

With its cast of stock characters who come from all parts of Italy, *commedia dell'arte* was from the very beginning not only an aesthetic phenomenon but also an intensely political genre of theatre that offered a virtual battleground for resolving regional grievances and settling outstanding political accounts. This paper demonstrates how the seemingly innocuous quarrels between the *vecchi* and the *zanni* could be read by their original audiences as a statement of *Realpolitik*. Using four scenarios from Flaminio Scala's collection for the Gelosi company, the paper explores the relationships between the Capitano and the rest of the characters, and interprets them as a microcosm of the Italian political situation of the era. One of the most obvious consequences of the Italian Wars was the shift in the distribution of political power. This new reality is very clearly reflected in the structure of *commedia* scenarios where a stereotypical braggart warrior in Spanish employ undergoes a series of transformations. Perhaps the most reliable clue to his character is the location of the scenario. Capitanos from Roman and Venetian scenarios often substantially differ from those set in cities within the Spanish sphere of influence such as Naples or Genoa, but in both cases they reflect faithfully the political views of *commedia's* target audience and its influential patrons. After the centre of *commedia* activity moves from Italy to France in the seventeenth century, the political dynamics of its plots changes, too, and the transplanted genre now becomes a primarily escapist form of entertainment.

---

**Keywords:** *Commedia dell'arte*, Capitano, politics, the Gelosi, Flaminio Scala, Italy

---

**Jure Gantar** holds BA and MA degrees from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a PhD in Drama from the University of Toronto. He has been a professor at Dalhousie University since 1992. His area of expertise is the theory of drama, in particular the theory and criticism of comedy, laughter, humour and wit. He has published numerous articles as well as three books on this subject: *Dramaturgija in smeh* (1993), *The Pleasure of Fools* (2005) and *The Evolution of Wilde's Wit* (2015).

jgantar@dal.ca

# Il Capitano's Many Enemies

## *Commedia dell'Arte* as a Political Commentary on Early Modern Europe

---

Jure Gantar

---

### Introduction

*Commedia dell'arte* has been described in the past as a “world of fantasy peopled with quaint characters, conventionalised but full of life” (Duchartre 17) or as “an alternative to the theatre of an intellectual and social élite” (Molinari 159). It has either been seen as “raunchy and vulgar” (Sprinchorn xi) or as based on “faultless technique” (Meyerhold 129), but it is rarely considered outside its theatrical confines. Yet, from its very beginnings *commedia* was not only an aesthetic, disinterested phenomenon but also had an intensely political dimension. I am thinking here less of its role as a Bakhtinian purveyor of the carnivalesque – though in its participation on fairgrounds and marketplaces it certainly fulfilled this role as well – than of its curious position as an ominous companion of historical calamities. Because *commedia* troupes were welcome guests at various aristocratic celebrations, from weddings to christenings, they consistently managed to involve themselves in very public controversies. In 1576, for instance, even the members of the famous and hugely popular Gelosi company “were stopped and arrested by Huguenots in La Charité sur Loire, and only freed by a ransom from the king himself” (Henke, “Border-Crossing” 28). While their troubles with various forms of civic government can often be attributed to interventions by their local artistic rivals rather than to the travelling troupes’ activism, especially in France where Italian comedians were repeatedly banned from performing publicly, the *commedia*’s potential political agency is nonetheless hard to dispute.

As Robert Henke writes, “*commedia dell'arte* was from its very inception the perfect transnational machine” (“Border-Crossing” 19), but we should not forget that it also played an important nation-building role. It was one of the few expressions of Italian collective identity at a time when the Apennine peninsula may have been peaceful once again after the protracted Italian Wars of 1494 to 1559 yet remained politically divided (compare Clivio, 210–11). The six decades of being the chessboard on which France, the Holy Roman Empire and Spain tried to disentangle their dynastic disputes

**Acknowledgment:** I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Hanlon of Dalhousie University for his invaluable advice on Italian early modern history.

and win their fight for European supremacy had left most of the Italian city states exhausted and perfectly willing to accept foreign influence, as long as regional autonomy was maintained (see Hanlon, *Twilight* 55–57). The American scholar Paul C. Castagno actually contends that *commedia* is a direct consequence of the economic crisis that afflicted much of the region in the sixteenth century (57–58). Inasmuch as Italy was bypassed by the traumatic divisiveness of the Reformation, it nonetheless paid the price for its geographical position at the intersection of the Valois and Habsburg strategic interests. The neighbouring duchies and republics were more or less forced to keep committing themselves to various alliances and eventually resigned to the role of proxy warriors for the absent landlords. In this perspective, *commedia*, with its cast of stock characters who come from all parts of Italy, not only helped to bring together former rivals but also offered a surrogate battleground for resolving residual regional grievances that was far preferable to real wars.

In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on this particular aspect of *commedia* and will try to demonstrate how the seemingly innocuous quarrels between the *vecchi* and the *zanni* could be read by their audiences as a reflection of the Renaissance *Realpolitik* with which the sixteenth-century spectators had to contend on a daily basis. Using four scenarios from Flaminio Scala's collection for the Gelosi company, the best known and oldest document of its kind that was first published in 1611, I will explore the relationship between the Capitano and the rest of the characters, and attempt to determine whether or not the *commedia* narratives really can be interpreted as a microcosm of the Italian political situation of the era. One of the most obvious consequences of the Italian Wars was the shift in the distribution of political power. This new reality is very clearly reflected in the structure of *commedia* scenarios where a stereotypical braggart warrior in Spanish employ undergoes a series of transformations. Perhaps the most reliable clue to his character is the location of the scenario. Capitanos from Roman and Venetian scenarios often substantially differ from those set in cities within the Spanish sphere of influence such as Naples or Milan, but in both cases they reflect faithfully the political views of *commedia's* target audience and its influential patrons. Rooted deliberately in the texts of the scenarios rather than in the other available historical primary sources, my observations about the Capitano's political alliances are inevitably speculative in their nature, yet this does not mean that they cannot explain some of the intricate transformations of the genre.

## The Capitano in Rome

The first *commedia dell'arte* troupes were formed in northern Italy. Actors in what was arguably the oldest Italian professional acting company, the Ser Maphio troupe – the earliest written record of its existence dates back to 1545 – for instance,

came from Padua, Venice, San Luca and Treviso (see Henke, *Performance* 69–70). Even members of the Gelosi as the fully-fledged *commedia* outfit were still mostly northerners: Giulio Pasquati, Orazio de Nobili and Isabella Andreini were from Padua, Adriano Valerini and Prudenzia from Verona, Girolamo Salimbeni from Florence and Francesco Andreini from Pistoia, Silvia Roncagli from Bergamo, while Lodovico de Bianchi, Simone Basilea and Gabrielle Panzanini all came from Bologna (Andreini 70). It is no wonder, then, that so many of the central *commedia* characters, too, belong to the north of Italy. Of the ten core members of a typical sixteenth-century troupe, which usually consisted of two old men, two comic servants and one serving girl, two sets of lovers, and a Capitano, at least three are almost always citizens of the Venetian Republic (Pantalone is from Venice proper, while Arlecchino and Brighella are from Bergamo), five of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany (the four *innamorati* and Colombina), while the Dottore comes from Bologna in the Papal States.

Of international characters, by far the most common foreigners in the early *commedia* scenarios are the Spaniards. Though scenarios regularly include stereotypical representations of French, German, Swiss, Turkish, Armenian and Jewish characters (in Scala's collection, Turchetto is Turkish, Claudione French and Hibrachim Armenian), *commedia* troupes did not treat all of them in the same fashion. As Erith Jaffe-Berg suggests, the more exotic Middle Eastern characters were rarely ridiculed (111–15). Whether this happened because of their political power or economic influence, or simply because the audiences in Italian cities were not familiar enough with their habits, is hard to determine, but they were clearly not seen as sufficiently rich subjects of laughter. On the other hand, the everyday exposure to Venetians, Florentines and Bolognese as well as to Spanish mercenaries, or at least to the local men who fought for the king of Spain (see Meehan 210), made it easy for spectators to form an opinion of their collective character and enjoy the theatrical retribution inflicted on their stereotypical representatives. Let us take a look at one such example that can give us the first taste of the potential political implications of a *commedia* production.

Scala's *Il cavadente* is not only a very typical scenario, but also one of the most successful ones (compare Andrews, *Commedia* 68). It is set in Rome and includes the required two *vecchi* (Pantalone and the Dottore), Capitano Spavento, two sets of lovers (brothers and sisters Orazio and Flaminia, and Flavio and Isabella), the *zanni* Arlecchino and Pedrolino, and *servetta* Franceschina. The only additional character is the old woman Pasquella who specialises in mixing potions. The villain of the piece is clearly Pantalone, who objects to his son's courtship of the widowed Isabella because he wants her for himself. The action begins with a disagreement between Pantalone and Pedrolino. The Venetian uses his superior social position and hurts his Reggiano employee (the merchant from La Serenissima literally bites the servant from the middle of nowhere). This violent act puts the wheels of the plot into motion: Pedrolino,

with the help of Franceschina, who in the Gelosi troupe may have been Bergamese, opts for revenge. Venice is again mistreating both its working class and its neighbours, and is about to pay price for this. The Dottore, who otherwise has very little direct involvement in the plot of *Il cavadente*, agrees to participate in their scheme because he is owed money by Pantalone. We can already see a miniature League of Cambrai forming that will result in a disaster for the arrogant Venice. The potential victims of Venetian lust in this particular scenario are the four Tuscans, the tool of revenge another Bergamese, Arlecchino, who resorts to the most Venetian of means that justify the end, to a disguise. After everyone on the stage persuades Pantalone that his breath smells – the metaphoric decay of the old city is becoming quite literal here – Arlecchino, dressed as a tooth-puller, extracts, without any local anaesthetic of course, four of the old man’s healthy teeth. According to Niccolò Machiavelli, “Any harm you do to a man should be done in such a way that you need not fear his revenge” (7). And this is precisely what happens at the end of Act One: even though Pantalone pulls off Arlecchino’s fake beard, the pain from the pulled teeth is so strong that Arlecchino manages to escape him.

In the second act, the one local character, Pasquella the herbalist, appears and offers to solve the problems by the help of a classic Roman medicinal remedy: a madness potion and its antidote. The added complication is that both Flavio and the Capitano dress up as someone else and are mistakenly beaten. Though the Spanish maintained a relatively substantial presence in Rome (see Dandele), they were careful not to throw their weight around too openly: the Capitano may have a place reserved in *Il cavadente* for a monologue on “le sue bravure” (“his military exploits”; Scala 37A; Andrews, *Commedia* 63), but he refrains from any forceful intervention in the action of the play. This conflict is obviously a northern affair. The play concludes with a sequence of characters, who have all mistakenly taken Pasquella’s potion, appearing on the stage in various stages of madness. The Dottore of Bologna is powerless and is, in his attempt to recoup his money, reduced to harmless legal threats. It is the cunning Florentine Isabella who eventually manages to convince Pantalone to give up his intrigues and accept the wishes of his adversaries.

Though *Il cavadente*, like most *commedia* scenarios, cannot be reliably dated, the political dynamics of the situation depicted resembles closely the balance of powers in the 1580s. Because there was a severe outbreak of the plague in Venice between 1575 and 1577, it was perfectly acceptable for a rich Venetian merchant to live in Rome. In addition to this, the Venetian, Papal and Spanish cooperation that resulted in the famous victory at Lepanto in 1571 started to disintegrate in the subsequent years, which may explain the mutually suspicious relationship between Pantalone, the Dottore and Capitano Spavento. And one can add to this the tension between Venice and its neighbouring cities (compare Lane, *Venice* 243) that colours the relationship between Pantalone and Pedrolino.

## The Capitano in Naples

One of the most obvious consequences of the Italian Wars was the shift in the distribution of political power. While Venetian economic power remained substantial for at least another century (Jordan 63) and while Rome's ideological pull is still substantial in Italian society today, after 1559 the true powerbrokers in Italy were the Habsburg Emperors and Spanish kings or, more precisely, whoever led the Spanish mercenaries in the region. This political reality is very clearly reflected in the structure of *commedia* scenarios where a stereotypical braggart warrior in Spanish employ is present virtually from the very beginning. Inasmuch as he is a direct descendent of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, the Capitano only becomes a true *commedia* character when he starts making references to contemporary enemies, to the Turks and to the French. Though some Capitanos, for instance Giangurgulo and Fanfarone, were from Calabria (and as such also Spanish subjects), the majority were exaggeratedly Castilian. The full name of Fabrizio de Fornaris' Capitano, for example, was

Don Alonso Cocodrillo, hijo d'el Colonel don Calderòn de Berdexa, hermano d'el Alférez Hernandico Mandrico destrico de Lara de Castilla La Vieja Cavallero de Sevilla, hijo d'Algo verdadero, trinchador de tres cuchillos, copier major de la reyna de Guindaçia, saccador de coraçones, tomador de tierras, lançador de palos, cavalcador de janetes, jugador de pelota, inventor de justras, ganador de torneos, protetor de la ley Christiana, destruidor de los Luteranos, segnor y Rey de l'arte militante, terror de los traydores, matador de los bellacos, socorro de los tribulados, capitán y Lugar-teniente general de toda l'armada ansí de tierra, como de la mar d'el gran Rey de Cappadocia, maestro de çerimonias, Príncipe d'el collegio de los matadores, dotado de muchas gracias, servidor de Damas, enemigo de los bellacos, y amigo cordialíssimo de don Garavite Ponces de León, y de don Rebalta Salas de Castannedo. (Fornaris 28–29)

Don Alonso Cocodrilo, son of Colonel Don Calderòn de Berdexa, brother of ensign Hernandez Mandrico, wise man from Lara in the Old Castile, knight of Seville, true gentleman, three-blade carver, higher cupbearer for the Queen of Guindaçia, robber of hearts, conqueror of lands, lancer of spears, master-horseman of riders, player of ball, inventor of jousting, winner of tournaments, defender of the Christian law, slayer of the Lutherans, lord and King of the military arts, terror of traitors, killer of cowards, helper of the afflicted, captain and lieutenant-general of the whole army, both of the land and of the sea, of the great King of Cappadocia, master of ceremonies, Prince of the assassins' guild, endowed with many graces, servant of Ladies, enemy of cowards, and the most cordial friend of Don Garavito Ponces de León and of Don Rebalta Castannedo de Salas. (my translation)

The extent to which the character of the Capitano depends on the politics of the time is most obvious from the ambiguous nature of the role. Andreini's Capitano Spavento da Vall'Inferna, for instance, "incorporated elements of the Dottore, the polylinguistic

magician [Falsirone], and the shepherd” (Henke, *Performance* 175). Capitanos could be either cowardly or entirely reckless, stupid or merely hopelessly infatuated. Andreini, for instance, describes his Spavento da Vall’Inferna as “proud, ambitious and boastful” (7), while Silvio Fiorillo’s Capitano Matamoros was equally pompous, but impoverished and fainthearted (Sand 1: 145). Even within Scala’s collection of scenarios, which were mostly intended for Andreini, there is a surprising variety of nuances to the Capitano’s character. In the eponymous *Il capitano*, Spavento is an entirely likeable character, an Italian runaway son serving with the Spanish, who ends up marrying Pantalone’s daughter Flaminia at the denouement of the play. In *Il fido amico*, on the other hand, the Capitano is first frightened by Pedrolino’s pretend blunderbuss, runs away from Flavio in Act Two, and then appears on the stage in Act Three “tutto infasciato, e caminando con le ferle” (“all bandaged up and walking on crutches”; Scala 88A; Andrews, *Commedia* 178), before he is beaten once again, this time by Arlecchino’s slapstick.

Perhaps the most reliable clue to the Capitano’s level of courage is the location of the scenario. In *Il fido amico*, where the Capitano is repeatedly humiliated, the action is set in Naples, which at the time was a part of the Kingdom of Naples, a monarchy effectively ruled by Spanish viceroys. There are several direct references in the scenario to the political situation there. Pedrolino, for example, “e lo manda á travestirsi alla Spagnola per condurla via, sapendo quanto gli Spagnoli siano temuti in Napoli”, (“sends [Orazio] off to disguise himself as a Spaniard in order to take her away, knowing how much Spaniards are feared in Naples”; Scala 86B; Andrews, *Commedia* 175), while the Guard Captain “imponendole sotto pena de la vita, da parte del Vicerè, che la mattina seguente debba trovarsi innanzi à S. E.” (“charges [Orazio] on the pain of death in the name of the Viceroy to present himself before His Excellency the following morning”; Scala 87A; Andrews, *Commedia* 176).

Spaniards administer their own form of justice in Naples that allows for eloping women to be imprisoned and are set on arresting Pedrolino “per haver tenuto mano alla fuga” (“for having aided the elopement”; Scala 87B; Andrews, *Commedia* 177). As welcome as their brand of peace may have been in some parts of Italy – Gregory Hanlon argues that “[m]ost contemporaries saw the Spanish regime in a positive light” (*Twilight* 50) – at least in *Il fido amico*, the Spanish are ruling with such a heavy hand that, in Act Three, Flavio, Pedrolino and Arlecchino openly rebel and start a fight not only with the Capitano but also with the Viceroy’s policemen. In such a context, Pantalone’s decision to promise his daughter Isabella to the Capitano as a representative of a foreign power is an act of collaboration and a cold-blooded political calculation that, in its effort to ingratiate, is bound to backfire on the scheming Venetians. The fight between Pantalone and the Dottore at the end of Act Two, for example, could be seen as the natural consequence of the disagreement

between various Italian states on how to handle the Spanish interventionists.

At the same time, the Capitano's direct influence with the authorities makes him far more assertive, and angrier, than in *Il cavadente*. Though he is, ultimately, no more dangerous than before, his annoying sense of entitlement and growing greed generate resentment among other characters. The stingy Dottore Graziano, for example, goes to great lengths to avoid inviting him for a meal while the women refuse to listen to his serenades. The financial strain of supporting Charles V's and Philip II's regiments must have been considerable to expose the Spanish to this kind of ridicule.

And there is one other new feature in the Capitano's behaviour in *Il fido amico*: his duplicity. First, he pretends that he is Orazio and then that he is wounded. In both cases, the issue is not so much that he is dishonest as that Spain tended to claim a higher moral ground in international conflicts and scorned the more perfidious forms of warfare. An implicit accusation of hypocrisy is, therefore, more damning than the mere use of force. Interestingly, the final note in the scenario is a call for friendship: Orazio "cede Isab. à Flavio, & egli si piglia Flamin." ("concedes Isabella to Flavio and himself accepts Flaminia"; Scala 88B; Andrews, *Commedia* 179), even though he, too, was initially in love with the former. In other words, the Tuscans (as the model mainstream Italians) can overcome the obstacles placed in their paths by the combination of Venice and Spain only if they work together and sacrifice their own selfish interests.

## The Capitano in Florence

Regardless of whether a scenario such as *Il fido amico* was written with a Neapolitan audience in mind or simply to capitalise on the Italian public's occasional anti-Spanish sentiments, the fact remains that the treatments of the Capitano vary significantly and do appear to reflect the political views of *commedia's* target audience and its patrons. Think, for instance, of another example from Scala's collection, *Li tragici successi*. In this scenario, the action actually takes place in Florence, and Capitano Spavento is Dottore Graziano's son. Otherwise, the matrix of characters is the same as in *Il cavadente*, except that Isabella is now the Dottore's daughter and that Flavio is not related to anyone. Act One starts with Orazio's return to Florence from where he was banished after his fight with the Capitano. Once again, Andreini's Isabella is indulging in substance abuse: this time, she has taken a sleeping potion that convinces everyone she is dead. An added complication is the impending death sentence that hangs over the Capitano, "per certi amorosi accidenti" ("because of some events connected with his love"; Scala 53; Andrews, *Commedia* 106). When Orazio is about to run off with Isabella, he is discovered and arrested. By Act Three, the Florentine authorities are ready to execute

both lovers. Somewhat surprisingly, they are not saved by a miraculous coincidence or by a disclosed identity, but by the petitions of their beloveds. The plot concludes with the reconciliation of Pantalone and the Dottore, and with the compulsory three marriages, though Pedrolino only gets Franceschina because he draws the right lot.

The dynamics of relationships in this scenario is entirely different than in the previous two. First of all, since the Capitano is the Dottore's son, it can be assumed that he is an Italian rather than a Spaniard. He might be in Spanish service, but he is so sympathetic – he actually “domanda perdono alla casa, à Pant. alla figlia, & à tutti” (“asks forgiveness from Pantalone's household, from his daughter, and from everyone”; Scala 54B; Andrews, *Commedia* 110) – that, given Florence's ambivalent relationship with Spain, the audience could only accept him if he was not a foreigner.

Second, the Dottore is far more active and can actually stand up to the aggressive Pantalone. Can we deduce from this the temporary rise in influence of the Papal States, perhaps around the time of Pope Gregory XIII (1572–85), who was actually from Bologna? Or is the answer more prosaic, namely that the story of *Li tragici successi* is based on a Matteo Bandello novella (the same one that might have served as a source for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) and that the Gelosi had to squeeze it into the same cast as the other *commedia* scenarios? Since the Dottore and Pantalone are both armed and openly threatening to kill each other, a political interpretation of their conflict may not be wholly implausible. While Pope Gregory XIII was indeed predominantly preoccupied with the dangers posed by the Protestants and not by Italian internal affairs, he did have a propensity for international conspiracies and, for instance, sponsored two abortive attempts to depose Queen Elizabeth I of England. Whatever the case, it is hard to deny that political implications of *Li tragici successi* are radically different from either *Il cavadente* or *Il fido amico*.

In general, Capitanos from Roman and Venetian scenarios are different from those set in locations within the Spanish sphere of influence such as Naples or Milan. If nothing else, the Neapolitan and Milanese Capitanos are more emotional and certainly more susceptible to female charms. Yet, even when they are very loud and menacing and do not get the girl, they tend to accept the resolution of the various love triangles: their sentimental streak usually overcomes their aggression. Perhaps the most unique are Capitanos from scenarios intended for Florentine audiences. Though in the 1580s, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was nominally a part of the Holy Roman Empire and, therefore, owed allegiance to the Habsburgs, the family ties between Florence and France were so strong (both Henry II and Henry IV of France married Medici princesses) that *commedia* troupes could occasionally afford to ignore the feelings of Spanish ambassadors in their court. No wonder then that *L'Angelica*, the play written to showcase the talents of “one of the earliest identified Spanish captains,

Capitano Cocodrillo,” was written by Fornaris when the Confidenti were working for the Medici in Paris (Katritzky 216). The Medici might not have been able to compete with Philip II’s *tercios* on the battlefield, but they could beat them in the clash of wits on the stage, sometimes both metaphorically and literally.

## The Capitano in Genoa

The Capitano’s main ally in *commedia* is Pantalone. Though their unholy alliance is often characterised by a mutual lack of respect, the unashamed pragmatism eventually carries the day. Just as Spain was the European military superpower, and Spavento, Cocodrillo and Matamoros its most ferocious emissaries, so was Venice perceived as the most prosperous of sixteenth-century Italian states, and Pantalone invariably the wealthiest and most tight-fisted of *commedia* characters. After the 1550s, Venice was no longer the political heavyweight, and its economic power was definitely less pronounced than in the previous centuries, but it was still an important player in trade with the Levant, especially in luxury goods (compare Lane, *Venice* 293–94 and Hanlon, *Early* 78–79), which enabled it to buy its way out of many political conflicts and wars.

And this is exactly how Pantalone behaves, too: he counts on the combination of Venetian brain and Spanish brawn. He regularly sees himself as the most intelligent person present and attempts to control everyone around him through financial means. In Scala’s scenario *Il pelegrino fido amante*, Pantalone is once more trying to set up a match between his daughter Flaminia and the Capitano. Since the location of the story is Genoa, another of the Spanish satellites and a major banking centre, Pantalone’s decision is probably in part motivated by his need for influence with the authorities but also by his mistaken belief, encouraged by the Capitano’s servant Pedrolino, that Spavento is outrageously rich. Whereas Dario Fo argues that the Magnifico, the generic Venetian noble who is the predecessor of the fully-fledged Pantalone, is essentially a caricature of “an impoverished nobleman”, a banker who lost his capital (42), Pantalone himself never acknowledges defeat and is always full of money and Bergsonian “*élan vital*”. Venice may have been seen as the old man of Europe in the sixteenth century (see Lane, *Studies* 325–26), and Pantalone does walk with a permanent stoop, but he still sports a pretty serious phallus. He may be decrepit, but he is certainly not impotent. Even when he loses the romantic battle, he often ends up profiting financially.

Yet, Pantalone is rarely the tyrannical ruler of his household. No matter where in Italy his family lives in various scenarios, Pantalone in a strange way still follows the arcane principles of the Venetian brand of diplomacy, which essentially implied that

backroom intrigue and nominal neutrality are preferable to brute force. Just like the doges, who went to great lengths to avoid overt violence at least when it came to their own populace (compare Hanlon, *Early* 49–50), the miserly Magnifico seldom punishes his lazy servants with physical force. Pantalone is lustful and greedy, but he is rarely belligerent, the biting of Pedrolino in *Il cavadente* a rare exception to this rule. If Pantalone absolutely has to fight anyone but the Dottore, he drafts the gullible Capitano, as happens in *Il pelegrino fido amante* where Spavento threatens to kill Orazio and terrifies Flavio's servant Arlecchino. Fortunately, the braggart's bark is almost always worse than his bite. When he does get involved in a scuffle with Orazio at the end of Act Three and is attacked by the furious competitor for Flaminia's affections, he, "senz'altra replica gliela cede" ("without another word, yields her to him"; Scala 44A; Andrews, *Commedia* 76).

Because of Pantalone's servility and the Capitano's connections, the main difficulties they encounter are not external but internal, domestic. Is it not possible to see in their constant struggles within their own households a commentary on the local politics where in-house dissent is often more problematic than any international issue? In the geopolitics of *commedia*, Turks rarely do real damage: it is usually the hired rustic help and the emerging *Lumpenproletariat* that wreak havoc in Pantalone's home. The true antagonists of the wealthy Venetians and mighty Spaniards were not their rivals in the Mediterranean but their own marginalised citizens, who were so economically disadvantaged (see Pullan 213–36) that they inevitably had to avenge themselves by undermining their masters' power from the inside, from within the family itself. And there is no better example of how this class struggle unfolded than the relationship that Pantalone and the Capitano have with Arlecchino, Pedrolino, Brighella, Franceschina, Colombina, and other *zanni* and *servette*.

## Conclusion

The most formidable enemy that the alliance of Pantalone and Capitano faces on the *commedia* stage is, however, not a Bergamasque but a southerner, Pulcinella. Though Pulcinella does not appear in any of Scala's scenarios and is only added to the regular repertoire of characters sometime in the early seventeenth century, he may actually be the most ancient of the *commedia* types: some critics trace this mask back to the Maccus and Bucco of the Roman Atellan farces (compare Fantham 24–5). Regardless of whether "[h]e had already existed, in a very similar form, under the name of Pascariello" as Antonio Fava contends (112), or was invented by the comedian Silvio Fiorillo, who was also famous for his Capitano Matamoros, as some other critics contend (see Marotti and Romei 2: 90 and Fava 112), his Neapolitan provenance is

undeniable. As such he is, even more so than other *zanni*, a natural antagonist of the occupying Spanish. Because he is not a working immigrant like Arlecchino or Brighella but a disenfranchised native, his dislike for his masters is often much more profound and hostile, and certainly far less forgiving. Pulcinella is frequently quite dangerous and, in his later English incarnation as Punch, literally bludgeons everyone in sight. He is certainly not as afraid of the Capitano as some other characters are. In *La Lucilla costante* (1632), a play written by Fiorillo himself and, interestingly, dedicated to the Spanish governor of Milan Don Gomez Suarez de Figueroa, in Act Four, Scene Eighteen, Pulcinella trades insults with Capitan Matamoros without any respect for his social and political status. He describes the Spaniard as having “culo di scignia” (“a monkey’s ass”; my trans.; Fiorillo 72) and imitates his accent. Neither character backs down in this scene, and the spectators would not be surprised at all if this exchange of insults really ended in blood.

In many respects, the relationship between the Capitano and Pulcinella is that between an oppressor and a rebel. Pulcinella “may not be on the right side of the law,” suggests Michael Byrom, “but he is ... most dreadfully oppressed” (Byrom 18). Yet, he is also “a ferocious sadist dedicated to the might of the Big Stick. A rebel in revolt against everything, including Death and the Devil” (Byrom 15). In fact, some theories even suggest that his inspiration was “a restless and grotesque patriot of thirteenth century Verona, Pulcinella dalle Carceri’, which makes Pulcinella the first Carbonaro and very close to Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideal of grotesque, yet liberating, laughter (Smith 11 and Bakhtin 247). Pulcinella is the downtrodden revolutionary from the south, a kind of theatrical Masaniello, a bloodthirsty Italian *sansculotte*, through whose rude jokes the Italians could sympathise with their repressed brethren. The more frustrated the Neapolitans were with the Spanish, the more violent Pulcinella’s gags became.

After 1625, the centre of *commedia* activity gradually moves from Italy to France (compare Scott). The drastic change in the political landscape within which *commedia dell’arte* operates – unlike Italy, France under Louis XIV was a centralised, stable and absolutist monarchy – necessarily results in the changed political dynamics of its plots. Several old masks either disappear or transform. The stammering Tartaglia supplants the Dottore, whose legal expertise is not needed in Paris, while the joyful Scapino and the gentle Mezzetino displace Brighella and other Bergamese *zanni*. “The Capitano,” Richard Andrews writes, “was a role much in demand during the ‘classic’ period of the genre, but had disappeared entirely by the eighteenth century” (*Scripts* 186). His Spanish mercenary lineage just does not make sense on the French stages, and he, too, is gradually replaced either by Coviello or by Scaramuccia. The latter, in particular, “half *zanni*, half captain” (Scott 31), becomes in Tiberio Fiorilli’s interpretation as Scaramouche perhaps the most successful of all imported *commedia* characters.

Yet, by the mid-seventeenth century, the days of *commedia* as a reflection of current political dynamics are definitely gone; instead, the transplanted Italian comedy becomes an escapist entertainment, while discussions of international hierarchies and power relations retreat to the chambers of diplomats and privy councillors.

## Bibliography

- Andreini, Francesco. *Le bravure del capitano Spavento*. Edited by Roberto Tessari, Giardini, 1987.
- Andrews, Richard, editor and translator. *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios*. By Flaminio Scala, Scarecrow, 2008.
- . *Scripts and Scenarios: The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana UP, 1984.
- Bandello, Matteo. *Novelle*. Edited by G. Vigorelli, Garzanti, 1945.
- Bergson, Henri. *Le rire: essai sur la signification du comique*. A. Skira, 1945.
- Byrom, Michael. *Punch in the Italian Puppet Theatre*. Centaur, 1983.
- Castagno, Paul C. *The Early Commedia dell'Arte (1550–1621): The Mannerist Context*. Peter Lang, 1994.
- Clivio, Gianrenzo P. “The Languages of the Commedia dell'Arte.” *The Science of Buffoonery: Theory and History of the Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Domenico Pietropaolo, Dovehouse editions, 1989, pp. 209–38.
- Dandele, Thomas James. *Spanish Rome, 1500–1700*. Yale UP, 2001.
- Duchartre, Pierre Louis. *The Italian Comedy: The Improvisation, Scenarios, Lives, Attributes, Portraits, and Masks of the Illustrious Characters of the Commedia dell'Arte*. Translated by Randolph T. Weaver, Dover, 1966.
- Fantham, Elaine. “The Earliest Comic Theatre at Rome: Atellan Farce, Comedy and Mime as Antecedents of the Commedia dell'Arte.” *The Science of Buffoonery: Theory and History of the Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Domenico Pietropaolo, Dovehouse editions, 1989, pp. 23–32.
- Fava, Antonio. “Official Recognition of Pulcinella: The One Who Saved the Commedia from Extinction by Securing Its Continuity to the Present Day.” *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick, Routledge, 2015, pp. 108–13.
- Fiorillo, Silvio. *La Lucilla costante*. *Corriere spettacolo*, 9 July, 2017, [copioni.corrierespettacolo.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FIORILLO%20Silvio\\_\\_La%20Lucilla%20costante\\_\\_null\\_U\(13\)-D\(2\)\\_Unavailable\\_5a.pdf](http://copioni.corrierespettacolo.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FIORILLO%20Silvio__La%20Lucilla%20costante__null_U(13)-D(2)_Unavailable_5a.pdf)
- Fo, Dario. *The Tricks of the Trade*. Translated by Joe Farrell, edited by Stuart Hood, Routledge, 1991.
- Fornaris, Fabrizio de. *L'Angelica*. Francesco Bariletti, 1607.
- Hanlon, Gregory. *Early Modern Italy, 1550–1800: Three Seasons in European History*. St. Martin's, 2000.
- . *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560–1800*. UCL Press, 1998.
- Henke, Robert. “Border-Crossing in the Commedia dell'Arte.” *Transnational Exchange in Early*

- Modern Theater*, edited by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, Routledge, 2008, pp. 19–34.
- . *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Jaffe-Berg, Erith. *Commedia dell'Arte and the Mediterranean: Charting Journeys and Mapping "Others."* Ashgate, 2015.
- Jordan, Peter. *The Venetian Origins of the Commedia dell'Arte*. Routledge, 2014.
- Katritzky, M. A. *The Art of Commedia: The Study in the Commedia Dell'arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records*. Rodopi, 2006.
- Lane, Frederic Chapin. *Studies in Venetian Social and Economic History*. Edited by Benjamin Kohl and Reinhold C. Mueller, Variorum, 1987.
- . *Venice: A Maritime Republic*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1973.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince: A New Translation, Backgrounds, Interpretations*. Translated and edited by Robert M. Adams, Norton, 1977.
- Marotti, Ferruccio and Giovanna Rome. *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca*. M. Bulzoni, 1991. 2 vols.
- Meehan, Kate. "The Rise of Commedia dell'Arte in Italy: A Historical Perspective." *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick, Routledge, 2015, pp. 207–12.
- Meyerhold, Vsevolod. *Meyerhold on Theatre*. Translated and edited by Edward Braun, Eyre Methuen, 1969.
- Molinari, Cesare. *Theatre through the Ages*. Translated by Colin Hamer, McGraw-Hill, 1975.
- Plautus, Titus Maccius. *Miles gloriosus*. Edited and introduced by Mason Hammond, Arthur M. Mack, and Walter Moskalew. Harvard UP, 1970.
- Pullan, Brian. "Town Poor, Country Poor: The Province of Bergamo from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century." *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*. Edited by Ellen E. Kittell and Thomas F. Madden, U of Illinois P, 1999, pp. 213–36.
- Sand, Maurice. *The History of the Harlequinade*. Martin Secker, 1915. 2 vols.
- Scala, Flaminio. *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative, ovvero la ricreatione comica, boscarecia e tragica: divisa in cinquanta giornate*. G. B. Pulciani, 1611.
- Scott, Virginia. *The Commedia dell'Arte in Paris 1644–1697*. U of Virginia P, 1990.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Edited by G. Blakemore Evans et al. Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Sprinchorn, Evert. "Introduction." *The Commedia dell'Arte*, Giacomo Oreglia, translated by Lovett F. Edwards, Hill and Wang, 1968, pp. xi–xvi.
- Smith, Winifred. *The Commedia Dell'Arte: A Study in Italian Popular Comedy*. Columbia UP, 1912.
- Italian early modern history.