks in mangled Latin and Italian-Latin hybrids; it's complete gibberish, not the subtle misuse of the classics by the erudite pedant. Andrews states that the *Dottore* was not specializing in one-liners; the humor was in the never-ending, high-volume nonsense speech, on any topic, with double entendres, and "twisting mundane and respectable concepts into sexual and scatological references, whenever the phonetics would allow."[87] Schmitt points out that *Il Dottore* is ridiculed because, first, he is a patriarch, like his friend *Pantalone*, and, also because, as an educated professional, he is a relative newcomer to the established social order; his social mobility is resented and made fun of. While he is a patriarch, he was not born into the elite; his mere existence and claim to a high social standing disrupts the social order.[88]

Scala's *Dottore* is probably based on Lodovico dei Bianchi, who was *Dottore* in the Gelosi company.[89] He has the name of *Gratiano* — and it's the most common name for a *commedia Dottore*. It may come from Gratianus — a twelfth-century Benedictine monk and a lawyer from Bologna, who around 1140 completed *Concordia discordantium canonum (Decretum Gratiani)*, which was "a collection of nearly 4,000 texts on all fields of church discipline, presented in the form of a treatise designed to harmonize all the contradictions and inconsistencies existing in the rules accumulated from diverse sources."[90] *Decretum Gratianorum* was a standard book taught in all universities of Europe and probably was familiar to, and detested by, many former university students.

In addition to the erudite Pedant, the character of *Dottore* probably borrowed heavily from the street performers – charlatans and mountebanks who would "mount the bench" or a trestle stage on the streets of Italy and sell magical cures, secret potions (*nostra*) and provide entertainment. Occasionally, *Gratiano* is such a mountebank himself; in Scala's scenario "Flavio's Fortune," *Gratiano* is a mountebank, travelling with *Arlecchino* and a Turkish performer.[91]

Characters similar to *Dottore* were present in medieval religious plays, and they were not limited to Italy. A *medicus*, an incompetent or fraudulent doctor, was present in multiple passion plays, ranging from Nativity to Resurrection; was independent from the plot; spoke in mangled Latin; and, together with his servant, provided comic relief in otherwise serious performances.[92]

If *Pantalone's* vices were rage and lust, *Dottore's* are lust and drink. His mask (if he is masked) traditionally has the red cheeks and nose of a drunkard. The mask is somewhat unusual, as it only consists of a forehead with bushy eyebrows, nose, and small cheeks. He is often depicted drinking wine, sending servants for wine, etc., as in Scala's scenario *The Fake Magician*.[93] He is traditionally dressed in black, like the contemporary academicians, often wears a black gown, and a wide black hat. *Dottore* may not have been masked in period. *Gratiano* appears unmasked on Brambilla's 1589 game board, on 1621's *La gran vittoria di Pedrolino* title sheet, on the Bayeux Museum painting from 1571 or 1572, and on a mid-1580's image from the *Recueil Fossard*. Duchartre only gives one example of a sixteenth-century *Dottore* in a mask, although he does not reference the source of the image.[94] All the images of masked *Dottores* in Duchartre's book are from the seventeenth century. M.A. Katritzky's book on early *commedia* imagery has only one example of a masked character identified as *Dottore*, on a late sixteenth-century painted glass goblet.[95] This figure wears a long blue tunic with a black vest, a round hat with white trim and a black mask which fully covers the cheeks, similar to a generic *zanni* mask. Overall, this is not a typical depiction of a period *Dottore* and may have been a variant of a character.

The Lovers/Innamorati

The love story of the children of the wealthy *vecchi* was the main plot of the *commedia* plays. The conflict between fathers and children was primarily about marriage. Early modern marriage customs were drastically different from ours, and deserve to be briefly explained here. Unlike the rest of Italy and Europe, Venice was a republic. The city was run by a council of merchant (patrician) families, which elected the Doge, who was a *de facto* ruler of the city. The Doges were distinguished by decades of service to the republic, and were usually in

their seventies or older at the time of their election.[96] The number of patricians eligible for the highest offices of the Great Council was artificially limited to the descendants of the noble families who just happened to be on the council for four years or more by the time of *serrata* (lock-out or closure) in 1297.[97] All other families were not eligible, regardless of their subsequent wealth and status. Technically, the republic of Venice was an oligarchy, and a gerontocracy at that.

The rich patrician families were ruled by their patriarchs, who controlled and ran them as mini-polities within the state. The patriarch's control over the families was supposed to be absolute, and it spread not just over servants, women, and children, but also over their grown marriageable sons.

The marriageable sons were hard to control. Upper-class men in Venice did not get married until their late twenties to early thirties, and, until marriage, were artificially kept out of business and politics. The problem was that many of these men would never marry. Upper-class marriage in Venice was an intricate puzzle aimed at maximum upward mobility: if one had a son, one would try to marry him off and get him into a family with the highest social standing possible, and get a dowry as big as possible. If one had a daughter, one aimed at marrying her to the man of the highest social standing and give the smallest dowry possible. Romantic love was not required — it was more of a business arrangement to solidify business or political ties between the families. In fact, the process started with an engagement contract called *le nozze*, specifying the dowry. The bride and groom did not meet until much later in the process.[98] The assent of the parties involved was required, but since the parties often never met each other prior to the wedding, the assent was signified by holding hands. By the sixteenth century, there was a bit of a marriage crisis. Marriageable upper-class daughters went to convents because their parents did not feel like giving them a large dowry, as no available candidates would increase their social status. The dowry inflation was enormous: 20,000 ducats and more in a city where a "journeyman mason earned an annual salary of about 50 ducats."[99] Convents literally were a cheaper option.

Furthermore, limiting marriages served to restrict the ever-expanding patrician family tree and prevent division of the family wealth, since, in Venice, all brothers were eligible for an equal share.[100] The analysis of a patrician family in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries showed that, usually, only one son in a generation married. [101] At the same time, the children were supposed to submit to complete control of the family patriarch, who was supposed to find them a suitable match, but wouldn't do so because the marriage was not in the best interest of the family. That is why a marriage is so prominent in *commedia*. The

thought of the lovers arranging their own matches was fresh and original, went against the established social order, and the thought of putting one's personal interest and individual desires before the family and societal responsibilities was also new and subversive.

Interestingly, the church did not get into the marriage business until fairly late. Our common understanding of the marriage ceremony involving a priest and two witnesses, and consent of both parties was due to the decisions of the 1563 council of Trent; prior to that, it was a private business arrangement between the families. Furthermore, Venetian parents had the legal right to disinherit the children who married without parental approval, so the Church's mandate for free choice and consent in marriage wasn't practical.[102]

The ideal lovers were loosely based on the ideals of courtly love popularized by Petrarch's sonnets. The lovers even speak Tuscan, the language of Petrarchan love poetry.[103] The love in Petrarchan sonnets was passionate, all-consuming, overwhelming, but, overall, it was chaste. The *commedia* lovers take it to the next level. Pre-marital sex is pretty common; occasionally, the female lover, the *inamorata*, starts the play heavily pregnant. The lovers can have sex for the fun of it, to ensure their marriage to each other, or as a way to upset whatever plans their parents made for them. Their love is as fickle as the lovers themselves. It's associated with spite, jealousy, and a very quick switch of the objects of affection. The young man dying of love for *Flaminia* in the first act can be madly in love and getting married to *Isabella* in the third. Furthermore, their great love makes them go mad, leave the country, get sick, and, overall, suffer greatly. It was thought that great love is associated with great suffering and that the suffering makes the object of your affection love you more.[104] Note that this noble passionate love was the prerogative of the lovers only! The servants were thought to be incapable of high emotions and passions and were guided by base emotions, such as lust, and the amorous advances of the *vecchi* were considered socially inappropriate.

The male Lover, the Inamorato: The male lovers were the marriageable sons of the patriarchs. They were stuck in artificially prolonged adolescence until their late twenties or early thirties. They were completely dependent on their fathers for money, were expected to obey their fathers in everything, and to defend the family honor at all costs, which often included duels to the death at the slightest provocation. Otherwise, they did not have much to do and spent their time serving in the army, forming street gangs, resorting to random violence (discouraged but accepted), or trying to have sex (encouraged and expected).

Contemporary young men had several options for sex: other men's wives, courtesans, immodest, or poor women, or young men.[105]

As their marital prospects were fully controlled by their fathers, were often bleak, and as no suitable brides were found, they resented their married friends. They especially resented if an eligible bride was snapped up by a patriarchal figure, in which case the lover felt positively entitled to the bride: the patriarch already broke the rules by yielding to lust, and he couldn't do anything with his young wife anyway. In Scala's scenario *The Jealous Old Man*, young and beautiful *Isabella* is married to old, impotent *Pantalone*, has an affair, and eventually marries young and virile *Orazio*.[106] In multiple period depictions, the lovers are not masked and are usually dressed according to the latest fashion. (The female lover will be discussed later with other female characters.)

Capitano: *Capitano* is a perpetual outsider, a boasting soldier, usually occupying a slightly lower social position than a male lover in the social hierarchy of *commedia*, and, most often, serves as a romantic complication. He is commonly not a member of the *vecchi's* household and is a foreigner, most often, a Spaniard. (There are always exceptions: in eight of Scala's scenarios he is a member of the household and becomes a much more serious character.)[107] He is boastful, larger than life, amorous, and cowardly. He is extremely similar to the Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, but would also be a familiar character to late-sixteenth century Italians.

In the late sixteenth century, southern Italy was occupied by Spain, and, in the north, several supposedly independent polities were also dependent on Spain politically. Furthermore, even the truly independent northern Italian city-states had to rely on bands of mercenary soldiers, as they had no armies of their own. The armies were led by the *condottieri*, or the mercenary captains who were originally foreign, but, by the time of early *commedia*, were usually Italian. The *condottieri* had a terrible reputation and were pretty much universally despised. Schmitt cites Coluccio Salutati, a contemporary politician who described the mercenaries as "outcasts who entered into perpetual conspiracy against peace and order."[108] Machiavelli called them

> …useless and dangerous; and if one holds his state based on these arms, he will stand neither firm nor safe; for they are disunited, ambitious, and without discipline, unfaithful, valiant before friends, cowardly before enemies; they have neither the fear of God nor fidelity to men, and destruction is deferred only so long as the attack is; for in peace one is robbed by them, and in war by the enemy. The fact is, they have no other attraction or reason for keeping the field than a trifle of stipend,

> which is not sufficient to make them willing to die for you. They are ready enough to be your soldiers whilst you do not make war, but if war comes they take themselves off or run from the foe; which I should have little trouble to prove, for the ruin of Italy has been caused by nothing else than by resting all her hopes for many years on mercenaries…[109]

They worked under contract for the highest bidder; were known to lie to their employers about their military prowess and the number of their soldiers; to take bribes and to give bribes to their opponents instead of fighting; avoided actual military campaigns as much as possible, especially in the winter; and, if they had to fight, the battles were essentially bloodless, as it was more profitable taking the opponents prisoner, rather than killing them.[110]

Scala's *Capitano* is the *Capitano Spavento da'Vall'Inferna*, made famous by Francesco Andreini of *I Gelosi*, husband of Isabella Andreini. Andreini was a professional soldier, but, after being captured by the Turks for seven years, became a professional actor. He played lovers and a *Dottore*-like magician, but his most famous role was of the *Capitano Spavento*. After *I Gelosi* was dissolved in 1604, Andreini turned to writing and published the first part of the *Bravure del Capitano Spavento* in 1607 and the second part in 1615. [111] The books consist of the fantastical monologues by *Capitano* and his conversations with *Trappola*, his servant. In Scala's scenarios, *Capitano's* servant is usually *Arlecchino*.

Spavento was the most famous period *Capitano*, but there were others as well. The *Capitano* in *Recueil Fossard*, which dates from the 1580s, is *Capitano Cocodrillo*, played by Fabrizio de Fornaris, with *I Confidenti*, and, in 1599, Silvio Fiorillo is first mentioned as *Capitano Matamoros*.[112, 113]

The costume of *Capitano* varied, depending on the actor, but the exaggerated military finery and a large sword seem to be common. Duchartre describes *Capitano* in a flesh-colored mask with a big nose, and in modern (including SCA) *commedia* performances, *Capitano* is a masked character.[114] However, in the engravings of *Recueil Fossard*, the *Capitano Cocodrillo* is not masked. In the illustration of the *Capitano* from Tristano Martinelli's *Compositions de Rhetorique*, published in Lyons in 1600 or 1601, he is not masked neither.[115, 116] The *Capitanos* in Callot's *Balli di Sfessania*, which dates from the early 1620s, are all masked, wearing light-colored, long-nosed masks, fitting Duchartre's description.[117]

The Women in Commedia

Women appeared on stage prior to *commedia* troupes, especially in amateur productions.[118] Women were a part of the travelling groups of the charlatans or mountebanks, who were selling *nostra*, or secret potions and cures, in the streets of Italy. The groups would have consisted of the charlatan, who was in

part precursor of the *Dottore*, a *Zanni*, often providing musical entertainment, and a beautiful woman. Occasionally, the women also played instruments, flirted with the *Zanni*, and fulfilled the role of a "lovely assistant" in modern-day magic shows.[119] They were referred to as *cantimbanche* (singers). There were also accounts of female acrobats accompanying the charlatans' troupes (*saltimbanche*) and, later, *commedia* troupes.[120] (The presence of female acrobats was probably the cause for the English to dismiss the actresses as "tumbling whores," referencing the 1576 performance of Dionisio's Mantua troupe before Elizabeth I.)[121]

There are suggestions that women appeared in *commedia erudita* performances, and Smith mentions that Angelo Beolco, also known as Ruzzante, employed women in his plays to perform songs and madrigals at a banquet in 1529.[122]

The addition of women to the previously all-male troupes was the common denominator that attracted audiences of all classes and ages to the *commedia* performances. The appearance of women in such a public display was new, unexpected, and subversive, causing absolute outrage from the Church and a steady stream of income for the *commedia* troupes. The Church had a problem with women on stage. Faced with the Reformation, it was trying to re-establish control over the population and was failing. People disillusioned with spiritual life turned to entertainments of the flesh. Theater was there to provide if not the outlet for people's sexual desires, then at least an illusion of such an outlet. In 1599, Jesuit Juan de Pineda insisted against the public appearance of women:

> Saint Paul did not want women to speak publicly because, as Saint Anselmo said, it would provoke those who heard them to feel unlawful desire, and even worse than looking at [women], would be looking at and hearing them at the same time.[123]

Furthermore, as both courtesans and actresses made a living in a public sphere, in the eyes of the church (and, sometimes, general public) they were one and the same. However, the fact that women on stage became not only common, but necessary for the success of Italian professional theater, serves as a testament to the waning power of the Church.

The first known appearance of a woman in a professional *commedia* troupe is recorded in a Roman contract, signed in 1564, that states that Donna Lucrezia of Siena will perform with a troupe of six men during the Carnival.[124] Women very quickly became the main attraction in *commedia*, and the first *commedia* female stars, Vincenza Armani and Barbara Flaminia, were hugely popular by the late 1560s.[125] *Commedia* stars were known internationally. In 1574, Henri III of France was asking for *I Gelosi's* Victoria Piisimi by name on his visit to Venice.[126]

In 1578, the actresses of *I Confidenti* became the first identifiable professional actresses on the English stage.[127] However, the acceptance of actresses was not universal; while adored in some areas of Italy, they were forbidden to perform in others. *Desiosi*, a troupe led by a female *capocomico*, Diana Ponti, was permitted to perform in Rome in 1588, but without women.[128] The debate about actresses and the moral dangers they presented went well into the seventeenth century.[129]

Given the general lack of education and restricted mobility of Italian upper-class women, it is possible and plausible that the first Italian professional actresses were from the *cortegiane oneste*, or the honored/honest courtesans, who often had excellent educations, socialized with men, and were held in high esteem by society.[130] (A good example of such a courtesan would be Veronica Franco, who was the subject of the 1998 movie *A Dangerous Beauty*.)[131] The Roman and Venetian courtesans were known for their wit and improvisation skills in prose, poetry, and music.[132] Kerr, in *The Rise of the Diva*, discusses the theory that after the council of Trent forced the courtesans out of Rome, some joined theater companies as a way to make a living. It is possible that Donna Lucrezia from the previous paragraph was one of those courtesans.[133] Regardless of how many actresses had courtesan backgrounds, there were numerous arguments that actresses were worse for public morals than prostitutes. At least a prostitute sins in private, it was figured, while an actress performs for a large crowd at once, and thus is responsible for moral decay on a larger scale.[134]

The costumes of the women on stage were much less codified than those of men, even in early *commedia*. Usually, the upper-class characters wore fashionable upper-class attire, and the servants wore the lower-class outfits. Furthermore, the women wore innumerable disguises, and sometimes appeared as men. Traditionally, it is accepted that the female characters were unmasked. Katritzky, in her *Art of Commedia*, gives numerous examples of masked female characters. These, however, may be more dependent on plot and situation, and seem to indicate a character in disguise rather than a character type.[135] To complicate things, as *commedia* costumes became very popular for party-goers and carnival revelers, and as comedians were hired to do performances at parties and carnival celebrations, occasionally it is hard to determine whether one is looking at a group of working comedians or a gathering of costumed party-goers. Even so, there are well-documented examples of actual masked actresses during performances as well.[136] Usually, masked characters are upper-class *inamoratas* or courtesans, especially when in the company of *Pantalone*.[137] Additionally, there are several depictions of female servants with aprons, baskets, and masks.[138] The masks are less uniform than those of their male counterparts, and can be half, three

quarters, or full-face masks. These masks can be light–colored or black, made of simple cloth or molded to the face (probably leather), and sometimes painted to look like a face.[139] Occasionally, the masks have bushy mustaches, and are then similar to the early *zanni* masks, which were a unisex disguise for the nobility.[140] The mustaches may have been functional; by blocking the nostrils, they functioned as a basic air filter in the horrible smelling city air.[141]

Inamorata: A female lover – an upper-class woman. *Commedia* upper-class women are always described relative to their male relatives or guardian: a widow, or a daughter, ward, or a niece of so and so. (This is not limited to *commedia*. The period descriptions of Venetian weddings do not even give the bride's given name, and describe her as a daughter or sister of so and so.)[142] Women of the upper classes were under complete control of their male relatives. They were sheltered, not well-educated (in late-sixteenth century Venice, only about 13 percent of women were literate), and were only expected to leave the house to go to church, albeit with a chaperone.[143] A woman's greatest quality was supposed to be chastity, and their upbringing was aimed at preserving their virginity before marriage. This was to ensure the honor of their family and their future husbands. At the same time, while the women were considered "timid by nature, soft, and slow,"[144] they were also considered more prone to sin and difficult to control; therefore, to ensure said virginity, girls were married off early. The usual age of a Venetian bride was between fourteen and twenty years.[145]

Most *inamorata* characters are daughters. Dutiful daughters were supposed to be modest, avoid the company of men, and acquiesce to their fathers' choice of a spouse for them. Just as there aren't any good servants in *commedia*, there also are not any dutiful daughters. The young ladies in the scenarios have affairs, scheme, defy their fathers' orders, choose their own spouses, and get pregnant out of wedlock. They are fickle and irrational. At the same time, they are still upper-class women and are still somewhat bound by the rules of propriety. While the male lovers are free to go places and do things, the women appear at a doorstep or window. They only go into another person's house accompanied by a chaperone or when it is first insured that the house is empty of males.[146] Otherwise, they have to go in disguise, so the rules of propriety are observed.

Occasionally, the *inamorata* is a young widow seeking to remarry. In sixteenth-century Italy, after the death of her husband, the widow was still under the control of his male relatives. Contrary to common assumption, the widow did not inherit her husband's property after his death; she was expected to stay in his family and raise their legitimate children, in which case she was eligible for a pension from

her spouse's estate. If she chose to leave, and take her (often substantial) dowry with her (pretty much the only way for some financial independence), she was expected to leave her children in her husband's family and was then reviled as an evil and irresponsible mother.[147] Often, the widows did remarry. Because they are more experienced sexually and financially, in *commedia* scenarios, widows tend to be more independent, ingenious, and scheming than daughters.

The *inamoratas* wore elegant fashionable gowns and jewelry, their hair was usually covered (for modesty and propriety), and, as an accessory, they could have a fan, gloves, etc. The courtesans (and the lines can be blurred between *inamorata* and a courtesan, especially if the *inamorata* is a widow) also wore elegant fashionable dresses, but tended to have more jewelry, elaborately coifed hair, and were more likely to be depicted partially nude. Courtesans were also more likely to wear masks.[148] The widows or courtesans are more likely to be the second *donna* type characters.

The *inamorata* is the most likely character to appear in disguise. Cross-dressing was one of the most common disguises, to the point it became almost a hallmark of *commedia*. One-third of Scala's scenarios feature cross-dressing.[149]

Why was cross-dressing so common? While the early *commedia* troupes were pretty democratic, the actresses, especially those playing the *inamoratas*, were one of the main attractions of *commedia*, and can be considered the first celebrities and superstars of the Western entertainment industry.[150] Appearing in disguise, among other things, helped highlight their skill and versatility as performers, and bring more money to the troupes.

Furthermore, considering the social norms of early Italian society, it was a practical way for an upper-class female character to advance the plot: a young woman of breeding would never be seen unchaperoned in the street — her reputation would be ruined, and she would put herself in danger. The female character dressed as a man would have the same freedom as a male character to scheme, carouse, fight, etc. There is only so much you can accomplish shouting from a second-story window or sighing from a balcony.

Female cross-dressing was also considered very risqué and subversive. The audiences were already used to cross-dressing on stage since, prior to *commedia*, adolescent men played the parts of women. The cross-dressing of women as men was new and unusual, and it undermined the rigid social structure. Women dressed as men assumed (on stage) all the power and privilege that the men held in society, and, for early modern Italy and Europe, this was very exciting. Cross-dressing in early modern Italy, a place with rigidly defined, regulated gender roles and unity of sex and gender, also signaled defiance of these norms and blended

the boundaries between genders. This sexual ambiguity was considered erotic. Venetian courtesans knew about that and did cross-dress, or wore clothes of both genders (women's upper garment, with male clothing underneath) to entice their customers.[151] Pietro Aretino, a sixteenth-century Italian poet, playwright, and professional blackmailer, in one of his letters to a courtesan, admired her ability to present an illusion of both genders.[152] It is probable that the early actresses, who came from a class of courtesans, employed the same device with their audiences. This also served to take something previously available to only a select few (the company of a trained courtesan) in a private setting, and present it at once to many people who would not have had an opportunity to experience it otherwise.

Furthermore, cross-dressed actresses looked like adolescent men, who in early modern Italy were seen as sexual objects similar to women.[153] Therefore, a young attractive actress dressed as a young attractive boy is attractive on several levels – as the young attractive talented actresses that the audience knows she is; as a young attractive boy, an illusion she convincingly creates; and, overall, as a sexually ambiguous being presenting itself as sexually available, presenting an illusion of sexual availability utilizing the methods of courtesans and performing in a public sphere. A common subplot where a cross-dressed heroine falls for a male lover has also allowed *commedia* plots to flirt with the illusion of homosexuality, another taboo subject. Rosalind Kerr, in *The Rise of the Diva*, gives a very interesting analysis of the relationship dynamics and social implications of Scala's scenarios where *Isabella* is disguised as her own brother *Fabrizio* (one actress playing both characters). *Isabella*, the most famous *commedia inamorata*, was the character created by Isabella Andreini, with *I Gelosi*. She is also the *Isabella* of Scala's scenarios.[154]

Servetta/Serva is a term for a female servant of the household, less common than male servants in *commedia* scenarios despite the opposite being true in real life. In *commedia erudita*, the women's roles were always played by men, and, in some *commedia* troupes, the servant women continued to be played by men. Battista Amorevoli played *Franceschina* with *I Gelosi* in France in 1577.[155] He was also *Franceschina* with *I Confidenti* in 1584, and thus it is possible that the *Franceschina* of *Recueil Fossard* depicts Amorevoli. However, later, the *servettas* were performed by women. In the 1580s, Sylvia Roncagli was *Franceschina* with *I Gelosi*.[156]

As opposed to the upper-class *inamorata*, who was a generally inaccessible (or less accessible) object of romantic interest, the servant was treated as an accessible object of lust, and often had her own romantic or sexual subplot that paralleled the main love story. As an accessible sex object, the servant class

women were considered fair game for premarital sex and sexual pranks. (In Scala's "Jealous Old Man," *Pasquella*, the innkeeper's wife, is set up and raped by *Gratiano* as a prank.)[157] *Franceschina* is also the most often partially naked character in the *Recueil Fossard* engravings.

Often in Scalas's scenarios, the servants get married in the end without any prior romantic development whatsoever — almost for symmetry's sake. If there is a romantic storyline involving the servants, it will be more concerned with sex rather than love. The lower classes were thought to be incapable of feeling such refined emotions as courtly love, but were more concerned with lower emotions, such as lust. This formed the basis of the servants' monologues mocking their masters' romantic involvement.[158] At the same time, the servants' marriages were rarely arranged, and the *servetta* was (usually) free to choose her own spouse. The servant's virginity and chastity were not valued, and pre-marital and extramarital sex was almost expected. The lower-class women were also marrying later than their upper-class counterparts, and usually to someone of their own age. They are usually older than the *inamoratas*. However, this doesn't mean that they were not considered desirable. Rosalind Kerr, in her book *The Rise of the Diva*, analyzes a possible reconstructed *commedia* performance recorded in Recueil Fossard, where the servant *Franceschina* starts out as *Pantalone's* lover, gets pregnant, marries *Arlecchino*, and then is pursued by the lover *Leandro*, while still loved by *Arlecchino* and *Pantalone* both.[159]

The *servetta* usually wears lower-class outfits, and can be recognized in the paintings and engravings by an apron, basket, kitchen utensil, or a spindle. Although occasionally, the servant is so well-dressed it's hard to tell her apart from her mistress.[160] The *servetta* is usually an unmasked character. The more famous *servettas* were Battista Amorevoli and Sylvia Roncagli, both *Franceschinas* with *I Gelosi*, and Spinetta Locatelli, who played *Spinetta* in Milan during the 1610s.[161] There were probably as many versions of *servettas* as there were of *zanni*. *Franceschina* was the most popular in period. *Columbina*, the best known *commedia servetta*, did not become popular until later in the seventeenth century, and was made famous by Catarina Bianconelli, who started playing the character in 1683. (Catarina Bianconelli is also credited with invention of *Arlecchina*, a female version of French *Harlequin*, in 1695).[162]

Character Functions

Commedia is an action-oriented performance. Plots develop because **characters** do **things**. The characters themselves are less important to the plot than the things they do within the plot. Therefore, each character in the scenario can be reduced to a limited number of functions. Tim Fitzpatrick performed an

absolutely titanic analysis of character functions in his book,[163] but here we will reduce them to the very basic few. This is by no means a complete list. This is just what the characters are *likely* to do in the plot.

Zanni — being hungry, hunting for food, searching for love and sex, carrying out masters' orders, fighting, sleeping, eating, having sex (basically, the actions associated with bodily functions will most often be done by the *zanni*), helping out the lovers, arranging pranks.

Vecchi (*Pantalone* and *Dottore*) — arrange marriages, interfere with the lovers' plans, lust after female characters, issue orders to servants, get enraged, beat servants, fall prey to pranks, get drunk.

Inamorato (Male Lover) — falls in love and pursues his beloved, monologues about his love, hangs out with friends, pursues romantic distractions (*serva* and second *donna* characters), defies parental orders, duels, fights, beats servants, asks *zanni* for help, plays love scenes.

Capitano — boasts about his martial and romantic prowess, challenges to duels, avoids fights, flees, hides, beats servants and gets beaten by servants, gets duped by cross-dressers, gets drunk, occasionally may be a character similar to a male lover.

Inamorata (female lover) — serves as a male lover's interest; or, less frequently, *Capitano's* and old men's love interest; plays love scenes; serves as a romantic rival; asks *zanni* for help; initiates and carries out plot complications (cross-dressing, disguise, pretending to be sick or dead, being pregnant, etc.); in SCA period, would not be seen outside of the house unless accompanied or disguised.

Second Donna — secondary female lover, can be another *inamorata*, a widow, a courtesan, or an actress. Very similar to the female lover in function, but more likely to initiate the plot and be more proactive.[164] Also more likely to be an available love interest, and more likely to be acting alone.

Servetta/Serva — serves as an available love interest to all male characters;[165] performs as bait in bed tricks and sexual pranks; carries out orders; serves as a romantic rival; helps out the lovers. Can actually go outside without a disguise. CA

SCENARIOS

The period troupes also played other genres, such as pastorals and tragicomedies, but comedies were the most popular. This section is on writing scenarios for improvised comedies based on period scenarios, but remaining accessible to

the modern audience. There are plentiful resources on scenarios for modern *commedia* actors, including a wonderful chapter on writing scenarios in Josh Rudlin's book, *Commedia dell'Arte, a Handbook for Troupes*.[166]

It is important to realize that there were no *commedia* plays per se before the 1600s. The performances consisted of rehearsed improvisations based on a scenario. A scenario was a scene-by-scene description of what had to happen in the play. It included very basic stage directions, listed the characters involved, and occasionally mentioned the *lazzi*, or the comedic elements, which could be played out in the scene.

Lazzi (plural of *lazzo*): the *lazzi* are the comedic elements that do not necessarily advance the plot. The origin of the word lazzi is generally considered to be from *l'azzo* or *l'azione*, which means action or activity.[167] These can be physical, verbal, musical, etc. The *lazzi* don't have to be included in the scenario — the actors will populate the play with the *lazzi* from their own repertoire. However, a scenario can absolutely be written that plays to the troupe's best *lazzi*, and lets the actors shine on stage. Theater scholars differ in their opinions on the origins and the use of the *lazzi*. Some argue that the use of *lazzi* is detrimental and detracts the audience's attention from the plot, and thus interferes with plot development; others insist that the *lazzi* can be used to both stall and advance plot development, depending on how the actors use them.[168] A number of *lazzi* can stand alone as a comic element or a skit when performed separately from a scenario, but some are tied to a plot and cannot. The troupe may have their own *lazzi* or use published ones. For example, *Lazzi*: *Comic Routines of Commedia dell'Arte*, by Mel Gordon, is a collection of early *commedia lazzi*, some from the late-sixteenth century, and gives one a good idea what the period *lazzi* were like.[169]

The same *lazzo* may be used for different purposes. For example, the very famous "*lazzo* of the fly" is one of the few well-documented seventeenth-century *lazzi*. It is considered to be by Domenico Biancolelli, one of the famous *Arlecchinos*, where *Arlecchino* chases the fly on stage and eventually eats it. The *lazzo* may be used by itself as the filler on stage, for example, where there is a backstage costume change, but something needs to be happening. If the plot calls for a fight between the master and servant, writers can use the *lazzo* in its original context and have *Arlecchino* hit his master while killing a fly that landed on him. Or if the plot calls for a misunderstanding between the lovers, a writer may decide that they couldn't hear each other because *Arlecchino* was very loudly and exuberantly chasing the fly on stage, thus rendering any conversation useless.

Lazzi, though an integral part of *commedia* performance and specific to *commedia*, are often left out of the scenarios. Sometimes when a troupe thinks about making up a scenario, they think about several funny situations, skits, and *lazzi*, and then try to organize them all into one plot. I find it difficult to do, and the resulting plot can feel disjointed and not very coherent. What works better for me is to build the framework for the plot first, without even thinking of the comedic elements, and populate them with *lazzi* later. In this case, the plot success does not depend of the success of the *lazzi*, and will still move forward even if a "funny" falls flat. This does not mean that, if you think that something would fit, you purposefully exclude it. It means that the plot should suggest the *lazzi*, not the other way around.

Not having a written SCA-period *commedia* play limits us in trying to recreate a period performance, but for the contemporary actors, there were certain advantages in not having a script. First, in an age when no copyright laws existed and imitation was encouraged, there was less danger of someone stealing the troupe's repertoire. Second, free from memorizing lines, the actors could improvise freely and subtly change the action and dialogue, even using topical references, to better engage the audience or to comply with regulations, which kept changing from city to city. Third, as *commedia* had no written plays, they were less subjected to censorship than their colleagues performing scripted *commedia erudita* plays. Censorship was pervasive. At the 1563 Council of Trent (the last of the Anti-Reformation councils), the Church was given the power to ban all immoral and heretical writings.[170] In 1573, the State of Milan Ordinances states that

> comedians may not dress in ecclesiastical robes of any kind, that they may not speak of the Sacred Word or anything pertaining to religion, or use the words from the sacrament; that they may not induce simple listeners to superstition or recite incantations, that they may not speak or act in lascivious manner (such as having women dress as men), that the comedies' amorous subjects must be honest; that they may not speak in any way that may be injurious to anyone; and that all comedies must be previewed by the delegates of the state.[171]

In 1578, Cardinal Gabrielo Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, realized the subversive nature of theatrical improvisation and how easily it avoids censorship:

> It is not enough to say that these comedies will be reviewed beforehand and the evil removed, because in practice it does not work, because words and phrases that have not been written down are always added,

in fact all that is written is a summary or argument, and the rest is all improvised.[172]

Overview of Early *Commedia* Scenarios

There is a lot of surviving material on *commedia* performances, but there is very little in the way of scenarios surviving before 1600. The quality and complexity of the surviving scenarios vary greatly.

Probably the earliest surviving period scenarios are by Zan Ganassa, an Italian comic touring Spain in the 1580s. They were published in 2007, together with his notes, as *Stefanelo Botarga E Zan Ganassa: Scenari E Zibaldoni Di Comici Italiani Nella Spagna Del Cinquecento*, but no English translation is available at the time of this writing.[173]

In this section, I will heavily refer to the scenarios of Flaminio Scala (1552-1624), who was a contemporary *commedia* giant. He was involved with the *Desiosi* in 1597, with the *Uniti* in 1598, and with the *Accesi* in 1600-1601, where he played a lover, *Flávio*. He was *capocomico* of *Confidenti* from 1614 to 1621, and was friends with Isabella and Francesco Andreini of *Gelosi*, as well as with their son, Giovan Battista Andreini.[174] Scala published his book of scenarios in 1611, and it was prefaced by Francesco Andreini. This is the most widely known and accessible collection of period *commedia* scenarios, and also one of the earliest. It consists of 50 scenarios in different genres, most of them comedies, with some tragicomedies and pastorals. Scala also wrote scripted plays but regarded scenarios higher, and, in the preface to his own scripted play, *Il Finto Marito*, published in 1618, referred to them as superior to the scripted and rehearsed comedies of *commedia erudita*.[175] Even though the book was published in 1611, we can reasonably assume that it consists of scenarios which were either performed in period, throughout Scala's long career, or were based on the scenarios Scala played in. The characters in Scala's scenarios are a compilation of the *commedia* characters from the most famous period troupes, which had not been necessarily performing together, creating a fantasy "all-star" *commedia* cast.

Another well-known scenario collection, the illustrated manuscript *Raccolta di Scenari Piu Scelti D'Istrioni* of one hundred scenarios, of the Corsini Library, is usually dated even later, from about 1621-42,[176] although there is some evidence that it was made between 1590 and 1620.[177] For those interested, a dual German-Italian edition, reproducing all full color illustrations was published in 2013; unfortunately, an English translation of this collection is not available at the time of this writing.[178]

The 51 *scenari* from the collection in Venice's Correr Library were traditionally dated from the second half of the seventeenth century, but some researchers

now date them back to the first half of the seventeenth century. These *scenari* are very similar to those of Flaminio Scala, and likely are a derivative work.[179] The *scenari* are available (in Italian only) as *Gli scenari Correr: la commedia dell'arte a Venezia*, published in 1996 by Carmelo Alberti.[180]

The surviving scenarios have many similarities. Even though there were many versions of the same character, which varied from actor to actor, the plots were formulaic. There is very little character development throughout the course of the play. The relationships between the characters are well-defined and do not develop. Each type of character performs a limited set of functions. In her book *Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminia Scala*, Natalie Crohn Schmitt states that

> Scala was describing not fixed characters, but characters' behaviours, reasons for them, and feelings for them, and these in relationships. … I have found it more useful to show the characters as functions of the plot and to describe their interactions.[181]

In a basic *commedia* scenario, there is an initial conflict between the older generation and the younger generation about the choice of a marital partner. Through machinations of the old and the young, carried out by their servants, the conflict is eliminated, predominantly through the actions of the servants. Additional complications occur through the middle of the plot, but all is eventually settled, ends happily, and the young people get married.

In his book *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Processes in the Commedia dell'Arte*, Tim Fitzpatrick draws very interesting parallels between *commedia*, which he argues is essentially a type of oral performance, and some types of folklore, such as singing and storytelling.[182] He also describes *commedia* not as a type of theater, but as a mechanism of making theater, where oral and literary elements are combined.

The scenario, unlike the scripts in traditional scripted plays, does not dictate or define the performance — it acts as a literary mechanism to facilitate oral performance.[183] *Commedia* scenarios serve to outline basic actions that have to occur in order to bring the plot to its conclusion, and they act as a reminder for actors of what has to be accomplished in each scene. This provides structure to the performance.[184] The performance itself will vary depending on the actors, their skill, and the audience. The troupes could also vary the performance to reference other popular plays, celebrities, and the recent events, or to avoid them. Sometimes the scenarios themselves were based on historical events. There were apparently several versions of *La regina d'Inghilterra*, very loosely

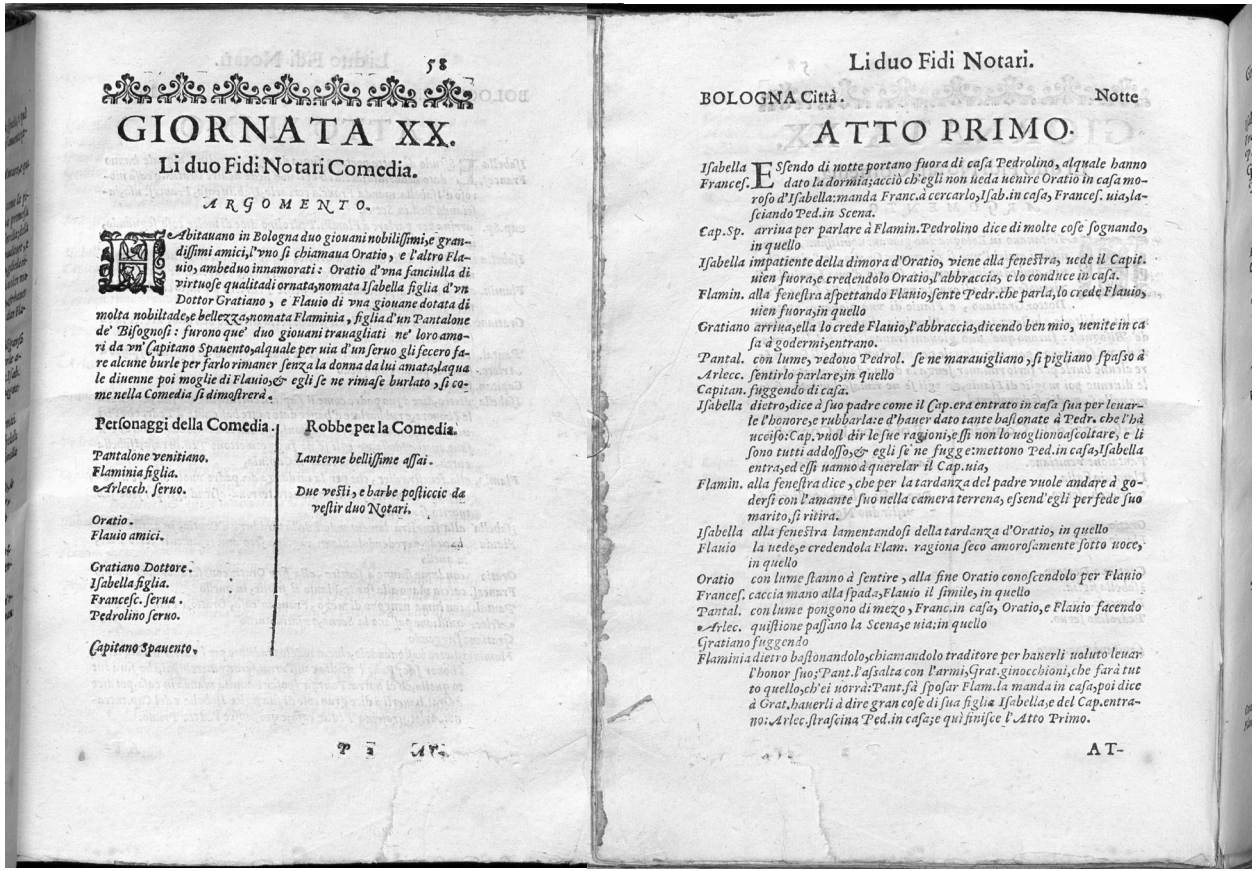
based on the story of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, dating anywhere from mid- to late-seventeenth century.[185]

Therefore, the same scenario will be played very differently by different troupes and even by the same troupe on different occasions. Failure to "read the audience" could have disastrous consequences. *I Gelosi*, one of the most famous early *commedia* troupes, got into trouble with the French Parliament (presumably over the content of their plays, but possibly because they were more successful than their French counterparts) during their Paris tour in 1577, and only a direct intervention by Henri III kept them in France.[186] Much later, in 1697, the Italian players were expelled from Paris and their theater closed, when their play, based on an old Italian scenario, was translated into French as *La Fausse Prude* (The False Prude). It was the title of a banned book, published in Holland about the details of the king's romance with Madame de Maintenon.[187]

Therefore, the function of a good scenario is to provide a solid structure/plot, not too convoluted, easily remembered, and logical within the parameters of the genre, well-defined to contain the improvisation direction, and at the same time flexible enough so the actors can populate it with comedic elements. A good scenario will be flexible, stretchable, and potentially funny. Let's look at Scala's scenarios to see how this was accomplished in period.

Scala's scenarios start with an *argomento*, a quick summary of what has happened prior to the start of the play, or rehashing (perhaps prehashing) the plot of the play itself. It is separate from the prologue, and his is the only scenario collection to include it.[189] The *argomentos* are inconsistent, and vary in usefulness of the information they provide from scenario to scenario. The other surviving scenario collections do not employ the *argomento*. It was used in the earliest *commedia erudita* plays, but fell out of use by the time that Scala's book was published. The scholars still argue whether the *argomento* was a standard practice in early *commedia* or Scala's own invention. It probably was a literary device to lend more gravity and legitimacy to the practice of oral performance, and emphasize the descent of *commedia* from the earlier scripted and classical plays. It could be that he numbered the plays in the book by days [Day1, Day 2, etc.], as a nod to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, already a classic by the time Scala had published his book. Considering that Scala, just like his successful colleagues in established professional companies, took great pains to separate themselves from the "low origins" of *commedia*, such as the *buffoni* (professional clowns) and the street charlatans, this artificial literary device is very likely.[190]

Scala's scenarios are written in three acts (as opposed to five in *commedia erudita*), and each act can be functionally divided into scenes marked by the entrance of a



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GIORNATA XX.

Li duo Fidi Notari Comedia.

ARGOMENTO.

Habitauano in Bologna duo giouani nobilissimi,e grandissimi amici,l'vno si chiamaua Oratio, e l'altro Flauio, ambeduo innamorati: Oratio d'vna fanciulla di virtuose qualitadi ornata,nomata Isabella figlia d'vn Dottor Gratiano, e Flauio di vna giouane dotata di molta nobiltade,e bellezza,nomata Flaminia, figlia d'un Pantalone de' Bisognosi: furono que' duo giouani trauagliati ne' loro amori da vn Capitano Spauento,alquale per uia d'un seruo gli fecero fare alcune burle per farlo rimaner senza la donna da lui amata,laqua le diuenne poi moglie di Flauio,& egli se ne rimase burlato, si come nella Comedia si dimostrerà.

Personaggi della Comedia.	Robbe per la Comedia.
Pantalone venitiano.	Lanterne bellissime assai.
Flaminia figlia.	
Arlecch. seruo.	Due vesti, e barbe posticcie da vestir duo Notari.
Oratio.	
Flauio amici.	
Gratiano Dottore.	
Isabella figlia.	
Francesc. serua.	
Pedrolino seruo.	
Capitano Spauento.	

P 3 AT-

Li duo Fidi Notari.

BOLOGNA Città. Notte

ATTO PRIMO.

Isabella Francesc. Essendo di notte portano fuora di casa Pedrolino, alquale hanno dato la dormia;acciò ch'egli non ueda uenire Oratio in casa moroso d'Isabella:manda Franc.à cercarlo,Isab.in casa, Francesc. uia,lasciando Ped.in Scena.

Cap.Sp. arriua per parlare à Flamin.Pedrolino dice di molte cose sognando, in quello

Isabella impatiente della dimora d'Oratio, viene alla fenestra, uede il Capit. uien fuora,e credendolo Oratio,l'abbraccia, e lo conduce in casa.

Flamin. alla fenestra aspettando Flauio,sente Pedr.che parla,lo crede Flauio, uien fuora,in quello

Gratiano arriua,ella lo crede Flauio,l'abbraccia,dicendo ben mio, uenite in casa à godermi,entrano.

Pantal. con lume, vedono Pedrol. se ne marauigliano, si pigliano spasso à Arlecc. sentirlo parlare,in quello

Capitan. fuggendo di casa.

Isabella dietro,dice à suo padre come il Cap.era entrato in casa sua per lenarle l'honore,e rubbarla:e d'hauer dato tante bastonate à Pedr. che l'hà uccisо:Cap. vuol dir le sue ragioni,e essi non lo uoglionoascoltare, e li sono tutti addosso,& egli se ne fugge:mettono Ped.in casa,Isabella entra,ed essi uanno à querelar il Cap.uia,

Flamin. alla fenestra dice, che per la tardanza del padre vuole andare à godersi con l'amante suo nella camera terrena, essend'egli per fede suo marito,si ritira.

Isabella alla fenestra lamentandosi della tardanza d'Oratio, in quello

Flauio la uede,e credendola Flam. ragiona seco amorosamente sotto uoce, in quello

Oratio con lume stanno à sentire, alla fine Oratio conoscendolo per Flauio

Francesc. caccia mano alla spada,Flauio il simile, in quello

Pantal. con lume pongono di mezo, Franc.in casa, Oratio,e Flauio facendo

Arlec. quistione passano la Scena,e uia:in quello

Gratiano fuggendo

Flaminia dietro bastonandolo,chiamandolo traditore per hauerli uoluto leuar l'honor suo;Pant.l'assalta con l'armi,Grat.ginocchioni,che farà tutto quello,ch'ei uorrà:Pant.fà sposar Flam.la manda in casa,poi dice à Grat.hauerli à dire gran cose di sua figlia Isabella,e del Cap.entrano:Arlec.strascina Ped.in casa,e quì finisce l'Atto Primo.

AT-

These are two pages from the 1611 edition of Scala's scenario collection, day 20, *Li Duo Fidi Notari Comedia*.[188]

new character on the left-hand margin. The number of scenes is pretty high. For example, *Flavio's Fortune*'s three acts contain 16, 18, and 17 scenes.[191] In period, the performance would take several hours, and there would be *intermedi* (plural of *intermedio* or *intermezzo)* between the acts, which might include musical numbers, dances, allegories, or actual mini-performances. In high-end companies, the *intermedi* would be accompanied by the state-of-the-art special effects.[192]

In my experience, the longest performances of *commedia* within the SCA occur at Pennsic and usually last between 60 and 90 minutes. Some troupes do divide it into acts, with short *intermedi*, and some condense the play into one act. Modern troupes are not obligated to continue with the period three-act structure, but it helps to divide the scenario into three parts. The introductions and initial set of romantic complications will happen in the first part; the lovers will try to counteract them, and potentially encounter the second set of complications in the second part; and everything is happily resolved in the third. Usually, the ending of the third part is a big wedding scene with all the characters present, which helps to sort through the plot lines, reveal disguises and mistaken identities, and introduce long-lost family members.

Remember, *commedia* scenarios are the early versions of the romantic comedies we are used to, and, at their core, are about conflicts. The conflicts were relevant to contemporary audiences and could be largely divided into the following categories: generational conflicts between fathers and children, conflicts between the sexes, and conflicts between masters and servants. While the lovers are much higher on the social ladder than the servants, they are both underdogs compared with the *vecchi*, so faced with the choice of helping the *vecchi* or the lovers, the servants, being the subversive unreliable people that they are, will help the lovers.

Characters: The make-up of traditional period troupes was as follows: two pairs of lovers, two old men, two male servants, one female servant, plus additional characters, such as *Capitano*, and some more servants. The average cast in Scala's scenarios has eleven people.[193]

Li duo fidi notari (day 20) has ten characters, pretty close to average. Scala lists them organized into houses. Some characters will remain houseless: these are your outsiders, marginal or liminal characters (*Capitano*, occasional lovers, gypsies, pirates, travelling charlatans, magicians, etc.). They will be listed separately,

Pantalone
Flaminia, his daughter,
Arlecchino, his servant

Oratio
Flavio, his friend

Doctor Graziano
Isabella, his daughter
Franceschina, his servant
Pedrolino, his servant

Captain Spavento

on their own lines. The old men (*vecchi*) are the heads of the households, and, if there is *Pantalone* present in the scenario, he and his household are listed first.[194] Simply organizing the characters helps to define the basic plot. The main theme of *commedia* is the conflict between the *vecchi* and the lovers; the lovers oppose the marriages arranged by the *vecchi* and try to marry their own love interests. Therefore, in this case, at the end of the plot, *Isabella* will end up with *Oratio*, and *Flavio* with *Flaminia*. The main plot will revolve around these four. The lovers will engage the servants' help to foil the plans of the *vecchi*. *Captain Spavento* will be a romantic rival.

Properties: *Commedia* tends to be fairly light in properties. Here we have "a great many beautiful lanterns" (*lanterne bellissime*…)[195] Scala does not specify the costumes for the characters unless something unusual is required; in this case, two suits of clothes and false beards for the two notaries (*due vesti*…). The props (*robbe per la comedia*) are listed in the right-hand column on the first page, opposite the dramatis personae list.[196]

Location: Scala designates a chosen city (such as *Bologna Citta*) at the top of the page, prior to the first scene. Based on the layout of the 1611 edition, it looks like it was a last-minute addition, as there was no proper space left for it in the layout.[197] The choice of city is arbitrary as the stage sets did not change based on location. The location was indicated just by mentioning it in the play. In this scenario, it is mentioned in the *argomento*: "in Bologna lived…"

Character relationships: At this point, we need to establish basic relationships between characters. As a basic rule, *commedia* is very ageist – characters from different generations will not end up together, and classist – characters from different social classes will not end up together (although casual dalliances may occur). Marital mixing of ages and classes is socially inappropriate, but mistaken

identities and the improper behavior of the characters trying to break these rules will drive the plot. Those who try to break these rules will be punished. Usually, nobody gets born, nobody dies, and there is no overt breaking of the social taboos of the time (such as incest, cannibalism, homosexuality), although the plot may come close.[198]

Commedia performances are very fast-paced and the plots are convoluted, so it helps to draw out a basic love interest diagram. Tim Fitzpatrick's method will be used here: solid vertical lines are for the familial relationships, solid double-headed arrows are for the pairings that will occur at the end, and the dotted arrows are the romantic complications which drive the plot and get resolved to achieve the happy ending.[199]

Diagram #1

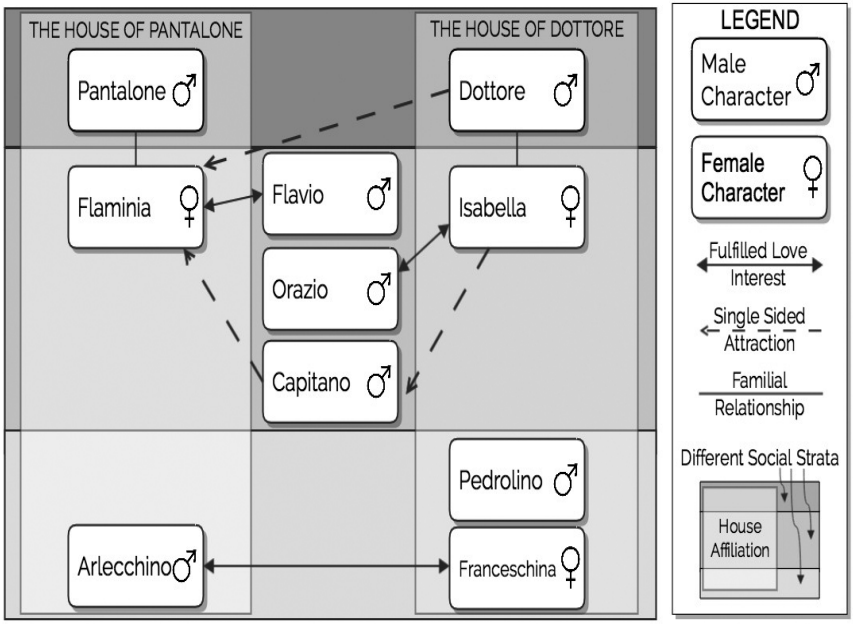


Diagram #1 depicts the character relationships of *Li ∂uo fiδi notari*, the day 20 Scala scenario, based on Diagram 1 from Tim Fitzpatrick's book. The diagram helps understand not only the relationships, but also the social order. The old men are listed at the top, as they are on the top of the pecking order. Directly below are their households, which consist of *Flaminia* and *Arlecchino* for *Pantalone*; and *Isabella*, *Franceschina*, and *Pedrolino* for *Dottore Graziano*. In this case, the male

lovers are not a part of the old men's households, and thus are listed in the middle. The male and female lovers are socially below the old men, but are equal with each other, and so are listed at approximately the same level. *Capitano* also does not belong to a household, and his standing is (usually, but not always) below the lovers. The servants are at the very bottom of the diagram, in their appropriate household columns. If *Arlecchino* were *Capitano's* servant, he would be listed in the middle column, below *Capitano*.

Just looking at the diagram, even without reading the scenario, you can see that *Flaminia* is *Pantalone's* daughter, and *Isabella* is *Graziano's*. *Flaminia* will end up with *Flavio*, and *Isabella* with *Oratio*. *Graziano* likes *Flaminia*, and *Pantalone* is trying to arrange her marriage to his old friend. *Capitano* also likes *Flaminia*, but will get nowhere. *Flavio* also likes *Isabella*, but will end up with *Flaminia*. *Isabella* also has a one-sided attraction to *Capitano*. *Arlecchino* and *Franceschina* like each other, and will get together in the end without any romantic complications. *Pedrolino* does not have a love interest in this scenario, and neither does *Pantalone*. This is a great deal of romantic complications, but, as the scenario calls for "a great many lanterns," the one-sided romantic complications are a result of mistaken identities in the dark.[200]

Diagram #2

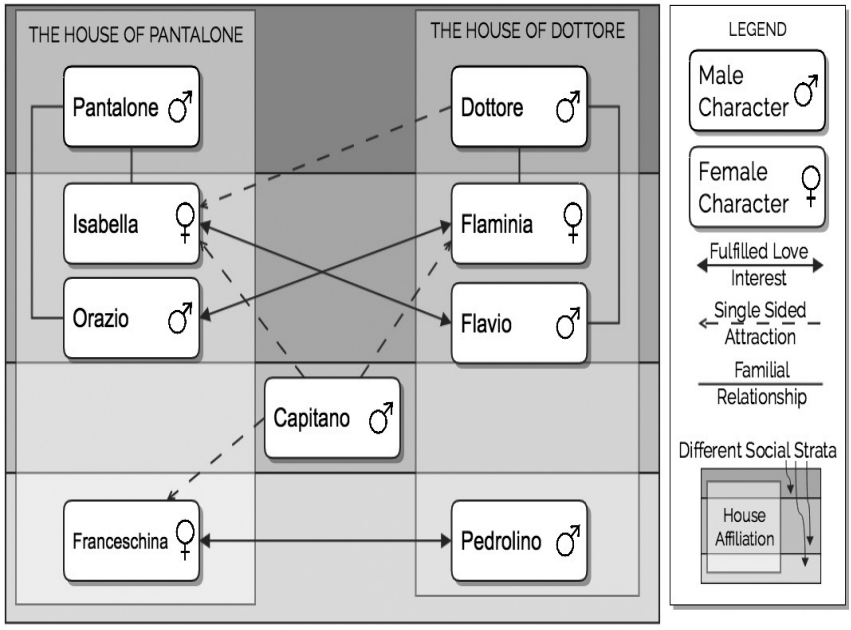
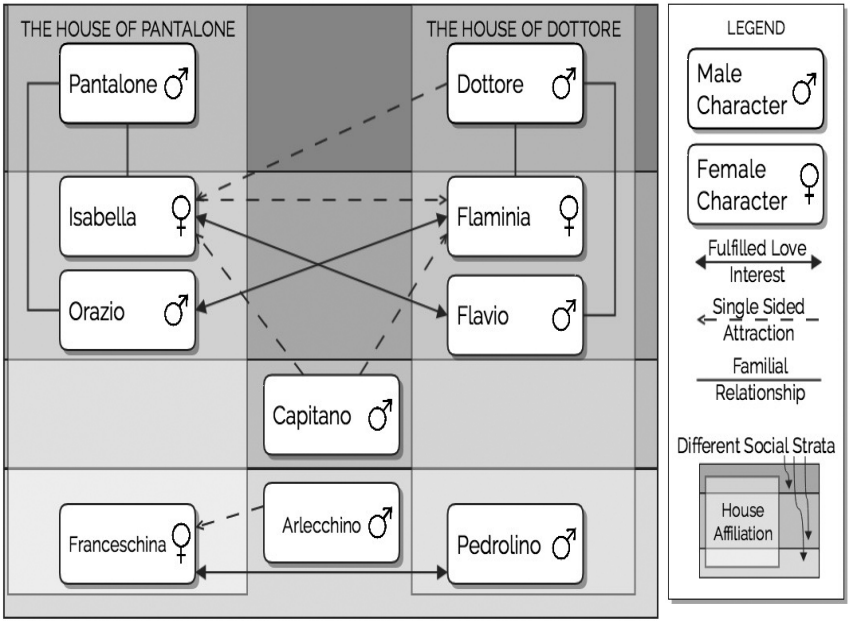


Diagram #2 is a relationship diagram for an imaginary scenario. Here, the old men have a son and daughter each, who all get married in the end. Again, *Pantalone* will probably try to set up Isabella and *Dottore*, or, *Dottore* may woo *Isabella* himself, with or without *Pantalone's* approval. *Capitano* will hit on every single female character in the plot and get nowhere, and *Franceschina* and *Pedrolino* will end up together in the end.

Diagram #3



However, not all plays are so straightforward. In **Diagram #3**, *Pantalone* and *Dottore* have a son and daughter each. *Orazio* and *Flaminia* like each other, and will end up together in the end. *Dottore* wants to marry *Isabella*. This, of course wouldn't work, and *Isabella* will end up with *Flavio*. *Capitano* also likes Isabella and *Flaminia* while *Isabella* likes…*Flaminia*? What's going on here? Isabella likes *Flaminia* and will end up with her brother, *Flavio*. Most likely, we have the case of the period "the twins look alike" trope. This is a well-documented device, used in *Gli ingannati*, a literary play from 1532, which later served as the basis for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.[201] So either *Flavio* was dressed in women's clothing (perhaps sneaking into *Isabella's* house), or more likely, *Flaminia* was dressed up as a boy (maybe trying to meet *Orazio*), and was mistaken by *Isabella* for *Flavio*. If

there is cross-dressing involved, usually it will be women dressed as men, rarely other way around. Usually, cross-dressing women do so to advance the plot, and cross-dressing men serve as comic relief, although there are exceptions. This does not take into account males playing female roles. In Scala's *Lady Who Was Believed Dead*, *Pedrolino* dresses up in women's clothing to play a trick on *Capitano*, and there is a print of *Pantalone* dressed as a female servant with a spindle.[202, 203] *Arlecchino* likes *Franceschina*, but she will end up with *Pedrolino* anyway.

Diagram #4

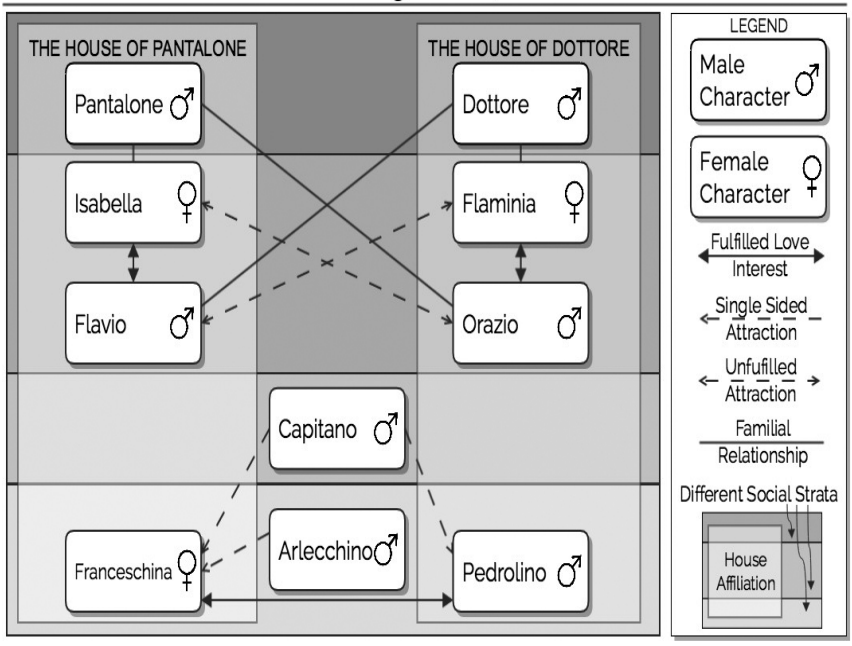


Diagram #4 illustrates an example of a scenario with another "mistaken identity" plot device. Here the old men again have two children each, and attempt to arrange two weddings. This won't work out because Flavio is actually the son of *Dottore*, and in *Pantalone's* household while *Orazio* is *Pantalone's* child, currently in *Dottore's* household. The lovers can't marry their actual siblings (incest taboo), so *Isabella* will end up with *Flavio*, and *Flaminia* with *Orazio*. The reasons why the young men were mismatched could be many. Perhaps they were switched at birth. Maybe they were lost in a shipwreck a long time ago, and the old men took in some orphans to raise who just happened to be their own children.

The lower half of the diagram shows *Capitano* romantically interested in both *Franceschina* and *Pedrolino*. Maybe he likes both men and women, but, more likely (homosexuality taboo), he saw *Pedrolino* in drag and mistook him for a girl. Why was *Pedrolino* in drag? He could have been pretending to be *Franceschina*, so he could sneak into *Pantalone's* house. He could have been buying a dress for *Franceschina* and trying it on to make sure it fits. He could have been in drag trying to distract *Arlecchino* from his beloved *Franceschina* and it backfired. Or he was dressed as *Isabella* or *Flaminia*, so *Orazio* could practice his love rhetoric. Alternatively, he could have decided to prank *Capitano*, and put on women's clothing because it happened to be there.[204]

Diagram #5

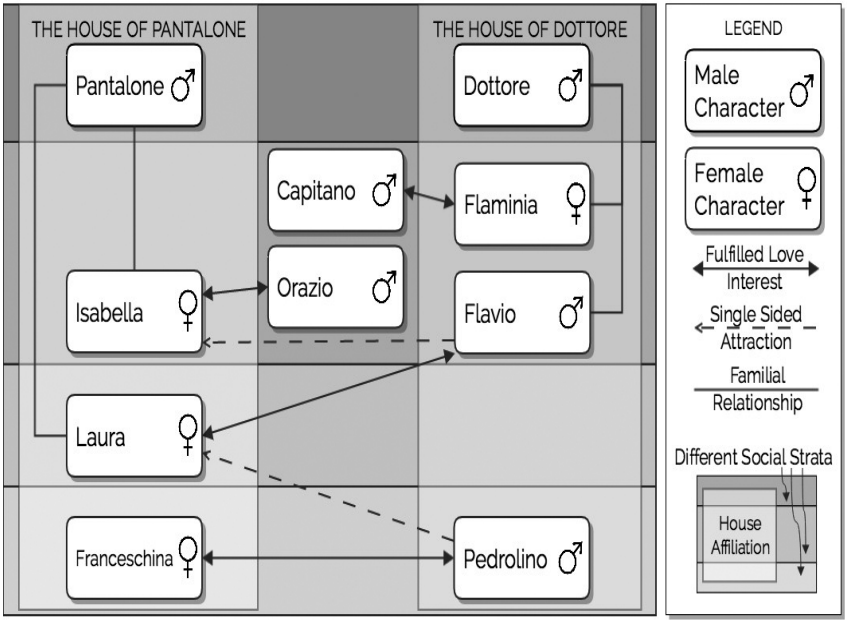


Diagram #5 illustrates a Cinderella-like plot device. In this case, *Pantalone* has two daughters, but one of them, *Laura*, is either a servant in his own household, a mistreated ward like Cinderella, or is there disguised as a servant, for whatever reason. *Flaminia* and *Isabella* are still present. To accommodate them all, *Capitano*, who is a very flexible character, will be treated like a male lover, end up with *Flaminia*, and have an uncomplicated love story. *Flavio* likes *Isabella* (or a marriage is being arranged), but *Isabella* and *Orazio* will end up together. *Laura* likes *Flavio*

and is herself liked by *Pedrolino*. As previously mentioned, *commedia* is very classist, and marriages across the class lines are not socially acceptable. *Pedrolino* would have never had any designs on a noble girl; the only reason this romantic complication is possible is because everyone thinks she's a servant. After the great reveal, *Laura* can marry *Flavio*, and *Pedrolino* will end up with *Franceschina*, a woman of his social class. Again, affairs between nobles and servants are perfectly socially acceptable, just not marriage. It's therefore possible that *Laura* and *Flavio* are lovers at the beginning of the play, but *Flavio* has to marry *Isabella* because *Laura* is a servant. If you move *Laura* from *Pantalone's* household into the middle column, and make her a poor but noble widow or a courtesan, the romantic complication would be more likely from *Capitano*, rather than *Pedrolino*. It can work the other way around. In Lope de Vega's *El Perro del Hortelano* (translated as *The Dog in the Manger,* written around 1613-1615, first published in 1618), Diana, a countess, cannot be with Teodoro, her secretary, until his servant, Tristan, convinces an older nobleman that Teodoro is his long-lost son.[205]

Character management:

Now that the cast is known and their relationships are reasonably spelled out, a scenario writer needs to manage this small crowd to a happy ending. The writer doesn't have to create the dialogue – the actors will take care of it themselves, and only need the framework to facilitate it. The easiest way to keep the improvisation running smoothly would be a dialogue between two people. Improvised monologues will tend to wander or become repetitive, and three or more interacting improvising characters on stage can be chaotic and uncontrollable. Therefore, the goal of a scenario author is to reduce all actions into a series of dialogues, or reduce the action on stage to only two interacting parties. This is exactly was Scala did. On average, out of 11 characters cast, the number of characters per scene is three - two and a half if the large, final marriage scenes where practically the whole cast was present are excluded.[206] How did he do it? There are several mechanisms.[207]

Character groupings: If several characters perform the action of one, they can be treated as one character. For example, if you have a gypsy fortune-teller (or two or three) or a band of gypsies on stage, they function as one character and are treated as such throughout the plot. This is the easiest example. Another way to group characters is to bundle them as a unit for the duration of the scene: if *Pantalone* is talking to *Orazio* and *Isabella*, instead of a three-way conversation, structure it as a dialogue between *Pantalone* and his children, or *Orazio* and the servants, etc. You can also group characters by function: if there are two

characters fighting (*Arlecchino* and *Pedrolino*) and a third (*Burattino*) is trying to break them up, instead of a three-way fight, you can have a fighting group and a non-fighting group. These groupings are very fluid and flexible; one could absolutely shift the sides and allegiances, making the fighters gang up on the peacemaker.

Another mechanism is to assign a character to a secondary role. Remember, in *commedia*, which is a very democratic process, there are no stars, and all roles are treated fairly equally. Therefore, this reduction in role shouldn't be for the duration of the play. However, during one scene it is perfectly acceptable. For example, after *Arlecchino* and *Pedrolino* from the previous paragraph gang up on poor *Burattino* and beat him senseless, they can continue their dialogue on stage over the body of passed-out *Burattino*, who at this point is no more than furniture.

Another example would be to disregard a servant in the company of his master, and treat him just as the master's accessory, or as a stage audience. This is a great way to bring out a servant on stage who is not necessary at this given moment, but whose presence will be required by the plot in the next scene. This could be done very unobtrusively or played up for the comic effect — the third character is doing all kinds of crazy things, but still gets ignored. For example, the servant is ignored by his master during the love scenes between the lovers. In this case, you can ignore the servant, who can literally take a nap at this point with no detriment to the plot, or you can make a servant interact with the audience (gagging, making smooching faces, etc.) and thus have two parallel interactions. The fourth wall in early *commedia* was pretty permeable or non-existent, so this would be perfectly acceptable.[208] When engaging a modern, non-SCA audience unfamiliar with the genre (who does not expect to interact with the characters), you can prepare them for character interaction by making one of the characters address the audience during the *argomento* or the prologue.

Another mechanism to group people on stage is to engage them in a pre-set, well-defined activity — carrying things, drinking wine from a bottle or performing a *lazzo*. It's a great way to occupy two or more servants while their masters are busy (*Pantalone* chiding *Orazio*, or *Orazio* monologuing about his doomed love, etc.)

Exits: If there still are too many people on stage to interact effectively, the simplest way to reduce the number of characters is to remove them. While the character entrances have to be somehow motivated by the plot, the exits are more free and unmotivated.[209] After *Pantalone* from the previous paragraph finishes chiding his son, he makes a dramatic exit to start the preparations for

the arranged wedding. *Orazio* will then storm off stage in defiance of his father, his servant will follow, the second servant will follow the first because the first still has the unfinished bottle of wine, and the third will exit because everybody else is doing it. Now the stage is empty and ready for the next scene. In some scenarios (Scala's days 3, 7, 18, 21, 25, 32, and 34), characters literally get picked up and carried off stage.[210]

Stage division: The traditional stage set in *commedia* was pretty set and invariable. The set was a basic street with perspective. The action happened in the street, usually between two houses. The characters came and went from and to their respective houses. There were also street exits, as seen in the Corsini collection of the scenarios.[211] Scala's scenarios require also a second story/level, or illusion of the second story: often the *inamorata*s appear "at the window."[212] This second-story *commedia* device spread beyond Italy, and Shakespeare used it as well. Remember the famous Juliet on the balcony scene? Examples of women at the upper-story window can be seen in the *Recueil Fossard* engravings and in the Trausnitz frescoes.[213] A character in the window is very useful. It (usually she) can observe the action below unseen, so it's a great way to convey the information without a need for yet another dialogue. She can also provide a focus around which the action on stage will take place.[214] As most troupes in the SCA perform without the benefit of a formal *commedia* stage, the plots are usually written for a single-story set. If a performance venue with a working second level is available, it could be very useful. It doesn't have to be a formal house — a hole in the curtain or a step stool behind the curtain will give the illusion of the second level.

Unseen characters: *Commedia* plots rely on huge amounts of information passed between characters. It would be very tedious to have the same bit relayed to a bunch of characters one at a time; at the same time, managing the entire cast on stage is complicated. Unseen characters solve this problem well. As previously mentioned, an *inamorata* at the window can observe unseen the action below, and, for example, find out that her father is trying to may her off to *Capitano*, and not *Orazio*. Alternatively, a character can sneak on stage and overhear the dialogue of others. Fitzpatrick gives a version of this technique, which he calls "slow sightedness": the characters enter onstage but are not noticed by the others until after some critical information piece is mentioned.[215] For instance, several characters walk in on a single monologuing character, who thought he/she was alone; this is a great way to overhear the *vecchi*'s plans or get someone's confession.

Repetitions and contrasts: Remember that *commedia* scenarios were often written and produced by the actors themselves. The director did not exist yet. Scala himself played a lover in comedies before turning to troupe management and writing. The actors will be working from the plot, and it is up to them to gauge their audience and make sure the audience is having fun. Repetitions and contrasts are the devices which are suggested by the scenario, but are fully taken advantage of by the actors themselves during the actual performance.

As *commedia* has many similarities with oral performances, the use of repetition is common. Repetition may involve verbal exchanges or physical acts. Unlike in the scripted plays, the number of repetitions is not set, and can be determined by the actors during the performances. This allows for stretching or contracting the scene as needed, and it is referred to as the "elastic gag."[216] It is a period device: the uses of the repetitious dialogues are recorded in the early Venetian *contrasti*, the disputes between the master and servant. *Contrasti* could be either improvised or composed in advance, in which case they were full-fledged poems, with master and servant engaging in rhymed wordplay with escalating levels of verbal violence, such as the 1576 *Contrasto del Furtunao e del Zanni* by Garzoni, or the 1575 *Dialologe del Patron e del Zanni* by Zan Bagotto.[217] Numerous examples of such *contrasti* are available in Italian. *Contrasti* were used in *commedia* scenarios. For example, Scala indicated the use of *contrasto* in Day 32 scenario *Li duo finti zingani*.[218] As SCA-period examples don't tend to be translated in English, the following is an excerpt from a much later, but translated example, from *Dialogo de un Magnifico Con Zani Bergamasco*,[219] published in 1700:

> *Magnifico* wants *zanni* (who is here called *Giani*) to bring a letter to the girl *Magnifico* likes, and calls him. The following dialogue follows:
>
> *Giani*: At your service.
>
> *Magnifico*: Come outside for a moment.
>
> *Giani*: What would Sir like?
>
> *Magnifico*: Come outside for a moment.
>
> *Giani*: Me?
>
> *Magnifico*: You.
>
> *Giani*: Me? Come out?
>
> *Magnifico*: Yes, you horse face, hurry up!
>
> *Giani*: Sure, boss. Would the master like me to wear my hat?
>
> *Magnifico*: What do you want with a hat? Wear a cap.
>
> *Giani*: Yes, sir, I'm coming.
>
> *Magnifico*: What are you doing?

Giani: You really want me to come?

Magnifico: Yes, really you.

Giani: Really me in person?

Magnifico: Yes, for God's sake, come out!

Giani: Here I come and now I am here. What is His Lordship's pleasure?[220]

Here it takes eight rounds of the back-and forth-dialogue for the servant to come out when his master calls. This is a scripted example. Should you put this in an improvised play, depending on the plot and the audience response, you may have fewer or more repetitions, but in the scenario, the whole scene may be indicated as "*Magnifico* calls *Giani*."

Repetitions may be verbal, as in the dialogue above; physical (exchange of blows); or the whole scene may be repeated several times, further building up the comic tension. It is good to have some kind of a pre-arranged "interrupter" to signal that the scene needs to move on; otherwise, it will begin to drag. In the period *contrasti* mentioned above, the interrupter was *Pantalone's bastone*, a stick he threatened *Zanni* with.[221] Fitzpatrick refers to it as a "circuit-breaker" or the "end-cue."[222] Repetitions make the actor's job easier, by providing the framework for improvisation. The pre-patterned framework and redundancy makes the dialogue between actors more fluid and fluent; at the same time, not repeating the same memorized text exactly every single time prevents the scene from becoming dry and boring. *Commedia* is basically an oral performance genre. According to Fitzpatrick, "in oral delivery, though a pause may be effective, hesitation is always disabling."[223]

Commedia is a pretty fast-paced performance, emphasized by the rapid switching of characters and actions. This fast pace is further accentuated by the use of contrasts. Plots themselves emphasize the differences between young and old, masters and servants, men and women. When writing scenarios, remember that the contrasts contribute to the pace. In addition to the differences built into the characters, as above, vary the moods — happy and unhappy, hungry and full, brave and cowardly, etc.

Period-plausible plot elements: A comprehensive list of *commedia* tropes is beyond the scope of this work. The best way to start getting acquainted with them would be to read period works, such as listed in *Appendix 1*, as well as seventeenth-century plays. However, unless the goal is to have as period-plausible scenarios as possible, modern troupes don't have to limit themselves to period tropes — the TVtropes.org website is a great source of all kinds of tropes, plot twists, character types, and such.[224]

If you have more or fewer actors than the classic scenario calls for: When starting a scenario, it's important to know what characters are available to carry the plot. The classic eleven characters may not always be available. Sometimes there will be more or less, and the classic two-couple marriage scenario is not possible. This section is about work-arounds. It's not called improvised comedy for nothing!

If you have more actors than seems to be necessary: As *commedia* is supposed to be a democratic process with no stars and equal stage time distribution, creating bit roles doesn't work very well, unless you have actors who prefer a small role due to lack of experience or lack of time to commit to rehearsals. The better way would be to multiply the characters. The simplest version of this is the grouping method: create a group of three bumbling *zanni*, instead of one. In this case, the actors act as one unit throughout the play and do similar things in triplicate.

You can increase the numbers of the characters: instead of two male lovers, you can have three different characters of the same class. This is different from the grouping method, as the lovers will not act as a unit; each character will do his or her own thing, but each character will perform only a few functions of the character class. For example, you can separate the lover character into several parts: the sensitive lover who will play love scenes and monologue about doomed love; a second, somewhat less sensitive lover, who will hit on servant girls and duel. The third lover can be a bit of both or play against the character type, and actually be an obedient son who would love to marry whomever his father chooses. In the end, all the necessary actions will be carried out, just by more people. This also works very well with servants.

Another version of the same device is to create an almost exact duplicate of the character, one who will divide the functions and the stage time that would otherwise be taken up by one character. It's a great device if you want to have twins in the plot with all the resulting complications. For example, twin *Capitanos* are carrying out numerous love intrigues in town and being mistaken for each other by their lovers.

Different functions can be assigned to different character classes, creating a hybrid atypical character. For example, there can be a courtesan, who pursues male lovers like an *inamorata*, and treats servants like a *vecchio*.

If you have fewer actors than seems to be necessary: What happens more often in SCA troupes is that there are fewer than eleven people. The simplest way to deal with this is to cut down the lovers to two, with only one upper-class marriage in the end. When decreasing the number of servants, it's helpful to have at least two. This provides for the full usage of the first and second *zanni* stereotypes. However, the first/second *zanni* division is not mandatory, and did not fully

emerge until later; even Scala's first *zanni Pedrolino* and second *zanni Arlecchino* have the features of both. So it's allowable to have only one very overworked servant, who has to carry out everybody's sometimes contradicting orders and deliver all the letters. It is only natural that this servant may become so tired and so resentful, that the letters *might* be delivered to the wrong people.

Reducing the cast even further gets tricky. It is great if both *Pantalone* and *Dottore* are available, but the play will still go on if one of them is absent. Let's assume it is *Dottore*, as, conventionally, if you have an old man in the play, it is *Pantalone*. *Dottore* can be away on business, stuck in court, or visiting courtesans on the other end of town, but the functions of *Dottore* will be carried on stage, via his verbal or written orders, by the same overworked servant from the last paragraph. *Pantalone* will have to rage against a clueless servant or a piece of paper, but that's where the improvisational skills come in.

So, now we are down to one old man and one servant. Two lovers are still needed in the plot; however, the same overworked servant can carry the love notes as well, and it can be that *Pantalone* is such a strict father that his daughter *Isabella* is effectively locked up in the house and never even appears on stage. The male lover, let's call him *Virginio*, will pine after his absent love, and occasionally read the love notes. In this case, the marriage scene can be amended, and after *Pantalone* gives his agreement to the lovers' union, *Virginio* will run off-stage to be with his beloved. This can also work with the cuckolding type scenarios, where *Pantalone* is a jealous husband of a young wife.

Alternatively, the male lover can be absent, and all the lover functions are done by the *inamorata*. A romantic complication is still needed — doesn't really matter which one, but usually a *Capitano* will do nicely.

If there are still not enough actors, cross-dressing and disguises are great because they effectively let you have more characters with the same number of actors. For example, *Isabella* can pretend to be a man to sneak out of the house to spy on her father or her lover, etc. For the duration of her disguise (*inamorato, Capitano,* servant), she is treated by the other characters as if she someone else, and she can perform those functions: she can carry letters like a servant, challenge *Capitano* to a duel like an *inamorato*, or challenge the *inamorato* and run away like a *Capitano*. If you have a really feisty *Isabella*, she can even fight her own duels.

Alternatively, you can have one actor/actress play multiple characters. The famous example would be *The Jealousy of Isabella* Scala scenario where, traditionally, one actress plays *Isabella* and her brother *Fabrizio*; both end up married at the end: *Isabella* to *Oratio*, and *Fabrizio* to *Flaminia*.

And, finally, you can always assign the character different character class functions. If worse comes to worst, *Virginio* can carry his own love letters and plot to prank *Pantalone*, if there is absolutely no *zanni* in the play. If you have no old men, but two *inamoratas*, one can be the somewhat evil, scheming one and interfere with the marriage plans of the happy couple. It's okay to assign cross-class functions, as long as you are aware of it. Do it too much and the stock characters, one of the trademarks of *commedia*, will disappear. As plots are defined by relationships between the stock characters, the plots can become shaky and hard to follow.

Even though several work-arounds are listed above as examples, it is a good idea not to use more than one or two at the time. There does need to be somebody to act, after all; however, if done right, a very reasonable scenario can be carried out by five or six people.

When writing a scenario, do not let the specter of originality haunt you. If you are trying to construct a period work, use period methods. Currently, imitation is despised and discouraged, but in sixteenth-century Italy, imitation was appreciated and valued. Imitation, both of nature and of the great masters was practiced in art, literature, and in education, and was encouraged. It was not unique to sixteenth-century Italy, but it also was a cornerstone of European civilization. As early as the first century, Quintilian wrote, "It is a universal rule of life that we should wish to copy what we approve in others."[225] The imitation was supposed to be creative. Schmitt has a very interesting discussion of this concept in her book, *Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*. The highest form of imitation was not mindless reusing. It was processing the material and reshaping it into something else, in a new context, just like the Italians themselves incorporated the ancient classical culture into their own during the Renaissance. Any imitation without processing was plagiarism and was frowned upon.[226]

Therefore, if the goal is to make a period-plausible scenario, it's fine to use the period sources for characters, plots, and *lazzi* — as long as you are aware where the material is coming from and you make your best effort to process it and incorporate it into your work (and, as we no longer live in Renaissance Italy, please reference it). CA

CONCLUSION

Early *commedia* was much less structured, rigid, and stereotyped than the choreographed performances, pantomime, and well-defined characters in their unchanging costumes of the later eighteenth-century *commedia dell'arte* most people are familiar with. In the late sixteenth century, *commedia* was just forming as a genre; characters were constantly reinvented and redefined. The plays were created from bare bones scenarios for one night and one night only, as the improvised nature of the genre made every performance different. The troupes were formed by actors and for actors. There were no scripts, script authors nor directors. The actors called the shots and became the first superstars of the Western world, travelling internationally. Their performances challenged the established social norms and grated on the nerves of the Church, while at the same time attracting patronage from the ruling houses of Europe.

The division between masked and unmasked characters was indistinct, and what we think of as masked characters, such as *Dottore* and *Capitano*, were depicted with and without masks. The only characters that were habitually masked were *Magnifico* and the *zanni*. There were as many versions of the characters as there were actors, each contributing something different. These characters were instantly recognizable, as they drew from well-known character archetypes, drawn from a mixture of sources: from literary comedies and classical theater to street performers and potion sellers to church mystery plays.

As modern re-creators, *commedia dell'arte* offers us a unique opportunity to participate in a period process of theater-making, inventing our own plays and costumes, creating our own versions of the old characters, and performing on stage with our own words, inspired by performances from hundreds of years ago that were never recorded and yet are instantly recognizable. CA

APPENDIX 1

Commedia erudita plays and authors, influential in development of the *Commedia dell'Arte* plots, from Richard Andrews' book *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: Translations and Analysis of 30 scenarios*."

PLAYS

- *La Calandria* (performed 1513/published1521), by Bernardi Dovizzi da Bibbiena
- *La mandragola* (performed 1518(?)/published 1521, by Niccolo Machiavelli
- *Gli ingannati* (performed 1532/published 1537), collectively composed by the Accademia degli Intronati of Siena
- *Amor costante* (performed 1536/published 1540), by Alessandro Piccolomino, Accademia degli Intronati of Siena
- *Alessandro* (performed 1544/published 1545), by Alessandro Piccolomino , Accademia degli Intronati of Siena
- *Erophilomachia* (performed/published 1572), by Sforza Oddi
- *La Pellegrina* (performed/published 1589), by Girolamo Bargagli, Accademia degli Intronati of Siena

AUTHORS

- Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1532)
- Pietro Aretino (1492-1556)
- "Ruzante" Angelo Beolco (c.1495-1542)
- Andrea Calmo (c.1509-1571)
- Girolamo Parabosco (1524-1557)
- Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615)

APPENDIX 2

Early *commedia* pictorial sources

An extensive collection of early *commedia* images is in M.A. Katritzky's 2006 book *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia Dell'arte 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records*. However, the images are small, black and white, and low resolution, but the book includes all of the images from the sources listed on this page. The book is hard to find, but it is available online. http://tinyurl.com/gq2l2vr.

The Feather Book, by Dionisio Minaggio, signed and dated 1618, consists of 156 feather mosaics; fourteen of them depict commedia players and characters. The book itself is in the library of the McGill University. Some images are reproduced in Duchartre's 1929 book. All of the images, in full color, are available on the McGill University Library website. http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/featherbook/index.html.

Corsini Album is a manuscript collection of 100 scenarios, each with a full color title illustration. The manuscript is in the collection of Biblioteca Corsiniana, Rome. All the title illustrations are reproduced as small black and white illustrations in Katritzky's 2006 book. Full color illustrations are reproduced in Stefan Hulfeld's *Scenari Più Scelti D'istrioni*. See the bibliography for full details.

Compositions de rhetorique by Tristano Martinelli, the first *Arlecchino,* was published in Leon in 1601, and consists mostly of blank pages, with several illustrations, depicting predominantly *Arlecchino*, but also a *Capitano* and a *Pantalone*. The full book is available as scanned images on Wikimedia Commons. http://tinyurl.com/jx2rael. A copy of the book is in the collection of the National Library of France (Bibliotheque Nationale de France) and a digital copy is in Gallica Digital Library: http://tinyurl.com/zqqyenh.

Recueil Fossard a part of the collection of Sieur Fossard of theatrical prints, now largely lost. The prints are in the collection of the Stockholm Nationalmuseum and in the Royal Library of Copenhagen. Its *commedia dell'arte* engravings date from mid-1580s, and some probably represent *I Confidenti* with Tristano Martinelli as *Arlecchino*. There are attempts at reconstruction of the series as a representation of the coherent play, but as the collection is incomplete, these reconstructions are inconclusive. Most are reproduced in Duchartre's 1929 book.

Trausnitz Castle Frescoes. These frescoes in Trausnitz Castle, Landshut, Bavaria, were designed by Friedrich Sustris and executed under his supervision. The project started in 1575, and was finished in 1579 or 1580. It consists of two

sets of frescoes. The sixteen canvas paintings mounted on the ceiling of the bedroom were destroyed in the fire in 1961. The set of thirty continuous frescoes on a staircase ("Stairway of Fools) survived, but are no longer open to the public. These are available as a part of the online virtual tour by Josef Spitzlberger. http://tinyurl.com/jrcqssh.

Balli di Sfessania, a series of 24 engravings by Jacques Callot, done around 1622, depicting generic northern and southern (has one of the earliest depictions of *Pulcinella*) *commedia* characters dancing and fighting. All types of characters are depicted, but *Capitanos* predominate. Currently in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. However, unfortunately, only the frontispiece is available in the online collection. The full series can be seen on Wikimedia commons at http://tinyurl.com/zhzezlj. All images are also reproduced in Donald Posner's article "Jacques Callot and the Dances Called Sfessania." *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 2 (1977): 203-16.

The *Pela Il Chiu* (Pluck the Owl) game board print by Ambrogio Brambilla. Published by Giovanni Battista di Lazzaro Panzera de Parma, 1589, Rome, it is currently in the British Museum. http://tinyurl.com/zhxreym.

Flaminio Scala's 1611 *Il Teatro di Favole* is in the collection of Bavarian State Library, but was digitized in 2014 and is available on Google Books as a free e-book. http://tinyurl.com/zcldlv9

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